

# THE SECRET SERIES

BY

PSEUDONYMOUS BOSCH



## Curriculum connections

- ❖ Literature
- ❖ Philosophy
- ❖ Science
- ❖ Psychology
- ❖ Social Science
- ❖ Art

## Genre connections

- ❖ Humor
- ❖ Suspense

Ages 8 – 12

## The Name of This Book is Secret

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Pseudonymous Bosch, the author and narrator, is one of the most important characters in the book, and one of the slipperiest. What roles does he play in the story? How reliable is he? How intrusive? Does your opinion of him change as the book progresses?
2. “Generally speaking, books don’t cause much harm. Except when you read them, that is. Then they cause all sorts of problems.” [from prologue] Do you agree? What problems have books caused for you, or people you know?
3. Cass is growing up without knowing her father. Max-Ernest lives with both parents but neither speaks to the other. How have those circumstances shaped their personalities? Would Max-Ernest be so chatty if his parents communicated directly? Would Cass be as cautious?
4. “As I’m sure you know from experience,” Pseudonymous Bosch claims [page 50], “lying is an important skill to have.” Do you agree? What makes Cass and Max-Ernest such bad liars? Who are the expert liars in the story?
5. Footnotes are seldom in novels, but this one is full of them. Identify and discuss the many roles they play here. Do you read the footnotes as carefully as you read the main text?
6. Ms. Mauvais and her followers will do anything — even kill — in their quest for eternal youth. What do you think of their goal? Would you like to live forever? Talk to older adults. Would they want immortality?
7. “Only bad books have good endings,” claims Pseudonymous Bosch. [page 314] Is he just making a joke, or a good point? Do good books always have you aching for more?

### ACTIVITIES

1. Cass is a survivalist who stows everything from bubble gum to a map of Micronesia in her backpack. [see p. 12] What do your students keep in theirs? Ask them to take an inventory and write a paragraph about what their backpacks reveal about themselves.
2. The Bergamo brothers “were born in a small town in Italy, in the time between the Wars.” A footnote [page 125] gives some explanation, but encourage your students to learn more. What were those two wars? What was Italy’s involvement in each? How did Mussolini gain power? How did he lose it?
3. The magical Symphony of Smells will be impossible to recreate, alas, but your class can certainly gather everyday (and safe) materials with distinctive aromas. Place samples of each in small vials with stoppers, then place them all in specially decorated boxes. Invite visitors to try to identify the odors.
4. The name Pseudonymous Bosch is clearly a play on Hieronymous Bosch, a celebrated Dutch artist. If possible, post reproductions of his paintings in your classroom or bring in an art book that features his work. Do your students find any similarities between Bosch the painter and Bosch the writer?
5. The Bergamo brothers had synesthesia, a fascinating condition in which the senses seem jumbled: colors can be heard or smells can be seen. Experiment a little bit with your class. Turn off the lights and turn on unfamiliar music. Ask your students to describe what they see.
6. As any reader of popular magazines or websites knows, the sinister Ms. Mauvais and her minions at the Midnight Sun aren’t the only seekers of eternal youth. Working in small groups, have your students gather examples of articles, ads, flyers, and other printed matter that promises the appearance of youth.
7. In the appendix, the author presents several projects for individuals, including a card trick sure to appeal to fledgling prestidigitators.



## If You're Reading This, It's Too Late

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The novel opens with Cass's bad dream, which her friend Max-Ernest explains by quoting the great psychiatrist Sigmund Freud: "A dream is the fulfillment of a wish." [p. 21] What does that mean? What you think is the significance of Cass's dream? What role do her dreams play throughout this novel?
2. Television stars, fashion icons, and dim-bulbs, the Skelton Sisters are fictional characters but they appear to be very loosely based on some real-life twin stars. Whom do they remind you of, and why?
3. What is the Sound Prism? Why can't it help Ms. Mauvais? How does it help Cass?
4. The Homunculus has been around for hundreds of years. Why is he still so important to the evil leaders of the Midnight Sun? How was he created? How was he treated by his creator? Why does he pretend to be mute? Why does he open up to the Jester?
5. What's in a name? Why does the dangerous German doctor like to be called Lord Pharaoh? Why does the Homunculus prefer the name Cabbage Face? Do you believe, as Cass asks Max-Ernest [p. 205] "that your name makes you who you are?"
6. The Homunculus dismisses the virtuous Terces Society, which includes Cass and Max-Ernest, as just a bunch of record keepers. "How does that help anybody," he asks. [p. 274] Is he right? What good can old documents do? How do they help Cass?
7. What secret has Yo-Yoji been keeping from his friends Cass and Max-Ernest? Do you think it was necessary?
8. The Homunculus is a cannibal and a thief – and a hero. Discuss his complicated personality. What makes him so repulsive? What makes him so appealing? Would you want to meet him?
9. What happens when the Bergamo brothers finally reunite?

### ACTIVITIES

1. First imagined in a dream, the sock-monster that Cass makes turns out to be an eerily accurate representation of the Homunculus, one of history's oddest creatures. Have your students make their own versions as an art project. The basic components that Cass used are described on page 21.
2. The author's introductory "Binding Contract" may not be legal but it's a fun way to look at formal agreements, and the hard job of wording them properly. Working in small groups, your students can draft their own light-hearted contracts for goods (like tasty lunches) or services (like homework help) with siblings, parents, teachers, or other significant people in their lives.
3. How does the Lord Pharaoh's creation compare to Dr. Frankenstein's? For supplementary reading, encourage your students to seek out Mary Shelley's creepy classic, which can be found in its original version and in abridgements. Several filmed versions are also easy to find.
4. Engraved inside the ancient Sound Prism is a perplexing poem written as a spiral. Ask your students to compose their own circular-shaped message to a classmate. It can be written in either poetry or prose, and it doesn't need to be a riddle, but it should be intriguing.
5. What's a polite way to say weird? The circus folk who visit the Magic Museum are an oddball bunch, as the author explains in both polite and rude terms. [p. 291] Ask your students to keep a running log of all the euphemisms they encounter in one week.

# This Book is Not Good for You

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This book begins with Chapter Fifteen. What reason does Pseudonymous Bosch give for jumping ahead? What do you think is the real reason?
2. “Max-Ernest wasn’t very good at feelings,” writes Pseudonymous Bosch [p.22] “whether his own or anybody else’s.” Do you agree? How sensitive is Max-Ernest to the feelings of others? As the novel progresses, does he gain a better understanding of himself?
3. Cass has two grandfathers, Larry and Wayne. Discuss her relationship with the pair. What role do they play in her life? What secrets have they kept from her? What has she kept from them?
4. Why does Cass start calling her mother by her first name, Melanie? [p. 41] What is her mother’s reaction? When does she go back to calling her Mom?
5. Kindly magician Pietro Bergamo is the twin brother of evil Dr. L, and the hatred between the two “was now as strong as their love once was.” [p. 56] What do love and hate have in common? How can one sometimes lead to the other?
6. What are the special powers of the Tuning Fork? What makes it so dangerous?
7. After years of estrangement, Max-Ernest’s parents are getting along better. Why isn’t he happy about it?
8. “To go forward,” Yo-Yoji was told by his master, “you must first go back.” [p. 356] What does this mean? How does it explain the operations of the Terces Society? How does it explain the choice Cass makes at the end of the book?



## ACTIVITIES

1. *Amuse Bouche*, as a footnote explains [p. 5], are small and unusual dishes that chefs at fancy restaurants sometimes whip up for their customers. What would young cooks in your class prepare? Brainstorm ideas, then challenge your students to try them in their own kitchens.
2. The humanitarian efforts of the Skelton Sisters are totally bogus but many real-life celebrities have done great things for others. As a whole class project, keep a running record of actors, singers, sports stars, and other notables who’ve successfully contributed their time and talents to important charities. Challenge your students to volunteer for local causes.
3. Two great filmmakers, the English Alfred Hitchcock and the Japanese Akira Kurosawa, get rave reviews in this novel. Both are likely too sophisticated for classroom viewing, but encourage your students to seek them out on their own, especially if they have older movie buffs in their lives.
4. The myths and symbols of the Aztec figure prominently in this adventure. Dig deeper into this ancient culture. Break your class into small work groups, and assign each a broad research topic – history, religion cuisine, etc. Groups will present their findings in brief oral reports. If a local museum has a collection of Aztec artifacts, arrange a class visit.
5. There is no better way to celebrate a book about chocolate than with an all-chocolate get-together. If school rules allow, host a bring-your-own-chocolate party for your students and their families. Encourage families to bring chocolate delicacies from all over the world (and to try the recipe included in the book’s appendix, too).



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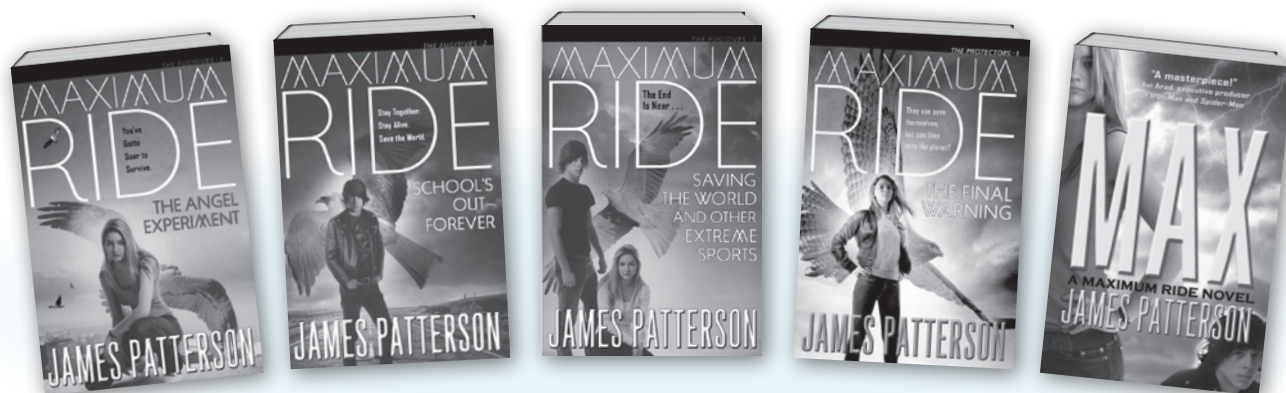
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AR 5.2

## about the books

If it were up to the author, the mysterious and possibly paranoid Pseudonymous Bosch, your students wouldn't even be allowed to see these books, never mind read them. It's very dangerous for outsiders to know too much about 11-year-old survivalist Cass, or her talkative buddy Max-Ernest, or their hair-raising battles with the evil Midnight Sun. For centuries the skeletal Ms. Mauvais and her vile minions have wreaked havoc with their relentless quest for eternal youth. Now the Secret is almost within their grasp...if only they can wrestle it from Cass!



### *The Name of this Book is Secret*

978-0-316-11366-3 • A.R. 5.6 • F&P U

Cass and her school-mate Max-Ernest are drawn into a shadowy mystery when they find a dead magician's diary.



### *If You're Reading This, It's Too Late*

978-0-316-11367-0 • A.R. 5.2 • F&P U

Now full-fledged members of the valiant Terces Society, our heroes thwart evil with the help of a snappish little cannibal.

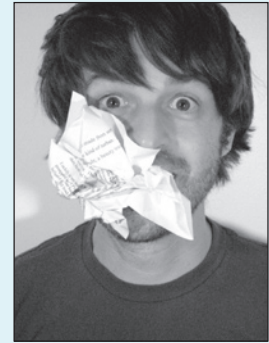


### *This Book is Not Good for You*

978-0-316-04086-0

The deepest, darkest chocolate of all time – *the chocolate of time* – nearly consumes Cass and her co-conspirators.

## about the author



Mysterious stranger? Anonymous author? Who is Pseudonymous Bosch and how does he know so much about our heroes and heroines? The truth will all be revealed – with time.

## about the illustrator

Gilbert Ford has braved numerous attempts on his life to illustrate these hazardous tales. Despite the inherent danger, and being kidnapped a few times, he has done work for the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and other much safer publications. He lives in Brooklyn, NY, and you can visit him on his website at [www.gilbertford.com](http://www.gilbertford.com).

## Praise for *The Name of This Book is Secret*:

“Equal parts SNARKY and DELIGHTFUL.” —*Booklist*

“Likely to acquire A CULT FOLLOWING.” —*Publishers Weekly*

An Edgar Award  
Nominee

An NYPL Book for  
the Teen Age

An E.B. White Award  
Nominee



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