



## The Puzzle Box

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**The Puzzle Box** Eileen Bell , Randy McCharles , Billie Milholland , Ryan T. McFadden

An intriguing anthology where reality is transient and the puzzle box holds the key to the meaning of life. Archeology Professor Albert Mallory understands reality. He knows the way the world works. When he steals an ancient puzzle box to pay off gambling debts, he thinks the only mysterious thing about the artifact is how to get it open. But when a stranger appears at Albert's door demanding to see the box, Albert is plunged into mysteries he never dreamt possible.

Through the tales of four others who succeeded in opening the puzzle box — a musician named Warlock with a weakness for witches; photographer Autumn Bailey, with a strange link to the past; video store clerk Angela Matterly with those unworldly eyes; and a comic book illustrator called Sam, on a quest for his life — Albert learns that reality is transient and the way the world works is not found in text books.

## The Puzzle Box Details

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# From Reader Review The Puzzle Box for online ebook

## Nicole Luiken says

Four fantasy novellas about a puzzle box, all with different takes, but fit into a framing story.

The Awakening of Master March - A would-be musician gets involved with a giggling coven. Good opening and some nice humourous moments. (Holy. Serious. Crap.)

Autumn Unbound - Interesting take on the Pandora myth. Sadly, I had trouble connecting to the main character in this one.

Angela and Her Three Wishes - Twentysomething video store clerk gets three wishes, but things prove more complicated when the djinn turns out to know her mother. Angela really rang true as a character and the plot moved well. Favourite line: "Quiet, Minion!"

Ghost in the Machine: A slow start, but around p. 7 there was a real sit-up-straight holy-crap-what-happened moment, and after that the story took off. I was briefly confused in the middle, but had it straightened out by the (satisfying) end.

Framing story: Again, I never really connected to the character and the sudden revelation in the Fourth Piece of the Puzzle seemed to come out of nowhere.

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## Paul says

This book shows that reality is not what we think it is, and the key is a puzzle box.

Professor Albert Mallory has stolen an ancient puzzle box, and plans to sell it to pay gambling debts. The night before the debt comes due, a man named The Chronicler visits Mallory and demands to see the box. From the open box, Mallory watches the stories of four other people who opened the box.

Warlock is a roadie for a rock band. He falls for a woman who really is part of a coven of witches, which he is all set to join. Through the open box comes Satan, who offers a chance to become the band's lead singer, replacing the current lead singer who is in the hospital. Autumn Bailey was sent to Earth to live as a human until her 30th birthday. She actually has a very strong connection to Greek mythology.

Angela Matterly is a video store clerk who likes to wear cats-eye contact lenses. One night, Roger, a fellow employee, gets the box open, and out pops an eight-foot tall djinn named Skip. Angela is offered three wishes, but there is a time limit. She uses one of the wishes, but things turn very bad, so she is able to put things back the way they were. Things get complicated when Angela learns that Ellen, her mother, and Skip, the djinn, already know each other (it's not what you are thinking).

Sam is a comic book artist who meets Lucy at an art show. Their relationship gets hot and heavy, until Lucy's ex-boyfriend interrupts them, carrying a shotgun. After he shoots Lucy, and then himself, things get weird.

These are all first-rate stories (personally, the second pair of stories are a little better than the first pair). They are well-done, and they are nice and weird. The reader will not go wrong with this book.

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## **Misty Ray says**

Um...no. Written as four unrelated short stories interspaced by a fifth. This tenuous connection hinges exclusively on a single box. On further review, none of the individual boxes in each story have the slightest resemblance to each other, in any possible fashion. As a whole, there is no cohesive balance, no correlation. Individually, they are distinctly sub-par. Two stories attempt humour with disastrous results; they try too hard, resulting in punchlines which are forced and smug. One story is yet another in a long, long line of attempted reimagining of the Greek gods and their foibles, from a modern day approach, simply declaring, yet again, that the Xena and Hercules franchises have a lot to answer for. The final story exists as an acid trip following the aftermath (or before-math, or during-math) of murder, a loosely woven mess of flashbacks, flash forwards and even flash sideways.

I wasn't horrified by this collection, or intrigued. It came across as a dry cracker: bland, with no redeeming qualities.

Thanks to Goodreads for the giveaway.

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## **Pedro says**

I'm very happy to have received this book through the Goodreads Giveaway program. I would like to thank the authors for sending an autographed copy to me.

For the review, I have to divide the book into its 5 parts, because they are quite different.

Albert - The wrapping story - 4 stars

It grips the reader and although it was not really necessary to the book, it adds a special flavour to it. I liked the character and his change during the five pieces of puzzle.

The awakening of Master March - 4 stars

I liked this story a lot. The main characters are memorable and very easy to connect with. The story runs smoothly keeping the reader interested.

Autumn Unbound - 2 stars

I think this is the weakest story of the book. It failed to attract my attention. Exploring Pandora as a XXI-th century woman was original but that was all.

Angela and Her Three Wishes - 3 stars

This story was hilarious! I think it is the best word to describe it. The pace is as fast and fluent. The humour was the definitive high point.

Ghost in the Machine - 5 stars

It was quite sometime since I got hooked like this! It is, by far, the best story of the anthology. Even if you can see it as some kind of "butterfly effect" cliché, it doesn't matter. The pace, the characters and background were almost flawless.

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## **Jennifer Rahn says**

This book claimed to have been written by the Apocalyptic Four (Four!), thus, I expected to be blasted by the saline, garlic-scented, brimstone-laced breath of the Horsemen from its very pages. After reading it, I gave it three stars, because while the stories are indeed well-written and entertaining, three out of four did not live up to the cover that promised doom, despair, devilry and demolition. I had no choice but to conclude that it was, in fact, not written by the Apocalyptic Four, but by the Three Very Nice People and the Apocalyptic One.

Story #1, The Awakening of Master March, was a sweetly-told, very nice story of a man who seeks and finds love. It left me full of hope and optimistic about life in general. Hm.

Story #2, Autumn Unbound, contained some Greek gods with the ability to smite and smother, however the protagonist was well-protected by her Fairy Aunts and has a happy ending. Hm.

Story #3, Angela and Her Three Wishes, started up with lots of Apocalyptic promise and demonic goodness, and this author has some serious writing chops which she ain't afraid to use, but then the protagonist goes and makes the right choice, and the Apocalypse is averted after which a happy ending ensues, denying me the satisfaction of literary mayhem and general Armageddon. Again, hm.

Story #4, Ghost in the Machine: Enter Ryan McFadden, Master of the Apocalypse and Writer of All Things Evil!! At last! Something truly creepy and (mildly) disturbing! Here is the aforementioned Apocalyptic One, and I won't spoil the story by telling you what happens - because it's the best one.

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## **Virginia Stark says**

This complex set of four stories all work together to give more pieces in a puzzle. It's a unique and fun way to read four extremely different stories from four brilliant authors.

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## **Edwin Downward says**

A surreal series of adventures adding up to a head scratching answer.

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## **Lou Sytsma says**

Interesting collection of 4 short stories built around a central conceit.

The cool thing about this collection is that each story is very different from each other ranging from comedy to straight out horror.

It leaves me wondering who wrote the connective narrative that frames each story.

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## **Lynda says**

“The Puzzle Box” consisted of a main story threaded throughout the book of a broken depressed man who needed to learn how he was controlled by forces within him. As he stepped further into discovery the despair and trappings placed around him were removed piece by piece. Albert Mallory learned to believe in himself, not to fear the past, to deal with the past released the pain sheltered within him, understood he was not the cause for everything in his life, and healed the memories of his childhood. The controls that bound him were gradually released with each observation, an inner healing that strengthened his soul, mind, and left him open for love. He had no fear and he soared into his future unburdened.

An ingenious concept of a puzzle box able to appear and disappear at will, regardless of time and physicality, with magical abilities to transport people to the places they needed to travel to learn their truth. In between each small chapter about the puzzle pieces, there were intriguing, mythical tales where the puzzle box played a dominate role in each. The tales were told by different authors giving the readers a variety of imaginative encounters. Unique and enjoyable to read, “The Puzzle Box” captured and transported my mind without realizing hours had gone by. It was a memorable read.

I received “The Puzzle Box” from Goodreads First Reads for free.

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## **Adele says**

I won The Puzzle Box in a first reads give-away, such an exciting novel. The four stories from Eileen Bell, Randy McCharles, Billie Milholland and Ryan T. McFadden are each original and propelling, and are wound together into one solid whole with a separate inter-weaving story. I really enjoyed this book and the different perspectives and ideas explored by the writers; believing in oneself, immortality, family secrets, and a tragic love infused with the Judgement of Solomon. Overall the multiple stories about the puzzle box are about the meaning of life, propelling and captivating the reader. I recommend this book to all who love fantasy.

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## **Lisa Cobb Sabatini says**

Delighted to have won The Puzzle Box by The Apocalyptic Four from the Goodreads, I found the book an enjoyable, quick read. The book is made up of four novellas, each written by one of the four writers, Eileen Bell, Randy McCharles, Ryan T. McFadden, and Billie Milholland, and tied together by a central theme: the puzzle box. The stories are further linked by a story that is interspaced between the novellas. As each novella has characters, settings, and plots that involve the fantastical and mythological, this is a great book for lovers of fantasy and science fiction. As various characters turn to the puzzle box for answers, I was often surprised by the direction a scene or entire story took, and, though often other-worldly, the characters' reactions and decisions rang true. Definitely a fun way to stretch one's imagination.

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**Leslie says**

I did enjoy a few of the stories or at least the premise if not the execution of some of them. The ending didn't endear me. Must confess that this isn't a genre I read so take my comments with a grain of salt.

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**Randy Mccharles says**

I greatly enjoyed writing The Awakening of Master March for this 4-author novella anthology.

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**Beverley Albright says**

Most books which try to 'teach' you a lesson or inspire you are preachy, dull and boring. This book is anything but. I loved the stories in this book. They were unique and crafted in such a way that you came away with a life lesson, but didn't feel as though you were expected to. Using these unusual tales of witches, puzzle boxes, old Gods and Goddesses etc... was a surprising and fresh approach to helping us mere mortals find some meaning to life. Bravo.....

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