

The Box and the Dragonfly

Ted Sanders

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On his way home, Horace F. Andrews is drawn to a strange store, directed by an even more mysterious old lady. After finding a box that gives him new abilities, Horace is left with more unanswered questions than ever before. Soon enough, he finds himself tangled up in a quest, with a spunky, energetic friend at his side. The best part of this story was the unique and fresh plot. Instead of your typical invisibility, flying, etc. superpowers, the book brings to life new and innovative abilities, in a complex and intriguing way. The society that Horace becomes involved isn't a typical magical school with classes and assignments. Instead, the value of self-learning and independence is emphasized in a different and varied setting.

Even more interesting, the plot isn't driven or directed by a romantic storyline. While the main characters do develop an interesting relationship, their thoughts are not centered around romance or anything beyond friendship. This feature cleared the way for a more detailed and compelling narrative. I also loved the generous detail and explanations throughout the story. The descriptions of setting as well as character emotions improved visualization and context, helping to balance out some of the longer chapters. Although the villain was somewhat typical, the creepy and tense atmosphere that Sanders generated more than made up for this aspect.

One piece of the story that made it difficult to digest was uneven pacing. The characters would have a drastic adventure, run through the whole town... and then go home for dinner. The home life and day life of characters just didn't mesh well together, creating an unrealistic effect. In addition, this aspect broke down rising tension before it could peak, distancing readers, and leading to disinterest. Some parts of the story also lagged a bit, overburdened with unnecessary pages or even chapters discussing the character's questions, lack of information and general confusion. Even though the story was trying to make a point how taking your time to discover your own path is important, it became tiresome very quickly. These factors might make it more difficult for younger readers to engage and connect to the story. A suitable audience for this novel would be ages 10+, as there are a few violent scenes throughout the story.

Recommended Titles:

The Mysterious Benedict Society by Trenton Lee Stewart

The Magic Thief by Sarah Prineas

The Unwanteds by Lisa McMann

Savvy by Ingrid Law

Mark of The Thief by Jennifer A. Nielsen