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Gwendy's Button Box



Synopsis

The little town of Castle Rock, Maine has witnessed some strange events and unusual visitors over the years, but there is one story that has never been told... until now. There are three ways up to Castle View from the town of Castle Rock: Route 117, Pleasant Road, and the Suicide Stairs. Every day in the summer of 1974 twelve-year-old Gwendy Peterson has taken the stairs, which are held by strong (if time-rusted) iron bolts and zig-zag up the cliffside. At the top of the stairs, Gwendy catches her breath and listens to the shouts of the kids on the playground. From a bit farther away comes the chink of an aluminum bat hitting a baseball as the Senior League kids practice for the Labor Day charity game. One day, a stranger calls to Gwendy: "Hey, girl. Come on over here for a bit. We ought to palaver, you and me." On a bench in the shade sits a man in black jeans, a black coat like for a suit, and a white shirt unbuttoned at the top. On his head is a small neat black hat. The time will come when Gwendy has nightmares about that hat... Journey back to Castle Rock again in this chilling new novella by Stephen King, bestselling author of *The Bazaar of Bad Dreams*, and Richard Chizmar, award-winning author of *A Long December*. This book will be a Cemetery Dance Publications exclusive with no other editions currently planned anywhere in the world!

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Customer Reviews

I'll start with this: Stephen King does not just write horror. This is a good example. Yes, there are some horrible things that happen in this book, but it is not a horror novella. It is a tightly written, beautiful book about what it's like growing up. It's about good vs. evil (and making the right choices to keep one or the other at bay). It is about the gray areas of life -- choices made and the consequences that come with them. It is fantastical, to be sure. But it also nails Stephen King's ability to create characters that happen to be children that are incredibly complex. When I picked up this book, I didn't know a thing about the other author listed -- and I'm not sure how much he was involved in the writing of the book, but I'm going to check his work out based on how much I liked this.

I started to give this novella three stars, but the description for that rating says "it's okay." The description for four stars says "I like it." Those three words describe my feeling toward this slight and yet meaningful story. Stephen King is one of my favorite authors, primarily because I enjoy the rich details and well-developed characters that make the stories come alive. In this collaboration with Richard Chizmar, his tendency to go big has been restrained. This is a simple tale that poses a question for the reader to ponder. I think of it as a parable or a morality tale. Gwendy receives a mysterious gift from a mysterious person that challenges her in her developmental years to reflect on power and its use. Gwendy is a wonderful character whose development is full of challenges and dilemmas. She struggles with her love of the good things that the box brings to her and the potential for problems that it poses. That for me is the heart of the tale - what price are we willing to pay for the good things we crave? It's only toward the end that the power of the story diminishes. I believe the authors wanted to leave the question open-ended for the reader. But to me it felt like the drive behind the events in Gwendy's life just fizzled out. I liked the concept. I enjoyed reading the story. I think it is a good one for young readers. It just could have used a bit more "punch" at the end,

An uncomplicated and different story from the Master of the Macabre, with just a frisson of the supernatural to give it a little kick in the pants. I thought the story was much more about choices made for good or ill, about growing up, maturing, really, and dealing with what could have been an unfortunate obsession than any sort of "horror story." And as always, King presents another spot-on juvenile character to like and remember. Gwendy, whose name is perfect for her and as comforting as mac-n-cheese, is given a box with buttons on it--a lot of buttons, some of them whose uses are beyond weird, and ultimately dangerous. How is a teenage girl to handle such a responsibility? How

can she resist the all too human urge to set the record straight, change the outcome, make a difference, by pushing a button? Or another? And then another? As she fights to overcome her unfortunate sobriquet "Goodyear Blimp" by a daunting jogging regimen and rapid ascension of the Suicide Stairs, losing pounds and inches while gaining confidence, the button box remains firmly planted in her mind. Yet the physical activity and concomitant intellectual maturity results in the box finding itself buried in the cellar, and absent from Gwendy's mind for longer and longer swatches of time. Until...If anything, this novella reminds me of the first third of King's Hearts in Atlantis, where the menace is just below the surface while the emphasis is simply on surviving childhood. A rewarding read on several levels.

It's always enjoyable to read a Stephen King book and this one was no exception. I also need to credit Richard Chizmar because without him, this story would not have been published. Chizmar revealed on The Horror Show With Brian Keene podcast that King started writing the story but got stuck. Then he asked Chizmar to take a look and then told Chizmar to work on the story. And before they knew it, the story was finished and the book was done. It really doesn't matter who wrote what because overall the story is enjoyable and spooky, nostalgic and uneasy. It's 1974. Gwendy Peterson is twelve-years-old and out running. During a break, a man in a black coat introduces himself as Richard Farris and they start to talk. He ends up leaving her a box with a set of buttons on it, not saying what the buttons will do but hinting at disaster. Gwendy's life is not the same from that point on. She must deal with the positive effects of the box as well as the stress and sickness it causes her. At the heart of the story, it is about growing up. Or maybe about the choices you make while growing up. It's about the choices made and the positive and negative results they have in life. Making your life better and becoming popular is good but what does that mean for your old friends that get left behind? Does an easy life really mean a better life? As Gwendy grows from elementary school to college, we see how she changes and wonder how much the box changed her. At novella length, the book is quick and concise. Gwendy is provided depth and dimensions but other characters are not. While doubling the length of the book might have been nice, it would have also changed the story to be about the button box rather than being about Gwendy. I was perfectly happy with it as is. And while a lot was mentioned about how Castle Rock was revisited, the town only plays a minor part in the story. It's totally possible and even probable that if I mapped out the story into the timeline of Castle Rock, that I would find some Easter Eggs or connections to the rest of the King mythos. But it's not necessary. I very much enjoyed the story without that extra level of research. However ... maybe I'll geek out and do so at some point in the future.

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