



## The Boxes

By William Sleator

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### The Boxes By William Sleator

Uncle Marco's frequent, mysterious trips have fascinated Annie for years--he never tells anyone, even his beloved niece, where he is going or when he'll be back. But this time is special: He leaves Annie in charge of two sealed boxes, with strict instructions not to open either one while he's away. As time passes, curiosity gnaws at her until she can think of virtually nothing else, even though problems dog her at both home and school. She worries especially about the evil Crutchley Development, a company that's trying to buy her family's house out from under them! Would it hurt to just peek inside one of the tempting, exotic boxes? But as soon as Annie does just that, an incredibly grotesque, crab-like creature scuttles out and disappears into the basement shadows. Annie is filled with an overpowering sense of dread. And when the creature almost immediately begins to multiply, she verges on panic and wonders whether opening the other box will help or hurt. There's just one difference between Annie and Pandora, though--for Annie, there's no hope left. This intricately plotted sci-fi thriller takes on the human psyche as well as the very nature of time itself, bringing fans on a suspenseful journey they'll never forget.

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## **The Boxes** By William Sleator Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

Like Pandora, 15-year-old orphan Annie has been given a box she is forbidden to open, opens it nonetheless and unleashes something horrible. But Sleator adds a twist: Annie has a second box. Moreover the telepathic crab-like beasts that came out of the first box may appear to be the evils of the world but turn out to be the protagonist's only hope for self-actualization. As in *The Beasties*, Sleator creates a community of strangely empathic monsters and a teenager who, when pressed into their service, discovers the mission isn't noxious but fulfilling. The creepy-crawlies worship a god/plant/clock that lives in the second box. They build a subterranean palace, order Annie about and enact enigmatic rites, saying things like: "The Lord will be very happy about the swing ritual, and the two more who are sacrificed to the Lord's goodness" (in reference to two creatures who are swung in a suspended boat and fall to their deaths). Unfortunately, a stereotypical crew of evil land developers and a less than compelling wizard figure (Annie's nearly absentee Uncle Marco) keep the tale on a superficial level. And readers may be disappointed in the ending, which sends Annie off on a cliffhanger of an adventure and never explains the process between creatures and clock, or Uncle Marco's role in it. Perhaps Sleator has a sequel in store; in the meantime, this is his signature high-style ick and suspense, but without sufficient payoff. Ages 10-up.

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#### From School Library Journal

Grade 5-8A Orphan Anne Levi tolerates her distant Aunt Ruth, with whom she lives, but adores her mysterious Uncle Marco, who flits in and out of their lives at irregular intervals. When he gives Anne two unusual boxes with strict instructions not to open them, curiosity gets the better of her. Opening the first one, she releases an unusual crablike creature that grows and reproduces rapidly; the life form and its offspring construct a fantastic palace in the basement and communicate with Anne telepathically. Dismayed by what she has done, Anne opens the second box, which she had hidden in her closet, revealing a clocklike object that has the ability to slow down time at the basement creatures' request, but only when Anne agrees to carry messages between the creatures and the clock. Unfortunately, the owners of a suspicious development company are intrigued by the time slowdowns and increase their ominous efforts to control Anne, her home, and the strange devices within it. Through her adventures, Anne grows into a self-confident teenager who is able to stand up to her overbearing aunt and trust her own instincts. Reminiscent of the complexity of Sleator's early science fiction, *The Boxes* introduces intriguing characters and unique situations but it leaves many loose ends and unanswered questions. Readers never find out just who or what Uncle Marco is, where he and Anne go when they enter the palace at the end, or where the boxes came from in the first place. The Boxes may be popular with Sleator's fans, but be prepared for requests for a sequel. *ASusan L. Rogers, Chestnut Hill Academy, PA*

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#### From Kirkus Reviews

Sleator (*The Beasties*, 1997, etc.) offers a strained mix of aliens and time travel in this tepid work of science fiction. When Annie, 15, is entrusted with two mysterious boxes by her secretive, young-looking Uncle Marco, her reaction is entirely understandable: She opens both. The first crate releases a crab-like creature that asexually reproduces in the basement of her Aunt Ruth's house; the second, in her bedroom, reveals a clock-like device that can slow the flow of time. Of course, the boxes are somehow connected to the clock, which the crab-creatures refer to as "Lord," enables them to erect a miniature palace within a very short time. Rather than focus on the aliens, the story shifts to the evil Crutchley Development Corporation, which, while buying up local houses to erect a super mall, discovers the secret in Annie's basement, and steals the

clock device. With her friend, Henry, Annie escapes the clutches of Crutchley employees and relatives, and returns with the clock, which, Uncle Marco divulges, is the key to his youthful appearance. As the Crutchley team bursts in, the crab creatures create a vortex through which the three humans escape. That lets Sleator off the hook for the moment, without providing any real explanation, and negates all chances for a satisfying ending. Readers will have to wait to see if there's a sequel. (Fiction. 10-12) -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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