



The Puzzler

Eyal Kless

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A postdystopian sci-fi work that recalls Gene Wolfe's *Shadow and Claw*, with elements of *The Fifth Element* and *Mad Max Fury Road*.

It follows a little boy who can open doors that nobody else can open, a society that is feeding off the salvaged technology of a lost generation, and a scribe who must figure out where it all went wrong.

The Puzzler Details

Date :

ISBN :

Author : Eyal Kless

Format :

Genre : Science Fiction, Fantasy, Mystery, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic

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From Reader Review *The Puzzler* for online ebook

Greg at 2 Book Lovers Reviews says

I'm sorry, but I could not wait for this story to end.

The Lost Puzzler dragged on for far too long, considering the storyline. Don't get me wrong, I absolutely love a long story, and at 528 pages, this book is far from one of the longest that I've read.

The story was an overlapping tale, consisting of a scribe's adventure in unearthing the mysterious disappearance of Rafik (story number two). Kless' narrative went back and forth between the scribe (don't ask me his name) and the story recounted to him by Rafik.

Whenever I feel like this, I feel compelled to think about why this story didn't work for me. I really think that it comes down to a connection; the story moved along well enough with action, but I never really felt like I knew enough about any of the characters. For the story to work for me, to really pull me in, I have to care. If the author can't make me care about the characters, I really can't care about the book. I honestly think that Kless needed to give me more background and development on this scribe, who I felt was the real focal point of the story.

I can see how *The Lost Puzzler* could resonate with some people, life would be boring if we all liked the same things. It is high on creativity, the writing is sound, and it ticked off a lot of boxes of what is expected from the genre. I just wanted, no, *needed* more from the characters.

*I received a copy of the book from the publisher (via Edelweiss).

Mary Nee says

An entertaining read! Starts off a little slow but once you get into it you will enjoy it.

Brian Cowlshaw says

Review coming soon for Sequart.org. I'll link it here when it's ready. Overall, pretty fascinating world-building in a compelling page-turner. Recommended for any SF/F readers teen and older.

Maayan Sasson says

Kless, created a novel in which all the elements come together in something approaching perfect harmony.

I loved the book. It shows what will happen to the world when there is no technology or limited access to

technology. It is a journey that connects the past, present and future with a lot of sense of humor, chapters that show a deep perspective of life and the world and that along with a feeling of adventure. Some of the scene reminded me battles in "Star Wars" or great histrionic battles. Go and read the book!

Joe Crowe says

(Review from an early advance copy)

Author Eyal Kless is a classical violinist, but he can whomp up a sci-fi adventure novel, too.

It's about a ragtag crowd of people in a dystopian society after everything got blown up real good.

The press release says the book is a combo of "Mad Max: Fury Road" and "The Canterbury Tales," and now I can't un-compare the book to those two things. The author captures the energy and the craziness of "Fury Road" in the world he creates, while the depth of the characters shows that he has thought way too much about the world he has created (I mean that as a compliment.)

This one is the first book in a series, and you will need need the next part, right now. Or sooner.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

3.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2019/01/17/...>

The Lost Puzzler was a puzzle, in more ways than one. Not only was the story shrouded in mystery, the plot was also slow to unravel, inviting the readers to seek the solution to the big question while doling out clues gradually in a teasing fashion. In addition, the structure of the book felt like a series of many separate and dissimilar segments making up a whole, thus making it feel very fractured.

For obvious reasons, novels like this often present me with a conundrum: how to rate it when I enjoy some of its pieces but not the others? In the case of The Lost Puzzler, I loved everything about the first half. We begin the tale through the eyes of a lowly scribe of the Guild of Historians who has been tasked with a dangerous mission to discover the fate of a boy who disappeared more than a decade before. This boy—named Rafik—is said to be a Puzzler, an individual with a special talent to unlock mysterious puzzle box-like nodes that are scattered across the world, hidden away in labyrinths and other dungeon-like places, where they guard the valuable treasures of the lost Tarkanian civilization. Following an apocalyptic event known as the Catastrophe, those who survived have split into different groups, and one of these groups called the Salvationists believe that the answers lie in the ancient technology of their forebears. They send teams on dangerous expeditions to plunder Tarkanian strongholds, where the Puzzler will attempt to crack their defenses while the rest of the squad protects itself from threats like traps and attacking lizard-like creatures.

Soon after the intro though, the narrative shifts to tell the story of Rafik. He was born in a community that has reverted to the old ways after the Catastrophe, becoming deeply faithful to the new gods they worship while shunning everything to do with technology. When the strange tattoos marking him as special began appearing on Rafik's fingertips, his parents feared their son cursed, sending him away to a "friend" of the family who promised to get a good price for him at auction. Recognizing his value, a powerful guild ends up purchasing Rafik at a high price, nearly bankrupting themselves in the process. To ensure a return on their investment, Rafik's new handlers begin grooming him for the demanding role of Puzzler, putting him through rigorous training exercises to prepare him for his first expedition.

The book flips the reader back and forth between these two timelines—the one in the present, where our historian attempts to extract Rafik's story from a woman who used to know him, and the one in the past, which flashes back to her knowledge of the boy's history and her recollections of her time with him. The awkward transitions notwithstanding, I generally liked how the two narratives were presented, especially the way they framed Rafik's backstory while doing an excellent job filling in the lore and background of the setting. Like I said, I loved the first half of the book, particularly the parts detailing the initial stages of Rafik's exile, from the time he discovered the telltale markings on his hand to the harrowing journey on the road where he is traded from master to master.

Not surprisingly, some of my favorite moments from the book came from these early segments, with Rafik's time with the charismatic Captain Sam and his supertruck Sweetheart immediately coming to mind. The problem, however, is that many of these fascinating encounters are much too short. While I really enjoyed Rafik's backstory, I wasn't so much a fan of the episodic nature of his narrative. It felt really fragmented, with his character being passed like a hockey puck from one situation to the next, not to mention how a lot of the entertaining side characters end up sticking around just long enough to endear themselves to the reader before they are swiftly left behind and never to be seen again. It seemed a little wasteful, in a way, how many of the incredible characters and concepts presented here were never explored to their full potential. It made me think that much of Rafik's backstory of his time before being sold to the Salvationist guild could have been cut down or reworked because of the way it plodded and meandered.

The novel also started losing me in its second half. After Rafik is bought by the guild, the story descends into a confusion of ideas that remind me of a bit of a fantasy RPG campaign mixed with the premise of a YA dystopian like *The Maze Runner*. These elements didn't mesh as well with the rest of the world-building. I also didn't feel as invested in the story once the present timeline took over for good. And while the conclusion provided some answers, the explanations given were convoluted and I didn't find them particularly helpful, especially since they led to even more questions.

All of this led to my mixed opinions on *The Lost Puzzler*. At times, it was a compelling page-turner where all I wanted was to know more about the life of Rafik and his abilities; other times, I was uncertain how I felt about the story's direction and disjointed sections. That said, on the whole I found this to be an entertaining read and a fairly solid debut, and at this point I'm up for giving this world another go if there is a sequel.

Lori L (She Treads Softly) says

The Lost Puzzler by Eyal Klessis is a highly recommended YA post-dystopian yarn which excels in world building.

Over a century has passed since the Catastrophe that caused the fall of the Tarakan empire. Whatever caused the disaster was, it left humans almost extinct, and changed. Survivors have either returned to rural, agrarian, orthodox lifestyles or live in destroyed cities full of warring guilds, and mercenaries, City people live in slum-like environments while trying to adapt to using technology they don't understand while scavenging for more old tech. The Guild of Historians has sent a scribe out in search of the story of Rafik. Rafik is a boy who was born marked and is one of a rare kind- a puzzler. A puzzler is a person who is used as a key to open doors that can only be accessed by quickly solving a puzzle.

The Lost Puzzler will hold your attention and is descriptive and exciting without vividly describing the more gruesome aspects of the grim under-belly that would certainly be present in this society. Klessis provides plenty of details about the inner workings of the current society, including depictions of the remains of tech and weapons they use, but don't totally understand. This is a very different civilization and Klessis does an excellent job creating a picture of this world and how the current survivors are living in this world. The care taken with this world building will pay off in future stories. The characters are well-developed and fully fleshed out. They all have distinct personalities, including strengths and weaknesses.

The main problem with The Lost Puzzler is its protracted length. Several aspects of the search for Rafik and his backstory could have been edited down. The narrative does begin to drag in the middle. This is a debut novel and the length may be indicative of that as I am guessing Klessis wanted to get as many of the descriptions, twists, discoveries, fights, and people he could into this novel. In the end it is a captivating and entertaining novel, albeit a bit over-long.

Disclosure: My review copy was courtesy of HarperCollins.
<http://www.shetreadssoftly.com/2019/0...>

els says

I kept reading more for the mystery than any interest in the story. At the end of the day I preferred the nested story much more than its frame, and wish that could have been the focus.

Marzie says

3.25 stars

The Lost Puzzler offers an interesting world but gets bogged down in a repetitive plot structure. Telling the story of Rafik, the titular lost puzzler, we see events that directly affect him in the past, along with a "present day" (future world) historical search for information about him, along with an attempt to determine his whereabouts. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, puzzlers are those both gifted and cursed with the ability to gain access to sophisticated technology and structures that are remnants of the mysterious Tarakanian society.

While the concept was initially intriguing, the repetitive theme of twelve year old Rafik being sold from

guild to guild as people exploit his puzzle solving abilities seemed to drag on. The reader can foresee early on what facets of the ending of the book will be but it's a long 500 pages getting there. My biggest complaint however was the development of the character of Vincha, who is judged by everyone in this future dystopian world by the same double moral standards as those in our day. It felt odd that this was a world that evolved with sophisticated technology, fell apart, its denizens struggle to survive in an almost Mad Max sense, many with significantly augmented humans, yet everyone is still focused on how many people Vincha has slept with in this camp or another. Evidently women's sexuality/promiscuity is still a significant social issue while men can still "just be boys." Really? After a while, it just began to annoy me. Wouldn't it be unique to have a future dystopian world in which assertive or aggressive women are not labeled bitches and no one cares about who they sleep with? It also would have given the sting of the revelations about her character's actions far more impact.

I received a Digital Review Copy from Harper Voyager via Edelweiss along with a paper review copy, in exchange for an honest review.

Maayan Sasson says

Kless, created a novel in which all the elements come together in something approaching perfect harmony.

I loved the book. It shows what will happen to the world when there is no technology or limited access to technology. It is a journey that connects the past, present and future with a lot of sense of humor, characters that show a deep perspective of life and the world and that along with a feeling of adventure. some of the scene reminded me battles in "star wars" or great histrionic battles.
Go and read the book!

George says

A true joy, cover to cover.

Jon says

This was an early download from Harper Voyager (those who follow along already know I'm part of the Super Reader program, those who don't will know now lol), the blurb sounded cool so I gave it a shot.

It's somewhat your basic dystopian YA, which got it dinged for a star, in that it felt like it somehow restrained itself. I mean, I don't need it to go all Cormac McCarthy, but it trod the edges of dark without really taking that leap, without taking advantage of the possibilities that an R rating has over a PG-13 when dealing with the darker aspects of humanity and post-humanity.

That being said, where the book excelled was world building. This is definitely something that I would like to see continued, as Kless has done a masterful job of setting the scene and prepping for an expanded story. The characters are (mostly) intriguing and engaging, even some of the bit players (the super truck driver still comes to mind two months after having read it). The book would easily translate to film with very little adaptation needed.

So yeah, 4 stars for everything it got right, well worth your time if you're into stuff like The Maze Runner, but it's waaaaayyy better than those books.

Amit Zohar says

I really enjoyed this book. Set aside a lot of time because you'll find it hard to put down.

Aristotle says

Mad Max(Mel Gibson and Charlize Theron), Rain Man, and Jesus walk into a bar.

The Lost Puzzler was puzzling.

I just don't know what to make of this book or how to review it.

I do not recommend it. That's a good start.

First time authors should rely heavily on editors. The book was unnecessarily verbose.

So what was it about?

Uhm let me think about it.

A 'puzzler' is a person with tattoos who can unlock doors by solving complex puzzles.

For example: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,...What's the next number?

Solve the puzzle in 5 seconds to open the door. If they don't they could die. Well that's not good.

Behind the doors are weapons, medicine, books and other assorted goodies.

These puzzlers are shunned and most of the time killed because the simple town folk believe the tattoos are a sign from Satan.

There are 'Guilds' that buy 'puzzlers' to open the doors and give them powerful goodies and knowledge to control the land. 12 year old Rafik is one of the most powerful puzzlers. There are black boxes or locks on the doors with three holes in them. The puzzler inserts three finger in it and is transported to a puzzler dimension to solve a geometrical puzzle once solved the door opens.

I don't know what i'm saying.

Rafik, The Scribe, Galinak, and Vincha were interesting characters. Some of the action scenes were cool but this bloated post-dystopian novel didn't work.

Thanks to Goodreads for an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review.
