



# The Hypnotist

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Editor's Choice:

Editors Choice

Media type:

Book

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It is the 1960s - the time of Martin Luther King and a rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Jack is looking forward to his new position as Head of Neurological Research in southern USA. Pip is trying to adapt to a life as a servant to Zachary and the extraordinary Lilybelle, Hannah, the mute Native American girl, is trying to keep out of the way of Erwin. Their stories collide and intertwine.

This is Laurence Anholt's first novel for a teenage readership and it is indeed a page-turner. Using three distinct voices, Anholt incorporates information on American history, personal reflection as well as an exciting narrative around Pip and Hannah. The shift in voice is emphasised by a differentiation in font and, of course, tone. Jack is the adult first-person narrator, but the reader follows Pip through a more conventional approach with a nod to that master storyteller, Dickens. The result is interesting but not wholly comfortable. I suspect young readers will find the narrative concerned with Pip and Hannah the more exciting and engaging and the shift to the adult voice disconcerting. However, the topic, the situation, is a powerful one and the author's passion and engagement shines through. This is a story that has a strong personal claim on Anholt and it is a bold first effort. Certainly the writer's style carries the reader along; though some may find the use of Southern US dialect jarring, it did not intrude on my enjoyment. Pip and Hannah are engaging protagonists. Zachary and Lilybelle are Dickensian, Erwin monstrous, Jack, our alter ego observing from the outside. While not wholly successful this is an ambitious novel about a period that is fast becoming history but has much to say to young people today.

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