

YA Book Review

A NEW QUIRKY KID ANTHEM: *THE STRANGE FASCINATIONS OF NOAH HYPNOTIK* BY DAVID ARNOLD

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Andover High School

My newest love is the novel *The Strange Fascinations of Noah Hypnotik* by David Arnold. This book, published in 2018 by Viking Children's, first appealed to me from its colorful exterior and obvious nods to my truest love, David Bowie. Once I opened the book, I was not disappointed.

Noah Oakman is the narrator of this coming-of-age story about realizing just how important the people in our lives are to us. Noah is a sixteen-year-old swimmer who has been exaggerating a back injury in the hopes that people will eventually stop expecting him to return to the sport. He is also extremely tidy, only wears ten different outfits, and has strange fascinations—but more on those later.

Noah's best friends are brother and sister Alan and Val. Alan is a Marvel fan and a part of the LGBTQ community (which he tells Noah at a very young age, bonding them from that moment on). Val is a talented photographer obsessed with photographing music-themed Instagram pictures that Noah admires. The three of them form what they call a delicate triangle and are inseparable, but lately Noah has been feeling like he is beginning to separate from his friends.

The story kicks off when Noah and the delicate triangle are invited to a party to kick off their senior year. At the party, Noah wanders to the library to discover a boy named Circuit who claims he can help Noah feel less disenchanting with the world. Noah readily accepts his offer, and when he awakes from the hypnotism, he finds that there are many small but important details about his life that have changed: his senile dog suddenly becomes lively and peppy all over again, his best friends' interests change, and his mother develops a scar on her face.

The only constants in this new world are his Strange Fascinations, the only things that haven't changed. It is then that he decides to get to the bottom of this new reality by seeking them out—a photograph, a man with a massive goiter on his neck, a slight discrepancy in his favorite book, and a YouTube video of a woman's face aging over the years that have kept his interest for a long time. The journey that follows ensures lots of laughter and tears (and a bit of confusion at points, if I'm being honest). Through lots of persistence, he eventually weaves a thread through all of his fascinations that causes him to grow and change throughout the novel as he figures out that each of these strange allures leads to loneliness. He begins to realize that even though it can be uncomfortable, it might be time to *turn and face the strange* (and do the right thing). The ending was absolutely perfect. I was sad to have to put it down.

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This book was amazingly relevant. It perfectly captures the feeling of an end of an era that comes along with graduating high school. Every feeling a senior feels as they step out into the unknown is perfectly captured by Noah, Val, and Alan. It included many references to current pop culture and technology that may not stand the test of time, but I hardly think that is any reason to discredit this book. If anything, the technological references will make future generations smile as they remember “the good old days” when we watched Netflix. There was also a lot of scientific talk that confused me a bit at first, but it all wrapped up nicely at the end of the book. All of the references aside, the way that the main character thought and spoke was a nice change of pace. Speaking on pointless internet content, Noah muses, “Look: I am not immune to the allure of the sea otter, but at a certain point a guy has to wonder about all the life decisions he's made that have landed him on a couch, watching a glorified weasel press H9 for a bag of SunChips” (Arnold, 2018, p. 2). Oftentimes when I read young adult literature, I find that the narrator sounds jaded, but Noah was perfectly quirky with a sweet family and great friends who are positive influences in his delicate triangle.

I would absolutely recommend this book for someone looking to get out of the typical “going away to college” narrative, but still wanting to read relatable texts about the weird in-between stage that is the transition from senior year to college. It would be perfect for a senior in an English class to take on as individual reading and I plan on recommending it to many seniors. The only challenges I foresee with this book are the references to both science and “the oldies.” If a student is not particularly scholarly in scientific matters like me, they may have a hard time understanding some of the theories presented in the book. But, to the students I can already hear complaining that this book is tough I say: hold on and keep reading. It is absolutely worth the time.

Author Biography

Rhiley Wall earned her bachelor's in secondary English education from Wichita State University in spring 2020, and she is excited to share her love of literature with the world. While earning her degree, she worked as a Resident Assistant in WSU's residence halls. When she is not teaching, Rhiley can be found reading or challenging others to a game of Bananagrams. Rhiley's love of young adult literature was rekindled this year in a college course, and she is excited to further explore this niche of literature and share its value with her future students. She will begin her teaching career at Andover High School in fall 2020. Contact her at rmmwall@gmail.com.