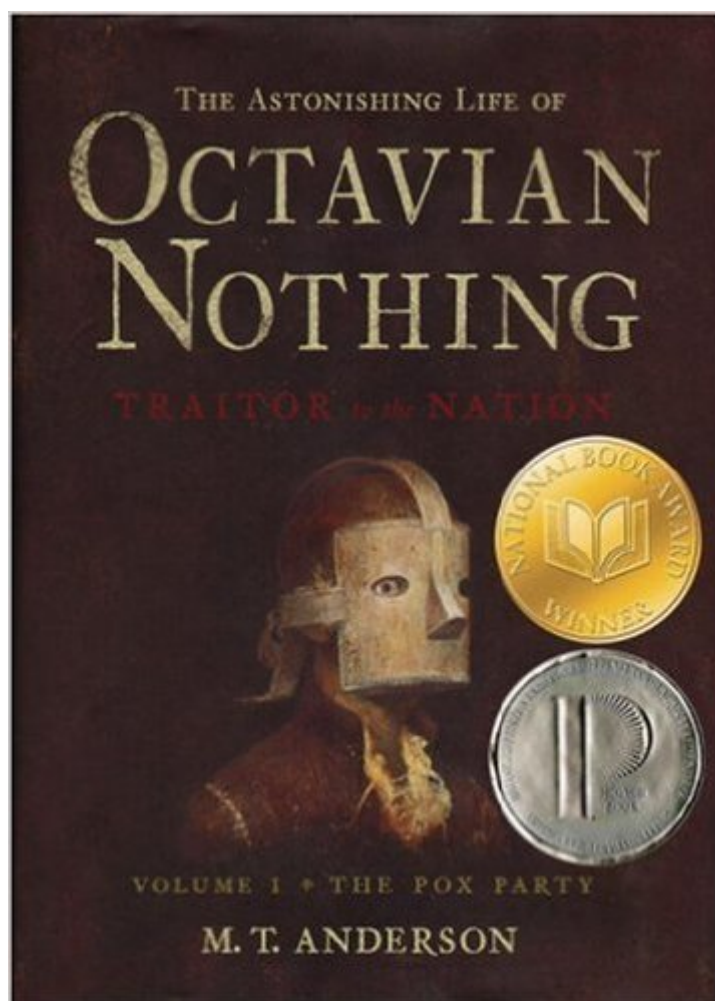


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The Astonishing Life Of Octavian Nothing, Traitor To The Nation, Vol. 1: The Pox Party



Synopsis

A gothic tale becomes all too shockingly real in this mesmerizing magnum opus by the acclaimed author of FEED. It sounds like a fairy tale. He is a boy dressed in silks and white wigs and given the finest of classical educations. Raised by a group of rational philosophers known only by numbers, the boy and his mother — a princess in exile from a faraway land — are the only persons in their household assigned names. As the boy's regal mother, Cassiopeia, entertains the house scholars with her beauty and wit, young Octavian begins to question the purpose behind his guardians' fanatical studies. Only after he dares to open a forbidden door does he learn the hideous nature of their experiments — and his own chilling role in them. Set against the disquiet of Revolutionary Boston, M. T. Anderson's extraordinary novel takes place at a time when American Patriots rioted and battled to win liberty while African slaves were entreated to risk their lives for a freedom they would never claim. The first of two parts, this deeply provocative novel reimagines the past as an eerie place that has startling resonance for readers today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"I do not believe they ever meant unkindness." So Octavian says of those to whom he was an experiment, to those who claimed him as chattel, to those who weighed his excrement daily and compared it to his intake. It is perhaps this book's most frightening truth that he is correct. Octavian and his mother were sold into slavery in the 1760s, in Boston, to The Novanglian College of Lucidity. These men were rationalists, and sought to discover — once all of the niceties are removed

- whether the Negro was inferior to the European. Octavian was taught "the arts and knowledge of the physical world...the strictest instruction in ethics...kindness, filial duty, piety, obedience, and humility," Latin, Greek, the violin, and while learning these things, he was dressed in silk and lavished with luxuries. Yet we see the detached scientist immediately in his caretakers, as Octavian describes an experiment whereby they drowned a dog to time its drowning, and another where they dropped alley-cats from high places to "judge the height from which cats no longer shatter," and yet another where they tried to teach a girl "deprived of reason and speech" the usage of verbs, and when the girl could not master verbs, they beat her "to the point of gagging and swooning." And yet they never meant unkindness. While this is a book of fiction, it is useful to remember (as the author calls us to at the end) that while the College of Lucidity is a fictional entity, the kind of experiments they conducted indeed took place, and the question of inferiority was one that was much discussed. Octavian, with his mother, Mr. Gitney, and Dr. Trefusis, excelled. He became literate beyond their hopes, and could play the violin as a virtuoso.

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