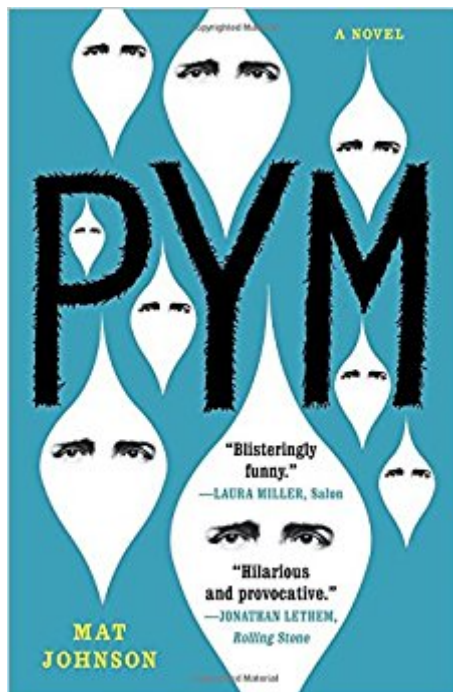


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Pym: A Novel



Synopsis

“THE SHARPEST AND MOST UNUSUAL STORY I READ LAST YEAR . . . [Mat] Johnson’s satirical vision roves as freely as Kurt Vonnegut’s and is colored with the same sort of passionate humanitarianism.” —Maud Newton, New York Times Magazine
NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The Washington Post
—Vanity Fair
—Houston Chronicle
—The Seattle Times
—Salon
—National Post
—The A.V. Club
—Recently canned professor of American literature Chris Jaynes has just made a startling discovery: the manuscript of a crude slave narrative that confirms the reality of Edgar Allan Poe’s strange and only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Determined to seek out Tsalal, the remote island of pure and utter blackness that Poe describes, Jaynes convenes an all-black crew of six to follow Pym’s trail to the South Pole, armed with little but the firsthand account from which Poe derived his seafaring tale, a bag of bones, and a stash of Little Debbie snack cakes. Thus begins an epic journey by an unlikely band of adventurers under the permafrost of Antarctica, beneath the surface of American history, and behind one of literature’s great mysteries. —
“Outrageously entertaining, [Pym] brilliantly re-imagines and extends Edgar Allan Poe’s enigmatic and unsettling *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. . . . Part social satire, part meditation on race in America, part metafiction and, just as important, a rollicking fantasy adventure . . . reminiscent of Philip Roth in its seemingly effortless blend of the serious, comic and fantastic.” —Michael Dirda, *The Washington Post*
“Blisteringly funny.” —Laura Miller, *Salon*
“Relentlessly entertaining.” —*The New York Times Book Review*
“Imagine Kurt Vonnegut having a beer with Ralph Ellison and Jules Verne.” —*Vanity Fair*
“Screamingly funny . . . Reading Pym is like opening a big can of whoop-ass and then marveling gleefully at all the mayhem that ensues.” —*Houston Chronicle*

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Chris Jaynes, professor of African American studies, has been denied tenure for his refusal to sit on the Diversity Committee at his university and for his intense interest in Edgar Allan Poe. Enraged, he nearly implodes before discovering a lost manuscript proving that Poe's only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, is a factual account. Jaynes devises a mission to find the lost, black-inhabited island near Antarctica described in Poe's narrative, setting off with an all-black crew that includes his seafaring cousin; his obese friend Garth; his ex-fiancee, Angela, and her husband, Nathaniel; and two flamboyant mechanics. They discover that something else described in Poe's narrative is also real: giant, yeti-like, albino humanoids living in large colonies below the ice in Antarctica. This extension of Poe's adventure is a romp that surprises on every page. Funny, insightful, racially important, *Pym* is a death-defying adventure and a probing examination of notions of race, even at the farthest ends of the earth. --Julie Hunt --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"BLISTERINGLY FUNNY...a full-fledged and fiendishly inventive inversion of Poe's [*Pym*], a series of bizarre encounters I can't bring myself to spoil, each one more deliciously pointed than the last." -- Laura Miller, *Salon* "SCREAMINGLY FUNNY...there's no shortage of thought and scholarship and experience underpinning *Pym*, but Johnson doesn't let any of it bog him down. On the contrary, reading *Pym* is like opening a BIG CAN OF WHOOP-ASS and then marveling -- gleefully -- at all the mayhem that ensues." -- Maggie Galehouse, *Houston Chronicle* "RELENTLESSLY ENTERTAINING...It's no easy task to balance social satire against life-threatening adventure, the allegory against the gory, but Johnson's hand is steady and his ability to play against Poe's text masterly. The book is polyphonous and incisive, an uproarious and hard-driving journey." -- New York Times Book Review "RIOTOUS...Jaynes never learns much about the white pathology and mindset, but Mr. Johnson knows plenty about the character types he skewers." -- Wall Street Journal "LOONY, disrespectful, and sharp, Johnson's *Pym* is a welcome riff on the

surrealistic shudder-fest that is Poe's original. "I'll stop there, but Johnson's inventiveness never does."

"Fresh Air" NPR's "Mat Johnson's new novel is nothing short of fantastic, in every sense. I fell in love with the voice, the tone and the world of Pym. This is an adventure novel, a work of historical and social commentary, a rumination on identity. The only problem I could find with this novel is that I didn't write it. It's a beautiful piece of work."--Percival Everett, author of *I Am Not Sidney Poitier*

Mat Johnson has come here to chew bubble gum and kick ass, and he's all out of bubble gum. Pym is an adventure, a satire, and a bracing political debate all rolled into one brilliant novel. Edgar Allen Poe has inspired many authors but Mat Johnson has the inspired audacity to both honor and discredit the man, often in the same sentence. I imagine Poe choking on half the things Johnson writes in this novel, and tipping his tiny hat in admiration to the rest."--Victor LaValle, author of *Big Machine*

"PYM reframes far more than Poe. It reframes everything American, from the whiteness of Ahab's whale to Detroit bus drivers; from DNA testing to tenure review; from the Gatsbyesque dream of romantic love to the dream of Utopia; from our fear of life to our love of death. No one today writes inside the brilliant black mind better."

--Alice Randall, author of *The Wind Done Gone* and *Rebel Yell*

"Social criticism rubs shoulders with cutting satire in this high-concept adventure. [PYM] is caustically hilarious as it offers a memorable take on America's racial pathology and the whole ugly story of our world."

--Publishers Weekly, starred review

You can trust the veracity of this account: Mat Johnson's Pym is a spectacularly sly and nimble-footed send-up of this world, the next world, and all points in between. A satire with heart, as courageous as it is cunning."

--Colson Whitehead, author of *Sag Harbor*

"An acutely humorous, very original story that will delight lovers of literature and fantasy alike."

--Kirkus, starred review

"This extension of Poe's adventure is a romp that surprises on every page. Funny, insightful...Pym is a death-defying adventure."

--Booklist

"Mat Johnson writes with all the probing intelligence of James Baldwin, the scalding satire of Dany Laferriere and the technique of a master craftsman, all of which make him one of the most exciting, important and gifted writers of his generation. Pym is a moving and accomplished novel."

--Chris Abani, author of *GraceLand* and *the Virgin of Flames*.

I read "Pym" during my as a Senior English Major in Contemporary American Literature. What word describes it best? "Encapsulating" is the first word that comes to mind. If Johnson's mix of characters aren't enough, the nod to multiple literary conventions should fill any perceived gap. This

novel is not written for the casual reader. It's geeky, informative, romantic, and also a bit visceral. The novel retains sociopolitical relevance and forces readers to question their definitions of blackness and whiteness. As a literature student, I will not be shocked if Johnson takes his place as part of the literary canon. Read the narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, by Edgar Allan Poe to gain more perspective about this novel. If you aren't a Poe fan, you'll still get your money's worth.

Well, this was an interesting book! Not like anything I had read before. It is refreshing to read a novel where black people are not background characters or sidekicks. Virtually all of the characters in this book are African-American and they each have their own take on what that means. The main character, Chris Jaynes, is a professor of African-American Literature at a small college when he fails to be granted tenure. The reason for this failure seems to be two fold. Firstly, he would not join the college diversity committee because he felt it was a sham and without the college's only person of color, this sham would be blatant. Secondly, he refuses to teach African-American Literature because he has become obsessed with the only novel ever written by Edgar Allan Poe. He believes this novel has something to do with the definition of "whiteness" that lead to racism in America, or at least the current definition of it. While he is obsessed with Poe's novel, he also has great disdain for it. He seems to believe it is the worst novel ever written. for example: ""There is an afterword "Note" section to the novel, but it offers basically nothing, just more confusion than solution. For one, it tells us that Pym died, and died suddenly, having not completed the final three chapters of the book--but he somehow managed that earlier preface, supposedly written after the journey." And yet he insists on giving a lecture on the book every semester whether anyone attends or not. There are some clever and insightful phrases in the book. I'll site just a couple. "I was so depressed at the end of his rant that I let him smoke in my living room." In speaking of the location of the college he states, "We were far enough north from the Point Pleasant nuclear reactor that if it was hit, we'd survive the radiation. Even a dirty bomb in Manhattan would be okay; the wind blew south from here. People moved here for that, and for the natural beauty." The ending is clever and ironic. I should have seen it coming but I did not. At any rate, I highly recommend this novel. Everyone should read it.

I have recommended this book to several people. I really enjoy reading about failed or even successful arctic and antarctic expeditions. This fiction that involved such an expedition, and literature, and Poe (who I don't worship) seemed like an interesting thing, and it proved to be more than that. It's hard to tell where satire begins and ends here, but it gives us points of view we don't hear from often enough. Rich in irony. A reader's read.

Mat Johnson is a brilliant, thought-provoking author who creates wonderful works of art, but this fell a little bit short of expectation. The book is a telling in reverse (of sorts) of Edgar Allan Poe's only novel, "The Narrative Of Arthur Gordon Pym Of Nantucket". We follow Chris Jaynes in an exploration of the story of Pym, which has long thought to be fictional but Jaynes finds to be true. The novel is a satire and social criticism of America and the idea that we're living in a post-racial world, and while it achieves that goal, the narrative that it uses as a frame is a little rickety. There are a few places where the plot is moved forward by unconvincing means: the most glaring example is Garth eating all of the food that the group was going to trade for their lives. It was a jarring moment that 'broke the dream', so to speak, and pulled me out as a reader. A novel worth reading, but falls short of Johnson's other work.

The story was entertaining at times, but was just too far fetched in an odd way for me. I enjoy a good sci-fi story, but this seemed to be something different.

PYM is a very interesting and bizarre book that takes a big twist from something like a dissertation on Edgar Allan Poe to a surreal allegorical adventure that looks at the race relationship between white people and everyone else. Or, may more to the point, our obsession with "white". The scenario is thick with satire and allows the reader to see these questions in a new light. From that standpoint, it's amazing. It did take me a long time to read the book. That is mostly due to my life and less to do with the writing. However, I did have a hard time keeping interest in the middle. It does pick up but I struggled a little.

Oh Matt Johnson, I didn't think there was anyone else out there who loved Poe the way I did. I was so wrong. This book slams in across home plate by page 6! And it doesn't let up until...well it doesn't let up. All that whiteness, all that Karvel lightness, I was laughing non stop until the furry white guys went all bad, like we knew they would. We're currently reading this in English 476 at the University of Illinois and I consider myself one lucky student to have this as required reading.!! Fantastic novel.

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