



Son of the Circus: A Victorian Story

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This historical drama is part of the narrative non-fiction series, **VOICES**, which uses storytelling to teach children about periods from the past and the extraordinary lives lived by the famous and the not so famous. From this book, young readers can learn about the first black circus owner in Victorian Britain, Pablo Fanque.

The story is told by Ted, who lives with his mother and ill brother in Bradfield, until he is visited by the mysterious Pablo Fanque and learns that his absent father is a circus owner! Despite much anxiety, Ted is whisked off for a life at the circus, where he is introduced to a totally different world, and readers are taught about Victorian circuses, how they were run and the acts that were performed.

Ted doesn't find it easy to adapt to his new world, despite the somewhat reluctant tutelage of Larkin (a young boy who is determined to fight with Ted for Pablo's attention). The learning curve is steep and Ted finds it hard to believe that he will ever have what it takes to make it at the circus. Adding to his worries is the fact that the circus is clearly not succeeding in the way it once did, and Pablo is concerned for its future.

There is some excitement and jeopardy in Ted's journey with the circus, and his race to master the tightrope in time to save his father's company. However, more compelling than this main story arc, is the achievements of Pablo as a trailblazer and the challenges faced by Ted as a young man of mixed race in Victorian Britain, which is captured poignantly in a tense and dramatic scene involving a small group of violent racists.

The narrative on the whole is somewhat predictable, with few genuine surprises, and some readers may be disappointed that there aren't more opportunities to learn about genuine Victorian life beyond the circus. However, the story of Pablo Fanque is unique and engaging and this book is a welcome introduction to his story.

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