



★ **Saga Boy**

Antonio Michael Downing

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Taking place across continents, *Saga Boy* is the memoir of a Black Trinidadian who grew into his manhood in Canada, surrounded by whiteness and colonial legacies.

Downing's early childhood was filled with Anglican hymns, British-style school uniforms, and "the single greatest sanitizer of our savagery: the King James Bible." The mysteries, rhythms, and magic of Trinidad surrounded him, too. Abandoned by both of his parents, he was raised by his grandmother. Following her death, he and his brother were sent to live with their hyper religious aunt in Wabigoon, Ontario. He was eleven; he went from going to sleep in tropics to dealing with blizzards in a matter of days. Even his name was changed: he was now called Michael, as Antonio was thought "unsuitable" to life in Canada.

Downing's narration is compelling and disturbing. He writes about longing for a home—a place where he could feel rooted. But the toxic secrets of the past had been passed down instead, and he saw himself becoming what he least wanted to be: a "saga boy," the Trinidadian term for a "playboy," just like his father and grandfather.

The book relates the dark side of Canadian life and the difficulties of learning to be a man without a guide. Downing, struggling to overcome the lasting effects of colonialism, parental abandonment, and the shame of sexual abuse, took refuge in his music and hid his vulnerability beneath a series of personas. Eventually, he came to realize that he was, in some sense, all of them, and more.

Saga Boy is an eloquent memoir about Anthony Michael Downing's experiences as an immigrant in a minority population; it centers his resilience.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2021)

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