

= Apex Hides the Hurt =

Apex Hides the Hurt is a 2006 novel by American author Colson Whitehead . The novel follows an unnamed nomenclature consultant who is asked to visit the town of Winthrop , which , rather conveniently for the nomenclature consultant , is considering changing its name . During his visit , the main character is introduced to several citizens attempting to persuade him in favor of their preferred name for the town .

The novel has received mostly positive reviews from critics , with few negative comments . In a positive review for American magazine Entertainment Weekly , Jennifer Reese called the book " a blurry satire of American commercialism , " adding that " it may not mark the apex of Colson Whitehead 's career , but it brims with the author 's spiky humor and intelligence . " The book was featured among the 100 Most Notable Books of The Year for 2006 , as published by The New York Times .

= = About the author = =

Colson Whitehead (born 1969) is an American author . Whitehead was born and raised in Brooklyn , New York and wrote for The Village Voice for two years during his early career , and has since authored three other novels : The Intuitionist , John Henry Days and The Colossus of New York . Since Whitehead began writing , he has had his books and writing reviewed and mentioned in The New York Times , New York Magazine , Harper 's Magazine and has been a recipient of the MacArthur and Whiting Award .

= = Plot = =

The book is set in the fictional town of Winthrop . The protagonist of the book is an unnamed African @-@ American " nomenclature consultant " who has had recent success in branding and selling Apex bandages , which come in multiple colors to better match a broad array of skin tones . The novel begins with the main character being contacted by his former employer , which he had left after losing a toe . He travels to the town of Winthrop after requests from the town council , which has proposed that the town be renamed . However , three key citizens disagree what the name should be : Albie Winthrop , descendant of the town 's namesake (who 'd made his fortune in barbed wire) ; Regina Goode , the mayor (descendant of one of the town 's two founders) ; and Lucky Aberdeen , a software magnate who 's leading the drive to rename the town . Winthrop wants to keep the name ; Goode wants the town to revert to the name it bore at its founding as a town of free blacks , Freedom ; while Aberdeen wants to call it " New Prospera . "

As the consultant talks with the residents of the town and investigates its history , the backstory of his injury is gradually revealed . After repeatedly stubbing his toe and covering it up with Apex bandages , the consultant accidentally stepped into pig feces during a company team retreat . Because of the colored bandage , he never discovered how his toe was badly infected , and fainted on the sidewalk after fleeing from an awards party . This led to the amputation of his toe , his departure from the nomenclature firm , and the beginning of his hermetic lifestyle .

After much deliberation , the consultant decides on the name " Struggle , " the original idea of the other of the two original founders , Field . Following this , the consultant promptly returns home , where his foot injury continues to bother him even more than before .

= = Themes = =

In an interview with Alma Books , Whitehead states that the concept of the book originated from an article about the naming process for new pharmaceuticals such as Prozac . The article made Whitehead question how a similar process is used to assert a certain control over one 's environment (his example is a boulevard named after a particular person) , and yoking the two concepts was the beginning of the ideas that led to his composition of the novel .

= = Reception = =

Overall , the novel was critically well received . It was highlighted among The New York Times ' 100 Most Notable Books of the Year , and also highlighted among 100 noteworthy books from 2006 , as published by The Charleston Gazette . In a review in The Boston Globe , Saul Austerlitz called it a " wickedly funny new novel . " USA Today noted that " no novelist writing today is more engaging and entertaining when it comes to questions of race , class and commercial culture than Colson Whitehead , " concluding that the novel " gets to the heart of the thing , but in a delightfully roundabout way . " The San Francisco Chronicle gave the novel a mixed review , commenting that " It 's pure joy to read writing like this , but watching Whitehead sketch out a minor character 's essence with one stroke , while breathtaking , makes one wish the same treatment was afforded the people who ostensibly inhabit the novel 's complex ideas . " American trade news magazine Publishers Weekly reacted negatively to the book , writing that " Whitehead disappoints in this intriguingly conceived but static tale of a small town with an identity crisis . "

Erin Aubry Kaplan of the Los Angeles Times noted that " too often , [Whitehead] can 't resist the temptation of irony , and his big ideas are sometimes overwhelmed by one wink @-@ wink or metaphor too many . " Kirkus Reviews praised the book , writing that " while making no attempt at depth of characterization , Whitehead audaciously blurs the line between social realism and fabulist satire . " The Library Journal praised the book , noting that " In spare and evocative prose , Whitehead does Shakespeare one better : What 's in a name , and how does our identity relate to our own sense of who we are ? " The New York Observer was critical of the book but noted that " readers not looking for direct emotional access to the characters may find it gratifying to solve the intellectual puzzle set here by Colson Whitehead . "

Scott Esposito of webzine PopMatters gave the novel mixed comments , writing that " it is no surprise that Apex Hides the Hurt , Whitehead 's third novel , is packed with a number of allegorical elements blended into a multi @-@ layered structure . What 's unfortunate , however , is that all this technical artistry is in the service of unremarkable themes and ideas . Entertainment newspaper The A.V. Club complimented the book , writing that " perhaps taking his cues from his protagonist 's profession , Whitehead keeps his prose as streamlined as it comes , and he uses it to craft a satiric novel in tune with a moment where marketing overshadows content and even the lowliest blogger thinks in branding terms . " Michael McGirr of The Sydney Morning Herald called it " a book of abundant irony . "

= = Honors = =

PEN Oakland / Josephine Miles Literary Award