



## What We Say

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Mystery series fall into two broad categories: those that are essentially static and those that are driven by characters. In the first sort, you can dip into any book in a series and find the same world, the same characters and a new mystery to solve. In the second sort, you'll want to start at the beginning. Of course, great novels transcend such labels. Anyone who has never read a single Easy Rawlins tale will be immediately drawn into the world of late 1960s Los Angeles. Our hero is Rawlins, a private detective embroiled in a case involving numerous gangsters and cops, all of whom would like to solve the puzzle at hand but are even more interested in (quietly) getting their hands on a missing pile of loot and don't care who goes down in the process, least of all Rawlins himself. Mosley wanted to move on from his greatest (but far from only) creation, yet like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, we simply won't let him. Maybe it's our fault that the ongoing bittersweet tale of Easy's great love -- Bonnie -- has fallen somewhat into melodrama. Maybe it's our fault that the mystery this time out is so complicated it makes the twists of "Chinatown" appear straightforward into comparison. And yet with those minor cavils, what a treat. Mosley's casual insights into human nature are always piercing and funny and true (one scene has Rawlins bring a female hairdresser to tears of laughter over his description of why women appreciate a man with a little gray in his hair). I've learned more about the daily dangers of life for a black man in America by reading these novels than a stack of history books. Indeed, you could do a thesis on the countless ways Rawlins interacts with policemen, from straightforward to playing it dumb to angry to teasing to smart and on and on. Rawlins is a great hero and yet he's grown and matured and come into his own. This novel finds him paired with two other men in a new detective agency, not to mention the significant presence of Fearless Jones, another indelible creation of Mosley's who is very welcome here. And the author has fun with the conventions of the private eye, with beautiful women invariably throwing themselves at Rawlins, the way women always do when an errant knight crosses their path. I love his daughter Feather, I love intimidating Mouse, I love the way a collection of lectures by Richard Feynman turns from a totem of smarts to a plot device without betraying the dream it symbolizes. I love the shout-out to William Styron in a one-sentence review of "Nat Turner" he would surely have cherished as the finest praise he could hope for. In short, it's another in a great series by a great writer. Enjoy. -- Michael Giltz

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