



## Cemetery Road

*Gar Anthony Haywood*

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**Cemetery Road** Gar Anthony Haywood

***The new novel from a critically acclaimed and award-winning author -*** When Errol 'Handy' White returns to his native Los Angeles to attend the funeral of his old friend R.J. Burrow, who has been brutally murdered, a terrible secret threatens to reveal itself. Twenty-six years earlier, Handy, R.J. and O'Neal Holden pulled a heist that went horrible awry, and Handy's been waiting for it to come back and haunt them ever since. Was the murder linked to the past? Handy knows he can't leave until he finds out for sure.

## Cemetery Road Details

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Author : Gar Anthony Haywood

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## From Reader Review Cemetery Road for online ebook

### Jeff Mauch says

I think we all have something in our past that haunts us to some extent, perhaps even something that will stick with us until our dying day. Maybe, in the case of this novel, it's the poor choices we made as kids that snowballed into more than we ever anticipated. This was a well written story and I truly felt that I could relate to the protagonist most of the time. It's part drama and part unexpected mystery, of which kept me in the dark to the very end. This author has a lot of promise and I may just have to get my hands on some of his other works.

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### Richard says

I'm surprised that this isn't a more well-known bestseller. It shows that you can't always trust those sales numbers in a search for quality. Because this was one of the most well-crafted mystery novels I've read in a while. It follows a middle-aged repairman named Handy White who travels back to his native Los Angeles in a half-hearted attempt to look into the murder of an old friend, a murder that might have something to do with tragic events that happened in their younger days nearly 30 years prior.

Not only is it very well-plotted and entertaining with a perfect pace skillfully transitioning between the past and present stories to develop the mystery, but it also has prose that's at times incredible in its sharp proficiency. It might not be the most surprising mystery, as it's fairly easy to figure out who's been doing what, but the book's strength is in how it gets there and how it tells its story of guilt and remorse, debt, and redemption, and whether or not full redemption is ever truly attainable.

*Right around the time he hits his middle forties, a man starts giving serious thought to dying well. In his sleep, in his own bed, or in the course of a street fight meant to settle something meaningful. His end doesn't have to be poignant, just devoid of dignity. You wouldn't think that would be too much to ask.*

*But how a man leaves this world, much like the way he comes into it, is almost never his own call to make, so evil men die on satin sheets in 400-dollar-a-night hotel rooms, while good ones breathe their last lying face down in cold, dark alleyways, their bodies growing stiff and blue on beds of rain-soaked newspaper.*

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### Tony says

One of the central themes of noir film and literature is that the past is inescapable, and that's certainly the dominant theme in this long-awaited novel from an acclaimed, but not widely known, writer. The story is narrated by Handy, the sensible one in a trio of three high school friends who lived a life of petty crime back in late '70s Los Angeles. Spurred by an incident involving a girl and some drugs, they decide to step up their game and rip off a local drug dealer. Bad things happen (although what exactly that was isn't laid out until well into the book), and three friends agree to split up and never meet again.

Twenty-five years later, one of the friends is found shot to death in a car, a murder which reunites Handy with the third friend and reopens that closed door to the past. As Handy pokes around a little, looking into the murder, it spurs a reassessment of the trio's friendship and the dark events that led to his moving to Minnesota those decades ago. The chapters alternate between the past and present, slowly revealing what went down years ago, and how it might or might not relate to the present. Handy is a sad middle-aged man with nothing to show for his life other than some deft mechanical repair skills and an estranged daughter. In attempting to solve his old friend's murder, he's also trying to bring some kind of closure to the past that's haunted him for so long.

The story has plenty of twists, turns, and startling revelations, but at the same time, isn't particularly memorable. What I really took away from the book is a keen sense of the weight Handy carries with him, and the sense of melancholy revisiting the past can bring. Oddly enough, what it reminded me most of is the Dennis Lehane book *Mystic River*, and like that book, I could see it making a good film.

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### **Ann says**

Interesting to read for many reasons including the intimate look at Los Angeles from the eyes and experiences of a former resident who sees the before and after portrait of a version of Los Angeles not often portrayed, not the glitter of Tinseltown, or the glamor of celebrity, but the gritty reality that many black residents experienced.

The story builds slowly revealing a sober reality that the best laid plans often go badly awry, and have the potential for violence and despair; as well as the eventual realization that revenge isn't really that sweet, especially for the victims. Eventually we come to realize that a life can be ruined when lived under a cloud of remorse, but in the end the reparation and attempts to atone for the errant deeds do some good and keep the faith in human nature alive. The truth may not be something we want to hear, but without realizing its message we are doomed to repeat our mistakes.

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### **Victoria says**

I really enjoyed this book - it was well-written and well-plotted. The L.A. setting interested me - the novel presented a side of the city that I had not seen before in fiction. The writing style seemed reminiscent of a very noir-fashion. The characters really came to life - all the more impressive due to the novel's brevity (only 215 pages in the hard cover version). The entire novel packed a surprisingly powerful punch - everything the plot and the backstory unfolded into an absolutely stellar novel. The plot also contained some very surprising turns - Haywood is a talented author to watch out for!

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### **Georgiann Hennelly says**

This is the first time i,ve read anything by this author.This was a truly amazing read.He truly raises the bar for thriller writers. The story is set in South Central L.A.A childhood friends death brings Handy back home to resolve some consequences caused by a crime they committed in their youth. And to find the killer of his friend.

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## Tim Chamberlain says

Written for the KAZI Book Review (<http://kazibookreview.wordpress.com/>):

Gar Anthony Haywood, author of the Aaron Gunner Mysteries, delivers an intricate and thoughtful crime story with his newest novel, Cemetery Road.

The story centers on Errol 'Handy' White, who returns from Minnesota to his hometown of Los Angeles to attend the funeral of an old friend who was murdered. This friend, RJ Burrows, and another friend (O'Neal Holden, now a local politician) committed a heist with Handy that went terribly wrong 26 years ago, thus causing Handy's flight to the Midwest. Handy, who is still wracked with guilt about these tragic events, is convinced that RJ's death is connected somehow. Cemetery Road follows Handy's journey to attempt to find the truth, and, as a consequence, confront the past he has been avoiding.

Haywood skillfully alternates between telling the present-day story of Handy and revealing the actual events of the bungled heist. This method allows him to layer the two stories, slowly revealing the details of the robbery while Handy continues his investigation of RJ's murder in the present day. His ability to keep the tension built in both storylines makes this a difficult book to put down.

One of the hallmarks of Cemetery Road is the way Haywood makes Los Angeles almost into its own character. His rich descriptions of LA, both of the people and the landscape, give the reader a rich backdrop on which to paint the characters. This especially gives Handy's interactions with the city an extra depth as he is reminded of the city he left 26 years earlier.

Handy is a richly drawn character, and Haywood is at his best when describing his protagonist's thoughts and feelings. Handy acknowledges his flaws and past mistakes with regret, but often feels powerless to change things. Despite the fact that he was a petty thief as a young man, he seems to be deeply moral and set on attempting to right past wrongs. This is a flawed man, and he knows it, but he is determined to make the best of what he has left of his life.

Haywood touches on several themes throughout the book, such as not being able to go home again, having to confront your past, and attempting to correct past mistakes. Handy's journey through Los Angeles is one traveled with regret, but also a hope that things can be put right. Haywood combines a skilled portrait of a man haunted by his past with a gripping heist story, and he produces a top-notch piece of crime fiction.

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## Robin says

This is an engrossing story which kept me intrigued by the way it alternated from present to past, slowly revealing the backstory bit by bit, with the current story being just as gripping. It was interesting to see how guilt affects each of the characters, all of whom are flawed in some way - there are no good or bad guys in this story.

One criticism of the story is that I thought that Handy's daughter was superfluous to the story - that particular thread lead nowhere and to me it looked as if she'd been invented as a red herring. (I won't say for what, to

avoid a spoiler).

Other than that, a great story with a typically noir ending - some resolution, some things left hanging. Just like real life.

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### **Dave Behrend says**

This is a fairly tight, propulsive tale in the noir tradition set in urban Los Angeles. The subplots involving the narrator's personal life threaten to derail the main story at times, but overall the author keeps things moving toward the inevitable conclusion while skillfully jumping back and forth between the present and the past events that led to the current conflict. This is the first book I have read by Gar Anthony Haywood, and I will certainly read his work again.

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### **Ed says**

I was thrilled to run across a new fiction title from one of my favorite mystery writers, Gar Anthony Haywood. His Aaron Gunner detective series have brought me hours of reading enjoyment. His pen name Ray Shannon books were sassy and smart yarns. I got a kick out of his funny Loudermilk series, as well. CEMETERY ROAD is a stand alone hardboiled fiction set in L.A. I won't go into the plotline. What I will mention is the great sturdy prose and the astute understanding of youthful regret and guilt here. A powerful, vibrant story, I read it in one sitting, not something I can pull off too often. Loved it.

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### **James says**

First of all, had it not been for the ALOUD series at the Los Angeles Central Library, I don't know if or when I would ever have discovered Gar Anthony Haywood's writing. As is evidenced by my rating of this book, however, I am very grateful to have discovered his work. 'Cemetery Road' is a smart, suspenseful, well thought-out, and well organized work of crime/mystery fiction. It is not a particularly lengthy book, but it is a fantastic story that is deserving of a reader's time. There is no doubt that I will be reading more from Gar Anthony Haywood and I would suggest that any reader of fiction (crime/mystery or otherwise) take a look at 'Cemetery Road'. It really is a very good book.

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### **Nigel Bird says**

Guilt. It's a powerful emotion, one that wrestles with heart and mind alike and usually wins with an easy pin-down. Just ask Raskolnikov and Handy White.

Cemetery Road opens with memories of the last day Handy spent in Los Angeles. The year was 1979, the smell of tar was overwhelming and Handy and his buddies O'Neal Holden and RJ Burrow are burning the money they've stolen from a rather unpleasant drug dealer.

It's a shame they couldn't have burned their guilt along with it.

Instead, the three men go their separate ways to suffer the twisted consequences of their robbery for the next 25 years.

When Handy gets news that RJ Burrow has been murdered, he attends the funeral fearing the worst – that what happened when they were young has finally caught up with them and that he'll be next in line.

What follows is an investigation by Handy into the death of his friend. This main strand is threaded in with the recounting of the robbery that set the chain of events in motion. Past and present move on apace, each engaging and impossible to separate.

Gar Anthony Haywood does a splendid job with an excellent premise. Like many of the finest, he uses the voice of the story to describe the impact life's events have upon the way the world unfolds, as well as paying witness to the inevitable movement of progress that is so much bigger than any individual.

Each chapter opens superbly, as though the author has treated them with the respect one often sees for the notoriously difficult first line. Within these openings, he injects the profound into the ordinary and in doing so adds an extra weight to the things he is about to describe.

It's a fine book. Well written throughout. The plots run in parallel perfectly well and his handling maintains a variety of tensions and unanswered questions like a juggler who can keep enough balls to supply a tennis match in the air at any one time.

I really enjoyed the slow reveals, the confidence with which Haywood allows Handy to meander through LA and the insides of mechanical objects in whichever way he so wishes and the detailed descriptions of the internal and external worlds on show.

Cemetery Road is a thought-provoking read and a very entertaining one.

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### **Deborah Ledford says**

What an amazing read! Gar Anthony Haywood raises the bar for thriller writers in this literary, yet approachable tale of a man who unwillingly, yet obsessively takes it upon himself to find the killer of a friend from their dubious past. I have highlighted so many passages in "Cemetery Road" to later return to that I don't dare lend my copy out. My plan is to now acquire everything else Mr. Haywood has written and revel in his lyrical passages.

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### **Jim says**

This is the first book I've read by Gar Haywood. I read this book based on Ed's review.

When his old friend R.J. Burrow is brutally murdered in Los Angeles, Errol "Handy" White must return from exile to attend the funeral, certain that a terrible secret is about to reveal itself. (from inside jacket of book)

Overall, I would say that I enjoyed this book. However, when giving it a rating, I was torn between a 3 and a 4. I would have given it a 3.5, but because the story was complex and layered, I rounded up to a 4.

The story takes place in present LA, but also has an extended flashback to the events concerning Handy White. He wonders if maybe he is next on someone's hit list; someone seeking vengeance for something that happened twenty-six years earlier.

I was as intrigued with the unraveling of the twenty-six year event that caused Handy to be worried, as I was the solving of the murder of R.J.

A good read, one I would recommend.

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### **Viktor says**

Mixed feelings.

I hate it when a narrator is relating the story and then goes "oh, what I didn't tell you is that yesterday I called his sister and got answers to my questions that's why I'm asking this guy these question". That type of thing happens a lot here. Including a jaw-dropper after the final confrontation -- to which I responded "you've GOT to be kidding me!"

OTOH, tricks like that keep it from being 475 pages.

I also don't think it's fair to the reader for a first person narrator not to mention the most important fact -- the driving incident of his entire story that occurs before anything else -- until just about the last paragraph.

That being said, it packs quite a wallop when it lands. Oof!

Like I said, mixed feelings.

EDIT: And weeks later I'm still thinking about it. That counts a lot.

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