



Men in Miami Hotels: A Novel

Charlie Smith

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From Charlie Smith, critically acclaimed poet and author of *Three Delays*, comes the thrilling, moving, and violent story of Cotland Sims, a Miami gangster hellbent on helping his mother-when he steals a trove of emeralds to cover costs, he risks losing everyone he loves.

Charlie Smith has been called a novelist of "appalling brilliance" on the front cover of the *New York Times Book Review*. Critics praise his work with the fervor of conversion. And he continues to write distinctive, compelling, and powerful prose that plumbs the experience of consciousness, the demands of the heart, and the mortal commitment that binds us all together.

In *Men in Miami Hotels*, a man named Cotland, a gangster from Miami, must come home to Key West because his mother's house has fallen off its stilts. For a long time, maybe since always, he's been estranged from his distant, combative mother, who is only now, in her old age, beginning to soften, starting to circle back to Cot, the son she had disowned. Motivated by the chance to help his mother (along with collateral financial gain), Cot decides to snatch a trove of emeralds that his boss back in Miami, the relentlessly vicious Albertson, kept hidden on a small island. And that's when the trouble starts. Cot has 48 hours to return the emeralds before he and his family-his younger, slow-minded brother; his life-long, pseudo-girlfriend; his wise, wary mother-are all killed. But Cot is formidable. He makes some unlikely escapes and executes nearly every assassino come to kill him with one of three pistols he keeps handy. But the violence is not gruesome or gory. Rather this tropical, sun-dappled noir becomes a dark fight for survival, a struggle for existential sustenance. By the end, there are heart-breaking deaths, maddening betrayals, and enough shots fired to fill a pool with bullets.

Men in Miami Hotels: A Novel Details

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From Reader Review **Men in Miami Hotels: A Novel** for online ebook

Tom Flood says

I perused some of the reviews here, after having read the book about 18 months ago, and I agree with them. The plot is sorta interesting, but contrived. I felt at times that I was reading one of my grandma's old True magazine murder mysteries that she kept around her house in the late Sixties. I like books that lay out a bit more of the characters involved, and that tug at my emotions. This read did not do that for me. I like writers that use words as a palette to draw a picture of where the events occur, and I was fairly pleased with that aspect. Overall, though, I was glad when I finished and could move onto something a bit more rewarding for me.

Zach says

The blurb on the back of the book says to "come for the character and the story, but stay for the beautiful prose." A better idea is to come for the beautiful prose and tolerate the idiosyncratic characters who all think and speak like a witty, talented novelist.

My favorite: "he wishes his whole life could simply stop--so he could sneak around behind it, work on it and if he couldn't fix it escape out the back."

Brenda says

I don't know about this. I can't figure out what is going on or get into the book! I read this whole book and there were parts that were good but I never knew what was going on in the book. I was just as confused when I finished it as when I started it. Maybe I will read some other people's reviews and see if that helps. I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Dani says

This gangster novel is a genre-defying, often dream-like exploration of what holds us in this world and what forces us, one way or another, to let go. The main character--capable of the most ruthless acts and the most moving observations and contemplations--still haunts me. May have to read it again soon.

Ken Deshaies says

The quote on the cover says that Smith is known for his eloquent prose, and I would agree. His prose is not only beautiful and, sometimes, enchanting, but in a novel like this, it gets in the way of the action. He can spend three pages describing a feeling as the protagonist moves through events, and often does. The book

could have been written in a third of the pages and would have been more lucid, more understandable, and more enticing to the reader.

In fact, the language often made the narrative confusing. I found often that I had to go back several pages to remind myself just where the characters were or what they were doing at the time.

It's a relatively enjoyable read, nonetheless, but I'd rather spend my time with authors like Carl Hiaasen.

Patrick SG says

Thought I'd like this. It had all the right elements: Key West, Miami, crime, gangsters. But I couldn't get past page 37. Too introspective and "literary" for the subject. I gave it two stars as a benefit of the doubt. I normally give a book 50 pages before quitting.

Paul says

This book was definitely not for me. I have no doubt that the author is talented and can write, I just have no idea why he chose to write this type of book (a criminal on the run for ripping off his boss) in the style he did.

Never before have I read a book where it was imperative that you read the description on the back of it. I say this because The author tells the story as if you already know everything as it is taking place, who everyone is and why what is happening or has happened, did.

The first chapter alone assumes you know the story it assumes you are familiar with Key West. it assumes you know all of the people being described, and therefore nothing is explained. This made reading the book a real chore to get as far into it as I bothered. The dialogue between the characters in the book- and there is not a lot of it- is clipped and does not help to tell the story. As other reviewers on Goodreads said some sentences are a paragraph long, you read the paragraph and realize there was no need for it.

It is as if the goal of this book was to take everything that is ever taught in a creative writing class (especially the heavy use of metaphors whether they are needed or not) amplify it by a 1000% and see what happens.

Here is an example of the writing, it is from page 10 and at this point all you know is that his mothers house was damaged in a hurricane (it has slipped off its pilings and she has decided to sleep underneath it. The main character Cot is having lunch with mother and other people you are already supposed to know, or have sort of already met but don't know if they are important to the story or not.

People drifted by the table, locals in ordinary clothing, students from his mother's teaching days at the college, lifelong friends, enemies on recon pretending to be friends, stooges, penitents, the raddled and uncomfortable, the shame-faced—a few who wanted mostly to bask in the glow of her latest trouble—nomads, the congenitally misguided, old men with enlarged hernias, ladies in clothes that'd gone out of style before the last war, stragglers, and those who rode tiny bicycles, others carrying their humiliation before them like a scrofula. How come you got into this? somebody was always asking him—meaning this outlaw business—and Cot said, I never wanted to be the one laying down the law, but this was just what he couldn't stop doing. That was clear to him.

This example takes place right after the one from above. It is an example of dialogue on a phone call between Cot and an assistant who works for Cot's boss neither of whom have been previously Introduced in

the story. If you did not read the back book description you would be even more clueless as to what is going on.

His phone buzzed. It was Spane checking on him. “Comp wants you to drop by to take a look at those beach properties,” Spane said.

“I’ll have to rent a truck.”

“Maybe you can get Eustace to carry you. Tell him to put it on the tab.”

“Comp’s got a tab with Eustace?”

“Come on, B-boy.”

You couldn’t tell but they were dead in earnest, playful maybe but also hard and careful, all the names changed and everything in code even though they were talking on unregistered phones. Most names. Spane always choked up on everything so he could get a better grip, swing faster. His voice like something with most of the juice squeezed out of it. Albertson’s second, he was the one went around checking to make sure instructions were carried out, went around figuring as he moved, catching the details on the fly. He had flat hairy wrists and wore a mustache that he regularly shaved off. The first day without the stache his creased face looked an extra size larger, not a reassuring thing.

“I got you,” he said, and Cot wondered what he meant but didn’t say anything. “You there?” Spane said.

“Sure.”

Spane was sorry for Cot, but he didn’t say this. There were developments Cot hadn’t foreseen—Spane hadn’t foreseen some of the developments himself, but most of those were in another area—catches and loopholes and asides and unduplicable scenarios that would bust him up if he knew, but he didn’t know. But Spane was aware, as Cot was, that no info was safe from detection. This knowledge made his voice come through a little rougher than necessary. “You got it?” he said.

“I do.”

“How’s your mother?”

“Miz Ella? Bewildered but doesn’t know it—or won’t admit it.”

“Like you and me.”

“Don’t talk about me as if I wasn’t there—here,” his mother said looking up from her mango snapper ceviche. This embarrassed Cot, and he said so. Said after hanging up the phone. Spane had told him to go ahead to the island tomorrow. He wanted him to do a count, some idea of Albertson’s. Cot didn’t know if he would go or not—or no, he knew, he was going; the impulse had clicked over into a plan on the way down. But he had never liked being out on the water, or above it. Odd for a man born and raised on a two-by-four gob of limestone in the middle of the sea. The grit in Spane’s voice disturbed him, and he wondered if Spane knew, and if he did, what it was he knew. Across the table Marcella smiled at him. There was a drag in her smile, just a tiny bit left out or trying to break through, and he wondered what it was.

James Lee Burke use heavy description and metaphors in his books but still manages to tell good interesting stories, and have logical dialogue take place between characters. The author of this book manages none of this.

Rick says

Charlie Smith makes the seedy side of Key West come alive.
With dead people.

Dan says

Cotland Sims is a Miami gangster who goes home to Key West to help his mother whose home was destroyed by a hurricane. The way he thinks he robs some emeralds and is soon being chased by his boss. Soon he, his mother, brother and girlfriend are running for their lives.

A colorful is not violent story filled with twists and turns, but not enough to hold my attention or care about Cot or his family. Although, the descriptions of southern Florida were prevailing and the writing smooth; it didn't help with me in following the plot which I thought was ordinary.

Ann says

I don't like to give bad reviews. I started this book three times and never got beyond page 45. I just couldn't get into it. I started over so many times because I couldn't keep track of the characters or the story and it wasn't that complicated of a book. I didn't like the way it was written, the way the author jumped around between the present and past tenses or the character development.

Yet, on the other hand, there are good descriptions of Florida and it does have some humor in it.

Toni says

3.5 stars: I read 20 pages of this book and put it aside for 10 days. I went back to it with the idea that I'd read another chapter and see whether I wanted to finish it. I finished it and think Smith is a talent. I'm still not sure what I think about the book.

Craig Pittman says

More like "Meh in Miami Hotels." Charlie Smith is a talented writer, but he's a little too much in love with the sound of his own voice and desperately needs an editor to prune back his prose.

A lot happens in this book -- a gangster steals his boss' emeralds and sets off a sequence of violence, betrayals and general mayhem that includes a plane crashing into the sea, a getaway by boat and a shootout at a funeral. The plot jumps from Key West to the Ten Thousand Islands to the Gold Coast and Cuba. The action scenes are all nicely done, too.

But to get from one those action scenes to the next you have to push through similes and metaphors that Smith has piled floor-to-ceiling, obstructing your forward motion.

On page 33 is a sentence so long and convoluted I made a note of it as an example. The main character, the gangster Cot, is talking to his ex-wife, whom he still loves: "She winces, her foot turns half over so he can see the ligaments stretch and she grimaces and catches herself on the rail and her mouth opens and she gulps air, grunts, and he can see in her face what she'll look like when she's old, her eyes without their scleral ring, her skin raked and tissuey, the same look of incomprehension she has now, the melancholic confusion as

consciousness retreats along worn pathways into some convenience store of the soul with pickled eggs in a big jar on the counter and a clerk fossicking his teeth with a peppermint toothpick, death standing like a shadow right next to her, coughing quietly in its hand."

Around the time I hit the convenience store of the soul and the pickled eggs in a jar, I knew this book would be a slog. I was right. Now please excuse me while I go cleanse my palate with some Elmore Leonard, a man who knows how to create vivid characters, spin some sharp dialogue AND move the plot along.

Gino says

It is tough to get a real sense of any of the characters, especially the two main women. The author spends so much time displaying his knowledge of Key West and a dictionary, that he doesn't have enough time for proper plot or character development.

Also, I don't remember the exact grammatical constructions he over-used, but a LOT of the sentences ended up sounding stupefyingly alike.

Kimberly Gray says

Don't bother! Couldn't get past page 55. Ugh!

Don Hackett says

Four and one half A gangster returns to Key West, tries to help his mother by stealing emeralds from his boss. First person narrative, a little more focused than steam of consciousness but only a little. The protagonist slowly reveals himself as a sort of minor god of death. Extremely well written; I was grateful for the Kindle dictionary function as the narrator uses some exotic words, self-educated and reading Virgil for relaxation. The writing about sex stands out, non-anatomical and emotionally explicit.
