



Howtown

Michael Nava

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A controversial case brings lawyer Henry Rios back home to Oakland—and into the sights of a stone-cold killer

It's been almost a decade since Henry Rios has seen his sister, Elena. A troubled family history has left them both with unhappy memories. But his visit with his sister isn't the reunion he imagined. She's asking him to defend Paul Windsor, someone they had grown up with—who has a history of pedophilia and has just been charged with murder after his fingerprints were found at a crime scene.

The victim, who peddled child pornography, was tortured before he was bludgeoned to death in a motel room. The investigation takes Rios back to his old neighborhood and down a twisting trail of blackmail, jealousy, and tainted love. Forced to confront his demons, he'll face off with some hard truths about himself—and with a merciless killer.

Howtown Details

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Author : Michael Nava

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From Reader Review Howtown for online ebook

Giulio says

A slow beginning, filled with too much courtroom procedure (according to my taste), but from the second half on it became really exciting.

Henry Rios is a great character and Mr Nava proved himself once again a great author, even when dealing with such an unpleasant topic as paedophilia and child abuse.

I'd never felt so much a part of another person as I did then; it was what sex was supposed to be like but, as I discovered soon enough, seldom was.

The look that says, if you're poor, there must be something wrong with you." An old dog decided to lope its way across the road and I came to a skidding stop. "Sometimes I think what people really want is to criminalize poverty. Not that the law doesn't already do that, in a way."

Great!!

Ije the Devourer of Books says

For me this is the darkest Rios book so far. It felt like an episode of Law and Order; dark and gritty, fast-paced, fascinating court procedures and politics, and dubious crime investigating.

The defendant was not a likeable person but neither were the police or judges. I think having such a morally flawed cast of characters made it more enjoyable to read because I wasn't emotionally invested in any of them, instead I just wanted Henry to discover the truth and of course he does following some deeply interesting twists and turns.

I also liked seeing Henry reflect on his past relationship with his sister and childhood friends and reflect on his present relationship and life under the shadow of a devastating disease. I really enjoyed this story. It isn't a long story but is really powerful in the way it takes the reader and draws them into the investigation and Henry's personal life. Excellent!

Richard says

It's amazing how much and how quickly this series improves. The first book is a little amateurish (Nava has recently rewritten it, but I haven't yet read the new version), the second book is ambitious but flawed, and the third is spectacular.

Dark, but highly recommended.

inbetween says

contains comparisons and a question

Touted as his most daring/cutting novel, it wasn't actually that much about child molestation, certainly nowhere near what British novels and TV series unearthed and portrayed. But asides here and there made me think Nava might know more, for whatever reason deciding not to go deeper.

Similarly, and more positively, the judicial details are never dry, boring or overbearing. Josh is bearable. The calamity of the two guys framing a paedophile (and victim) for their murder of their tormenter, a worse paedophile, is that they were basically good guys and hurt badly - but precisely because they were cops, they could not be let get away with it.

He did deal with his liking for younger men though; while I was grumbling about what seemed an overlooked prejudice, Henry started worrying about being a paedo inside; loving a 22 year old was further explained by Henry having had sex first at 19. Those were small mentions that make his books for me.

He also made me think of Lord Peter Whimsey again. Whenever I gaze wistfully at the nice books, I remind myself how much I hated his sanctimonious condemning of people to their deaths, just for the law ruling of it, no matter if their victims were much worse and the perpetrators had no other chance. So no matter how many new fans Sayers gets daily, I don't think I can bear him anymore - and I certainly like Henry Rios, very much.

There were many tiny asides that were definitely no throw-aways - I'm not sure if the genre or his gender makes Nava decide not to write more about them, but e.g. the observations about Rios not wanting to eat were very good. As usual, it was clear to me that the accused hadn't been a victim of who seemed most logical either, and the cop-out (ha. ha.) at the end was odd (again, not sure why, Nava can write, so was it space constraint or simply giving in to a tried solution).

The only thing I don't understand - and maybe I'm too tired and eating while reading isn't something I usually do either, and the cat whined and I'm brian ded ATM - is the connection between Henry's sister and Ruth. Explanations welcome.

Marshall Thornton says

My second time reading this series. It's excellent and this book in particular is good. Almost finished and I don't know who did it. Not always an important thing for me. In the second book, I knew early on and still enjoyed it immensely.

Ulysses Dietz says

Howtown (Henry Rios mystery, 3)
Michael Nava
Open Road Integrated Media, 2013 (originally published 1990)
Five stars

“...I have a bad feeling about the way they do justice in my hometown...”

Tight, gripping, and darker than ever, Michael Nava’s “Howtown” takes Henry Rios back to his roots in the most unpleasant possible way. Having moved from the Bay Area to Los Angeles to be with Josh, Henry is called to his sister’s house in Oakland, where he’s asked to get in touch with a childhood friend who’s in serious trouble.

Thus the fictional Central Valley city of Los Robles (which felt very real—I only discovered it was imagined when I tried Googling it) becomes the sere, restricted stage-set for a psychological flashback to Henry’s grim childhood. Whereas Henry left, his client, Paul Windsor, remained behind. A known pedophile, and now accused of murder, Paul’s brother Mark was Henry’s best friend and high-school crush. Henry is confronted with the current reality of the gilded Windsor family’s harsher truth: their childhood was as abusive and emotionally starved as his own poor Mexican version on the wrong side of town.

The double-down on the darkness here is the parallel narratives of the sordid murder investigation and Henry’s youth in his Spanish colonial town from which every trace of Spain has been eliminated but the street names. Oddly, however, even as Henry confronts his own past unhappiness, we begin to see that the arc of his life has been upward, allowing his better nature to flourish and thrive in spite of its unpromising roots. The Windsors, on the other hand, have remained in Los Robles, cushioned by their wealth and local power, and their fortunes have curdled into something both lush and decayed.

Josh Mandel, Henry’s lover, makes a few carefully crafted appearances, to remind us of two things: how much happier Henry is than his childhood companions, and how fragile that happiness is. The shadow of AIDS still looms over this book, set in the late 1980s, and I fear that it’s only going to get worse as the series progresses. Like Marshall Thornton’s recent splendid Nick Nowack series, set in 1980s Chicago, these Henry Rios books remind us of what my generation of gay men in 2018 America has survived. Nava’s books, however, were created at the time, and have an immediacy that makes them chilling.

At the core of this book’s success is Nava’s great writing, and his ability to bring sympathy to even the least appealing characters. Henry Rios, however, achieves a quietly heroic status. It felt to me that Henry, in this unflinching view of his hometown, is beginning to appreciate not just how far he’s come, but how truly good he is. Henry has always acknowledged that he is damaged, but in this book he seems to begin to understand that, in spite of that, he’s a good man. That might sound like nothing much, but given the ugliness that swirls through this story, it’s a beacon of light and hope that makes us yearn for the next book in the series.

Becky Black says

This was a tough story to listen to. But a series about a lawyer isn't going to be complete without tackling the subject of defending a client the lawyer finds personally repulsive.

It's a good dilemma. The guy's undoubtedly guilty of all kinds of awful stuff, but what if he's not guilty of this particular crime? When the murder victim is possibly even more appalling, then the temptation has to be to just let the defendant take the rap, guilty or not and decide the real killer did the world a favour. But a man of principle like Henry can't do that. The truth is more important to him.

The outcome is tough to take. The real killers are more sympathetic than the defendant *and* the victim. It's easy to understand why they did it and to come close to wishing they'd got away with it.

A story that made me think, however tough it was to listen to.

Ami says

The third book in Henry Rios mystery brings Henry back to his home town and his estranged sister, when he is asked to defend a pedophile who has been accused of murder. I was surprised by the amount of animosity I had for the defendant. I despise pedophile as much as I despise rapist. While the background of his life, an almost cliché reason of childhood abuse, which psychologically can add to his adult behavior did made me have small sympathy, I still couldn't really like him as a character. BUT Michael Nava really knew how to write a story. This one is filled with social issue (how a pedophile see himself, the implication of that to victims), personal issues (Henry's estranged sister, his own relationship with his HIV positive lover of 3 years, Josh), and a great court room scene ... just make a very satisfying read.

Eli says

Every time I read (or reread) one of these books, I discover something I'd missed before, some new facet of Henry Rios's world.

Reading *Howtown*, I'm struck by how, in every situation Henry walks into, he's aware of power balances. Race, sexuality, gender, class, occupation, geography--all of these are palpably present in every conversation he has, and it shows, subtly and beautifully.

The ending of this one feels more abrupt than the ending of the other two, but maybe that's because my copy has an excerpt from Book 4, so it ended way before I thought it was going to. But I actually *gasp*ed when Henry put all the pieces together, it was such a powerful moment.

Jordan Lombard says

My favorite of the Rios books so far.

Beesley says

Michael Nava is a solid mystery writer who doesn't shrink from difficult topics. This one grappled with how a defendant's prior history accused of pedophilia caused him to be the lead suspect in a later murder. His Henry Cisneros books are great for anyone looking for a well-written mystery series, and of special interest for anyone looking for LGBTQI-friendly mysteries. Recommended.

Jilles says

Michael Nava is not capable of writing a bad book. This is another gem, great plot, characters that feel very real, a gay theme that keeps evolving in every book, and a protagonist that makes me at least want to be a

better person. And of course it is all very well written.

Lori S. says

I'm really liking the audio books of this series. Well done.

Lena♥Ribka says

"Sometimes I defend someone because I think he deserves a break, or maybe just because I like him. And sometimes I do it because, whatever the guy's done, worse has been done to him. And sometimes I do it for money. And sometimes I do it because no one else will. Like this case."

It was a difficult case for Henry Rios. Normally I empathize with Henry Rios clients, I feel for them, but how to sympathize with Paul Windsor?

Does Paul, who had been already charged of child molestation in the past and who escaped a jail by a hair's breadth only because his victim refused to testify against him in court, deserve to be punished for a brutal murder that he probably didn't do?

The evidence against him is weak, though he is not very trustful, the police and judicial authority of Henry's hometown aren't proved to be very open-minded, helpful and welcoming, and the publicity in this small provincial town has already made its verdict.

Not a particularly good basis for a fair process.

I was torn between Law, Justice, Ethic, Morality and my personal Feelings. But Henry is a pro. And he mastered this challenge EXCELLENTLY. And it got an extra bonus from me for some wonderful moments of Henry Rios private life. You won't be disappointed!

Great mystery, superb writing!

Misty says

**** 4.5 Stars ****
