

Blue Light, Futureland, This Year You Write Your Novel

Three by Walter Mosley; recommended by James O. Born

A program of the Center for the Book at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the "VABooks!" column suggests books for Virginians to read in common. This month, James O. Born—author of five crime novels and a forthcoming work of science fiction (as James O'Neal)—recommends *Blue Light, Futureland, and This Year You Write Your Novel* by Walter Mosley. We hope that individuals, book groups, families, and neighbors will read and discuss VABooks! selections.



Walter Mosley may be best known for his dynamic and popular crime fiction series featuring Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins, an African-American war hero turned amateur detective. Starting in the late forties and running through the early sixties, the stories not only follow Rawlins but the ever-changing landscape of Los Angeles. But the prolific Mosley has written exceptional science fiction and literary novels as well as nonfiction. Never interested in following the crowd or writing in one genre, the enigmatic writer has blaze trails in many ways.

As with many best-selling authors, Mosley has gained a strong following from his vivid writing, complex characters and twisting, intelligent plots. But it was the 1995 movie of his first Easy Rawlins novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, starring Denzel Washington, that made him such a recognizable name. Few authors take such a candid look at racism as well as history while thrilling readers. His knowledge of varied subjects, grasp of the political intrigue and personal connection with his characters, make each of his novels compelling and thought-provoking.

In 1998, Mosley published his first science fiction, *Blue Light*. The novel brilliantly explores the forced evolution of a group of people struck by a light of extra-terrestrial origin. Like many of his novels, *Blue Light* not only explores different eras but race as well. The switch in genres shows that a good story-teller can excel in any arena.

One of his goals in venturing into science fiction was a desire to change the dynamics of the genre. He believed that readers only saw

white people or aliens in tales set in the future. Mosley points to the original *Star Wars* as a ready example where the only black character is the deep voice of James Earl Jones hidden by the mask of Darth Vader and played by British actor David Prowse. The author wanted to create a fantastic universe that was populated in a more realistic and representative way. In his second work of science fiction, *Futureland*, Mosley connects nine different stories of marginalized people, big-brother like corporations and the heroes which can arise from crisis and despair. His embrace of history and the pride one can take in heritage help Mosley create a future where these same attributes can be disastrous.

Perhaps less well-known but equally powerful is one of Mosley's nonfiction books. Published last year, Mosley's concise and practical guide to writing; *This Year You Write Your Novel*, takes on the basics to get one started on the path to completing a novel. His main advice, the major obstacle in completing a novel, is that one must make the time to write. The sacrifices in writing are manifold but time must be the first casualty. If a would-be author won't believe an award winning, best-selling author like Walter Mosley, then the art of writing is probably lost on them anyway.

A gifted writer, social commentator and speaker, Walter Mosley can be considered one of the new century's literary icons. From his popular mystery novels to his quirky, inspiring science fiction, you will find a man whose imagination and skill have earned him the right to tackle any genre.