



# Sayonara Slam

*Naomi Hirahara*

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*“Hirahara has a keen eye for the telling detail and an assured sense of character.”*

—*Los Angeles Times*

At Dodger Stadium it's Japan vs. Korea in the World Baseball Classic, but before the first pitch is thrown, Mas Arai finds himself in the middle of a murder. Mysteries layer atop mysteries in this sixth in the award-winning series featuring the most unlikely of sleuths, an aging, widowed, not-exactly-communicative gardener from Altadena, California.

Who is that unusual woman throwing knuckleball pitches to warm up the Japanese team? Who sent thugs to threaten Mas and accuse him of treason? And what were in the deleted files on the murdered sportswriter's computer—and did they hold secrets that led to his death?

The more mysteries Mas uncovers, the deeper he gets drawn into a situation that soon grows dangerous—including the danger of losing the affection of the woman he might someday admit he loves.

*“What makes this series unique is its flawed and honorable protagonist. . . . A fascinating insight into a complex and admirable man.”*

—*Booklist (starred review)*

## Sayonara Slam Details

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Author : Naomi Hirahara

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# From Reader Review Sayonara Slam for online ebook

## John Yingling says

This is my first time reading a book by Naomi Hirahara, and I will be back to read more of her titles. In this book, Mas Arai is a resident of Los Angeles and a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. He's a widower, a baseball fan, a father, a friend, a gardener, and now an amateur detective as he tries to find out who killed a journalist. He's an appealing character, and the storyline kept me interested and guessing until the end. Definitely an author, and a character I will revisit.

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## Craig Sisterson says

California writer Naomi Hirahara may have created one of the most unlikely sleuths in mystery history. Mas Arai is nearing eighty years old, a curmudgeonly almost-retired gardener, with a dilapidated car, failing eyesight, dentures, and a house in Altadena filled with his no-longer-estranged daughter and her family. A survivor of Hiroshima, Mas is a simple widower who doesn't get why the younger generation is so flashy, or needs to talk so much.

In this sixth instalment in Hirahara's Edgar-winning series, Mas is helping out his son-in-law Lloyd, now head groundskeeper at Dodger Stadium, before Japan faces South Korea in the World Baseball Classic. What should be a leisurely day sharpening mower blades ends up as something else altogether. Mas is questioned by police after an abrasive and disliked Japanese sportswriter, Itai, keels over dead. A man Mas had given a bottle of water to, just minutes before.

Things get more complicated when Yuki, the grandson of Mas's childhood girlfriend, arrives from Japan to replace Itai. Yuki wants to hire Mas as a driver and translator as he investigates Itai's death, which wasn't of natural causes. Files are also missing from Itai's computer. Mas has many doubts about young Yuki, but together the pair dig for the truth.

Hirahara has crafted a pitch-perfect blend of mystery and history. As Mas and Yuki investigate, readers get fascinating insights into lesser-known aspects of Japanese-American and Japanese-Korean history, from wartime internment camps to the rise of Asian baseball. To her credit, Hirahara displays a very deft touch, never becoming lecture-y or overwhelming the forward drive of her enthralling mystery. Historic facts are adroitly woven in as texture to the tale.

At the center of it all is Mas Arai, a truly unique and unforgettable hero. In a forest of familiar crime characters, he stands out; a bonsai among the pines. I can certainly see why the series, centered on a lovable curmudgeon who endearingly fumbles the English language, has won Hirahara the Edgar Award. I'll be adding all the other books in the series to my TBR shelves. Superb stuff.

**This is a condensed version of the full review that will be published on *Crime Watch* on the day of the book's official release, 10 May 2016. You can see *Crime Watch* here: <http://kiwicrime.blogspot.co.uk/>**

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## **Brad H says**

I read Sayonara Slam when the 2017 World Baseball Classic was being played. As a baseball fan, the WBC is one of my favourite sporting events, and my attention was immediately captured by a novel that features a murder mystery with the WBC as the backdrop. However, this book was far from a grand slam for me, and did not live up to my expectations.

The storyline for Sayonara Slam is slow to develop, and I never found compelling nor believable the main character's motivation to solve the murder mystery. Mas Arai is a gardener, not a police detective. The author chose to write this character's dialogue phonetically to reveal his Japanese accent, such as the lines "Whatsu goin' on?" and "Whozu dat ole woman?" (page 80 of my copy), a device which I felt was distracting while adding no value. In the end, the mystery wraps up too neatly, with the culprit confessing profusely, an ending that felt unsatisfactory.

The author provides a detailed look at the personal life of Mas Arai, obviously believing that the reader will find this back story to be interesting, but I found it to be only mildly so. I did enjoy learning more about Dodger Stadium, as well as Japanese and Korean baseball and history, but I expected the novel to deliver a more-compelling overall storyline.

The writing style is fun, but it is too light and fluffy for my tastes. For murder mysteries, I prefer a more-serious tone that corresponds to the seriousness of the subject matter. Fans of Japanese-themed murder mysteries should check out the works of Keigo Higashino. His tone, style and plotlines are more to my liking, and his books are certainly superior to this one.

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## **Mark Baker says**

The World Baseball Classic has come to Dodger Stadium, and Mas Arai is excited about the upcoming match between Japan and Korea. He's on hand early and witnesses a reporter drop dead at a press conference. Mas has no desire to get involved in the investigation until a friend's grandson hires him as a driver and interpreter. What will they uncover?

I haven't read most of the books in this series, but I've been wanting to return to it for a while now. The characters are good, although I think I missed some of the character development since I'm not super familiar with them. Some sub-plots bogged down the plot a bit early on, but as the book continued, the mystery got stronger. I learned a bit about World War II history along the way to the logical climax.

NOTE: I was sent an ARC of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Read my full review at Carstairs Considers.

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## **Fran Soto says**

It's easy to get wrapped up in the struggles of Mas Arai, American, but very Japanese, to find a path in modern LA. You sympathize with him, but he behaves impossibly at times. He's exceedingly observant, but

struggles for self-awareness. Such a rich story, and so well written! Hirahara has a unique style and vantage point.

I won this book as a giveaway.

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### **Glen U says**

"Sayonara Slam" is the sixth in Naomi Hirahara's detective series. Mas Arai is the protagonist in this well received amateur detective series, an 80 year old Japanese-American gardener who always seems to come in contact with dead bodies. An entertaining story, but a bit thin on the plot, it does provide intriguing information on the history of the Japanese people, especially those who have immigrated to the United States over the last 100 years. For me, this novel does not live up to the previous 5 in the series. Mas Arai comes across as a Mr. Miyagi clone ("Karate Kid") as he steers a young man through the Baseball Classic, Korean-Japanese relationships, a murder and a budding romance. A decent read.

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### **Sarah-Hope says**

The "detective" in Naomi Hirahara's Sayonara Slam is Mas Arai, former gardener, baseball fan, and resentful host to his extended family. Like most of the characters populating this novel, Arai is fascinating, drawn in careful detail.

The mystery in this mystery novel is the murder of an unpopular Japanese journalist, who drops dead while covering a World Baseball Classic game being held at Dodger Stadium and played between historic opponents Japan and Korea.

More interesting than the mystery (which is interesting) is the network of relationships among the book's "Japanese" characters. I'm putting Japanese in quotation marks here because their experiences are different enough to make lumping them under a single heading inappropriate. There are the Japanese who lived through internment in the U.S. in World War II. There are the Japanese who returned to Japan rather than be interned. There are the Japanese who survived the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, who are now U.S. citizens. There are Japanese who will acknowledge the wrong Japan committed when it forced Korean women to serve as "comfort women." There are younger Japanese trying to climb their way up today's economic ladder. Sayonara Slam lets us see the complexity of culture played out on both historical and global scales.

Read this book for its central character and for the puzzle it's built around, but also read it for the rich, complicated world it will introduce you to.

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### **Jennie Falen says**

Mas Arai is such an interesting character, and so well developed. I like the setting--especially the Altadena location! Add to all this the theme of life as a Japanese-American citizen in California who survived Hiroshima as a child, and all the complications that accompany that. Hirahara is a really good writer. I look forward to her next book.

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## Spuddie says

One of my favorite fictional characters, Mas Arai, a nearly-eighty-year-old Nisei gardener, is back in this new adventure which deals with the death of a Japanese journalist covering the World Baseball Championship between Japan and Korea at Dodger Stadium. Of course Mas happened to be on hand when the journalist collapsed in front of a crowd of people but it wasn't determined until later that the water he drank was poisoned. Mas wants nothing more than to be in the background but of course he ends up right in the thick of things as he always does, saying little but observing carefully.

Love this old guy and hope he lives to be a hundred!

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## Richard says

The author puts loads of energy into historical research, and she weaves historical fact into the narrative very well. Like some of the others in the series, this story uncovers interesting chapters in Japanese-American history.

I really enjoy the protagonist and his world, but this kind of thoughtful, somewhat relaxed mystery might not be for everyone. The narrative pacing is good, but it revolves around a retired gardener who's pushing eighty. But for those who have been following Mas Arai through the previous books in the series, there are at least two "squee moments" in here... Now I can hardly wait for the next one.

(view spoiler)

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## Donald says

A good book, about baseball, family, and history! I loved all the Dodger references - Scully, Nomo, Valenzuela, etc. and as a life long Dodgers fan, that's a sure quick way into my heart! Loved this quote, at the end of chapter 7, "...while Vin Scully was more melodious, a wind instrument made from aged oak." Amen, Hirahara!

So this is a Mas Aria Mystery, and it is about a murder at the WBC in Dodger Stadium. It is also about Japanese American history and culture, and its entwinement with Korean history and culture, with teams from both of those nations competing in the back ground. Lots of Japanese words to be learned in this book, and lots of history too, about the role of Japanese Americans during WWII, the internments, and the prisoner ships. It is all very much like an onion - many layers to be peeled back to see the truth of the tale.

I would like to recommend this to young adults too, though there are a few swear words in it, though far less than I heard at the coffee shop this morning. And anyone interested in Japanese culture, history, and heritage too! Oh yeah, and Dodger fans everywhere!!!

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## **MiaJames says**

If the author were not named “Hirahara” I would have a different opinion of the book. She comes close to making Mas a figure of ridicule with his pigeon English and old-fashioned ways. I read the first books in the series years ago and found this one by accident or serendipity in the library. Since I love baseball and had just read some stories about the importance of baseball in the Japanese internment prisons, it seemed like a serendipitous find. I liked the book with reservations about the way the main character is described but the story is interesting. The author has done research and added contemporary details.

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## **Jenny C. says**

Mas Arai is an interesting character, and I continue to love his quirks. The latest novel in the mystery series has him involved in baseball. I love all the details of the setting and the period. It's definitely a twisty mystery, and I think Hirahara went to great lengths to accurately research everything. Sometimes, though, I felt like the historical details overwhelm everything--in fact, it almost seemed like I couldn't discover the killer because my mind was still wading through all the info. However, I do enjoy Hirahara's books because they're both entertaining and educational. A solid mystery.

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## **Lesa says**

What a fascinating character! I had never read one of Naomi Hirahara's mysteries featuring Mas Arai, the almost retired gardner who is nearing eighty. The mystery in Sayonara SLAM was interesting. But, the true mystery revealed, and, never completely revealed because he is such a private man, is the character of Mas Arai himself.

Mas, his family and friends are at Dodger Stadium for the 2009 World Baseball Classic, Japan vs. South Korea. Because Mas' son-in-law is head groundskeeper, Arai is down on the field before the game with the sportswriters who are there from Japan to cover the game. So, he witnesses the death of one of them, a death that turns out to be murder. Before he knows it, a young Japanese journalist shows up at Mas' house, asking for his help as a translator and driver. Mas finds himself harassed by thugs, threatened, and involved in a case involving Japanese politics and secrets from the past.

Mas Arai's history makes him the man he is today, a private man who "often let life happen to him". He was born in the U.S., but taken to Japan as a small boy. And, he was in Hiroshima, a young survivor, when it was bombed. He's a widower, a private man, who is seeing a woman. But, he's worried about that. "If he opened his heart to Geneses, really opened it, wouldn't his decades of life with Chizuko fall and blow away like dead leaves?" These are the kind of deep questions Hirahara uses to portray Mas Arai, thoughtful questions of culture, belief, and an aging man who grew up with beliefs that are no longer common in 2009.

He's a man who would never share his life on social media. In fact, when Yuki questions him, Mas' reaction is, "Yuki had no right to his personal stories. They were Mas's to hold close and protect. Once they were released in the form of words, they could be mangled and distorted."

The mystery in Hirahara's Sayonara SLAM is an intriguing one, and there are historical events that I had never heard. I looked them up because I was so interested. But, to be honest, it's the intriguing character of Mas Arai that will draw me back to the books. Hirahara's descriptions of Mas' feelings and thoughts are beautiful. It's poetry with a depth that makes the reader think. You may pick up the book as a mystery. You'll appreciate it as a study of a man with great wisdom.

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### **Richard Janzen says**

Hirahara is incredibly ambitious with all of the important, controversial, and emotional topics that she packs into this book....survivors of the Hiroshima bomb; Korean "comfort women"; ultra-conservative denial and violence in relation to the comfort women issue; gay marriage; Japanese-American internment during WWII; and so much more. All these issues couched in a murder mystery within the context of baseball- a religion in both the US and Japan. Perhaps the book tries to cover too many issues too quickly....but an interesting read.

A side note-something new for me that I want to explore more- the Gripsholm is something I had never heard of, and want to explore more....a ship used in a prisoner-of-war exchange between the US and Japan...though I think it sounds like what it really was is (perhaps even forcibly) "repatriating" Japanese-Americans who had never set foot in Japan before. Thanks Hirahara for introducing this to me.

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