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Following 'Shame the Devil', George P. Pelecanos returns with his second novel starring Derek Strange and Terry Quinn - grizzled PI and erratic ex-cop.

Hell to Pay Details

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From Reader Review Hell to Pay for online ebook

Charles says

A nice tight procedural - no mystery. This is a multi-ethnic portrait of one segment of Washington, D C. Pelecanos lays out some of the many issues facing the Capitol city. Racism predominantly among them. He does a very nice job with the various settings and the music and the culture. At times a little too simplistic and obvious, but not always. I recommend this writer and this book.

Francis says

its like

This guy walks in, like muscular and lean, head shaved, OJ grin, hard eyes. Moves loose and lithe, but quick like a cat. His athleticism is apparent, his intentions a mystery. His smile lights up, he spots his homies, he grins and he talks, but his cold eyes keep scanning the room and then just for a second your eyes cross.

But that second is enough for you to realize, somthin' easy, somethin' prophetic

You ain't supposed to be here.

And, thats the way it goes, first, casual and loose then some little thing, then all fast and violent.

Like, a grinning man's knife in your gut. Like a hot summer's night in DC.

Yeah, like sumshit, like that

Byron says

The fact that I enjoy these George Pelecanos books so much doesn't make me the equivalent of guys in prison who shank people for the latest James Patterson, does it? (There was a big thing in the Times a while back about how those books are written and who reads them. You should look it up. It's one of the more ridiculous things you'll ever read.) I feel like these books are a cut above the average crime fiction BS, because they describe things that are really happening in the ghetto (I'm assuming), so there's an element of "journalism" to it. Like the Wire (on which Pelecanos was a writer), but not quite as challenging or ultimately rewarding. Just something to stare while you're not out earning a living. I'll probably end up reading all 40 of them, if I don't go completely blind first. Now if you'll excuse me I've got some pr0n to look at.

Ken Schloman says

Second book of the series, and the author does did not miss a beat. Many series go down hill as they

progress. This novel actually is a step up. It's gritty and tells a story of Washington DC that tourists don't see. Pelacanos puts the reader into the mind of the character. You see what the character sees. You feel what the character feels. I highly recommend anything he writes.

Tim says

HELL TO PAY by George Pelecanos is the second book in the '*Derek Strange & Terry Quinn*' series following *Right as Rain*, and further establishes the unlikely friendship of two very different men that work well together in spite of their differences to form a loose partnership that is effective.

Garfield Potter is a violent young man trying to make a name for himself in his neighborhood where he and his two partners deal dope and the story opens at a dog fight where they own one of the dogs. Potter sees someone at the fight who knows a guy who has not paid Potter for drugs he owes payment on, which Garfield sees as a sign of disrespect that must be dealt with severely to make an impression. Crumbling under pressure, the young man Potter confronts gives up the information that the man he's looking for can be found at his younger nephew's football games and practice sessions.

Derek is approached by two female officers who have formed an alliance to protect and return home runaway hookers living on the streets, and they want to hire him to find a missing girl. Strange suggests Terry to the pair as his own plate is full at the moment, and asks Terry to take the case which he does. Quinn becomes involved both in the case and with one of the ladies, and a relationship begins that seems to fit both of them as they understand each other very well.

Two formidable players become involved in cases that both Strange and Quinn work on separately and at times together, and one is known as "Worldwide" Wilson, while the other is Oliver Granville, and both are "in the life" and their crossing paths with them places the partners in a great deal of danger.

Derek and Terry coach a youth football team called the Panthers, and really make a positive impact on the lives of the boys that play for them.

Derek is still struggling with his commitment to Janine, and his trips to the Asian massage parlor only make matters worse, while Terry and others try to help him through this and to remind him of how special his woman is and how his behavior is being disrespectful towards her.

Pelecanos has improved on the first book in the series, and this is a great story where everything comes together perfectly to clarify the path of both Derek and Terry in their personal lives, and cements their friendship and working relationship.

I'm jealous that the D.C. area has George Pelecanos to recapture the golden days there, and wish that the Detroit area had someone of his caliber to recapture the 60's and 70's in a similar way.

5 stars.

Michael says

This one makes me regret never taking up a read of Pelecanos. He felt like a rock I didn't want to turn over to witness the squirm of scorpions and slugs. But he makes life in the mean streets of Washington, D.C., a microcosm worth attending to. The teen-aged prostitutes' struggles to get by has its own form of heroism, and the tough young punks on the way up to gang membership are driven by the same urge to find meaning in action and simulated families as the rest of humanity.

In this world Pelecanos puts a couple of private detectives, Derek Strange and Terry Quinn, who have survived growing up in these neighborhoods and thus have good reason to believe that many of these kids can be saved. They run a football program for middle-school aged kids. They are far from angels. Strange, who is black, takes some recourse in booze and massage parlors, while Quinn, who is white, has anger-control issues and needs to prove his virility.

There is a lot of life in the dialog of the characters, their everyday excursions through the neighborhoods, and the music in the minds of the heroes and villains alike. All that and dangerous events faced by both the criminals, their victims, and our detectives feels like poetry in motion, well in line with the flow of stories from Elmore Leonard. A female ex-cop, Tracy, brings them a case of a 14-year old runaway now working as a prostitute. An older girl, who is 17, gives them an angle on her possible position in the stable of a supremely violent pimp, Worldwide Wilson. Another case they take on is personal, the murder of an 11-year old kid on their football team. His death is collateral damage from a hit on his uncle, who failed to pay his drug debt. We spend a lot of time with the responsible set of teens led by one Garfield Potter, streetname "D" for Death. Their wilding reminds one of the futuristic kids in "Clockwork Orange", revealing how that future is now.

The real mystery resolved in this tale is that of how Strange and Quinn hold on to their humanity in this urban jungle and of how we readers can find hope in their seemingly hopeless efforts.

Dan says

another addictive pelecanos novel (my second). this basically deepens the universe created in *right as rain*, and does a nice job propping up its next installment (*soul circus*, which i'll undoubtedly get to in the coming months). this one has less of the sensational shoot 'em up stuff that sometimes scars the plausibility of *right as rain*, choosing instead to get inside the heads of each of its characters. very effective as a portrait of poverty, particularly in its look at characters on the periphery. i'm not always convinced pelecanos is comfortable working women into his universe - i'd have liked more access to the thoughts of quinn's girlfriend, for example - but he takes a pretty critical look at machismo and ego bullshit, which kind of makes up for it. there are basically two stories at play here, and the one involving derek strange (the middle-aged, black P.I. that anchors the series) is more compelling. with his sidekick's narrative (tortured, white ex-cop quinn), i felt like the "climax" was a bit hurried. not as soulful, either.

pelecanos might be the most ADDICTIVE novelist i've ever read, to be honest. part of that is because he's pretty plain-spoken, so the reading process moves quickly. but every time i sit down with one of his novels, it's like i have to pry myself away from it. which is pretty amazing, on some level.

Melissa says

It pains me to give this only three stars, it really does, but after a solid rocking first 300 pages or so, I just cannot wrap my brain around the way that Strange does things with Potter & Little. The set up to let Granville Oliver kill those two is aborted because Strange has a crisis of conscience, so then what? They let them go? They take them home? They're both apparently arrested immediately afterward, so it's not like they ran like White, but Pelecanos doesn't say anything about how it all works out & I cannot fathom how it does. I'm also a little tired of Quinn's shenanigans, although I had a dream last night that he ended up sleeping with Stella even though he knew it was wrong; this is really neither here or there, but it just goes to show that it could always be worse. I feel like the ball got dropped on this a bit.

Pamela McLaren says

This is a gritty, dark tale situated in the heart of our nation's capital; a story about a neighborhood and the men who are fighting to help its children survive, but to survive and get out, to be productive citizens, not drug dealers, prostitutes and pimps. It's a hard life but Derek Strange is fighting it with something that the kids can understand: sports. But in the case of one child, it isn't enough.

Strange and Terry Quinn, both ex-cops know that they did their best but they also know that they must do something to find the killer or killers. It is these two men who make this a very powerful, compelling story. I had a hard time putting this down as they get to the bottom of the tale.

Josh says

A painstaking mural of the metamorphosis of Washington DC from a metropolis to murder-polis whose inhabitants are at once menacing and heart warming. It's this chalk and cheese persona of Pelecanos' characters that draws a somewhat translucent line between good and evil in the third world urban sprawl of the major US city. Victims of circumstance turned hardened thugs turned kid killers find themselves the focus of PI Derek Strange as he seeks the right kind of justice for the murder of an innocent caught as a causality of wanna-be tough guys in their pursuit of notoriety and hood fame.

Protagonist, Derek Strange and part time side kick, Terry Quinn are disassociated to a degree, with each taking leads on separate cases - Terry's, to save a teenage runaway from a life of prostitute, and Derek's to solve a murder. While maintaining a brotherly bond, the disassociation is more than physical with a distinct lack of camaraderie evident in their limited exchanges. Whether this was a key point of note from Pelecanos or not remains to be seen.

The plot is elementary, as DC and its environs take centre stage. The culture, music, race, and criminal underbelly are paramount to the inhabitant's survival amidst everyday chaos and the good guys who try to make the streets a safer place. Not so much a straight PI novel as more a serrated one man army fostering hope where light fails to shine.

'Hell To Pay' reminded me much of the DC Quartet where the peripherals (storefronts, passer-by exchanges, music, current day sports etc.) promote such ambiance as to transfer the reader direct to locale. The plot itself, whilst engaging wasn't the key element to this second instalment in the Strange and Quinn series,

rather their growth as friends and individuals alike with the cases more a means to an end.

If you like the Wire and Pelecanos' fantastic DC Quartet, this is for you – 3.5 stars.

Side Note: My perception of Derek Strange is reminiscent of the Wire's Lester Freamon - a wise old man who still packs a punch and is more attuned to enjoying life and giving second chances rather than throwing the book and busting heads.

Terri says

Great

I read this year's ago, and just started to re-read Pelecanos last week. I'd forgotten how good his books were, the mood he sets, the complexity of the characters. I can't wait to get the next.

Del Johnstone says

I read Right as Rain, the first Strange & Quinn, four or five years back, and I'm not sure why I haven't been back before now; I guess it's just the eternal headache - so many books, so little time.

The main crux of the story here will be depressingly familiar to anyone with a even passing knowledge of the horrible self-perpetuating cycle of poverty/drugs/black on black gun crime that plagues some U.S. inner cities. This came out in 2003 but it could have been published this year. Pelecanos is scathing of the ability of the mainstream media to look the other way while mass-murder is being committed on their own doorstep; *'American children were enslaved in nightmare neighborhoods, living amid gunfire and drugs and attending dilapidated public schools. The nation was outraged at high school shootings in white neighborhoods, but young black men and women were being murdered without fanfare in the nation's capital every single day'*.

Derek Strange and Terry Quinn were introduced in Right as Rain; two ex-cops working as private investigators, trying to get a measure of each other. In the first novel, Quinn seemed the more damaged of the two - this time round, it's Strange who seems to be sliding into his own personal hell. These are two deeply flawed men, but where Pelecanos succeeds here is by laying bare both of their prejudices (and by extension, our own), but making no judgement, because that's not what defines them. There are three separate story strands, but all work well together, and all are basically concerned with pride, and fragile masculinity - and it's impossible not to do a bit of reflection when you've put the book down for the night and turned off the light. It's not all soul searching though; the writer has a great knack for describing the clothes and the haircuts and the cars and the streets in such a way that, even amongst the squalor, guys like Strange are cool, in a spit-and-shine kinda way. I found myself trying to remember the names of songs and albums that were name-checked, although I doubt I'd be quite as stylish, cutting about Glasgow listening to Johnny Winter or Stevie Wonder...

Looks like there's only two more Strange and Quinn books, then a Strange standalone. That seems a shame, because I like the way these two men intersect and converse. On the bright side, there's plenty more

Pelecanos to dip into.

Ann says

This is the second in a trilogy by George Pelecanos, the first being *Right as Rain*. We meet Derek Strange and Terry Quinn again, both private investigators in Washington, DC, both former cops and both men with the desire to do the right thing and help the kids in the area to break out of the cycle of poverty, drugs and violence. Troubled by demons themselves, the story is as much about their personal crises and journey through life as it is the story of a tragic shooting death and the search for the killers. This is one of those books that makes you think. Not just about the violent act that occurred so much as the cause and effect of actions long removed from today as well as the far reaching effects of violence on young victims. The incongruity of the friendship between these two men is intriguing. Highly recommend.

Kellie says

(#2 of the Derek Strange series)-This was a really good one. Better than #1. Derek is coaching a football team. One of the kids gets shot by a thug. Derek and his partner go on their own search for this guy. In the mean time, Derek is asked to help find a runaway turned hooker. He puts Quinn on the case. Derek is battling a weakness for massage tables and really starts to question his life. These books tell a hard story of the DC streets. They are excellent in drawing the picture and putting you there in the danger.

Sibyl says

Interesting to see that other readers do not find *Hell to Pay* and *Right as Rain* as high up on their approval list as I do. I just finished reading *Hell to Pay* and found it even stronger than the first one. Now the cat is out of the bag, too, as in searching for the book on the Goodreads library I see that there is a third novel, perhaps completing a trilogy with the same cast of characters. I see the recently checked out Pelecanos from my library is the final one. That means I'm going to be stuck with my nose in a good book for another couple of days.

Pelecanos' series on cable, "*Wired*", is not for everyone. It's difficult to take in the sad lives of kids stuck in poverty who see their only way out getting 'in the game' of drugs and prostitution. It isn't all that easy either to root for the good guys either. Pelecanos doesn't whitewash anything, yet the endings of the two of his books I've just completed are satisfactory. Unrealistic, perhaps, that the two good guys always get their man, or even their woman. Yet, the thrill in the novels is the journey, the authenticity, the sense of deep understanding of procedure whether it be police or the drug world. How does Pelecanos know the inner workings of his lead black investigator and how is he able to convince me that his characters arise out of truth?

Maybe my high rating of the two novels are based upon being led to believe that the author really has a firm grasp on the world he writes about, the underside of the D.C. I visited once upon a time. Maybe I like to feel that there are good women out there who attract men with dark pasts, men who are worthy of their love.

Women who don't have blinders on, who are worthy to be heroines of their own stories.

I can't wait to get into the third novel to see where else Mr. Pelecanos wants to take this team of Strange and Quinn. I have criticized other books because the villains had no redeeming characteristics, no reason to devote so much attention to them because who cares whether they survive or beat the rap? Pelecanos figures out a way or a reason to make the reader want to know more about his criminals. He humanizes them, just as he does his investigative due, neither of whom admits to being perfect.

Larry Bassett says

What can I say? I love George Pelacanos. But tears in my eyes at the end of *Hell to Pay*? It was too much like *And They All Lived Happily Ever After*, wasn't it?

With Pelacanos, language is never plain or simple. It is always dressed up in descriptive adjectives and proper nouns. Product placement is a Pelacanos trademark. *Hell to Pay* is like a guided tour of metropolitan DC and its suburbs. And, of course, the Wheaton Mall appears in its usual cameo role. As does Bonifant Street and Sligo Avenue in downtown Silver Spring. George takes his cuts at downtown revitalization driving out the ma & pa stores and Whole Foods with its "\$5 tomatoes." He has his usual commentary about social issues like the curfew and gun laws through his dialogues. And the street murder that plays a major role in the storyline doesn't happen until over half way through the book. But the first half of the book is no less entertaining for the absence of the plot core; there are plenty of subplots to keep the reader busy and entertained. With Pelacanos I search for a better word than "entertained" since so much of his writing is glorious b-movie and comic book caricatures. The landscape is so comfortable and familiar if you have read other Pelacanos novels.

Some writers might turn on the radio in their car. Not Pelacanos.

Driving home, Strange rolled up the windows of the Brougham and turned the AC on low. He popped a War tape, *Why Can't We Be Friends*, into the deck, and he found that beautiful ballad of theirs, "So." He got down low in the bench, his wrist resting on the stop of the wheel, and he began to sing along. For a while, anyway, sealed in his car, listening to his music, he found some kind of peace.

Some character descriptions might be non-descript but Pelacanos is anything but ho-hum.

Quinn was replacing his cell in his bag when he noticed a girl standing before him. She wore boot-cut jeans and a spaghetti-string pink shirt with a cartoon illustration of a Japanese girl holding a guitar slung low, a la Keith. Her shoulder bag was white, oval, and plastic. Her dirty-blond hair fell to her shoulders. Her hips were narrow, her breasts small, mostly nipple and visible through the shirt. She was pale, with bland brown eyes and a tan birthmark, shaped like a strawberry, on her neck. She wore wire-rim prescription eyeglasses, granny style. She was barely cute, and not even close to pretty. Quinn put her in her midteens, maybe knocking on the door of seventeen, if that.

Sunday breakfast out? Pelicanos asks us along.

Strange ate a feta-cheese-and-onion omelette sprinkled with Texas Pete hot sauce, and a half-smoke side, and washed it down with a couple of cups of coffee. Some after-church types were at the counter and some sat in the old red-cushioned booths. The diner was white tiles and white walls, kept clean by Billy and his longtime employee, Etta.

Pelicanos has a pattern but, for me, it doesn't get old as long as I don't read a string of his books back to back. His one-a-year publishing schedule is just right for me. His storylines are multifaceted but not so complicated that I lose my way. He lets me see the forest and the trees.

Dave says

Here, Strange and Quinn are both former Metropolitan Police Department Officers. Strange is an older African-American man who keeps his office right in the city on Bonifant Avenue as sort of an example to younger men in the area. Quinn is Caucasian and a bit younger than Strange. Quinn left the police force after a controversial shooting in which internal affairs found his actions to be "right as rain." This story takes place some time after the events in "Right as Rain" and Quinn now has a private investigator's license and assists Strange with cases.

One case involves Quinn working on finding a teenage runaway who more than likely is now working the mean streets of Washington, D.C., and Quinn makes contacts with other street workers as he attempts to find Jennifer and free her from the life she has been reduced to. Along the way, he has to deal with Worldwide Wilson, Jennifer's pimp, who towers over Quinn. Pelicanos does a great job of showing Quinn's discomfort when Sue Tracy, another investigator, actually rescues Quinn. Another subplot of the book is the Peewee football team that Strange and Quinn coach and how the uncle of one of the players is caught up in the life and how that eventually leads to trouble.

All in all, another terrific book in a top-notch crime series. One of the hallmarks of a Pelicanos novel is the backdrop of music and cars. You always feel the music pumping in the background of his books.

Zoeytron says

This was my second George Pelicanos novel, but my first outing with the team of Derek Strange and Terry Quinn. This one is apparently the second in the Strange/Quinn series, so I am reading these out of order, but it didn't seem to make a nickel's worth of difference. It was easy to fall right into step with these two guys.

A little bit hip and quite a bit old-school, Derek Strange is a 50-ish ex-cop with a store-front business called Strange Investigations (love it!), who values his old vinyl records, listening to Stevie Wonder, Al Green, and The Stylistics to smooth his ruffled feathers after a particularly trying day. His character just pops right out of the pages at you. His partner, Terry Quinn, is a 30-something former police who really should take a front row seat in anger management class. He seems a little on the immature side, allowing a pimp to get under his

skin and belittle his manhood by calling him 'Teresa'. I do believe we have a loose cannon on our hands with him. Still and yet, he's one of the good guys and offsets his older counterpart nicely.

The street talk is superb, with the down and dirty lingo dragging you way down in the hole, as the author did with his writing on *The Wire*. The bad guys are truly frightening with their deadeye stares and their wooden acceptance of the likelihood of dying young. The ending was on the sunny side, which was unexpected and even unnecessary for me, but it was an engrossing story, thoroughly enjoyable.

Dan Schwent says

Strange and Quinn take on two cases, one of a runaway turned prostitute and the background check of a longtime friend of Strange's daughter's new suitor. Complications ensue when a young boy on the football team Strange and Quinn are coaching is gunned down. Will Quinn be able to keep his temper in check long enough to get the girl back? Will Strange find dark secrets lurking in Calhoun Tucker's closet? What is the secret connection between the dead little boy, Strange, and the boy's unknown father?

Strange and Quinn are at it again. This time, most of the book is about the relationships between Strange and Quinn and the supporting cast. Strange and Janine's relationship is explored, Quinn meets another woman, and Strange and Quinn coach a peewee football team. Lurking in the background are Garfield Potter and his gang, a pimp named Worldwide Wilson, and druglord Granville Oliver.

The Derek Strange books, while detective fiction, are also Pelecanos' way of showing the rough way of life of poor black children in Washington DC, showing a different side of DC than we've seen with Nick Stefanos and the DC Quartet. Each of the antagonists grew up rough and while they are all pieces of garbage, they didn't have much choice in the matter.

I really like that Strange is committing to Janine and likely giving up his happy endings at the massage parlor. I also like that Quinn has a girlfriend now that will likely reign him in. Strange and Quinn are much more complex than they appeared at first glance.

Some of this book is hard to take, like the death of Joe Wilson. Hell, the fight between Worldwide and Quinn was one of the more brutal fist fights I've ever read. The connection between Strange and Granville was unexpected but made a lot of sense once it was revealed.

At this point, I'd read the phone book if Pelecanos had a hand in writing it. Four stars.

Ensiform says

The second Derek Strange novel. While his hot-headed white partner, Terry Quinn, is hired to rescue a runaway girl from a pimp, Strange gets involved in a high-profile murder case after one of the young boys on his peewee football team is shot. With the police closing in fast, Strange must decide whether he wants the arrogant gang bangers who did the shooting to be arrested, or suffer the rough justice of a vicious drug dealer who has a personal interest in the case.

It's another solid crime story from Pelecanos, who delivers the seedy underbelly of DC without rose-colored glasses or glorification. He knows that every person, even the most cruel and unthinking, is a product of his culture and upbringing, so imbues even the minor villains of his story with motivation, rationalizations, and dreams, which makes their condition all the more tragic. Derek Strange continues to be a fascinating character, a man who is weak in the ways of the flesh but with a noble spirit, a tough guy who doesn't carry a gun, a man who's seen a lot of violence and doesn't want to be the cause of more. There's the usual man-out-of-time idiosyncrasies from Pelecanos – both protagonist and antagonist independently muse that CDs don't have that rich “bottom sound” that vinyl does – but this is a compelling, smart noir that examines hard questions of crime, culture, and consequences without flinching.
