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Hell to Pay: A Novel

By George P. Pelecanos



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Derek Strange and Terry Quinn, the team of private investigators who made their stunning debut in *Right As Rain*, are hired to find a 14-year-old white girl from the suburbs who's run away from home and is now working as a prostitute. The two ex-cops think they know D.C.'s dangers, but nothing in their experience has prepared them for Worldwide Wilson, the pimp whose territory they're intruding upon.

Combining inimitable neighborhood flavor, action scenes that rank among the best in fiction, and a clear-eyed view of morality in a world with few rules, "Hell to Pay" is another Pelecanos masterpiece for his ever-expanding audience to savor.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In *Hell to Pay*, Washington, D.C., is just one more thug in an endless list of thugs who brutalize the poor, the weak, and the young. The primary victim this time is a rising star on Derek Strange's Pee Wee football team. In this city where making T-shirts for bereaved families of young murder victims is a full-time business, the boy is an accidental victim in a war between drug dealers and lowlifes.

Private investigator Strange, in his second George Pelecanos outing (after 2001's *Right as Rain*), has seen enough of this face of D.C. His relationship to his secretary/lover Janine sputters in the wake of increasing, irrational infidelities. His moral compass swings wildly as he tracks the killers, Garfield "Death" Potter and friends. Not knowing if he can be satisfied seeing these men in prison, Strange contemplates other brands of "justice."

For fans of Pelecanos, all the usual trappings are here: the hyper-real dialogue, the bloody street fights, the immersion in classic R&B, and the *most* current music on the streets. Pelecanos does stumble in a few places. His narrative becomes wooden at times, and his plot features a couple of glaring coincidences (e.g., Strange just *happens* to jot down the license plate of a car that later turns out to be the one driven by the murderers). But Pelecanos is the real deal in *noir*. If Dennis Lehane owns Boston and Michael Connelly is master of L.A., Pelecanos is dark D.C.'s intimate chronicler. --Patrick O'Kelley

From Publishers Weekly

You know you're in Pelecanos country when the music begins early a trio of street thugs on their way to a dogfight listen to "the new DMX joint on PGC, turned up loud" and continues to throb all the way through this second book in the author's hardboiled and heartbreaking series centered around Washington, D.C., private detective Derek Strange. A black man in his 50s, Strange first notices these particular thugs when they hang out around a Pee Wee football team he is coaching. Their appearance comes to seem more sinister in retrospect, when Strange's nine-year-old star quarterback is shot and killed at an ice cream stand. While Strange hunts for the men who shot the boy, his partner, Terry Quinn, an Irish Catholic ex-cop, gets pulled into an attempt to save a young runaway turned prostitute from a big-time pimp and falls for one of the tough women organizing the rescue. Meanwhile, Strange goes through a rocky period with his longtime lover (and secretary) Janine, forced to consider what his massage-parlor habit is doing to their relationship. The novel's turf the nontourist parts of Washington, D.C., neighborhoods where so many young black children die that selling T-shirts with their pictures on them at their wakes and funerals has become a cottage industry was staked out successfully in Pelecanos's earlier books about the sons and grandsons of Greek immigrants and now is extended to focus chiefly on the District's black majority. It is Pelecanos's intimate understanding of this volatile D.C. and the complexity of Strange a rich, sometimes frustrating but always warmly human character that should keep this series fresh for a long time to come. (Feb. 19)Forecast: Little, Brown is betting \$100,000 in marketing dollars (not to mention a 20-city author tour) that this will be the book that propels cult favorite Pelecanos onto the bestseller lists and they may be right. Few writers deserve a boost as much as the hardworking, fearlessly gritty and engagingly idiosyncratic Pelecanos.

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From Library Journal

Having debuted in *Right as Rain*, the interracial private investigator team of Derek Strange and Terry Quinn

here returns to the mean streets of Washington, DC. African American Strange, the older and wiser or at least more experienced of the duo, is initially contacted by some police officers who want him and Quinn to find a teen runaway working as a prostitute. They accept the job, while Strange simultaneously examines the background of the flashy fiancé of a friend's daughter. Also a coach at an after-school football league, Strange finds that his investigations impact his team, and he is made painfully aware of the precarious lives of DC's black youth, too often victims of sudden violence. As always, Pelecanos handles the infrequent bouts of brutal action expertly, but the heart of the book resides in the conversations about music, race, and life that occur in the local streets, restaurants, and bars. Pelecanos's growing body of fans won't be disappointed, and *Hell To Pay* just might attract new readers who enjoy gritty urban tales of the type featured on the late, lamented TV series *Homicide*. For all larger public libraries.

- *Bob Lunn, Kansas City P.L., MO*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jose Anderson:

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Michael Stanford:

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