



Drama City

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Lorenzo Brown just wants to stay straight. After eight years in prison on a drug charge, he's come "uptown"-back to the Washington, DC neighborhood where he grew up, where his old cohorts still work their corners and their angles, trying to get ahead and stay alive. But Lorenzo's had enough of the life: Now he has a job as a Humane Society officer, policing animal abusers and protecting the abused. In the dangerous streets he used to menace, Lorenzo plays a part in maintain- ing order-and it's a role reversal some of his former friends don't appreciate. Rachel Lopez, Lorenzo's parole officer, tries to help him, even as she battles her own demons and excesses. Trying to stay one step ahead of her troubled past is a daily struggle. It looks like they both might make it, until a malevolent young killer, working for the powerful local drug boss, changes everything with one violent act. Now Lorenzo finds himself caught between the light and dark sides of the street, struggling to stay legit-or throw everything away to exact revenge.

Drama City Details

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Author : George Pelecanos

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From Reader Review Drama City for online ebook

Edward says

Anyone who has watched that great tv series, THE WIRE, will like this "hardboiled" crime fiction by the same writer who worked on the series.

It has the same location (Washington and Baltimore slums) with the same theme - individuals who try to escape from this area of drugs, crime, and misery; some make it, and others don't - it's often a matter of luck whether one succeeds or fails.

Strangely, I thought this issue of "redemption" (people struggling against immense odds in this bleak environment) almost qualifies the book as a "spiritual" work, especially in its description of the Narcotics Anonymous meeting to which two of the main characters (Lorenzo and Rachel) attend.

Dan Schwent says

Lorenzo Brown, dog catcher and ex-con, struggles to keep from falling back into his old ways, while his parole officer, Rachel Lopez, has some problems of her own. What will happen when two drug factions get into a dispute and Brown and Lopez find themselves caught in the crossfire?

Drama City is a throwback to George Pelecanos DC Quartet. While it's a crime book, it's also a story of life in Washington, DC. In this case, it's the story of a black man trying not to fall back into a life of dealing drugs and a parole officer trying not to let her life go up in flames due to her addictions to sex and booze.

Brown and Lopez are both deeply conflicted characters. It could be that Brown's love of animals and feels toward the young woman and her little girl that he sees every day while walking his dog are all the keeps him from his old life of violence. Lopez has never been in an equal relationship and the idea of one scares her.

Brown's friend from his youth, Nigel Johnson, is a fairly powerful drug dealer. After a minor turf dispute with a rival dealer's thugs, things begin building and Lorenzo is pulled in when he breaks up a dog fighting ring. Melvin Lee, one of the thugs he runs across, shares his parole officer.

Father figures and growing up without a father play important roles in Drama City. Rico Miller, psychopath that he is, sees Melvin as a father figure, and therein is the source of much of the drama that happens in the story. Nigel Johnson sees himself as a father figure to Michael Butler, and when Michael winds up dead, things quickly escalate.

There isn't a lot of action in Drama City. Most of the events are of the emotional sort, but when the violence comes, it is brutal. I love the twist at the end with Nigel and Lorenzo.

Most of Pelecanos' books have a cinematic feel but Drama City felt the most like a movie to me so far. Like something that would probably be nominated but not win an Academy Award.

As with all Pelecanos books, there are a lot of music references and a fair amount of car talk. Derek Strange and his dog make an uncredited cameo appearance early on. Well, Greco is named but not Strange. One thing I noticed is that Pelecanos doesn't often point out skin color to describe characters so you might not realize someone is or isn't white right away.

Like I said earlier, Drama City feels like a throwback to the DC Quartet to me. Four out of five stars.

David Keaton says

A fast read. Be warned though, this book does have some unflinchingly brutal dog-fight passages, and that kind of thing can be a lotta no fun. But luckily Pelecanos takes some satisfying shots at the culture, calling out posers who think of a scary dog as a status symbol, as well as the idiotic '90s dog fighting boom, where everyone who wasn't fighting a pit bull certainly wanted you to think they were. In fact, even though this book was published in 2005, it feels very grounded in the '90s, full of that era's music, sometimes in flashbacks, sometimes not. The main characters are memorable, too. The two major players, slow burning ex-con Lorenzo and Rachel (day and night versions), are both introduced efficiently and effectively, and the author does wonders with Lorenzo early on by having the reader ride along on his thankless day job for the Humane Society, as he works to convince deadbeat dog owners to improve their beasts' low standard of living. The plight of the canines in the book mirrors the humans, of course ("You can't save every animal"), and even though the main plot regarding a childhood friend's drug dealing empire circling the drain and the young, hot-headed psycho all headed for a showdown is well-worn territory, I still stuck around for the finale. As far as the prose, it's suitably rough, slang-ridden, and unpolished but never distracting, although there was that unintentionally hilarious metonymy where the author kept referring to a particular body part as a woman's "sex." But it is a confident book, so much so that you may get the feeling Pelecanos wrote it one-handed. Quickly devoured.

RandomAnthony says

I was late to *The Wire*, only watching the first three seasons (actually, in full disclosure, I've still still to watch the last two season three episodes) over the last few months. But I'd heard of this Pelecanos guy because of his connection to the show, and my library has half a dozen of his novels at the ready every time I pass the Ps. I wanted something lighter and noir-ish but the cover design reminded me of the kind of shit my dad read (e.g. Tom Clancy), and I hate both that shit and my dad, so I wasn't sure what to expect. *Drama City* turned out pretty well. After starting the novel I realized abused animals were at the forefront (a main character works for animal control) and wasn't sure if I wanted to continue. I can't stand animal abuse, even in fiction. But the storyline flowed and rose beyond the spinning-paperback-rack thriller level. The dogs mirror the dealers, esp. the broken youth beyond rehabilitation. Pelecanos keeps the storyline complex and fluid, his characters flawed, and his details fresh. So *Drama City* felt like time well-spent, although I'm not panting (please note dog reference) for the rest of his work. I'll check his catalog out in, if you will, a leisurely fashion. The definition of three stars. No fist-pumping enthusiasm, better than okay.

James Thane says

This is another excellent novel from George Pelecanos who demonstrates once again that he knows the seamier side of Washington, D.C. inside and out and can portray it better than anyone else. Even better are the characters who populate this novel--some good, some bad, some still making up their minds, but virtually all of them struggling in one way or another.

The main protagonist, Lorenzo Brown, once ran with a rough gang headed by his best boyhood friend. But after serving eight years in prison on a drug charge, Lorenzo is back on the street, determined to stay on the straight and narrow and make a new life for himself. He finds a job as a "dog man," working for the Humane

Society, attempting to rescue mistreated dogs.

Lorenzo must report periodically to his parole officer, an attractive but troubled woman named Rachel Lopez. By day, Rachel is very conscientious and does her job well. But by night, she drinks too much and picks up strangers in hotel bars for rough sex. Outside of their scheduled sessions, Lorenzo and Rachel also occasionally run into each other at a mid-day meeting of a Narcotics Anonymous chapter.

Lorenzo is doing well, content in his humble job and steering clear of his former bad associates, when a simple mistake by a stupid gang banger threatens to set off a conflict between two of D.C.'s major drug lords, one of whom is still Lorenzo's friend. The incident threatens both Lorenzo and Rachel and forces Lorenzo to make an agonizing choice.

These characters are beautifully drawn and their story pulls you in from the first page. These are *real* people in a setting that is totally believable and flawed or not, you can't help but sympathize with virtually all of them. Certainly you won't soon forget them.

C.E. says

Pelacanos writes two kinds of books: good ones and great ones. For my money, this is one of the great ones and, perhaps, the best of the dozen or so of his I've read.

The plot revolves around the intertwined lives of two characters. Lorenzo is a paroled criminal, working as a humane society investigator in some of the meanest streets of DC. Rachel Lopez is his parole officer and an alcoholic with her own set of problems. Plenty of action ensues, all of it plausible but what makes this so great (what makes ALL of Pelacanos' work so great) is the completely realistic picture he paints of a world with so many pitfalls, where a modest, lower-working class existence seems like a dream too big to hope for. When he writes of AA meetings, crappy brownstones subdivided into multiple low-rent apartments, poorly treated animals, drug dealers big and small and anything else, Pelacanos makes it all feel just right, down to the tiniest detail. It's fiction, but every word rings true and you suspect the characters and many of the situations are based more closely in reality than is comfortable.

In the end, it's an engaging character study and a finely observed peak into a world in which most people will never go. As usual, Pelacanos draws few lines in pure black and white and finds the humanity in even the least admirable characters. It's a world where victories are few and usually small but Pelacanos paints it with such care that we can't help rooting for humanity at every turn.

Melissa says

While a familiar man walks his familiar dog by a familiar sign at the beginning of this book, it isn't about any recurring characters, which actually happens to be quite refreshing. I like Derek Strange & all that, but Lorenzo Brown can more than hang on his own without any help from more familiar D.C. guys. There are all the usual suspects of the drug trade; the murderous boss, the less murderous boss, the scary psycho teenager with the dead eyes, the Most Promising Young Guy who will undoubtedly be tragically gunned down. My only qualm is with Rachel Lopez. There's certainly a sense that she drinks to excess & sleeps with strangers because of the concurrent deaths of her parents, but I wanted her character to have a little more meat to it. Now I'm wishing for another whole book about Lorenzo Brown, but I'm hoping I can make do without

disappointment by reading *Shoedog*, which, c'mon, has got to be about the man Shoedog. If it isn't, I'm going to be a sad little reader.

Mfred says

There is something about a Pelecanos book that is like sitting in a classroom, making dreamy eyes at your favorite professor as he lectures about your favorite topic while you wear your favorite clothes on your favorite day of the best year of your life.

Not that Pelecanos is expository. Or dry. Or anything remotely like listening to a lecture, in the slightest.

But reading him, I learn. I learn so much about Washington, DC. About people. About crime and violence and struggling and living.

Drama City is nominally about Lorenzo Brown, ex-offender, now working for the Humane Society, and Rachel Lopez, his parole officer. Lorenzo and Rachel gets caught up in the spiraling violence between two local gangs— one led by Lorenzo's longtime friend, the man he went to prison for, Nigel.

But, not to spoil this book before you read it (and you really, really should read it), the violence, the mayhem which the book blurb makes you think is the whole plot? Doesn't happen almost until the last quarter of the book. What you really get with Pelecanos is a story about a whole city, how it is now, how it was, how people end up where they are, and why.

It's a slow book, with a whole host of secondary characters and sub plots. I never got confused though, never got lost. Each new person or story was interesting, fascinating. Sometimes I felt a little voyeuristic- middle class suburban white girl peeking in on a predominantly black, inner-city experience. But that is *my* hang-up, not something the book imposed on me. I felt no judgement in the text, nor was there a sense of Pelecanos distancing the reader from the characters in order to teach some greater moral lesson.

I honestly do not know if these books would resonate with me as much if I didn't live in DC. It is something amazing to read a book set on my streets, in my neighborhood even, that doesn't have a damn thing to do with the President and Secret Service foiling terrorist hijackers by landing Air Force one on the tip of the Washington Monument. And even though this is a crime book, the next time someone looks at me askance for living in the "murder capital of the United States" (actually, it's DETROIT) or makes a joke about crack-smoking mayors, I'm gonna hand them this book.

Here, here is my city. Here is the heat in summer, and the smells, and the noise, and yes the terrible violence, the corruption, the loss. But here too are the people in my city, good and bad, and in all the choices they make, see the profundity of average life.

Five of five stars.

Erin ? *Proud Book Hoarder* says

Lorenzo Brown is an ex-convict who is determined to lead a normal, morally righteous life. He is employed as a Humane Society officer for the city, determined to protect abused animals and bring some sort of justice to those that cannot defend themselves. Throughout all this, he has to stop himself from getting involved

with the old street life.

At work he is employed alongside Mark, who is a humorous and supportive character. The trials he goes through as a Humane Officer are intriguing and depressing in a realistic way.

His parole officer, Rachel Lopez, is one of the good ones, believing that some people really can transform their lives for the better. But while during the day she has her head on her shoulders, at night is a much different story.

Drama City takes the reader through the daily lives of both of these main characters, creating an interesting story that is believable and realistic. When something tragic happens that could cause Lorenzo to undo his oath that says he should stay on the good side of things, will he be able to resist the temptation? What is the right thing for him to do after all?

George Pelecanos' story is one of hope, inspiration and survival. His style is easy to digest, his point comes across clearly without sounding preachy and his characters are strong.

On the negative side, the novel could have used some tightening in pace and tension, with more flavor added to Lorenzo's life (present and past). Overall, though, it's an enjoyable read that is thought-provoking, emotionally gripping and well-written.

Greg says

A high three stars. I couldn't bring myself to give this four stars. I think I've been giving out too many four stars lately, so this one gets a three. It's kind of like life in the game, sometimes shit just doesn't go your way. Like the streets the book reviewing game has its victims.

The book is enjoyable. There are only some many times I can make *The Wire* references about Pelecanos, or maybe I've only made one reference in the past, but it still seems too much to repeat myself. But reading Pelecanos is sort of like reading a minor sub-plot line out of the TV show. There was a small nod towards Omar in a Snoop-esque character, which I would have enjoyed being developed a bit more than the tortured souls of the those that have left the game; these tortured older people seem to be the bread and butter of Pelecanos, or maybe they seemed too much like the characters in *Shame the Devil* and *The Way Home*. *Drama City* wasn't as good as his newest novel.

The moral ambiguity that I loved so much in the TV show is here, but in the written form I think he needs to go farther to get the same effect the show has. I don't know what I mean by that, but I was thinking last night about the parts of *The Wire* that made it such a groundbreaking TV show, and so smart only really seem to make average literature. Is it the mediums? Do I expect a lot less from TV shows, or has television conditioned me to expect less that deviations from the black and white world of good and bad is considered edgy?

A good fun read, with a couple of cringe worthy moments but kind of predictable at times. Oh, and there are a couple of continuity problems that irked me, but nothing too serious.

Larry Bassett says

The book *Drama City* is an aberration for George Pelecanos. One of the two main characters is actually a woman! Having a woman as a main player is almost unheard of for Pelecanos. Now we just have to see if there is any character development of Parole Officer Rachel Lopez. And what do you think? Are we going to find out some about her more than her body type and what she drinks! Eureka, yes we are! But, like I say, an aberration. But I'm going to enjoy it while I can. Hello, Rachel, good to know you.

The book starts in a familiar neighborhood so we are comfortable in our surroundings immediately. However, there are some new Pelecanos characters in the hood. People particular to this book. Life can be rough in this part of DC but that is to be expected of Pelecanos. He doesn't hang in nice, middle class neighborhoods. But there are many flashy, expensive cars, nicer than the houses they are parked in front of most of the time. The men work at low pay jobs, if they work at all, but they can still somehow afford those cars and expensive chains around their necks.

Drama City features two people in law enforcement, but the kind of law enforcement without a gun. Rachel, as mentioned, is a parole officer. And Lorenzo is a Humane Society officer who breaks up organized dog fights and watches out for mistreated animals. Rachel deals with a lot of troubled people, Lorenzo with a lot of troubled animals.

We find mistakes, misunderstandings and murder courtesy of George Pelecanos. Not justice as we might see it, but revenge. But at the end we find some good moralizing and satisfying action. And, as is often the case with Pelecanos, we see someone doing the wrong thing for the right reasons. We understand that people are not all good or all bad but often some of each. The Pelecanos world is a mixed bag.

Going up Georgia Avenue, she saw single mothers moving their children along the sidewalks, young girls showing off their bodies, church women, men who went to work each day, men who did nothing at all, studious kids who were going to make it, stoop kids on the edge, kids already in the life, a man smoking a cigarette in the doorway of his barbershop, and the private detective with the big shoulders talking to a white dude on the sidewalk in front of his place, had the sign with the magnifying glass out front. It was a city of masks, the kind Nigel had said hung in theaters. Smiling faces and sad, and all kinds of faces in between.

Drama City gets four stars from me just like most Pelecanos books. And I have now read them all as I wait for the new one about to come out. I hope there will be more strong women like Rachel in future Pelecanos books. Strong women deserve a place in metro DC, Mr. Pelecanos. Maybe we'll find her in *The Cut* coming out at the end of August? I hope so.

Nigel Bird says

“The more you walk this road, the longer the road seems to be.”

I'm not entirely sure how George Pelecanos does it. *Drama City* is yet another example of the man's brilliance. He tells a huge number of stories all at once by weaving together the lives of the main players with those of the supporting cast and still manages to drive forward a central theme that never lets on about

where it's going until things reach their climax.

Lorenzo Brown is a dog man. It's where he's ended up after a spell in prison for working drugs with his friend Nigel. Lorenzo has locked the demons of his past away and he's determined to stay clean and live a straightforward life. As a dog man, he trawls through the city's difficult spots and encounters a cast of unsavoury situations. In contrast to the animals he works with, his own dog is well-cared for. In this brief description of his pet, Pelecanos manages to hint at the violence of the environment and let us know about the dog all in a oner:

"Jasmine's coat was cream coloured, with tan and brown shotgunned across the fur."

Lorenzo has a probation officer, Rachel Lopez, and she (like me) is rooting for him all the way. Lopez invests a good deal into each of the offenders she works with, believing in the possible. Unfortunately, she's fighting demons of her own. Like Lorenzo, her job leads her into many difficult and dangerous places and her ways of coping are easily understandable.

For me, the power of Drama City lies in the strength of the characters. From an early stage I felt a strong desire to see them come through their own personal battles unscathed. Once that desire had been established, Pelecanos began to play with the inhabitants of the book like a mischievous god, throwing them to the lions piece by piece and forcing me to watch as the situations played out.

Pelecanos also manages to summarise the profound using very simple brushstrokes and is able to impart huge amounts of information through the tiniest of things (take, for example, the provenance of a matchbook).

Drama City is a hugely satisfying read. The only way I could recommend it more highly would be to stand on something very tall. Be warned, it's not for those of a nervous disposition.

George K. says

Τελευταία φορά που διβασα βιβλίο του Τζορτζ Πελεκάνου, ήταν τον Δεκέμβριο του 2014. Δηλαδή τσα χρόνια, δεν τύχε να πισω για διβασμα κάποιο βιβλίο του, εν μου ανκουν για σα χουν μεταφραστε στα ελληνικ, και εν ενα νας συγγραφας που μου αρσει πολ. Τι να πω, βυσσος η ψυχ του βιβλιοφγου! Στο μεταξύ, αυτ ενα το πμπτο βιβλίο του που διαβζω και μου φνηκε στο ιδιο υψηλ εππεδο ποιτητας με τα τσσερα προηγμενα. Πριν κτι μνες η ΕΡΤ πρβαλλε τη σειρ The Wire, την οποα πραγματικ απλαυσα, και το βιβλίο αυτ μου θμισε ντονα την ατμσφαιρα και τη θεματολογα της συγκεκριμνης σειρς. Κτι λογικ, μιας και ο Πελεκάνος ενα νας απ τους παραγωγος/σεναριογφους της. Λοιπν, το Drama City περιχει... δρμα, σκηνς βας, ντονο ρεαλισμ, απστευτη ατμσφαιρα, ενδιαφροντες χαρακτες και πολ πειστικος διαλγους. Πρκειται για μια ιστορφα που αναδεικνει τον κσμο του εγκλματος και των εγκληματιν στην γρια πλευρ της Ουσινγκτον, ο συγγραφας μας δνει την ευκαιρφα να ρξουμε μια ματι στους μηχανισμος του εγκλματος. Το πλον δυνατ "χαρτ" του βιβλίου ενα η εξαιρετικ γραφ, η οποα ενα γεμητη οξυδρκεια και σιγουρι, με εξαιρετικ ρεαλιστικς περιγραφς σκηνικν και καταστσεων, αλλ και με την απαρατητη χρση της αρχκ. Σγουρα πρκειται για να απαρατητο ανγνωσμα για τους λτρεις των σγρονων δραματικν νουρ με στοιχεα εγκλματος.

Orsodimondo says

DRAMA CITY

Piacevole sorpresa Pelecanos.

Lo si incrocia in quei contesti e ambiti, e premi, che includono nomi come Winslow e Jefferson Parker, per citare mie letture recenti: ma Pelecanos mi ha colpito, e sorpreso, gli altri due non altrettanto.

”Suspect-Presunto colpevole” un film del 1987 diretto da Peter Yates ambientato a Washington. Qui la protagonista Cher, e un coprotagonista, Dennis Quaid: per entrambi era il periodo più fulgido della carriera da attore.

Ho letto che ambienta tutte le sue storie a Washington, città capitale che si sa ha partorito contrasti pazzeschi, dalla Casa Bianca a quartieri poveri come pochi altri.

‘Drama City’, il titolo originale, è un viaggio tra gli umili, tra gli ultimi, tra gente piena di sfumature: anche nel Bene e nel Male, Pelecanos sa introdurre una ricca gamma di toni, dando vita e anima a ogni singolo personaggio, e anche il più bieco sa trovare il suo momento di umanità.

Quasi tutti cadono, qualcuno sa rialzarsi, sfruttare una seconda possibilità, e trovare la sua redenzione.

Nel film, Liam Neeson, non ancora esploso come protagonista, interpreta un veterano del Vietnam che vive in mezzo ai senza casa, una Washington molto diversa dallo stereotipo, proprio come nella pagine di Pelecanos.

È un racconto duro, realistico, anche spietato, della società americana, del suo rapporto col crimine, con la droga, la povertà, la morte della classe operaia. Un ritratto e un’esplorazione della vita urbana nei suoi gironi marginali.

Un altro momento dello stesso film che testimonia la trasformazione fisica del personaggio interpretato da Liam Neeson.

Procede con ritmo lento, sembra perdersi in dettagli (le infinite descrizioni dei percorsi!), ma la tensione è latente, palpabile, si sa che deve succedere, si intuisce che succederà a chi non si vorrebbe, la questione è capire quando.

E il quando non lo dice Pelecanos, ma la sua storia: quando il momento è maturo, il colpo arriva. E fa male.

Mi ha ricordato molto un’ottima serie tv, quella che il presidente Obama ha molte volte ripetuto essere la sua preferita, The Wire, alla quale Pelecanos ha partecipato sia in veste di sceneggiatore che di produttore.

Il personaggio interpretato da Liam Neeson è quello di un veterano di guerra sordomuto ingiustamente accusato d’omicidio. Cher è il suo avvocato d’ufficio. Un buon, solido thriller.

Robin says

I quite enjoyed this story of a criminal trying to stay straight and getting caught up with characters from his past; the characters are well drawn and the novel is very atmospheric. However I felt the climax was an anti-climax. Without giving anything away I was expecting more of a showdown, which didn't happen, and the book ended on a more positive note than I expected.
