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A Peace Corps volunteer has gone missing in Bulgaria and everyone assumes he is dead, everyone except his grandfather, who refuses to give up hope. Retired literature professor Simon Matthews launches a desperate search only to be lured into a bizarre quest to retrieve a stolen Thracian artifact—a unique object of immense value others will stop at nothing to recover.

Matthews travels through a Balkan landscape dotted with ancient tombs and fortresses, unaware that his grandson has been confined to an isolated mountain cabin, slowly recovering from a severe head injury. Nothing can be taken at face value, as the woman assisting Matthews in his quest and the nurse caring for his injured grandson may have ulterior motives in helping the two reunite. Even when Matthews succeeds in joining up with his grandson, departure from Bulgaria is only possible if the missing relic can be found.

Valley of Thracians Details

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From Reader Review Valley of Thracians for online ebook

Ste J says

A novel set in Bulgaria? This is something new for me and it's nice to get an insight into and learn about a country that is arguably – and perhaps unfairly – best known for its football team of the 1994 world cup.

My first impressions were that this was going to be a Da Vinci Code style book but I am happy to report that it isn't and that makes me happy...very happy.

From the outset the author's words radiate a genuine passion and a deep sense of love for the beauty of Bulgarian culture and history and gives the story that authentic feel.

The book is a slow burner with many plot threads that are unravelled then twined together and developed for the inevitable finale. With the story sometimes reading like a travel book or perhaps an advert for the Bulgarian tourist board, not that that is by any means a criticism, I like the picturesque.

The story is divided neatly into parts which seamlessly transition between plot and cultural lessons of Bulgarian idiosyncracies, geography and pronunciation. There is a nice change between third and first person perspectives at one point as we are introduced to key character Scott which helps the book feel fresh and had me sympathising with him more than I perhaps would have done in third person...the workings of the mind render characters ever more intimate.

If there a weakness overall to the narrative though. it is in the characters. I enjoyed the book but I just didn't feel I cared enough about them...there were a number of questions regarding characters' actions which kept up the mystery of the book but I just don't think they were strong enough overall. Having said that there were some good foundations laid, Boris had the potential to be a real figure that the reader loves to hate and equally Katya's mental fragility and obsessional behaviour was something I did enjoy, she was my favourite character for her complex mix of weakness and misguided nature.

The ending for me felt a little rushed, everything was tied up extremely quickly and I just expected a little more than the low-key conclusion. To offset that though and because this review does not deserve to end on a negative note, the author did bring up the topic of archaeological propaganda which is a fascinating topic that I need to explore and as with the rest of history, evidence can be changed in order to suit one's purpose...it is something we should be aware of in history books and in the news at large, it's a good lesson to be taken on board.

Louisa Dang says

Part thriller, part travelogue, this novel drew me right in from the start! A grandfather refuses to give up on his lost grandson, presumed dead by the police, who went missing in Bulgaria while in the Peace Corps. Shuman does an excellent job of weaving Bulgarian culture and history into the story without dragging it down. He adds so many twists and turns, it's nearly impossible to stop reading! I loved learning about Bulgaria, a country I previously knew nothing about. If you like thrillers and history, this one's for you!

Tar says

A grandfather journeys from Chicago, USA to Bulgaria and travels all over the beautiful country in Eastern Europe in search of his grandson who was declared dead three years ago. Then why does he travel now? How will he track his grandson's steps three years ago? Firmly believing his grandson, Scott, to be alive, retired English Professor Simon Matthews has taken it upon himself to visit every corner of Bulgaria. He meets Sophia who teaches history at a local university and she extends her help in his quest. With every lead ending up in nothing, how long with Simon keep looking for his grandson?

Author Ellis Shuman takes us on a journey through many parts of Bulgaria and explores bits of Bulgarian culture of present and past. It was entertaining and also somewhat educational. I had never known about Thrace and this book was a great introduction. The suspense of the story makes it impossible to stop reading and the first half of the book moves quite fast. The second half, although a bit slower, goes into more details about some of the characters and I very much appreciated the attention paid by the author; both the sophisticated and the gritty sides of the country are beautifully incorporated. Fiction mixed with facts with a gripping story, anyone who likes travel and suspense stories would absolutely love this book.

Gigi Frost says

As the novel opens we meet Simon Matthews, a man on a mission. Simon's character evokes the reader's empathy as his heart-wrenching situation comes to light. He has traveled to Bulgaria to answer a question that had been plaguing him, what has happened to his grandson?

No body had ever been produced from his grandson's death. And as Simon begins his quest, digging into the truth behind the mysterious death, he uncovers something incredibly sinister.

"The bus speeds east through the dark and forbidding Bulgarian night. The rhythm of the tires on the asphalt pavement soothes my worries, and I close my eyes, eager to forget the strange happenings that have led me to this unexpected journey."

With the help of Sophia Ivanova, an expert in Thracian culture, he is able to traverse throughout Bulgaria on an amazing journey filled with the languid rhythms of culture, and subtle clues of muddled deception.

Shuman's writing style ensconces the reader in an intriguing plot-line that is chock-full of significant detail. His past experiences provide a compelling narrative.

Read the entire review here:
[Bookend Chronicles](#)

Ionia says

When I first read the description for this book, I thought "Bulgaria?" That is certainly an unusual setting. It really is, and that, I believe is part of this book's charm. I get tired of reading stories that are set in the same place over and over. I like it when the author not only uses a different setting than the norm, but also knows something about the setting they choose, and this author clearly does.

The descriptions are beautifully penned. You can see the colours before your eyes and feel the atmosphere as you read. There were actually a couple of passages in this book I went back and read again after finishing, simply because I enjoyed them so much.

Another thing that impressed me about this author is how smooth his writing is. He does not add any extra fluff that does not need to be there and reading his words are as easy as breathing. You understand from the very first couple of sentences that the main character finds himself in his current predicament because he cares deeply for his grandson, and that theme never loses momentum.

This novel has a good flow and a lot of twists and unexpected turns. I liked the plot and was impressed by the way Ellis Shuman took his characters to the extremes of their abilities without losing realism. The adventuresome spirit in me was clapping for his genius. If you think you know what to expect from the beginning, I bet you will be wrong.

This author interweaves a fictional tale with the history and culture of his setting to create an intense, original story with a lot to offer the suspense lover.

There were a couple of places where I felt the author could have let the characters show more through action rather than displaying things through dialogue, but this did not in any way ruin the story for me.

I would recommend this book to anyone who likes mystery, thrills and a book that takes you on a serious adventure.

Scott Whitmore says

Three years after a young American Peace Corps worker goes missing in Bulgaria and is presumed dead, his elderly grandfather arrives in the capital of Sofia, intent on getting to the bottom of the mystery. So begins *Valley of Thracians* by Ellis Shuman (@EllisShuman), a novel that is equal parts mystery, thriller and travelogue.

Bulgaria becomes a supporting character in this story as the grandfather, Simon Matthews, journeys around the country searching for clues to his grandson Scott's disappearance. Assisted by Sophia Ivanova, an academic specializing in Thracian culture — before the rise of the Greeks and Romans the Thracians lived in an area spanning parts of modern Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey — Simon does his best to learn more about Scott's life in Bulgaria, his disappearance and how his wallet and passport came to be discovered at a Black Sea resort hotel.

To say much more would be to spoil the plot, but suffice to say there is more going on here than the disappearance of Scott, whose activities in Bulgaria went beyond his Peace Corps brief of community outreach and teaching English as a second language.

Reading *Valley of Thracians*, I was taken aback at the realization that it has been going on twenty-five years since Bulgaria broke free of Communist control and started on the path to becoming a democracy. Where did that time go? My knowledge of the country prior to reading this novel was minimal, centering mostly on claims of Bulgarian involvement in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II.

The author lived in Bulgaria for two years, and Mr. Shuman weaves a wealth of information about the country's history and culture into the narrative. Additionally, the travels of Simon, Scott and Sophia allow the author the opportunity to showcase many of the country's historic sites and its natural wonders. For

someone like me who enjoys learning something new, this novel is a real gem.

All that learning comes with a small price, however. The pace of the story is languid to begin with, but added to that many of the “lessons” tend to pull the reader out of unfolding scenes. This happens most often in the first and last parts, while the middle section moves along at a good clip even while dealing with multiple timelines.

I enjoyed *Valley of Thracians* and recommend it. Bulgaria sounds like a wonderful place to visit, with many interesting historic sites to explore as well also mountains and beaches to enjoy. For more of Mr. Shuman’s writing, including book reviews and Bulgarian memories, visit his blog.

Khaled Talib says

If there is one thing I've learned from this suspenseful novel, it is an affirmation that one should always trust one's gut feeling. No matter what everyone else tells you, if you believe, then pursue what you think to be true till the very end -- until you are personally satisfied with the final answer.

And so, in this lengthy four-part novel, a determined grandfather travels from the United States to Bulgaria in search of his missing grandson, Scott, with the hope of seeing him again, refusing to believe that he is gone forever.

Ellis Shuman succeeds in making the reader feel the strain and agony of the protagonist-grandfather, Simon, as he -- at half-a-breath in his lungs -- traces the path of his grandson, who three-years earlier had gone to Bulgaria to join the peace corps. But the reader is left wondering if Simon's trip to Bulgaria is but a fool's errand as he pursues carrots of clues and tip-offs that lead to dead ends.

You will be holding your breath at times as you wonder if the next page would bring the old man closer to a reunion.

Bruce McDonald says

Mysterious disappearances, betrayals, loyalty. Crooks, cops, an enigmatic archaeologist, helpful strangers. All these come together against a backdrop of beautiful Bulgarian vistas, crowded cities and down-to-earth rural villages.

The story is a thriller with all the classic elements of the genre. A Peace Corps volunteer has disappeared and clues don't fit the official reports. A doting grandpa tries to find the truth, persevering against all odds. There are villains and good guys swirling around a priceless lost treasure, hide-and-seek chases all over the country, crowded festivals and lonely mountaintops, drugs and guns. As we follow the twists and turns of the plot we are treated to fascinating lessons in Bulgarian culture, geography, customs and folkways, mores and ways of thinking. The writer's observations about the country are always relevant to the action, as well as being informative and fascinating. There are enough plot twists to engage the diehard mystery reader, and enough human interest angles to warm anyone's heart.

The author's detailed and colorful Bulgaria knowledge shows that he has "been there," and there's good reason for that authenticity. He lived and worked in Bulgaria, and he was obviously a serious observer of the place, its history and people.

For anyone who loves Bulgaria, and even more for anyone who has never thought about Bulgaria, this book is an excellent read.

Book Him Danno says

An excellent book with a well developed plot told by different characters as seen from their point of view. The word descriptions of the various locales brought them to life before you. The historical information provided a background for the location and it's people.

I have rated this book 4 stars.

I obtained this book from Amazon in Kindle format
Thank you Frank

Claire says

I enjoyed this book immensely. I have never been to Bulgaria but having read this I feel I know much more about the country and it's history. The author introduced historical instruction as part of the storyline without the reader feeling lectured or taught.

The storyline itself was original and well written with characters a reader could easily identify with. Although there were no real surprises as the story played out I found myself swept along and thoroughly enjoying the ride.

I would recommend this book to anyone, it has enough substance to appeal to many.

Terry Wilkes says

Enjoyable thriller set in the unusual choice of Bulgaria. It revisits the old wounds of Europe's east/ west split while also providing a fascinating insight into local color and customs. This is standard thriller material: grandpa goes to find what happened to peacekeeper son. All credit to Ellis for giving it a new spin, making it engaging and shining a spotlight on an unexplored area of the world (literarily speaking)

Adrienne Woods says

I loved this story. Being a huge fan of travel, Bulgaria has always been one of my destination I still needed to visit. Thanks to Ellis, I sort of got a taste of it. His descriptions is really vivid and it makes you feel that you are right there. It follows a grandfather, Simon. Who never gave up searching for his missing grandson, Scott, somewhere in Bulgaria. He gets plenty of help from the locals and that's when the motives gets questioned. Why this and Why that? The plots were set up amazingly, it had a real 'treasure hunt' type of feeling to it, but instead of treasure, it was a missing grandson.

There is really everything in this story. From smuggling with artifacts, to murders and car chases. Now what I didn't like about the book: I struggled with getting into the story. But as soon as I did, I couldn't put it down. It is a novel worth reading and I promise this is something for everyone, doesn't matter what genre your favourite is. His characters are so strong, that you easily connect with them.

Laurie Hanan says

Like many Americans, I knew basically nothing about Bulgaria. Now, thanks to the author's vivid descriptions, I can see almost believe I've been there and experienced the rich culture, tasted the food, befriended the 'natives'. I can close my eyes and see the historic monasteries and fortresses, and the ancient Thracian artifacts on display in museums. But this book is more than just a travel guide. The story begins as we follow Simon, a likeable character who has set out to find a grandson missing in Bulgaria for three years. The young man's parents, the American Embassy, and the Bulgarian police have long since given up on finding him, dead or alive. Simon is befriended by an archaeologist who helps him on his quest. But Simon has a hard time believing such a beguiling woman could be attracted to him. So why she is being so helpful? Why she is so interested in the case of the missing boy? Simon's search comes up empty and he's about to head back to the states, when someone deliberately leaves him a clue. From this point, the plot takes off. The story moves back and forth from past to present and is told from multiple viewpoints, but is never confusing. The action builds with smuggled artifacts, car chases, and murders. Thugs and smugglers converge against a stunning backdrop of mountains, forests, and historic sites. This was an easy, enjoyable read with a satisfying conclusion.

Christoph Fischer says

"Valley of Thracians" is a wonderful book about grandfather Simon travelling to Bulgaria to track down his missing and declared-for-dead grandson Scott. The latter used to work for the Peace Corp in Bulgaria before going missing. With some reason to assume that Scott is still alive Simon starts his own enquiries and with help from some locals he finds indeed new evidence regarding his grandson.

The story is told in four parts and changes perspective throughout. This serves the storyline very well and gives the reader a chance to be more involved in the plot. Starting with Simon's perspective it is a slow burner, building up only gradually as at first Simon learns little and comes across as stubborn and full of wishful thinking. The writing in the first few chapters includes a lot of interesting background information about Bulgaria and its history, culture and people. Those parts are skilfully woven into the dialogue and make for a great read.

As the storyline moves along we get less of the (well received) tourist information and move swiftly into darker territory of organised crime, smuggling, drugs, corruption and so forth.

As the second voice takes over the narrative the pace picks up and never lets us down again throughout the whole action packed plot until the end of the book.

Well written and full of great characters the book turned out to be a rich and exciting read, with huge expert local and historical knowledge that gives this thriller a great unusual and well chosen backdrop, without taking away the focus from the actual story. It is a rare find to have great suspense and almost educational details combined and work together so well.

Liz Barnsley says

A Peace Corps volunteer has gone missing in Bulgaria and everyone assumes he is dead, everyone except his grandfather, who refuses to give up hope. Retired literature professor Simon Matthews launches a desperate search only to be lured into a bizarre quest to retrieve a stolen Thracian artifact—a unique object of immense value others will stop at nothing to recover.

I wasn't entirely sure what to expect when I started this one - it's true that I would not have chosen it for myself, yet that would have been a shame. Told from various points of view, we open with Simon - beginning his journey to find out the truth about his missing Grandson - with the help of Sophia, a local History teacher he meets along the way.

I especially loved how Mr Shuman manages to give us a lot of background and information on the culture of Bulgaria, a country I know little about, by weaving it effortlessly into the flow of the story - in a way this is part travel guide and it works very well to put you in the moment.

The mystery element is well imagined and as the story twists and turns towards its ultimate conclusion you will find adventure, thrills and intrigue here. Wonderful writing style makes it easy to read with a mix of fast paced plot and more sedate meandering that keeps you involved until the end.

It did take me a while to "sink in" to the tale - but once I was there, there I stayed. Enjoyable mystery thriller, great characters and very well written.
