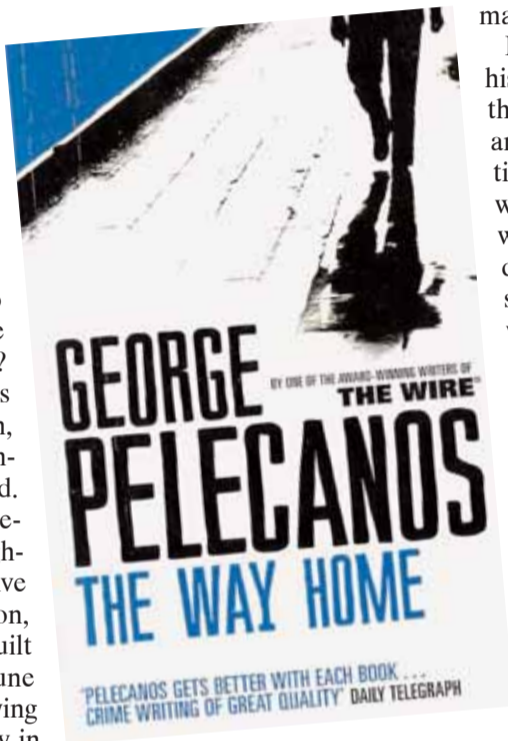


GREEK AMERICAN WRITER GEORGE PELECANOS

# Finding 'the way home'

AS ITS title suggests, The Way Home revolves more around a family finding its way out of turmoil than the crimes that caused the trouble in the first place. Likewise, the action comes hard and fast but it's the thorough, flowing detail Greek American writer George Pelecanos puts into each of his characters that sets this new title apart from the typical crime novel.

A question that haunts many families (American and otherwise) seems to hang over the whole plot: Who's to blame when the kids go astray? Thomas Flynn has tried to give his son, Chris, every advantage in the world. Though not as "refined" as their neighbours in an exclusive area of Washington, DC, Flynn has built up a modest fortune with his carpet-laying business. Still madly in love with his high-school sweetheart and wife (there are plenty of erotic encounters between the two of them throughout) one could hardly say he's created a broken home.



But Chris couldn't care less. While his buddies and girlfriend apply to universities, he's picking fights and smoking marijuana. His dabbling into crime disappoints his father more and more but nothing seems to force Chris to "shape up". At the same time, Thomas realises he has taught his son how to hold his own in a fight, not how to walk away from it.

Things come to a head when Chris rams his car into another and punches its driver with his fist. A car chase of epic proportions ensues, and Pelecanos' prose works in cinematic fashion.

Pelecanos describes his native city in a way that is precise, concise and enthralling, particularly for those who have lived and worked in DC. (Full disclosure: I spent a summer working with television crime reporters in the District.) Non-natives might want to sit in front of Google Maps to keep up with the action.

Even this Hollywood-style chase is interrupted to develop the characters further as Chris initially eludes arrest,

smokes some weed with his best friend dubbed "Big Country" (who ends up going to law school), then has a rendezvous with his girlfriend (her only appearance). He returns home to find his neighbour-

hood blockaded by irate yet impressed policemen, who arrest him.

Chris' antics land him in a juvenile detention centre, where he's the only white inmate from a nuclear family. On the inside he learns the code of behaviour that exists amongst inmates. This is a vivid but realistic look inside the rehabilitation system. This in-depth look isn't exactly what you'll see on tv's Prison Break.

At this point you're 10 chapters into a 30-chapter crime novel, when the plot leaps forward a few years to the present day. The details of what happened in-between come in bits and pieces. Chris teams up with another former inmate, Ali, who operates a local NGO, to employ their old jail buddies at the Flynn family carpet business so they can get a headstart on life once released.

Chris and one of those friends, the affable Ben Braswell, are working on a house that a Ms Mindy Kramer is trying to renovate and "flip" in an up-and-coming neighbourhood. Ben discovers a bag with \$50,000 under the floor boards. Chris, fearing the trouble they could get into when someone comes back for their cash, tells him to put the bag back. Ben, heartbroken, reluctantly puts the money back but blabs about its location to another of their former jail buddies. Sure enough, the former "owners" return. Intrigue and murder follow.

The Washington Post criticised the idea that anyone would leave \$50,000 of found money as "straining credulity". Perhaps. How Chris ultimately (and suddenly) finds his "way home" back to his father's respect might strain belief a bit more.

But these critical junctures in the plot aren't what make this another great Pele-



canos' crime novel. The author has an uncanny ability to weave all those details together in a way that puts you inside the head of his characters, while he paints a vivid picture of life in America's capital city (minus any mention of the White House or Congress) and the criminal justice system.

The Way Home is the fifth stand-alone novel for Pelecanos. His other books include three different series of novels - including one about a Greek private investigator named Nick Stefanos - and work on the award-winning television series The Wire.

Those seeking a drama with some depth shouldn't be disappointed in Pelecanos' latest title. There's still plenty of justice and violence to go around but this is not just another crime novel.

## George Pelecanos

was born in 1957 in Washington, DC. Publishing his first novel in 1992, he has written 15 novels, including the Nick Stefanos series.

He worked as a salesman, cook and construction worker, among other things, before hitting it big.

He is one of the award-winning writers of HBO's TV drama The Wire.

WHO built the pyramids? Slaves, as Hollywood's version would have it? Jewish slaves, as an Israeli prime minister famously remarked?

Neither, say Egyptian archaeologists, who on January 11 presented further evidence to reinforce what they and other experts have long maintained: The Great Pyramids were built by free men - paid labourers who worked out of reverence for the pharaohs and were rewarded with burial near the ancient monuments, in graves discovered last week. The latest findings come from a dozen skeletons in newly discovered pits more than 4,000 years old, perfectly preserved by dry desert sand, along with jars that had once contained beer and bread to feed the dead in the afterlife.

The mud-brick tombs, each three metres (nine feet) deep, were found last week beyond a larger burial site first discovered near the pyramids in 1990 and dating to the 4th Dynasty (2575 BC to 2467 BC), when the giant structures were built at Giza, on the fringes of mod-

# Who built the pyramids?

ern-day Cairo.

The previously discovered graves already pointed to their occupants being pyramid-builders, and the latest findings reinforced the paid-laborer theory, according to Egypt's archaeology chief, Zahi Hawass. They are the first to be found containing supplies for the afterlife, indicating how respected the workers were, and one tomb was found containing a limestone piece with an inscription identifying its occupant as Idu, a supervisor of a group of builders.

Herodotus, the Greek historian of the ancient world, described the pyramid-builders as slaves. Hollywood films and an offhand remark by the late Israeli pm Menachem Begin put forth the idea that those slaves were ancient Israelites.

The Jewish angle did not come up at Hawass' presentation to reporters, but it has long rankled Egyptians, for whom the pyramids are a source of national pride. Even as Egypt was

negotiating peace with the Jewish state in the late 1970s, the argument flared anew with Begin's remarks during a visit here. Archaeologists, Jewish and other, generally agree that the Jewish role is a myth.

"No Jews built the pyramids because Jews didn't exist at the period when the pyramids were built," said Amihai Mazar, professor at the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. "If the Hebrews built anything, then it was the city of Ramses as mentioned in Exodus," said Mazar. Dorothy Resig, an editor of Biblical Archaeology Review in Washington, DC, said the idea probably arose from the Old Testament Book of Exodus, which says: "So the Egyptians enslaved the children of Israel with backbreaking labour" and the pharaoh put them to work building ancient cities such as Ramses. Menachem Friedman, professor e-



tabloids and Hollywood," Wildung said in a telephone interview. "The world simply could not believe the pyramids were built without oppression and forced labour, but out of loyalty to the pharaohs."

Hawass said the builders came from poor Egyptian families and were so respected for their work that those who died on the job were honoured with a burial near the sacred pyramids and preparation for the afterlife. The tombs survived grave robbers because they contained no valuables, and the bodies were not mummified. The skeletons lay in a fetal position, head pointing west and feet east according to ancient Egyptian beliefs, surrounded by the jars once filled with supplies for afterlife. Hawass said some 10,000 labourers - not the 100,000 chronicled by Herodotus - worked in three-month shifts, and ate 21 cattle and 23 sheep sent to them daily from farms.

mer-itus at Bar Ilan University near Tel Aviv who specializes in religious identity in society, said few Jews believe "this fantasy that that their ancestors built the pyramids".

"Most Jews believe the ancient Hebrews were made to do forced labour in Egypt like the other slaves of the period," he told the Associated Press.

Dieter Wildung, a former director of Berlin's Egyptian Museum, said centuries separate the construction of the pyramids and the story of the Israelites in Egypt.

"The myth of the slaves building pyramids is only the stuff of