



Proving Ground

Peter Blauner

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From *New York Times* bestselling author and Edgar Award winner Peter Blauner comes a gritty new audiobook.

"Ari Fliakos gives a splendid performance. His versatile voice and energy enliven the many characters in this thriller." -- *Library Journal*

"Ari Fliakos enhances an exciting story with his expert narration. He gives everyone a unique identity, differentiating them through varying tones, voices, and accents." -- *AudioFile Magazine*

Nathaniel Dresden never really got along with his father, an infamous civil rights lawyer who defended criminals and spearheaded protest movements. As an act of rebellion, Natty joined the U.S. Army and served in Iraq, coming back with a chest full of commendations and a head full of disturbing memories.

But when his father is found murdered near the peaceful confines of Brooklyn's Prospect Park, Natty is forced to deal with the troubled legacy of their unresolved relationship. He also has to fend off the growing suspicions of NYPD Detective Lourdes Robles, a brash Latina cop with something to prove, who thinks Natty might bear some responsibility for his father's death. Though truth be told, the list of people--cops and criminals--who wanted David Dresden out of the way is long. The search for answers leads Natty and Lourdes into an urban labyrinth where they must confront each other--and the brutal truths that could destroy them both.

Proving Ground is Peter Blauner's first audiobook in more than a decade. It is at once a sweeping crime narrative, an intricate story about the quest for redemption, and a vibrant portrait of contemporary New York City, all told in Blauner's singular voice.

Proving Ground Details

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From Reader Review Proving Ground for online ebook

Matt Schiavenza says

Nathaniel Dresden, Natty Dread for short, returns to the U.S. from a tour in Iraq with a battlefield death weighing on his conscience. But soon Natty faces a new crisis: His father David, a prominent civil rights litigator, is found murdered near the family's home in Brooklyn. The leftist father and soldier son didn't always see eye to eye; Natty, in fact, always got along better with David's larger-than-life law partner Ben Grimaldi.

But soon Natty plunges into an investigation of his father's death. Also on the hunt are Lourdes, a tough Latina cop from the New York City projects, and her veteran partner Sullivan. The more Natty digs in, the more questions arise. Plenty of people had beef with his father — but who wanted him killed? And is Ben Grimaldi — law partner, family friend, father figure — precisely who he says he is?

Proving Ground is a rollicking summer read — I tore through it in two afternoons sitting on the beach. Blauner has a keen ear for dialogue and a journalist's attention to detail on police and legal procedure, lending the book a credibility that others in the genre lack. And as a resident of Brooklyn myself, I got a kick out of reading a murder mystery set in my old neighborhood.

Florence Millo says

Proving Ground by Peter Blauner

Proving Ground by Peter Blauner is a relentless thriller about an ex GI, Natty Dresden , who comes home to find his liberal father David, a criminal defense lawyer, has been murdered. He desperately wants to find the killer but he has his own problems to deal with as well. He's got terrible dreams of killing a kid in Iraq and he fades in and out of reality. Drinking doesn't help and he almost kills a firefighter in a brawl. Meanwhile, the book's second narrator Lourdes , is a female cop who is also looking for David Dresden's killer. There is another story which works into all this, David Dresden was suing the government in The Mailman Case, which has to do with terrorism. Did the FBI have him knocked off? David is in no shape to take all this on but does anyway, and we go with him on this dark ride. It's a really well written novel, with great lines, and subtle observations. A very literary thriller, which substitutes brains and insight for loud explosions. This is the first in a series. I look forward to the next one.

Michael Martz says

'Proving Ground', Peter Blauner's first novel in a long time, is a gritty crime story starring a cast of tough Brooklyn cops with a plethora of somehow connected murders to clear, a PTSD victim of the Iraq war who happens to be the son of a famous attorney who was just murdered, and some dynamite action and dialogue. I've seen Blauner's writing in this one described as being Richard Price-like, and I'd heartily agree with that. I couldn't put a finger on specifically how they're similar, other than the overall feel, pace, milieu, and storytelling seem to be very comparable. That's high praise.

The plot is sort of a conventional who-done-it, complicated by the general disdain most of the characters have for the main murder victim (he was a criminal defense attorney who represented many really bad actors), his son's background and behavior, the involvement of the FBI, and a pervasive feeling that nothing's like it seems. I don't want to spoil the plot, but everything is connected in some way, and in the end even more connections are revealed. Although by the conclusion of 'Proving Ground' we know what happened and who did what, I wouldn't say it wraps up nicely for all parties.

This novel goes on my 'best of the year' shelf. The writing is great, dialogue is spot-on, the characters are fully developed, and the author paints realistic pictures of the environment. Loved it!

Maha says

Proving Ground is the first installment in the new and very compelling series by Peter Blauner. I have to admit that it was quite a different and compelling read.

Nathaniel Dresden, Natty, had served in the US army in Iraq. Now back from Iraq, he is still fighting his daemons. He had accidentally shot a 7 year old kid back there in Iraq and this dreadful event is still haunting him. He can't get over what he did and saw in Iraq and it seems impossible for him to forgive himself and move on with his life. He had joined the army as an act of rebellion against his father, David Dresden. David had dedicated his life as a defense attorney to fight for civil rights.

Robles is a police officer working hard to prove herself. Being both Hispanic and a woman, she feels she has to do extra effort to prove her ground. She's a strong woman yet she has to fight her way through her career.

But when David Dresden is murdered, Natty's world is shattered. He comes home to stay with his mother but his search for the truth takes him into dark passages.

Meanwhile, Robles is working with Sullivan to solve David's case. They follow every lead and they are confronted with many unexpected hurdles along the way. The more they dig into this case the darker and more entangled it seems.

The truth has multiple faces. There seems to be no straight answer. Moreover, there are no saints and no daemons. The plot is very compelling and gives the reader a lot to think about.

Peter Blauner does a great job setting the ground for this very compelling series. The characters are so well crafted. He introduces us to two brilliant characters, Natty and Robles. They are so real. They seem to breathe on the pages. You can sense their vulnerabilities, weaknesses, insecurities and also their pride and power. They have all the contradictions of the human soul.

The plot is amazingly built. It's very complicated and real. Peter Blauner throws so many characters into this blend and lets the interaction takes us on a very compelling and thrilling path. What I liked most was the real life edge to it. Life is moving on. There's no time for the characters to sit back and dwell on their losses. They are forced to move on even if they are suffering under the weight of their own baggage. Also there are no blinding signs saying "Here's the good guy" or "This is the bad guy". As I said, no saints and no daemons. They are humans. They all have their baggage and even the darkest of them has his or her bright sides.

Proving Ground is the grand opening to a very promising series. The pace starts slow at the first half of the book but everything goes so fast in the second half. I think that was for the sake of setting the ground for the series. In all cases, it's worth the wait. You should be patient enough with the first half because it's really worth it. I also loved the ending. It gives so many options and alternatives for future installments.

Proving Ground is one of the best novels I read this year. I will be impatiently waiting for the next installment.

**Special thanks to the NetGalley & St. Martin's Press for supplying my copy of this book in exchange for an honest and unbiased review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review. **

For all my reviews please visit <http://www.meshascorner.net>

Nancy McFarlane says

Two people have something to prove. Lourdes Robles is a homicide detective just off of probation who must prove she deserves to be back on the job. And, Nathaniel Dresden is a prosecuting attorney who has yet to get over what he did and saw in Iraq and who needs to prove to himself that he is capable of living a life he can be proud of. When his father, a defense attorney who always championed the underdog and disadvantaged, and who was always fighting the establishment is murdered. Natty comes home to be with his mother and try and forgive himself for never really getting along with or understanding his father. What follows is a suspenseful, action-packed, and at times, dark story. A story of love and hate and betrayal that you won't want to put down.

Nancy Cook Lauer says

A crime novel from the perspective of an Iraq vet suffering from PTSD is one of the last places I'd expect lyrically descriptive and sometimes downright humorous passages, but here it is. The plot, introducing gung-ho police detective Lourdes Robles, ticks along in a fairly ordinary way, but it's the snappy dialogue and smooth writing that win this one for me.

Julie says

Characters and plot didn't come together for me until the last third of the story. When it finally did, the characters came alive and felt like they were driving the plot instead of the other way around.

The story did a good job of showing a soldier trying to get back to life after war and how hard that is. I would describe the story as a family-mystery-who dunnit-cop-courtroom drama.

About one-third of the way into the story, I didn't care much about any of the characters. Though I was interested to know more. I felt like I was reading a tv script more so than a novel at the one-third mark. The author felt like a writer that was a master at plot but not quite so much when it came to character. Though

decent, there was just a disconnect for me.

About midway through the novel, as three main players are having a tense conversation, it stuck out like a sore thumb that none of the characters I'd spent time getting to know seemed unique. I could hear the author in all of it, what he wanted the character to say, or some cute dialog he'd put aside (and this was the moment he was going to use it). Cutting banter does not a character make.

Yet about midway, it started feeling like a few of the main players had a secret or knew something crucial. This is what kept me reading, to find who killed the dead guy.

At the two-thirds point, the main characters still didn't seem to have unique voices - yet some of the minor characters just popped. Things started heating up in the plot and I was very curious how it would all work out. The author gets high marks for plot throughout.

The one character that seemed the most real at this point was the dead guy. His presence, or lack thereof, felt real. Every character thinking or speaking of him felt authentic. That didn't feel fake or like they were going through the motions. Maybe that was the point ~ the dead guy as the protagonist? In a strange way, he did have an arc.

Even though the bones of all the main characters were there, it seemed more like a pile of bricks for an actor to make his own. I kept waiting for flesh and blood characters to jump from the page.

Chapter 20 was confusing as it started off with the protagonist talking about his dad's home office. It sounded like inner first person dialog and then seems to awkwardly jump to what seems outside the protagonist. Yet it made me think that when trauma happens such as with war or death, people do sometimes step outside themselves in some way. Maybe the dialog was a representation of that. Though the inner dialog of the horrors of war seemed off. Having never been at war, I imagine it would be more like flashes. But I could be off on this point.

Some of the dialog, for example between mother and son, seemed inauthentic. There's a shorthand with family where sometimes a grunt or silence can not only be more realistic, but more powerful.

Then the chapter with the aunt and the female detective happens and the aunt's character - who we don't really know - is so damn alive, her dialog is hers and hers alone, she is flesh and blood. It was striking how authentic her voice was compared to the main characters.

And then things start to heat up, the characters and dialog start to pop. It's as if a 1960s jiffy pop had been sitting on the heat with only a few kernels popped and wham, suddenly, it starts popping away as the foil top puffs up. It's as if it took this long for the writer to get to know his characters.

The last third of the book was significantly better than the first two parts, as far as characters feeling fleshed out and real. It's like the awkward dance the characters were doing with the plot finally got into sync.

The plot was better than the characters for most of the book, and then like a stew finally ready to be served, it was great. If the whole novel had been as good as the last third, I could have given this one more star. I definitely think this would make a good movie with a few tweaks and the right casting.

There were a few times I guessed what was coming but overall the story has satisfying twists and turns and doesn't end in any cookie cutter fashion. There are no cookie cutter bad guys or good guys here.

The story made me ponder war and inner cities. When we go to war with another country, soldiers go into residential neighborhoods with people like you and me that are probably feeling the same way we would if hostile foreign entities showed up on our doorsteps with war weapons. Kids are growing up in neighborhoods now that are hard to separate from war zones. The threats are as plentiful and the safety as hard to come by as 24K solid gold bars flying out of a poodle's ass.

At the end, not everything is tied up on a silver platter but there is resolution and revelation.

It would be interesting to carry this forward to another story with parallels of the protagonist (soldier) and antagonist (female cop). Though, I have a feeling the author may have seen the cop as the protagonist. It would be interesting seeing their stories unfold and more of their histories revealed as it feels there is a lot there to discover.

David Madara says

Great start of a new series! Defense attorney David Dresden gets killed and his son who just returned from the Army is a suspect. Lourdes is on the case and she doesn't take anything for granted... Can Lourdes get to the bottom of the case?

I liked this book, and can't wait for more in this series...

Chris Gill says

Classic Blauner

The main character(s) in this novel, as well as other novels by Blauner, are, at least to me always unforgettable for several reasons. They are identifiable because they are so human, flawed, yet with a rare nobility all wrapped up in one person. Plus, Blauner always delivers an excellent story with excellent writing skills. He is in the top five of my alltime favorite authors!!!

Andy Plonka says

What a great book! This book is the first from this author in a decade. I hope that doesn't mean we won't get another for another decade. Proving Ground has it all : unique characters that draw you in and make you care about them, an interesting plot, and a setting while familiar to New Yorkers provides its own flavor and charm. Without spoiling the story or the superb ending, Blauner's sense of pace and just enough description to pull you in rather than drive you away results in a perfect novel.

Kris - My Novelesque Life says

RATING: 2 STARS

(Review Not on Blog)

I called it...a DNF at 55%. At 55% there still did not seem to be action...a lot of talk but no show. I stopped because the snail pace was killing me and the characters were not engaging enough to care where they ended up. Moving onto to something else.

Larry Fontenot says

I had just finished T Jefferson Parker's new book Room of White Fire when my wife brought home this book by Peter Blauner. I like T Jeff and I've read many of his books and he is an excellent writer. The main character in Blauner's book has a similar background that T Jeff's main character has in Room of White Fire, a survivor of the Iraq war with experiences we all know about but never have been told in detail. But I think Proving Ground is just a bit better in its development of the characters. The story lines are different, but the war time experiences are directly responsible for some of the behavior of the characters. These experiences are directly involved in the plot of T Jeff's excellent book, but less so in the Blauner book. But the interplay among the characters in Proving Ground is more realistic and less "showy" and the backgrounds of the characters are much more interesting. The blurbs on the Blauner book says that this is his first book in a decade so I have no idea if his early stuff was up to this high level. But it appears that this new book is the start of a series featuring police officer Lourdes Robles, so I'll certainly keep my antenna up for the next one.

Patricia says

PROVING GROUND is a fantastic read! Nathaniel survived the war in Iraq but is left with mental issues. When his father, a civil rights attorney, is murdered, Nathaniel returns to New York. Nathaniel, who has had father issues since childhood, is told that his dad was in the middle of suing the FBI. Trying to discover who murderer is, a dirty law enforcer or a criminal, Nathaniel makes many shocking discoveries. There is a surprising twist at the end. I highly recommend this novel. I can't wait for the next one!

Topher Payne says

I cannot say enough good things about this book! It was thought-provoking, exciting, mysterious, and sad all at the same time. It follows a young man named Natty Dread. He is an army veteran dealing with PTSD after having killed an innocent civilian kid in Iraq. His father is a famous Civil Rights lawyer and advocate. The story starts out with his father murdered, and soon Natty is seen as a suspect. He decides to do some digging and find his father's killing. Everything you thought you knew ends up being something else, as surprise after surprise continues throughout the book.

Tim says

I received this book from the publisher through NetGalley to read and review

PROVING GROUND by Peter Blauner, author of Casino Moon, and several other books, begins with

Nathaniel Dresden aka “Natty Dread” a soldier in Iraq who is skilled in interrogation. Natty is the son of a well known defense attorney named David Dresden, and was given his nickname by his father David, a Bob Marley fan and a liberal in every sense of the word.

Natty is on the team sent to locate Ahmar, the reported one responsible for the death of a man known to Natty as ‘Borat’, an informant with a resemblance to the character portrayed by Sacha Baron Cohen in the comedy with the same name as the title, and is well like by the American soldiers. Borat has been recently beheaded in front of his family, and the soldiers are out for revenge which leads them to the home of an Iraqi family that a man has said much might be harboring Ahmar.

Tragedy results from their raid on the family's home with Natty responsible for the outcome creating an unshakable image that affects him for the duration of the book.

Later, the story picks up with Natty in jail after putting a probationary fire fighter in NYC in the hospital after a bar brawl the previous night, and we learn Natty was drunk and violent in the wake of his father's murder.

Natty stays with his mother while going through court ordered therapy for PTSD to avoid jail time, and we learn that Natty has been a prosecutor in Florida before coming back home following his father's death.

David, Natty's father had been involved in the high-profile case known as ‘The Mailman Case’ involving the FBI along with David's partner Ben who has in the past been a mentor to Natty.

Lourdes Robles, a young female detective assigned to her first case since disciplinary action for her previous partner's behavior, is assigned to the case along with a long-time veteran named Sullivan.

Natty finds himself a suspect in his own father's murder, which only adds to his already heavy load he's been dealing with as he tries to adapt to civilian life while battling PTSD that comes with suicidal thoughts, and flashbacks to his time in Iraq.

Peter Blauner has written a very good full length novel about a subject that has probably been overdone recently by other authors and screenwriters, yet has done so in a way that makes it not seem clichéd and builds interest as the book progresses detailing Natty's past and filling in holes that explain the relationship between him and his mother, father, and Ben.

I'd recommend this book to anyone pulling for someone coming from a difficult situation wanting to come to grips with it and move on, as well as anyone who has an interest in the struggles of a veteran returning to civilian life back home, and this book was even more touching to read over the recent holiday where we honor those who have served, and those who have given their lives for country.
