



Fidali's Way: A Novel

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"Disillusioned with American life, Nicholas Sunder has spent months backpacking through South Asia, most recently in the company of a beautiful French woman he met in India. When the woman is found brutally murdered in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan, Nick is arrested and tortured by the Pakistani police, who are convinced he is the killer. Amazingly, Nick escapes their custody and heads off on foot through the steep mountains of Kashmir, the highest war zone on earth. Now a fugitive without papers, money, or a country that will welcome him, Nick is reduced to his most elemental human identity in an unforgiving mountainous landscape where his very survival is unlikely." Nick's fortune turns when he encounters an eccentric Kashmiri smuggler and his mysterious companion, Fidali. An enormous, nearly silent man, Fidali not only knows a hidden way through the mountains but makes a deep impression upon Nick through his sacrifices for others. In time, after barely surviving great violence, Nick reaches an idyllic mountain village in Indian-occupied Kashmir, where he is drawn to Aysha, a remarkable woman unlike any he has ever met, who operates a medical clinic in the remote region. It is there he will confront the divide between Islam and the West and be forced to ponder how he has reached such a place - forced to consider, in other words, Fidali's way.

Fidali's Way: A Novel Details

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From Reader Review Fidali's Way: A Novel for online ebook

Helen Caldwell says

I love a book I can't wait to get back to. Fidali's Way not only enhanced my vocabulary but also broadened my understanding and comprehension of events occurring in the Middle East today, generating a compassion for all those in the region forced to endure their current circumstances. Neither all black nor all white, the book reflects the many shades of gray that live in between.

I loved the rich text of description and was quite happy Mastras didn't feel the need to dumb it down to satisfy the less educated or for those impatient few who simply want to get to the point and skip all the subtext. The subtext was exceptional in enlightening me to the complexity of the political, social and religious issues of the various factions in that region. Mastras' writing deftly illustrates how subtly harmful and destructive ideas can insidiously work their way into the populace and the devastating ripple effects such can create.

I found myself unexpectedly surprised and delighted at the depth of spiritual insight provided by the characters and was left with the thought that – in spite of all the idiotic ideas human beings are willing to grasp and kill for – there still may be some hope for humanity.

Maggi says

This is a gripping page-turner with interesting political commentary on extremist Muslims in Pakistan and Kashmir seamlessly woven in. Not subtle, not written in gorgeous prose-- it's a muscular work with a strong story line. Not your standard trade paperback for the book group but definitely fascinating and worth a read.

Jbh says

A terrific, taut, and timely tale. While the novel approaches the pace of a thriller and solves all its mysteries, it is much more than a mere whodunit, defying easy categorization. While it is thoroughly entertaining as an adventure story, you will take away from it and carry with you a new lens through which to view the ideological conflicts of our times and perhaps your own struggles as well.

With awesome descriptive and emotive power--and nary a wasted word--Mastras takes us to the top of the world for an explosive culture clash and journey of self-discovery largely devoid of cliché. Tragedy and atrocity abound, yet the protagonist (and reader) emerges from the carnage renewed, and sensing the basic capacity for kindness within even the most flawed individuals.

Mastras clearly knows the region and its peoples, evoking the landscape with vivid detail, and presenting sensitive and unbiased renderings of the local cultures and beliefs--including many nuances--without slouching in a stance of moral equivalence.

This is a tremendous debut. I hope there is more to come from this author.

Jane says

A first book by Mastra, and pretty impressive. As was true of *People of the Book*, I found the author's portrayal of female characters less convincing than of the male characters. It is a combination thriller, survival story, expose of Taliban methods of brainwashing youth, and love story. Takes place in Pakistan, Kashmir and the Tribal Controlled territories. Worth the read.

John says

Fidali's Way, a debut novel by George Mastras, is more than an exciting adventure story set in some of the most exotic - and treacherous - regions of the world, it's a gripping tale that takes American traveler Nick Sunder (and the reader) upon a harrowing odyssey leading to his eventual awakening and transformation. Disillusioned with the American way of life, Nick has aimlessly traveled the globe in search of finding meaning to his life, a goal that hopelessly eludes him. In Pakistan, he descends into his own personal hell when he is charged by the Peshawar police with the savage murder of his beautiful French female companion, Yvette. Thrown in jail, Nick is tortured by the sadistic inspector Akhtar, who'll stop at nothing to wring a confession from his captive. Escaping from the police, Nick makes his way through the tribal areas along the Pak-Afghan border with ruthless Akhtar in hot pursuit. Along the way, he joins forces with the smuggler Ghulam, a half-Asian, half-Caucasian wisp of a man, and his companion, Fidali, a stoic giant. Together they travel Fidali's way - a route used by smugglers which passes through areas of such desolation they are seldom seen by man. The trio make their way north into the Hindu Kush, up the steep slopes of the Karakoram and down into the verdant valley where the beautiful Aysha, an Indian medical doctor, lives and works. With faint echoes of *Midnight Express* and *Lost Horizon*, *Fidali's Way* paints a fascinating portrait of the horrors of fanaticism, the ephemeral beauty of life and love, the transcendence of the human spirit, and opens up a window into the soul of Islam with compelling figures such as the fanatical Kazim, an Islamic extremist torn between love and religious duty, the self-sacrificing Aysha, whose unwavering devotion to her calling borders on martyrdom, and the enigmatic Fidali, who teaches Nick that Fidali's way is more than just a smuggler's route - it's a spiritual path leading to true understanding and redemption. Mastras' rich descriptions of distant, forbidding places, their quixotic inhabitants and the local customs of people who, distilled to their essence, are really not very different from you and me, along with knowledgeable expositions of history and lore, make this novel a must read. It is all the more fascinating when one appreciates that Mastras has actually been to the places he writes about. Kudos to Mastras for a thoroughly entertaining, insightful, and original debut!

Weavre says

Is it possible that this richly textured literary tour de force is the author's first novel?

George Mastras breathes life into his characters and settings, creating a work of fiction that contains a considerable amount of truth. He spent several years traveling the Himalayas, Karakorams, and Hindu Kush, and brings a firsthand familiarity with the Pakistan/India borderlands in which he sets his novel. The

complex characters are deeply human, with unique strengths and weaknesses, quirks and backgrounds, motivations and challenges.

Nick Sunder, the protagonist, is backpacking through Asia in an attempt to escape guilt related to his former American law practice. Drugs, cigarettes, and even pretty girls haven't succeeded in driving away his demons, however--and in fact, these lead to his topple into the abyss. Hauled into a Pakistani jail on suspicion of having murdered his female traveling companion, Nick loses his American passport to the Pakistani police. When he later flees during a temporary release, he loses his remaining money and identification, leaving him as completely destitute as any other refugee. When even this situation takes a turn for the worse, Nick has reason to fear that even an American embassy would return him to the Pakistani authorities rather than help him regain his freedom. Alone, with no supplies, he is ready to die in the harsh climate, when he is rescued by two simple Muslim men who become his close companions and mentors. Nick has confronted other human forces, struggled with the unforgiving nighttime cold and daytime blazing heat of the local desertlands, and now finds himself face-to-face with the worst demons of all: those within himself.

The rest of the story unfolds through the actions of all the major players in Kashmir's politics: the simple mountain families whose villages were long untouched by religious conflict, the children influenced by madrasa education, the mujahideen, the Indian soldiers, a Muslim woman who is a trained physician and treats men as well as women, a Hindu politician, and more. As the reader is drawn into the stories of these people and this land, it becomes clear that none of these people can be explained in a few simple words. From the "Moslem terrorist" who can't bring himself to harm civilians and is forced to choose between the woman he loves and the religion he practices, to the protagonist himself, motivations are complex and open to examination.

In a time when Americans are too ready to lump all Muslim people into one frightening mix, the distinctions of belief, internal disputes, and differences in religious practice Mastras reveals are particularly important. In this book, some Muslim people are filled with hate, convinced that utter cultural destruction is the only way to achieve "freedom" for their faith. Others live lives of love and generosity, helping even infidel strangers without reservation and at great personal risk. Still others participate in the fighting while longing for a different way to proceed, or continue farming while maintaining friendships with infidels, or live their faith in any of a hundred different ways. They are not painted with one religious brush, not all fanatics, not all even devout.

I'd be posting spoilers to explore one intriguing aspect of *Fidali's Way*, so won't do so in any detail here. But, I'm fascinated by Mastras' portrayal of one particular Muslim character as distinctly Christlike.

The simple message of love for one another can originate in a variety of places, and sometimes we have to confront the Abyss before we can find ourselves. Ghulam, Nick's primary mentor in the story, explains why he believes that Islam existed before Mohammed, why the "greater jihad" takes place within oneself, and why "There is no God but Allah" can be understood to embrace all paths of spiritual growth. This work examines the meaning of sacrifice and acquisition, the longing for freedom and the ways of seeking it that eliminate hope of its gain, what it means to love, and what it means to believe. And, somehow, Mastras accomplishes all of this without sacrificing an excellent surface story, with continuous action sufficient to hold the attention of its least introspective readers.

I'm still amazed that this is his first novel.

Sophie says

I loved this novel. I felt like I could see the mountains and villages Nick was travelling through by the author's rich descriptions of the characters and landscape - like Corelli's *Mandolin*. I'm a mystery fan too and recommend it highly on that level as well. This book has a lot to offer and it does so across many genres.

Susan says

This book worked well on so many levels. It starts with a murder, with the protagonist, Nick, accused, a daring escape and then a brutal trek through a rugged land wrought with both danger and beauty. Although the story begins in Pakistan, the real development is in Kashmir, where we gain insights into clashing cultures, religions and philosophies. One of the most interesting voices is Ghulam, who, along with Fidali, serves as Nick's guide through the rugged terrain and it is through their interaction that we see Nick's character evolve as the book is also his personal odyssey and we gradually see that Fidali's way is not a physical path but a spiritual one. Layered on top of Nick's personal story is the heart-wrenching story of Kashmir, torn between two religions and two neighboring nations, and the story of a peaceful village that for so long was able to rise above the conflict, but is eventually and tragically plunged into it headfirst. Last, but not least, there is Aysha, the incredibly beautiful, strong and confident Muslim woman who becomes a physician and returns to her home village with only a desire to serve, making no differentiation between Muslim and Hindu. This is a book that I had to finish, close and digest to really appreciate all its textures.

Gigi says

This novel is an emotional and engaging read, both beautifully written and thought provoking. It's also a timely and gripping page-turner that takes place in the cauldrons of modern-day terrorism - the tribal areas of Pakistan and Kashmir. I like that it deals with India and Pakistan in a current time frame (so many novels concern colonial India, so this is a refreshing change).

The novel essentially follows Nick, an American expat who finds himself in trouble with the Pakistani police after his French girlfriend, Yvette, is found murdered, in a remote part of Pakistan's lawless tribal areas. The events leading up to Yvette's death remain a compelling mystery until later in the book, but we get enough hints and glimpses to keep us wondering, and to understand why Nick flees from the police into the dangerous tribal areas, rampant with Taliban militants and drug smugglers. From there, he heads east into the Himalayas, where he crosses the dangerous "Line of Control" into the Indian side of Kashmir. Nick is only able to survive the harrows of this route through the guidance of two local smugglers who befriend him along the way. Once across, and while still in hiding from police (now the Indians), Nick begins to work at an outpost hospital clinic run by a beautiful female doctor, Aysha, whose ex-lover, Kazim, left her to join a cell of mujahideen insurgents fighting against Indian rule. As these lives intersect (or rather, come crashing together), they are all changed in profound ways.

The book reminds me somewhat of Alex Garland's *"The Beach"* because it's largely a literary thriller set in an exotic land that deals with fanaticism (in a different form than in *"The Beach"*) and the effects of colliding cultures. At the same time, the novel has an extreme sense of place, in the vein of EM Forster and Rudyard

Kipling, with its richly-described characters and living, breathing picture of the tribal areas of Pakistan and the rugged mountain landscape of Kashmir (the author apparently spent time in the region, so his descriptions are authentic). The story is also one of redemption and self-discovery, and thus, in this way, it reminds me a bit of Somerset Maugham's "The Razor's Edge."

Although Nick's storyline is the centerpiece and vehicle through which the story moves, I found Aysha and Kazim's storyline to be the most emotional. That being said, I was moved by Nick's character-arc and how he's motivated to change by his relationships with the smugglers. Despite all that, on a very basic level, I had to know who killed Yvette and read the book quickly to find out.

This book has a political edge that should not be overlooked given the devastating effects the conflict over Kashmir continues to have on the world around it – the recent Mumbai terrorist attacks being a case in point. Fortunately, there was nothing preachy, distracting or narrow-minded about the author's handling of these issues. It did give me a new understanding and insight into what's really at stake in the conflict – not just Kashmir's place in the larger worldwide clash between the West and fanatical jihadists – but on a more human level.

This novel is a must read. I highly recommend it.

Karen says

Fidali's Way is a riveting adventure story of Nick, an American backpacker, who accidentally kills a Pakistani police officer investigating the murder of another backpacker. In fleeing Pakistan, Nick meet two travelers, Fidali and Ghulam, who are homeward bound with cigarettes to sell in their isolated village in the Himalayas. They help Nick make the treacherous journey across the Himalayas while avoiding the Mushahadeen educated in Pakistani-funded madrassas and India's border guards. The book weaves Nick's story with that of Kazim, a Kashmir boy who who becomes a freedom fighter with Aysha who becomes the town doctor. After a fateful encounter with Kazim, Nick and Ghulam end up at Aysha's clinic. The book does an excellent job portraying the recruitment of young boys in Kashmir to the cause of Islam and the consequences of the struggle between the Pakistan and India on Hindus and Muslims who have lived peacefully in isolated villages for centuries.

Harvee says

I learned about the geography and politics of the region and about the conflicts surrounding the whole Kashmir issue - Indian held Kasmir and the northern portion controlled by Pakistan.

The detailed descriptions of the terrain and landscape of the area - Hindu Kush, Karakorams, the Vale of Kashmir, are very interesting.

What kept me moving through this very detailed book, however, were the two love stories and the inevitability of their being intertwined in the plot of the novel.

I have written another review of Fidali's Way at www.bookbirddog.blogspot.com

American says

George Mastras is a true storyteller. 'Fidali's Way' completely transported me - as great art can do. I don't consider myself a voracious reader, but these pages flew by for me. the author's bio mentions that he spent a considerable amount of time trekking throughout the region where the story takes place (the Himalayas), and this comes through in the writing. his observational sense of the essential human nature of people from both the east and west - how they interact, understand and can confuse one another - makes me believe that he has lived many of these situations first hand.

I love learning about different cultures - what other people hold sacred, what may have little meaning to others that we westerners may praise... Fidali's Way did not disappoint.

if you're interested in experiencing an informed, articulate, insiders view of The East, told through a great story - I definitely recommend this book.

Backpack Reader says

This was one that I could not put down for three days until I finished it. As someone who have traveled through the Himalayas, this novel does it justice by bring out the beauty of the mountains and more importantly the complexities of the politics and cultures. The plot is based on an engaging whodunit mystery, love triangle romance and more importantly envelops the reader in an intellectual journey in learning more about the cultures that is the foundation of present day conflicts in the region.

This is not your standard fictional novel that you read and put away. The author has exceptional skill in combining an engaging suspenseful plot with details that is very much relevant to the current events around the world today.

I will not describe the book too much as it is all written o Amazon
<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1416556184?t...>

Linda says

Until now, I have been occupied with finishing some of the other books I had been reading. I began yesterday reading Fidali's Way in earnest. All I can say is WOW. If you like Kite Runner and A Thousand Spenid Suns, you will definitely like this book. It is so well crafted that I just want to keep reading and do nothing else.

Clay Kallam says

It is a bleak world, no doubt, and there is value in communicating the depths of the grim and brutal reality to readers. For that, "Fidali's Way" deserves credit.

For me, though, this was a very hard read. There is plenty of blood, plenty of violence, plenty of pain, all written about in excruciating detail. (This, of course, is OK for our society; but similar descriptions of the act of love are considered pornography. I guess it's good to wallow in the flow of blood and the breaking of bones in this and other books, but for me, the constant repetition is depressingly unnecessary.)

Perhaps my main issue with "Fidali's Way," however, is its lack of redemption. There is a minor sense of accomplishment in one area at book's end, but overall, the main characters do not fare well (especially the titular one). It is good, presumably, to present a dismal picture of humanity and how the world works, because many of us would like to believe otherwise, living in our American cocoons, but it is also possible to deliver that message without hammering away at the violence, negativity and hopelessness of the situation in Kashmir and Pakistan.

And all of this was done from a personal, combatant level, which makes the violence almost less justifiable. For me, some sense of the higher-level machinations that cause this violence would have made the book more palatable, and perhaps Mastras could have even shown a potential political path out of the brutal morass this area of the world is caught in.

But instead we just get suffering and pain and agony, over and over again, with most of the suffering and pain and agony serving no real purpose. Perhaps this is what life is really about, and perhaps this is the best we have to hope for as a terrorist-dominated future unfolds (you are either with us or against us, if against us, we will torture you and kill you).

In the end, though, without something more to offer than meticulously descriptive, and constant, episodes of physical pain, blood, wounds and death, "Fidali's Way" is a depressive, black novel that goes nowhere and tells us nothing more than that the world is an awful place and we can do nothing about it.
