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James R. Benn

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Lieutenant Billy Boyle reluctantly accompanies Major Samuel Harding, his boss, in the first boat to land on the shores of Algeria during the Allied invasion. Their task is to arrange the surrender of the Vichy French forces.

But there is dissension between the regular army, the local militia, and De Gaulle's Free French. American black marketeers in league with the enemy divert medical supplies to the Casbah, leading to multiple murders that Billy must solve while trying to rescue the girl he loves, a captured British spy.

The First Wave Details

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From Reader Review The First Wave for online ebook

Cheryl Gatling says

Doesn't everyone love a Boston Irish lad? A little charming, a little awkward with the ladies (yet successful enough to win a beautiful blonde girlfriend), impulsive enough to disobey orders whenever necessary, smart-talking, informal and rumped, brave enough (or love-sick enough) to walk through fire to rescue the lady, devoted enough (or stupid enough) to get off his cot despite a fractured skull to save the life of his best friend. Billy Boyle (who just happens to be a nephew of the general he calls Uncle Ike) is among the first wave of Americans to invade Algeria. The plan is to quickly liberate Algiers from the Vichy French and Germans. But morphine, and a new wonder drug called Penicillin are stolen from the army hospital. Boyle gets assigned to uncover and break up the smuggling ring. But the ring includes some powerful and ruthless men, as well as at least one American traitor. There are fire fights, knife fights, broken glass, jeep chases, druggings, a secret code to break, and a whole lot of lies to uncover. It's a man's man's book. It's an action movie, with a little brain-power detection work, and the occasional beautiful woman thrown in. But the best part is that the sights and sensations of WWII Algiers are depicted in sweat-drenched and often smelly immediacy, and the delicate politics between the various occupying factions are explained. It's good to learn something about a part of the war that is less well known. And the Irish lad does what he sets out to do, but ends up sadder but wiser, humbled by the violence of war.

Faith says

This was my first time listening to an audio book, and my second experience with James R. Benn. I had previously read and enjoyed "A Blind Goddess", the eighth book in the Billy Boyle series. "The First Wave" is the second book in the series, and it featured a younger, wise-ass Billy, who I didn't recognize at all. I much preferred the character in the later book. Maybe he's matured or perhaps the snarky tone sometimes adopted by the narrator had something to do with my impression of the character.

The narrator's voice was pleasant but the accents he employed for the various characters seemed to come and go. I also wasn't very engaged by the plot of this book. It felt like a pulpy 1940s B-movie. The plot and writing in the 8th book were much better. I will probably stick with the later books in this series.

Jeannie Mancini says

All's Fair in Love and War

Once again our Boston city cop turned World War II Private Investigator is thrown into the fray as bullets fly, bombs drop, and murder and mayhem toss Billy Boyle into the fires of chaos. Just back from a skirmish in Norway, his uncle General Ike Eisenhower hands Billy his second mission, allowing him a not so scenic tour of exotic Algiers. This version of the Kasbah was not what Billy had envisioned.

Arriving on desert shores with the First Wave of American troops, Billy and his commanding officer Major Sam Harding, immediately encounter a barrage of submachine guns pelleting them with lead that falls like rain. Greeted by both enemies and allies, Billy and Sam scamper off the beach into town, finding

headquarters at a hospital outpost. They are there to assist Algiers and convince France to join the British Allies to fight against the Germans, but the Vichy French have agendas of their own and all is not as it should be among the world of sand and palm trees.

Not even an evening passes before the heat gets turned up and Billy is forced to play detective. Two murders, a drug heist, and his beloved Diana, who is an undercover special operative agent, gets kidnapped by an sadistic French officer taking prisoners for ransom.

This second installment brings the reader a volatile, high octane historical adventure mystery packed with blood curdling action, World War II history, romance, humor and a complex murder plot to rival any of the other top Noir style mystery novels. James Benn is a top-notch writer who has the talent to pull it all together with a blend of ingredients that can only win. With loveable characters you can do nothing but root for, and pages that turn for the reader like wildfire, I doubt any avid reader could put the Billy Boyle series down. High praise all around for a series that has it all, 5 stars for James Benn. His hero is handsome, his hero is brave, now if he can only manage to get the girl! Well, he does get her, but somehow keeps losing her..... Fabulous second installment to this addictive new series!

Ktmholm says

In the second of this series, Billy Boyle—Eisenhower's personal investigator (and nephew)—and his boss, Harding, are landing with the first wave of Allied troops into Algeria. Their mission is to contact the Vichy French and see if they will cooperate with the Allies against the Germans. However, the story goes far deeper than that, as Billy uncovers an international drug ring stealing the first mass-produced penicillin meant for the troops, in addition to a number of suspicious deaths. More personally upsetting to Billy is finding his girlfriend Diana, a British SOE agent, captured and tortured by the Germans.

Harding shows that he's not entirely devoid of human kindness, and Billy is again accompanied by his sidekick, Kaz, a Polish officer. Together they discover the culprits and rescue Diana, while barely surviving their own assassination attempts from unexpected sources, as well as strafing by German Messerschmitt aircraft.

I must congratulate Benn on his historical research and his powers of description. This is an area of the war that is written about less often, and I was captivated by his descriptions of the setting. As his powers of deduction improve, Billy—a newly-minted Boston cop at the beginning of the first book—also learns about the darker sides of war (and that not everything necessarily will turn out 'ok') in this very readable story.

Sean says

If not for my figuring out the mystery so early in the book, I would've given this book 4 stars. Really likable characters, awesome writing, and overall great story.

Looks like I've found another series to follow. Can't wait to get to book 3.

Anthony says

This has quickly become one of my favorite mystery series. Set amid the turmoil of World War II, it is a murder mystery, as well as a history lesson.

In this outing, LT. Billy Boyle is sent to North Africa to be a part of the first Allied invasion of German occupied territory. But the target city of Algiers is governed by the Vichy French forces and the allies are not sure if they will be welcomed by the Vichy French as liberators or enemies. Billy is sent by his Uncle Ike to investigate a smuggling ring which is stealing quantities of the new wonder drug, penicillin, which is being used for the very first time by US doctors in the North Africa theater. Of course, the Germans hear about this, and work with some French gangsters to try to get a hold of as much of this new drug as they can. Along the way, there are murders, betrayals and the usual bad stuff that comes with war.

This is a very entertaining series, and as I've already said, a history lesson in every book.

Jenifer Young says

Well Researched War Story

The Billy Boyle books are well researched as well as being great fiction. The war scenes are accurate. The characters and story have depth. I am excited to read book 3.

Mary says

This is a good leisure read. Mystery, history, humor and loss. Billy Boyle is irreverent rule bender who will have you cheering for him. All the history in both books I have read so far has been accurate or explained at the end of the book. I strongly recommend this series of books.

John says

The story continues with Billy Boyle investigating his way through North Africa during the American invasion. Complicated by the Vichy French, the German Luftwaffe, a General Evacuation Hospital, a secret mission, and numerous close calls requiring medical attention, this tale creates tension and excitement. Looking forward to the third book.

Francis says

First of all, I want to admit I bought this book because of the cover. I know, I know, you shouldn't judge a book by its cover ...yada, yada, yada. But, growing up as a kid, reading comic books, I never bought into that saying, cause a good cover was, just about always, a precursor to a good yarn.

Well in this case, the cover did kinda match the content, in that, it wasn't so much a mystery as an action adventure for developmentally arrested adults, and being one, I know that of which I speak. (Is that proper English? Well anyway, you know of which that I am speaking about, so I guess it don't really matter.)

So anyway, never more than ten pages from the next action sequence; I was like a 'pig in slop' or a kid in a comic book store with a dollar in his pocket looking at a ten cent comic rack, (pick your metaphor). And ..Billy Boyle he's like a super hero, humble, but if you was to say something bad bout his girl or his Mom, or hurt his best friend? Well watch out, cause he can stick a knife through your ribs faster than you can say "Wait, I was just funin' with you." Course, afterwards he would spend at least a couple of paragraphs, reflecting about what he had just done and regretting the necessity of it.

Anyway, I could go on and on telling you about all those predicaments, he got himself into and out of, and the time in spent in between, while he was in the hospital recuperating, thinking on the case and figuring things out, but you get my point, don't you? I mean that, it wasn't that great a mystery but it was a fun read anyway and that still counts for a lot.

Right?

Michael says

The second of the Billy Boyle series finds Billy up against the Vichy French as the Allied Forces invade North Africa. After the initial invasion Billy finds himself investigating the murder of a supply sergeant and the disappearance of a shipment of the new miracle drug penicillin. Great page turner. I'm really loving this series

Michael says

I am a huge fan of this series after finishing the first two books. Benn is adept at painting vivid pictures of the people and places in the stories, and the stories are truly gripping. Billy Boyle, a young ex-Boston cop now working for his distant relative, Uncle Ike, is assigned to be the General's personal detective. While he has very little direct contact with Eisenhower, the General's desire for devoting all attention and energy to pursuing a successful war effort is clear. Boyle accompanies the first invasion forces landing in Algeria, where the Vichy French are in control. A recurring theme is that no one knows whether the French will attack or surrender to the Allies, and the General's elaborate plans for invasion are in constant flux, as reality changes and plans fail to develop as expected. Adding to the chaos, Boyle discovers an elaborate smuggling operation involving international contacts, the French underworld, and apparent traitors. What appear to be unrelated murders complicate things and Boyle is presented with the difficulty of even determining whether a dead body was actually a murder victim with war swirling around. Personal tragedies must be set aside in pursuit of military objectives, but in the end, Boyle achieves some measure of "justice."

Martin Hill says

U.S. Army 2nd Lieutenant Billy Boyle is a reluctant hero. Drafted just weeks after earning his detective shield on the Boston P.D., Boyle enters WWII as a special investigator for his uncle, General Dwight

Eisenhower.

In *The First Wave*, author James R. Benn's second installment in his Billy Boyle WWII mysteries, Boyle joins his boss, Major Sam Harding, at the forefront of Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa. Their mission is to negotiate the surrender of Vichy French troops in Algiers before the main landings take place. They end up embroiled in a multi-faceted mystery involving murder, black marketeers, French fascists, and the rescue of a British spy and hostages.

The First Wave takes place in the early, tenuous days of the North African campaign when no one was certain whether the Vichy France—the small portion of France and its colonies left unoccupied by German troops—would fight the Allies or join them. The clandestine negotiations between Allies and Vichy officials in the months prior to the invasion are legendary for their Byzantine intrigue and betrayal.

I found this novel particularly enjoyable for a couple personal reasons. My father took part in Operation Torch, landing with the 1st Armored Division at Oran, where the Vichy officials promised not to fire on the landing force. The French lied. Hundreds of Allied troops were slaughtered.

Much of the story takes place in an army hospital, from which drugs—including the new and precious miracle drug, penicillin—are being stolen by black marketeers. In my day job, I am a Navy analyst in combat casualty care capabilities, and occasionally write nonfiction articles on the history of military medicine. I found Benn's description of the wartime hospital both interesting and true to life.

Aside from my admittedly arcane interests, *The First Wave* is a well-written story blending Raymond Chandler detective noir with Alistair MacLean WWII suspense. Boyle is a three-dimensional character who grows—perhaps wearily—with experience. It is clear in *The First Wave* that the once shallow young man is learning what his close friend Kaz, a Polish officer who has lost everything, and his girlfriend, Diana, a British agent, have already learned—war is about personal loss and scars that remain forever.

LJ says

First Sentence: It was dark, and I as at sea, hunkered down in a flat-bottomed landing craft, slamming through four-foot swells and chugging noisily toward short, leaving the relative safety of our troop transport behind.

Benn has such an excellent voice. Narrated in the first person by a very appealing character, it conveys the sense of “I’m telling you a story,” and that story captivates you from the very first page.

For those of us not alive during WWII, and not particularly well versed in its history, I appreciate how much I learned without being “taught”. The information was so well integrated into the story.

Billy Boyle is a wonderful character. In this second book of the series, he is still quite young, but his background as a Boston cop, coming from a family of Boston Irish cops, stands him in good stead. He’s tough, resourceful, but with good common sense. He is very real. Part of what makes him work, as a character, is his wry humor...”So after landing in North Africa, with the first wave of the first invasion of the war, if I survived, I’d be celebrating my twenty-fourth birthday on a motorcycle ride from hell. Not for the first time, I wondered how a nice Irish kid from Boston like me had gotten himself into this situation.”

Diana, Billy's love, isn't pure set decoration, at all. She goes through her own hell and survives by being strong and determined, yet not invincible. Billy's friend, Kaz, is so appealing and interesting, providing a good counterpoint to Billy. Benn also does emotion very well, and there is strong emotion here. Benn provides good backstory on each of the recurring characters. That's critical for those who have not read the first book.

"The First Wave" has excellent tension and nail-biting suspense while focusing on strong characters. I became a fan with the first book and am even more of one with book two. Can't wait to read more.

THE FIRST WAVE (Hist Mys-Billy Boyle-Algeria-1942) – VG+
Benn, James R. – 2nd in series
Soho, 2007

Michelle Connell says

Billy gets involved with murder and theft at a hospital in Algiers during the war. Smuggling, theft, all kinds of crime don't seem to stop during a war. It's up to Billy to find the culprits. In the meantime, Diana and a bunch of SEO are kidnapped and it weighs heavy on Billy's mind, but it isn't his main mission. Will he be able to find Diana and the culprits without being killed? This was another good story in the Billy Boyle series though the beginning was a little slow.
