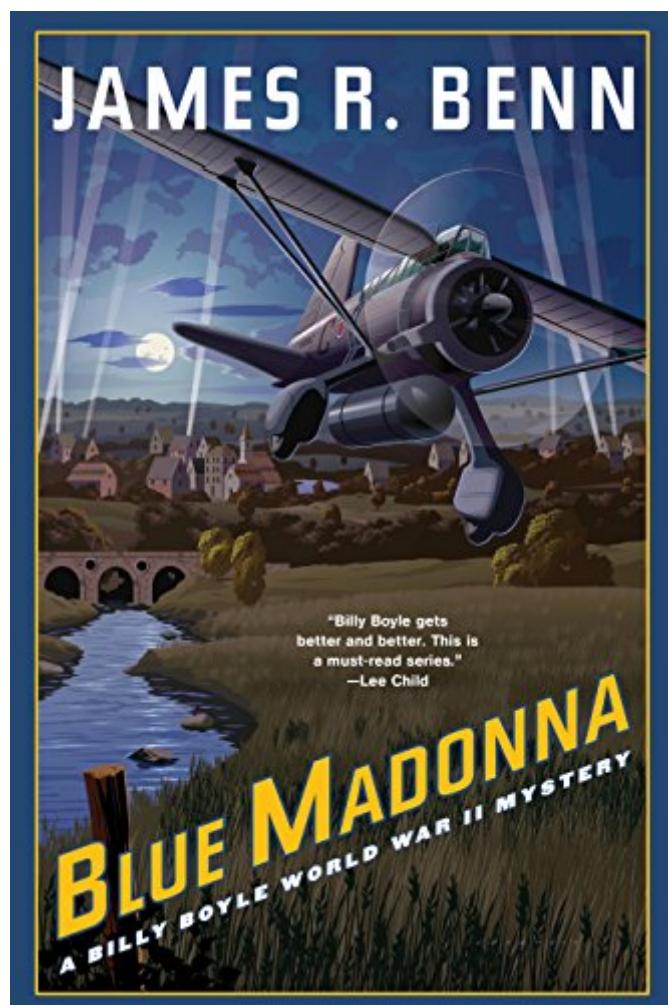


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Blue Madonna (A Billy Boyle WWII Mystery)



Synopsis

Billy Boyle, US Army detective and ex-Boston cop, faces his toughest investigation yet: infiltrating enemy lines in France as the Allies invade Normandy. It's late May 1944. Captain Billy Boyle is court-martialed on spurious charges of black market dealings. Stripped of his officer's rank, reduced to private, and sentenced to three months' hard labor, Billy is given an opportunity: he can avoid his punishment if he goes behind enemy lines to rescue a high-value Allied soldier. A secret chamber and tunnels, once used by escaping Huguenots in the 17th century, has since been taken over by the Allies. But this "safe house" on the outskirts of Chaumont turns out to be anything but "two downed airmen, one Canadian and the other American, have been murdered. Billy is flown in as part of a three-man team on June 5, 1944, the night before the Normandy invasion, and must solve the mystery of who is behind the murders before then leading a group escape back to England, with both the Germans and a killer hot on their heels.

Book Information

File Size: 994 KB

Print Length: 336 pages

Publisher: Soho Crime (September 13, 2016)

Publication Date: September 13, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01A4ANSCC

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #13,426 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #71 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Military #76 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Mystery > International Mystery & Crime #83 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Mystery > International Mystery & Crime

Customer Reviews

Author James Benn has written 11 "Billy Boyle" novels. They've all been good, except for the last one, which was set in the South Pacific and featured a Navy J/G named Jack Kennedy, who was

under investigation for possibly murdering someone. It was a bit of a stretch and I'm glad that "The Blue Madonna" is set back in the ETO. A good novel can teach as well as entertain, and so James Benn does with his newest novel. It's the weeks before D-Day and Billy is arrested for racketeering in stolen goods for resale. The arrest and conviction is bogus and gets Billy "in" with the gangs - both British and American - who are dealing in these goods. This is a set-up to get Billy and his friends to rescue another black marketeer caught behind enemy lines in France. As this is a series book, you can be pretty sure Billy and company will make it out alive, but that's okay, because the story of his behind-the-lines job is quite well written. Benn includes plenty of history in his story, and mentions a small village in France that was destroyed by the Germans in retaliation to French underground activity. (And in case you're interested in that part, find Ethan Mordden's book "One Day in France".) So, Billy Boyle and his associates - including a token appearance by harried "Uncle Ike" - are back. Veteran readers of the series will be pleased by his latest adventure.

I took this story as a love story. A love story set in the midst of a mission that would witness an horrific atrocity well into France during the D-Day invasion as well as exiting action. Those who are familiar with the relationship between Diana Seaton and Billy will recognize that. They were two people in love in perilous times and in this story they couldn't even acknowledge each other. It's also the author's love and respect for the SOE agents, men and women, whose life expectancies behind enemy lines was six weeks. And the fictional Diana was one of those. The poem that graces Blue Madonna, written by Leo Marks, an SOE cryptographer and used as a code poem to one of the SOE agents, Violet Szabo says it all. The life that I have is all that I have And the life that I have is yours. The love that I have is of the life that I have yours and yours and yours. A sleep I shall have A rest I shall have Yet death will be but a pause. For the peace of my years In the long green grass Will be yours and yours and yours. Violet would, on a second mission, be executed by the Germans.

Benn's gripping imagery and expert ability in articulating Billy's thoughts allow the reader to feel the danger of landing on a small dark bit of land behind enemy lines. We know Billy's sensation of horror and ineffectiveness as he witnesses a Nazi atrocity, and we recognize the shock of perception Billy feels when he repulses the attack of a German soldier. Numbness and despair are as much a part of Billy's emotions as are his feelings of protectiveness and resolve. I believe that no one who has not fought a battle can truly understand the emotions of a soldier, but Benn's Billy Boyle series offers an excellent perception of those feelings. Benn's climax and denouement in Blue Madonna are two of the best I've ever read and they will leave you feeling

as close to resolve and despair as Billy.

I eagerly await the latest Billy Boyle release each September ... when I promptly drop everything so I can dive right in to the new adventure. They keep getting better and better. 51 weeks til the next one!

Slow start to a fairly engaging story. It looks like Mr. Benn has been infected, like most of the pulp writers, with the PC virus. Let's see: a female in charge of the operation in England, a female running the resistance in France, and of course two female SOE operatives running things on the ground. C'mon, really. I know there were female agents in WWII, but I find this ridiculous.

This book is a fun romp, combining a decent detective story with the drama of the Overlord invasion of France in 1944. I find it to be easy to read, with somewhat transparent characters, but to invoke the spirit of the French Resistance very well. The story revolves around Capt Boyle getting railroaded into a mission on D-Day. The plot revolves around black markets in England, and the attempts to stop them. The author provides some statistics about the actual black market at the end of the book, which make it a lot more believable. With this vehicle, the author goes on to make a nice combination of action, mystery, military, and a bit of romance. "Romp" is the right word, as the main character seems to take everything very lightly. Every time he spoke, Boyle seemed to be quoting out of some kind of 1930's detective book. To me this detracted a bit from the plot. The writing style is good, but I thought that it went a little predictably. Having said that, I did not guess who did the murders until it was revealed, so there are some good plot devices there, and no real red herrings. The details about operations behind the lines on D-Day really rang true. However, the stand out part of the book for me was the description of the resistance fighters as they supported the military behind the lines on D-Day. It was a little over the top, in that the characters were a bit too dedicated - but maybe that is indeed how the French were in real life. The descriptions of German brutality were very well done, and quite disturbing. Overall, I really enjoyed it, and read it through in a single sitting. Summary: Interesting details you never knew about D-Day - behind the scenes. Recommended.

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