



## Desert Run

*Marshall Thornton*

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Palm Springs, 1973. Don Harris is a piano player on the run after killing a Chicago mobster's son in a bar fight. On the lam, he meets a pretty blonde girl in town for a convention. He lets down his guard and spends the night with her only to discover she's the younger sister of his best friend all grown-up. Foolishly, she tips her brother off to Don's location, and he's on the run again, hoping to find a safe place to land.

Out of money and desperate, Don accidentally walks into a gay bar where he allows a kid named Harlan to pick him up so he'll have a place to stay. As the mob chases them, Don begins to fall for the kid, putting them both in harm's way. Harlan has problems of his own, and Don knows he shouldn't get involved but he can't help but step in when Harlan gets in trouble. To save himself, Don's got to save Harlan.

## Desert Run Details

Date : Published November 23rd 2014 by Amazon Digital Services, Inc. (first published January 1st 2011)

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Author : Marshall Thornton

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# From Reader Review Desert Run for online ebook

## Baba says

**3 stars. Review posted February 18, 2015**

Why I read this book:

A)

COVERLUST.

B)

A second chance for an author who didn't work out for me at my first attempt.

I read the first book in Marshall Thornton's Boystown series and unfortunately it didn't do it for me. It's safe to say that I enjoyed Desert Run more. Although I didn't end up lovin' it either. As it was, somewhere along the way I just lost interest. I'll be giving it 3 stars for the good writing and the entertainment value of the story but I can't say that I liked the characters and a couple TSTL moments soured the whole picture.

Also, I really tried to ignore the editing issues but I came to a (late) point where I started to highlight them. Here are a few for your perusal but keep in mind there are more. It's not a detailed list.

*"I've meet a lot guys who where there.(...)"*

*"Let's o to bed."*

*The he gave me a very serious look.*

*I finished both ass cheeks, being careful not to get to intimate around the crack of his ass.*

*I took at good look at the spot we'd ended in.*

*"(...)You don't think it will bother me that's you're dead whether it's my fault or not?"*

*I wasn't sure there was much waiting or me in Chicago.*

*I'm almost punched him to prove him wrong.*

Again, my mother tongue is not English but even my little self can see that someone did a shoddy job editing and/or proofreading this book.

Don, aka...of course I'm not going to tell you his aliases, is suffering from PTSD and anger management issues. While I found his 'Nam flashbacks pretty compelling, his choleric temper and loose fist started to irritate me after a while.

After so many DNFs in a row, I'm glad I could array yet another decent book to my 2015 Reading Challenge.

### **Warning:**

I know that some m-m fans don't like the "f" in their m-m stories. Desert Run contains quite a bit of m-m action but also a little bit of m-f and one m-f-m scene.

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### **Monika says**

#### **2.5 Stars**

Review posted on World of Diversity Fictions!

I looked forward to reading this book. The cover is beautiful, yes I'm one of those that the cover is important it's what draws me to the story and I thought the blurb was intriguing. I love a good mob story they're usually full of suspense and drama by adding in the M/M Romance angle it should be a win win for me.

Unfortunately, that didn't happen with this story. My first uh oh moment was right at the beginning, a good portion was about Don (not his real name) and Shelly a girl he meets in the Bar he works at. They hit it off and they leave together, without going into exactly what happens next I'll just say for a moment I'm like "Whaaaaat?" I thought this was an M/M Romance not M/F Romance, did someone switch my book?" I was put off for a bit but the writing was easy, I liked Don and I figured I would just hang in there I was sure it would come around. It did....sort of.

There is supposed to be drama and suspense, it's a mob story right? Sadly I didn't find there was much of either. I'm almost half way into the book and finally I meet Harlan, the character I'm assuming is going to be Don's love interest. He's great they are both great but I just couldn't get myself to believe in the two of them as a couple not the way it was written at least.

My biggest gripe with this book is the GFY storyline, I think that's a tough one to get to work and the GFY here was totally not working for me not even a little bit.

If you're a big fan of GFY you may enjoy this book. I didn't hate it by any means but I also didn't love it.

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### **Jon says**

Little Gem! This is a little gem that's rather deceiving, very complex, but wonderfully thrilling. Extremely addictive, an erotic adventure/thriller you don't see coming until it's too late - wonderful ending!

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## ♣ Irish Smurfétté ♣ says

Lawdy, Marshall Thornton, of course I freakin' reviewed your story on Prism Book Alliance®

*Candles, under glass with silly-looking metal hats, provided the lighting. I had to have my own piano light attached to the Steinway. They couldn't find the real thing, so they used the kind you get for an expensive oil painting. The kind you stuck on top so you could see a painting clear enough to wonder why the hell you ever bought it.*

I just like this passage. That's why I included it. It's from chapter one and provides hints to our narrator's personality before much else has been revealed about him this early in the story. It also serves as a way of showing how far from this starting point Don, said narrator, ends up by the time I got to the last page of this book. He's been going through the emotional ringer most of his life and that doesn't appear to be changing any time soon. What might be changing? His outlook on it all, and his ability to continue surviving what seem to be constantly appearing pitfalls and no-win situations.

Four chapters in and things are grim. I don't want to give anything away but I'll say Don is running, from his past, his mistakes, and even his (former?) best friend. He served in Viet Nam which, of course, is having lasting effects on his life back home. Guns, adrenaline, death, regrets, and hiding from all of those things take up most of his living days, and sometimes his sleeping ones.

It's fascinating the way the mind works in trying to process shocks to the system. Don isn't exactly new at this but even he's surprised at some of his own reactions to the goings on around him. The way Thornton examines someone living a life like this feels all consuming while reading this. Don is feeling like there's no escape, even while running, and I felt the same way.

*Drank water when I was thirsty. Ate when I was hungry. Slept every so often. I even laughed at the TV shows I watched, whether they were funny or not. It surprised me that I did these things. Why not just let the pain swallow me and have done with it? But then, bigger than guilt, bigger than self-hatred, was my will to survive. I kept going.*

Now and then, the prose drifts into cut and dry territory, reading more like "just the facts, ma'am, just the fact" instead of Don's showing us what was going on. This never lasted long, though, because this is Marshall Thornton and he doesn't do cut and dry anything. His characters are 'every-person' people stuck in unusual circumstances and settings that show off just how vulnerable, hopeful, frustrated, dream-driven, and imperfect they are.

This also means he doesn't shy away from the truth of any situation, and the realistic consequences resulting from them and the decisions the characters make that result in sometimes subtle but no-turning-back-now changes in the path their lives are on. All of this means I feel surrounded by the story, that inability to escape feeling. Specifically, Don had me curious the entire way through, and Harlan sprinkled me with intrigue, oh yeah. About half way through? Things took quite a turn, a quiet but definite turn, and I smiled despite the darkness and danger that still surrounded these two, and probably always would.

This is a story about self-discovery wrapped in a gritty, dangerous, tenuously hopeful, frightening, packed full of surprises package, set in the 1970s with its simultaneously simple and complicated ways. The characters never wander into falsehood for the sake of moving the plot forward, which is especially fantastic since our main guys are "bad" guys who show how 'bad' isn't one-dimensional but instead one dimension

among many. The intensity pretty much never lets up and I didn't really know where things would end up. The ending is a beginning, allowing my own imagination to have its way with what comes next for Don and Harlan.

The experience of reading a Marshall Thornton story is unlike any other.

Book hangover, anyone?

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### **Caipi says**

Wow, it took me some pages, but all of a sudden this book had me captivated and I couldn't put it down until I had finished it!

4,5 stars

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### **A.B. Gayle says**

Thanks to a Facebook "share" from Kayla Jameth of a blog he wrote on the difference between m/m romance and gay fiction: [http://www.goodreads.com/author\\_blog\\_...](http://www.goodreads.com/author_blog_...), I discovered Marshall Thornton's books.

Impressed by things he said, I bought and read "Desert Run" and am glad I did. The book hit all the right notes of the action, suspense genre. It also includes a "gay for you" scenario (or rather an "out for you", taking into account the POV character's reluctant recognition of his attraction to guys in the past). There is also gay sex in it, love and a HEA.

However, it doesn't fit the "Harlequinized" m/m romance agenda. For starters, there is explicit m/f sex at the beginning. This is necessary, because it fits the plot.

The presence of this scene has provoked at least one reaction which exemplifies the problem Marshall discusses in his blog. To quote a reviewer on Amazon:

"Heavy on the action, but it also has a pretty sweet romantic element:

The writing is a little wooden at times because it focuses so much on relating the things that happen rather than the character's emotional reactions to them, but the plot is quite good. I'm afraid that the book might have a limited audience, though: those looking for gay fiction might be put off by the straight sex, and others might be put off by the gay scenes."

Once again the expectations of the reader as to what they will find in the genre are seen as being a negative.

From a quick scroll through Goodreads booklists of males who I know are gay, many are not averse to reading books with heterosexual characters, so it's not the guys who might be put off by the straight sex scene. Which only leaves the females. In real life, many men have had sex with women before becoming "out for you" or being happy to be gay, so why shouldn't that be included in books if it fits the plot?

Marshall's writing is fluid with good cadence and flow. All kudos to Torquere for publishing the book as is and not demanding that the sex scene be cut to pander to females who want their m/m girl cootie free. I'll even replace the star I took off for the typos. But, hey, get a copy editor folks...

So how to classify its genre? M/m romance or gay fiction?

In the blog Marshall states: *M/M at its core is about the formation of a committed relationship*

A committed relationship develops but this *happens* rather than being sought after, a by-product of the plot rather than *the* plot. So this might tend to swing it away from m/m romance.

Furthermore, if m/m romance readers demand emotional reaction to plot developments and insist on no m/f sex being depicted then again it's not an m/m romance.

Are these factors enough to preclude it from being m/m then? Perhaps the problem is that so many readers automatically tag the word "romance" after the initials, whether they are appropriate or not. Are the Adrien English mysteries m/m romance? In fact, the story is reminiscent of Josh Lanyon at times without the emotional angst (although there is some). There is a raw grittiness which I think fits the story and suits the characters. They're certainly not chicks with dicks.

Perhaps it's best to describe Desert Run as action/suspense with gay protagonists who develop a committed relationship and admit they're in love. That's enough of a romantic element for me.

If this makes Desert Run gay fiction rather than m/m romance, then fine, give me more.

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### **Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says**

Price drop to \$0.99 right NOW at amazon US, 1/31/15!

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### **Lena♥Ribka says**

#### **3,5 stars**

If you don't know that Marshall Thornton is one of my favorite writers..... then you probably don't know me well enough.

If you don't know WHO is Marshall Thornton.....ARE YOU SURE WE ARE GR FRIENDS?!

Because to say that I am a true fan of the author is like to say nothing: EVERYONE in my environment knows/at least heard once this name. Even if they never read or don't plan to read gay mystery. My family, my friends, my GR friends knows WHO Marshall Thornton is.

I read everything he wrote. *Desert Run* was my LAST UNREAD novel by the author.

**There were 2 reasons for this:**

This book wasn't available on Amazon, when I was on my Marshall Thornton's mission. It was shortly taken out because of re-editing.

I found out that there were M/F and M/M/F sex scenes. (OMG! Marshall wrote something like this?!)

Now, when I'm more wiser than I was when I had started this novel, I can say that in spite of M/F and M/M/F sex scenes at the beginning, I REALLY enjoyed the first third of the book. It was, **without any hesitation, a 5 read for me.** I enjoyed the second part of the book a bit less, DESPITE of the fact that the novel, along the way, became more *gayer*, but also more *stereotypical* and less *realistic*. And a ROMANCE became more essential and more important than a MYSTERY part. And THAT I NORMALLY don't expect from MT's books.

Still an enjoyable fun read, with typical Marshall Thornton's dialogues - I LOVE THE WRITING!!!- and with a typical Marshall Thornton's sense of humor- I LOVE IT!!!

But I rate Marshall Thornton's books according my personal Marshall Thornton's scale.

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I'm sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo sad...because...it was my LAST UNREAD WORK by MARSHALL THORNTON...

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**R \* A Reader Obsessed \* says**

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[due to the strong initial and persistent straight vibes with some explicit MF action for

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**T.A. Webb says**

Don is an entertainer in a third rate cocktail bar in Palm Springs circa 1973. He's out of the army, single, and doesn't mind picking up the occasional hot woman and having a good time.

When Shelly walks in to the lounge, she is a hot looking blonde, in town for a convention and hot to trot. That she looks oddly familiar raises his red flags, but not enough to keep him from hooking up. After a brief few days and a lot of fun and sex, Don's past shows back up to cause a LOT of trouble.

Seems Don is really Ricky D'Amico from Chicago, ex-army, and on the run from a terrible situation that has him changing his identity and laying low, unable to contact family or friends. Shelly's revelation of who she

is and that she recognizes him stuns and worries him, and then, quickly has him in the run yet again. Then, what starts as Don pool sharking to get money to stay on the run from the troubles chasing him leads to his meeting and falling into a friendship with Harlan, a young man being kept by a middle aged movie star. A male star. And what follows is an action packed, thrill ride of mobsters, movie stars, murder and memories.

This is NOT your average m/m story, and that is a VERY good thing!

This is first and foremost a story about an average guy trapped in a situation anything but average, but out of his control. What happened in Chicago starts a chain of events that has Don constantly looking over his shoulder, reacting and on edge. Shelly's stumbling across him by accident brings all that he has tried to put behind him right back in his face, and drives the action throughout the book.

And this is a great ride of a book. The action fast paced, the fear palpable and Don propelled into reactions designed to keep him safe for one more day. Mr. Thornton has crafted a very believable character in Don - a Vietnam era veteran (this is 1973) who suffers from light PTSD and flashbacks. He is brutally adaptable, able to make quick decisions, but is a man with a conscience. He is used to doing what is necessary to survive, and all of the actions he takes in this well written, excellently paced roller coaster of a book are consistent and believable.

What sets this book apart from merely being a well written action story, however, is the addition of the m/m element to the mix. While on the run, Don is thrown into a situation where he meets Harlan, a young gay man. Don's initial intention is to use him for a place to stay, never intending for anything sexual to occur. Don discovers that he has an initial connection with the guy - or at least to getting off. As he gets to know Harlan, however, he has to question himself as to whether there is something more to his attraction than Harlan's being just an easy way to get off, or if there is an emotional connection.

And that is what makes this such a relevant and exciting book for me. Don is on the run, fighting for his life. And Mr. Thornton works in a nicely told interlude where Don contemplates his sexuality. It fits seamlessly into the tale, and adds texture and depth to the character. I never questioned where Mr. Thornton was taking me or how we were getting there - I just sat back and let this masterful storyteller take me along for a fun, exciting and ultimately satisfying ride.

I wish we had more of this in the genre to choose from - action driven stories where the m/m element was secondary but important. I love me some HEA and hot sex, but there is a place for this type of book in the genre also.

Good work!

Tom

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### **CrabbyPatty says**

It's a sweltering July day in Palm Springs, circa 1973, and Ricky D'Amico, aka Don Harris, aka Fred, is playing piano at Danny's Hideout. He's on the run from his hometown of Chicago, where he killed Ernie Collata's son Mickey in a bar fight. Accidentally, sure, but Ernie is with The Outfit, and he's gonna kill Ricky once he finds him. *"It's a funny feeling when your life ends, and you're still walking around.... Chicago was the only place I'd ever called home, and now by throwing one lousy punch, I wasn't safe in my own home. I*

*needed to be just about anywhere else."*

Don has run as far as Palm Springs, where life is treating him okay, until The Outfit finds out where Don has been hiding, and he is once again on the run from thugs driving a Lincoln Mark IV, wearing knit golf shirts and plaid slacks, and carrying BIG guns. Slipping into a dark Cathedral City bar, Don meets Harlan, who has a few secrets of his own - he's living in Hollywood star Rory Winter's palatial Palm Springs get-away as his boy toy. Against a backdrop of mobsters, movie stars and murder, Don comes to realize that he's falling for Harlan and when bad news comes looking for Harlan, Don realizes that he has to step in to save them both.

As always, Thornton's writing is succinct and compact, yet you finish the book feeling you know Harlan, Tony DeStefano, Tucker, Andy, Effie, Dora Van Pelt and any number of characters Don meets along the way. Like Chicago in Thornton's Boystown Murders series, the Palm Springs setting becomes an important facet of the story. You *feel* that stifling desert heat, hear the swamp coolers kicking in, sense the uneasy combination of the struggling desert town and the tourist Mecca.

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### **Rebelexmachina says**

4/5 stars. I know I'm late to the Marshall Thornton party because his books weren't available to me until recently. But now I can say I am definitely a fan of MT!!

What can I say? I loved this fun and thrilling read. I loved the Palm Springs desert setting, the characters, the dialogue - and the dark humour, for me, really adds to the believability of a plot that could have veered into heavy handed and outlandish territory.

My only criticism would be that the final third of the book felt rushed. The MC's fairly low-angst struggle with his sexuality felt believable to me but during the final portion of the book, I felt he was a little too quick to accept that he'd fallen head over heels for Harlen.

That said, I still loved this book and since finishing it have been languidly daydreaming about DonRickyFred and Harlen's life like together.

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### **Lou Harper says**

4.5 stars

*Desert Run* is the most wonderfully angst-free GFY story I've ever read. Not that there's no tension, because that would be hard when the main character is on the run from Chicago mobsters.

*The story is equal parts of taut thriller and romance. Marshall Thornton's stories are usually set in the seventies and I came to think of them as period pieces - in a way they are, even if some of us can still remember the period they evoke.*

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### **Shanna says**

The author did an excellent job setting the scene, even before clear period markers were presented it was obvious when the story took place. The character development was slow and never fully realized. I did end up liking Don but I didn't really believe his attraction or feelings for Harlan. When the book began Don was a womanizer and even picked up a tourist in the bar he worked with and spent a week with her enjoying a no strings romp. So while the author tried to flash back to other instances when Don had felt stirrings of attraction to his own sex, it just didn't seem like it was enough. I also felt the ending was slightly anticlimactic and pat, everything was wrapped up too neatly. I was also struggling with Don settling down with Harlan for the long haul, especially since he didn't seem the type and the two had only recently met. The writing was great and the setting was interesting but plot and the characters just didn't come together to create a cohesive story. With such promise I expected more.

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### **Mare SLiTsReaD Reviews says**

In a sea of DNFs and duds and WTF am I really reading

This book

I dont know. I love the way Mr Thornton writes

I love his writing style and TBH enjoy his characters, the thought processes and the actions.

Plus I love anything mob related really

Mare~Slitsread

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