



A Blind Goddess

James R. Benn

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March, 1944: US Army Lieutenant Billy Boyle, back in England after a dangerous mission in Italy, is due for a little R&R, and also a promotion. But the now-Captain Boyle doesn't get to kick back and enjoy his leisure time because two upsetting cases fall into his lap at once.

The first is a personal request from an estranged friend: Sergeant Eugene "Tree" Jackson, who grew up with Billy in Boston, is part of the 617th Tank Destroyers, the all-African American battalion poised to make history by being the US Army's first combatant African American company. But making history isn't easy, and the 617 faces racism at every turn. One of Tree's men, a gunner named Angry Smith, has been arrested for a crime he almost certainly didn't commit, and faces the gallows if the real killer isn't found. Tree knows US top brass won't care about justice in this instance, and asks Billy if he'll look into it.

But Billy can't use any of his vacation time to investigate, because British intelligence agent Major Cosgrove puts him on a bizarre and delicate case. A British accountant has been murdered in an English village, and he may or may not have had some connection with the US Army—Billy doesn't know, because Cosgrove won't tell him. Billy is supposed to go into the village and investigate the murder, but everything seems fishy—he's not allowed to interrogate certain key witnesses, and his friends and helpers keep being whisked away. Billy is confused about whether Cosgrove even wants him to solve the murder, and why.

The good news is the mysterious murder gives Billy an excuse to spend time in and around the village where Tree and his unit are stationed. If he's lucky, maybe he can get to the bottom of both mysteries—and save more than one innocent life.

A Blind Goddess Details

Date : Published September 3rd 2013 by Soho Crime

ISBN : 9781616951924

Author : James R. Benn

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Mystery, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, War, World War II, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review A Blind Goddess for online ebook

Barbara Gregorich says

Thanks to a review in Publishers Weekly, I learned about this mystery and this author. Although I prefer to start at the beginning of series, reading the books in order, I do on occasion read a book out of order and then go back to read the others. That's what I did in this case: I decided to read A Blind Goddess to see if I liked the mystery and the writing.

The mystery takes place in England during World War II, in the days leading up to D-Day. Lieutenant Billy Boyle, the protagonist, is an Army special investigator who is (probably against his wishes) working with British Intelligence to determine who murdered "a chap named Stuart Neville," found at a boarding house with his head bashed in. At the same time, Boyle is asked by an American Negro soldier, Sergeant Eugene "Tree" Jackson, to help clear another Negro soldier of a different murder. (Two murders in the same small village.) To complicate matters even further, two schoolgirls are missing. One is found dead: raped and murdered. That makes three murders.

Though I easily figured out the concerns of British Intelligence, it was more difficult for me to figure out who the rapist-murderer was and who murdered Stuart Neville. I found the pace of the story a bit slow: that is, some of the back-and-forth delays seemed unnecessary. And while I did feel as if I were in Britain during World War II, I could have used even more details about setting. The story is told in first person point of view and that works well for the most part. . . I had a hard time picturing what Billy Boyle looked like physically and a hard time figuring out his age.

But I liked this enough that I'll read more in the series, starting with the first one. I liked how the author depicted the troop movements just before D-Day, and so I look forward to seeing whether he starts the first book at the beginning of the war and, if so, which battles he chooses to depict.

Ivy M says

I won an advance copy of this book through a Goodreads giveaway promotion.

I had not read the previous books in this series so was hoping that I didn't get lost in the back story and not know what was going on with the protagonist. I found that the book was so well written that not having read the previous books was not a problem. The author told me just enough back story to keep me up to date but not so much that I felt like I was reading a biography and not a mystery.

This book is set in 1944 during World War II, in England, outside of London. There is a racist thread through it but the author expressed it in such a way that I was not offended but still felt like I was learning how it was to be a Negro in that era.

What I thought was going to be one mystery turned out to be several. The author's way of keeping them separate but still inter weaving them was exciting. The way he kept me guessing as to had possibly committed each of the crimes and the ending was so well brought together.

Jack says

An excellent addition to the 'Billy Boyle' series of mysteries. Billy just wants some R&R, but he gets pulled into two mysteries. Set against the backdrop of invasion prep and American racism, the story gets complicated fast, with too many players, too many motives and too little information. It's up to Billy to dig out the truth from some very secretive and distrusting people.

Donna says

I am liking this series. I've read two books from the Billy Boyle WWII series. I like Billy and his Irish background. He is a great MC. I like that these aren't too graphic. It is a crime that needs to be solved, while other crimes are being committed.

This book had a lot going on. It isn't a book you read and put down, read and put down, etc., unless you have a great memory (which I'm getting too old for). There is much to keep track of in this one, which probably kept the pace fairly brisk in this book.

My only complaint is that the title was stupid.

Barbara says

This was my eighth Billy Boyle World War Two mystery novel. They keep getting better. There are several murders that Billy is called upon to help solve. There is also the disappearance of a young 14 year old girl, which raises all sorts of fears. The adventure takes place in England--we don't adventure to any European war theaters! There is also the story of the difficulties that African American soldiers had when they tried to share in the war! We've come a long way!

Dana Stabenow says

One of my 2014 favorite reads.

I have enjoyed all the books in this series but this one really stands out. To recap: Billy Boyle's mom looks around for a convenient relative with whom to stash Billy so he doesn't wind up on the front lines of WWII. The relative she settles on is Uncle Ike, as in Dwight David Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe. Far from being far from the front lines, in his role as Ike's special investigator Billy finds himself, variously, infiltrating German-occupied Norway, going ashore in Algeria ahead of the first wave, fighting off a division of Tiger Tanks in Sicily, and sneaking into the Vatican in the middle of Nazi-occupied Italy. Just don't tell his mom and everything'll be fine.

In this, the eighth novel in the series, it's March 1944, Billy's back in England and D-Day is in the air, even if no one knows when and where. This time Billy is involved in four different investigations, one the wrongful

arrest for murder of a black US soldier, the murder of an apparently inoffensive civilian loan officer, the disappearance of a thirteen-year old girl, and the rape and murder of another young girl. I was dreading the possibility that they'd all be connected in the end (haven't we all seen that plot too many times), but no, here Billy investigates each case simultaneously in a straightforward manner, albeit at a gallop, using his wits and the resources available to him from the local constabulary, help from his friends Kaz and Big Mike and Diana, and despite the interference of MI5 manages to untangle them all. During which there are enough attempts on Billy's life to make you think he should get back into the front lines, where it's safer.

As usual, Benn's author's note at the end provides some of the best reading in the book. There was in fact a Twenty Committee. Every incident of race discrimination and outrage and criminal act in the book is taken directly from history. It's painful enough to read in the fictional form, especially when there are a couple of moments where Billy and Tree are able to reach back to their friendship as boys and you are able to see in a few brief sentences of dialogue that if we as a society could just leave each other ALONE that we could, indeed, maybe, possibly, all get along.

Benn doesn't pretty up the ending, either. It must have about killed him to write it. It about killed me to read it. Highly recommended.

Mark Wilson says

Another excellent entry in this series. As always, Billy Boyle's investigation uncovers more than a murder - in this case, the bizarre, troubling, and disgraceful way the Army treated black soldiers during WW2. Separate but not equal, with Jim Crow attitudes and actions following them across the sea to England. Boyle must try to clear an old friend, while that friend just wants to fight to save a country that seems uninterested in saving him. Benn's books are always satisfying as mysteries, convincing as evocations of a time, and complex as examinations of war, and how many different wounds it can inflict.

Fredrick Danysh says

Billy Boyle is sent to a small community in rural England where a Black American soldier is accused to murdering an English constable. The local police are more concerned with a missing teenage girl. Boyle is soon caught up in the investigations amid racial strife and has his hands tied by British intelligence. A good World War II mystery on the vein of writers like W.E.B. Griffin.

Gloria Feit says

Just prior to the Normandy invasion in 1944, Billy Boyle, just promoted to the rank of Captain, is handed an assignment by Britain's MI5: work with the local police to find the murderer of a supposed civilian, without any background, but the admonition to "stay away" from a couple running a rooming house. At the same time, a boyhood friend, a Negro sergeant in a tank destroyer platoon, beseeches him to look into the arrest of his gunner after the murder of a local policeman, stressing the man is innocent.

As in the previous novels in the series, the book traces various aspects of World War II in which Billy, who serves on Dwight Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters staff, acts as a detective, solving crimes and other

mysteries. Only this time, the author also portrays the injustice of race relations, since the army continued to be segregated until after the war. And the indignities suffered by Black servicemen.

The plot proceeds smoothly with unexpected turns, but with familiar faces from previous novels, including Kaz and Big Mike, as well as Major Cosgrove and Billy's girlfriend, Diana. Once again, Mr. Benn has done a superlative job of creating a first-class mystery while authentically describing the period and circumstances.

Highly recommended.

Dolf Patijn says

It is always a joy to read a Billy Boyle book, mainly because of the atmosphere. The mystery side of it isn't always that believable (too many coincidences) but the history side is always interesting and the books have a nice pace. This time one of the subjects is the horrible way black American soldiers were treated by white American soldiers and the whole racial problem at the time in the US of A. (Unfortunately this has become an issue again over recent years but that's another story.)

The Billy Boyle series is highly recommended. Best to start from the first book because the characters evolve and in the story it sometimes refers back to what happened before, in previous books.

Derek says

I don't read *Billy Boyle* for the mysteries. The mysteries are no better than "okay"—far too much coincidence for my taste. But I love mysteries set in authentic historical settings, and Benn's WWII settings are as authentic as they come.

That said, once you get past the coincidence of Billy being asked by a friend to investigate one murder, and being sent to the same location by his bosses to investigate another, the mystery is pretty well done.

The most annoying thing about the book is the cover: it depicts Billy being hit over the head and pushed into a canal. A crime that occurs but is never solved in the book. The cover shows the assailant as being another soldier. Why? It seems a little too specific for the usual excuse: which is just that the artist didn't actually read the book.

There are no happy endings. As with most of Benn's books, this is his way of airing historical dirty laundry: in this case the shameful treatment of black American soldiers during WWII—as Benn points out, to the serious detriment of the war effort.

G. says

This one is a "must read" category. A great series, but this one is the best one thus far.

Sue says

It's March 1944 & Billy Boyle has been promoted to Captain in the US Army. He's in London & just about to go on leave with his sweetheart Diana Seaton. However, he's been contacted by an old friend from Boston, a Negro, with whom he had an off/on again friendship. The man is a Sgt. with a Tank Destroyer group and his gunner has been arrested for the murder of a constable in the town where the group is stationed. Diana is OK with Billy going off to check this out because she has plans to meet with high-up British authorities regarding the extermination/concentration camps in the East. Billy had encountered racism in South Boston, but nothing like what he encounters while trying to help his friend. Oh, there's also a murder to solve & who slugged Billy in the back of the head and tossed him in to a freezing canal? As with all the previous Billy Boyle books, this is an excellent read - particularly if you want to learn information about WWII.

Frances L says

Billy is asked by Tree, a friend from home, to help him prove his fellow GI is innocent of killing a policeman in the countryside town where both are stationed. In addition, Billy is asked by his uncle, General Eisenhower, to help in the solving of a crime committed in the same county. Another exciting Billy Boyle mystery.

Sue says

The most recent of the Billy Boyle WWII mystery series is another winner. In this episode Billy, newly promoted to captain, is sent to a small English village to investigate the murder of a local man. Outwardly this seems both simple and odd. Why would an American soldier investigate the murder of a British citizen? Actually he has been sent by MI5, with whom he has worked before, ostensibly because the body was found by an American soldier. This much you will know within the first few pages. I will tell you no more as it would spoil the many layered mystery.

There are also other issues in the same country area. There is a missing young girl. And a former friend from Boston comes to Billy with his own request. This friend happens to be a Negro, stationed in a nearby village. A friend has been arrested for murder ostensibly "for being black". The disparate attitudes toward race between American servicemen and British citizens is interesting. All of this is happening as everyone is waiting for the call up for invasion of France in 1944.

Benn has obviously done much research (as for past books) on major aspects of WWII and it shows. His afterword, while brief, is very interesting.

I continue to recommend this series to readers of historical fiction and those interested in the war years.

A copy of this book was provided to the reader by the publisher for the purpose of review.

