



Billie Morgan

Joolz Denby

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“Denby is clearly a writer who has the capacity to get under the skin of the world she inhabits and to translate it for her readers.”—Val McDermid

Billie is in her forties, running a little jewelry shop in Bradford, trying to live a quiet life, trying to forget the past. Because Billie has a lot of past to forget. She was a biker chick, one of the Devil's Own, the speed- and acid-fueled road demons. Her life was hurtling out of control, and it ended in murder. Now, years later, she has to face the consequences.

Joolz Denby was born in 1955. She married an outlaw biker at 19. She lives in Bradford, Yorkshire.

Billie Morgan Details

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From Reader Review Billie Morgan for online ebook

Zineb says

I read this one A couple months ago. it's one of those books that catches your undivided attention from the very first paragraph.

It's about a girl. I don't want to call her introvert because she's Not. she's just quiet, and carries every emotion within. probably because her family's dysfunctional and don't even care if she is alive. her relationship with her mother is very troubled and full of tension. But I guess that's what you get from being the black sheep in the family.

she falls in love. literally kills for the one she loves. he walks away from her. but not before introducing her to the world of gangsters and Mafia. she gets caught up in it. when she walks out, she is accompanied by an abused-drug-addict-pregnant woman. the woman gives birth to a beautiful boy and Billy gives and sacrifices her all to bring him up correctly. which doesn't happen. This book was pretty dark and depressing. being inside her head is torturing, because you're often exposed to this cruel world through her eyes. she makes you feel helpless, because you already know that nothing you do will set things right. The scary part is that I totally related to her character. the dark part. she tried giving people chances but they kept screwing up. I don't know why I've given it five stars. I just know that this book carries too much darkness and turmoil.

Ian Mapp says

Chosen because it was on the Orange Prize shortlist in 2005 and then was strangely pleased to see that it was written by the poet associated with New Model Army.

Simple story of an ex-biker chic from the 70s with a temper who killed her drug dealer and then had to face the consequences as it was investigated in present day Bradford.

Narrative driven with lots of great insights about city life and providing a voice for the working class... at times not always pleasant.

Examples of include the observation that when she had tattoos in the seventies, she was seen as a freak and now everyone has them.

The story is made a bit more complex by the fact that Billie has now made friends with the girlfriend of the drug dealer that she killed and has become part of her family.

You do wonder where the story is going or what the twist is and it is revealed (rather unnecessarily) that the son has been sleeping with his mother. Not sure what this adds to the story.

Sparkling dialogue and great descriptions and an interesting, easy to read story. Will look out for more of her work.

Ignacia Pinilla says

este es como el típico libro barato que compró en la feria pero siempre es excelente.

Billie es la protagonista que tuvo una vida muy difícil que provocó diferentes sucesos en su vida. Me sentí muy identificada con la protagonista aunque igual no era tan fluido el libro, ojalá mi vida no sea tan desgraciada como la suya y que mi mikey vuelva :'(

Ali says

A book I got from bookcrossing - now passed on.

Phew this isn't my usual read, but I do like to step outside of my comfort zone now and then. This is a novel about, the damaged, brutalised and dispossessed people of society, and it's also about the burden of secrets and responsibility. Billie Morgan is not a pretty story. Bradford is laid before us in all its bleakness- and it's rarer loveliness. It is however a well written novel, with a strong authentic voice, and it is certainly a very compelling read. These are characters who I certainly won't be forgetting for a while but I wouldn't want to live them for long either.

Simon says

Billie Morgan by Joolz Denby
(www.serpentstail.com)

It has been long enough since I last read one of Joolz's books that I have two to read the first one was Billie Morgan that has the dread slogan at the bottom of the cover that reads "Shortlisted for the Orange Prize for fiction" which is the sort of tag line that normally gets me running away worrying at how bad something must be to be accepted into one of the major book prizes.

But then I've liked Joolz back far enough to the days when she never used her surname on anything and this novel follows her normal topics of life in and around the badlands of Bradford in Yorkshire and in this case we are following in flashbacks the life of Billie Morgan who as a youngster had been queen bee at the Devils Own Motorbike club, of course women weren't allowed to be actual members and Joolz paints a picture of a time when just about every village large enough to have a couple of Ginnels would also have at least one motorbike club either of the hells angels or devils own style varieties and we journey into the dark heart of the one she

belonged to.

The story slowly unfolds as do the lives of the characters as they intertwine and fracture and fall apart in the messiest of situations I had almost figured out the main twist before the end as Natty's problems come to a head as his mum Jaz's life falls to pieces and Billie's role in her life is revealed in all its nasty reality. Yes this book clings to the "It's Grimy Old North" cliché quite tightly, but it's also very well written and a good story and well worth reading if not Joolz best book yet.

Peter Chandler says

This is not an easy book to enjoy, not because it is badly written, but so much of the story is particularly depressing. Though there is a certain amount of humour to lighten the bleakness it's far from the easiest of reads. Still it does do a very good job in creating an emotively engaging protagonist along with an occasionally beautiful, yet believable vision of its Bradford setting. That being said, it does retain a tendency to perhaps overdo it at times. There is a danger in some ways of the plight and stories of the outsider and underclass becoming something of a Dickensian parody, particularly towards the end of the narrative when you think things might be difficult to get much bleaker.

On the whole the narrative just about manages to steer itself away from that, although there are some dodgy moments. It is a particular problem for this book that is so concerned with asserting itself as providing a genuine and realist vision of the lives of those on the edges of society. It runs into that most sticky dichotomy of any realist novel that it is still a fiction and can only represent its realism through fictitious means, archetypes and plot devices. This becomes particularly problematic with the more didactic elements of the story, particularly its conclusion, which rather seems to want to have its moral cake and eat it in a way that just seems a little too unlikely. Still, the violence and drugs and particularly the narrator's emotional turmoil are all generally believable, if some of the artistic descriptions and sheer depths of misery sometimes threaten to verge on becoming the parody it insists it is not and it is that continual insistence of being the truth of the real world that in fact continually reminds you of its fictitiousness.

Still this remains a strong and engaging story, driven by an emotionally complex and believable central character whose strong voice does well to draw the reader into their difficult and troubling world. Though it may perhaps draw a little too much attention to its own fictionality than the complexity of its setting and subtlety of its devices can withstand. It is not quite, therefore, as fully absorbing as it might be as a story, which is a bit of a shame, since it weakens the ideas it clearly wants to impart by being so. For all that though, it's a strongly written and moving piece of work that generally manages to bring a story from the complex and troubling edges of society to colourful, powerful and believable life.

Lesley says

Re-read (first read more or less when it came out).

Ape says

This is a fantastically well-written book, but rather grim and depressing in a realistic way. Life's crap at times and for some people there isn't a way out of the hell that they're born in to.

It's about Billie Morgan, a Bradford lass whose father leaves the family when she's still young - she never gets over it. Her mother is a self-absorbed, selfish uppity what have you; so Billie's got some confidence issues under the surface. She hangs out with hippies, has a bad time, then gets in with a biker crowd, has some more bad times that end up with murder and the break up of her marriage. She then spends the next years helping out hopeless case drug addict Jas and her little son Natty, who grows up into a messed up, violent, drug abusing youth. They live on a depressing council estate block of flats type of environment, where no one really has a hope for anything in their lives. Happy happy days.

You'd almost want to say, by, it's grim up north... except that I am a northerner myself and I don't like these stereotypes; plus there is a very strong north-south divide in this book and I don't think that's what she was aiming for either!

Pam says

TITLE/AUTHOR: BILLIE MORGAN by Joolz Denby

RATING: 4/B

GENRE/PUB DATE/# OF PGS: Fiction, 2004, 280 Pgs

TIME/PLACE: Bradford, UK, 1990's

CHARACTERS: Billie Morgan/shop owner

COMMENTS: Billie Morgan is in her 40's and had a "colorful" past she is trying to come to terms w/. She was involved w/ drugs, a hard-core biker group "the Devil's Own" back in her 20's. Billie holds a secret about one of their old friends, Terry, who has gone missing -- Terry will not be returning. She has looked out for Jas & Natty (Terry's family) the last 20+ yrs, allowing them the futile hope that he may some day come home. The story is told through Billie writing in a diary about what happened. Well written. Read for a mystery group ... I don't consider this a mystery/suspense book more of a general fiction character study.

Maddy says

RATING: 5.0

PROTAGONIST: Billie Morgan

OCCUPATION: Jeweler in a small shop

SETTING: Bradford, outside Yorkshire, UK

Billie Morgan needs to confess, to explain, to understand and document the one colossal horrible act of her life; she's 46 years old and a murderer. It's a purging of her soul to explain her life through her writing; for the reader, it's an astonishing trip to hell in a beautifully written autobiography of a dark past that tears your heart out and leaves you gasping.

Billie's childhood was almost bereft of any loving. Her mother clearly favors her sister, Jen, both of whom have "being beautiful" as their key goal in life; her beloved father who read her Narnia and poetry and let her dream abandoned the family when she was nine. From that point on, Billie was persona non grata in her own household, a rebel at school; struggling to realize her own potential, she makes some terrible life choices. Ironically, she feels most accepted when she joins the Devil's Own biker gang. There she meets the sweet man, Micky, who will become her husband. She also befriends a lost woman by the name of "Jas" who is subject to terrible emotional abuse from her husband, Terry. Terry is a despicable human being; at the height of a drug-fueled rage, Billie ends up killing Terry and using Micky to help her hide the deed. The cost is high; Micky who has loved Billie unreservedly can no longer face her. As far as anyone else knows, Terry has "disappeared". Jas becomes a totally druggie, barely able to care for her beautiful young son, Natty. As a kind of compensation for her act, Billie cares for Jas and Natty, providing Jas with money when she needs it and acting as a godmother to Natty.

Twenty years go by; in a horribly misguided moment, Jas's mother volunteers the story of Terry, who everyone thinks has abandoned the family for his own purposes, to a newspaper. The reporter lays bare the pain of the family and reopens all the old wounds that Billie has been so carefully covering. Natty is a young man who has naively believed that his Dad would return and their life would turn magical. Now, he spirals out of control himself, and the whole carefully constructed world that Billie has built begins to crumble. Billie never really repents for having murdered Terry; rather, it is the impact of his loss on the people that she loves that she regrets.

BILLIE MORGAN was a character study more than a mystery and, as such, I thought it was extraordinary. The diary structure worked well to reveal Billie, layer by layer. Denby has an almost poetic writing style; there were passages that I read over and over again because they were so beautifully written. In spite of the dark elements of the book, there is never a sense of despair, even when the worst possible things happen. BILLIE MORGAN is clearly a book of hope and love and redemption, showcasing a "murderer" who can be warm and honest and compassionate, a woman who has been through incredible pain and is battling to conquer her own demons.

BILLIE MORGAN is one of the most powerfully and beautifully written books that I've ever read. Any flaws in the book were irrelevant to me. There was one particular scene where my jaw literally dropped. Brilliant in every way, it receives my highest possible recommendation.

Emma Glaisher says

By all means read this. But best of all, listen to the audio version read by author Joolz Denby. I thought it might be a bad idea reading your own book (unless you're Stephen Fry) but Joolz really brings the book alive.

It is a harrowing book. Drugs, bikes, dysfunctional families and murder. But you have to like Billie. Where I once teetered a little on the brink, she plunged in with both feet and plumbed the depths. And survives.

The Book Nazi says

This book has a dark subject matter... Billie, The main character is superbly portrayed with manic depressive tones and it is disturbing to watch the chain of events that are set in motion and which may well bring her world crashing down around her. She has carried many heavy secrets for a long time and I can almost feel her relief as she finally gets them down on paper and out into the open as they have been eating her up for so long.

This is a fabulous well written book that you won't want to put down, and which will make you thankful for your own controversy-free quiet life!

Plum-crazy says

I thoroughly reading of Billie's teenage years & especially her mums desperation to turn her into a girlie girl like her elder sister - a wonderful mix of the sadness, difficulties & angst of not fitting in but written with humour (loved the bit about the dermatology hospital visits!). Then Billie's discovery of drugs & the *Devil's Own* biker gang all flowed so believably onto to the event that changed her life....

Billie's later years are taken up with her godson Natty & helping his beautiful but junkie mother Jas. Denby really brings her characters to life with the frightful Mrs Skinner & Monkey...aww, poor, poor Monkey....& manages to be shocking & yet heart breaking at the same time...Natty's little bombshell being a prime example!

I really enjoyed the book. Okay, I may be a bit biased with it being about Bradford & it helped that the timing was the same as my own teenage years - I loved the nostalgic references to clothing (I always wanted an afghan but wasn't allowed one because of the smell!), music and perfume -remember Aqua Manda? I certainly do.

Sue says

This book follows Billy's life before & after a terrible event. It was written in such a way that while I was reading it I felt actually part of what was going on.

Billy's character was very well developed, so much so that it seemed more like reading an autobiography.

The book was quite shocking in places, but it is the best book I have read for a long time.

Jenni Morrison-Smith says

I picked this up at the library, based on the intriguing cover. In a nutshell, without spoiling anything, the book tells the story of Billie Morgan, a former biker, who grew up in lower class England. Billie has some dark secrets that she can't forget. She's now a more mainstream member of society, but secretly waits for her

past to catch up with her.

There is a lot of English slang in the dialogue, which made it a little clunky to read at first. But halfway through, I found that I couldn't stop reading. There are some extremely dark issues dealt with here, such as depression, drug abuse, poverty and outsiderism in general. The author, Joolz Denby is especially skilled at writing about the effects of a life lived in the darkness of depression.

I can't say much more about the story without spoiling it, but if you're up for a very dark read with an emotionally difficult ending, I would suggest this book. When it was over, I found myself wishing the character was a real person that I could meet.
