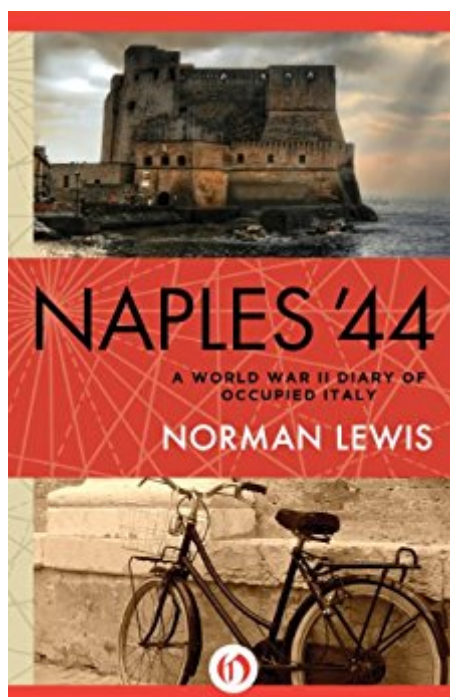


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Naples '44: A World War II Diary Of Occupied Italy



Synopsis

Now a documentary narrated by Benedict Cumberbatch: This memoir of the Italian city after Nazi occupation is as evocative as poetry. (The Plain Dealer). As a young man with a gift for linguistics, Norman Lewis was assigned to the British Intelligence Corps's Field Security Service, tasked with reforming civil services, dealing with local leaders, and keeping the peace in places World War II had devastated. After a near-disastrous Allied landing at Salerno, Italy, Lewis was stationed in the newly liberated city of Naples. But bringing the city back to life was unlike anything he had been prepared for. Much of the populace was far from grateful, stealing anything they could, not only from each other but also from those sent to help them. Local vendettas and endless feuds made discerning friend from Nazi collaborator practically impossible, and turned attempts at meting out justice into a farce. And as the deprivations grew ever harsher, a proud and vibrant people were forced to survive on a diet of prostitution, corruption, and a desperate belief in miracles, cures, and saviors. But even through the darkness and chaos, Lewis evokes the essential dignity of the Neapolitan people, their traditions of civility, courage, and generosity of spirit, and the indefatigable pride that kept them fighting for life during the greatest calamity in human history. And with his detached British wit, Lewis finds the absurdity in almost any situation. A masterpiece of a memoir, *Naples 1944* is the heartbreaking, humorous, and starkly human account of the true cost of war as seen through the eyes of a young, untested man who would never again look at his world the same way.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Before becoming one of the finest travel writers in English (Graham Greene called him "one of the best writers, not of any particular decade, but of our century"), Norman Lewis served in British intelligence during WWII. From September 1943 to October 1944, he was in southern Italy. He landed with the U.S. Fifth Army near Salerno and then spent the next year with the occupying forces in and around Naples. NAPLES '44 is his marvelous account of that year. In addition to being superbly written, NAPLES '44 stands out on two scores. First, it belongs on the top shelf of WWII books, not as a report of combat (though Lewis had a few experiences of front line danger which he describes in the book) but as an account of the chaos, bureaucratic claptrap, and occasional callousness of the Occupation. Just one of far too many examples from the book: A 10-year-old boy was brought into the hospital with three fingers chopped off and wrapped in newspaper; he had been part of a gang that specialized in jumping onto the backs of moving army lorries and then tossing out to confederates whatever might have value, but he became a victim of a British campaign to stop such theft by hiding soldiers in the backs of supply-trucks with bayonets and orders to chop down on the hands of any boys who grabbed the tailboards as a preliminary to hauling themselves in. Second, NAPLES '44 is an indelible portrayal of Naples, "that anthill of humanity", and its countryside neighbors, including the wretched poverty and Dark Ages living conditions and the proclivity of many for banditry, lechery, and superstition. In the Cathedral there was an ampulla of the congealed blood of San Gennaro, patron saint of Naples.

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