



How I Became a Spy: A Mystery of WWII London

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From the award-winning author of *The Great Trouble* comes a story of espionage, survival, and friendship during World War II.

Bertie Bradshaw never set out to become a spy. He never imagined traipsing around war-torn London, solving ciphers, practicing surveillance, and searching for a traitor to the Allied forces. He certainly never expected that a strong-willed American girl named Eleanor would play Watson to his Holmes (or Holmes to his Watson, depending on who you ask).

But when a young woman goes missing, leaving behind a coded notebook, Bertie is determined to solve the mystery. With the help of Eleanor and his friend David, a Jewish refugee--and, of course, his trusty pup, Little Roo--Bertie must decipher the notebook in time to stop a double agent from spilling the biggest secret of all to the Nazis.

From the author of *The Great Trouble*, this suspenseful WWII adventure reminds us that times of war call for bravery, brains *and* teamwork from even the most unlikely heroes.

How I Became a Spy: A Mystery of WWII London Details

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From Reader Review How I Became a Spy: A Mystery of WWII London for online ebook

Susan says

How I Became a Spy

By Deborah Hopkinson @deborah_hopkinson

Published by Random House Kids @randomhousekids

Thank you to the author and @kidlitexchange for sharing a copy of this book. All opinions are my own.

Oh, this story! It grabbed me from the moment I started reading and I couldn't put it down! From the first page, I felt the danger of wartime London in 1944. I understood the characters constant fear that bombs could fall at any moment. I felt their hunger as they faced endless days of powdered eggs and very little to eat. But I also felt their certainty that the Americans were going to lead an invasion onto the European continent very soon which would bring an end to a very long war.

This story is told through the eyes of thirteen year old Bertie, a civil defense messenger for the war effort. He and his two friends, David and Eleanor, have the adventure of their young lives as they search for Eleanor's missing tutor, Violette, and work together to decipher her secret notebook. Along the way, they face danger and adventure as they help to unmask a traitor.

I loved the friends' determination to solve the mystery, to help Violette and to assist the in war effort. I loved their creativity in solving the ciphers that led to the traitor. I loved their consideration, kindness, loyalty and courtesy to one another and to everyone they met.

This is a great book for historical fiction lovers. I learned so much about London in 1944. I appreciated the author's notes at the end that included historical notes, as well as the definitions of terms used in the book. In fact, I asked the author if there actually were teenage messengers in London during the war and learned there were!

It's also the perfect choice for kids asking for an adventure with lots of action and danger, a complex mystery or simply a fascinating story with strong characters.

This is a must buy for every elementary and middle school library. You'll probably need multiple copies!

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

It's 1944, American servicemen have arrived in London and everyone is talking about the pending invasion of France to break the Nazi stronghold in Europe and end Hitler's reign. London is being bombed once again by the Germans, and for Bertie Bradshaw, 13, and his rescue dog Little Roo, it means finally being old enough to become a messenger for the Civil Defense post in his neighborhood.

One night, as the air raid sirens begin, Bertie bumps into an American girl in a blue coat about his age, who drops a little red notebook. Bertie picks it up to return, but the girl has already run off and so has Little Roo, down a different street and straight to a unconscious woman laying on the sidewalk. Determining that she isn't a bomb victim, Bertie reports the incident to his Civil Defense post, but when they return to the spot where the woman was laying, she is nowhere in sight. What could have happened to this mysterious lady?

Back home, Bertie pulls out the red notebook to see if he could find the owner's name. Instead, he finds notes made by someone in training with the SOE (Special Operations Executive) to become a spy. Fascinated by what has been written, Bertie keeps reading until suddenly the writer begins using random letters that just look like gibberish. Thinking it might be a cipher, Bertie decides to talk to his best friend David, a German Jewish boy who had come to London in 1939 on the Kindertransport, and is a Sherlock Holmes fan who also happens to know all about ciphers.

The next day, a Saturday, Bertie and Little Roo head over to where most of the Americans are staying hoping to find the girl in the blue coat. Realizing it was a long shot, the two begin walking when Bertie notices that he is being followed by a man. Dodging the man, Bertie decides to follow him instead and is led right to Baker Street, to a place called the Inter-Services Research Bureau. Thinking this might just be the SOE offices he read about in the notebook, there's no time to investigate what it's all about because suddenly his arm was grabbed by none other than the American girl in the blue coat, demanding he return the red notebook immediately. But why? A 13-year-old girl can't be training to become a spy, can she? But how is the notebook connected to this American girl named Eleanor Shea?

Right from the start there's a lot going on in this exciting mystery/adventure novel. It turns out that Eleanor knows that the notebook belongs to Violette Romy, a former French tutor of hers. David is able to help with some of the cipher in the notebook, but not all of it. As secrets about the impending top secret invasion and the French Resistance are revealed to the three friends, they also discover a series of double crosses and traitors putting both Violette's life and the liberation of Europe from the Nazis in jeopardy.

But that still leaves a question about the identity of the unconscious lady and the man following Bertie. Mystery abounds.

I loved reading *How I Became a Spy*. Not only is it full of historical references, but for added interest and authenticity, Hopkinson has also peopled it with some real, if not necessarily, familiar people, such as General Dwight Eisenhower, Leo Marks, a SOE code maker, and she modeled the character of Warden Ita, of the Civil Defense after the real air-raid warden E. Ita Ekpenyon, who was born in Nigeria. The story is narrated by Bertie, who is a lively character despite living with the memory of his paralyzing fear during the Blitz that caused injury to his older brother, Will and who always feels like he has disappointed his father.

The novel takes place over the course of one week, beginning on Friday, February 18, 1944 and ending on Thursday, February 24, 1944, plus an Epilogue dated Sunday, July 2, 1944. The one week perimeter adds to the excitement and tension of needing to decode the pages written in cipher and then getting the information into the hands of the right people.

The bombing of London by the Luftwaffe in 1944, often referred to as the "Baby Blitz" isn't generally the setting for historical fiction, let alone that written for middle graders, making this a great addition to the body of home front literature.

One of my favorite things about *How I Became a Spy* is that Hopkinson has included four different ciphers scattered throughout the book, allowing readers to learn about some of the different kinds of ciphers they

work alone with Bertie, David, and Eleanor. There is a Simple Substitution Cipher, a Caesar Cipher, a Atbash Cipher, and a Mixed-Alphabet Cipher. And at one point, they make and use a Cipher Wheel. I really liked this hands on activity for kids to try.

How I Became a Spy is an engaging historical fiction novel with engaging characters that will surely have wide-spread appeal. I can't recommend it highly enough.

This book is recommended for readers age 9+

This book was provided to me by the author

Story Eater says

Part spy thriller, part detective procedural, *How I Became a Spy* is a WWII story that places some context around the air raids in London and their effect on the collective mental stress for the city of London (and the whole of the UK) during the war. It also draws specific attention to one of the most important events toward the end of the war, D-Day.

Hopkinson does an amazing job of engaging the reader to become involved, visually and kinesthetically, through puzzle and cipher activities interlaced within the narrative. Young readers can get their fill of imaginative scenarios with WWII's historical giants while putting themselves in the shoes of our heroes and heroines, both human and canine.

Kathy Martin says

This middle grade historical mystery stars Bertie Bradshaw, Eleanor Shea, and David Goodman. These thirteen-year-olds find themselves solving ciphers to find a German double agent in London before the specifics of D-Day can be discovered and sent to Germany.

Bertie's father is a policeman. Bertie is working as an air-raid messenger. One evening when the sirens go off, Bertie grabs his dog Little Roo and heads out to the air-raid shelter. He directs everyone he sees to the nearest shelter including American Eleanor Shea. He literally bumps into her. When she continues on her way, Bertie finds a small red notebook. Then Little Roo leads him to an alley and an unconscious young woman.

When Bertie gets back to his base and sends help, the young woman is gone. Where she went and who she was is a mystery for him to solve. The red notebook contains still another mystery. It tells of a young woman who is being trained to infiltrate German-held lands and assist the Resistance. It talks about her training. However, the last part of the book is ciphered. Bertie calls on his friend Jewish-immigrant David who is a devoted fan of Sherlock Holmes and a good puzzle solver.

The boys also reconnect with Eleanor who tells them that the red notebook was written by her French tutor Violette. Violette asked Eleanor to take care of it and share it with her father, who works for the OSS, if something should happen to her.

The kids work together to solve the various ciphers and then use their information to try to track a traitor. While the three main characters are fictitious actual historical figures do make brief appearances in the story. Both General Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower and his dog Telek have a role as does Leo Marks who worked with the Special Operations Executive (SOE) who sent civilians to occupied territory and who wrote a book after the war.

Each chapter begins with a quote from the SOE Training Manual or other quotation and each section has a different cipher for the reader to solve (with solutions in the back of the book). There are notes at the end citing the chapter quotations.

This was a nice mystery about a time period that interests many students.

Smart Bookaholics Inc Bookstore says

What a great read this was! I'd even go as far as to say this is in a way a coming of age book. I really enjoyed this book. I'm usually not into books that pertain to the war, but this author entwined a wonderful plot into a not so wonderful era! Thank you Net-galley for the free earc in exchange for an honest review.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

Bertie is helping out as a volunteer air-raid messenger during a bombing in London during World War II when his dog finds a battered red notebook and leads him to a mysterious young woman lying on the ground. He brings help for her, but she has disappeared, without explanation. When a feisty American girl comes in search of the notebook, Bertie is drawn into a mystery that involves ciphers, the Allied invasion, and spies.

How I Became a Spy is a captivating story, with strong characters, perfect for middle school history buffs and mystery readers.

Marilyn Smith says

If you love solving codes and spy craft, this is your book.

Bertie's a civil dense volunteer (WWII) which helps the war effort in London. When he tries to help two people find the closet shelter they brush him off. It's only the next day that Bertie realizes these two people may be involved in a spy ring but on whose side?

Bertie and friends have only a few days to decode the messages he's found to get to the real story.

Looks of codes to solve, surveillance tips and plain old detecting work makes this an exciting, fun read.

Myarn says

How I Became a Spy by Deborah Hopkinson 5 stars

I start this by saying I am not the right demographic for this book, but I enjoyed it all the same. The book

was fun to read and had codes to solve for parts of the book. Aside from the adventure and intrigue, there were several strong historical references in this book. - The plight of Jewish children that escaped before the roundups; the food deprivation in Britain during the war; PTSD for the people of London that survived the Blitz; the entrance of America as an ally during WWII and D-Day the Normandy Invasion. There were also real people introduced as characters in this book. This is an excellent story that slips in a history lesson on the side.

Thank you Netgalley and Random House Children for allowing me to read the ARC.

Ms. Yingling says

E ARC from Edelweiss Plus

Bertie is a very young civil defense volunteer who lives with his father at a boarding house for single policeman after the family home was destroyed and his mother and brother relocated to the country. On his first official call, he forgets his helmet, brings along his dog, Little Roo, and leaves his coat with an unconscious woman he finds in an alley. He also finds a red notebook after an encounter with an American girl, but later realizes that the notebook belongs to someone else... someone who is working as a spy. Once he meets the American girl, Eleanor, he finds out that the journal belongs to her former tutor, a french woman named Violette who gave the journal to Eleanor for safe keeping. The journal is in code, so Bertie approaches his friend David, a German Jewish evacuee staying in London with foster grandparents, to help them out. David is a fan of Sherlock Holmes and loves codes. As the messages emerge, the trio gain more facts about Violette's involvement with the resistance to the Nazis. They manage to keep going through the "baby Blitz" of 1944 and survive until D-Day, using their connections to important war leaders to get Violette's message heard.

Strengths: This had a lot of good details about living in London and having to deal with air raids, shortages, and general war time activity. I liked that young people had believable war time roles. David's plight was interesting and realistically portrayed; he knew his parents hadn't survived, but he tried to focus on his life in London and things he could control.

Weaknesses: I wasn't as interested in Bertie's guilt over his brother's injury when their house was destroyed, but it was handled well and not harped on too much.

What I really think: This is an excellent book about the London home front, which is a fascinating topic, and includes lots of clever use of codes and ciphers. There are four practice exercises that can be done as the story unfolds. I will definitely purchase, but just wish that there were more books about Vietnam and Korea!

Karen Arendt says

Bertie is a great character as are his friends Eleanor and David. The story is exciting, and the puzzles add reader engagement. This is a great story for anyone who is interested in WWII history.

Rachel Yoder says

So many fun things in this book. Loved the ciphers. Enjoyed the lesser known historical WWII focus. I knew there would be something exciting coming, and then suddenly I didn't want to quit reading to find out how it ended.

Quirkybookworm says

This book was such a delight to read! It is gear towards preteen and teenagers. Adults will enjoy reading it.

It tells of a young boy during WWII and how he learned to be a spy.

I enjoyed learning how to be an amateur spy such as how to decipher a code, how to tell if someone is following you and how to lose the person.

This young hero has captured my heart. This story helped my imagination grow bigger. I imagined being with him in the book.

This book that will help the YA understand the era of WWII and how it was for kids during that time. They will be able to see the horrors, courage, unlikely friendship, war, etc. through this brave hero's eyes.

I strongly recommend this novel for all young kids who are learning about WWII. This is the novel which will pique their interest strongly, encouraging them to learn more about this era.

As I was reading this delightful novel, I felt like a kid all over again but yet being forced to mature as the war went on. This is what reading a book should do to a reader, and this author did a great job of it.

I'd give this book a low four stars

I received this lovely ARC from Random House Children's/ Knopf Books for Young Readers through Net Galley. Thank you!

Amber Webb says

How I Became A Spy was a phenomenal historical middle grade fiction. I loved the setting, the characters, the codes, the mystery and the intrigue. Okay, I loved everything about this book! The story of three young children during WWII in London who were suddenly takes with solving a major war mystery. I loved the quotes to start each chapter, the connection to Sherlock Holmes and the focus on the importance and power of children. This book will appeal to a broad range of readers because of the historical setting, the codes and deciphering, and the mystery. I think kids, and teachers alike, will truly love this book.

Michelle Kidwell says

How I Became a Spy
A Mystery of WWII London
by Deborah Hopkinson
Random House Children's
Knopf Books for Young Readers
Children's Fiction
Pub Date 12 Feb 2019

I am reviewing a viewing a copy of How I Became A Spy through Random House Children's and Netgalley:

Bertie Bradshaw did not set out to become a spy. He could never have imagined traipsing all over war torn London, learning to solve ciphers and practice surveillance as well as searching for Traitors of the allied forces. He never expected to do these things with a strong willed American Girl named Eleanor.

When a Young Woman goes missing leaving behind a notebook in code Bertie is determined to solve the mystery his friend Eleanor and his friend David a Young Jewish Refugee will have to help along with his pup Little Roo.

I give How I Became A Spy five out of five stars!

Happy Reading!

Jennifer says

I think it would be cool, but I've never had the spirit or the smarts to be a spy, so when I read the advanced reader copy of Deborah Hopkinson's newest book, How I Became I Spy: A Mystery of WWII London (coming February 12th, 2019), I felt that I had reached a new goal while following the story of Bertie Bradshaw, a young boy living in WWII London.

Summary: Penguin Random House states, "Bertie Bradshaw never set out to become a spy. He never imagined traipsing around war-torn London, solving ciphers, practicing surveillance, and searching for a traitor to the Allied forces." This middle grade novel practically sells itself -- "historical fiction by Deborah Hopkinson," "WWII," "mystery," and "solving ciphers" are the book talk keywords here. Students are going to love this one!

What I Loved: I love that Deborah Hopkinson, once again, gives us a real-life peek into history. This time it's

explanations of ciphers and codes, the appearance of actual figures, such as Leo Marks and Dwight D. Eisenhower from WWII reality, and the Special Operations Executive (SOE) that make the story engaging and believable. The SOE organization, with headquarters at 64 Baker Street, trained men and women to become secret agents. In the story, Bertie, his dog Little Roo (LR), his Jewish-refugee-friend, David, and a mysterious American girl are all caught up in the action. There's a young girl missing -- an agent -- and Bertie must hide her secret notebook, translate it, and inform the right people before a double agent ruins the Allies' plans.

Why You Should Read This: *How I Became a Spy* is an action-packed spy thriller for middle schoolers, or anyone who likes puzzles, Sherlock Holmes, London's crowded streets, war stories, or doggie heroes. And...

if you ever wanted to be a spy...this book might just help get you started.
