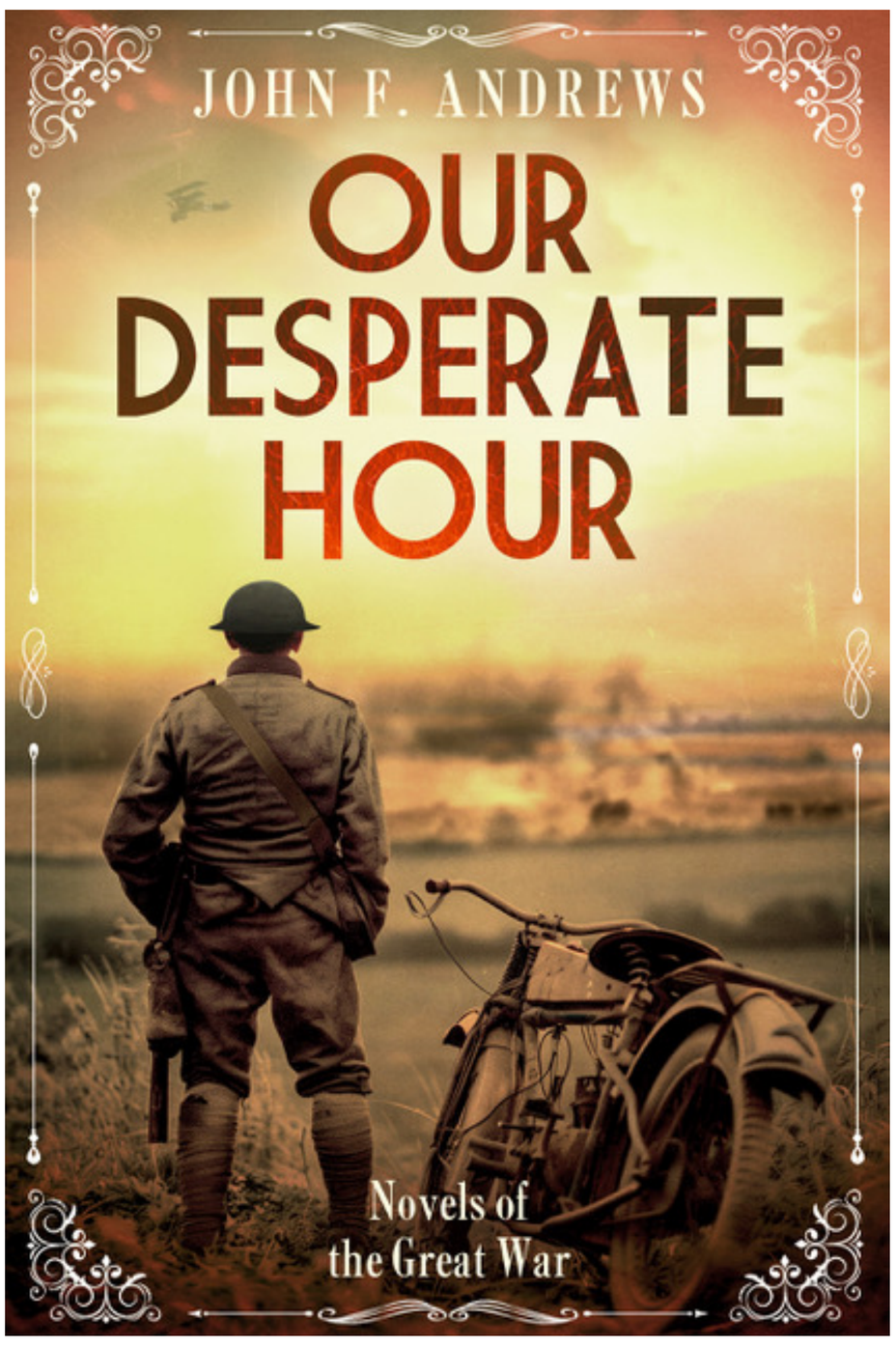

OUR DESPERATE HOUR

By John F. Andrews

IR RATING: 5.0

John F. Andrews's OUR DESPERATE HOUR is a vivid, thoroughly researched, and powerfully told story of the horrors and cruelties of World War I. Its immediate, personal intimacy and emotional intensity will pull the reader in and refuse to let go.

IR Approved *Action/Adventure*

Posted by IR Staff | March 31, 2025

OUR DESPERATE HOUR tells the story of the bloody Battle of Belleau Woods in World War One, from the perspective of those who fought it and those who cared for the wounded and dying.

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Told through several different perspectives—a journalist-turned-supply-officer desperate to find his Marine son, an arrogant surgeon secretly afraid of reliving his father's post-Civil-War battle trauma, an orderly and runner eager to make his mark on the enemy, and an orphaned medical apprentice—OUR DESPERATE HOUR gives a powerful first-person account of the horrific Battle of Belleau Woods, a pivotal moment in the history of the US Marine Corps. The variety of narrators may be a little confusing at first, but the voices of these characters are distinct enough to come through clearly. Their respective positions during the battle give the reader a multifaceted look, which makes for a fuller picture than any of the individual stories told alone could manage. The first-person points of view draw the reader directly into the characters' lives, bringing their emotions and actions vividly to life in a way that few history books can do.

Written by John F. Andrews, this is not a novel for the squeamish or faint of heart; it does not step back from describing the horrific damage that can be inflicted on the human body by artillery fire, bayonets, or (worst of all) mustard gas. The brutality of war is made all the more intense by the clear immediacy of the characters' thoughts, all the more powerful for their straightforward-seeming calm: "I dive to the ground next to a private shot in the leg, writhing in pain. I dress the wound, jab in a shot of morphine, fill out the wound card, and wave two litter-bearers over. When they arrive, I move toward a gurgling scream to the left."

Wrenching emotional dilemmas and losses add to the physical horrors, from Major Johnson's fear for his son's fate to Dr. Beck's struggle with the shellshock he scorned as cowardice in his father to Lyle MacCormack's grief at the loss of a friend he had bonded with over their shared orphanhood. We see character growth directly from the person's own perspective, as the war destroys arrogance and preconceived notions—laying bare what matters most: the courage to survive and do what needs to be done in the face of hell on Earth, the bonds of brotherhood and love that compel some to lay down their lives for comrades or even strangers, the fury over misguided orders and prejudices that destroy human lives by the thousands, and the honesty to admit to one's own faults or preconceived notions (and outgrow them). In the end, the author's respect for the courage and endurance of the Marines who fought this brutal battle, as well as the medical officers who fought against incredible odds to save as many lives as they could, shines through brilliantly.

John F. Andrews's OUR DESPERATE HOUR is a vivid, thoroughly researched, and powerfully told story of the horrors and cruelties of World War I. Its immediate, personal intimacy and emotional intensity will pull the reader in and refuse to let go.

~Catherine Langrehr for IndieReader

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