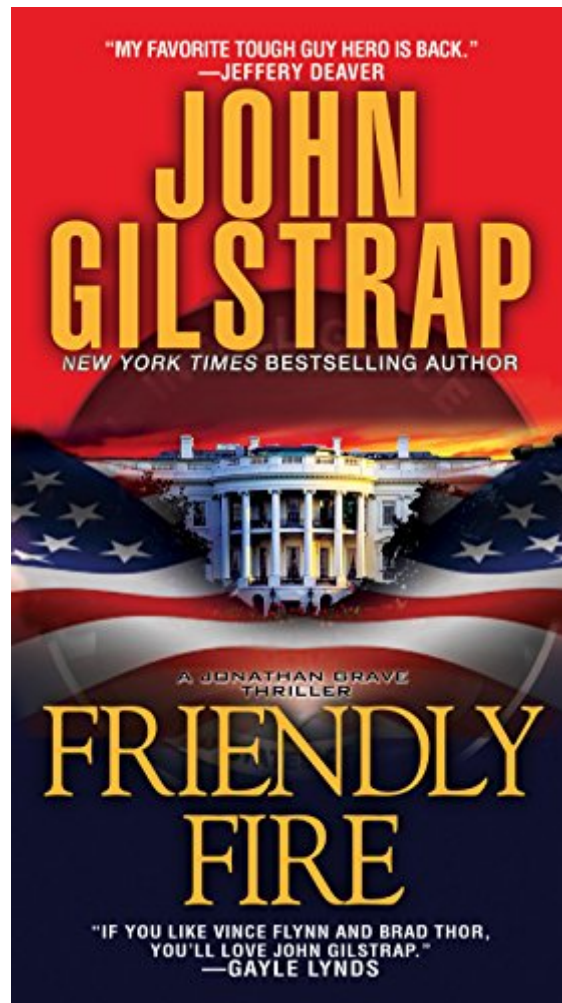


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Friendly Fire (A Jonathan Grave Thriller)



Synopsis

It begins with a shocking act of vengeance. Barista Ethan Falk chases a customer into the parking lot and kills him. He tells police that years ago the older man abducted and tortured him. Then Ethan's story takes an even stranger turn: he says he was rescued by a guy named Scorpion. Of course, there is no record of either the kidnapping or the rescue, because Scorpion--Jonathan Grave--operates outside the law and leaves no evidence. As Grave struggles to find a way to defend his former precious cargo without blowing his cover, he learns the dead man has secrets that trace to an ongoing terrorist plot against the heart of America. It's up to Grave and his team to stop it. But first they must rescue Ethan Falk--a second time.

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Customer Reviews

I was a late discoverer of John Gilstrap and his signature character, Jonathan Grave, code name, Scorpion and I have come to love his work and his characters. "Friendly Fire" is the third book in the series I have read and this one is a real nail biter that becomes addictive reading. Grave and his team of "Big Guy" Boxers and Venice, are faced with a conundrum. Eleven years ago they rescued an 11 year old boy named Ethan Falk from his kidnapper and torturer and now, so many years later,

Falk sees his evil tormentor and kills him in a blind rage. However, since Scorpion's work is always "off-the-books" and unacknowledged on any official record, there is no proof to Falk's story that he killed his kidnapper; indeed, the police can find no record of a kidnapping nor a rescue at that alleged time. Now Grave and his team must find a way to help his former "precious cargo" by somehow interceding with the truth without placing himself or his team at risk. Adding to the suspense is the knowledge that the man killed has had his identity "wiped" clean but was tied in with a militaristic cell working with Al-Amin, an offshoot of Al Qaeda to kidnap children of American Congressmen and create havoc in the homeland. Working with unofficial sanction from the FBI, Scorpion and Boxers must find a way to save Ethan Falk a second time while neutralizing a deadly cell of homegrown terrorists bent on killing Falk and continuing their kidnapping scheme. In a suspenseful and thrilling maneuver, the terrorists attack a shopping mall with half their force to draw law enforcement so that the other half can attack the local precinct where Falk is being held.

Scorpion begins *Friendly Fire* by rescuing a congressman's daughter who has been kidnapped (the details of how he finds her are conveniently left unsaid). Ethan Falk begins *Friendly Fire* by murdering the man who abused him as a child. He was rescued from that man eleven years earlier (by Scorpion, of course), but since there is no record of the kidnapping or the rescue, the police don't believe him. That puts Scorpion, who keeps his daring and extra-legal rescues confidential, in a sticky situation. Scorpion is Jonathan Grave, who sometimes accepts assignments from Irene Rivers, a/k/a Wolverine, who also happens to be director of the FBI. Calling in a favor, Grave wants Rivers to explain why the man Falk killed, James Stepahin, appears never to have existed. That leads to an improbable storyline about terrorists and their hired guns who plan to cause havoc in Virginia. I don't hold its improbability against *Friendly Fire* because improbability is the new norm in the world of thrillers and the novel is not so outlandish as to be laughable. The fuzziness of the background (neither the team of killers/kidnappers who cause havoc throughout the novel nor the people who hire them are well developed) is offset by the action scenes, which are tense if fairly standard for an action thriller. Scorpion and his sidekick Big Guy manage to kill dozens of bad guys without breaking a sweat, about what you'd expect from the action genre. Fortunately, the quality of John Gilstrap's prose is better than average for the genre, making *Friendly Fire* a fast and pleasant read.

Following *AGAINST ALL ENEMIES* and *END GAME*, John Gilstrap introduces his most complex work, an intriguing premise that potentially holds all of America hostage in a grip of terror. Gilstrap is

the New York Times bestselling author of intense thrillers featuring Jonathan "Digger" Grave and Brian Van de Muelebrocke, who, gratefully, has the abbreviated moniker Boxers, a nickname derived from his first three initials: BVD. Eleven years ago at age 11, Ethan Falk was kidnapped by sex-slave traffickers. Digger and Boxers saved him. "Hostage rescue was a delicate balance of finesse and violence." During Ethan's rescue, three of the four pedophiles were killed, only "Bill" escaped. Since covert operations are off record, Ethan knows his rescuer only as Scorpion, "a cool name for a scary insect that strikes fast." Despite carrying more baggage than a major airline, Ethan survived the ordeal and has recently turned 23. He's now a coffee shop barista. A customer comes in and immediately Ethan knows it's the monster he knew as Bill. He plunges a knife into the pedophile's warped brain, killing him. But there's no evidence that Ethan had been tortured or rescued. No defense for justifiable homicide. Detective Pam Hastings is first on the scene and talks Ethan into surrendering. He tells of the horror he endured, but there's no documentation. Hastings feels that there's an element of truth in what Ethan says and investigates an 11-year-old unsolved triple homicide. Compounding matters, Hastings learns that the victim's name is James Stepahin, not Bill. "There are no records of the man [Ethan] killed. None. Totally off the grid. How can you kill someone who doesn't exist?" Digger had "made it a point over the years not to think much about the people he rescued."

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