



Midnight in Europe

Alan Furst

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Paris, 1938. As the shadow of war darkens Europe, democratic forces on the Continent struggle against fascism and communism, while in Spain the war has already begun. Alan Furst, whom Vince Flynn has called “the most talented espionage novelist of our generation,” now gives us a taut, suspenseful, romantic, and richly rendered novel of spies and secret operatives in Paris and New York, in Warsaw and Odessa, on the eve of World War II.

Cristián Ferrar, a brilliant and handsome Spanish émigré, is a lawyer in the Paris office of a prestigious international law firm. Ferrar is approached by the embassy of the Spanish Republic and asked to help a clandestine agency trying desperately to supply weapons to the Republic’s beleaguered army—an effort that puts his life at risk in the battle against fascism.

Joining Ferrar in this mission is a group of unlikely men and women: idealists and gangsters, arms traders and aristocrats and spies. From shady Paris nightclubs to white-shoe New York law firms, from brothels in Istanbul to the dockyards of Poland, Ferrar and his allies battle the secret agents of Hitler and Franco. And what allies they are: there’s Max de Lyon, a former arms merchant now hunted by the Gestapo; the Marquesa Maria Cristina, a beautiful aristocrat with a taste for danger; and the Macedonian Stavros, who grew up “fighting Bulgarian bandits. After that, being a gangster was easy.” Then there is Eileen Moore, the American woman Ferrar could never forget.

In *Midnight in Europe*, Alan Furst paints a spellbinding portrait of a continent marching into a nightmare—and the heroes and heroines who fought back against the darkness.

Praise for Alan Furst and *Midnight in Europe*

“Furst never stops astounding me.”—**Tom Hanks**

“Furst is the best in the business.”—**Vince Flynn**

“Elegant, gripping . . . [Furst] remains at the top of his game.” —***The New York Times***

“Suspenseful and sophisticated . . . No espionage author, it seems, is better at summoning the shifting moods and emotional atmosphere of Europe before the start of World War II than Alan Furst.” —***The Wall Street Journal***

“Endlessly compelling . . . Furst delivers an observant, sexy, and thrilling tale set in the outskirts of World War II. In Furst’s hands, Paris once again comes alive with intrigue.”—**Erik Larson**

“Too much fun to put down . . . [Furst is] a master of the atmospheric thriller.” —***The Boston Globe***

From the Hardcover edition.

Midnight in Europe Details

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From Reader Review Midnight in Europe for online ebook

Yvonne says

'Midnight in Europe' begins with a lovely paragraph about snow falling on Manhattan...and then goes downhill. This is not Furst's exceptional writing, his tense plots, his foreboding atmosphere, his intriguing protagonists, his almost poetic occasional phrases, his settings that transported the reader. Another reviewer said, "Furst phoned it in." I say it feels as if Furst subcontracted it.

More than a book with a central story, "Midnight in Europe" it is a series of stories, involving the same lackluster protagonist, Cristián Ferrar, who doesn't act, he only reacts—to phone calls, notes, meetings—he's pushed and pulled and we never get to know what he feels or thinks. Or we do, when Furst tells us what he has failed to show us, "Ferrar had a big, warm heart, people were drawn to him," or "A responsive lover, he listened carefully to her breathing." Alan Furst wrote that? Max de Lyon, not the protagonist, brings a spark when he appears; the reader knows he will have a plan, an idea, something. There is even a time sequence mistake. And don't even get me started on the dull ending. My husband didn't even get halfway through the book and we have both read all of Mr. Furst's books and even went to see him at a Manhattan presentation. We are fans. Therefore, it pains me to say that since "Mission to Paris," his previous book, he's lost his magic. I hope Mr. Furst takes a year off and recharges his source of inspiration.

Jim Loter says

Less an espionage thriller and more of a procurement procedural, Furst's latest in the "Night Soldiers" series is downhill even from "Mission to Paris," which I felt was already a marked decline from his earlier novels.

In "Midnight in Europe" we focus on Cristián Ferrar, a Spanish lawyer living in Paris, who becomes involved in an effort to smuggle arms and ammunition to the republicans in his home country. There is very little tension as Ferrar rather openly pursues his aims, announcing his mission to virtually everyone he come into contact with. The only real tension occurs near the end in a marine encounter that feels tacked on.

The novel gets off to a good start with a sort of "cold open" involving a courier named Castillo who is questioned and ultimately executed by sinister Spanish Nationalists. It's only a few pages long, but it's a well-crafted set-piece that nicely introduces the conditions in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. We never experience those (or any) terrifying conditions again.

Furst's novels focus on the Everyman spy - the reluctant do-gooder who is persuaded to take extraordinary risks on matters of principle, justice, and patriotism. This really only works when the protagonist actually has to make sacrifices. Ferrar is barely inconvenienced by his covert work and never directly faces any real danger. He operates from Paris in comparative safety and comfort. He has meetings at night clubs, openly travels throughout Europe, visits his family, has an affair with a Marquesa, conducts business while horseback riding, flies to New York and buys an apartment for his relatives to escape to, and dines at the Brasserie Heininger, the location of Furst's favorite *leitmotif* - a bullet-hole-ridden mirror above Table #14. All in all, Ferrar seems to be having a pretty swell time while conducting an illegal arms deal more-or-less in his spare time.

With nothing really at stake, it's hard to care whether the arms-running plot succeeds - and even if it does, we all know how the Spanish Civil War plays out. What we really need in these kinds of novels is for the protagonist to undergo some kind of personal transformation or overcome some kind of inner war for which

the events unfolding in Europe are merely the backdrop and/or a metaphor. Sadly, Ferrar has no personal arc, struggles with no inner conflict, and experiences no growth. What appears to be a story about a man trying to get a big gun from Russia to Spain turns out to be just a story about getting a big gun from Russia to Spain.

Lewis Weinstein says

Another terrific story from Alan Furst, who always manages a different take on events that you are vaguely familiar with. Here, a lawyer in Paris gets involved in arms smuggling on the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War, and in the course of telling the story, Furst presents as clear an understanding of what that war was about as I have read. All of the bad guys - Germany, Russia and Italy - were getting ready for the bigger war to follow while the French and British dithered.

Furst's ability to set a scene - warmly and indelibly - is as good as any author I know. Some authors take paragraphs or even pages to do this; Furst does it, time after time, in a few words. Almost instantly, you are in the setting, seeing and hearing along with the characters, feeling the weather. His scenes of Paris, many of which describe locales I know, are magnificent.

The only complaint I have about "Midnight in Europe" is that it was, at 250 pages, too short. I wanted more.

C.W. says

Alan Furst's WWII novels read like chilled martinis served on a dark battlefield. His crisp prose and compelling narratives are spare and go down smooth, but their iciness chills the blood as you realize that his protagonists, often idealistic yet jaded men caught up in the snare of fascism, are about to come up against forces far greater than they expect. He never wastes time filling in backstory. From page one, you're drawn into his masterful tales set in isolated corners of a Europe hovering on the brink of annihilation, populated by spies, black marketeers, gilded dames with secrets, night club owners, and blustering arms dealers. Each novel stands on its own: a piece of an overall devastating picture. Where he excels is in creating lasting glimpses into a vanquished world full of flawed humanity, whose choices are never simple, never easy, and of decisions made in a vacuum of historical forethought. For Furst's people, war is a reality, not an abstraction. Every day is another day to survive. What comes next cannot enter their minds because they never know if the future will ever arrive.

In MIDNIGHT IN EUROPE, it's 1937 and Christian Ferrar, a Spanish refugee lawyer living in uneasy Paris with his family, all of whom have fled Spain, is approached by a branch of an office dedicated to ensuring Republican victory in his civil-war torn country. Hitler growls in the distance, his shadow already looming over Europe, and Spain has become a bone of contention, with a non-intervention pact that has allowed Franco's Nationalists free rein. The Republicans' last desperate stand depends on munitions, and Ferrar is asked to assist in the secretive negotiations. Abetted by a Jewish spy / jack of all trades, Ferrar plunges into the murky underworld of arms dealers and Russian subterfuge, while entertaining a marquesa of dubious motivations who needs his legal counsel. Ferrar is a classic Furst hero: not a fighter by nature, but rather a man of good taste and reserve, who can see which way the wind is blowing and hopes to sidestep the impending chaos. But he's also loyal to the ideals of freedom in a time overcome by fascist nationalism, and his journey entails him shedding pieces of himself along the way as he struggles to defend a doomed cause.

The book is deceptively slim and moves at a rapid pace. Furst depicts Paris in all her finery and seediness, a city of elegance and bistros, and back-alley night clubs where shady dealings are par of the course. The jack

of all trades, de Lyon, is a wonderful character: wry, unimpressed by humanity's capacity for betrayal, and dedicated to preserving himself while abetting the battle against fascist ideology. While Ferrar is the hero, de Lyon is the heart. Together, they manage to pull off a seemingly impossible feat, with harrowing scenes set in Nazi Berlin, but the price is, as ever in a Furst novel, too high.

The ending too, as always, is a fading, sepia-tinted scene. We never know what will come next, like the people themselves. And that's what makes these novels so addictive. Furst doesn't pander to our sentimental need for stories wrapped in tidy bows. What he offers us instead is a cold drink of reality; and when the glass breaks, its jagged pieces are ours to make of as we will.

Emily says

What is there left to say about Alan Furst? This novel was not better than the others, nor as good, but I can't call it appreciably worse. Some reviews have said Furst phoned this one in, which I don't agree with, but I think they put their fingers on something lackluster in this book, which I'm more willing to pin on its focus on the Spanish Civil War. That conflict is more complex and less familiar and it's not going to be as easy to use its events and outcome to loom over the story. I did find the main female character in this story particularly frustrating; she gets written out of the story barely ten pages after she is given a backstory and motivation.

Above all, I really wish Furst would try something new. I'll even provide some free ideas in ascending order of difficulty. He should write a book about a protagonist with a wife or family that he is close to, and who are involved and at risk in the spying. (I think he's written some men with families, but they still operated day-to-day like lone wolves. That gives the novels a certain freedom and style, but significantly contributes to their interchangeability.) Or, he should write a book that takes place during the war. Better yet, *after* the war, since the machinations and choosing of sides at the end must have been just as complicated as at the beginning. Or, he should write a book about a woman, a *real* woman and not one of the walk-on vixens he usually does. The female protagonist should have her own motives and an actual emotional life that goes beyond adventure and lust. She can't just be the usual male character with breasts, but I can't specify exactly what such a character should be like, because that's the author's job.

Review copy received from Edelweiss.

Tony says

MIDNIGHT IN EUROPE. (2012). Alan Furst. ***.

Furst was not up to his usual high standard with this novel. It is more of an outline of potential characters thrown at a potential crisis that he could dip into in the future. His main character is Cristian Ferrar, an attorney for a global partnership dealing in international affairs. He has offices, seemingly, in most countries of Europe. The period is the late 1930s. The Spanish Civil War is raging. Franco is sure to win since the Republicans cannot obtain the weapons they need to combat his troops. The only country that will sell weapons to them is Russia. Most all of the rest of the world has gotten together and agreed not to ship weapons to them. Ferrar thinks he can make a difference, and volunteers to help grease the skids so that weapons can get into the country into the right hands. He has no experience in weapons trading, and doesn't know any of the players. He is helped along the way by a series of shady characters who all contribute their particular skills. The problem, however, is that these individuals have no official standings either. They are all drawn with a sharp pen, but are not ever developed. By the end of the book, I was wondering what kind of

cockamamie story this was. I got the feeling that Furst submitted this novel in response to a time commitment. It is not part of his best work.

Thomas says

A solid 4 stars

I read this library book in 2 days. It is a taut, suspense filled story of spies in Paris, France, in the winter of 1937-38. It is obvious to most people that the Spanish Civil War is just a prelude to a European wide war. The main character is Christian Ferrar, a Spanish émigré and lawyer for a prestigious Paris law firm. He is approached by the Spanish Embassy for assistance in buying arms, desperately needed by the Republican army. He agrees to help and is soon enmeshed in a world of spies and counterspies. How he manages to survive is a thrilling tale, told by a master of the genre. If you like Eric Ambler's spy stories, then you will like this series.

One quote on Spanish pastries available in France:

"At one time, pastry in Spain had been baked and sold in convents, so the names of the little treats came from those days. Ferrar bought huesos de Santo, saints bones, tetas de novicias, novice nuns' breasts, and suspiros de ninja, nuns' sighs.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"Wouldn't it be a better world if people revealed themselves? Did what they secretly wanted? 'I know you want to kiss me,' she said. 'What are you afraid of?' So he locked the door and they went ahead with it, his hands exploring her...She stood, removed hat and dress, then...suddenly self-conscious, 'Would you look away for a moment?' He did, discovering a perfect image of the dimly lit compartment in the dark window as she wriggled out of the girdle, freeing a cascade of soft, rosy flesh."

Parisian Girdle from the late 1930s.

It is 1937 and Christian Ferrar is a Spanish ex-pat living in Paris making a very good living working as a lawyer for a prestigious firm. The Spanish Civil War is going on and times are desperate for the Spanish Republic as Axis troops from Germany and Italy have joined the Francisco Franco Nationalists effort to overthrow the government. Interesting enough the Soviet Union and Mexico are allied with the Spanish Republic. Ferrar has an extended family in France that he is supporting, and so though he wants to go join the fight to protect the Republic it would mean leaving his family impoverished.

I've always liked this shot of Hemingway working as a reporter and gathering material for a book in Spain in 1937.

Meanwhile he is enjoying his life in Paris so aptly described by one of his friends.

"The conversation drifted away, to life in Paris and then, as they worked through the second bottle of wine and ordered a third, to nightlife in Paris; nightclubs high and low, and brothels catering to every imaginable inclination.... 'The Parisians are worldly in these matters,' he said. 'They believe that with money, all things

are possible. They accept the reality of the human appetite, and the reality of markets. Here, one can have whatever one can pay for. I have always admired their point of view.'"

Ferrar is offered the services of a high class madam who has a stable of aristocratic women indebted to their dressmakers, but he prefers his lovemaking infused with passion.

"No, I like love affairs, a woman's desire is the best aphrodisiac."

I would give Ferrar a high five if I could walk into the pages of this book, sit down at the table with him, light a Gitanes cigarette (I would most assuredly have smoked in 1937.), and order myself a gentiane.

Gitanes Cigarette Poster from the 1930s.

The Spanish Republic is in desperate need of supplies, weapons that can be bought from the Soviets, but must be moved by ship and train through German controlled territory to Spain. (Danzig or Gdansk, a city with an interesting history.) Ferrar is asked to be a broker to help move those much needed weapons to his friends in Spain. His predecessor, a museum director, did not fare well. One of the issues for the Republic is that they don't have a professional spy organization and so have to recruit amateurs to be those valuable facilitators to keep the war effort alive.

Iconic Robert Capa photo of a Falling Republican Soldier.

Ferrar meets people, some working for the cause and some selling information to whoever is willing to pay. I particularly liked the description of Professor Z.

"Finding Professor Z was not hard; he was sitting on a bench at the foot of a staircase beneath an ivy-covered pergola, reading a French novel. When he looked up and saw de Lyon, he kept his place in the book with his finger, and there it stayed for the length of the conversation. The professor was wearing a battered old chalk-stripe suit and had the sort of beard worn by men who don't like to shave but don't like beards either; a scraggly growth, brown and gray, chopped back when it grew too long. He was smoking a cigarette in a cigarette holder and was, apparently, a chain-smoker--there were more than a few squashed-out butts on the brick cobblestones by his feet."

Haven't we all been in that position with our finger in a book waiting for someone to stop talking to us? Books always play a part in Alan Furst novels. Ferrar's girlfriend in New York is a librarian by day and a lurid pulp fiction writer by night. Furst's characters generally are readers and Ferrar is no exception. When time drags he picks up Robert Byron's book *The Road to Oxiana* which is still considered one of the classics of travel writing about the Middle East.

Lose yourself for a moment along with Ferrar in Persia in 1933.

"The day's journey had a wild exhilaration. Up and down the mountains, over the endless flats, we bumped and swooped. The sun flayed us. Great spirals of dust, dancing like demons over the desert, stopped our dashing Chevrolet and choked us. Suddenly, from far across the valley, came the flash of a turquoise jar, bobbing along on a donkey. Its owner walked beside it, clad in a duller blue. And seeing the two lost in that gigantic stony waste, I understood why blue is the Persian colour, and why the Persian word for it means water as well."

Robert Byron, a writer who died way too young.

Alan Furst has a talent for infusing his atmospheric novels with elegance, sensuality, anxiety, sacrifice, and cleverness. His characters, generally, are common people placed in uncommon circumstances who sometimes have to choose between loyalty or survival. Things go wrong. Sometimes luck is as important as skill. His characters are learning the rules of the game on the fly and the penalty for losing is best not thought about. There is a stylishness that I really appreciate in a Furst novel. He places me back in time, a time that was full of danger and possibilities. A time when a beautiful countess might be the love of your life or she might be the one who tries to kill you. A time when criminals are useful and crimes have new definitions. A time of changing alliances and trust is a difficult commodity to earn. A time when a man might save the world and the world will never know it.

I highly recommend his Night Soldiers series. They all work fine as stand alone novels so no need to read them in order. I was first introduced to Furst with *The World at Night* so I have a soft spot for it. I believe that universally *The Polish Officer* is considered one of his best. I won't disagree with that assertion.

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I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Nancy says

Furst phoned this one in. The characters, settings and dialogue are sketchy and formulaic, even as he explains things any dunderhead would know and repeats plot points in case we missed them the first time. A very disappointing effort from an author who's given me much entertainment in the past. This barely earns two stars.

Alex Cantone says

It is December 1937. Cristian Ferrar is a Spanish émigré, a multi-lingual lawyer with the law firm Coudert Frères in Paris, his family living in a house at Louveciennes so loved by Impressionist artists. He is in New York for meetings at the branch there and looking for a Christmas present for his girlfriend, aware of the man who has been following him all day. In Madrid another émigré smuggles false documents and money to a woman hiding from Franco's secret police. On his way back to his hotel he dodges a mortar shell and heads down an alley...

On his return to Paris, Ferrar receives a call from the Spanish embassy, where the diplomat Molina sounds him out for his affiliations. A week later Molina invites him to meet with arms dealer, Max de Lyon, an Eastern European Jew, assisting in the anti-Fascist struggle. Their task is to procure anti-aircraft guns for the Republican resistance, and de Lyon takes Ferrar to a Paris nightclub, introducing him to Stavros.

'He's Greek?' Ferrar said.

'Macedonian. He spent his teenage years fighting Bulgarian bandits. After that, being a gangster was easy.'

Ferrar is swept up in the world of spies, blackmail, bribes and subterfuge. The train journey to Berlin leads to confrontation with the Gestapo; the flight to Poland and freight train to the port of Gdansk; an attractive Marquesa who is not who she seems, but who is there to trust? Artillery needs ammunition, but the ever-resourceful de Lyon has a plan.

'We work on finding a Russian gang that operates in Odessa ... then we figure out how to approach them and, then, how to use them without getting robbed or stabbed in the process.'

Furst's writing style grabs you from the start and does not let go, but aside from the colourful characters and heart-stopping tension, he describes the seasons and landscapes with an eye for detail.

As February turned to March, the spring rains began to blow in from the west, and some of the chestnut trees at Métro entrances started to bud, forced by the warm air drifting up from the stations below. Parisians found themselves restless and vaguely melancholy for no evident reason, an annual malady accompanying the nameless season that fell between winter and spring.

Highly recommended.

Marita says

“Europe is a nice neighbourhood with a mad dog. Just now the dog is biting Spain, and nobody else in the neighbourhood wants to get bitten, so they look away.”

But there are people like Cristián Ferrar, a Spanish lawyer employed by Coudert Frères in Paris, for whom the situation in Spain matters. Consequently he allies himself with a clandestine operation where he assists in the procurement of arms for the Republican forces in Spain.

1938 is a difficult time in Europe. The Spanish Civil War is in full swing and war is just around the corner for the rest of Europe. Spies are everywhere and the arms race is on. Ferrar and his oddball companions have to do what they can to find weapons for their cause. The action takes place in various countries, and there are meetings in restaurants where delicious food is consumed, other meetings take place in bars and nightclubs. Here is Ferrar's observation of one such nightclub where *“slumming nouveaux riches, swindlers, spies, prostitutes of the higher order”* congregate: **“The scene struck Ferrar as a kind of undersea world. Beneath a placid sea, exotic creatures mated and fed on each other and, as you sank deeper, the world turned darker and the creatures grew strange indeed.”** Ferrar is adept at finding the right locale for any business meeting, and he keeps lists in two separate drawers of his desk; one with restaurant names and one to cater for other appetites: **“Far easier were requests such as you know Paris, Mr. Ferrar, where shall we eat? So, another list, kept in a different drawer to avoid mortal error, perhaps by a secretary. But Mr. Ferrar, can the bistro really be called domination and whipping? Do they have onion soup?”** And so Ferrar might choose **“An elegant restaurant, expensive and not subtle about it. We want our guest to feel honoured and respected, a man we see as a high personage, because we're going to insult him, by assuming he's the sort of gent who would take a bribe.”**

It doesn't all take place in restaurants or cafés such as the famous Angelina's (which still exists!) where he indulges in pastries and hot chocolate, but he and his associate Max de Lyon undertake dangerous journeys to Germany, Poland, etc. in their quest for arms for their Spanish Republican comrades and their contacts are not always people that you would like to introduce to your mother.

This novel is apparently the thirteenth in the Night Soldiers series. I have not read the rest of the series, but this novel works well enough on its own.

Michael says

I got a pretty good fix for my addiction to this loosely connected series. Now up to 13 books known as “The Night Soldiers” collection, they all take place in the last few years before France is invaded (May 1940) and feature relatively ordinary people become extraordinary by getting involved in actions to slow the impending takeover of Europe by the fascists.. France is usually a setting for much of the action, but the plots spread the narrative to peoples and locations in other countries which vary from book to book (e.g. Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Greece). Here our hero is a Spanish transplant to Paris, Cristián Ferrar, who works for a large international law firm. He gets drawn into an arms supply scheme to help the Republican forces fighting a civil war against the military takeover by Nationalists led by Franco.

As a lawyer who frequently travels around Europe for corporate clients, Ferrar is a logical candidate to facilitate financial dealings on arms deals on behalf of the Republic. But France is technically neutral, and an embargo is in place on direct shipments. Shipments through neutral countries often get intercepted. In contrast with Russia’s inadequate efforts to support the Republic, the Nationalists are well supplied by Hitler and his Luftwaffe dominates the skies. Their besieged forces continue to hold big cities like Madrid and Barcelona, but most of the country has been taken. Ferrar wants to help, and the espionage division of the Spanish embassy in Paris encourages him to take on the task of finding a source and directly managing the purchase and shipment of tons of anti-aircraft shells. There are definitely some thrilling parts where Ferrar has to engage criminal elements in his task and orchestrate clandestine activities in Berlin, the Polish port of Danzig (now Gdansk), Istanbul, and Ukraine. German spies work hard to sabotage their schemes, and Ferrar is concerned over whether his new lover, an exiled Spanish marquesa, might be working for them.

For those like me are a little fuzzy about the human cost of the Spanish Civil War, I pull this thumbnail sketch from Wikipedia:

The war was cast by Republican sympathizers as a struggle between tyranny and democracy, and by Nationalist supporters as between communist and anarchist "red hordes" and "Christian civilization". Nationalists also claimed they were protecting the establishment and bringing security and direction to an ungoverned and lawless society. ...Death totals remain debated. British historian Antony Beevor wrote in his history of the Civil War that Franco's ensuing "white terror" resulted in the deaths of 200,000 people and that the "red terror" killed 38,000. Julius Ruiz contends that, "Although the figures remain disputed, a minimum of 37,843 executions were carried out in the Republican zone, with a maximum of 150,000 executions (including 50,000 after the war) in Nationalist Spain"..

As usual, Furst achieves in me as a reader of this book a marvelous sense of presence in this time and place of momentous significance. The prose becomes invisible, and you can’t help but be transported by the atmospherics. I believe Furst’s tales to be quite realistic and not over dramatic or romantic about his favorite theme of citizens from various walks of life moved to become secret soldiers and volunteer spies. People hooked on espionage thrillers will likely be disappointed with the limited scope of the action of Furst’s lead characters. But their plausible heroism still moves me. Unlike le Carré’s plots, Furst’s protagonist characters are not in moral torment or struggling with cynical despair, but merely human in their weaknesses, doubts, and vices. You root for them with sadness over their doomed task to stop the forces of darkness and cling to the currents of nostalgia over the lives and culture destined to be swept away in the coming maelstrom.

To help prospective readers with their choice I share a couple of quotes that speak to the sense of life in the character of Ferrar and some of his bold creativity in his approach to his efforts. His attempts to garner useful help from the cagey representatives of the Spanish embassy in Paris stimulates this reaction:

He had seemed genial and forthcoming, but he was a diplomat and it was his job to seem so. What was the old joke? ... "When a lady says 'no' he means 'maybe.' When a lady says 'maybe' she means 'yes.' But if a

lady says 'yes,' she's no lady. When a diplomat says 'yes' he means 'maybe.' When a diplomat says 'maybe' he means 'no.' But if a diplomat says 'no' he's no diplomat."

To get across the border into Germany, Ferrar and his partner in deception unfolds the following ruse with the security guard:

"What then will you do in Germany?"

"We are here to take photographs for a special issue, to be called 'Nudism in the Reich.' It is quite popular in Germany we are told." It was. In an effort to stimulate the national libido, and thus breed more Germans, public nudity had been officially endorsed. Hitler himself, known to be a great prude in all things, had attended a nude ballet in Munich. ...

"Herr Major?" ... "Would you care to have a look? I've brought along some recent issues." ... "Would you care to keep those, Herr Major? I have more with me."

This book was loaned as an e-book by the publisher through the Netgalley program.

Manray9 says

With *Midnight in Europe* Alan Furst is now a good novelist simply going through the motions. His characters are stereotypes and the plots, always his weakness, are more lifeless than usual. He has lost his edge. Frustratingly, Furst insists on patronizing his readers with ham-handed history lessons.

I came across two lines which, if they had been openings, would be contenders for the annual Bulwer-Lytton Contest:

He believed, deep down where his desire lived, that redheads had thinner skin, so that a single stroke went a *long* way.

The poetry of lust describes many inspirations: the moon, a stray wisp of hair; but only now and then cites *haven't done it for a long time*.

The italics are Furst's.

Whew!

Abby says

Either Alan Furst has lost a step or I've read too many of his books and they're starting to seem interchangeable. Smoky, Champagne-soaked cosmopolitan Europe, just before the cataclysm of WWII, is as well drawn as ever and sucks me in every time. But the assorted cast of aristocrats, gangsters, whores, bureaucrats, spies, and always at least one brave working stiff with his political heart in the right place, is getting old. As is our stalwart hero, an amateur called, often reluctantly, to the cause of fighting fascism. Usually middle-aged, unmarried, a lover of good wine, fine food and beautiful women, he is this time a

Spanish lawyer working in Paris who agrees to buy arms and ammunition to support the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. As always, there is intrigue, a few tense moments, a hair-breadth escape, and a soupçon of sex.

Even the titles are getting confusing: Was it "Mission to Europe" and "Midnight in Paris"? (Oh, wait, that was Woody Allen.) And before that were "Spies of the Balkans" and "Spies of Warsaw."

I initially glommed onto Alan Furst's books because I saw him as a worthy successor to Eric Ambler and I thoroughly enjoyed the earlier works in the "Night Soldiers" series. But, sad to say, the books have become formulaic in recent years. Maybe that's what a series audience wants -- the predictable and familiar. Maybe that's why I seldom read series. But I'm hoping Furst digs deeper next time and taps into a more original and creative vein. If not, I'm afraid this will be a fond finis. Dommage.

Helen says

Damn! I finished it in one day! Now I have to wait two years for his next one! *sigh* Maybe I'll go reread *Night Soldiers* or *Dark Star*. That might make me feel better.

I've always wondered what the Spanish Civil War was really about. No one could tell me. I knew it was a testing ground for Hitler's new weapons, but that's about it. (So, yeah, maybe I'm a dope, but I wasn't really clear on what World War 1 was about either, until my daughter wrote an 11th grade paper about it.)

As he always does, Alan Furst teases apart the tangled threads of the war, explaining and displaying the different sides, then showing you the terrible human cost. Over the course of this brief, intelligent, sexy, and elegantly written novel, it became blindingly clear how this conflict grew into the horrors of World War 2, an extension of the grotesque battle between communism and fascism.

Was this Furst at his best? Well...for that you must read the aforementioned *Night Soldiers*, or *Dark Star*, and I would also recommend *The Polish Officer*. But I confess; I will follow Alan Furst with his supple prose and his very human spies anywhere, into any conflict, any book. I wonder what the next one will be about.
