



Burned

Valerie Plame , Sarah Lovett

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Covert CIA ops officer Vanessa Pierson has dedicated her career to capturing one man: Bhoot, the world's most notorious nuclear arms dealer. That mission has been impeded by the murders of her assets, who were betrayed by a mole within her own agency. When she narrowly escapes death during a devastating explosion at the Louvre, Vanessa immediately suspects that Bhoot was the architect of the brazen terrorist attack. But when a previously unknown militant group claims responsibility for the bombing and promises even greater carnage, she is forced to rethink her initial assumptions—especially when Bhoot himself contacts her to deny responsibility and confirm her suspicions that a miniaturized nuclear device may have fallen into hands more dangerous than his own. Of course, Vanessa knows Bhoot can't be trusted. But she begins to fear that a new and even greater threat to the world's fragile balance of power may have emerged.

As Vanessa's investigation leads her ever closer to the identity of the mole and the real terrorists' plans, she finds herself drawn against all her better instincts into a perilous alliance with one of the world's most dangerous criminals—a man who has become her darkest obsession . . . and perhaps her savior.

Moving swiftly from Paris, to Amsterdam, to Venice, to Istanbul, *Burned* is a nerve-shattering, intricately woven thriller about the mission to capture a brilliant and elusive mastermind—and an exhilarating new chapter in the Vanessa Pierson saga.

Burned Details

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From Reader Review Burned for online ebook

Angie says

I got a free copy of this ebook from Penguin's First to Read program.

As a genre book, this was a fun read. When I rate a mystery book, there are two main points I look at: the plot and the characters. The plot in this one was pretty good; the down side was that there was really only one suspect for the bad guy, and he turned out to be the bad guy, so there was no major twist anywhere that really left me (or the characters) guessing. But I really liked the characters. There were several of them. An international collaboration (American, French), team effort, with all the challenges that come with team efforts and personality clashes, made it feel more realistic. Inevitably, at times it was a little more confusing than most books like this. Because there were a reasonable number of people on the team, some of them didn't get fleshed out. But I liked and trusted (believed) the characters. It felt like a solid description of how something like this could be handled.

I never know with these books by famous folks who aren't famous for writing how it will go. It could have been a disaster. But Plame added some realism, I think, and her co-author must have contributed enough to really make it work as a book. Another downside for some may be that it didn't have a happy ending where everything got wrapped up nicely. But I actually appreciated that as another aspect of realism.

Jim says

Vanessa Pierson is a CIA field agent whose primary target has been a terrorist with the code name Bhoot, which is Hindi for ghost. He has proved to be very elusive and though Vanessa has helped capture and in one case kill members of his organization, she has never gotten close to catching Bhoot. When a suicide bomber attacks at a site in Paris where she was supposed to meet with an informant, Vanessa immediately links the attack to Bhoot, but later events make her question her initial reaction. As part of team 'Viper', a cooperative task force of French and Americans, Vanessa begins to assemble the evidence and it looks more and more like there is a nuclear weapon in the wrong hands. She and the rest of the agents of 'Viper' must figure out who has it and how to stop them.

Plame and Lovett draw upon the former's experience as a CIA agent to build a novel that is filled with tension and a real page-turner. The story is more of a mental chess game than a series of physical confrontations and the action takes place in old world cities steeped in history and intrigue. This makes for a winning combination. If you are a fan of the spy novel, I think you will find BURNED to be an exciting and worthwhile read.

Deborah Gray says

I really liked this book and the combination of authors - former CIA spy Valerie Plame and Sarah Lovett's psychological thriller writer - gave it additional depth and interest. However, it was published in 2014 with a whopper of a cliffhanger and there has been nothing since. I don't think readers should be left hanging like this for so long.

Elizabeth McIlhaney says

Riveting sequel to "Blowback," set primarily in Paris, with lots of French phrases and words, nestled within details of French culture, providing a wonderful armchair visit to both Paris and Istanbul. Like "Blowback," I had a hard time putting this book down, read the almost 400 pages in about 24 hours. It ends with a frustrating cliff-hanger, made all the more so in that the third novel in the series does not seem to be on the publishing horizon. With such a mysterious and shocking ending, the next in the series should have been in the works by the time this book was published in 2014. So where is it? We MUST know what happens to the main character?

We must!

Daryl says

Won this from Goodreads First Reads program. I was familiar with Plame's backstory -- a CIA agent outed by members of the Bush administration -- and I knew she had become a novelist, so thought I'd give her a shot. I violated one of my own rules/guidelines, however, in reading the second book of a series without having read the first one. A good lesson learned, too, as there are many references to the past of the characters (especially Vanessa Pierson, the main character), which are much more than filling the reader in on a character's story. Without having read the first novel, I felt a bit like being left out of an inside joke (or story). The book itself: I haven't read many (if any) "spy novels" before, and this one didn't really do much for me. Plame obviously knows the spy game, but the story doesn't enthrall. There's a lot of jargon and acronyms used throughout (partway through the book, I discovered an "espionage terminology" list -- of only seven terms -- but it didn't help much. And why was this placed at the back of the book, where most readers wouldn't see it until they'd read the book?). Even adding a co-writer (Sarah Lovett, who also co-wrote the first novel in the series) doesn't help. A lot of the prose is clunky, and some of the dialogue is cringe-inducing. The book opens strongly with an explosion targeting (maybe) Vanessa, but my midway through the book, the whole focus of the "operation" seemed to have shifted from one antagonist to another. I did appreciate the fact that the bad guys here were Christian fundamentalist terrorists rather than Muslims. The ending of the book takes a wide left turn that I found very strange, though it's probably meant to draw the reader to the next book in the series. I don't think I'll be joining them there.

Sharon says

I have read all three books by Valerie, Fair Game: How a Top CIA Agent Was Betrayed by Her Own Government, Blowback and just finished Burned. I find her career and books intriguing. I like the female heroine, who is smart, strong, and yet vulnerable. James Bond never writes up a report, but Vanessa Pierson does, and so you get the sense that she's sharing the life of a real CIA operative. I'm looking forward to more books by Valerie Plame.

Beck says

I received this book as part of a GoodReads Giveaway.

When I won this book I was really excited, but I hadn't read the first book in the series (*Blowback*), so I went out and got it. I was surprised at how much I enjoyed that book; it was fast-paced and while the writing wasn't anything award-worthy, it wasn't bad either. It follows undercover CIA operative Vanessa Pierson, a very good agent who always manages to be in trouble at work and whose assets keep getting murdered. It reads like an episode of *Alias* and ends on a bit of a cliff-hanger, so I was even that more excited to receive *Burned*.

Burned starts off after the action of *Blowback* (I'd recommend reading that one first), with Vanessa still on arms dealer Bhoot's trail. I don't want to give away too much of the plot, but I will say that this book feels bigger in scope than the first, with more at stake for Vanessa and company. A new terrorist group, True Jihad, threatens millions, echoing, of course, real-life events. In fact what I like best about these Plame novels is the realistic feeling she lends them. You get to see inter and intra-agency tension and politics; Vanessa is always pissing off someone above her. The motivations also seem more based in reality - there's no "bad guy" who's bad just because he's evil or crazy. Everyone has an agenda, and it's Vanessa's job to discover what that agenda is.

(view spoiler)

If you like spy novels I'd definitely recommend picking the Vanessa Pierson series up. They're not on the level of say, Eric Ambler, and there's not a huge amount of character development, but these books are quick, fun reads. I will definitely be getting the next book in this series -- I'm hooked!

Kim says

Super weird ending.

ILyk Tourid says

3.5 stars

The novel starts strong –a bomb explodes and there's an execution of the informer Farrid. The conflict is maintained throughout the chapters and as Vanessa moves from Germany to Venice to Turkey, the novel has an international feel. The focus of the book is to gain control of a miniature nuclear weapon, a prototype, but then politics and conflicts between other departments intervene. Somehow, the plot line didn't pull me and by chapter 45, I lost interest.

I had to ignore most of the abbreviations. They might add some accuracy and authenticity. Only a few would have been ok. I got pretty lost among all the PRD, CPD, TDY, EOD suits, RRD, BIGOT, CART, DDRI, DDO. The only ones that I could still remember are FBI and CIA. As they slow the reading, I manage to skip them.

I like the way Vanessa's emotions are portrayed. She's shaken by the events, and yet has the strength to go on. Unfortunately, with all her smoking (an addiction, I suppose the author puts in as a flaw), no wonder she could not keep up with chase and runs. A fit CIA with a cigarette doesn't compute in my mind (I know, I know CIA officers smoke all the time). We even have the psychologist and Vanessa bond over the smoking. If it were Chris smoking, that would have been preferable, because he's not a field officer, more of an analyst.

By chapter 33, I realise it was the prose that really got me. Too many –‘Vanessa wondered’, ‘She felt’ etc., In 2 paragraphs –she found, she stared, she tightened, she found, she wandered.... Extraneous details that do not pertain to the plot (hey, I really thought Fournier’s watch Vacheron was an important clue!) By the time, I read all the details, I’ve lost track of the plotline -all the names, sellers, Russians etc., Then there’s the shift from True Jihad to the Christians and I was really lost.

I forged on, but alas by ch45, I had no clue who the ‘she’ Jeffreys was referring to. There are suspense chapters from a ‘he’ point-of-view and I had no clue who. At the beginning, not knowing lifted the suspense but by the end, I was too frustrated to read. It felt like navigating a maze. The book should have been focused with the search for the prototype but it wasn’t at all. There’s a fine line how to dole out information little by little, so too much information was withheld. Pacing is a bit of a problem in the read.

The dialogue was ok, the characters –Khoury, Chris, bland. The feral Aisha nearly kills the informant. The conflict and Vanessa’s lovelife, ok. Somehow, it seems we are reading how the plot unravels and Vanessa is not driving the plot (even as Bhoot contacts her and sends her on the right track to look for the prototype). Nothing stood out. I couldn’t find the heroine likeable and the novel could have been 100 pages shorter.

This review is for the ARC version. I won the book on Goodreads Giveaway. Thank you to the publisher for providing me a copy in exchange for a honest review.

D says

Interesting thriller about a strong female CIA agent named Vanessa Pierson. However, the ending was quite disappointing:(It was obviously set up for a sequel but no follow-up book has been released in two years. I have become rather disgusted with so-called series books. Authors need to provide a satisfying ending even if they plan to write a sequel!

Grady Hunter says

My best read since The Penkovsky Papers

Anyone who has known this serpentine world will relish the hard charging unending action. The whole world is within reach. More please.

Tom Donaghey says

BURNED by Valerie Plame and Sarah Lovett is the second book in the Vanessa Pierson CIA series. It is also the first that I have read and I have the feeling you would be better off reading BLOWBACK prior to picking this one up.

That being said, I did enjoy this book a great deal. Like most of this type of espionage thriller, the authors have spent a good deal of time authenticating their hero using acronyms and clandestine operations lingo so as to add reality to the entire affair. And that is okay also.

The book opens with a self-detonating bomber at the Louvre and we end in the Grand Bazaar within Constantinople. There is a mini-nuclear device that has been stolen from Bhoot (see the previous book) that

everyone is in a mad scramble to recover and thereby causing some strange bedfellows. There is also a mole within the CIA, an uneasy alliance between the French and the Americans, a possible love affair/triangle in the works, and terrorists who are Christian Fundamentalists rather than Arab Jihadists for a change. There are conflicting agendas, double dealing and our hero discovers you can't always tell whose side another person is truly on or what their real motivations are. While this is not among the elite of espionage thrillers, it is a pretty good read, certain to keep you up later at night than you had wanted. I won this book through Goodreads.

Abby says

Maybe I disliked this book because I'm not an experienced reader of spy novels, but I chose it because I thought it might reflect the reality of a career as a spy better than other thrillers. For whatever reason, probably because it wouldn't have been as fun to read, I don't feel like it did.

The protagonist is a female spy who struggles with a mole in her midst and her romance interfering with her work. That stuff was pretty usual, but the twist or whatever was unusual and also super trite.

The terrorists in this story aren't Muslim, they're actually Christian, and backed by a thinly veiled version of the religious right organization The Family. But of course, they have to be brown, so they're Coptic Christians, from the Middle East. The motivation appears to be a combo of the persecution that Coptic Christians actually do face, and a western obsession with the end of the world. Anyway, the big reveal that Christians want to nuke the world or whatever was both so foreshadowed as to be anticlimactic and so ill-conceived that it reminded me of stoner talk. "Whoa like what if like... Terrorists were CHRISTIANS, man"

I might have suspended my disbelief if I liked the main character but despite being written by women, she was a pretty bog standard Strong Female Character. Despite being a capable spy who knows what she's doing, she often needs saving by her boyfriend. The villain is finally defeated, I kid you not, by getting hit by a truck. Also, she has a secret panic disorder that trained CIA psychologists are totally unaware of. As someone who gets anxiety attacks, that rang particularly false to me. It's not really hard to tell you have one if it is at all affecting your work.

Disappointing to see an actual female spy writing such a boring and trite version of a female spy. Sure, everyone has their weaknesses, and if she was TOO good at her job and always getting the man all on her own, it'd be unbelievable and frustrating. But her very obvious damsel tendencies along with her by-the-book romantic entanglements made her a character I just couldn't see as 3-dimensional.

Joe O'Connor says

Good; Continuing character: Vanessa Pierson; after witnessing a bombing in France, the CIA agent teams up with others to try and stop a nuclear bomb; too many loose ends, characters not of much interest and not very well fleshed out

Kim Latham says

Valerie Plume and Sarah Lovett did it again with the second book in the Vanessa Pierson Sieries!! I can't wait to see what they have in store for us next. They left the heroine as likeable as the first book. This book kept me up all night reading. The thriller brings you to the edge of the seat but does not leave you completely dropping off the edge. I can not wait to see what these two brilliant authors bring us in the future, but I am sure that they will go very far!
