



Trapeze

Simon Mawer

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Trapeze Simon Mawer **It's Not for the War.**

Marian Sutro would be just another young English woman wondering whom she'll marry and how to find a way to be useful. But World War II has turned everyone's life inside out. Marian happens to be bilingual (her father is English, her mother French) and is recruited by the "Inter-Services Research Bureau" and enrolled in a rigorous, take-no-prisoners espionage training course to aid the French resistance. Or at least that's what Marian thinks at first.

But as she learns more about the risky operation her superiors have in mind for her in occupied Paris, she begins to suspect that it may be a more personal connection that singled her out for assignment. A name from her past, Clement Pelletier, suddenly reappears, forcing Marian to call into question her first love, her dangerous mission, and how far she's willing to go for the cause.

Trapeze Details

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From Reader Review Trapeze for online ebook

Amy says

Some novels should come with an advisory: "Readers will not get anything done until they have completed this book." Trapeze by Simon Mawer is desperately in need of that label. Readers are immediately drawn into this novel by its main character, Marian Sutro, a young woman wondering what her place is in the fighting of World War II. Marian is the daughter of an English father and a French mother, and is bilingual, making her the perfect addition to the French Section of the Special Operations Executive, or the SOE. The SOE was an actual Operation that sent thirty-nine women into the field between May 1941 and September 1944. Mawer has taken this fact and created an unforgettable heroine and a war story filled with spies and intrigue. Marian is put through rigorous training and is to be dropped into France when she is questioned by two gentlemen who seem to be privy to personal details of her past. Her girlhood crush and a longtime friend of the family, Clement Pelletier is still in Paris, where he is still working as a physicist. As the war escalates it becomes evident that science will somehow play a role in ending the war, and Pelletier is wanted in England by the Allies. Marian's initial mission of being dropped into Southern France to assist the Resistance now takes on a more dangerous and emotional element. Trapeze is finely crafted and well researched, fast paced and full of unexpected plot twists, and will surely have readers on the edge of their seat until the final page.

Nicki says

I hoped for more from this novel. The protagonist, Marian/Anne-Marie/Alice is a difficult character to warm to and the novel relies heavily on her being an interesting and accessible character because she's our way in. I found Marian spiky, aloof and quite irritating, especially as an agent in training. Apart from anything else, she blabs about her exciting new venture immediately after being explicitly told not to tell anyone.

The novel doesn't really take off until Marian, now known as Alice, arrives in France, but even then I found all the stuff with Clement quite tiresome, both the science and the romance. The best bits were when Alice found herself in trouble, but that was only maybe 10% of the book.

Stories about SOE agents in France are normally a honeytrap for me, but this one didn't really hit the spot. If you want to read a really good novel about a female SOE agent, read Code Name Verity. You won't be disappointed.

Kelsey says

I hovered between three and four stars all night. Tossing and turning in bed after I'd finished the last page. I suppose this is not a book to finish just before bedtime, as it did not sit well. First off, it's a total cliffhanger which if doing a trilogy or a series I enjoy. It usually makes me excited to read the next, but this was more flat than exciting. I was more disappointed.

Marian Sutro, a young woman chosen by the SOE (Special Operations Executive) to be trained and sent to France as a spy is an interesting woman. She is not flat by all means. In fact she is rather interesting, and very intricate. She has layers that are not uncovered fully throughout the book but I believe this builds a wonderful character, and allows you to grow with them as they grow.

All of the relationships in the book minus the one with Clement were 5-star. Her interactions with Benoit, Yvette and Ned kept the book alive for me. I wanted to know more. Who is Yvette? What are her real qualities? Can Marian love Benoit? Can Benoit love Marian? It was all a bit of a roller coaster, but Marian seemed to mesh well with these characters. It seemed to carry the story in an interesting way, rather than falling short and making me feel full of nothing the way the interactions with Clement were. Clement was my real disappointment.

Why did Marian not feel more when revealed that he was married with a child? Why did this not break her down the way it should have? Why did Clement not say more... about Marian, rather than acting like a child about her being sent away to school... it seemed sloppy. As if the author had a grand plan in place for Marian and Clement, but had run away with the wonderful idea of Marian and Benoit. I wanted more angst, but was left feeling bitterly cold. Marian was never depicted as bitterly cold. A bit stoic at times, but when description of Clement came to mind she was bubbly, happy, almost giddy. The marriage of Clement should have been devastating. The advances Clement made should have been more effective, instead of Marian claiming she was no longer a child a hundred times. This is the point of the book I started to get disappointed, and began over-analyzing all the other pieces.

The training part of the story was good, but could have been more exciting. I think Simon Mawer is an excellent writer with a gift of description, though does not use it in times that are important. I do not care to know all the details of a Paris street that has no meaning. I want to know more about espionage training, how they could turn such a head-strong, stubborn woman such as Marian into a rather tough, and scary woman with an excellent gift of concealment.

In addition, once placed in France, it felt as though Marian didn't do very much. The description of her first parachutage was good, interesting and exciting but is that all she did once placed? Surely, the SOE wasn't sending women and men over to do nothing all day? This is a fundamental flaw of the book, that although could mean nothing should the rest of the book hold-up, did not sit well with me in the end. We spent more time learning how to travel and not look scared than knowing what it was that Marian actually did.

Lastly, I was in absolute shock at the end. I supposed it was nice to be thrilled by Marian's actions, but there was no hint, no glimmer of her pretending to go with Clement and then jumping the plane at the last second. There was no inclination that Marian had felt the need to do that. It was shocking, and unsettling to say the least. I was not at all impressed, and then the last few pages where a whirlwind of confusion. Simon Mawer lost his excellent skill of description, and fell short with coded meanings and difficult plot advancement.

Overall - I think this was a good book. Well written characters, and interesting plot but I am not sure if I could read a sequel. I might just to see if Simon had redeemed himself, as a lot of series novels are not good in the beginning but good enough to interest you and this is definitely an interesting read. I enjoyed the characters more than anything else in the book and would enjoy to find Simon has developed them more. Not sure I would recommend this to others, which is why I have given it a 3 star in the end but I supposed this could change with the continuation of the series.

For now, I will leave you with my long thought-out review of Trapeze.

Flo says

I bought this book because every previous book I read by Simon Mawer was excellent. Sad to say, this book comes nowhere near his previous standard. The plot is plain silly, the heroine ditto and so is the writing. If you read *Sweet Tooth* by Ian McEwan you will understand how an intelligent Britain-based wartime spy story should be written. This one is about a young half-British/French girl who is transferred from her position as an ordinary WAC (the British equivalent is apparently called a FANY) because of her knowledge of French and her acquaintance as a young girl with a youth who has become a famed French physicist and on whom she had an enormous crush. She's dropped into France undercover in order to persuade this physicist to come to England and join the war effort to build an atomic bomb and as well as to replace 2 crystals required by a colleague transmitting out of Paris, the crystals lodged safely in her vagina. She meets him in Paris and says probably 5 times: "I'm not a child any more." Is this an invitation? He's now married with a child. She breaks cover on every other page and although at the end (SPOILER ALERT) compromised she insists on staying on in France to do what...I can think of nothing else except falling into the hands of the Gestapo and revealing all the names of the people she has been in contact with. This cannot be the same writer as the writer of *The Glass House*. I do not recommend this book to anyone.

Tim says

The Girl who fell from the Sky is about a young half-English, half-French woman who joins the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in 1943 and, after extensive training, is parachuted into occupied France. Marian Sutro is beautiful, sassy, romantic and insubordinate to superior officers – so more like the 21st-century heroine of an action film than a convincing portrait of a woman of her times. This though enables the author to crank up the tension in a way that wouldn't be possible perhaps with a more realistic, cautious, self-effacing and less attractive heroine. Otherwise the research was impressive and gave a good idea of what these brave women went through. That said, the first hundred pages dealing with Marian's training rather dragged because of his insistence to cram in all this research without really ever successfully dramatizing it. The novel greatly improved when Marian arrives in France and her deadly hide-and-seek game with the Gestapo begins. An entertaining read which gathers tension and pace half way through. Having said that I suspect those great old British films *Carve Her Name with Pride* and *Odette* were far more realistic and so moving in depicting what these brave women went through.

Trish says

This novel was left open-ended in the manner of an ongoing thriller series. The next book, *Tightrope*, is due out in November 2015 published by Other Press. Mawer chooses a nineteen-year-old British espionage agent as his central character, based on the background of a real group of women, half-French, who are recruited and trained to infiltrate France during the Second World War on behalf of British Intelligence.

Mawer sticks to the personal in this novel, and does not venture out into the war at large: fighting, tactics, or even soldiers. We are invited to imagine the possibility of several countries' scientists all striving to be the first to realize a nuclear option. The Americans were working on their own bomb, and the Germans were doing what they could. Occupied France had some scientists with knowledge, if not capability, and the British science regime was looking to bring in those Frenchmen to aid their efforts while keeping those secrets from the Germans.

We get a detailed look at the women's recruitment, training in Scotland, and deployment in France. They were so young: perhaps that made them braver. Some were better at the spycraft than others and they quickly learned to pick those they admired when possible on assignments. Others of their team they learned to be wary of, but when wariness wasn't enough, they had to treat their teammates like the explosive charges they were, at any moment threatening to blow their cover.

The Second World War is a convenient catalyst to writers and filmmakers because it throws human desire and capability into extremis. Mawer attempts to show the ordinary daily life of a spy: lots of waiting punctuated by shattering terror. Mawer's research on the work of preparation and infiltration was capable enough, but I wasn't completely convinced by his female lead. I understand the excitement generated by imagining real young women being dropped by parachute into France in the dead of night, but somehow that excitement did not communicate itself to me, perhaps because the ground is thoroughly churned and picked over for nuggets. Although Mawer did a marvelous job with his female-centered World War II novel *The Glass Room*, this novel left me wondering why he chose to use a female central character.

Marian's name changes throughout the novel, to Anne-Marie, to Alice, to Laurence. Her skills and motivations change also, becoming more practiced, seasoned, and hardened with each iteration of her identity. But because the novel is so intensely personal, we might expect to share more of her secret internal thoughts--about her lovers, about her colleagues--rather than just the face she shows to the world. Mawer *does* this to some extent, but I just wasn't convinced. I couldn't have done that job, which is why I may have needed more clarity. Perhaps there are people out there who do not have agonized internal conversations about who their duplicitous lives as spies are helping.

Maybe it was just like Mawer says: a young woman accepts a commission to risk her life undercover overseas without even knowing which division of British Intelligence she worked for. Maybe that's why they needed them young. However interesting it is to imagine such a wildly impetuous jump into the deep end--meeting a former boyfriend and nuclear scientist in Paris, and trying to get him to fly to Britain without much convincing dialogue--I find it infinitely more gratifying to read about, work with, and follow someone with a little more maturity and doubt.

But I have read so much about the Second World War that it takes some really spectacular writing and imagining to bring me anything new. I was the one who thought *All the Light We Cannot See* was a Young Adult title. So don't listen to me. If espionage is your thing, this may be just the ticket. But read it now, so you can move on to *Tightrope* when it comes out in November.

Cynthia says

In war there's a fine line between being alive and being fully human.

I enjoyed this book immensely. "Trapeze" centers around a young English woman, Marian Sutro, who's recruited to be a spy embedded in France. Marian is the daughter of an English diplomat and a French woman. She grows up in Switzerland where her father is stationed. She's the adored younger sister of a brilliant scientist brother. She's also adored by and adoring of her brother's fellow scientist Clement. Mawer quickly catches the romance of the times as well as the danger and horror. Marian goes on a crash course as one of only two women who are learning skills that will keep them alive in France and that will enable them to help the French continue their resistance. She learns that a momentary loss of awareness could cost her her life as well as the lives of the people she's trying to help. She lives in fear. Mawer is skilled at setting impactful scenes with few words. Marian's thoughts and predicament seem very real and Mawer's attention

to details is exquisite. You'll feel like you're walking the dangerous war time Paris streets right next to Marian.

Interestingly Mawer briefly ties in Leo Marks' work as presented in Marks' fascinating nonfiction work "Between Silk and Cyanide: a Code Makers War"* . Marks' book is understandable to the layman and tremendously humorous while still being, literally, deadly serious.

<http://www.amazon.com/Between-Silk-Cy...>

Julie Christine says

If you were to read a simplistic blurb of Simon Mawer's *Trapeze* - at the height of World War II, a young English-French woman trains as a spy and is dropped into Occupied France to aid the French Resistance - you might think you hold an espionage-adventure in your hands. Which, in fact, you do! But Mawer isn't after writing a Robert Ludlum thriller. He offers us a subtle, mannered take on a well-worn theme: how war forces the most ordinary amongst us to behave in the most extraordinary ways.

With prose that is distant and spare, Mawer sets the tone of isolation experienced by his young protagonist, Marian Sutro, as she is recruited and trained by the little-known British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and dropped by parachute into Southwestern France. Marian is determined to be of use and to succeed, but her motivations aren't clear. From an upper-middle class family, she has been spared the worst of the war's deprivations and has no family members in combat. Only memories of her teenage crush, a older French man who remains in Paris, tie her to her mother's homeland. She is a restless and intelligent, but hardly strikes one as a tough, street smart spy.

And as it turns out, the SOE's motives are even more shadowy. Of course, all spies are pawns. What makes *Trapeze* so unique - with its quiet suspense and undercurrent of dread - is how deeply Marian and the reader are drawn into the conspiracy, how inexorably Marian's nature leads her to play precisely the role that has been designed for her. And like most realistic portrayals of war, there are long stretches of lethargy, of waiting, followed by bursts of adrenalin, terror and split-second decisions that a spy's highly-trained body and mind are designed to handle.

The brevity of Marian's training is the only jarring note. Marian spends six weeks on an island off the coast of Scotland and emerges a lethal weapon. She becomes skilled in radio communication, ciphers, firearms, explosives, hand-to-hand combat -- it's a disbelief-suspending transformation from a soft, naive girl into a trained assassin with the survival instincts of a fox and the killer reactions of a tiger. *Trapeze* is based on the true story, so perhaps this short training period is accurate. It's hard to imagine, really. But again, Mawer's theme runs through: do any of us really know the depth of our own character - its weakness or its power - until we are faced with desperate times?

I made a comment the other day on Twitter that I felt "character-driven" to be one of the most useless descriptors of literary fiction. To my surprise, my off-hand remark was retweeted numerous times by writers and book fans. Apparently, my words touched nerve.

Had I more than 140 characters to express myself, I would asked: if one says a novel is character-driven, what is the alternative? What well-crafted story *isn't* character driven? Story IS character, as much as it is plot- it is the behavior, action and reaction of the protagonist and ancillaries within and to their environment. A great story is one that wraps you in the characters' world, whether that world is a disintegrating marriage or an exploding planet of some distant universe. Or the shadowed streets and freezing lofts of Occupied

Paris.

What leads me to finally reject the notion of "character-driven" as reductive is Simon Mawer's restrained *Trapeze*. The author does a superb job of taking fiction's inextricably-linked elements - setting, plot, character, theme - and distilling them into the essence of a perfect story.

trish says

The premise was fascinating and true -- young women who had volunteered for low-level support roles in WWII-era Britain were secretly tapped to infiltrate Nazi-occupied France as spies.

This book could have been a great glimpse into a covert operation, but unfortunately it fell flat. The main character never developed, really, and the supporting characters were never more than paper-doll men.

It told me what happened instead of showed me, to the point where the last few paragraphs were literally a first-person "what if I had done this? what if I had done that" list of plot points.

I enjoyed the backdrop this book was set against, but the plot alone couldn't save this story.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

3.5 stars, rounding up to 4 because I like the way he ended it realistically. I also appreciated the subtle building of suspense a couple of times near the end of the story. It's not the heart-pounding suspense you get from a thriller, but a much more natural feeling of dread and uncertainty while the characters are trying to act nonchalant.

I enjoyed learning about the various training exercises women went through in Scotland and England to prepare them for life as infiltrators.

But the best thing I got from the book?---> "*Merde alors!*"

Carol says

4 Stars - 3 Stars - 4 Stars

Is it me or is it the book?

At the outset I was very interested in reading *Trapeze* as it promised a peek into a little known piece of World War II history --a fictionalized account of the 39 women, members of The French Section of the Special Operative Executive.

As someone who has tandem jumped and who also is the niece of a World War II parachutist who died doing just that during the Battle of the Bulge, I was intrigued by the thought of these women who parachuted into danger during the war.

4 Stars for the characterization of Marian, Alice, Ann-Marie, Laurence.

I love strong female characters with a mission.

4 Stars for Marian's recruitment and the working of the Inter-Service Research Bureau

4 Stars for the strong female voice, dialog, espionage, writing and the plot.

3 Stars as somewhere in the middle I started getting bored, perhaps just me, and wanted the author to get to the point.

4 Stars for the last pages when the the action picked up and climaxed in a fitting finish.

Be certain to search for and read the true accounts that inspired this book.

Mindy Tysinger says

This book has been on my list to read for a while but it came up on a couple of different challenges lately, so I figured it must be a sign I should bump it to the top of my list. Interesting story about a young woman from England who goes to France to work with the Resistance during World War II. I enjoyed the story learning about these women that sacrificed their relative comfort and safety in London to go into a vastly different environment in order to help the war efforts. I must say it was a bit tedious. My normal complaint of many male authors applies here. It was far too detail oriented in a story where in my mind it wasn't needed. I am sure there are many others that will disagree finding it fascinating. For me though, it just wasn't needed. Still a good read though.

Anastasia Fitzgerald-Beaumont says

The Girl Who Fell from the Sky – published in the US as *Trapeze* - is a thriller, a spy story, a coming of age narrative, a tale of sexual awakening, of self-discovery, of the terrors of working under an assumed name in a land occupied by a malign presence. The life that it has is all that it has, and it's yours and yours and yours! Is it mine? The honest answer is that I'm not at all sure.

It's the first novel I've read by Simon Mawer, though his much lauded *The Glass Room* is in my collection and begging my attention. The Girl in question is Marian Sutro, plucked from obscurity to become an agent of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a British wartime organisation set up, amongst other things, to aid local resistance movements in Europe against the Nazi occupiers.

Marian's appeal, like so many of the real women who worked for SOE, is that she is fluent in French. But as there are secrets within secrets and agencies within agencies, her additional appeal is that she happens to be on past familiar terms with a French nuclear scientist by the name of Clément Pelletier. Living in Paris, he is wanted by those stumbling towards the creation of an atomic bomb.

After training in all sorts of secret agent techniques, she is dropped from the sky into south-west France, there to work with the resistance. That's dangerous enough, but her ultimate task is even more perilous – she has to go to Paris, an anxious city in the grip of hunger and in the grip of fear.

The Girl Who Fell from the Sky is a good little book with a good big book struggling to get out and not quite making it. I honestly don't know why I picked it up now, other than for a spot of undemanding holiday

reading. Certainly the subject matter interests me, the stories of the remarkable women of SOE, women like Violette Szabo, Odette Sansom and Anne-Marie Walters, known simply as Colette, to whom the novel is dedicated. But chiefly what I think I was looking for was an understanding of what it was like to live under extreme conditions, an understanding of what Paris was like during the occupation. I was looking for something exceptional. There are exceptional parts which makes the unexceptional all the more striking.

Mawer's descriptive power is excellent at points. The Paris scenes are full of mounting, heart-pounding tension. I give you one passage which I found particularly striking:

An old man peers out from behind a heap of used clothes. He's as wrinkled as a walnut and wears a woollen cap on his head that makes her think of the tumbrels that rolled through the city during the Terror. This is the new terror, with new myths and new nightmares.

Indeed there are. This is not a city to stop and stare, for if one does someone else stops and stares right back; if you gaze into the abyss the abyss will gaze back into you. This is not a city for the unprepared or the unwary. The atmosphere of tension and dread is constructed with considerable skill but, alas, only a fairly small part of the book is set in the streets of Paris. Just as much time is spent on Marian's soulful and, at points, tiresome reunion with Clément. For a scientist of such importance he is a person in whom the Nazis take surprisingly little interest.

Mawer is good on the detail of espionage. I feel sure that he carried out a lot of research on techniques and training. Clearly in this sort of work detail is everything, the narrow margin between life and death. Marian goes to France as Alice, into a darker Wonderland. Amongst other things she is told not to ask for sugar for her coffee because there isn't any. Such a request would mark her out as a stranger. Surprisingly, though, she is not told to avoid smoking on her own – something she only discovers when she arrives –, because women did not get a tobacco ration.

Mawer would do well himself to pay closer attention to detail. At one point his God-like narrator says the various materials dropped by the RAF to the resistance was like "one of those cargo cults in the Pacific islands." Yes, sure, but that is not a contemporary perspective. The cults he is referring to are a post-war phenomenon. This comment marks him out as a stranger!

I don't want to give too much away in spoilers but I feel sure that the real SOE must have been much more thorough in their vetting and training. Speaking French like a native simply would not have been enough. Early on I spotted Yvette as an obvious weak link, a girl who volunteers simply because she wants to go home. Marian befriends her but it was to be a particularly dangerous friendship. One would have to be a fool not to know the reason why eyes were turned on Marian on her second visit to Paris. Her task was to get Clément and Clément alone. All other considerations should have been abandoned. Tragically for her they were not.

The Girl Who Fell from the Sky is a rattling good yarn when it isn't a boring digression into the ins and outs of Marian's emotional and sex life. There is colour but not enough. There is character but not enough. There is tension, real tension at points, but not enough. Marian's first encounter with the Germans, for example, which should have been a moment of high anxiety, is curiously flat.

I also wonder if Mawer was getting a bit tired towards the end because the scene where his heroine and Clément part is a commendable exercise in bathos and cliché! What happens afterwards is sad but for me not unexpected. She should have left when she had the chance. I would have. It was the right thing to do. She should have been ordered out, a danger to herself and everyone she worked with.

I'm sounding a bit too negative. I really don't want to give you the impression that I did not enjoy this book because I did...up to a point. It's a good read, not a great one. That's the problem: I was expecting more. *The*

Glass Room I hope will be more.

Gumble's Yard says

Marian Sutro (the Geneva born daughter of a British diplomat and a Frenchwoman) is recruited by the British Special Operations Executive to work in France in 1941. As well as her training and role as a secret agent a separate part of the Secret Service also want her to take a message to Clement Pelletier, a research physicist. Clement was friends with her older brother – Ned also a research physicist but she and Clement had a burgeoning relationship pre-war despite her being only 15 and he 10 years older. Ned reveals to her that both he and Clement are working on an atomic bomb and the allies need him to join the UK efforts.

Mixed book: a reasonably easy but also engrossing read without being thrilling/consuming; not without literary merit in the dialogue, the sense of time and place; complex relationships (her renewed relationship with Clement has lots of nuances - her older which makes their relationship easier but unsettles him, him married but unhappily so, in the War environment of not worrying about consequences but with the responsibility of her training and mission – and isn't easily resolved); a theme of atomic bombs whose treatment as an implicit and even explicit in the character's discussions literary allusion (e.g. the uncertainty principle, collapsing wave functions, chain reactions) is one level original for a thriller but which also seems to go over some old ground (eg Copenhagen).

Susan says

Marian Sutro is a young woman from Geneva, with an English father and a French mother. It is wartime and Marian is in London, when she is approached about whether she would undertake a secret mission in occupied France. Although she knows she should be afraid, Marian is exhilarated by the thought. We travel with her through training and see her learn how to use morse code, how to shoot a weapon and kill a man. Through it all, though, she is still a young woman, who is coming to terms with herself and her feelings. In England she meets a young Frenchman, Benoit, who is also travelling to France. However, she is also asked to try to meet up with Clement Pelletier, a French scientist and friend of her brother, Ned. There is top secret research being carried out in England and those involved want to recruit Clement for the Allies. When she was young, Marian had a crush on her brother's older friend and now she finds herself torn and conflicted emotionally, as she heads into the unknown.

France has changed when Marian parachutes into occupied territory, with a new alias and a whole new set of skills. She begins as a courier, helping the Resistance and then comes the call to go Paris. Marian heads into danger, as she has to meet a former colleague she trained with and convince Clement Pelletier to leave the country. As she leaves the country for the city, she is constantly on alert; having to contact, and trust, people with her life. Can she complete her mission without being compromised? This is a thrilling wartime story of betrayal, bravery and of a young woman who discovers she can do so much more than she believed possible.
