An autumn evening in 1937. A German engineer arrives at the Warsaw railway station. Tonight, he will be with his Polish mistress; tomorrow, at a workers’ bar in the city’s factory district, he will meet with the military attaché from the French embassy. Information will be exchanged for money. So begins The Spies of Warsaw, the brilliant new novel by Alan Furst, lauded by The New York Times as “America’s preeminent spy novelist.”

War is coming to Europe. French and German intelligence operatives are locked in a life-and-death struggle on the espionage battlefield. At the French embassy, the new military attaché, Colonel Jean-Francois Mercier, a decorated hero of the 1914 war, is drawn into a world of abduction, betrayal, and intrigue in the diplomatic salons and back alleys of Warsaw.
At the same time, the handsome aristocrat finds himself in a passionate love affair with a Parisian woman of Polish heritage, a lawyer for the League of Nations.

Colonel Mercier must work in the shadows, amid an extraordinary cast of venal and dangerous characters—Colonel Anton Vyborg of Polish military intelligence; the mysterious and sophisticated Dr. Lapp, senior German Abwehr officer in Warsaw; Malka and Viktor Rozen, at work for the Russian secret service; and Mercier’s brutal and vindictive opponent, Major August Voss of SS counterintelligence. And there are many more, some known to Mercier as spies, some never to be revealed.

The Houston Chronicle has described Furst as “the greatest living writer of espionage fiction.” The Spies of Warsaw is his finest novel to date—the history precise, the writing evocative and powerful, more a novel about spies than a spy novel, exciting, atmospheric, erotic, and impossible to put down.

“As close to heaven as popular fiction can get.”

—Los Angeles Times, about The Foreign Correspondent

“What gleams on the surface in Furst’s books is his vivid, precise evocation of mood, time, place, a letter-perfect re-creation of the quotidian details of World War II Europe that wraps around us like the rich fug of a wartime railway station.”

—Time

“A rich, deeply moving novel of suspense that is equal parts espionage thriller, European history and love story.”

—Herbert Mitgang, The New York Times, about Dark Star

“Some books you read. Others you live. They seep into your dreams and haunt your waking hours until eventually they seem the stuff of memory
and experience. Such are the novels of Alan Furst, who uses the shadowy world of espionage to illuminate history and politics with immediacy.”

–Nancy Pate, Orlando Sentinel

**Personal Review: The Spies of Warsaw: A Novel by Alan Furst**

It’s hard to pick a favorite from Alan Furst’s extraordinary body of work but this one ranks near the top of the ten spy novels collectively referred to as the Night Soldiers series. Not only does the author recreate the atmosphere and tension of pre war Europe better than any other contemporary writer of my knowledge, he seems to be the master of blending his fictional characters and story lines with the actual historical figures and news headlines of the era.

The protagonist here is spy handler, Colonel Mercier, camouflaged as French military attaché based in Warsaw, ostensibly looking out for his government's interests during the build up of what nearly everyone knows will be a European war. As with espionage in any era the facts are not always what they seem. Is it information or misinformation? Is it the truth, lies or something in between? Regrettably the French government led by the disastrous Marshal Petain failed to recognize the difference and continued France’s preparation for a nineteenth century war instead of the twentieth century mechanized warfare the Nazis were getting ready to unleash.

Colonel Jean-François Mercier, however, pursues his country's interest dutifully from cocktail parties, atmospheric hotels and overnight trains to the barbed wire frontier with Germany, a Baltic seaport, Prague and obligatory visits back to Paris. Much of the action takes place during exceptionally frigid winter weather. There are plenty of other details including what the characters ate and drank, how they dressed, the music they listened to and the books they read, all elements that attract me to that era and the genre. We are also introduced to the secretive Black Front of Hitler hating Nazis. There are also tasteful (as in other Furst books) sexual entanglements including the pursuit of a lovely French/Polish lady named Anna Szarbek.

The end is bitter sweet because everyone already knows what happens to France and Poland during World War II, but Jean-François and Anna live on together to fight another day. Wouldn't it be nice to have Alan Furst revisit these charming characters again? Furst demands patience from his readers, but it is well worth the effort.

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