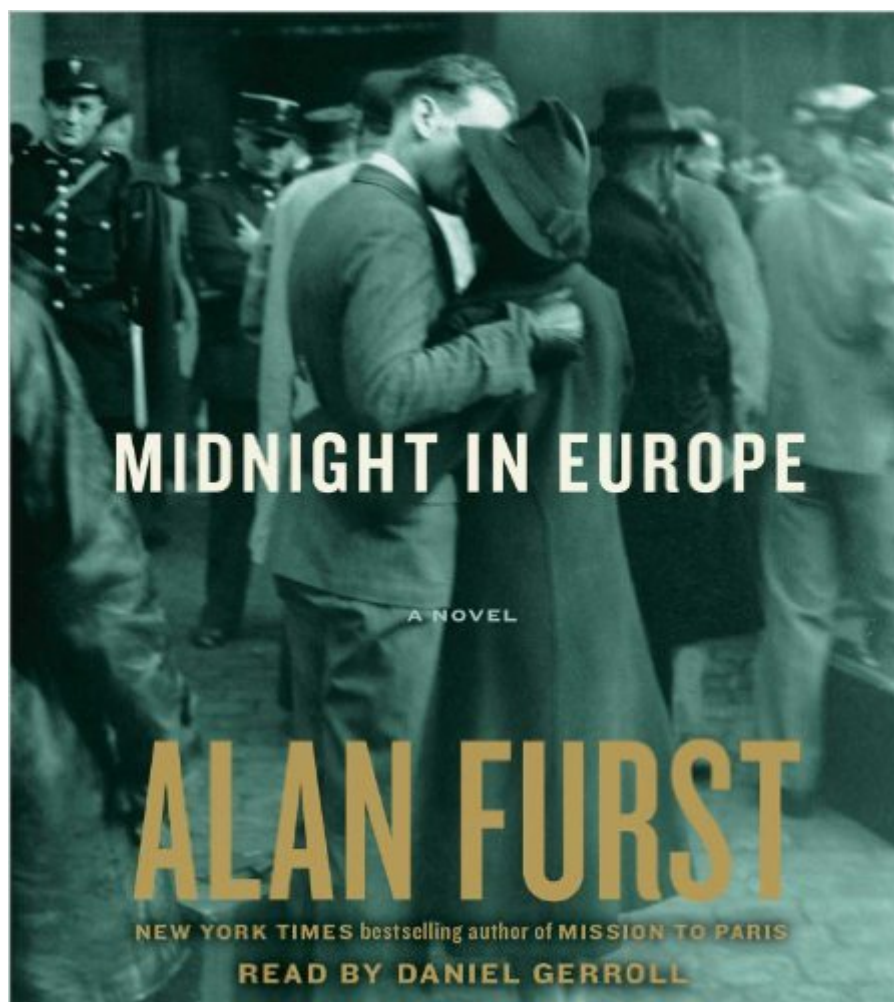


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Midnight In Europe



Synopsis

The latest novel from New York Times bestselling author and the "modern-day master of the genre" (Newsday), Alan Furst. From the New York Times bestselling author and the acclaimed "grandmaster" of espionage (Boston Globe) comes the taut, suspenseful story, set in Paris and Spain, of a man caught in the turmoil of the Spanish Civil War, and an operation that "with the help of FDR's secret operatives" will determine Europe's fate in the coming world war. New York City, autumn 1938. Gregorio D'Alba, a minor noble descended from the Spanish Bourbons, is awaiting passage on a freighter to Paris after a failed attempt to convince American oil companies to support the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. In Paris, surrounded by shifting political allegiances and prying spy services, D'Alba does whatever he can to support the Spanish Republic--smuggling, gathering intelligence, running arms. But the stakes quickly escalate when D'Alba, along with the British and the Americans, undertakes a mission to infiltrate the highest levels of the Spanish government, and to determine the alliances of his country and forever alter the course of the coming world war. With his signature gripping, heart-pounding story, Alan Furst's new novel confirms his status as "the most talented espionage novelist of our generation" (Vince Flynn).

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Customer Reviews

Having been a devoted reader of Alan Furst's often dark and exciting novels about the years leading up to and into WWII, with spies and passionate efforts to find ways to prevent the Fascist/Nazi takeover of Europe or to oppose the effort during the war, I approached this new novel with eager anticipation. While I was not deeply disappointed, I have to admit that this one seems to

offer evidence of authorial fatigue, of a somewhat casual, if not careless, approach to building the fictional world--full of familiar character types and credible events (possibilities if not historical certainties)--that I have so much enjoyed living in through the earlier novels. There is plenty of suspense; there are appealing characters, including the central figure, the brilliant lawyer and reluctant hero, Cristian Ferrar; there are the same gloomy feelings associated with the frustration of people of good will attempting to resist the efforts of moral monsters while trying to avoid becoming monsters themselves by behaving with the same disregard not only for moral and legal limits but even of basic human decency. There is talk of the necessity of sacrificing some individuals for the sake of the cause, but always that talk is tempered with recognition that the sacrifice is not justified by the ends, even if practical considerations force recognition of its inevitability. In 1937/1938, in Paris, observers of all stripes watch the apparently inevitable destruction of the Spanish Republican cause by the vicious combination of General Franco's Spanish Nationalists with supporters--the Third Reich, most obviously and the tacit or overt "support" (through inaction or behind-the-scenes collaboration) of the British and French governments.

By now, readers of Alan Furst know what to expect of his work and he follows the familiar script in this latest novel without much variation. That does not mean that this book was not enjoyable. After all, why mess with success? However, the danger remains that an author at some point becomes formulaic and avoids taking risks - and sooner or later this may happen to Furst. So we once again find ourselves in the years leading up to World War Two in Paris. Our hero follows the usual Furst rules of what makes an interesting protagonist - he's a Spanish lawyer living in exile in Paris, pushing 40, single but willing to embrace sensual adventure when it comes his way, cautious but fundamentally decent, appalled by fascism and eventually pushed from his role of bystander into that of active participant. Our hero gets involved in gunrunning to the Republicans fighting a doomed battle against Franco's fascists in his native land. This involves dangerous trips to Poland and Nazi Berlin to buy Czech anti-tank guns and smuggle them past a blockade and an audacious plot to steal ammunition from the Soviet Union. But there is never the sense that this will change history, which at this point is moving inexorably toward the great conflagration. Furst is brilliant in describing what Berlin was like in late 1937; his reconstruction of the sights and sounds of a city dominated by Hitler and his henchmen is utterly compelling and authentic. He is also great in describing how knowing, experienced adults conducted sophisticated sexual dalliances in those days. His characters seek fleeting pleasure where and when they can find it.

Alan Furst gives us another Casablanca-style yarn set in prewar Europe. This one concerns the Spanish Civil War, which he hasn't dealt with much since his first couple of books. Only a bit takes place in Spain; it's mostly about Spanish émigré Cristian Ferrar, a Paris lawyer who gets involved helping the beleaguered Republican forces procure arms through their Paris embassy. It's not easy, as hardly anyone will sell them any, requiring all sorts of chicanery, and meanwhile the Republic is low on cash. Ferrar and arms dealer Max de Lyon must make a couple of dangerous journeys east. The book continues Furst's familiar formula - heavy on ambience, light on plot. I'd say it's lighter than usual, a series of episodes without much crescendo. But the episodes themselves are plotted delightfully; this is where Furst can put his stylish characterization and scene-setting to work. Furst is really a novelist of manners. He gets tremendous mileage out of every pause, every arched eyebrow, every word left unspoken, every cigarette lit. How does an aristocratic woman hold her hand out when she wants it to be kissed? His intensive research lends his scenes great authenticity. But while he can research what was on a menu in 1938, or why a Polish gangster would really rather have a Buick, much must come from a very fine imagination. You can't research how a dockworkers' fight would have gone down, what it was like to be a Republican soldier down to his last bullets in the freezing cold of Teruel, or what an NKVD triggerman might whisper in the ear of a one of the dozen or so people he'll execute that day.

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