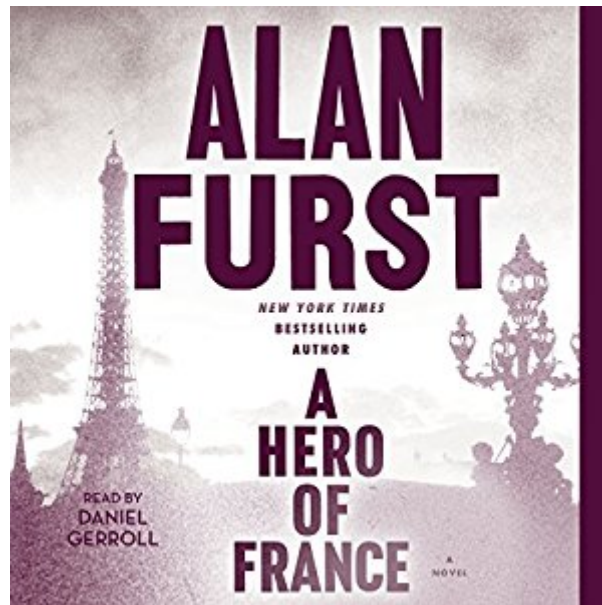


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A Hero Of France



Synopsis

The latest war novel from the New York Times best-selling author and "modern-day master of the genre" (New York Newsday) Alan Furst. Alan Furst's latest novel takes place in the secret hotels, nightclubs, and cafes of occupied Paris and the villages of France during the spring of 1941, when Britain was losing the war. Many of the characters are resistance fighters who run an escape line for British airmen down to Spain; they include men and women, old and young, all strong - an aristocrat, a Jewish teacher - and the hero is a hero, has a gun, and uses it. Some of Furst's former characters - including S. Kolb, the spy; and Max de Lyon, former arms dealer, now a nightclub owner - return. A Hero of France is sure to please existing Furst fans and attract new ones.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

book reviewers can choose one to five stars to rate a book. The five and four star reviews are considered "positive", while the one, two, and three star reviews are considered "Critical". And there's a real problem for reviewers who would like to use a three-stars as "not bad but not good". A three star review should be considered "neutral", but it isn't. There are books that I would like to use that designation but I can't, so I have to write a nuanced-enough 3-star review to state that the book is "okay". I'm rating Alan Furst's new book, "A Hero of France" as three stars, and will try to explain why. "A Hero of France" is set in France, mostly in Paris, but also in other cities and the countryside. The time is spring and summer 1941, after the German victory over the French and the occupation of most of the country. This time is before the German invasion of the Soviet Union and

the Germans have the upper hand in western European countries. The United States hasn't entered the war; that'll happen in December 1941 and things are still pretty bleak for occupied France. There are resistance units operating in France, and it's these brave men and women who carry on the silent war against the Germans. They smuggle out downed Allied fliers to safety and are beginning to sabotage German holdings. Alan Furst's characters in the resistance are given back stories that complement the work they're doing, and a lot of work is certainly being done, but the book never quite gels. The characters are "there" and they're doing things, and they're traveling all over France, and they're hiding from the German occupiers and the French police, but there's just very little substance to the book.

A Hero of France is not as meaty as Alan Furst's best works, but at least he didn't pad the story as do so many best-selling authors. The hero to whom the title refers is Mathieu. He is in the French resistance, working to return British flyers to England after they parachute from crashing bombers. The first two-thirds of the novel introduces a few British aviators who are spirited out of France with Mathieu's help. I formed no attachment to any of those characters because they didn't stay around long enough to warm my heart. Other people who assist Mathieu's operation of the escape line make occasional appearances, but none of them are given great substance. A British official tries to pressure Mathieu to expand his efforts by engaging in espionage, but the Brit plays such a limited role that it is difficult to view him as villainous or to care about him one way or another. That leaves Mathieu, the novel's constant, but we know more about what Mathieu does than who he is. Mathieu's motivation is obvious -- he doesn't like Germans, at least not after they've taken control of his country, and he doesn't like collaborators, including the French government -- but all of that is fairly superficial. It isn't the sort of character development that readers have come to expect from Alan Furst. The early stages of the novel foreshadow trouble for Mathieu and his small band of conspirators. A member of the German military police named Breum spends the last third of the novel trying to catch everyone associated with escape-lines. Breum, who wants to save himself from the consequences of an unfavorable performance review, is probably the most carefully developed character in the novel.

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