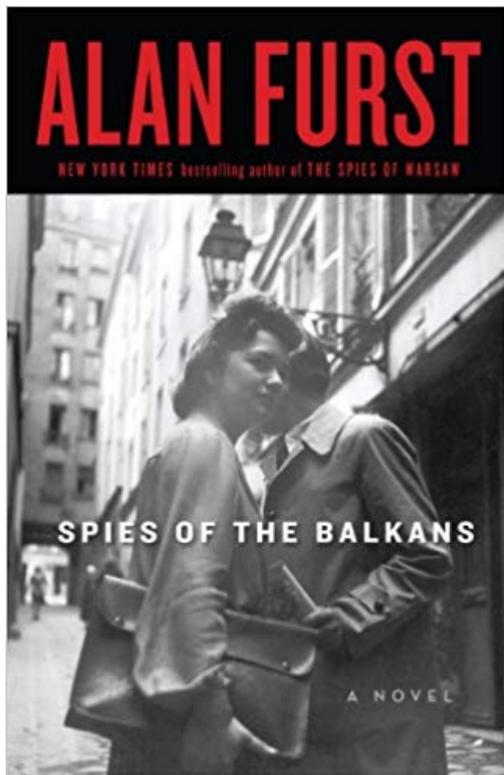


## Spies of the Balkans



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## Reviews of the Spies of the Balkans

Mushicage

Constantine "Costa" Zannis is a police detective in Salonika, Greece. It's autumn of 1940 and Zannis keeps one eye turned north as Hitler's war machine invades other European countries, knowing the Balkans will someday face the same fate. Today, the city is known as Thessaloniki and is Greece's second major economic, industrial, commercial and political center, and a major transportation hub for the rest of southeastern Europe.

Zannis' lover, a British woman named Roxanne, introduces him to an Englishman who is also a spy. Zannis soon has 'skin in the game' and sets up a railway route that will help persecuted Jews in Berlin avoid deportation to a death camp. An excellent map at the book's beginning shows the Balkan escape route from Berlin through Prague, Vienna, Belgrade, Nis, and finally Salonika. We read of a prominent Jewish couple, the Gruens, and how they manage to leave Berlin one step ahead of the Gestapo, thanks to Zannis' covert actions.

Love affairs in times of war seem to come and go in Furst's historical novels. As Hitler's Wehrmacht divisions drive closer to Greece, Zannis begins another one with Demetria, wife of a Greek shipping magnate. Danger lurks around every corner and, because Zannis' spy activities require much travel and Demetria must deal with her husband in Athens, the two lovers never know when their day together will be their last.

It's an interesting read, sometimes exciting, and it captures the tragedy of refugees during WWII in a part of Europe that is not often the setting of a novel.

## Whitegrove

This book is part of a series, each different but connected by the era, that takes place Europe in the late 1930's when Germany was inserting its tentacles in the various countries it was about to invade or had already started to. Its roundup of Jews and dissident citizens seen as a threat was already underway but not yet at its peak. There is real historical relevance woven into the story which makes the story line more impressionable if you enjoy history or are a WWII buff.

The main character here and associated characters are not professional spy's or resisters. They are more like ordinary people caught up in the events of their time but rather than remaining passive or untouched they respond against the evil all around them. The characters are richly filled out and the plot is exciting. You cannot really guess the outcome. The writing is superb and this book as well as the others in the series ranks in the top tier of the genre.

## Cala

It seems that quite a few readers didn't appreciate this stunning novel as I did. Accidentally, being an American who spent first 30 years of my life in the Balkans, I might have a different outlook. Alan Furst is a precious writer for these turbulent, uncertain times. Some of the unsatisfied readers begrudged him lack of action. Really??? Mr. Furst brought to life the atmosphere of 1940's and the Balkans perfectly. Smells, fear, passive awaiting of the doom to come and swallow everything. Heroes and cowards, victims and bullies, tyrants and refugees. Quite exciting, at least for this reader, refugee himself. It is interesting how people who never lived through anything more dangerous than a tornado warning can not get enough excitement. Perhaps the fake action distracts easier from boring lives they have to endure. I find this book riveting and heartbreaking in equal measure. Average people in extraordinary times. Now please go back to your explosions, car chases and superhuman heroes. Why grow up, it's such a drag.

## Cells

From a historical perspective, "Spies of the Balkans" is rich in detail and transports the reader back through time to a simpler but no less dangerous era, sans cell phones and other modern electronics. Our protagonist, Costa Zannis, communicates via landline, telex, typewritten and (gasp!) even handwritten notes. Zannis is a complicated guy who, at times seems unbelievably naive for a police officer, especially one who is clandestinely assisting his fellow countrymen to escape the oncoming war. He seems an unlikely spy and succeeds in large part due to the network of people who are willing to help. But succeed he does and the reader can't help but root for him. Zannis' love affair with Demetria seems a bit of a stretch and her character isn't well developed. Furst weaves a tale of intrigue, heavy with the uneasiness of the Greek people of the Balkans as they realize the Nazi reign of terror that began in Poland is all too quickly heading their way.

## Felolv

I have read and enjoyed many of Mr. Furst's books, and this one is no exception. Engrossing characters, intriguing plotline, and satisfying denouement. The only reason I gave only 4 stars is that the book is set in Greece, not the Balkans as I know them in the Carpathian Mountains of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. I was hoping to get more insight into the Slavic people, but this novel is Greek, with a minor Slavic character or two. Still, another classic WW2 spy romance, worth reading.

## Mavegelv

Another winner in Alan Furst's Night Soldiers series. This one takes place in Greece and the Balkans. It helps a lot if you are up on your geography here. This book studies the decisions that ordinary people must make under the stress of war to save themselves, their families and their countries. The spies of the Balkans are ordinary people who took extraordinary actions during the horror of World War II. Furst excels at character development. Even the dog, Matilda, has a personality and must adapt to war. It also explores the complicated relationships that the various countries and inhabitants have with and among each other. Nothing is simple in the Balkans, but there is always a way...a Balkan way. An excellent read.

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