



Red Gold

Alan Furst

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If you enjoy mysteries set against the rich background of World War II Europe (Philip Kerr's Berlin Noir trilogy and the fine French series by J. Robert Janes are prime examples), you should also know about Alan Furst. He began by writing such excellent, original books as *Dark Star* and *Night Soldiers*, all set in Eastern Europe. The locale then moved to Paris for *The World at Night*, where we first met the enigmatic film producer and reluctant Resistance hero Jean Casson.

Casson returns in fascinating form in *Red Gold*, washing up broke and depressed in his home city, now totally ground down by its German occupiers. Recruited by a sympathetic cop, Casson joins a group of officers working undercover inside the Vichy government to help de Gaulle. Casson's job is to convince justifiably skeptical French communists to cooperate; to do so he must organize a complicated, extremely dangerous transfer of weapons. There's nothing glamorous about the work or its result, but Furst is such a persuasive writer that we come to realize what a success it is for Casson just to stay alive. This innovative and gripping novel eloquently transports us back to a different era and a different world. --*Dick Adler*

Red Gold Details

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From Reader Review Red Gold for online ebook

Paul says

In *Red Gold*, the fifth book of his loosely-connected *Night Soldiers* novels - all of which have featured different protagonists - author Alan Furst breaks form and returns us to the world of Jean Casson, the character at the center of the preceding volume, *The World at Night*.

It is late 1941, and having, in the name of love, forfeited a chance to escape occupied France, former film producer Casson is living on the margins of Paris under an assumed name. He has lost the woman for whom he returned and is just barely keeping his head above water when he is contacted by Captain Degrave, an old comrade from his days in the army.

Degrave has a proposal for the desperate Casson: use the bohemian and leftist connections made in his days in the film industry to make contact with the French Communists, the only organized resistance actively fighting the Germans. The once hesitant Casson agrees, and discovers that he has found his footing in the shadowy world of espionage and smuggling. A man who now knows not only how to improvise, but how to survive, he embarks on a series of missions that inflict damage on the forces of his country's occupiers.

Despite his growing confidence, however, danger remains constant. Hélène, a woman with whom he is having an affair is an undocumented Jew living in plain sight in Paris, and Casson must juggle trying to get her out of the country with navigating the infighting and assassination that is the stock-in-trade of the Soviet-supported French communists.

Red Gold is, like the other Jean Casson novel, not the author's very best work, but it is nonetheless excellent, Alan Furst's best being far, far better than most. Also, like many of his books, it is more of a slice of wartime life than a story with a defined beginning, middle and end. Furst richly evokes the atmosphere of a time when Paris, a city initially hopeful that German occupation would be just one more inconvenience to be endured for a while, began to shake itself awake and fully realize that it had no choice but to confront both the invaders and those who would collaborate with them. Fans of the *Night Soldiers* series will not be disappointed.

Mal Warwick says

Alan Furst homes in on the French Resistance in *Red Gold*, the fifth of the 13 novels in his "Night Soldiers" series that have been appearing regularly since 1988. His mastery of the moods and the political environment in Europe before and during the Second World War is unexcelled, and the flawed, believable characters he writes about cause him to be regularly compared to Graham Greene and Eric Ambler, who were regarded as the masters of spy fiction decades before him.

Red Gold features a former film producer named Jean Casson who finds himself forced to become involved in espionage and sabotage in France early in World War II. In telling the story, Furst spotlights the tension and distrust among the several factions involved in the Resistance, from the loyal army officers on the staff of the puppet Petain to the Gaullist forces headquartered in London and the well-organized Communist underground. Casson's role as liaison among the various factions gives him a unique vantage point on the complex relationships among these contending groups, each of them positioning itself for what was shaping up as a civil war that would follow the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Furst's novels have a formulaic element, in that every one features a reluctant hero — Casson fits that bill to a T — as well as a love story. However, there's nothing formulaic about either the circumstances or the locales Furst chooses, shifting from Eastern Europe to Spain to France and Greece and back. Even minor characters leap off the page, fully formed. As a guide to the reality of life as it was experienced by Europeans during World War II, there's no one better than Alan Furst.

If you're looking for blockbuster spy fiction in the tradition of Ian Fleming, with superhero agents and larger-than-life master criminals, you won't find Alan Furst's work to be satisfying. However, if you crave realistic stories and credible characters based on thorough historical research, you'll find it difficult to put down any of his novels.

Brad Lyerla says

RED GOLD is Furst's sequel to WORLD AT NIGHT. Jean Paul Casson, former film producer before the Nazi occupation, is in hiding from the Gestapo. He barely survives by selling his old clothes to pay the rent for the seedy Parisian hotels where he just manages to exist. Casson is a deeply sympathetic character. As he evades the Germans, he nurses a broken heart over a lost love that nearly drove him to a break down before the war.

Then he is contacted by operatives for De Gaulle's loyalist party. He is asked to act as intermediary between the loyalists and the communists to coordinate anti-Nazi activities, including sabotage and gun running. This is tricky because they despise and distrust each other, almost as much as they hate the Nazis.

The "red gold" of the title refers ironically to the fact that the communists are well-financed from Moscow.

Furst is just the best at telling stories of this sort. I could not put this book down. And I am pleased to report that, apparently, there is a sequel that I will have to get my hands on quickly. RED GOLD ends with a very provocative set up for the next adventure in Casson's career as a resistance fighter.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in February 2001.

Following on from The World at Night, Red Gold continues to chronicle the exploits of Hugh Casson, one time film producer, as he becomes reluctantly involved with the various anti-German factions of occupied Paris. While definitely wanting the Germans ruling France, Casson is not a hero and probably would have kept his head down and stayed far away from de Gaullists, disgruntled Vichy Regime secret service and certainly the Communists if circumstances has allowed.

As in The World at Night, two components of Red Gold lift it above the usual level of Resistance thrillers: the characterisation of Casson and the atmospheric depiction of wartime France. Red Gold is basically more of the same, as you might expect of a sequel; The World at Night set a high standard which is maintained here.

Leslie says

episodic, casablancesque love story, great French Resistance spy story, intriguing characters, killer ending

Lobstergirl says

Lots of atmosphere and not so much of a plot, as several episodes. The protagonist Casson is likeable, at least, as is his brief Jewish paramour. Other characters flit in and out of the text like fog. Were the machine guns ever used? Furst is no Le Carré. I don't like his novels enough to purchase them, but if they turn up in local alleyways in good condition, I'll pick them up.

Lianne says

This mystery "Red Gold" follows "The World at Night", set in 1940. It is a year later (October 1941.) The Occupation is underway and the main character John Casson has assumed a new identity. He is hiding from the Gestapo, living on a few francs during the "darkest hour" of the war when the Germans have decisive momentum. The political motives of the characters Casson meets become murky. It becomes difficult to know whether they are as they say, or double agents with other agendas. Casson becomes drawn into an alliance with the French Communist party to run arms for the resistance.

Times are bleak under the Vichy government while in England, De Gaulle is beginning to build support. Internecine rivalries between factions complicate the mission. Victory seems too much to hope for. At most the resistance works to slow down the Nazi advance elsewhere. Pearl Harbor happens and now the French and Casson hang on through a hopeless time. Small and large acts of courage give meaning to each day.

Cphe says

Enjoyed this novel more than the previous book (World at Night). This continues the story of Jean Casson a film producer who becomes caught up in the French Resistance during the war.

I enjoyed the atmosphere, the time period, the descriptions of life in a "seedier" darker Paris under Occupation. I really had no idea that there were different Resistance movements in play at the time.

Overall from a reading perspective I felt that the two Casson books would have done far better being incorporated into the one novel. As separate novels they just felt "choppier" and without real resolution to this reader.

Not the best on offer by the author to date.

Darwin8u says

A decent follow-up to 'The World At Night', 'Red Gold' continues the saga of Jean Casson's struggle to survive both morally and physically in Nazi occupied and collaborating France.

I prefer Furst's novels that center on Eastern European characters ('the Polish Officer', 'Dark Star', 'Night Soldiers') instead of French, but it is hard to deny that even though it isn't a major Furst novel, it is still a highly readable one. Using Jean Casson allows Furst to explore the world of those French collaborators, profiteers, and elites of Pétain's France who refused to see the German occupiers for what they were. Furst clearly demarks the fragmented France that was left after Germany's invasion and the Vichy collaboration.

This novel should be read closely with 'A World at Night'. Like I wrote about that novel, even though I find this to be a minor Furst novel, it is context that matters. Most spy novelists don't approach the art or the skill of a minor Furst novel. So enjoy.

Ken Mueller says

BOOK REVIEW: Alan Furst's RED GOLD & Louis-Ferdinand Celine

The latest novel I've read from historical spy writer (his appellation, not mine) Alan Furst started out slower than usual. RED GOLD is Furst's only sequel and picks up the story of film producer Jean Casson after he has jumped ship on way to London and freedom and swims back to Occupied France "for love, not patriotism" he later confides to a flic who has run him in for questioning. As usual Furst delineates the normal people who get drawn into the dangerous and often fatal resistance to Nazi-occupied Europe not out of misplaced idealism but an existential awareness of moral right. Indeed, his characters could be lifted from one of Sartre's novels of resistance. And as usual his book is full of historical accuracies. But it wasn't until he describes a sign by the cash register with a photograph of a funeral and the legend LE CRÉDIT EST MORT and later mentions "the doctor who wrote under tin- name Celine had worked with the poor, and now shrieked against the Jews on the radio" that I got it. Of course Furst had read his Louis-Ferdinand Celine and the take on his novel Mort à crédit (Death on the Installment Plan). So the novel of a film producer is told in a cross between cinématique and Celine without the famous three dots...elipses. Celine, the novel as delirium, a perfect vehicle for the nightmare world of Nazi/Vichy France with the Gestapo, SS, whores and black marketeers. Listen:

"10:30 in the evening in the rue Hennequin. Some restaurants lived secret lives, others spread out into their streets. This was the second kind; a green-and-gold façade, a line of handsome automobiles. A Horch, a Lancia Aprilia. In the back seat of an open sedan, a redhead with a dead fox around her neck was smoking like a movie star. On the street: German officers in shiny leather, boots and belts and straps; their girlfriends, wearing plenty of rouge and eye shadow and black stockings; and the strange tidal debris--the Count of Somewhere, Somebody the art dealer--that flowed into conquered cities."

and

"Upstairs, a small office used for interrogation--two chairs, a desk scarred with cigarette burns, tall windows opaque with dirt, a floor of narrow boards. The station backed up to a schoolyard, it was recess, and Casson could hear the kids, playing tag and yelling. The detective leaned on his elbows and read the dossier, now and then shaking his head."

We get the movie version of setting and action:

"Casson never knew who shot first or why, but there were five or six reports from the front of the truck. Somebody shouted, a car door opened, somebody screamed "Maurice!" When Casson saw Jacquot's hand move, he grabbed for the Walther, pulled it free of his belt, and forced the hammer back with his thumb. In front, a shot, then another, from a different gun. Jacquot's hand came out from under his sweater, Casson fired twice, then twice more. Jacquot grunted, there was a flash in the shadows. Casson ducked away and ran around to the front of the truck. On the road by the

Citroën, somebody lay on top of a rifle."

Or with wry humour:

"No. It can't be. Of course, we both know people who'd like to ignore the whole thing--just try to get along with them. But you know the saying, le plus on leur baise le cul, le plus ils nous chient sur la tête." The more you kiss their ass, the more they shit on your head..."

"War changes everything."

Weiss smiled. "It should, logically it should. But the world doesn't run on logic, it runs on the seven deadly sins and the weather. Even so, we have to try to do what we can."

"And it helps," Casson said, "to have mac

AC says

Worth reading after *World at Night*, but the book has some real weaknesses. The plot is careless thrown together, far too many deus ex machina's -- (that should be Dei ex..., of course; but hey...) -- Jean-Claude gets arrested; a door mysteriously opens... poof! he walks out into the night..., etc. And no resolution at the end -- Furst keeping his options open for the next book(s)... and what's with the anachronism of Casson buying and reading, in 1941/42, "a tattered copy" of Braudel's *Mediterranean*...?!

Eh, bien... still worth reading after *World*...

Dick Reynolds says

It's Autumn 1941 and we're back in Paris again as the World War II menace continues to grow. Jean Casson, once a well-to-do film producer and now a target of the Gestapo, is drawn into a mission of running guns to combat units of the French Communist Party.

I was mildly disappointed with this book. I've read several other novels by Alan Furst which have their settings in Europe during WWII but this one didn't have the exciting events like the ones portrayed in the others. It seems like Furst has taken plot elements of two other novels and used them again this one.

However, it's not totally without some action. Casson and his cohorts transport machine guns from Marseilles to north of Paris but you have to wait until the middle of the book before you read about it. There is also an exciting incident near the end but I won't reveal it because it would spoil the plot.

The book did have its enjoyable moments. The descriptions of Paris, its people, and the many attractions along its streets, boulevards and alleys brought back fond memories of several visits to that wonderful city.

William says

Cover endorsements by William Boyd, Nelson DeMille and Charles McCarry (one of which compares Furst to Eric Ambler and John LeCarre) are a shorthand summary for why Furst is a strong contributor to the spy fiction genre. If his plots are not quite as memorable as McCarry and Ambler in particular, his command of detail is amazing. "Red Gold," another story set in the WWII era in Europe about which Furst always writes, reads almost too convincingly to be fiction, with innumerable small details making life in occupied Paris in 1941 very real.

I have read a fair number of Furst's novels and liked them all. I am challenged to say how this compares to the others, since all are very good and none quite at the level of Ambler or early McCarty (whose "The Secret Lovers" is a masterpiece). In general, the characters do not in general seem to appear in more than one novel (though I gather that the central character in this one, Jean Casson, appears in two others which I have not read), but one roots for each protagonist. My memory may be inaccurate, but the only recurring item seems to be a bullet hole in a mirror in the Heininger restaurant from a pre-war incident.

While the book is not quite a masterpiece, it's a very good read, and far more than mere "beach-reading." Furst is an accomplished and compelling author telling the behind the lines story of Europe's war from different angles in book after book.

Jean Hontz says

Alan Furst's series is about normal, everyday people stuck in the middle of Hell, when Europe goes to war. Some of them survive, some don't. Some find a way to work in the resistance, some try to escape, some help with that.

He presents the situation, not idealized with brave, beautiful people who are incredible spies, but instead as people who barely manage to find ways to survive, and do what little they can to help the cause of defeating Hitler. Fear is always present and one never knows who is knocking on your door, or who will be knocking it down.

Neil says

This is the 5th book in Alan Furst's "Night Soldiers" series, but it is also a continuation from the previous book "The World At Night". Once again the main character is Jean Casson, who was a well known film producer before the war. After a run in with the Gestapo, and a missed chance to flee the continent, Casson finds himself inhabiting the seedier side of Parisian life.

He becomes embroiled with the French Resistance, and starts to act as a go between between two differing resistance factions. On one side there is the resistance loyal to DeGaulle, and on the other there is the French Communists. The two factions deeply distrust each other, but seemily have to co-operate in the effort to provide an effective resistance. Could this merging be managed with the help of Casson?

Once again this book has plenty of atmosphere, with well crafted characters, although sometimes the plot is a little predictable. Even if you don't read the series in order, it is still worth tackling "The World At Night", before this one as that introduces you to the character of Casson.
