



Mission to Paris, by Alan Furst
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, October 2014

Author Alan Furst, a master of the historic spy genre, is at the top of his game with his fast-paced espionage novel *Mission to Paris*. The story is set in the “City of Light” during the prewar years of 1938-39. War is looming, and Parisians are tense and anxious, not sure whom to trust or to believe.

Enter handsome, enigmatic Hollywood movie star Fredric Stahl, who has been sent to Paris ostensibly to make a movie for Paramount France. Stahl, charming and seemingly apolitical, is courted by the growing Nazi party, eager to advance its influence through international propaganda. But Stahl harbors secrets of his own. Born in Vienna and horrified by the Nazi march to power, Stahl has become part of an informal American spy ring operating in Paris.

Frust particularly is adept at depicting the mood of impending doom that permeated prewar Europe, when it was difficult to tell friend from foe. The Paris he creates—star-covered bridges across the Seine, sophisticated cafes, elegant parties—becomes a central character on its own in the novel.

Fredric Stahl unwittingly is caught up between those who want France to prepare for war and those wanting France to appease the Nazis and negotiate peace. Along the way, Stahl meets a disparate group of characters including the French cast of his movie and its German film producers.

And, of course, *Mission to Paris* has its share of romantic intrigue. Stahl uses his movie-star persona to help his lover who is held for interrogation in Budapest. Moving in high-society circles, he encounters beautiful, dangerous women: émigré Renate Steiner and socialite Kiki de Saint-Ange. *Mission to Paris* certainly fits the bill for a satisfying spy thriller.