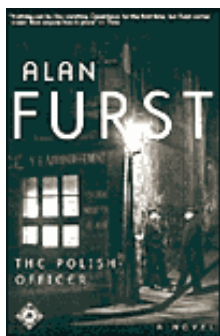


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## ***The Polish Officer* by Alan Furst (1995), 294 pages.**



The author is apparently a prolific writer of war adventures and spy stories, mainly using World War II and later periods for his settings. He warns us from the start that his novel is a fiction, but the reader with some general knowledge of the events described may be forgiven for comparing this yarn with facts. This is not to point out errors but to note with some amusement how far afield imagination can carry the novelist.

In mid September of 1939 the hero, Capt. Alexander de Milja, is frantically burning the super secret files of his Polish counter-intelligence department, specifically Folder 4088 which contains details of the city of Istanbul, the depths of the Marmara Straits near the Black Sea, and elevations of an odd place called Uskudar. All this takes place in Warsaw, and he is in a great hurry as virtually next door German officers occupy Hotel Franconia. They drink cognac served by, a frightened waiter but, obviously, they are up to no good. Soon thereafter Col. Vyborg instructs de Milja to immediately line up an emergency train; it will pretend to be for refugees, while in reality 100 million dollars worth of gold will be hidden under the floor of each coach. The slow train leaves punctually for points south, leaving Warsaw, the grim Savka Fortress, and the Jablonka Bridge behind. The locomotive engineer is a marvelous technician, and the precious train runs smoothly via Lwów, eastern Czechoslovakia, Hungarian Uzhgorod, reaching Romania with all refugees and the gold intact. There are a few tense moments, but another Polish officer, Capt. Nom de Guerre, saves the transport. The mission is accomplished, the gold is under way to the West, but de Milja (the main hero) is bored doing nothing in Bucharest. Hence he returns to occupied Poland, first encountering the Soviets in the East and then the Germans in Warsaw. But he is a restless individual: in January 1940 he steals a small plane for one trip, dropping leaflets on Polish villages. They tell the unhappy populace that liberation is near. Signed: the British Air Force, RAF.

From here on we know that our hero will survive all the subsequent adventures and they will grab your attention. Here are the main parts of his itinerary: by convenient train from Warsaw to Gdynia, by boat to Sweden, a flight to France just in time for the defeat in June 1940. The author is well acquainted with that country and it is evident that he has little admiration for the French Army. As expected, de Milja finds himself in various dangerous predicaments from which he is rescued in daring ways. Soon he is in England, preparing for an assignment in Eastern Europe. In the summer of 1941, the German invasion against the Soviet Union

begins. For unclear reasons he parachutes east of the Bug River with the region of Volhynia as his destination, with pockets full of czarist gold rubles; lots of partisan activities take place. But soon de Milja heads for Warsaw, and here the story ends. Perhaps the next volume will tell us more.

If you want to feel free from the burdens of actual historical facts and let your imagination follow the fortunes of our hero, then this is a good novel for you. It does not pretend to be a commentary on the politics of the period; no important personages are discussed in any, detail. But there are plenty of romantic adventures.

***George Suboczewski***