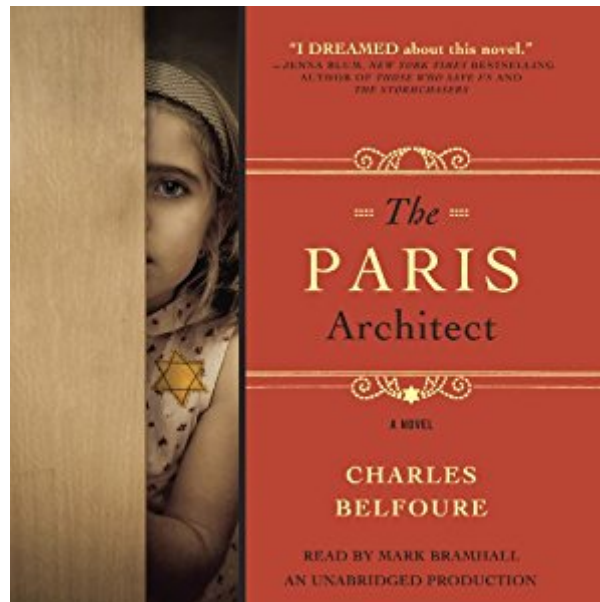


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The Paris Architect



Synopsis

Like most gentiles in Nazi-occupied Paris, architect Lucien Bernard has little empathy for the Jews. So when a wealthy industrialist offers him a large sum of money to devise secret hiding places for Jews, Lucien struggles with the choice of risking his life for a cause he doesn't really believe in. Ultimately he can't resist the challenge and begins designing expertly concealed hiding spaces - behind a painting, within a column, or inside a drainpipe - detecting possibilities invisible to the average eye. But when one of his clever hiding spaces fails horribly and the immense suffering of Jews becomes incredibly personal, he can no longer deny reality. Written by an expert whose knowledge imbues every word, this story becomes more gripping with every life the architect tries to save.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After five short chapters, I made notes of what I thought would happen in this book and, no surprise, I was correct. In the author's Q&A at the end of the book, Belfoure describes his novel-writing process as being similar to an architectural project. He first devised the plot, and then he populated it. I suspected as much. The plot certainly keeps the reader turning the pages but, at least in my case, I was turning them more and more quickly because I wanted to be done with the book. The problem was that although Belfoure's structure--the plot--was sound, albeit predictable, his characterization and dialog were seriously flawed. It was a good idea of Belfoure's to have the protagonist, Lucien Bernard, be a man with no sympathy for the plight of France's Jews, but who

was drawn into saving Jews--first, through ambition, but then from conviction. Beyond that, though, the characters were flat, stock characters, and/or devices to help move along the plot. Sometimes they were inconsistent and changing in a moment, just to serve the plot. For example, Belfoure apparently felt that Bernard, being a Frenchman from Paris, must have a wife and a mistress, so he did, even though the wife, Celeste, was an almost entirely undeveloped character and could easily have been eliminated from the novel. The mistress, Adele, seemed to be there only to help illustrate the stock character of the "horizontal collaborator," help the reader to get to know the depths of Nazi evil, and put Bernard in dangerous situations with the Nazis. The dialog was wooden, and characters used slang and vernacular that wasn't appropriate to the time or place.

...and not stopping a third of the way through it, at which point the graceless, clumsy writing and two-dimensional characters were wearing on me. But the two stars are for Charles Belfoure's ability to plot. The book is a page-turner, no doubt about it. Once I had started reading, I had to find out how it ended. That doesn't mean that I found the ending--particularly the main character's revelation about his own motives--believable. I didn't. But beyond the plot, there is nothing here. The characters are cardboard cutouts--especially, but not solely, the women. You have your gorgeous, ambitious slut who will do anything to save her business; your gorgeous former slut with a heart of gold, whose entrance into a factory causes every single one of the 200+ men who work there to stop working simultaneously (Come on...); the brilliant microbiologist for whom "being a mother would always trump her career;" and assorted slatterns and ugly charwomen. You have your good Nazi and your typical Gestapo guy who laughs helplessly as a man is brutally tortured in front of him. The writing is sloppy and reflects the now common lack of editing and proofreading that infects virtually all books; in one paragraph, "Lucien, the atheist didn't want any religious horse s***," and in the very next paragraph, he thinks, "His father was probably looking up at him from Hell." And wouldn't you think that an architect would know that the thing over a fireplace is a mantel, not a mantle? At one point, Lucien, the main character and the Paris architect, suddenly longs to become a father. Out of the blue. With no background to support what becomes a major factor in the plot and that rings as false as a cracked bell. Mr.

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