



The Expats

Chris Pavone

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Kate Moore is a working mother, struggling to make ends meet, to raise children, to keep a spark in her marriage . . . and to maintain an increasingly unbearable life-defining secret. So when her husband is offered a lucrative job in Luxembourg, she jumps at the chance to leave behind her double-life, to start anew.

She begins to reinvent herself as an expat, finding her way in a language she doesn't speak, doing the housewifely things she's never before done—play-dates and coffee mornings, daily cooking and unending laundry. Meanwhile, her husband works incessantly, doing a job Kate has never understood, for a banking client she's not allowed to know. He's becoming distant and evasive; she's getting lonely and bored.

Then another American couple arrives. Kate soon becomes suspicious that these people are not who they claim to be, and terrified that her own past is catching up to her. So Kate begins to dig, to peel back the layers of deception that surround her. She discovers fake offices and shell corporations and a hidden gun; a mysterious farmhouse and numbered accounts with bewildering sums of money; a complex web of intrigue where no one is who they claim to be, and the most profound deceptions lurk beneath the most normal-looking of relationships; and a mind-boggling long-play con threatens her family, her marriage, and her life.

The Expats Details

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From Reader Review The Expats for online ebook

Carmen says

Should you be honest with your spouse? Is your spouse being honest with you? Are you SURE?

"Okay," she said. "I'll bite: WHY would we move to Luxembourg?"

"To make lots of money, and travel around Europe all the time." And there it was, the full, unrestrained smile. "Just like we always dreamed." The open look of a man who harbored no secrets, and didn't admit the possibility that other people did. This was what Katherine valued above all else in her husband.

Everyone has secrets. It's just that some people's secrets are bigger than other people's. Kate Moore is a CIA agent. Her trusting husband Dexter doesn't know a thing about it - she's been lying to him for a decade while dating him, marrying him, and raising up their two sons.

She will reboot herself. Relaunch. She will become, at last, a woman who is not constantly lying to her husband about what she really does, and who she really is.

But she's tired of her job. And just at that instant, Dexter comes home and tells her that he has a great opportunity to make money in Luxembourg. She seizes the moment, retires from the CIA, and travels with her family to Luxembourg.

Kate was still getting used to the idea of strolling around a foreign city with absolutely no concern that someone might, for any variety of reasons, want to kill her.

Immediately Kate is plunged into a completely different life. Instead of sneaking around with a gun, under the cover of a secret identity - she's playing Legos and wiping snotty noses all day. Instead of coming home and telling her husband about her day at work while he tells her about his, she's anxious for him to come home so he can share the burden of taking care of the kids. But he's working later and later and he's home less and less. She's becoming more and more frustrated with the life she thought she'd always wanted.

What do you DO with children, all the time? In Washington, she'd had charge of the kids on weekends; preschools and the nanny had borne the brunt of the day-to-day child-care responsibilities. She'd wanted more time with the kids, then.

But now? Now it was every day after school, every evening, every night, every morning, and all weekend long. How was anyone supposed to amuse them, without spending her life lying on the floor, playing with Lego? Without the kids killing each other, or making an unbearable mess, or driving her crazy?

Now that she had what she'd wanted, she was having her doubts. Which had been her worst fear about this whole thing.

But it's understandable why Dexter isn't around much. He's settling in the new job, he has to take business trips to meet with clients... Or is something more sinister going on?

Suddenly, Kate sees intrigue and conspiracy everywhere. Is her husband hiding something from her? Or is she just missing her former life as a secret agent?

Kate was increasingly convinced that she was never going to be a happy stay-at-home mom. If there was such a thing.

...

This is an amazing, gripping thriller by Chris Pavone. It's very well-written, with Pavone getting right into the heart and mind of Kate Moore. As Kate is piecing things together, so is the reader. It's exciting.

Kate is a strong character and an agent who knows how to take care of herself. It's very exciting to be in the mind of a woman who knows how to lie, tail, shoot, fight, and kill - but on the outside looks like a sweet, rich, American housewife.

The only problems I had with Kate's character were the following:

1.) There's two REALLY obvious times that she's being manipulated and she doesn't see it. This really brought me out of the mindset of "oh she's such a cool and efficient spy." I mean, they were obvious! I wish Pavone had been more clever so that Kate would have seemed more competent. It was a pair of glaring mistakes.

2.) Pavone writes Kate as really attracted to this guy Bill. And I had a huge problem with that. I just don't buy it at all. Here's some descriptions of Bill:

One whose entire being was suffused with confidence, flowing up from some deep well that originated Lord knows where - maybe he'd been spectacularly good at some sport, or he had a photographic memory, or was impressively well-endowed - and oozing out into a sleekness, a fluidity, as if all his gears were well-oiled, perpetually lubricated and running efficiently, manifested in smooth physical movements and playful smiles and undeniably animal sexuality. This man didn't run his hand through his hair, or adjust his shirt collar, or dart his eyes around the room, or run his mouth meaninglessly; he didn't fidget in any way.

Here's another:

But Bill was still wearing a small smug smile, the supremely confident look of one of those guys who's competent at everything, at skiing and tennis and auto repairs and finish-carpentry, at communicating in languages he doesn't speak, at tipping porters and bribing cops, at foreplay and oral sex...Kate felt a chink in her armor, in her lifelong struggle against men like Bill: slick men, manipulative men, dangerous men.

I'm sorry, this slick Rick type of guy has NO appeal to me. And Chris Pavone is trying to say that Kate is attracted to him - even thinking about cheating on her husband with him? Ludicrous. She's seen the man cheat on his wife - practically right in front of his wife. And she strongly suspects that he's not who he says he is. I know Chris Pavone is a male, but this is just not feasible. Kate's a basically good person. Not only does she love her husband and kids, but (and this is important) - she and her husband ARE STILL HAVING GREAT SEX. No woman, at least no sane woman, would ever cheat on their husband, the father of their children, who she still has amazing sex with - with a shady, smooth-talking, duplicitous, suspicious man. I DON'T CARE. I don't care about his "animal magnetism" or how good at flirting he is or how she thinks he'd be really good in bed. This would NEVER happen with a woman who has even an ounce of self-esteem or good sense. And ESPECIALLY not a woman trained to be an intellectual, rational, cool-headed agent. So I didn't buy Kate's "Should I sleep with him, or not?" line of thinking AT ALL, and it just brought me out of the story every time in cropped up.

ETA: My views on this may be skewed because a.) Bill is so repulsive to me and b.) she's a fucking CIA

agent who should know better.... but I guess I shouldn't say 'no' woman 'ever' would sleep with this asshole. Some women find slimebags extremely attractive.... I guess.

There are some main themes that are dealt with in this novel. They are, in no particular order:

1.) Working mom vs. stay at home mom.

Kate's boys are preschool and kindergarten age. She works full-time at the CIA. She thinks that all she wants is to be a stay at home mom. But when her wish is granted and she's confronted with the reality of entertaining and caring for toddlers day in and day out, she realizes it isn't as fun or as fulfilling as she'd imagined. I won't tell you what eventually happens, but I feel like Pavone is definitely coming down on the side of "you should work, for your own sanity and the sanity of the kids" side of this age-old argument.

She used to be a person who did things. Not just run-of-the-mill things. Illegally crossing international borders. Eluding police. Hiring assassins, for God's sake. Now she was folding laundry. Could her life really have become this?

2.) Honesty between spouses.

Do you owe it to your spouse to be honest with him/her? In what circumstances is it okay to keep secrets? If you suspect your spouse is keeping secrets, is it okay to spy/snoop on him/her? When you find out that your spouse has been hiding something from you, do you forgive him/her? Or is the relationship irrevocably broken? These are wonderful questions and I felt like the book did an amazing and realistic job of the characters working through the twisted labyrinth of answers.

3.) What makes someone "a good person?"

If someone commits a horrifying act, does that negate all the good things s/he's done in his/her life? What act, if any, is enough to negate the good in a person's life? Which acts are unforgiveable and why? These kind of moral questions are probed delicately in this book and I think the author does a stupendous job of tackling a sensitive subject. Kudos to Pavone on this.

Tl;dr - I thought Kate was a great, multi-layered character. Pavone did a solid job of writing her. The book was gripping and thrilling and kept me guessing. I love reading about female spies! This was giving me the same thrills as Sweet Tooth, but Pavone didn't fuck up the ending like Ian McEwan did, so I liked this novel a lot better. Pavone's insights on everyday life are astonishing in their simplicity and truth, and I think the book was very well-written. I recommend it.

P.S. RE-READ 11/12/2015

This book is what Gone Girl and Hausfrau WISH they could be.

Pavone is a talented and skilled writer who crafts his chapters excellently.

Here's Pavone's take on pecking, which I very much agree with:

"It's a slow day," Dexter said, leaning down to peck her on the lips. Kate had long struggled with the

pointlessness of the perfunctory peck, but she could never bring herself to tell Dexter to cut it out. She knew she'd have a hard time articulating her antipathy, and was afraid she'd come off as unloving, despite her admittedly contrarian opinion that it was the perfunctory peck itself that was unloving. So she didn't say anything, and pecked right back.

Also, the book is genuinely funny. Pavone is a witty writer, I was laughing out loud more than once.

Chris Pavone also writes an amazingly believable woman character here. This is what I'm talking about when I say that men CAN write real and believable females.

EXCELLENT BOOK, and the rare one that I would recommend to ANYONE. Male, female, young, old, gay, straight, white, Latino, black, Asian, people who like mysteries, people who hate mysteries, ANYONE. Very pleasing and well put-together book.

However, I still can't bring myself to give this five stars as I am still reeling from Kate (a CIA agent!) missing two very important and obvious clues that this reader (who is about as far from a CIA agent as one could get!) noticed right away. In case you're wondering, I'm talking about (view spoiler) Not any of the many, many twists that come after that. I just couldn't buy that Kate was that dumb, it definitely didn't go with the rest of her smart character.

STRONG 4 out of 5. I would recommend to ANYONE.

Changed my rating. I'm giving this 5 stars, because it's fucking amazing. But I have caveats. Okay? Five stars with some caveats.

katwiththehat says

Wow, this book was amazing! Kate Moore has worked in the CIA for close to fifteen years, but somehow managed to keep the whole thing a secret from her husband. After he suggests a move overseas, she decides it's time to quit and devote her time to raising their young children, but strange things begin happening and Kate isn't sure who or what she can trust.

This is a must-read for anyone who loves spy thrillers, and especially anyone who loves twists and turns and lies and questions of real or not real in marriage. This one kept the twists coming all the way to the end, and the setting in Europe, with the main characters jumping all over the place and each city so beautifully described, was a real treat to read. Very authentic CIA writing.

Please excuse typos/name misspellings. Entered on screen reader.

?Karen says

You can take the girl out of the CIA, but you can't take the CIA out of the girl.

Kate secretly works for the CIA in Washington, until she has to resign when her husband lands a job in bank security in Luxemburg. Even then, once in their new home abroad, Kate cannot help but be suspicious of everyone she meets -- even her husband Dexter -- of being not who they appear to be. Another couple from America has wormed themselves into Kate and Dexter's life, and their actions are indeed suspicious. Actually Dexter is being pretty secretive about his job and his travels as well. The reader cannot help but wonder, What is going on here?

That's exactly what Kate sets out to learn, as her secret past and secrets of those around her are revealed. I really enjoyed this, couldn't put it down for a day and a half. I have the hard cover but tried to listen to the audio version as well. That turned out to be ill advised as there are some confusing parts at the beginning that were easier to follow in the paper version, IMO.

Larissa says

I was looking for a fast, fun read for a vacation that I took recently took and when *The Expats* (which, incidentally, was just listed as one of Bill Ott's 'Best Crime Novels: 2012' in *Booklist*) caught my eye, I thought it would easily fit the bill. But this book was pretty much a disappointment from start to finish. The set-up is promising, but the whole novel is sloppily structured and written and the conclusion is not only silly, it's also pretty lazy on the resolving details. (For instance, "I framed someone," is generally a fact that requires some explanation. Who did you frame? How did you frame him? You can't just leave it at "I set up a guy," and move on, particularly when the framing involves war criminals and international thievery.)

All in all, it felt like I was reading a treatment for a bad thriller film, and not one that made me care about any of the individuals involved--particularly the main character, who we're told is this super badass former spy, but constantly behaves like an amateur girl detective.

Andrea says

This book was, unfortunately, mostly boring. I kept reading because I knew that something was going to happen eventually, but when it did it was not particularly exciting. Basically, you spend three-quarters of the book inside the head of the main character while she's wondering if anyone will figure out all the secrets. We jump back and forth in time, which is disorienting, and every time important information is about to be revealed, we switch back to a different time. We don't really get closer to the truth, we're just repeatedly primed for the very long reveal at the end. The writing was okay, but sometimes I felt that the description was there just for description's sake. I wasn't invested in any of the characters, nor did I find them at all likable. And where I come from, Americans call them "Legos," not "Lego." That may be proper in Danish, but the characters in this book weren't Danish. I know that's pretty nitpicky, but I just spent hours reading a book that was mostly a waste of my time. Sigh.

Everyday eBook says

"Everyday eBook." If there's one novel in the world that should appear on a website with this name, it's my debut, *The Expats*. Ridiculous claim? Bear me out:

It's four years ago. My wife comes home one night and asks, "What would you think of living in Luxembourg?" Like you, I never, ever considered living there; I wasn't entirely sure where — or what — Luxembourg was. But this was a good time for me, and for our family, to pick up and move. So we did.

And so there I was, no longer a book editor and a ghostwriter in New York City, but a stay-at-home dad in a tiny city in Western Europe, tending to our four-year-old twins, keeping house, trying to get by in French. Cooking and cleaning, shopping and driving, tidying and washing, every day.

Meanwhile, every day my wife went to an office early in the morning, and came home late, late at night. Basically all her colleagues worked on the West Coast, nine hours behind Central European Time. Which meant that her meetings and conference calls started in the evening, and often lasted past midnight. Other days, she was in England or Germany, France or Italy.

Sometimes, so was I. We traveled a lot, because that's what you do if you're an expat; that's one of the reasons to be an expat. We were in Rome when Barack Obama was elected. We spent a Thanksgiving in Amsterdam. One Christmas driving through Bavaria, another skiing in the French Alps. Weekends in London and Paris. I'd sometimes go to Paris by myself — it was an easy two-hour train ride — to get a break from the everyday grind, to walk around a big city, ride a subway, feel the energy of a world capital.

Then we'd come home to little old Luxembourg, and return to our routines, which for me included writing. After school drop-off, I'd go to a café with my laptop, chronicling the everyday life I was living, and the people who surrounded me. Eventually, to make it more exciting, I added a spy (or two). Then a chunk of stolen money. And before long my novel had turned into a full-blown espionage thriller.

But when I was halfway through working on this manuscript, our expat adventure suddenly ended. My wife had come to Europe in the first place with a very specific mandate, a mission that was nearly accomplished. Her job would soon get progressively less interesting, would become more about maintaining relationships than making deals, more about follow-up than innovation. Her everyday life would get less engaging. So she took a new job in New York, at the same outfit she'd quit a year and a half earlier. And we moved home.

So: back to my claim at the top, about the perfect marriage of *The Expats* and *Everyday* eBook. Because the thing that my wife spent a year and a half doing abroad was: working for Amazon. And her job at Amazon was to launch the Kindle in Europe. Which is to say that every day, eBooks were her life; eBooks were the reason we lived in Luxembourg, the reason I wrote a novel set there. *The Expats* would not exist without eBooks.

This story was originally published here: <http://bit.ly/Ax4joN>

Matthew Lerner says

Unfortunately, I didn't love it. *The Expats* came highly recommended and sounded like a great story. Such potential!

In a nutshell, the heroine of Chris Pavone's book, Kate, vacates her seemingly happy life in Washington, D.C. and travels overseas to start anew with her husband and two children (two boys who, although underutilized, became my favorite characters). Ultimately, Kate, (SPOILER!) an ex-CIA agent, uncovers life-altering secrets about her husband and his surreptitious work abroad. The first 50 - 60% of the book is

filled with WAY too much redundancy - what is my husband doing? I'm a housewife living in Luxembourg. What does my husband do? Are these people investigating me? I'm a housewife. Who is my husband? Am I being watched? What is my husband up to? And finally, the last 30 or so pages is just word vomit; here's all the answers, secrets revealed, major climax ...annnnnnnd we're done.

Yes, there are surprises and twists and a very unexpected ending, but was it really worth it? All in all, it fell quite short of my Expat-ations (see what I did there?).

Maureen says

This book is a perfect example of why I do not put any stock into the endorsements on the book jacket from other authors. The book jacket for this novel has glowing quotes from John Grisham and Patricia Cornwell among others. After reading this book I am convinced that these quotes are just paid for endorsements without the author really reading this book because this book was horrible. It was boring, the writing was pedestrian, the characters were one dimensional, and there was zero suspense. There was an abundance of descriptions about Europe but this was not a travel log - this was supposed to be a suspense thriller. I did not care what happened to any of the characters in this book; I just wanted it to be over. On top of how much I disliked this book, after 160 pages or so I had determined that if I read about Legos (yep I said it LegoS not Lego) or the husband scratching the palm of the wife's hand as their secret signal to indicate they were going to have sex later one more time I was going to throw this book across the room, and sure enough the author just couldn't resist and threw these overused (in the case of his obsession with the proper plural form of the word Lego) and trite (in the case of the passe palm scratching) devices in again towards the end of the novel. The only thing that kept me from following through on my promised toss of this book was that it was midnight and my husband was asleep beside me. This was an absolutely disappointing read and a complete waste of time. The only positive thing I can say is that this book has reinforced my belief in not trusting those endorsements!

K says

"NOOOOO!!!!" shouts my inner snob. "Don't do it! No more than three stars! This is a terribly flawed book! Just look at that low average goodreads rating!"

And really, for a lot of the period I was listening to this book I agreed. But in the end, I had to go with a four star rating for the simple reason that, despite its many flaws, this was an engaging and interesting book to listen to. I don't know, listening to this on audio while I drove or did housework just worked for me, confusing though the story was at times (many times).

At first glance this is simply a spy thriller, one that is told in bits and pieces arranged in a strange order. Kate, the main character, is an ex-CIA agent whose husband has just accepted a lucrative and mysterious job offer in Luxembourg. Kate is adjusting to being an American expat in Europe and a stay-at-home mom after an action-packed career when she meets Julia, a fellow American expat. Julia and her husband Bill seem eager to befriend Kate and Dexter, and Kate starts to suspect, rightfully, that there is more going on under the surface. She is also getting increasingly suspicious of her husband and his unknowable job. Although the ride is bumpy as the story moves back and forth in time, somehow my interest was maintained despite this and, unlike the more critical goodreaders, I found the ending shocking and worthwhile rather than anticlimactic.

So much for the thriller aspect of things. On a deeper level, this was a story of deception and fascinating moral ambiguity. The secrets spouses keep from each other, for altruistic and not-so-altruistic reasons. The double lives people can lead, and the choices they make -- is it ever okay to do the wrong thing, the really wrong thing, for the right reason? Not to mention what I felt was an authentic rendering of Kate's voice, her character, and her struggles to adjust to stay-at-home motherhood after an unusually stimulating career. For me at least, this was more than just a run-of-the-mill thriller.

Once again I'm in the minority here on goodreads, although unusually I seem to have liked this book better than others did. So take my recommendation with caution, but if you're willing to run the risk, it's possible you'll enjoy this as much as I did.

Bill says

too boring....gave up after reading 100 pages during which absolutely nothing happened...and this is supposed to be a thriller?

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

I don't know how to say "lukewarm" in Luxembourgish, but that was my response to the book. The story has a lot of structural problems that could have been cleared up with aggressive editing. Part I is a complete mess structurally, changing venues and time frames every page or two, sometimes every couple of paragraphs. This makes it hard to follow and keep track of the people and narrative pathways. It does smooth out later in the book, but is still in need of reorganization.

Chris Pavone had an exciting story idea that would have worked much better if he'd taken the time to add depth and complexity. A Robert Ludlum-style thriller is what I'm thinking of, with fully fleshed out back stories for the characters, and more buildup to the various events, with enough detail to make them believable.

As the story now stands, it's too domestic to feel like a thriller. Hang out with other expat couples, assemble Ikea furniture, pick up the kids from school, travel to a new European city every weekend. Oh, and spy on your spouse. There *is* that.

So, as I said, lukewarm and in need of organization. But not terrible either. It was interesting to see how expats with a lot of money fill their time in Luxembourg.

Philip says

WARNING - THIS REVIEW INCLUDES SEVERAL SPOILERS: Having myself lived in Brussels for a few years with my family as expats, I'll give Mr. Pavone credit for nailing those portions of the story. I really enjoyed his highlighting many of the joys, surprises, annoyances and other telling details of living as a foreigner in northern Europe, (which according to the book's jacket the author himself did). However, while

he does well with those sections written from experience, he is much less successful in those areas where he isn't an expert -- particularly (I assume) being a spy, (and here follow several SPOILERS, so be forewarned).

His heroine Kate comes across as a moody, lonely, insecure and generally unhappy mother/housewife living in Luxembourg, which is fine -- but then in flashback (and there are LOTS of flashbacks, so that a number of chapters have to start with the word TODAY, just so the reader knows what's going on) she's a super-spy "Jane Bond," a cold-blooded CIA assassin. Aside from all this jumping around in time being a major distraction (at least it was listening to the book on tape), I believe this whole CIA background is really unnecessary, as I think the author could have told the same story with Kate just being a very clever and capable woman trying to understand her husband, rather than having this cliched back-story. Plus (again -- SPOILER!), what are the odds of a CIA assassin marrying an international master banking thief, with neither one knowing anything about the other's secret life?

On top of all this, while Kate may have been a good spy "back in the day," she's frankly just terrible at it now. Early on she grants her highly suspicious new friend unattended access to both her car and laptop -- and sure enough, her "friend" (who turns out to be FBI -- apparently they train their agents better than the CIA does) puts a GPS tracker in the car and a keystroke logger on the computer, thereby being able to follow Kate the Spy's every move. Furthermore, Kate is frequently described as nervous, panicky, etc., over the slightest thing -- certainly not the sangfroid I'd expect from a former professional hitwoman. She gets in her car without noticing someone hiding in the back seat; she runs in panic when she thinks she's being followed and then turns around and wallops an innocent neighbor -- the list goes on and on, but you get the point.

As such, this is not a "spy story" as it is marketed; it is basically a crime story (I'm even reluctant to call it a mystery) where one of the main characters is -- or was (and, as noted, unnecessarily at that) -- a spy.

Mr. Pavone is a reasonably good writer with a strong voice, and I hope he continues to write (this is his first book). But as they say, "write what you know" -- and unless there's more to his personal background than what appears on the dust jacket, I think this is where he got into trouble in "The Expats."

Sean B says

I have to give the author credit: the story sucked me in and I had to finish it just to find out how it ended. Alas, there are many problems with this novel, including:

1. The main character, to be blunt, is an idiot. There is no way such a person could be in covert operations for the CIA. It was clear as could be what her husband was doing, and it took forever for the main character to do basic research that anyone with any intelligence would have immediately done.
2. On a related note, this novel is WAY TOO LONG. I diligently read the first half of the book, but sped through the 2nd half because it was becoming very tedious and predictable.
3. All of the characters are annoying. The main character is dumb as noted earlier. Her husband is a tool and you really don't care about anyone else because they have no redeeming qualities whatsoever.
4. Predictable ending. About half-way through you know what's going to happen. Why continue reading then? Just to verify that yes, this book is THAT predictable.

5. Way too much description for insignificant things. The author sometimes goes crazy with adjectives and it adds nothing to the book.

Overall this novel is pretty bad. If you want some mindless entertainment, I suppose it might be worth reading, but only if you're in dire need of a way to pass the time.

Ellen Keim says

How can there be so much difference of opinion about the same book? Simple: it's all in what you see in it. If you're looking for a spy thriller, you're going to be a bit disappointed. Yes, this is about covert ops and cyber crime, but that's almost incidental. What the story is really about is secrets. What do you do when you have secrets? How do you act? How do you feel? How long do you keep them? How do you reveal them? What if you know someone's secret but have to act as if you don't? And most of all, is it ever all right to keep secrets from your spouse?

Unlike some people, I liked the main character, although I did find it hard to reconcile her being married with children with being an assassin. I can't judge how accurate the "spy" details were, but the parts about living in a different culture (being an expat) seemed entirely believable.

I did find it hard to keep straight what city the action was taking place in and when exactly things were supposed to have happened. But overall I found these to be minor annoyances since the book wasn't really about solving a mystery as much as it was about one woman trying to make sense of her life.

Pamela says

I received this book as a Firstreads novel and I'm so glad I was given the opportunity to read it. As an Expat myself, I was especially intrigued by the parallels I could draw with the author having myself spent 2 years in the Netherlands. The descriptions of Amsterdam and the Dutch were spot-on! Down to the minutest detail...it was neat to read that the author's first impressions of the canals, the cobblestoned streets, the parking procedures...equalled ours. To quote a paragraph from the book:

"The canals of Amsterdam shimmered in the cold night, the water forming a rippling blanket of pinpoints of light, reflections from the streetlamps, restaurants, bars, houses. All the houses' blinds were undrawn, curtains open, people sitting in their living and dining rooms, reading the newspaper or drinking a glass of wine, family gathered around the dinner table, children watching television, all if it on display to neighbors, to strangers, to the world."

BRAVO! I couldn't have described it better myself. Not to mention, when our friends ask us about what was noteworthy about living in the Netherlands we usually reply, "It's like living in the land of 6 ft. blond-haired, blue-eyed giants who all own and ride a bike, smoke fags, and never draw their bay window curtains in the evenings...it was like living in a fish bowl!" I swear, we were the only ones who drew our curtains once dusk came in the evening.

Right off, the author begins to weave a story that will slowly unravel as it is being knit. We are introduced to Kate and Dexter who are preparing to make a transfer to Luxembourg due to Dexter's employer. Little do we

know at that time of the double lives both Kate and Dexter are living...and the secrets they each are hiding from each other. As the story unfolds, look out...you just might slide off your seat! WONDERFUL suspense, mystery and intrigue that will leave your brain thinking about the WHO dun it's and the WHO'S involved....and STILL...the ending will leave you gasping in surprise! I thought I had it all figured out until the very last pages and then....Oh MY GOSH!

I loved to read about Kate's difficulty adjusting to the routines of living in a new country and being the Expat. The language difference, the difficulty finding and then relying on new friends who on any normal day you wouldn't EVER hang out with, the day to day monotony of finding your way around a new city and culture, having a husband working long and torturous hours while YOU are spending hours alone "handling" the household affairs including the moving and unpacking and decorating and putting together of the IKEA furniture that replaces the rentals you have while waiting for your shipment to arrive....then the moving and unpacking and decorating and putting together all of your stuff from the shipment. All of this ALONE...while at the same time discovering you really are handy with the screwdriver and that book of directions for the bureau you just built is your badge of honor for the day. PHEW! Now, lets add 2 rambunctious boys to that busy mother and you have Kate...who like most of us Expat wives and mothers, now newly joined the "club" pulls on the bootstraps of her new life and struggles to make sense of her SELF, her MARRIAGE, her LIFE in another country.

Add to that impossible mix the fact that Kate is an ex-CIA operative with a past that still haunts her...and you have one exciting, riveting, thriller of a story which will not disappoint you in the ending.

Mercedes says

This was well written AND a page turner. Don't you love that? It falls into the spy thriller genre. I also loved the ex-pat context, having lived that life myself and remembering....

Bonnie E. says

I was excited to read this book given all the good press which it had received. And I had not read a top notch spy novel in quite some time. By the time I finished this book, however, I concluded that I had read a good spy novel but not a very compelling one.

First of all, the story was written through the eyes of Kat (or Kate), a former CIA agent who quits her career and moves to Luxembourg with her husband and two small children. She then begins to discover that her husband is not entirely what he seems which is also the case with many of the other people she encounters along the way. It's a unique premise and there is much to like about the story, but as much as the author tries, the main character does not seem genuine to me. And for me, if the protagonist doesn't ring true, then the rest follows suit. None of the characters are developed all that well, and as a result, if/ when something really good or really bad happens, you're not particularly moved.

Second, the ending is a let down. After investing so much time and energy into reading an interesting but somewhat convoluted plot, to just wrap it all up into a neat and tidy bundle at the very end is a bit of an

affront.

Tony says

Presumably the main purpose of a thriller is to provide thrills -- unfortunately, this one does not. I have no earthly idea why John Grisham's blurb compares it to "the early works of Ken Follett, Frederick Forsyth, and Robert Ludlum" because not only is it not in the same league, it's not in the same sport. Christopher Reich's blurb makes the claim that the book is a "jet-fueled story that rockets from one corner of the globe to another." This is curious characterization of a book where the action almost entirely takes place in Luxembourg, France, and Switzerland, with the occasional flashback to Washington, D.C. and New York and occasional weekend trip to various other European cities. And it is anything but "jet-fueled," -- quite the opposite: it is slow and plodding to a deadly degree.

The story concerns a middle-class married couple (Kate and Dexter) with two kids who move to Luxembourg as a result of a job opportunity for the husband. This gives Kate the opportunity to quit her work as a CIA agent and settle into a new life as an expat housewife without ever having to reveal her secret professional life to Dexter. Of course, it goes without saying that Dexter harbors a secret or two himself (shades of that tepid Brangelina movie *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*). Their story flips back and forth between the present, and two years previously. In the present, they are living in France and Kate runs into a friend from Luxembourg who is not really a friend, but some kind of agent sent to track her and Dexter down. The "two years ago" sections are the bulk of the book, and detail the family's move to Europe, and the gradual revelations of truth that eventually tie into the present. It's a clunky narrative method, with the two timelines cut and pasted back and forth in a vain attempt to create some kind of narrative tension.

Unfortunately, most readers will have a reasonably good idea of Dexter's revelation is going to be, so we're left waiting, and waiting, and waiting...for Kate to catch up. Meanwhile, we roll around in Kate's head as she struggles to figure out her new life and her husband's odd job. There are some nice moments when we see Kate struggling with her deception, and trying to convince herself to tell Dexter about herself and what she knows about him. But even that is just a typical portrayal of a marital deception writ large. There are a few scenes here and there that unfold quite nicely, for example, a gathering of ex-pat mothers having coffee and babbling about nothing, or Kate's acquisition of a gun from a Scottish pimp in a brief trip to Amsterdam.

However it's not until the very end of the book that the deceptions start to fall away and the action picks up, and Kate and Dexter confront the other's secret side, and have to work together. Only then can a very elaborate David Mamet-like con artist plot start to unfold. This is all reasonably nifty, but even here, the two timelines create a narrative choppiness that slows the pace down. In the end, the whole enterprise felt rather thin and artificial, which left me thinking that this might be the kind of book that is actually better as a slick Hollywood film. I wouldn't be surprised if we get the chance to find out in about three years.

Candace says

Dexter and Kate Moore move from Washington, D.C., to Luxembourg where he gets a job in cyber security. Kate quits her job at the CIA. Bill and Julia McClean (spelling?) are fellow expats living in Luxembourg. Kate becomes suspicious of her husband, Julia and Bill. She starts secretly investigating them, searching for answers. As her suspicions grow, her questions increase. Is her CIA training kicking in or is she letting her imagination run away with her? If her suspicions are correct, does she really want to know the truth?

This thriller is a spy novel. It's? also the lies (by omission or spoken out loud) versus the truth in a marriage story. I honestly wondered if the plot was more about the spying or the marriage. I felt they sometimes intermingled -- one openly and the other implied. The heroine is a strong, resourceful character. The hero gains some cleverness near the end of the novel. Until then he's kind of flat. The secondary characters, Bill and Julia, are fleshed out as the story progresses. This novel contains adult language.

Elaine says

I first tried to read this book about a year ago and gave up after a couple of chapters because I couldn't get into it, so I put it to one side for a later date, which turned out to be now. This time around I got as far as page 115 before I threw in the towel and ditched it. It is supposed to be a thriller but it really is an incredibly dull read about incredibly dull people doing incredibly dull things, which isn't helped by the fact that the story is told in different times. It chops backwards and forwards between each time frame, usually without any warning that you have switched so it gets very confusing each time.
