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LoveReading Reader reviews of **The Spy** by Paulo Coelho

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.



Marjorie Lacy

*I have read many of Paulo's books over the years, he is a unique writer. Each book has its own style. This one is no different, it is written in the first person, with Mata Hari telling us what happened to her. The story uses letters sent and received, about the life of, for the times, a most unusual woman. An independent, world travelling woman. Who knew and understood men. She was a dancer, accomplished in the arts of sex and seduction (prostitute is too mundane a word). She fell into the world of espionage by accident and was not very good at it. I don't think she fully understood what she was supposed to do. Or was she, pretending innocence to be ahead of the game? **This is***

a clever and well written book, the hardback edition is a pleasure to look at and to hold. I can recommend it to you.

Phyllippa Smithson

Boy, if you want to know how far society has come in recognising the right to equality of the sexes, this is the one for you.

Written as a letter to her prosecutor ahead of the final judgement, this is the story of a woman writing the truth which those of influence in the male dominated world chooses to ignore.

Set in the late 18th century and moving into the 1920s, the story follows a young ambitious woman who seeks escape from the predictableness of her childhood home where women marry, have children and serve their masters, also known

as husbands.

For these reasons and a burning ambitions to achieve wealth and fame, Margaretha Zelle marries an officer with the sole intension of fleeing the predictable to establish a life in Indonesia. And whilst she had married only to escape the prison like life she was destined for, she finds a new sort of prison when all too late she realises that her husband has a cruel side to him hidden from anywhere outside of their marital home.

Eventually she escapes the life-threatening ordeal and returns to Europe. Despite the experience in the Far East, she is no less ambitious to achieve at least wealth and fame and manages to flee to Paris to become a dancer. But ignoring the type of dancing expected of her, she takes to the stage not as a shy and cautious performer but, as a stripper who manages to keep to the acceptable side of tolerance. Her fame and thus her fortune is immediate.

But her dreams are short lived and as War encompasses her world, she is arrested with claims of her being a Spy.

The Spy is both disturbing and ruthless. The brutality of the early 20th century is never far away as page after page the author triggers an empathy with the leading character.

Powerful writing to inspire a belief that the world really is a fairer place.

Lynda DeFreitas

Paulo Coelho has used his considerable skills as an author to dispel the myths and show Mata Hari in all her daring, naiveté and courage. This novel is well worth reading.

I already knew of the story of Mata Hari before reading this book, but now I think I only knew the myths that surrounded her. This novel, based on letters written by her and others, made me see the real woman – one who wanted to be independent and make her own way in the world.

In a time when women were meant to be subservient she shocked and enthralled a lot of people with the way she behaved, but rich and powerful men were fascinated by her performances and she played that to her advantage initially. Unfortunately for her the powerful men she took as lovers could wield their power both for and against her.

After reading this novel I ended up with a new outlook and a respect for the way

she conducted herself throughout her trial and execution.

Sarah Musk

A brilliant book about a shallow, delusional woman which begs the question - did she deserve to be executed or was she a victim of the paranoia of the times.

This is a very interesting book about a very interesting woman. Mata Hari, who was executed in 1917 after being accused of spying for the Germans, is portrayed as both a slippery character, a lying adventuress, a naive innocent woman. Throughout the book Mata Hari often changes her personas and her image so that one moment the reader feels sympathy for her, the next contempt.

Paulo Coelho mainly portrays her as an arrogant, deluded dancer who is proved to have told lies about her past but I did occasionally feel sympathy for her since through necessity brought about by her fading beauty and fame, she is embroiled in a deception which she never seems to take too seriously. Even when she is in prison and in deep trouble she boasts about her 'influential' friends (who did not lift a finger to help her) and how important she was. It begs the question - although she is said to be clever - how clever was she.

This book, which is quite uncomfortable at times (the execution scene is very vivid) leaves the reader feeling that Mata Hari was a shallow, delusional woman who was out of her depth. Maybe some low-level spying was carried out but did she deserve execution? There is a suggestion that there were powerful men who wanted her silenced. It is left up to the reader as to whether she deserved her fate or not.

Cathy Small

Mata Hari is a woman who reinvents herself whenever she needs to so that she survives from the life that she is in and moves on to the life that she wants.

Mata Hari wanted to escape her home life so answered an advert for a woman and shortly became married. She finds a way to escape and arrives in Paris penniless but she is a strong woman and soon learns how to make her money. She teaches herself exotic dances and puts on shows for those who know nothing about the true origin of these dances. She takes many lovers to support her choice in life but makes one mistake too far. She ends up being asked to spy which she tries to turn into her benefit as a double agent. This doesn't go well and she is found out and imprisoned. No one will come to her rescue with her

*previous lives vets denying knowledge so her life ends by her paying a great price for just trying to be different and make the best of a tough life. We see the story of a desperate woman who turns away from her terrifying husband and her daughter to try and build a great life for herself but she becomes a victim again as her precious country goes to war. **An enjoyable short story that many could relate to.***

Sue Burton

Enjoyable read and describes how different life was many years ago and how life has changed today.

Quick read and enjoyable - certainly never knew anything about Mata Hari but my impression is that she was born too early and in the wrong era.

Humaira

*I'm glad that 'The Spy' is the first book that I have read of Paulo Coelho because **this book was just phenomenal. I loved everything about it.** It was a great read. **Mata Hari is a character I will never forget.***

Edel Waugh

*This is a novel based on true life events of the life of famous woman Mata Hari. From the gripping opening chapter to the sad and though provoking end, this is a story you won't forget. Mata Hari was pushing boundaries in her love and social life from the beginning of her life as a young woman, she would meet many wealthy men and make the most of these acquaintances getting material items, money and information when she could, but the tide turned on her, she became notorious, and suspicion was cast against her. **Told with compassion and honesty, this would make a great read for those nonfiction book readers out there and for anyone interested in great women of the past.***

<http://edelwaugh.blogspot.ie/2016/10/the-spy-by-paulo-coelho-review.html>

Sheila Dale

*Not an author I have read before and won't be reading again. **I have not read Paulo Coelho and wanted to review this as it is completely outside my normal reading. Have to say I did not enjoy it at all.***

Jennifer Stoddart

This is the first Coelho book I have read and it will not be my last. 'The Spy' is a moving read, designed to illuminate the life of Mata Hari - a person I knew very little about. Coelho manages to give Mata Hari a voice that is **compelling and insightful**. I think he manages to write from Mata Hari's perspective realistically and allows her to be viewed as a woman who sought to take control of her own destiny in an age when women were still subject to men. The tragic end of Mata Hari's life serves to remind us that her attempt to carve her own path led ultimately to her downfall. I also enjoyed the fact that the book contained photographs of Mata Hari as this helped to personalise her even further. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to review this novel.