



The Pale Assassin

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Set during the French Revolution, this novel about a teen aristocrat who must question the justice of her own wealth while facing the cataclysmic divisions of her society will captivate readers as secrets come out, sympathies shift, and every choice can change or end a life.

The Pale Assassin Details

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Author : Patricia Elliott

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From Reader Review The Pale Assassin for online ebook

Lynette says

Just a short quick read! It was ok. I don't believe I will be reading the next one? I don't have a screaming in my head that I need to read it, and the third book in the series appears like barely anyone has read it. It's not that this is a bad book, but after just within the last year of finishing Les Mis, it seems dull in comparison, which almost seems unfair.

Z says

This sounds like a book I'd like. However, I haven't found any historical fiction that I've actually enjoyed in a few years, which leads me to believe that perhaps I no longer like the genre? I don't know. My basic problems were that the main character didn't do anything until the last bit of the book and that the author seemed too focused on the historical context and getting big names (Robespierre) thrown in there. There's nothing wrong with that, necessarily, but here it just didn't seem necessary. I want to read a good historical fiction book with a heroine that's actually a strong character on her own, without coincidences making her strong.

Mara says

The first thing that I must assure Readers is that Eugenie is not nearly as annoying as the synopsis makes her out to be. Eugenie certainly isn't my favorite heroine. I would not call her resourceful, practical, or even especially clever. But she really doesn't complain often, she tries to have original and successful ideas, she grows to understand that the political upheaval in France is important and that she cannot ignore it, and she is not scornful of the lower class. She's just young and hasn't had to work for anything. She still possesses a great innocence, which is probably realistic for a fourteen-year-old aristocratic girl.

My main complaint is the story. It takes what seems an unnecessary length of time to get to the storyline concerning Le Fantome, who felt like a minor background character to me. I didn't think him terribly threatening or mysterious; just kind of . . . there. Le Scalpel, his "right-hand man" seems more imposing and someone to avoid than Le Fantome, and I have to say that I liked Le Scalpel and who he ends up being.

I know that The Pale Assassin will have a sequel, and if it doesn't, I will be very much surprised and my opinion of said story will go down, because that is a very sudden place to end it. Despite the fact that it's going to have a sequel, The Pale Assassin doesn't pull me in. The entire time it felt lethargic, probably because Le Fantome had very little to do with the story. The best way I can describe it is it felt like a very long prologue. I hope that the sequel will pick things up. Maybe it will better explain why Patricia Elliott wrote the first book like she did.

Of writing style, I have nothing critical to say, other than the Author didn't seem to quite understand when the work "most" should be interjected and when it should be left out. Just because "most" is put into a sentence doesn't mean it sounds old-fashioned. But other than that, The Pale Assassin was well-written, and I was especially fond of the character Julien.

I am looking forward to seeing what happens next to Eugenie.

Kate McMurry says

A beautiful young aristocrat's high adventure during the French Revolution

Eugenie de Boncoeur is the beautiful daughter of a wealthy marquis. In spite of being an orphan, she and her brother have been well provided for and she's lived a life filled with glittering parties and gorgeous, outrageously expensive clothing. Until the moment the French Revolution breaks out. In addition to her whole way of life being destroyed, she is horrified to discover that her guardian has promised her in marriage when she turns 16 to Le Fantome, the Pale Assassin. This shadowy, evil man has had a grudge against her father for many years, because the marquis humiliated him as punishment for cheating at cards.

This is an action-adventure historical novel with a heroine in the vein of Scarlett O'Hara, though with a less compelling goal. Unlike Scarlett, she is not seeking to save her home at any cost, rather to escape her awful would-be bridegroom and the violence against aristocrats in her war-torn country. The heroine encounters spies, revolutionaries and double-crossing suitors in her frantic journey across France.

Though the heroine starts out understandably spoiled from her life of privilege, she grows across the course of the book. For teens who have never read a historical novel, or who have read and enjoyed them, this book is a satisfying journey through a deadly period of history.

Amy says

1.5 stars

I expected more from a series entitled "Pimpernelles." Pimpernelles...the French Revolution...this book is going to have something to do with the Scarlet Pimpernel, right? Or this Eugenie girl is going to become a female Scarlet Pimpernel? Or....?

Nope.

The book had lots of potential but doesn't live up to it. Eugenie is an extremely boring character. I learned from the description that she would be spoiled and experience growth as she faces the French Revolution. Which might have been interesting...but it takes till almost the last chapter for her to show any skills or growth. The character change is too slow and too late to be interesting. The other characters are vague and uninteresting. The villains are unbelievable.

The French Revolution is covered in detail...and more detail. It gets slow and boring. The story is conveyed through a very passive, telling style. I kept waiting for it to stop "catching me up" and actually get to the action. Unfortunately, this whole book is a set up for more action that never comes.

Finally, I was distracted by the strong "women are strong! Give women the vote!" coming from every female

character. (The men are all chauvinistic and ignorant) Eugenie keeps saying she doesn't want to marry...and then falls for every handsome man who smiles in her direction. I strongly dislike books that spout Strong (and in this case, cliche) Female messages and then have pathetic, weak heroines. Overall, not worth it.

Tova says

Well, that was terrible. I don't care about any of the characters (except Belle & Hortense).

Sarah says

I wanted to enjoy this book, I really did! Historical fiction, strong female characters, coming of age...

However, I thought it fell short. Elliot puts too much emphasis on the historical aspects of the French Revolution, makes Eugene an annoying little girl, and romantic aspect of the story is completely predictable.

The first chapter, "The Beginning" is wonderful. After that, I kept picking it up and tried to read more, trying to be interested...I was just bored. It didn't have enough action nor enough character development to hold my attention. Even with all of the emphasis on the French Revolution to explain motive, the characters didn't feel real to me.

She set herself up for a sequel. I won't read it.

Erika C says

The (somewhat misleading, anglophone-biased) view of history that appears in The Pale Assassin probably won't be surprising to long-time French Revolution junkies. We've heard it all before: 1789 began with the promise of just enough freedom from monarchy, but then the mobs went mysteriously crazy and before you know it the king's head got chopped off. Robespierre Took Over both the CSP and France and perpetuated his Reign of Terror up until Thermidor, at which point, thank god, we all started calling one another "madame" and "monsieur" again and could try out a bunch of newer (...wait) better (WAIT!!!) governments.

Salinity of my comments aside, I'll concede that Elliott's done her research. The details indicate she's read primary and secondary sources. It's just that it's so much of one specific KIND of research. I can tell she's used Lucy Moore's Liberty to write her book, based on her descriptions of Germaine de Staél and Condorcet, and I would not be shocked if Simon Schama's Citizens were on her reading list either. Especially as the novel draws closer to the execution of Louis Capet, and the weeks after it, Elliott does little to question the conventional narrative we're fed in history class. Was Robespierre really just too paranoid to comprehend? Of course he was. Was the mob smelly and leering and in it for their own gain? Of course they were.

Beyond the issues with the history—which I might have endured, maybe—there are the problems with the protagonist. Eugénie de Boncquer is a half-French, half-English noble girl in her late teens whose fortunes fall as a result of the revolution, and who has to escape the country, both because the revolution's gotten

radical, and because some weird old dude stalker who ends up part of Robespierre's secret police (??? He isn't even ON the CSP until much after this novel ends, and yet they act like he is there and a dictator from the beginning) is after her. It's a solid set-up for conflict, I suppose, and for historical fiction observations on the past from a POV teens might relate to and find exciting.

The thing about Eugénie, though, is that I personally find her unlikable simply because everything about her seems calculated to be so likable. Elliott seems to have created Eugenie with the Goldilocks principle in mind. She's a noble girl with a charmed life and pretty dresses, but her family backstory means she's got a little bit of tragedy going on. She has just enough training with guns and riding to be unique compared to other girls of her station. She has servants, but is always kind to them, and we can tell they're good people because of their loyalty to her. She's oblivious but not too oblivious—she learns and accepts quickly. She would rather have adventures than get married, which I suppose we're supposed to find spirited, but she becomes marketably heterosexual when the Appropriate Cute Guys show up. (But she is never TOO forward with them, and only likes one at a time—gosh we don't want her to be immodest or anything!)

This is not to say that Eugénie would have been a better character if everything about her would have been taken to extremes—she wouldn't have. But any one of these traits could have been teased out a bit more in such a way that it would have better driven the narrative. And that's one of the big problems: in the first two thirds of the book, Eugénie doesn't do much to drive the narrative. It's the revolution and then her brother and his friends who do so. Eugénie starts using her skills to escape towards the end, and even though they've been mentioned, at that point her skills don't feel adequately built up to.

The problems I find with Eugénie are the sort a writing teacher might comment on, and while they exist in male protagonists, they're even more frustrating and common in female protagonists. We need girls in books to be proactive in their own way (even if it has the surface appearance of passivity, like with Sansa Stark) rather than reactive. We need girls in books to be brutal and want things. I don't think those ideas are pushed far enough in *The Pale Assassin*, and I think this is done out of an attempt to make Eugénie sympathetic.

Ultimately this leads me to a point I want to make about a sort of... let's call it an Intersectionality Of Reactivity that emerges re: Eugénie as a female protagonist and the way we portray more "moderate" (bourgeois? constitutional monarchist? whatever) politics of the Revolution. While trying to understand her former governess's going over to the radical, republican side of politics (though Elliott neglects to mention all the divisions even there) Eugénie declares, "There is no wrong side, Hortense—I have learned that." In other words, Eugénie attempts to position herself as apolitical and therefore humanitarian. The issue here is that Eugenie's privilege is what allows her to do this. Even when she is desperately escaping to England, pursued by our story's villain and Republican partisans, she can only have done so in the first place with that boost from the world she's raised in. Someone ought to have reminded Eugénie, when she remembers a childhood glass of lemonade kindly presented to her by Marie-Antoinette, that the lemonade was likely sweetened with sugar harvested by slaves in Saint-Domingue.

It's dangerous to equate recusing oneself from political and social strife with humanitarianism, especially when you come from the class of people who can afford to recuse oneself. And while Elliott gives lip service to the lower classes throughout the book—Eugénie lives with a milliner whose family is starving, which shakes her out of her obliviousness somewhat, and she becomes sympathetic to what caused her governess's political metamorphosis—we're never invited to question the "clarity" Eugénie might have achieved about human nature, and the kind of privilege that "clarity" is built on. Overall, this strikes me as an irresponsible narrative, one that dissuades young readers from pushing for social change just at the point when they begin to become uncomfortable with it. Putting an "apolitical but humanitarian" slant on a female protagonist is the icing on the cake, especially considering that we're writing about a time when the male majorities in most

political camps were trying to dissuade women from being actively political, and suggesting that they focus on their “nurturing” sides instead. As if the two ideas are somehow mutually exclusive.

To sum this all up: The Pale Assassin is nothing new. But works about the French Revolution really ought to be by now.

Katy Sites says

Eugenie is a young french aristocrat lady who is caught in the middle of the French Revolution. Little known to her this is not her biggest problem, she is pursued by Le Fantome, the Pale Assassin to be his bride. This is the same man involved in the death of her parents and the attempts on her brother's life. She is soon sent to a nunnery to become more proper and docile, soon after her arrival however the nunnery is attacked and she is forced to run away back to her brother's one room apartment. There she is sent to another location, thinking that it is for her to have a proper living but really to hide her once more from her fiance that she knows nothing about. She must stay hidden there in order that no one discovers that she is an aristocrat, for they have been abolished and now being hunted down and killed. The house is safe for now, but a suitor and supposed friend of her brother's, Guy, has found her location and wants to see her. No one quite trusts him, and don't quite know why, Eugenie however is head over heels for him after he saved her from the nunnery months earlier. Having had this location discovered she must move in with her brother once again and stay with him til their planned escape to England, there to live with their Uncle and cousin and be safe. Right before their attempted escape, a friend of Armand is discovered to having been revealed for being against the revolution and wanted for having attempted the rescue the king from execution. Armand and he must switch spots to escape to England. Soon after Eugenie and he have left, Armand is captured by the Pale Assassin and tortured to know where it is that his sister has gone. The Assassin attempts once more to get her for himself but she escapes him by way of a British spy and a ship of British Naval sailors who rescue her and her friend. Little do they know that Guy is right behind them as usual, he being the Pale Assassin's right hand man.

This book is a terrible book, there is no progression in the characters at all, nothing to warrant a change in the reader's life, and no morals/message to be taken. Eugenie is a young, spoiled aristocrat that even when there is war in the air, blood on the streets, and starving people everywhere, she is still being spoiled by her brother. The war its self was more interesting than the life of Eugenie. She is oblivious to most of what is going on around her, only caring about the look of her dress and the food in her stomach. It's only in the last 15 pages or so that she actually begins to do something unselfish, risking her life for her brother Armand's friend. A man whom she has always despised but now has feelings for him, very sudden, and convenient. In the end, the book was disappointing because I love period pieces of the French Revolution, this did not "float my boat".

PickyReader says

As mentioned before, this book is quite dull. I didn't really like it much at all, really, but I kept thinking it would get better as I continued to read it. Unfortunately for me, things did not improve. The plot never really moved any faster than a snail's pace until the last 60 pages or so.

Other than that....the book bored me. The characters remained the same throughout the ENTIRE book:

Eugenie stayed incredibly, PAINFULLY, naive; the brother Armand, had no personality at all to me, and no other characters seemed alive/real to me.

and La Fantome. C'mon. He's the villain. Surely he could have been in more than a scattered, random sentence here and there, and appear in the last 70 pages. Like, forreal. Make me fear him. Make me fret for the Eugenie's safety. MAKE ME FEEL SOMETHING.

I almost feel bad for finding it so boring, because everyone else seemed to like it.

Oh,well.

On to the next book!!

Sophie Carter says

I really did not expect to love this book as much as I did. My motto is, "Never judge a book by its cover, always go by the inside flap." This book was an exception. The inside cover made Eugenie sound really lame and the book seem one dimensional. But honestly, it was neither of those things at all!

This book takes place in France during the French Revolution. I stayed up late to finish so I'm not going to go too in depth into the plot, but basically Eugenie, the main character, is a rich girl. But during the French Revolution, there is a genocide of sorts towards the aristocrats, so Eugenie goes into hiding in a poorer part of town. She thinks she's in love with Guy Deschamps, and her older brother and his 'dull' friend Julien are planning to rescue the king. Eugenie is also betrothed (without her knowledge) to a creepy serial killer who is called Le Fantome, or The Ghost, because he's really pale. Eugenie's brother's plan fails and the king is executed before they are about to flee from the revolution to England. But Eugenie's brother knows that his friend Julien will be detained for questioning, so he stays behind and sends Julien to England with her instead. They have some trouble escaping National Guard and Le Fantome, but in the end, they end up on their way to England safely and Julien and Eugenie get married (well it's implied. That's what I like to think).

The only reason I couldn't give this five stars was just because of silly technical things that made the book a bit confusing. There were several pronoun use issues, where it was unclear which 'she' the author was talking about. I also noticed a few missing quotation marks and errors such as that. I was a shipper of Eugenie and Julien since the time when Julien was first introduced so I was very happy with that! This book was very interesting, and definitely one of the best historical fiction books I've read in a while!

Donna says

The title and description of the book made me expect something quite different, but on the surface this one still sounds like a winner. A young girl, forced into political awareness by a great societal change, must escape both the turmoil of her time and the more personal threat of an unwanted marriage. Sounds pretty

interesting, right?

Unfortunately, I didn't care for pretty much every other aspect of the book.

Setting a story during an infamous event like the French Revolution is always risky, because the characters and plot must be strong enough to stand out over their backdrop. *The Pale Assassin* fails that test.

Eugenie is a bland protagonist who floats through the plot and does very little of interest until the final pages. The story is often advanced by either things she overhears or the things those around her choose to do with her. The other characters may be more active, but they're equally flat. The person who provoked the biggest reaction in me was one of the obvious villains - and it's not the vengeful revolutionary, whose motivation for a decade long "punish the children of my enemy" vendetta is more sad or silly than sinister.

The author seems much more interested in the setting than character or story. Several scenes feel awkward or highly coincidental so that a real historical figure or event can be incorporated, and I can't help but feel that those pages would have been better spent filling out the sparse backgrounds of the characters. The writing has a stiff style that may be partly due to this focus.

Through the entire story, people do obviously stupid things, and the plot relies entirely on these terrible, unsupported decisions. It would be bad enough if they were constantly wrong, but they're also inconsistent. One encounter near the end of the book was handled in a ridiculous way, seemingly to leave something foolish for Eugenie to do in the inevitable sequel. The romance plot was predictable and barely built up to at all.

Some of my issues with the book could have been forgiven if I'd been able to care much about Eugenie, but she spent too long as the empty-headed aristocrat that everyone took her for.

♥ Ashleigh ♥ contrary to popular belief i'm not actually mad! says

Original Review 15.04.2012

DNF

what can i say?? i just cant stand the way females talk in these kinds of books - it drives me *Nuts!* plus im not a big fan of the whole damsels in distress thing.

Latest Review 02.01.2016

1 Star

What a horrid book. I can't believe i read this after i had already DNF it. To be fair i had completely forgotten i tried to read it before, it has been quite a few years.

The characters were ridiculous and completely unlikeable, and ruined a potentially good adventure book about the Revolution in France. They had no redeeming qualities, and made me cringe and roll my eyes throughout the book, I'm 24, rolling my eyes should be something I'm passed but they were just so shallow and unbelievable in their behavior it was impossible to resist. France would have been completely wiped out if this was how everyone thought and behaved, what a bunch of imbeciles.

Sarai says

The book ended with a lot of loose ends, so I assume there is going to be a second book coming.

One of my main gripes is that it seemed like all through the book the main character, Eugenie, and her brother's friend, Julien, were at odds and then all the sudden at the end Julien was in love with Eugenie and she was in love with him where in the chapter before she was mad at him and was not speaking to him. I felt like I'd missed a chapter somewhere when he all the sudden started kissing her fingers - eh? I figured they were going to end up together, but you never got to see the change in her feelings. It was always she hated him, she despised him, she would never forgive him, blah blah blah, and then she was in love. She had been mooning over Guy and then when Julien told her Guy had been the one who attacked her, she didn't believe him. So what happened there?

Also, when did she get smart? She was bored and wanted clothes and wanted to dance and go to balls and then all the sudden she was making disguise decisions and knew how to read maps and was able to flirt her way out of danger. It was less like character growth and more like out-of-character lucky guesses. 2/3 of the way through the book she was still being a ding dong and then all the sudden she changed.

I guess I just felt that the author did not do a good job of showing the transformation and growth.

K. says

Okay, so I suspect a reasonable chunk of my disappointment in this one comes from the series title. Based on Pimpernelles and the fact that the main character's brother is named Armand? I was totally expecting this to be a retelling of the Scarlet Pimpernel, for which I am EXTREME TRASH.

Instead, this is a book about an aristocratic girl growing up against the background of the French Revolution with a little bit of OMG WILL THEY ESCAPE PARIS?? action thrown in at the end.

Literally the most exciting moment in the book was when the page said "Lafayette himself is coming!" and it took all my self control not to yell "I'M TAKIN' THIS HORSE BY THE REINS MAKIN' REDCOATS REDDER WITH BLOODSTAINS!" in the middle of a year 10 silent reading class.

So yeah. Not what I expected. I guess it's a decent introduction to the French Revolution for teens? But it's also not particularly exciting for, like, 60-70% of the book.
