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## HOPE

By Len Deighton

HarperCollins. 320 pp. \$24.

In this eighth offering in his Bernard Samson thriller series, master espionage writer Len Deighton takes another sure-footed walk through territory trembling with uncertainty and change.

This time, Samson, the battle-worn British spy, heads into the chilling winds of the winter 1987 Cold War, through a Europe reeling from the October stock market crash. It seems Samson's brother-in-law George Kosinski, a millionaire expatriate Pole, believes his wife Tessa did not really die on the German Autobahn under a barrage of Eastern agent gunfire, an execution Samson had witnessed with his own eyes.

As Kosinski sets off on a trail that wends through England, Switzerland, Poland and Germany, the intelligence brass of London Central, suspecting Kosinski is himself chest-deep in duplicity, sends Samson after him. Soon, at the East Prussian Kosinski estate, Samson is handed physical proof that Kosinski has been murdered by deserting Soviet soldiers.

But this is the world of cloak and dagger deception, where only the most experienced and perceptive can guess which Chinese box will finally contain the truth. Samson refuses to believe Kosinski's dead. He trudges on. And, of course, Samson's mistrust will prove justified.

Through the obstacles and burdens slowing Samson's progress, Deighton lifts this tale to the level of heroic quest and domestic tragedy. For a British spy, Samson is absorbingly human. No martini-sipping 007, Samson is more shaken than stirred by the circumstances of his life: his career floundering, his home life a painful muddle.

Not only must Samson slink among Polish and East German heavies who would love to end his life, he must drag with him his irritating boss, Dicky Cruyer. Unlike the German-raised Samson, Cruyer has gone to the right prep schools, and, like Samson's wife Fiona, stands atop the espionage ladder far above field-agent rungs like Samson. A supercilious prig with a distaste for bloodshed, Cruyer hates to be reminded that things can get messy in the field. He prefers to believe "that firm words and two choruses of 'Rule Britannia' should be enough to bring any recalcitrant foreigner to his knees."

When Samson bashes the heads of three thugs about to execute him, Cruyer expresses qualms: "We can't be absolutely certain they were going to kill us."

No, Samson concedes, "To be absolutely certain they were going to kill us, we would have to be dead."

A far heavier cross than Cruyer, however, is the ambitious Fiona, less Samson's wife than his Delilah. Back from a staged defection to the East she had planned for years without ever telling Samson, Fiona sits about their apartment needling Samson and refusing to help raise their two children, whom she has farmed out instead to her wealthy father.

His wife as cuddly as dry ice, Samson finds a vacuum of warmth at home that most readers will yearn to see filled by Gloria Kent, the sweet, caring young woman who had loved him and his children during Fiona's mock defection. But Samson is too loyal to Fiona and considerate of Gloria to leave his wretched marriage or dally outside it.

Among Samson's other attractive qualities is a jaded wit that stays on the affable side of cynicism and helps him survive the blows to his body and ego. When Fiona switches on the TV, Samson observes "a discussion between four people best known for their availability to appear on TV discussion programmes." He describes a turbofan Learjet as "the sort of thing the presidents of big international corporations buy for themselves because they think their shareholders wouldn't like them to be standing in line at airports."

In lesser hands than Deighton's, it would be easy to get lost in this mercurial world of geopolitics where who's in and out is already far out of date. His authoritative sense of place, however, keeps the settings too immediate for confusion. He knows which vegetables the Germans eat and how "you can't get lost in Warsaw since the Soviets built the world's ugliest building there and made it so tall you can see it from Vladivostok."

Nor will new readers be lost in Samson's intricate history, as Deighton weaves in relevant background and even provides on the inside cover a tabular chronicle as detailed as those connecting the House of Plantagenet to the Tudors. Still, many will find this richly textured novel so absorbing they will want to pick the series up at the beginning and revel in each book.