

## 48 Hours

### David Halfpenny

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*A retiree-cum-international-spy finds himself zipping around the world in this wish-fulfillment thriller.*

David Halfpenny's spy novel *48 Hours* crisscrosses the globe from England to continental Europe and Afghanistan.

The narrative moves quickly, beginning with the fast, transformative forty-eight-hour span in which a retired middle-aged businessman, Dexter Campbell, unexpectedly finds a new lease on life. He identifies a terrorist bomber at Gatwick airport and is whisked away by MI5 for his own protection.

Recruited to be an agent in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and compelled to change his name and appearance, Campbell soon finds himself at the forefront of antiterrorist activities, whether it's rooting out a mole at MI5 headquarters in London or tracking down international terrorists in Afghanistan's war zones. Taking part in top-secret operations and sporting James Bond-style weaponry such as a walking cane that shoots darts, Campbell also finds his love life revived. He's romanced by a trio of women: the spy who initially recruits him, the nurse who cares for him after he changes his face and name, and the buxom RAF lieutenant who works alongside him in Afghanistan.

*48 Hours* has the bones and fast pace of an engrossing spy thriller, and every so often the narrative hints at psychological complexity, as when Campbell feels guilt over an adulterous affair. In most other respects, however, the book is an implausible wish-fulfillment fantasy that is dimensionless in its presentation.

Campbell's adventures are related in a flat, one-thing-after-another fashion, without the details or style that could invigorate the story. As a hero, Campbell is none too compelling; all that's related about him is that he's a goodhearted bloke who takes to his new life of spycraft all too easily. He never encounters a problem he can't solve with a bit of planning or firepower. Like a glamorous secret agent, he attracts every woman who comes into contact with him, even though nothing about him is extraordinary. Likewise, the other characters are barely-sketched-in types: the maternal boss, the friendly colleague, the supportive wife.

As *48 Hours* unfurls, the implausibilities mount: the sixty-year-old Campbell acquires spy training, and he ferrets out a traitor simply by eyeing suspicious-looking employees during lunch. Without breaking much of a sweat, he becomes a master agent and war hero. Plausible real-world scenarios arise, but everything from the plotting to the character work is unpersuasive. By the time Campbell's adventures end, one would be hard-pressed to remember anything of impact or consequence.

Too bland to be convincing and not pulpy enough to be fun, *48 Hours* is a spy thriller that seems to know little about spying.

HO LIN (August 24, 2018)

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