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The Prime Minister's Secret Agent: A Maggie Hope Mystery, Book 4



Synopsis

For fans of Jacqueline Winspear, Charles Todd, and Anne Perry, *The Prime Minister's Secret Agent* is a gripping new mystery featuring intrepid spy and code breaker Maggie Hope. And this time, the fallout of a deadly plot comes straight to her own front door. World War II rages on across Europe, but Maggie Hope has finally found a moment of rest on the pastoral coast of western Scotland. Home from an undercover mission in Berlin, she settles down to teach at her old spy training camp, and to heal from scars on both her body and heart. Yet instead of enjoying the quieter pace of life, Maggie is quickly drawn into another web of danger and intrigue. When three ballerinas fall strangely ill in Glasgow - including one of Maggie's dearest friends - Maggie partners with MI-5 to uncover the truth behind their unusual symptoms. What she finds points to a series of poisonings that may expose shocking government secrets and put countless British lives at stake. But it's the fight brewing in the Pacific that will forever change the course of the war - and indelibly shape Maggie's fate.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 9 hours 46 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: July 1, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00KKPSILI

Best Sellers Rank: #104 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Mysteries & Thrillers > British Detectives #483 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Historical Fiction #651 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Mystery > British Detectives

Customer Reviews

The Maggie Hope mysteries are one of my favorite historical fiction series to read, not only because of the intelligent, resourceful and determined main character but because of the unique and historically informative viewpoints they give to readers. Maggie has brought us into the belly of No. 10 Downing Street, through the corridors of Windsor Castle, onto the training fields of secret MI-5 facilities and behind enemy lines in Berlin. Mixed in with the historically accurate key players and

circumstances we also get to feel along with Maggie as she experiences love and loss during these uncommon situations and singular time period. In this fourth installment we find Maggie healing from the horrific things she has witnessed and the losses she isn't quite ready to deal with. This is a Maggie we haven't really seen before and, to be honest, it isn't my favorite side of Maggie to see. From the beginning of *The Prime Minister's Secret Agent* a shroud of depression and exhaustion seems to hang over not only Maggie but the British people. They've been staying strong for so long as bombs (both literal and figurative) have rained down on them, but without an end in sight and without much hope that America will join them in bringing down Hitler, their stiff upper lip seems to be slipping. I hated seeing Maggie so down and unhappy, battling her "black dog" of depression and PTSD for much of the novel. The mystery of why and how her friend became so sick gives her something to do, but not much else really happens to Maggie during the story. More time was given to the real-life American and Japanese people surrounding the bombing of Pearl Harbor, an action that sets up Maggie's journey to America with Churchill in the next installment, than was given to any real development on Maggie's part. This isn't to say that seeing the politics behind the eventual bombing of Pearl Harbor wasn't interesting, it just wasn't what I was expecting or wanting from a Maggie Hope novel. I wanted more Maggie! This being said, there were a lot of interesting elements that kept me turning the pages. We get to learn a little bit about floriography, poisoning and secret British testing with biological warfare. We also get to see Churchill begin to unravel somewhat and see what he's willing to sacrifice to win this war. Best of all, in my opinion, is the storyline dealing with Maggie's mother, Clara - a Nazi spy due to be executed by the British for her crimes - and her multiple personality disorder that might be real and might be just another manipulation by a master manipulator. This element really helped solidify my understanding of Clara's backstory and made her even more interesting than I already found her. And let me just say the cliffhanger at the end of the novel involving Clara has me ready to jump into book number five ASAP! In many ways, *The Prime Minister's Secret Agent* felt more like a transition between novels than a novel itself. The concentration is more on getting the Americans involved in the war than developing Maggie's character and, while it is still an enjoyable novel, it didn't satisfy my need for the character I've come to love in Maggie. I should also note that anyone new to the series could easily pick this book up and be caught up with previous events within the first few chapters (Susan Elia MacNeal does an exceptional job of weaving the backstory in so you never feel like you're missing something) but I would definitely recommend starting with book one as each book in the series is quite enjoyable. The set up for the next novel in the series sees Maggie ready to travel back to America, not only with Churchill but with her friend David and her old flame John, and I very

much look forward to seeing Maggie on her old stomping grounds, to meeting the aunt who raised her and to hopefully seeing some old friends from previous novels that didn't make it into this one. And with the cliffhanger ending I mentioned above, it's shaping up to be quite the adventure!

This is a tour de force work. Apparently this is a middle book in a series. That didn't effect my enjoyment at all. In fact, I am impressed with the masterful way this very talented author wove earlier happenings seamlessly into this story. The marvelous historic details lifted this from a good story to a great novel. The characters (especially Churchill) were complete, real, complex, imperfect but believable. Of course, the time just before America enters WWII is about as dramatic a time as can be. The author brings this period alive with a glimpse into its challenges but without the feel of a text book. I couldn't put this down and intend to read the entire series. Congratulations Ms Macneal.

Maggie, still recovering from her wounds, is sent back to Scotland with two goals: to train new students at Britain's spy school and to recoup from the damage she suffered in Berlin. Her physical body is recovering, but her sense of self is suffering: can she reconcile herself with the knowledge that she has killed? Can she escape from those haunting memories and do her job? When her friend Sarah (a ballerina) invites her to see a local performance, she at first refuses, but then is directed by her boss to take the weekend vacation. During the performance, the principal dancer collapses, dying, onto the floor. Then Maggie notices that her friend and another of the dancers also appear ill. Not satisfied with the medical response at the local hospital, she engages the help of another agent to help seek information to help her. And for the first time since her return to England, she feels a sense of drive and urgency, and recognizes that she is still strong. As the Maggie plot is developing, however, a couple of side plots also emerge: 1) the beliefs and fears at 10 Downing St. that the US will not join in the war, and 2) episodes taking place in the US regarding early intelligence about the looming Japanese attack on Hawaii. The first set of episodes seem to fit the book nicely--after all, readers have met most of those characters in earlier books. The second set, however, seems oddly intrusive and bumpy; maybe they're setting something up for the next book, but they didn't appear to fit in well with this one. I enjoy Macneal's ability to plot and to portray interesting and realistic characters, and so liked this book quite a bit--despite the "time-outs" when the plot bounced into the Pearl Harbor bits. If you liked the other Maggie Hope books, you'll like this one, but it definitely seems a bit less focused than the previous three novels.

Too many story lines meant none were adequately developed. The research was good, but became

the book. The book would have been so much better if the author had focused on one line of inquiry and then placed her characters within that context. Clara Hess business was irrelevant to this novel, as was the business with Sarah (the dancer), since the story line did nothing to develop the anthrax scenario (which would have been a interesting story line). I have zero idea why the story went to France to meet Kim Philby. And then there was the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor with a whole cast of characters who had nothing to do with the central character. If the goal was to get Maggie to Washington with Churchill (and to repair the relationship with John Sterling), she should have had something to do with the Japanese scenario beyond taking a martial arts class and speaking to the Japanese-American instructor. A nice contrast to the martial arts instructor would have been pitting Maggie against "Tokyo Rose" propaganda utilized by Japan. It was a real lost opportunity because, as with the Bletchley girls, women were serving in amazing ways during WWII. Pick a topic and then help the reader understand what the ladies were up to within the context of that event. If you want to see how it's done, two recommendations: Maisie Hobbs series and Outlander series. The Nell Sweeney series is also good.

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