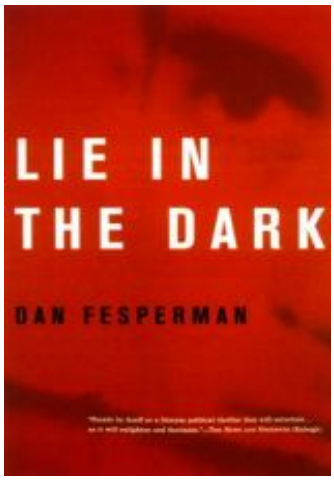
Lie in the Dark

by Dan Fesperman



About the Book

In a city where death from mortars, bombs, and sniper fire has become routine, Inspector Vlado Petric works as a homicide detective. Despite ridicule from friends, who liken him to a plumber fixing leaky faucets in the midst of a flood, he doggedly investigates the crimes that thrive in war and in peace: spurned lovers shooting one another, drunks stabbed over the last drop in a bottle, gamblers beaten for not paying their debts. Petric dreams of getting a case that really matters, one that will not only counteract the debilitating combination of fear and boredom of living in a besieged city, but will somehow justify his very existence. The possibility of such a case coming his way becomes less likely when, early in the war, the Interior Ministry creates its own police unit to cover high-profile cases. Then one night Petric literally stumbles upon the body that will mark the turning point in his career. The murder victim is Esmir Vitas, the chief of the Interior Ministry's special police. Eager to prove to the U.N.--which is monitoring every move made in Sarajevo--that the new government is above reproach and worthy of international support, the Interior Ministry designates Petric as an independent investigator. In an inquiry that takes him from the enclaves of Sarajevo's flourishing black market to the most-bombed out sections of the city to an outpost of guerrilla soldiers in the surrounding hills, Petric uncovers a web of dangerous secrets and unthinkable betrayals.

In **Lie in the Dark** Dan Fesperman brings to life the grim, chaotic atmosphere of Sarajevo, the private tragedies of its war-weary citizens, and the corruption that feeds on desperation and despair with an immediacy that echoes the best works of Graham Greene and John Le Carré. In a world where the innocent fare no better than the guilty, he presents a hero forced to redefine his own beliefs about right and wrong in order to survive.

Discussion Guide

1. Aside from the threat of official sanctions, why does Petric refuse to talk to the English journalist about corruption in the local government? Are journalists and other outsiders able to report on the conflict objectively, or are they influenced

by their own cultural prejudices? How does the freedom to leave Sarajevo whenever they want affect their perspective on the war?

2. Do you agree with Toby Perkins's statement that war is "always about money, or power, or whatever form of wealth you want to name" [p. 9]? Most events in the book support this belief. Which, if any, contradict it?

3. Is Petric morally wrong to accept coffee, cigarettes, and other gifts as he goes about his work? How does he justify his behavior? Can certain rules of conduct be suspended during wartime, or is it important to maintain the conventions of a civilized society in the midst of chaos?

4. How do loneliness and isolation shape Investigator Petric as a character, and how do they color the way he deals with others?

5. When Petric is given the case, Kasic tells him, "Keep the major work for yourself. The fewer who have access to your findings, the better" [p. 51]. Does the way Kasic presents the case--along with his offers of "technical" help--support his promise that Petric will be able to operate independently? Is it possible for police investigations to be completely free of the political interests and ambitions of those in power?

6. How do Petric's personal feelings about the victim and about his colleagues color his investigation? Do his assumptions help or hinder him? Is he overconfident or na?ve about what he can achieve?

7. Glavas gives Petric the key to solving Vitas's murder. What other function does he serve in the novel? How do his opinions and stories strengthen Petric's determination to get to the bottom of the case at any cost?

8. Petric's old friend, Goran, accuses him of being "One of those poor deluded souls who thinks he's got this figured out--who believes that survival is all there is to it" [p. 146]. To what extent is this an accurate portrait? How do his phone conversations with his wife, as well as his musings about his daughter, belie this impression of him? Is Petric's careful, seemingly unemotional approach to crime and chaos essential to his success as a policeman?

9. From Dashiell Hammett to Tony Hillerman to Ed McBain, many writers have created detective heroes who appear in several novels. If you've read their novels, how does Petric compare to those detectives? How is he similar and/or different?

10. Does the absence of civil order aid Petric's investigation in any way? Which particular acts, interviews, or strategies might have been more difficult or even impossible under normal circumstances?

11. Does Petric succumb to the corruption that surrounds him, or are his actions the only choices he has? How do they illustrate his contention that "When it seems that the future would never arrive, every day became a sort of judgment day. Every morning seemed a vindication of your behavior the day before" [p. 62]? Do the other characters live by this principle as well? Is personal survival the only thing that matters during wartime? What books have you read that offer a different perspective on coping with the atrocities of war? Were their protagonists more admirable than Petric?

12. Petric's three encounters with the prostitute--his clumsy attempts to buy her, his cursory interrogation at his office, and finally, his day long stay at her apartment--create an affinity between them. What cues, dialogue, and actions made

this relationship inevitable and necessary?

13. When shellbursts and gunfire become a sort of background music, how does it influence the reader's reaction to other descriptive details?

14. Do you think Petric and his family will return if peace is finally achieved in Sarajevo? Why or why not?

15. The bloody conflicts in the former Yugoslavia represent one of the darkest periods of recent history. Does **Lie in the Dark** give you a clearer understanding of the causes of the ongoing civil wars? Why did Fesperman choose as his protagonist the son of a Catholic mother and Muslim father who, officially classified as a Catholic Croat, is married to the Muslim daughter of a Serb mother?

16. Wartime conditions are often thought to bring communities closer together. Petric, for example, remembers being taught that the citizens of London and Stalingrad stuck together as their cities suffered the devastation of World War II [p. 3]. Why is there a rise in crime in his own besieged city? In what ways does the situation in Sarajevo differ from the circumstances the English and Russians faced during World War II?

17. Petric's deputy says "Tito lied about everything. That was his job" [p. 20]. As the leader of a fragmented nation, was it essential for Tito to tell lies? Instead of perpetuating the myth of ethnic harmony, should he have dealt directly with the history of hatred that festered in Yugoslavia? Is it possible for any ruler to eliminate a population's centuries-old fears and suspicions?

18. Glavas says "In every tale of war there is always a tale of art, of one culture trying to steal the soul of another" [p. 113]. Discuss how this statement relates specifically to the events in Bosnia as well as its relevance to World War II and other twentieth-century conflicts.

19. The siege guns are punishing the city in part for its indifference to ethnic division. Yet within the city, there is still a tangible emphasis on other divisions--gypsies are still a sub-class, rural versus urban. Why would these differneces still be evident, given the causes that have brought about the siege?

20. Discuss how the U.N. is depicted in the novel. Do you think that in the name of neutrality, it allows inhuman suffering to continue, as Glavas suggests [p. 128]? What humanitarian obligation do the U.N. and/or individual nations have to war-ravaged areas? What role, if any, can an outside force play in restoring peace to Bosnia and other areas torn apart by internal conflicts?

Author Bio

Dan Fesperman served as a foreign correspondent for *The Baltimore Sun*, based in Berlin. His coverage of the siege of Sarajevo led to his debut novel, LIE IN THE DARK, which won Britain?s John Creasey Memorial Dagger Award for best first crime novel. Subsequent books have won the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger Award for best thriller, the Hammett Prize from the International Association of Crime Writers, the Barry Award for best thriller, and selection by *USA Today* as the year?s best mystery/thriller novel. He lives near Baltimore.

Critical Praise

"A mystery tinged by the politics of today. . . . Brutally realistic. "

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