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FRANCE

The Case of the Missing Exile

Last May Romanian exile Virgil Tanase left his apartment in the Bastille neighborhood of Paris and vanished. Passers-by saw two toughs hustling him into a car. All of France believed that the dissident writer had been abducted by Romania's dreaded Securitate service. President François Mitterrand deplored the kidnapping and canceled a Romanian visit with President Nicolae Ceausescu. Then last week Tanase showed up in Paris looking tanned and fit—with a cloak-and-dagger story straight out of James Bond.

Tanase said he had faked the abduction in cooperation with members of France's counterintelligence service, the DST. He had spent three months holed up in Brittany with his wife, his two children and a service revolver. He had gone underground to protect a top Romanian spy, Motu Haiduc, whose code name was Mr. Z. Haiduc said Ceausescu had personally ordered him to kill Tanase and Paul Goma, an even better-known Romanian writer. Haiduc, who had been an intelligence operative in France for eight years, balked at his orders—"I'm an intelligence officer, not a killer," he said—and switched sides. The French promised Haiduc help and protection; in return they wanted information on the Romanian Securitate.

Mr. Z agreed to the deal, but he said he had a problem: he was supposed to kill Goma. The Securitate had supplied Haiduc with a colorless, tasteless, fast-acting poison concocted to induce a heart attack and leave no traces. The French told Goma about the plot and he agreed to cooperate. At a reception held by the National Independent Center, a conservative political party, Haiduc arrived with a fountain pen containing a pump for squirting poison. While Goma

looked away, Haiduc shot the poison into his drink. Then a French agent "accidentally" jostled Goma's arm, spilling the drink. Haiduc had established his credibility with his Romanian colleagues, who presumably reported to their superiors that he had done his best to kill Goma but had been foiled by bad luck.

Tanase, meantime, published a new attack on the Romanian president—"King Ceausescu the First, Communist King"—and Bucharest renewed its orders to kill the dissident. Haiduc's control suggested either a shooting or a mail bomb, but Mr. Z convinced his boss that it would be wiser to hire French thugs to kidnap Tanase and kill him later. Instead, French agents carried out the abduction with Tanase's help. Haiduc returned to Bucharest as a secret hero. He was decorated for his efforts and Ceausescu sent his congratulations. All the time, Haiduc was collecting information about Romania's intelligence service—including a list of agents around the world.

Happy Ending: In Paris, police went through the motions of an investigation, Mitterrand feigned outrage and Tanase hid out. The secret was kept through June and July, but last week the socialist daily *Le Matin* broke the story under a huge headline: TANASE ALIVE. Haiduc and his brother had already escaped Romania, but he said his mother was trapped by the premature disclosure. The ending was happy for the other Paris principals: for Mitterrand, whose government had been accused of aiding terrorism, and for Tanase, whose latest book was released amid massive publicity. "A writer can't remain anonymous," Tanase said. "I will live a normal life and take the risk of a real kidnapping."

SCOTT SULLIVAN in Paris