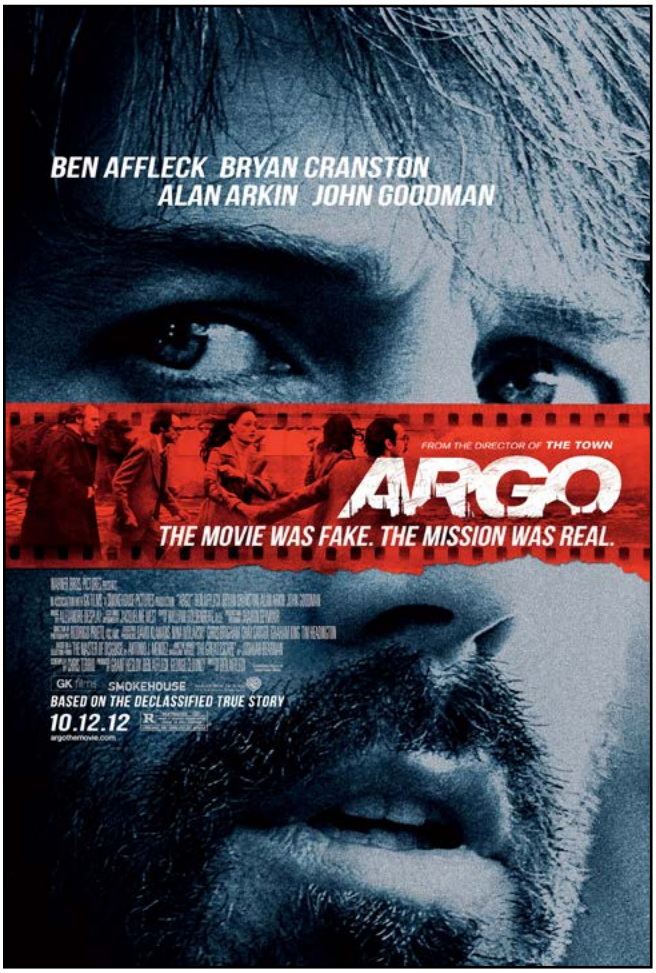
ARGO Producer Chay Carter: Thinking about Film and the World of Intelligence

Interviewed by Peter Usowski and Sara Lichterman

This article is dedicated to the memory of Tony Mendez, 1940–2019.

"Believe it or not, it took almost 13 years to get* ARGO *made."



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Peter S. Usowski, Director of the Center for the Study of Intelligence, and Sara Lichterman of CIA's Office of Public Affairs interviewed Ms. Carter on 20 September 2018. Ms. Carter is one of the executive producers of the movie ARGO*, which portrays the story of Anthony Mendez's successful effort to exfiltrate six members of the US embassy who avoided being taken during the Iranian seizure of the embassy in November 1979. The article is an adaptation of the interview, edited for clarity and brevity.*

Questions have all been italicized.

The Origins of ARGO

Thinking about *ARGO* actually started a long time before Ben [Affleck] and I came on board as part of the movie-making team. Believe it or not, it took almost 13 years to get that movie made. Its inception was an unclassified article that appeared in *Studies in Intelligence* in 1998.[a] David Klawans, the executive producer of *ARGO*—who is brilliant at finding articles and ideas—found that article, thought it was interesting, and went through whatever process it was to grab it up.

He initially tried to start selling the story, taking it around Hollywood to the studios and whatnot, which is very typical here. They say, "Oh, well, we want . . . . You need more to it, attach more, do more." So, he came up with a way: He talked to a friend of his, Joshuah ("Josh") Bearman, a journalist and screenwriter and said, "Josh, let's use your journalistic capabilities." And they wrote an article for *Wired* magazine.[b]

a. Antonio Mendez, "CIA Goes Hollywood: A Classic Case of Deception," *Studies in Intelligence* 42, no. 2 (June 1998)
b. Joshuah Bearman, "The Great Escape," *Wired*, April 2007 at https://www.wired.com/2007/04/feat-cia/

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***"This is the best script I think we have that fits your wheelhouse. It is kind of what you like, the things that you gravitate toward."* —** Jeff Robinov (Warner Brothers) to Ben Affleck.

And so, that gave Hollywood a piece of source material. The *Wired* article was great. So with David's finding the original *Studies* piece in 1998, getting Joshuah on board in 2005, and the *Wired* article coming out in 2007, there was a lot of inactive time. In 2007 when the *Wired* article came out, a small bidding war broke out in Hollywood. That's when our partners in the film, George Clooney and Grant Heslov with Smokehouse Pictures, acquired the article and optioned it.

Clooney and Heslove had their deal with Warner Brothers—where Ben [Affleck] and I also were. They then found a screen writer, Chris Terrio, who you guys may know. He wrote the screenplay; he was kind of unknown then. Nina Wolarski, who worked for Warner Brothers, developed the script with him. They took a lot of research that Joshuah had done.

We came into the picture about 2009 because we were shooting *The Town* for Warner Brothers. Smokehouse, George [Clooney] and Grant [Heslov] had just moved to Sony. But they still had the *ARGO* project at Warner Brothers because they had developed it there. So, when we finished *The Town*, Ben [Affleck] said to them, "We're looking for your best script. We want your best story, the best story that you've got out there."

You would think coming from a huge studio like Warner Brothers which does big tent-pole type films and a variety of others, but you wouldn't think immediately that *ARGO* might be the best they'd think about. But Jeff Robinov, who was running Warner Brothers at the time told Ben [Affleck], "This is the best script I think we have that fits your wheelhouse. It is kind of what you like, the things that you gravitate toward."

As soon as we read it, pretty much immediately, things started fast-tracking. So, we read it in 2009 or 2010, and we were shooting in 2011. And then, of course, the film came out in 2012. So, a 13-year process to make that film, which seems like a lot. But it's not that unheard of. You guys probably work a lot quicker—intelligence. [Laughter.]

Q: What was it about the Wired *article, in comparison with the original* Studies *article, that attracted people to the concept?*

You know, quite honestly, that's a great question. Because, again, it was so early in the process, 1998 until 2010–2011 when we started actually shooting—in that time I think none of us ever saw the original article.

So, we read the *Wired* article and then the script. And those were the two things. And truly it was the script that we focused on at that piece of the process. It's what we were given to make the decision. I wish I had seen the article because that would be more specific to you guys. I'm guessing the *Wired* article had a little more drama to it, added pieces.

How Ideas Turn to Film

CC: Typically studios here want source material. So, one might think, "Oh, it's Hollywood. They're creative people. These things are made up." They are made up, but [studios] want backup now. They want branded content. If it's a book, if it's an article—and that goes also for your journal, *Studies*—if it's something that they could draw from, "Oh, it's here. Okay. Great." They're more apt to consider taking a look at and making something of such material because they know it has some kind of audience.

And so, specifically to you guys, I was so fascinated that you probably have so many incredible stories there about the agency, about agents, about missions that are made unclassified as time goes by. Those stories are super valuable, I think, to producers like me or other content creators.

Factors Behind Decisions to Produce

Decisionmaking is a very specific, subjective process. It's very personal. So, it really depends on the genre, the filmmaker, and who's driving the process. For myself, its what I gravitate toward; I tend to love true stories. I have developed five over the past few years in that vein; they all some kind of message. You want it to be entertaining. But I think if you see certain directors, certain producers, certain types continue, usually, to direct the same types of films. It's a very personal type of thing.

In the case of *ARGO*, it was absolutely Ben Affleck who drove the decisionmaking. Ben [Affleck] was looking for his next project. And Warner's was happy with the work we had done with them on *The Town*.

Q: We're talking about a more serious type of spy or espionage movie. What elements make one story more compelling than another in

terms of the way Hollywood can use it?

I think it's specific to the kind of film, and I think it's really in the details. It's also very societal and related to the [social] climate, the current climate. We're supposed to be a business of creators. And in a way, we're part of media, right? We're supposed to lead in that sense and put up different stories and trends and see what the public likes. I think in the last five, 10 years—you've seen a big change in Hollywood, where they've gone away from making more serious films, for which I think there is a great market. Our audiences are smart. I think they also want variety. But I think we're coming around, but for a while, it's been all super hero films and big tent poles and whatnot.

So, I think the elements that are attractive in a serious drama or spy type thing, are truth and details. Viewers want true stories. They want something that lets them peek behind a curtain and see what they haven't really seen before.

So, [in your world] I guess nothing is really "new new," but every mission, I would gather, every day is a little different. And if if there are things in your vault that you can share and you're allowed to share certain details, that's going to be more enticing to any filmmaker and I think any kind of distributor/financier or studio.

Q: What other research was done to help craft the story line for the whole movie?

Screen writer Chris Terrio actually won the Academy Award that year for *ARGO*, and Josh Bearman already had a treasure trove of research he had done. Tony (Antonio J.) Mendez and his wife Jonna were incredibly instrumental. He was our main resource from the very beginning.

"Hi. This is Chay Carter. I'm the producer of a film about ARGO. We're doing this." — Carter telephoning former hostages.

And then there were the six hostages. Tony gave me a couple emails and a phone number. [There had been a reunion of the group as the film concept was being considered.] I literally just picked up the phone or emailed and reached out to each and every one of them. "Hi. This is Chay Carter. I'm the producer of a film about ARGO. We're doing this." That was really important because we started to build a relationship with them. We were trying to let them know, out of respect and courtesy, that we're making this film about their lives, and we know it's personal. It's something I'm sure that was intense for them, intense and difficult. So, you want them to be comfortable and, out of respect, tell them.

But we also really wanted to mine for details. So, "Can you send us pictures of you back then? What type of stuff did you like to wear?" Then you get a sense for their personalities and such. And those are things that you can pass along to the actors, right? So, we had a researcher on the project with us, Max [Daly]. And all he did was to research this project and the people. And he created a dossier for each of the main characters, each of the real people. We shared those with the heads of our departments, and we shared those with the actors as well, so that they could really get into it.

As we approached production, we rented a house for a week—one of the locations we were going to shoot the six in what was supposed to be the interior of the home in Tehran, the ambassador's place. We made the actors stay there for a week together. And we dressed the whole place only with '70s stuff. They weren't allowed to use their phones. Can you imagine six actors, no phones, no this or that. They were there with each other for five days, close to five days. That's it—70's looking TV (television), 70's publications. Everything was to get them in the moment and know what it felt like to be smashed in there.

Legal Concerns

And so you know, in making this film, there was a lot of legal stuff we had to go through because the film was about true people. We needed to know that they were okay with us using their likenesses, their names, and the same even with public figures.

At one point we were getting close to shooting, and one former hostage had not yet responded to our efforts to get his approval. Warner Brothers studio kept saying, "Like you can't [use that person's name] . . . You're going to have to shoot alternates. Shoot it as you're shooting it, and then call him something else. . . . What if you don't get him?" What you want to do with all this research is to be authentic and take in all the details, and it's a fine line, right? You're covering the legal, but you're also depicting real people. So, you want to be respectful of that. And if you try to trick an audience, and you only show them half the truth—and they know because people are very savvy these days—I think you lose them.

And so, we felt—given the way the story came to us—to tell it from Tony's perspective, but everyone's involved. The ambassador had told his story. . . . But Tony couldn't because the story was classified for a very long time.

Q: Did you speak with any of the Canadians who were involved?

We did. We reached out to the ambassador a little bit after the hostages. We let him know that it was happening, and he got involved. There's an interview of him on the DVD of the movie.

How a "perspective" is chosen

This brings up a question of yours. How do we choose what perspective to take when one has many choices. The ambassador had told his story in a book, and he had been on tour and could speak. Tony couldn't because the story was classified for a very long time.

And so, we felt—given the way the story came to us—to tell it from Tony's perspective, but everyone's involved. Obviously, the Canadian ambassador to Iran, Kenneth Taylor and his wife were incredibly instrumental. And other people were as well, but Taylor's story's been out there already. I think we depicted him well. But this was a story we wanted to tell from Tony's perspective, and that's why it came to be that way.

Q: How was CIA helpful in the course of your research in developing the accuracy of what you were trying to portray?

The most incredible thing that you guys did—and we were humbled, shocked, like little kids, super excited—was to allow us to shoot at CIA Headquarters. We had heard that not many people are allowed to shoot at Headquarters and so, we were super thrilled.

Doing so was a bit of challenge, but we wanted to be authentic. We were able to take photos, just for stills use in certain unrestricted areas. It was incredibly helpful. And it is good now to know that you [CIA] have an office [in Public Affairs] willing to be open and talk to filmmakers and content creators. I think to get that message out would be amazing because you're going to attract the right people. The people who want to do the research and depict the CIA and Intelligence Community properly. But I think there is a slight element of not—not full fear, but like you guys are still . . . it's still the CIA, right?

But I do think the most important thing is to know that you guys are there, that you have stories, and that you're willing to share, and you're proud. So, if can share details and information, you're going to have the best stuff. I think some might wonder that you might only give them certain pieces, and they're going to want more. That might be a hurdle get over with content creators because they like freedom, full freedom, and obviously if you have to stick with the true story, there are going to be more limitations. So, again, it's really dependent on the filmmaker's perspective and personality.

Q: How do you make those decisions of historical accuracy versus taking liberties to be entertaining?

Historically accurate is the way you want it at every level. Every department—and we work with some of the best department heads and crew members—helped create the vision. As the research is coming in, they are constantly coming in and out of my office and Ben's office with results of their own research. For example, "We found out that they didn't make this color at that time." Or there is

Ben Affleck as Tony Mendez en route to a critical meeting at CIA Headquarters.
Image © AF archive/Alamy Stock Photo

something else. So, we want to be as accurate as we can be.

And Tony helped a lot. It was crazy and amazing. We're asking, "Do you have photos of you at the . . . " "Oh, sure, I have photos." "Do you remember what you wore?" "Not only do I remember what I wore, but I still have the jacket in my closet, and the pants, too." And he says, "I'll send it out to you." So, he did. We took it, and our wardrobe department head and a costume designer made a replica of it. He'd found the same type of fabric, color, everything, buttons, and whatnot, and made it to fit Ben [Affleck]'s character.

You're creating a world; this one happened to be a real world. Every element that you can in every de partment, right, from the production design and the set decoration. What did the room look like? We wanted to know, wanted photos. What did the office look like? Do you know what the couch looked like? The goal is to replicate those pieces based on a true story in a world that existed.

At the end of the film, you can see the side-by-side images of actors and hostages. Those didn't just happen by happenstance. Those happened through research and studying down to the smallest detail, down to how people spoke and the badges they carried.

That effort is driven by the director and the producers saying, "We want it to be as accurate as possible." Time and cost are also factors. And do we have the passion? We were fortunate that everyone on the team from the get-go knew the mantra was "This is a true story. This is authentic, authentic, authentic. This is how we will do it."

Conveying the Intensity of the Moment

Now, you still need it to be entertaining. So, the final scene—the plane chase—that didn't happen of course. In my own travels, I'm nervous if I'm running late to the airport: "Oh, I got to get there!" or "I hope I don't get cut off on the parkway!" or "I can't miss the tram!" or whatever. There is already a level of tension there.

But can you imagine posing as someone else, trying to get out of a country where you know things are going down. The six weren't being chased like that but it's not interesting if the they are just sitting on the plane ready to go, and maybe all of a sudden a crew member comes on the speaker and says, "We have some mechanical difficulties with the plane. So, we're going to have to wait." I mean, we can't ask an audience to sit and wait.

Well, what could we do? Okay, we know the Iranians are on their heels. Our six are nervous; they're trying to get out. They could make a mistake at any moment. So, that's intense, but we have to give the audience a little Hollywood magic, a little bit of the chase to increase the tension within the audience. So, that was dramatic license, a little extra embellishment. And I think that that's okay. We've never lied about it. We always expalin that it adds to the tension and the relief when they get airborne and are told, "You've cleared Iranian airspace." It was very emotional, like incredible. So, those are the types of things that we would change; not major points.

The Challenge of Depicting Intelligence Work

We depend a lot on production design—how does an office look? How do you shoot it? It's a lot more than just staring at papers. So we made sure we had an incredible set with a ton of elements. For example, there is the office scene (see below) in which Bryan Cranston (as Jack O'Donnell, Tony's boss) is visiting officers at their desks and you see the scope the office—the mounds of paperwork on the desks, all the people involved, ashtrays full of cigarette butts. It was every little detail, the lighting, and how they chose to shoot it adds to the intensity. And at the end of the day, it is the performance really. Bryan Cranston was incredible in that role

Tension mounts as the hostages face inspections of their falsified passports.
Image © Picture Lux/The Hollywood Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

and added to it. So, you have to cast properly.[a]

Q: How, in a two-hour or so movie, do you take the work of a lot of people—dozens and maybe hundreds of people—and winnow it down to just two, three, four, or five principal characters? What's the process you go through to do that while staying true to the story?

In the film *Zero Dark Thirty*, Jessica Chastain's character certainly was the star, and she drove it from her perspective. But you did see the military groups around her, supporting characters but still important. You saw other agents in the office, the ones she had to partner with and go up against. Every mission has a chain of command, right? So, there has to be someone driving the mission, and thus driving the story's perspective. I think that result naturally comes with the creative process; you have to pick someone.

There are other ways this could be done, but it is really about the story. In this story we could have done it from Ambassador Taylor's perspective; then it would have been wildly different. Tony would have been a secondary or tertiary character. The six probably would have been about the same, maybe slightly more prominent. But everything would have started with the Canadian ambassador. It's just a choice of filmmakers and what perspective they want to tell it from.

Tony Mendez's Consulting Role

Q: Were there any parts of the story that deviated from Tony's recommendations? And if there were, what were the reasons?

You know, that's a really good question. We've had that. We didn't really have that with Tony. I will say he was really incredible with Jonna [Mendez]. And honestly, as I said, they were always a gift. Do you have photos of what you wore then? "I don't just have photos. I actually have the clothes." He was amazing, and then he would ask questions. Or, are you going to do this? But he was always, "I know you guys know what you're doing. You're asking all the right questions. You clearly care about the details. You guys are good at this. This is your baby and I trust you."

When we were first talking to the six, for instance, they didn't have that longevity and trust with us. Tony's had already been built by David [Klawans] and Josh and then George [Clooney], Grant [Heslov], and Nina [Wolarski] and Chris [Terrio], the

a. For Bryan Cranston's take on playing a senior CIA officer and the making of the film see HitFix, 11 October 2012 interview on youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV-j9yCMXlo).

Bryan Cranston (as Jack O'Donnell, Tony's boss) in an office visit. Image © Picture Lux/The Hollywood Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

Tony Mendez in 2013. Tony passed away on 19 January 2019. The *Washington Post* obituary by Harrison Smith described his profession as "geopolitical theater."[a] Photo © WENN Rights Ltd/Alamy Stock

a. Obituaries of Tony Mendez appeared in the *Washington Post* (19 January 2019) and *The New York Times* (22 January 2019).

writer. And so with the six, it was different. When I called, cold called, "Hi. This is" me and blah-blah-blah. That took a little while to get them on board and build the trust. They were all wonderful, I have to say—really, really wonderful—but it took them a while.

And throughout the process, I had an open line at all times and listened to their objections or wishes to be treated differently or to play larger roles. That helps a lot. But I think it's always human nature for people to want more. They want to be able to say, "Oh, if you're using me and my character in there. . . " It's a very delicate dance to say, "We will be respectful. But this is also a movie or a TV show and there's just going to be a little bit" so you're preparing the real people for that I think.

Q: Was there anything about your original conception that you wanted to include in the film but you didn't and what were the reasons?

In the original script and shooting of the film we had a story line about Tony's personal and home life, because we thought it was important to depict not only the mission but the lifestyle of a CIA operative and how that affects and plays into personal life. You know, Tony had a wife with young child who's at home and he can't always tell them what's going on. You don't know when you're going to see them, all those things. We thought it was important to do that because it was something that Tony and Jonna had explained. So, we had a number of scenes—Taylor Schilling played Jonna—and there was this lovely little boy. I think we had three or four scenes, full scenes, that we completely took out in post-production because we thought that while they were heartfelt and beautiful, they detracted from the story line and the force that would keep people interested. The scenes interrupted the main story, and the transitions felt jarring.

It's very rare when the stars truly align. Everybody who worked on* ARGO *had the same passion and vision: to be authentic, to tell a great story with as many facts as possible, to be incredibly detail-oriented, to be very respectful of the real people who were involved and create this at the highest level with integrity.

So, we made the decision in post-production, which is another difficult thing to do. First, we told Jonna, and she was fine—again, wonderful, laughing—and we then told our actress that she's no longer in the movie. That's tough, but it happens.

Q: If you had to do this all over from the beginning, is there anything you would have done differently?

On every movie I've worked on, whether it was as an assistant, as a producer, or whatever, I could sit for hours and be like, "Oh, my God!" I can barely watch some of them! I might think, "We should have never done it so dark. We shouldn't have had so much profanity here. Oh, my God! This scene is really not well developed." So, many different things. But truly I wouldn't have done anything differently with this movie.

Because it's very rare when the stars truly align, and everybody who worked on it from the PAs (production assistants) to interns in post-production to everyone who starred had the same passion and vision: to be authentic, to tell a great story with as many facts as possible, to be incredibly detail-oriented, to be very respectful of the real people who were involved and create this at the highest level with integrity. And I mean that from the actors who took it super, super seriously every single day to every person on the crew. That creates a certain type of magic. And I do believe that we had that in this case.

Things that I wish for? I honestly wish we had gotten involved sooner. I wish I had met Tony sooner. I wish I had known the six longer than I had. I wish we had spent even more time with the ambassador, and I wish we had known John Chambers when he was still alive.[a] And I wish we had more time to make it, even though we didn't.

Reflections on Other Intelligence-related Films

I appreciate films on different levels. I do like *Zero Dark Thirty* because I think it feels more gritty; told from the Jessica Chastain character's point of view, it felt more realistic to me. There wasn't that sort of glossy glamour that you tend to see on some other spy, espionage-type films that I'm not that into. You look at something like *Atomic Blonde*, with Charlize Theron. That came out last year. And truth, I love Theron, and the reason I wanted to watch that movie was

a. John Chambers was the Hollywood makeup genius who created and ran the studio front of the *ARGO* filmmakers. He would receive a medal from CIA for his help. He died in 2001. (https://historyrat.wordpress.com/2012/11/04/john-chambers-studio-6/)

But the other big piece—and I mean this with the greatest of respect—is that obviously what you guys do every day is real world and it has real consequences.

because she's an awesome, female ass-kicking agent, right? The style was incredible. And the effects! But did I think it was a real great depiction of the CIA or the spy industry? Absolutely not! And everyone could tell that because you don't have a six-foot gorgeous blonde decked out in Dior, trying to be a spy.

I like *Ronin*. I thought *Ronin* was really cool, again, because it was a little more gritty. It felt more real. The action of it was incredible in the drive sequences. I do like the Bond films, and I like the *Mission Impossible* films. Those are huge, huge, huge audience attractors, right? It's because people are seeing something that feels and is almost impossible.

And then there is the *Bourne Identity*, because to me it seems much more human and much more of what you'd think an agent probably has to be when he is one of the best. But he starts out with a handicap, right? He's got amnesia. So, how do you have an agent who's supposed to be in the intelligence business? He knows how to fight. But he has got amnesia, and then through the course of things he gets over it. So, a little more realistic than Bond and *Mission Impossible*. But still probably less than a *Zero Dark Thirty* or a *Ronin*-type.

Q: After working on this film, how did your understanding of the intelligence business change, or did it change?

CC: It's little nerve wracking working on a CIA story in a sense because it's a very highly respected agency, and the way that it's been depicted through time—good or bad, true or not—as a place to be a little fearful of. So, I'm obviously not afraid of you guys. Everyone's just wonderful, normal. It's impressive but normal. So, that's one little piece of it.[a]

But the other big piece—and I mean this with the greatest of respect—is that obviously what you guys do every day is real world and it has real consequences. And this is seen in *ARGO*. It changes lives, it changes countries, it changes everything, right? What we do is for the most part entertainment, right? Hopefully informing, educating, whatever, but it's entertaining. We're not making or breaking anybody's life.

So, that's very different, but what did surprise me was that Hollywood and the CIA are not that different if you think about it. What we do, what we both do in a sense, is very covert, right? So, you have a mission. We have a movie. We don't talk about it. There are levels of classification. So, who knows what in intelligence is on a need-to-know basis. The same thing when you make a movie. It's need to know; there are levels of classification; who delivers what; and then there are very specific roles for very specific individuals. You try to compile the story and gather information. It's very specialized. And most important, this person does this job and that job only and talks to this person but not that person. And then it's managed somehow, and it has to be done in a certain amount of time in a very covert way.

For us, it's much the same thing. We find the best person for the job, and they have to execute at the highest level and work with the others, because if one little piece doesn't happen, we can miss an entire shot. So, every person, every piece, every moment, every kind of handoff, whatever, is incredibly important. I know that's kind of dumbing it all down. But that was interesting to me because regardless of all the technology that we have, it's still a human-based business.

We're like the weird circus. We pop the tents up literally. One day we're in a location, and it looks like a little world. And then by the end of the day it's gone; hopefully there's not a scrap left behind. Not that different from what I gather you guys do, right? You're here today, gone tomorrow, but things are happening. And so, it's all done by people. But you have to work together, whether you like the person or not. It's all about the mission, and for us, it's all about the vehicle of the film, which is our mission. So, I thought that was interesting. We have a lot more similarities than differences, except you guys do important things and we play all day.

Q: Would you do another movie about the intelligence business?

CC: Oh, my God! In a second. In a second, absolutely. And, again, I would want to do it right, with the pieces that people are going to want to see, a detailed peek behind the curtain—the things that are going to be enticing to actors, production heads,

a. In his youtube interview, Cranston said the first thing he had to deal with in preparing to play the senior CIA officer was to "remove the aura" of the agency and recognize individuals as they were.

a filmmaker, director-type, other producers, a studio, or financiers.

Q: I ask this final question because the Center for the Study of Intelligence and Studies in Intelligence*—indeed the Intelligence Community—have a mission to help the public better understand the intelligence business and to know that their money's being invested in a worthwhile way. Before you went into making* ARGO*, what would you say were your most important sources for understanding the intelligence business?*

For us, we were very fortunate that we were doing a film about real, still living people who were very eloquent in sharing the details. As a producer, I did a very—a large amount of research, but mine was specific to getting people involved, especially the six. I think your question would be a better one for Max [Daly], our researcher. He really dug in.

But so much in research will depend on the drive behind the person doing the research. Are they trying to depict something in its true light—which is probably rare? Are they looking at it with a more sinister view? Do they want to look at it very positively? It's all in the vision that's taken and then how it will be backed up with research. So, what types of movies are you going to watch? What types of articles and what sources are you going to seek out? Still, knowing that the agency has an office serving as a resource for filmmakers, I think you'll have a lot of people calling and trying to utilize that.

The* ARGO *experience showed me impressive details of what your community does and what human beings are capable of on the intelligence side.

Q: Was there anything you wish we had asked you about?

I would like to share the feeling of our experience in entering CIA Headquarters on the day of our shoot there. I was surprised to learn that you couldn't have your phones in the building. And, of course, everybody in the crew is feeling naked. So, we're in the front getting ready, and we're all excited and a little nervous. I think security allowed us to have two or three i-Pads because sometimes we have to check the script or some detail. But no phones. We were getting ready to shoot, and all of sudden, an officer comes over calling out, "Wait! Wait! Wait! Someone's got a phone on!" We're like, "That's unbelievable!" And then you're embarrassed. Then it happened again with an Apple. So, then we're like, "Oh, my God! Now we're in trouble with the CIA."

Things like that—things you expect, but you don't expect—were surprising and exciting, even though we knew what you guys do. When you can get adults to feel like little kids in your presence and in your space, that's very powerful. And that's what I think I would like to say. I would do something about the Intelligence Community again and again, because it's something that we haven't seen that much of. And we certainly haven't seen that much of the real stuff. That gets people excited. It allows people's imagination and expands their vision and thoughts about what actually is out there and what it all entails. The *ARGO* experience showed me impressive details of what your community does and what human beings are capable of on the intelligence side.

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The interviewers: Peter Usowski is the Director of the Center for the Study of Intelligence and Chairman of the Editorial Board of Studies in Intelligence. Sara Lichterman serves on the staff of CIA's Office of Public Affairs.