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INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR MARCHETTI

(Program begins with conversation underway.)

BETTY GROEBLI: ...First, your cover immediately.

VICTOR MARCHETTI: That you're just working for the government. And then as they decide where they're going to use you, then the cover is built, which was a sloppy way of doing things. But things were done that way in 1955. There'd be whole houses of guys up in Georgetown working for the government, quote, unquote. All their buddies who were in the State Department and elsewhere realized that these fellows were actually working for the CIA. And then, you know, they'd come bouncing in after a month or a year and a half one day and say I'm going to Buenos Aires with the State Department. I'm a Foreign Service officer.

GROEBLI: Let me introduce our guests today. We have Stu Schulberg here, who's producer of the "Today" show. And he's just produced an extraordinary first in television. This is the one hour documentary that follows President Nixon through one entire day. And it is hosted by John Chancellor, and it'll be on on Tuesday night on Channel 4 at 7:30. You'll also meet Victor Marchetti. Now Victor was with the CIA for fourteen years. He left about two years ago because he became disillusioned. And he's encompassed some of his attitudes and ideas in a novel which he calls "The Rope Dancer."

And Ken Bernstein. He is a former NBC correspondent. He was in Latin America; he was in Moscow. And he's the author of "The Senator's Ransom." And Max Gunther, a freelance writer and author of "Wall Street and Witchcraft, or How to Beat the Street? With a Broomstick"...

Now, let's discuss your novel because oftentimes I think, as in Vic's book, you're writing about something you know, obviously, even though it's in novel form. Let's start out with the purpose

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of the congressional fact finding trips and some of your thoughts on these, since they go on and on and on.

KEN BERNSTEIN: Well, the principal character in the book is an American senator, who's totally fictional, I hasten to say, especially in Washington where people always suspect dire undercurrents in works of fiction. He's a totally fictional hopeful for the presidency who gets the idea, or the idea's given to him, that if he would make a fact finding trip of Latin America it might win him some votes. It's a rather crass idea. But crass people give him the idea. Because he gets the idea that Latin America has been long forgotten, which, indeed, it has been since about the early sixties with the flush of interest with the Alliance for Progress and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and things like that. He feels that there'll be a revival of it.

And he does find out a lot. He finds out more than he bargained for because he's kidnapped by the Brazilian rebels. Well, of course, there have been lots of people like him kidnapped in Brazil and Uruguay and Venezuela. So it's based, to a great extent, on what has happened in the news.

I had worked in Rio in the earlier, better days of South America. And I went down last year to do some more research on it. Finding these rebels is not very easy, 'cause they're underground. But I was able to find them and find out why they do these things, and try to find out what makes them tick and what they want to do.

It's odd that Victor Marchetti is on the program, because one does encounter CIA types in that sort of operation.

GROEBLI: You say "types." Are they CIA's, or are they just types?

BERNSTEIN: Well, they don't announce that they're CIA men, but they're suspect by the local people.

GROEBLI: Could you give us an example?

BERNSTEIN: Well, oddly enough, I was often thought to be a CIA man because I was asking questions about things you weren't supposed to ask questions about. This is quite a stigma if you're a writer and you're trying to do an honest job. I turned up in Paris because there were some exiled Brazilian rebels there that I couldn't see anywhere else but in Paris. They were living quietly in Paris trying to stay out of trouble. And I had found them through sources in Rio. And they thought I was CIA, and they were scared to death of me for a long time.

GROEBLI: How do you disprove that?

BERNSTEIN: Well, it's very hard...

GROEBLI: Is it?

BERNSTEIN: ...You know, it's hard to prove innocence, isn't it? But among other things, I was able, more or less, to talk their language. And I had been in believable locations.

They were particularly upset because the French were having dealings with the Brazilian Secret Service at exactly the moment I arrived. And the place was crawling with Brazilian secret agents. And they sort of thought I was a Brazilian secret agent or a CIA man, or something.

GROEBLI: Were you ever sent to Latin America, Vic?

MARCHETTI: No, that's one of the areas I never did get to. I went to Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Far East. But I never did get to Latin America.

GROEBLI: You were, as I mentioned, with the CIA for fourteen years. I'd like you to explain the professor that you met at Penn State.

MARCHETTI: When I was a student there studying Soviet affairs and Russian culture, one of my professors was a very active man in that he travelled a great deal in Eastern Europe. He obviously had some sort of government connections. I assumed at the time it was State Department. He got to know me fairly well, because I was older than most of the students. I was an ex-GI and I had been in military intelligence before I had gone to college. And he had a great deal to do with shaping my life in that he convinced me not to go to graduate school but to work for the government in some kind interesting field where I could put all this to good use.

And then one day the phone rang. And the fellow said he was a friend of my brother's and just happened to be in town and would like to meet with me. And I [sic] said come to this hotel and not ask for him at the desk, but go right up to the room and knock at the door and he would meet me there. I did. And when the door opened there were two men in there. And I knew then that this was the recruitment pitch.

Now, there was no -- well, then they asked, you know, about my background. Of course, they knew all about it already. And I never bothered to ask them how they found me...

GROEBLI: How they knew.

MARCHETTI: ...at Penn State. But later on when I went to work with the Agency I learned that we had quite a few contacts

with the universities...

GROEBLI: Professors?

MARCHETTI: Oh, of all sorts.

GROEBLI: Students as well?

MARCHETTI: Students, professors, research organizations...

GROEBLI: Vic, excuse me just a moment. I hate to interrupt you, but we have to pause. We'll be right back.

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GROEBLI: Okay. Now we're talking with Vic Marchetti who was with the CIA for fourteen years and has written a book called "The Rope Dancer." I think it's -- well, it's a novel. And he bases it I'm sure on some of his activities.

We have to jump quickly now. You were with the CIA that long. He decided to go instead of going to graduate school...

MARCHETTI: Yes.

GROEBLI: When you left, who was in charge? Was it Mr. Helms?

MARCHETTI: Yes. Dick Helms was the director.

GROEBLI: Did you tell him why you were leaving?

MARCHETTI: Yes, I did, in general terms. He called up one evening when he found out I was leaving and asked me to drop by. He said he has some time to discuss the matter with me. And I told him I was fed up with the bureaucracy; I felt that there were a number of things wrong with not only the agency, but the intelligence community, the other intelligence...

GROEBLI: What are your beefs? What are your gripes?

MARCHETTI: Well, it starts with simple things like it's just too big. Much too big.

GROEBLI: How big is it?

MARCHETTI: Oh, in terms of dollars, the intelligence budget is a good six billion. There's a great deal of debate over this. And it all depends on how you slice the baloney as to, you know, what final figure you come up with. But six billion is a good figure, give or take half a billion.

GROEBLI: Well, that doesn't mean anything to us unless we know what other agencies cost. For instance?

MARCHETTI: Well, the way it means something to you, Betty, is this way, that that is a lot more money than goes into fighting the drug problem. That's a lot more money than goes into housing and urban development and various other domestic problems which are pretty important.

But within the -- to answer your specific question, within the intelligence community, CIA actually is one of the smaller agencies, in terms of money. They only have a budget of around seven to eight hundred million dollars.

GROEBLI: Okay. Now, I want to get back to your gripes in just a moment. But, first of all, how many agencies, intelligence gathering agencies, do we have?

MARCHETTI: Well, we have CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, the Army, Navy and Air Force agencies. We have the National Security Agency, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence Research. There's the FBI, Atomic Energy and Treasury. All of these are members of the intelligence community...

GROEBLI: Good night.

What do you think? Do you think we need that many? They should be consolidated, or what? How do you feel about it?

MARCHETTI: Well, I think you have to think in terms of national and departmental intelligence. Many of these agencies have a need for intelligence gathering and analysis because of their peculiar work. For example, the FBI is charged with counter-espionage, so they have to do a certain amount of their own work.

But they do not all need to get involved into the big national problems, such as, you know, the status of Soviet strategic strike capabilities. Yet the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, DIA, NSA, even the State Department, along with the...

GROEBLI: But what would you do, though, Victor? Would you consolidate what? Would you have three? Would you have four? How many?

MARCHETTI: I would have one national intelligence agency, and it would be very small and it would be concerned largely with analysis and technical collection and exploitation of open sources and the like. And then I'd have another agency, which would be a very secret, clandestine organization. And this would be the outfit that you would use for clandestine collection operations.

GROEBLI: Within this country or without?

MARCHETTI: No. No. Strictly without. And this organization would have to be very tightly controlled, both by the White House and Congress, to cut out such things as the CIA now gets involved in and some of the other agencies, such as paramilitary activities, the police work down in Latin America that Ken was referring to. We don't need it. The United States doesn't need. It doesn't help our image. And it really is -- it's an aberration in intelligence. The classical intelligence was collection and analysis in order to advise the President and the policy makers. What has happened is they've gotten into the action side of things a little too much. Like buying and owning airlines for contingency purposes, for supporting...

GROEBLI: What airlines does it own?

MARCHETTI: Well, Air America is the most famous one. And that is huge.

GROEBLI: Where does it go?

MARCHETTI: Well, it operates largely in Southeast Asia, in Laos...

GROEBLI: Are you familiar with it, Ken?

BERNSTEIN: Yes, I've flown it in Vietnam. It's a no questions asked airline. You just tell the man where you want to go.

GROEBLI: Well, what do you do? Do you pay a ticket or what?

BERNSTEIN: It's very convenient. Well, the press has the facility to get on if nobody else needs the plane at that moment, or to hitch a ride on it. They're very kind to the press. But they have very pretentious silver airplanes with the big logo which says Air America....

GROEBLI: Well, that doesn't sound very sneaky.

BERNSTEIN: ...as if were a commercial airline.

MARCHETTI: No one will notice it.

BERNSTEIN: The idea is that it should look like a normal airline.

GROEBLI: The CIA owns these. Is that what you're saying?

MARCHETTI: That's right. It started off as a very quiet

operation. It grew out of a joint air operation that CIA and Chiang Kai-shek had, which was the Civil Air Transport with the famous mandarin jet. And originally, it was just a little rinky-dink transport type air firm operating in Southeast Asia going to places where other people didn't want to go, the bigger airlines. And this was perfect for CIA's purposes, because this way you could, from time to time, slip in an agent Black or take in supplies, and the like.

Well as the situation in Vietnam and Laos worsened and got into more of a shooting war and the CIA found itself in the position of supporting in Laos the government forces, the Meos, to the tune of thirty or forty thousand men, a great number of weapons had to be delivered. A great deal of rice and other food supplies had to be provided.

Well, then, Air America just grew according and became virtually overt. I think anybody who's ever been to Southeast Asia knows Air America is a CIA subsidiary. And yet they'll deny it.

GROEBLI: And we want to get back to your gripes very quickly because we don't have much time. What are they? Kind of tick them off to us, will you?

MARCHETTI: Too much military influence in intelligence. Not enough good direction within the community, because it's so fragmented. Not enough control from the outside, particularly not from Congress. This is one of Senator Symington's and Senator Fulbright's complaints.

GROEBLI: When you say control, you mean we should know about how much money they're spending, or what?

MARCHETTI: Not only about how much money they're spending, but what activities they're involved in and their plans.

GROEBLI: Does that defeat the purpose?

MARCHETTI: No, it doesn't. And be a recipient of the product. As it is now, it means that intelligence is largely the private tool of the President of the United States and his national security adviser. And they can tell intelligence what to do, and they benefit from whatever actions it takes or anything it produces. And to a lesser extent, some other members of the administration benefit too. But the public is not made aware of things. And Congress is kept at arm's length at most.

GROEBLI: Vic, in your book, Mr. Ferguson, who is your hero or anti-hero, or whatever you want to say, is an agent.

MARCHETTI: I think Mr. Ferguson is in your book.

GROEBLI: He's in yours, isn't he?

MARCHETTI: I don't think I have a Mr. Ferguson.

GROEBLI: Well, what's his name?

MARCHETTI: Franklin.

GROEBLI: Franklin. All right. Mr. Franklin. Is it  
Pete?

MARCHETTI: No, Paul.

GROEBLI: All right, Paul. I have the initials right  
anyway. If you read three books in one night, you get a little  
confused, if you don't mind.

MARCHETTI: Right.

GROEBLI: At any rate, he's quite a boozier.

MARCHETTI: Yes.

GROEBLI: Is this an implication that a lot of agents  
are?

MARCHETTI: Yeah, I think they drink heavily as a group.  
This is also true of anyone who's under a great deal of pressure.  
There have to be outlets. They smoke heavily, drink heavily.  
It's a problem.

GROEBLI: Did you?

MARCHETTI: I would -- I'd say maybe more than the average  
person, but not so much as my hero did.

GROEBLI: Well, it's a little spooky when one thinks that  
the CIA is composed of people who have to drink under pressure.

MARCHETTI: Well, it's a pretty rough job. It's not just  
the CIA. Now, just remember. In this case, this guy was cracking,  
was slowly cracking...

GROEBLI: Yes.

MARCHETTI: ...so his drinking was going up. I would  
say he was more typical of an agent, because you take agents like  
Penkovsky, for example -- they have to have outlets. Now, he had



women. He had to be supplied with women when he came out. He had to have...

GROEBLI: What about a good old ping-pong game? Why do you have to have these weird outlets?

MARCHETTI: Well, I think it's a pretty weird business to spy on your own country and take your life in your hands. Ping-pong isn't going to do much for you.

GROEBLI: What is the most serious experience you ever had as an agent?

MARCHETTI: Oh, it's hard to say. I was never an agent. Remember, the agent is the person who gets the work for you...

GROEBLI: Yes. But what was the weirdest thing you were ever given in your assignment to do?

MARCHETTI: Oh, I can't think of any one thing. But I'll just tell you one scary little thing that happened to me. It was very interesting, though, and it goes to show the amount of influence the CIA has in certain areas of the world.

I was in the Middle East once. And I wanted to go from Jordan to Israel, and, of course, they were at war legally, but the shooting had stopped. And through our officers there it was arranged to save time that I could cross directly from Jordan to Israel over the ruins of the Allenby Bridge. And so I was taken up to the bridge by some Jordanian officers. And on their side were a group of Jordanians standing with guns and smiling at me. And on the other side were the Israelis with guns and staring at me. We got to the yellow line on the bridge. And the Jordanian and I embraced and shook hands, and then I stepped over. And the Israeli and I embraced and shook hands, and all his machine gunners were smiling and now all the Arabs were frowning. On my passport, of course, it never showed that. I don't know. I think I went according to my passport to Greece and back.

GROEBLI: Has the CIA made any comment, overt or otherwise, on your book?

MARCHETTI: Yes, indirectly they have commented through former CIA personnel, such as Lyman Kirkpatrick, who wrote a long rebuttal in U. S. News & World Report...

GROEBLI: Yes, I read that.

MARCHETTI: ...to an article. I have gotten phone calls, ostensibly, and letters from old friends in the agency and out of the agency, telling me to knock it off and to use my head, tugging

at my heart strings; you know, veiled little threats like you might be dragged into court if you don't watch out. I've been badmouthed around town in the journalistic world. Several reporters have told me this.

But since I'd say after the first month or two after they got over their shock, they've tended to act much more intelligently and mature about it.

GROEBLI: Do you think your book will have an impact on changing the agency? I know that's hypothetical, but...

MARCHETTI: Yes, in the sense that it brought the subject to the attention of a lot of reporters and to people up on the Hill. And I am working with these people to get some changes made...