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Time

TODAY

Can you keep a secret? Okay... then listen to what these spies, spooks, agents, moles are up to in the realm of espionage. Maybe you, too, will be tempted to flirt with danger! _____ By James Horwitz

□ "CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY . . . Where your career is America's strength . . . Unique overseas assignments that challenge your every talent . . . You will frequently live and work in foreign lands and interact with persons on all levels. You will find yourself in situations that will test your self-reliance to the utmost; situations that demand quick thinking to solve problems on the spot. You can forget about a 9-to-5 routine. You must be adventurous yet self-disciplined and tough-minded. And your assignments will call on the deepest resources of your intelligence, knowledge, and responsibility . . . We will respond to written enquiries. No phone calls please."

—From the classifieds in the Sunday New York Times

Uncle Casey Wants You

Jumping James Bond! The CIA recruiting spies from the want ads? The mind reels with images of trench coats, clandestine meetings on the rain-slicked back streets of Berlin, secret passwords, invisible ink—echoes of Mata Hari and all the espionage novels you've ever read, not to mention visions of those armies of the night creepy-crawling through the jungles of Southeast Asia and Central America. Cloak-and-dagger derring-do. Twitchings of paranoia.

But is the spy life *really* like that—a thriller demimonde of international intrigue, breathless adventure? Have you ever wondered what goes on in the whisper world of the CIA? Can you keep a secret?

Up From a Band of Thugs

"Gentlemen do not read each other's mail," a former Secretary of State was said to have remarked high-mindedly in a more innocent time. "When the fate of a nation and the lives of its soldiers are at stake." Allen Welsh Dulles, one of the founding fathers of the CIA and a fabled spymaster, retorted years later, "gentlemen *do* read each other's mail—when they can get their hands on it."

That, in essence, is what the CIA is all about. And its one rule of engagement is: Don't get caught! What Rudyard Kipling once called "the great game of spying" has, of course, always been pretty murky. These days, it is simply more complex and pervasive, if not perverse.

The United States, as a matter of fact, is something of a latecomer to the great game, never having had an official, government-authorized foreign-intelligence service until, spurred

by the incipient paranoia of the early cold war, the Central Intelligence Agency was created by the National Security Act of 1947. Manned in those early years predominantly by gifted tyros—wealthy and socially prominent Ivy League lawyers, stockbrokers, academics, and athletes—the young CIA compensated for its amateurism with dedicated patriotism, enthusiasm, and some daring. "We were a marvelous band of thugs," says an ex-Yalie who joined up in the early fifties, speaking nostalgically of the years he spent as an American secret agent in the Far East in the guise of an English gentleman (complete with monocle and waistcoat) straight out of the pages of Somerset Maugham or Graham Greene. "In those days, all you needed were guts, self-discipline, confidence, and a sense of adventure. It was an exciting life. I'm not sure the Agency would even accept people like us today. We were unconventional, not the programmed type."

Indeed, the CIA today not only advertises in the *Times* but sets up its recruiting booths at college career fairs right next to the likes of IBM and General Motors. The Agency of the eighties has become a giant intelligence conglomerate (euphemistically called The Company by its employees, as if it were just another multinational corporation) whose extensive international operations and activities can only be guessed at. Its ranks number more than seventeen thousand people (the exact figure is a secret), and it has a budget (again secret) in the billions of dollars. With sophisticated high-tech gadgets, spy satellites whirling through space, and a host of undercover operatives on the prowl all over the world, the CIA can now read the opposition gentleman's mail even before it is delivered. It can count his arsenal and calculate his food production, eavesdrop on his phone calls and listen to his pillow talk. It can see him in the dark. With enough information, its computers and analysts can sometimes deduce what he is going to do before he does it. And the CIA has been known to send secret armies under false flags and counterfeit colors to frustrate his diplomatic designs and tangle his alliances.

Yet being an organization steeped in secrecy, the CIA naturally doesn't like to admit or even discuss what it does or is capable of doing. "We're not a James Bond operation," says an Agency spokesman a bit disingenuously, being careful not to actually say anything. "There's a lot of misperception of what we're about. I look at it like any corporation. We're an elite organization with a vital mission to carry out. We're here to produce the best intelligence in the world."

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Only The Shadow Knows

It is no secret that, as Washington monuments go, the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency, unlike, say, the Capitol, the White House, or the Watergate Apartments, is not exactly a tourist attraction. Just a short taxi ride along the George Washington Parkway, across the Potomac River and into the trees near Langley, Virginia, America's House of Spies stands in imposing anonymity on 219 acres of rustic government property. A massive, forbidding structure built of amnesia-gray concrete and marble, seven stories tall and loaded with the most advanced communications and security gear, the forty-six-million-dollar headquarters gives the impression of being in the middle of nowhere. Outside the entrance stands a statue of America's first spy hero, Nathan Hale, who was not very good at the game (he was caught and hanged by the British), yet left an inspiring patriotic legacy by regretting that he had but one life to give for his country. On a wall in the main lobby is engraved the CIA's motto borrowed from the Bible: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free—John VII-XXIII." But with almost no people in view, the stillness and eerie silence of the place is palpable, almost lunar, which only enhances the impenetrable air of mystery that is intended to surround the Agency's hush-hush world.

Operating in that ambiguous shadowland of riddles buried in enigmas, the CIA must metaphorically walk an existential tightrope between the public's right to know about activities undertaken in its name and our desire not to know too much for fear of what we might learn. Alas, more often than it would like, the Agency has found itself smack in the spotlight, squirming in the public gaze, its cloak flapping open, its dagger exposed, hidden cards tumbling from its sleeve.

"Your successes are unheralded, your failures trumpeted," President John F. Kennedy once remarked, characterizing the perpetual dilemma of the secret organization. And, to be sure, the trumpets of CIA failure, scandal, and embarrassment have oftentimes blown resoundingly while its praises have mostly been sung only in nods and winks.

In the aftermath of Watergate, the Agency found some of its dirtiest laundry strung out on the public line, its darkest secrets emblazoned in the headlines of the daily press, a number of its ex-employees marched off to jail, its top officials grilled by congressional committees and grand juries. Charges ranged from attempted assassination of foreign leaders and the subversion and overthrow of duly elected governments to spying on American citizens, tapping their phones, reading their mail, and carrying out fatal drug experiments on unsuspecting subjects. Hundreds of hard-core spooks were speedily retired from duty. Agency morale plummeted in the double crunch of accusation and alibi. Revelations of two decades of foreign mischief and domestic mayhem in the name of national security shocked, outraged, and bewildered a citizenry brought up to believe that only the bad guys behaved that way.

The late Senator Frank Church, at the time chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, labeled the CIA "a rogue elephant out of control" as the skeletons of conspiracy, corruption, and cover-up tumbled out of the Agency's closet. In defense of the CIA and its dubious capers, Richard Helms, the then director of Central Intelligence who would be convicted of perjury for lying to a Senate committee about CIA involvement in the overthrow of the government of Chile, could only reply, "The nation must to some degree take it on faith that we, too, are honorable men."

Under the Reagan administration, the Agency has undergone a renaissance if not necessarily a reformation. While the worst excesses of the sixties and seventies have largely been

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eliminated, even now questions persist. Is the CIA performing its legitimate intelligence function or is it still up to some of its sneaky old tricks? Is it an instrument of policy or the instigator of it? What exactly is the role of the Agency in the labyrinth of world affairs? Does only The Shadow know for sure?

Commenting on the CIA's ingrained penchant for secrecy in the name of national security and its often disdainful attitude toward congressional oversight of its covert activities, California Congressman Norman Mineta has remarked, "We are like mushrooms. They [the Agency] keep us in the dark and feed us a lot of manure."

The current director of Central Intelligence, William J. Casey (a millionaire businessman and Reagan's 1980 campaign manager), favors buccaneer boldness in the espionage game, with a particular fondness for secret operations. He has the President's good ear in foreign-policy matters and his confidence in an intimate way that few other CIA heads have ever had with the man in the Oval Office, who has the ultimate responsibility of giving the Agency its marching orders. And the order of the day these days is: Full speed ahead!

The CIA has been engaging in secret operations to prop up friendly governments or to topple unfriendly tyrants almost since its inception. In those early years, the Agency snatched Italy back from the grasp of communism and restored the Shah in Iran. With a bit of moxie and a clandestine radio station, it stampeded the leftist president of Guatemala out of office and saved that country for free enterprise and the United Fruit Company. Less successfully, the CIA tried to poison Nasser of Egypt and, when that scheme failed, attempted to bribe him into submission. A three-million-dollar payoff was found to be ten dollars short on delivery, so the bagman had to make up the difference out of his own pocket. Nasser took the money but refused to be bought. Instead, he used the funds to build a useless tower on the Nile right across from the Hilton Hotel in Cairo. And after the Central Intelligence Agency made an abortive effort to undermine Sukarno, president of Indonesia, by trying to fake a pornographic film of him in bed with a prostitute, it threw money and muscle into a guerrilla war that eventually toppled him from office.

The CIA's secret army suffered a total fiasco at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba, and subsequent attempts to murder Castro (with poisoned cigars, exploding seashells, toxic wet suits, and Mafia hit men) only made the Agency look incompetent. In Vietnam, nearly twenty cloak-and-dagger years of the biggest, most expensive, and deadliest CIA endeavors ever undertaken ended ignominiously in those terrible televised scenes of a helter-skelter helicopter evacuation from the rooftop of the Saigon embassy. Yet today, perhaps more than at any time since Vietnam, the CIA's unofficial presence is leaving big footprints all over the world.

It has long been an open secret that the CIA has been training, advising, and paying the bills for the so-called contras making guerrilla war against Nicaragua. Witness the recent revelation that the Agency, in defiance of a 1982 law forbidding American personnel from taking part in any effort to overthrow the Sandinista government, floated a primer to the rebels instructing them in the lethal arts of political assassination, blackmail, and mob violence. In El Salvador, the CIA was accused of funneling up to two million dollars into the election campaign of the eventual victor, José Napoleon

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Duarte. Elsewhere, the Agency is sending millions in clandestine support to Islamic guerrillas in Afghanistan, to anti-Khomeini exiles in Turkey, to assorted bands of jungle fighters in both Africa and Southeast Asia.

The idea of Central Intelligence making secret war, hiring mercenary soldiers, running guns, engaging in sabotage is cause for dispute not only among politicians but within the CIA itself. "Every President has chosen the option of going to covert operations at certain times when he feels diplomacy isn't working but he doesn't want to send in the marines," says a former high official in the Agency. "When some of these actions become public knowledge or go wrong, it leaves the impression that we're engaged in this sort of thing all over the world. That's simply not true."

"Ideally, I don't think the CIA should be running secret military operations at all, even though it seems to be a major preoccupation of The Company," argues another Agency retiree, a man who spent twenty-five years in the business, a number of them doing just that in Southeast Asia. "Sure, it's exciting to be out in the jungles running military ops with your own little army of mountain tribesmen or whatever. But in the end, it's usually poison for The Company, misguided, a huge waste of money and lives. Our job should be intelligence. That's what we're supposedly trained for. To get the best intelligence and analyze it honestly and accurately, to *understand* what's going on—that's a full-time job."

HUMINT vs. ELINT

Certainly, few would argue that the major role for which the CIA was created is not war mongering but intelligence gathering, much of which is carried on eight miles high with wizardry that can practically decipher the headlines of *Pravda* from out in the ionosphere, observe the mass movements of entire armies toward troubled borders, and listen in on the communications of field marshals and foreign ministers. Endless amounts of collected information flow into Langley's computers around the clock, but it provides only part of the picture. Take the Cuban missile crisis. While CIA spy planes first detected the presence of what looked like Soviet missile sites on Fidel's island, it took an agent on the ground in Cuba who actually saw the missiles rolling past his front door and got the word back, and another informant within the Soviet military establishment in Moscow who got his hands on the actual missile designs, to supply the crucial corroboration.

If anything is axiomatic in the espionage business, it's that expensive spy satellites may perform inhuman wonders but only the cleaning lady can tell you what's in the defense minister's wastebasket. No question that the intelligence game is played most energetically inside foreign countries (not miles above them), where the CIA, the KGB, Britain's MI-6, the French SDECE, Israel's MOSSAD, and all the other government-sanctioned snoops deploy their operatives, spread money around, and play the tricks often the stuff of spy novels.

In these cat-and-mouse capers, anyone with access to information the CIA wants to have might make an agent, which, in the lingo of the trade, generally refers to a foreign national recruited as a spy, not the full-time intelligence officer (in the CIA, always an American citizen) posted to that particular country. "The CIA tried to recruit me," says a young woman who lives in the Middle East and works in a deluxe hotel. "They wanted to know if I'd supply them information on people who come to the hotel. They talked to me a few times, but after I told them my husband was American, I never heard from them again. I guess they found someone else. I sometimes wonder who."

In their quest for intelligence from human sources (called *HUMINT*, as opposed to *ELINT*, which stands for intelligence gathered from gizmos and gadgets), the CIA's station chiefs and case officers (a.k.a. The Company's overseas branch managers and traveling salesmen, usually under diplomatic cover of the American Embassy) are constantly establishing and coordinating networks of local informants who will do the actual spying on the opposition. "Recruiting and running agents requires a lot of time and plodding perseverance," says an experienced CIA case officer. "There's a lot of pressure on you, and it can be schizophrenic. You have to tell a lot of stories to people. Sometimes, an agent won't even know he's working for us. Some of our operations are very, very secret and risky. But others might only be liaison with some local police chief, which doesn't require a great deal of sneaking around in the night. In the intelligence business, the name of the game is produce, produce, produce. You're always on the lookout for people who can supply information."

Recruiting a prospective agent can take months of subtle probing for the area of vulnerability or mutual interest that will open the way for the approach, which is the actual offer to spy for our side. Is the agent-to-be a disgruntled government official? Can he (or she) get access to the information you want? Is he eager or reluctant? Can he be sexually compromised? Does he need money badly? Can he be trusted? Does he trust you? "Getting an informant to work for you can be like trying to reel in a troublesome fish," says the CIA officer. "Once you've hooked him, and that's not always easy, you have to know when to pull hard on the line and when to ease off."

At first, a simple request for some insignificant inside information might be made in exchange for a small sum of money or a favor. Eventually, a web of complicity is woven around the informant, until he or she is finally entangled. "In many cases," says the case officer, "it's a dangerous game—very stressful, particularly on your agent. If an operation is blown, we're usually asked to leave the country, because we have diplomatic immunity. The agent, on the other hand, has had it. So you have to tread very carefully."

Running agents calls for all the specialized tradecraft of espionage—use of secret signs and signals, furtive exchanges in crowded places, surreptitious midnight meetings in out-of-the-way safe houses, coded messages left in hollow trees or behind loose bricks or in flower pots or public toilets. One Russian who secretly spied for the West (he was eventually caught by the KGB and shot) used to pass his information wrapped in candy he would give to the child of a British diplomat.

It has been said that a good spy is a person with a passion for anonymity. Frequently, however, the full-time intelligence officers are positively conspicuous. "In Saigon, we all knew who was CIA," says an American journalist who reported from Vietnam during the war. "They all drove Ford Pintos, wore short-sleeved polyester shirts, and carried Samsonite briefcases. Once, at a party, I saw a couch piled with Samsonites and I knew the place was crawling with CIA officers. Who *their* spies were among the Vietnamese and the other foreigners in the country was something else altogether. You were always wondering whether this or that Vietnamese was an informant for the Agency or for the Vietcong or both."

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One CIA station chief in Buenos Aires gained a certain notoriety when he personally foiled a hijacking attempt. Negotiating with the culprits in a stifling plane at Buenos Aires airport, he ordered cold drinks to be delivered to them. The drinks were spiked, the hijackers all passed out, end of siege. The cool CIA man was proclaimed a hero. His reward? He eventually became chief of station in Saigon, the last American spook to hold that thankless post.

As you might expect, especially energetic efforts are made by American intelligence officers to recruit agents from among Communist-bloc scientists, scholars, diplomats, and officials. CIA eyes and ears constantly monitor the comings and goings at every Soviet embassy and diplomatic mission. The Agency had pictures of Lee Harvey Oswald entering the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City weeks before he turned up in Dallas with his mail-order Mannlicher-Carcano special, but the information got lost in the shuffle; conversely, the KGB for years bugged our embassy in Moscow with a listening device built into the official U.S. seal.

Much of the CIA's information on Russia comes from defectors among the Soviet hierarchy who bring their secrets out with them. The most sought-after intelligence coup, however, is to turn a man still inside the Soviet government or the KGB who will stay on the job as an agent-in-place (a *mole* in leCarréspeak), supplying top-secret information far into the future. The Agency's first acknowledged mole in Soviet intelligence was a Colonel Pyotr Popov, who originally offered to spy for the West by dropping a note in a diplomat's car in Vienna in 1953. He continued to supply Soviet secrets for six years—until he was caught.

As for the mole of the century, he's widely acknowledged to have been one the Soviets planted in the West. Called "the spy who betrayed a generation," Harold "Kim" Philby was head of British counterintelligence, based in Washington in the fifties and in line to become chief of MI-6 (the British Secret Intelligence Services). When he escaped to Moscow from Beirut in 1963 and it was revealed that he had actually been working for the Russians for more than twenty years, the international intelligence community shuddered. For years afterward, mole hunting became an obsession within the CIA, causing suspicion and mistrust. "There was always that question whether your agent was genuine or a Soviet plant," says a former spook with knowledge of the devious workings of counterespionage. "You tended to think the whole world was run by intelligence agencies and a kind of paralysis of action set in." Yet as far as anyone knows (or will say), no mole has ever burrowed into the Central Intelligence Agency.

If the CIA's major successes are against the Soviet Union, elsewhere it has suffered conspicuous failures for lack of agents. The Agency station in Beirut was virtually decimated when terrorists blew up the U.S. Embassy there. We had no local informants in Iran at the time of the failed hostage-rescue operation. And before the fall of the Shah, although there was a strong CIA presence, everybody was apparently looking in the wrong direction. "In the past, I think we've spent too much time tracking the Russians in third-world countries, with no idea or understanding of what the locals are up to," says a CIA officer who has served in several African and Middle Eastern posts. "Not enough of our people speak the languages of these countries, and they're unable to develop good contacts within the population but outside the ruling power structure. When the coup comes, we're as surprised as anyone. But I think that's changing now. At least I hope so."

Of Facts and Fantasies

Continuous collection of every scrap of information you can get your hands on all over the world is only part of any intelligence agency's work. Just as important (if not more so) is understanding what it all means. David Atlee Philips, in *The Night Watch*, a book about his career as a CIA officer, describes the job as "not all fun and games. . . . Laboring to put together the whole picture in intelligence is like assembling a jigsaw puzzle from an almost infinite number of tiny pieces with the hope that enough of the final mosaic will emerge to mean something."

It is here that the CIA is making perhaps its most significant strides. Almost half the Agency's personnel and a large part of its budget are assigned to the Directorate of Intelligence, the analysis branch where the work is more for patient scholars than action-hungry spooks. "We hire the best people from every academic discipline—historians, linguists, journalists, doctors," says a CIA officer. "We have enough Ph.D.s in our organization to staff a small university."

It is the responsibility of the Directorate of Intelligence, with its scholars and computers, to turn out the finished product from that mass of raw material so that The Company's customers—the President, the Pentagon, assorted government agencies and officials—can formulate foreign policy and conduct national-security affairs with a reasonably accurate idea of what's happening around the globe today and what's likely to occur in the future. Toward this end, the Agency compiles a report every morning on the world's hot spots for the eyes only of the President and a very select few high-ranking insiders. "It's the most exclusive daily newspaper in the world," says a man on the delivery list. "The most accurate, too."

The Agency also turns out fifty National Intelligence Estimates a year and prepares hundreds of additional assessments covering everything from projections of Soviet missile advancements to prospects for the Sudanese peanut crop. According to those who have access to these reports, they are in general more reliable and balanced today than in the past, particularly during the Vietnam era, when the Agency so often twisted the data, the better to catch the prevailing political winds-blowing from the White House. Says a former CIA officer, who remembers those days, "If the facts didn't fit the preconceived fantasies, the facts had to be changed. When you've got money and manpower, it's easy to produce good intelligence . . . when you're committed to truth."

Infiltrating The Company of Men

The CIA's recruiting ads are peppered with words like *adventurous* and *challenge*, broadly hinting at excitements not offered by, say, Mobil Oil. But before rushing out to buy your trench coat and dark glasses, you should know that the spy life is not everyone's idea of a good time. And if you want to join the Agency, you'd better not have any secrets of your own. In addition to being an American citizen and having a college degree, every applicant for a career in Central Intelligence must submit to a complete background check and is required to pass a lie-detector test (called *FLUTTER* in the trade).

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Once in the business, secrecy creates its own peculiar burdens. "You can't lead a normal life," says a CIA officer with two decades' experience. "You can never tell anyone the truth. Your story keeps changing, and you're always on guard. You tend to draw back from outside friends and only associate with Company people. And because you tend to isolate yourself, it's hard on your family. I wasn't even supposed to tell my wife what I did for a living. And you're always moving around. One day you may be on a desk job and the next you're snooping and pooping in some jungle. And if you ever want to quit and get an outside job, you're in real trouble. You can't say where you've worked for the last twenty years."

While espionage remains, like war and football, largely a man's game, there are more women in the Agency today than ever before—as secretaries, analysts, case officers in the field. "The CIA is now an equal-opportunity employer," says a longtime intelligence officer, "and The Company would like to have even more women where the power and action is. Although we used to be pretty much a men's club, it's conceivable that there'll be a woman director of the CIA sooner than there'll be a woman President of the U.S."

In Quest of the Ultimate Answer

In the best of all possible worlds, organizations like the Central Intelligence Agency wouldn't be needed. In the world as it is, however, the CIA does, indeed, have a vital mission to perform. But there are special responsibilities that come with all the secrecy. Knowledge, it has been said, is power. *Secret* knowledge, if manipulated and abused, can be power beyond limits and restraints. The ultimate question has always been: Who watches the watchers? 