



The Master of Disguise: My Secret Life in the CIA

Antonio J. Méndez

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From the author of *Argo* comes an unforgettable behind-the-scenes story of espionage in action. In the first ever memoir by a top-level operative to be authorized by the CIA, Antonio J. Mendez reveals the cunning tricks and insights that helped save hundreds from deadly situations. Adept at creating new identities for anyone, anywhere, Mendez was involved in operations all over the world, from "Wild West" adventures in East Asia to Cold War intrigue in Moscow. In 1980, he orchestrated the escape of six Americans from a hostage situation in revolutionary Tehran, Iran. This extraordinary operation inspired the movie *Argo*, directed by and starring Ben Affleck. *The Master of Disguise* gives us a privileged look at what really happens at the highest levels of international espionage: in the field, undercover, and behind closed doors.

The Master of Disguise: My Secret Life in the CIA Details

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From Reader Review The Master of Disguise: My Secret Life in the CIA for online ebook

Kate says

I read this after watching Argo, and it was interesting to hear about this and several cold war operations from the man who lived it. Surprisingly candid and relatable. Action buffs may be disappointed by the lack of certain story details that relate to still-classified agency tactics, but that's a small price to pay for a peek inside life as a CIA officer,

Melinda says

I really enjoyed reading this book! The reality behind the cloak-and-dagger work of CIA work is revealed by Tony Mendez in this book. I found it to be VERY fascinating, and worth reading. How the 6 US diplomats escaped from Iran when the American Embassy was taken over is explained in this book. How informants are managed and extracted from various countries is also explained. Have you read "The Hunt for Red October"? Well, it seems that Tom Clancy must have known some real details, because it meshes and matches with what Mendez speaks about.

The most fascinating aspect of the book to me is that Mendez had a friend in the movie makeup / special effects industry. Mendez asked for some disguise help from his Hollywood friend, and then the Hollywood friend used some of the techniques in subsequent movies! The real name of the Hollywood friend is not supplied, but it would be fascinating to know and then watch the movies.

Of course not all the details are shared or spelled out in detail, and many of the disguise methods are still classified. But to read about the CIA during the 70's and 80's is worth the time with this book.

I find myself wanting to read "Agent Zigzag" again, as I remember how the British spy handlers managed Eddie Chapman. Even though there is always the "gadget" aspect of this kind of work, the one-on-one human work is also important and critical.

Jim says

This isn't an action-packed spy thriller featuring ruthless agents breaking all the rules. This is about a guy who wanted to eat & be an artist, but found an opportunity with the CIA & rose through the ranks impressively. He spent 25 years mostly forging documents, identities, & working out disguises so other agents could do the job, but he did have quite a few hours in the field as well.

There was some repetition due his meticulous handling of every subject, definitely great fodder for any spy-thriller novelists. Forged papers & identities - legends - aren't whipped up at the spur of the moment. The amount of tedious preparation, sometimes in primitive conditions, was incredible. The skills needed were mind blowing. He discusses slicing open an envelope & then gluing the threads back together until the glue job was invisible! I can't imagine doing detail work like that, sometimes for 18 hours at a time under threat of discovery.

Perhaps the best part was to hear an insider's account of some of the milestones of recent history. He discusses *Argo* (but never mentions Zelazny or Lord of Light by name) the fall of the Berlin Wall (the very end of his career), & several traitors. He doesn't excuse Iran-Contra or other boondoggles, but it's pretty easy to see that the CIA has done some great work as well as made some great goofs. They're also hampered by politics & news coverage. He doesn't blame either, but does mention a couple of times when both certainly put extra pressure on those in the field.

I'm glad I listened to this. I would have skimmed a lot if I'd read it in print. Still, it's well worth getting through the entire book. I don't think I'll read *Argo: How the CIA & Hollywood Pulled Off the Most Audacious Rescue in History*, since it was covered well enough for me in this book, but I might read another of his books. *Spy Dust: Two Masters of Disguise Reveal the Tools & Operations That Helped Win the Cold War* & *Gathering Info: Getting the Scoop by Using Your Wits* both look interesting because they're co-authored by his second wife, who worked with him in the CIA.

Jeff Clausen says

Within the limits set by the CIA, he writes of cool disguises and spy tradecraft. This book is best when it's a first-person account of his adventures on the job in exotic locations, with code-named foreign agents working for the US. When it gets to the expositions of how and why his occupation works, it can be a bit dry but necessary. And the most famous of his tales, the extrication of 6 diplomats from Iran using the *Argo* movie scam, gets only a few pages.

Samadrita says

Didn't particularly like *Argo*. But....I'm intrigued.

Mara says

The book's author (and ex-CIA agent), Antonio Mendez, also wrote *Argo*, which was/is, IMHO, just a better book. I'd say more, but I'm on a frantic book logging catch-up scramble, so, for now, I'll leave it at that.

Robert Bidinotto says

While I was researching the CIA background for my debut thriller, *HUNTER*, I devoured a host of books written by former Agency officers. My goal was to try to get a sense of the reality of their day-to-day lives and activities. And because aliases and disguises play such an important role in my novel, I was especially eager to learn as much as possible about that aspect of spycraft.

For both reasons, I was delighted to discover *The Master of Disguise*. Antonio Mendez is, and presents, the real deal when it comes to life in the clandestine services. His CIA memoir is rich with detail about operations, tradecraft, and the personal impact of living in a universe of lies, ruses, and manipulations. I profited greatly from reading this book -- both as a writer, and as a citizen who acquired a greater

appreciation for the brave, dedicated men and women who often must put their lives on the line to defend our nation.

With the hit movie "Argo" now paying tribute to his greatest covert-ops triumph -- his daring rescue of six desperate American citizens from the heart of post-revolutionary Iran -- I'm delighted that Mr. Mendez is now receiving the public acclaim that he never sought, but has richly deserved. Thank you, sir, for your service to America. And thank you for this wonderful book.

Jenny GB says

I read this book after seeing the movie Argo and becoming intrigued to hear the real story behind the mission to help the six embassy workers get home from Iran. Mendez in this book takes you through his early life and the parts about his career in the CIA that he can reveal. It's not an action packed spy novel, but it's better than that because he is talking about real operations and real things that officers did in their daily work. Mendez primarily worked with disguises and exfiltration during his years with the CIA. Even though the Iran situation takes up about 60 pages of the book, the other stories were quite interesting, too. I found this to be a fascinating piece of insight into the pre-911 CIA and how it conducted some of its work. The one down side is that Mendez clearly wanted to boast at least a little about the awards that he won (despite him saying otherwise), although even with the little information he can disclose it seems clear that his awards were highly deserved.

Gabriel says

*** 3.5 ***

this is quite a nice book, as much as a memoir or an autobiography can be, it's not really full of action and intrigue or suspense and tension like a fiction spy book, but it's nonetheless quite entertaining

the author is a retired CIA operative, that reached over the years the equivalent of the rank of colonel or even close to a general, if compared with the army ranking system, as such he had the chance to see a lot and to take up a special seat with a great view in his career to some events that took place in fact in our recent history

is covering the cold war era, from 1965 all the way to 1990 and even a bit more, so, if you have some interest in some significant events that happened during this period, you may find this book quite interesting

I know I did and it was time well spent on my end

Maria says

Very informative on the world of espionage.

The reason why I don't read much crime or spy novels is because I know it isn't like that. I admit, it is cool, but it's something I'm very sensitive in. Anyway, while, do know that the US Department of Defence has

taken out every classified piece in this book, it truly does give a meaning to what "CIA officer" means, and he's not a man who wears custom tailored suits who shoot guns like they're vigilantes.

Kim says

An interesting book. Parts of it were very intriguing, while other parts could get boring. It was cool to learn about CIA tradecraft, but also takes some of the mystique away. Not so many James Bond stories, but still some interesting things they did.

J.R. says

After seeing the movie Argo this is really interesting. At first I thought I'd only be into the Argo section, but the lead up to it was very important to understand aspects of the situation and the movie. Somethings that were detailed but were not explicitly explained are much more understandable after having read this.

I do think movie first and then this book.

Jesse says

I liked this book. There's a lot of 'behind the scenes' books regarding American intelligence but this is one of the few that's agency sanctioned. Antonio Mendez is a CIA lifer who has worked in Southeast Asia and Russia during the Cold War including working with a woman who has her own small exhibit at The Spy Museum.

I definitely liked it and parts of it were very difficult to put down. However, parts of it very dry and dragged. If you already have an interest in spying and intelligence, this is definitely worth the read. Mendez has lead a fascinating life but it doesn't come across as enthralling as it should in print.

Ken says

Unfortunately, because of the author's position as a forger and disguise-master, he didn't get the plum assignments. No tales of break-ins or derring-do here, but rather hours spent behind a magnifying glass creating documents. The most exciting cases here involve ex-filtrating spies and others from behind unfriendly territory. This usually involves making a mask for them and walking through an airport. In fact, there's about 3 tales of making masks and walking through airports ... and the author can't tell you the details of the masking technique, because it's secret.

I can't help but think that any CIA spook who did see REAL adventure couldn't tell about it anyway because it would be classified. So this is the best we'll get. I'll stick with John LeCarre.

EDIT: In retrospect, this book is more interesting than I thought at the time I wrote the review above. The book is about real CIA work, not fictional heroism. The author Mendez is the subject of the film "Argo", as well.

Nick says

Mendez is in the news again because of the part he played in smuggling six U.S. diplomats out of Iran in early 1980, but don't read this book merely to get that story. Read it because Mendez manages to write 300 pages of fascinating stories without revealing any trade secrets, keeping the suspense up while juggling your curiosity with his pledge to protect classified material. This is a Cold War memoir, one that captures the spirit and attitudes of those times. A true tale well told.
