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A Night at t

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"The James Bond movies add a touch of realism to our work," the man deadpanned. "But Bond never makes reports. How could he survive in a bureaucracy?"

The man speaking was Paul Chretien, senior briefer at the Central Intelligence Agency. Was he about to destroy my romantic ideas about international spying?

Is the myth of James Bond exactly that?

I went to a CIA meeting for journalists determined to prove that spying was every bit as glamorous as it seems.

The night of the meeting, I met my comrade — let's call him Andreovich — at the corner of 14th and F in Washington, all according to a pre-arranged plan.

Wearing a tan trenchcoat, a hat pulled down low over my eyes, and dark glasses, I gave him the signal at exactly 5:30 — I flashed the car headlights.

He got in quickly. I looked with approval at his unobtrusive navy blue blazer and gray slacks. "Are you ready?" he muttered. I nodded.

Everything was running according to schedule.

We discussed the evening's plans as we inched through the snarled Georgetown traffic on M Street.

After crossing Key Bridge, we headed west on the George Washington Parkway, while visions of international intrigue in London and Paris danced in my head.

We continued along the romantic, tree-lined road until we saw the sign, "Central Intelligence Agency."

Driving onto the exit ramp, I expected any minute to see hundreds of secret agents dressed in trenchcoats skulking around trees and sending messages on walkie-talkies.

I was disappointed.

We were stopped by a lone man, dressed in a conservative blue suit, at the CIA entrance gate. He peered into the car.

"We're here for the journalists' meeting," my colleague said, pulling some identification out of his pocket. I eagerly reached into my trenchcoat for credentials and took off my dark glasses (I took them off more for my benefit than the guard's; it was dusk and I couldn't see a thing).

The guard shrugged off our identification. He just put a "Visitor" pass on the windshield and gave directions to the main building. The pass wasn't even numbered; I had hoped we would get number 007.

We passed several buildings as we tried to follow the man's directions, and finally ended up at the main building, a huge, many-windowed site. We spoke to another man.

"Are you the press?" he asked. He told us where to park, and then directed us to a mysterious-looking, igloo-shaped building we had passed earlier.

Andreovich and I speculated on the many covert activities that could go on in a building like that until we found out it was simply an auditorium.

The sensation we caused when we entered the building was amazing. "It must be because we look like spies," I concluded happily, owing it all to my slouched hat, a la Greta Garbo.

It wasn't. We just happened to be early. No one was expecting anyone to arrive so soon.

A CIA employe took my purse from me and inserted it in a metal-detector machine. He returned it to me without comment. "I guess I'm 'clean,'" I thought.

We were given badges and instructed to wear them during our entire visit. The badges said, "Conference Visitor," were numbered, and had the CIA seal on them. Still no 007, but we were getting closer — my badge was number 702 and my cohort's was 701.

All during the evening, we were never asked once to show identification. "What kind of a spy organization is this?" I asked bitterly.

Lavon Strong, CIA public affairs, told us why no identification was needed. "The people were checked on ahead of time, just to see if they worked for whom they said they did."

Asked how many employes the CIA had, Strong said the two things that were confidential were personnel and the CIA budget. These subjects are protected under the 1949 Central Intelligence Agency Act.

When the journalists took seats in the 500-person capacity auditorium that was decorated with potted plants, Herbert Hetu, assistant to the director of central intelligence for public affairs, made some opening remarks.

"The CIA is hard to find, get into, and maybe get out of," he said humorously. After the meeting, we're

just dug this afternoon to have come and cookies."

Was that a warning?

"You are helping us break the ice," Hetu said. "We have a new openness policy."

He said the group, members of Sigma Delta Chi, was the first group of journalists to be admitted to the CIA. The television shows 60 Minutes and Good Morning, America, and magazines Time and Newsweek, have individually been admitted.

As Hetu went on, I began to feel dejected. This evening was going to turn out to be just a simple meeting. No covert activities or brainwashing of any kind. This would never happen in a James Bond movie.

When Paul Chretien took the lectern and began to talk about intelligence collection, I perked up, adjusting my hat to a more rakish angle.

"Clandestine collection" is the CIA phrase for spying, he said. The "intelligence community" is made up of the State Department, and Department of Defense and the CIA.

"Approximately 98 percent of the CIA's budget is used for intelligence purposes," he said.

The production of intelligence is a process, Chretien said. The collection of information is the first step, followed by the analysis of that information.

There are, he said, three methods of information collection — overt, which involves foreign radio broadcasts, newspapers and embassies; technical, which is obtained through photography and electronics; and clandestine, which is obtained from secret sources, such as agents and defectors.

Analysts take this "raw intelligence," evaluate and interpret its meaning and significance, and produce "finished intelligence," according to a CIA pamphlet.

The CIA is responsible to the Senate and House Select Committees on Intelligence, a total of about 140 people (70 congressmen and 70 staff).

The CIA does not give its intelligence methods or sources to the committees. No information, however, is withheld from the President. He also has access to the CIA's sources.