

Ex CIA-Man's Ultimate Fantasy: Selling U.S. Secrets

By Henry Allen

It was the Ultimate Fantasy for Victor Marchetti.

It was the final, cataclysmic whimsy, probably, for the rest of them up there in the executive suite of the Central Intelligence Agency, a tantalizing daydream after one of the more brutal power auctions known as "morning coffee" with the director, Richard Helms (the ritual 9 a.m. coffee poured by the ritual blacks into the CIA's very own china, blue rimmed, with agency seal in blue on the side of the cup).

In 1968, Victor Marchetti was one of the blue-ribbed, Ivy-belonged inner circle of 14 "old boys" who sipped the coffee and played the politics of their own and everyone else's country. He was a GS-15, the executive assistant to Deputy Director Adm. Rufus Taylor.

He was also the inner circle's "token dago," he'd say. It seemed he was still the smallest lineman on the football team, the team now being that of the Eastern establishment, a term Marchetti likes, instead of the high school team in the coal town of Hazelton, Penna., (where he played guard at 175 pounds).

At night, in his suburban house crammed with Americana -- bronze eagles and hand-painted milk cans -- he was having chest pains and stomach aches and his wife was telling him to quit.

And days, in his GS-15's office with mock-leather chairs and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Potomac, he was having this mad suicidal daydream.

So in 1969, he quit the

agency. Like a lot of men for whom the American dream has turned to nightmare, he wrote a novel -- "my great fantasy," he calls it.

The novel, called "The Rope-Dancer," (361 pp., Grosset & Dunlap, \$6.95) is about Paul Franklin, executive assistant to the deputy director of the National Intelligence Agency, a Polish-American from a Pennsylvania coal town who for reasons never explained, falls prey to the ultimate fantasy of selling to the Soviets every secret he can Xerox, photograph or tape record.

The novel, told in the flat, familiar prose of myriad other novels about the government, with little of the flash and hintful allure of spy novels, describes the agency's discovery of Franklin and Franklin's discovery, along the way, that the director himself is working for the Soviets, an astonishing but plausible possibility, since the defection of Britain's Kim Philby to Russia after years of leaking the secrets of M. I. (Military Intelligence) Six.

Old boy and new boy alike, the agency is rotten. In between, Marchetti tells us, the fictional agency fudges facts to fit the whims of the President, or connives to "end run" around our ambassador to Colombia to overthrow its government. It's guilty of all the chicanery, backstabbing, and self-seeking that have marked organizations, and the chronicles of men disillusioned in them, through history.

Perhaps the novel, and the disillusionment that drove Marchetti to write it, was inevitable.

Recently, sitting in the basement bar of his Oakton, Va., home, Marchetti remembered the illusions of 1965, the year he joined the agency.

"I was going to be a mysterious person--adventurous, romantic, living in foreign countries . . ."

Now, a slightly pudgy 41, with three sons (Franklin has two sons), Marchetti wears a paint-stained red sweatshirt, work pants and crepe soled boots. Upstairs his wife is yelling at one of the dogs.

"I spent one year in operations. Then eleven years as a research analyst, and working on national estimates until I moved up to the director's staff. Sitting up there I began to see how it's all pulled together, the interplay with the rest of the executive branch of the government.

"The agency is the most romantic segment of the intelligence community, but I began to lose faith in it and its purpose, in intelligence in general.

"We spend \$6 billion a year on intelligence, which is too damn much. There's not nearly enough Congressional control. One night, after a particularly hard day I walked into the office of one of the other executive assistants and I said 'This place couldn't foul up worse if the KGB was running it.'" (The KGB is Russia's intelligence service.)

And a novel was born.

Actually, Marchetti wanted to write a non-fiction account, a critical analysis, "but after 14 years, you're very, very security conscious, and besides, there are a lot of old buddies over there I wouldn't want to hurt."

Fact or fiction, however, the novel "cuts close to the bone," Marchetti said. He's written another novel, and he's tried to sell a couple of analytical pieces. He believes he is under "mild surveillance" by the CIA, and he has recently begun to suspect his phone is tapped. He has been going to various congressmen to plead his case for more congressional surveillance of intelligence.

He claims he "cleansed" himself of agency influence in his first few months away from it. But a fascination and frustration still seem to wrestle inside him, the conflict of responsibility and romance.

"Sometimes at a party, when I was still with the agency, we'd discuss national or international issues. But as the night went on and more whiskey got drunk, we'd end up shooting the bull. I'd realize we were sitting there telling old war stories about old operations in this and that country. They were just war stories and we were all fascinated.

"I don't trust any of my old friends now. I've made new friends, journalists and politicians, but it's not the same thing, not like being with the guys you were recruited and trained with. These are the things I miss.

"But I have a son who's 17. If I have anything to say about it he's not going to die in Vietnam or Laos or the jungles of Colombia because of a bunch of CIA spooks and Eastern establishmentarians."

Still, he keeps souvenirs of his agency days. One of them, for instance, next to the basement bar, is a framed letter from Director Helms, thanking Marchetti's three sons for the coffee mug they bought for him. Helms regretted that the large size of the mug might force him to drink more coffee than was good for him.