

Secrets of the CIA

Author David Wise's Agency Thriller

By Christian Williams

David Wise blew up the Chesapeake Bay Bridge as a favor to his wife, but it was his own idea to make the director of the CIA as nutty as a fruitcake. After 20 years of writing nonfiction about the espionage establishment, he'd decided to have some fun.

The result is "Spectrum," a novel in which a dashing CIA station chief, chagrined to learn that his agency has become a nuclear power, takes on the deranged CIA director in a transatlantic battle of wits, shellfish-toxin "non-discernible microbioculations" and cryptography while the future of the world hangs, as they say, in the balance.

"Spectrum" has been in the bookshop windows since Friday, and its author will be talking it up on the "Today" show at 8:30 this morning. But the novel might be just another spy thriller if David Wise, at 53, did not happen to be an investigative reporter with five books out.

With his partner Robert B. Ross, he wrote "The U-2 Affair," "The Espionage Establishment" and "The Invisible Government," an account of American spying abroad that became a best seller in 1964. Since then he has published "The Politics of Lying," which argued that government deception has resulted in massive public distrust, and, in 1976, "The American Police State," an account of how recent administrations suppressed dissent and harassed their critics.

Until now, however, Wise was unable to reveal that the CIA had stolen enough uranium to become the first nuclear-tipped Washington bureaucracy. Such are the encumbrances of nonfiction, he conceded with a grin.

"However, it is true that in 1965, 381 pounds of weapons-grade uranium did disappear, or was stolen, from a plant in Apollo, Pa., as I say in the book. And we haven't been told what happened to it yet. In 1968 the CIA concluded that the missing uranium went to the Israelis, who used it to become the seventh nuclear power in the world."

And how does Wise know that?

"There was testimony before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission by a high official of the CIA, who said that Richard Helms went to LBJ and told him that. And LBJ said, 'Don't tell Rusk. Don't tell McNamara.'"

Helms said that?

"Helms says he doesn't remember," Wise replied. "But Helms doesn't remember a lot."

Did the the CIA in fact steal the uranium?

"I don't know."

Is the CIA, at the moment, armed with nuclear weapons?

The novelist only laughs.

Wise insists, however, that after covering spy stories for 20 years, he did not have to invent much when it came to decorating his thriller with the doodads and gizmos of clandestine tradecraft.

For example, when one of his characters considers hijacking a nuclear weapon from a transport convoy, he learns the escorting guards are equipped with M16s that fire gallium arsenide laser beams for targeting; that the missile trailers are unmarked; that the escort vehicles are ordinary campers. Furthermore, the convoy trucks are designed to withstand penetration by drills, explosives or blowtorches for one hour, and to survive a head-on collision at 60 miles an hour and a 1,900-degree fire for 30 minutes. If a hijacker did gain entry, sensors would automatically set off sprays and chemical foams to further confound him. Meanwhile, the trailer wheels would lock.

"That's all completely true," Wise said. "The laser beams are just for computing the target, of course. I got a lot of that from material the Nuclear Regulatory Commission put out, and also from the Department of Energy. Almost all the James Bond stuff in the book is literally true."

Including the poison dart gun with which Wise's CIA hero nearly gets bumped off?

"Of course," Wise said. "It shoots a tiny fleshette. And they really call it a 'nondiscernible microbioculator.' The CIA loves phrases like that. They

also have a Health Alleviation Committee. Its purpose is not to improve your health, but to *alleviate* it."

"I also looked into shellfish toxin, which the agency likes to use as a poison. I did my own research, I checked with a doctor and with an author. Shellfish toxin comes from Alaskan butter clams or Pacific Coast mussels, after they've ingested what they call 'red tide.' One mussel wouldn't kill you, but what the agency does is extract it from hundreds, and then it's extremely lethal. I confirmed by research that someone who was administered this stuff had symptoms indistinguishable from cardiac arrest."

Nevertheless, the business about the cats is surely made up — right?

"Oh no," Wise exclaimed. "Although maybe it goes better in a work of fiction than in the real world. You see, somebody at the agency decided that if you wired up a cat with a transmitter, he'd be the perfect eavesdropper. Maybe sitting right on the suspect's lap. Who'd suspect a cat? Well, as a matter of fact I would. I have two cats, and I'm extremely suspicious. But yes, the fact is the agency was actually cutting up cats."

Verification?

"The reason I know the cat stuff is true is that it was cut out of Marchetti's book." (Victor Marchetti is a former CIA agent who, with John Marks, published "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence." All former agents are required to submit manuscripts to the agency for review and deletion of material deemed unacceptable. Wise, who says he has never been employed by the CIA, is not subject to such review.)

This brings us to the part where somebody asks if Wise hates the CIA and is out to destroy it, subvert its purpose and generally make fun of the vast cloak-and-dagger bureaucracy unsecretly located behind a conspicuous sign on George Washington Memorial Parkway that reads "CIA."

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