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# 'Supermole' Or Con Man? The Arkady Shevchenko Mystery

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Is he the highest-ranking Soviet diplomat ever to defect to the West, a "supermole" who for years provided the United States with a veritable gold mine of information on the Soviet Union's most closely guarded secrets?

Or is he one of the most successful con men of all time who, with CIA cooperation, fabricated a James Bond-type story convincing enough to hoodwink CBS' *60 Minutes*, Alfred A. Knopf book publishers and *Time* magazine?

Despite the success and notoriety of Arkady Shevchenko, who was featured on *60 Minutes* and whose best-selling book, *Breaking with Moscow*, was condensed in *Time*, the jury is still out on the former United Nations bureaucrat.

Although former U.N. Ambassador and now-Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y., has touted Shevchenko as the most important intelligence source of the post-World War II era, there is some reason to suspect the erstwhile disinformation specialist is still plying his old trade.

Edward Jay Epstein, author of *The Warren Commission and the*

*Establishment of Truth and Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald*, has seriously questioned the veracity of Shevchenko's claims in a recent detailed review of the Russian's book.

It seems Shevchenko, who defected in 1978, made his first attempt to sell a book that same year but could not find a publisher because his manuscript was singularly dull and lacking in any new or startling information.

It was rejected by Simon and Schuster and Reader's Digest Press, in the latter case after many hours of interrogation by Henry Hurt, an expert on Soviet espionage.

By 1985, however, Shevchenko's story had suddenly grown all the elements of an Ian Fleming novel — car chases, dodging KGB agents, clandestine meetings, CIA "dead drops," sinister secret agents.

Shevchenko's book, which originally had no firsthand information about the top Soviet leadership, now miraculously includes page after page of verbatim private conversations with the likes of Leonid Brezhnev and Nikita Khrushchev.

Moreover, Shevchenko's book apparently has numerous errors of fact and chronology that call seriously into question his overall credibility.

It is understandable why Shevchenko would want to pass himself off as a deep-cover mole of amazing importance — the best-selling book and upcoming movie are reasons

enough for a Russian who reportedly acquired very expensive tastes in fine food, clothing and women during his 20 years at the United Nations — but why would the CIA go along with such a scam if it knew the defector was only a low-level functionary?

Considering the demoralized state of the U.S. intelligence community in the late 1970s, it is understandable why the CIA has done nothing to discredit Shevchenko's story.

The agency's image needed the public relations boost gained from supposedly besting the Russians at every turn by means of a "supermole" in the very heart of the Soviet government.

After the scandals, the damaging revelations of the Watergate era and the scourging of the intelligence services by the Church Committee in the Senate, the CIA in Arkady Shevchenko justified itself with a single stroke.

On the surface — if Shevchenko is a liar — the only apparent loser in the whole affair is the KGB.

A deeper look at the possible scam, however, reveals that the United States could come a cropper if Shevchenko's fanciful revelations lull us into a false sense of security by making us believe that we have bested the Russians at arms-control agreements because of the advantage our "supermole" gave our side.

So Shevchenko's possibly fictive book may be not be the innocent game it first appears.