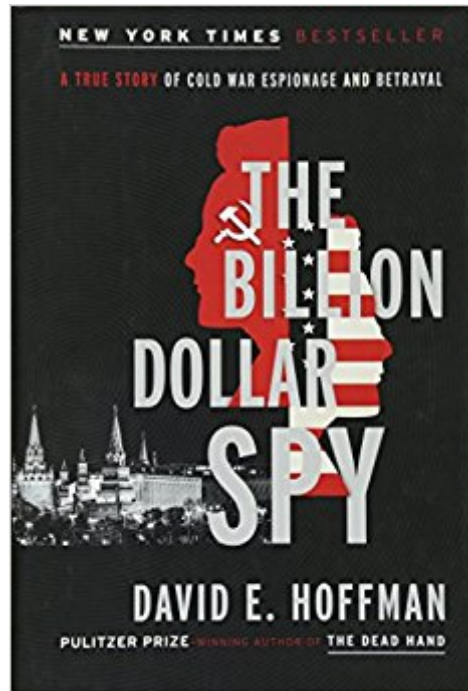




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# The Billion Dollar Spy: A True Story Of Cold War Espionage And Betrayal



## Synopsis

From the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning history *The Dead Hand* comes the riveting story of a spy who cracked open the Soviet military research establishment and a penetrating portrait of the CIA's Moscow station, an outpost of daring espionage in the last years of the Cold War. While driving out of the American embassy in Moscow on the evening of February 16, 1978, the chief of the CIA's Moscow station heard a knock on his car window. A man on the curb handed him an envelope whose contents stunned U.S. intelligence: details of top-secret Soviet research and developments in military technology that were totally unknown to the United States. In the years that followed, the man, Adolf Tolkachev, an engineer in a Soviet military design bureau, used his high-level access to hand over tens of thousands of pages of technical secrets. His revelations allowed America to reshape its weapons systems to defeat Soviet radar on the ground and in the air, giving the United States near total superiority in the skies over Europe. One of the most valuable spies to work for the United States in the four decades of global confrontation with the Soviet Union, Tolkachev took enormous personal risks—but so did the Americans. The CIA had long struggled to recruit and run agents in Moscow, and Tolkachev was a singular breakthrough. Using spy cameras and secret codes as well as face-to-face meetings in parks and on street corners, Tolkachev and his handlers succeeded for years in eluding the feared KGB in its own backyard, until the day came when a shocking betrayal put them all at risk. Drawing on previously secret documents obtained from the CIA and on interviews with participants, David Hoffman has created an unprecedented and poignant portrait of Tolkachev, a man motivated by the depredations of the Soviet state to master the craft of spying against his own country. Stirring, unpredictable, and at times unbearably tense, *The Billion Dollar Spy* is a brilliant feat of reporting that unfolds like an espionage thriller.

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## Customer Reviews

"In an era of suicide bombers and ISIS beheadings, the spy dramas of the Cold War can seem tame, almost polite affairs. Central Intelligence Agency officers who worked in the Soviet capital complained about operating under "Moscow rules," meaning the relentless scrutiny of the K.G.B. And they knew that any Soviet citizen caught spying faced certain execution. Still, there were rules. Those rules may actually be a reason that David Hoffman's *The Billion Dollar Spy*, about Adolf Tolkachev, a Soviet radar expert who spied for the C.I.A., is such an engrossing tale. The story played out over several years, almost entirely on the streets of Moscow, in a twilit chess game that pitted American intelligence officers against their Soviet counterparts." *New York Times* "The Billion Dollar Spy is one of the best spy stories to come out of the Cold War and all the more riveting, and finally dismaying, for being true. It hits the sweet spot between page-turning thriller and solidly researched history (even the footnotes are informative) and then becomes something more, a shrewd character study of spies and the spies who run them, the mixed motives, the risks, the almost inevitable bad end." *Washington Post* "[A] dramatic spy vs. spy story, complete with a trove of trade-craft tricks, is the grist for Pulitzer Prize-winning author David E. Hoffman's scrupulously reported *The Billion Dollar Spy*, a true-life tale so gripping at times it reads like spy fiction ... Hoffman interviewed key players and gained access to more than 900 pages of long-secret CIA files and operational cables to fill in a crucial gap in the Cold War espionage canon." *Los Angeles Times* "[The Billion Dollar Spy] packs valuable insights into the final decade of the cloak-and-dagger rivalry between the United States and the former Soviet Union, which came undone in 1989. It is a must-read for historians and buffs of that era, as well as aficionados of espionage ... Hoffman draws on extensive declassified CIA and FBI files and myriad other sources to chronicle how the United States gained and lost one of the elite spies of the Cold War." *Christian Science Monitor* "Gripping and nerve-wracking ... Human tension hangs over every page of *The Billion Dollar Spy* like the smell of leaded gasoline ... Hoffman knows the intelligence world well and has expertly used recently declassified documents to tell this unsettling and suspenseful story. It is an old cliché that any true story about espionage resembles the best of John Le Carré's fiction.

That's especially true here. The Billion Dollar Spy reads like the most taut and suspenseful parts of Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy or Smiley's People. It's worth the clenched jaw and upset stomach it creates." USA Today "The Billion Dollar Spy not only chronicles the life and motives of [Soviet engineer Adolph] Tolkachev but also provides a rare look at the dangerous, intricately choreographed tradecraft behind old-school intelligence gathering ... What [Hoffman] accomplished here isn't just a remarkable example of journalistic talent but also an ability to weave an absolutely gripping nonfiction narrative." Dallas Morning News "Hoffman excels at conveying both the tradecraft and the human vulnerabilities involved in spying." The New Yorker "David Hoffman is a scrupulous, meticulous writer whose pages of footnotes and references attest to how carefully he sticks to his sources ... His book's value is in its true-life adventure story and the window it offers into a once-closed world." Columbus Dispatch "The fine first sentence of The Billion Dollar Spy could almost have been written with an icicle. A work of painstaking historical research that's paced like a thriller." Departures "Hoffman [proves] that nonfiction can read like a John le Carré thriller ... This real-life tale of espionage will hook readers from the get-go." Publishers Weekly, starred review "Hoffman carefully sets the scene with both cautious and free-wheeling CIA directors and staff and also provides intimate details that prove fascinating and give human faces to these brave participants, including spies often known by code names and encountered in 'fast drops.' The book's hero who gave the U.S. technological information worth billions, with the technology still in use today is Adolf Tolkachev, a Russian engineer, and Hoffman's revealing of him as a person and a spy is brilliantly done, making this mesmerizing true story scary and thrilling." Booklist, starred review "Gripping and informative ... Focusing on Adolf Tolkachev, who served as a spy inside the Soviet Union for more than 20 years before being betrayed, the author sets out to write the story of a spy and in so doing, chronicles Cold War espionage and an overall compelling tale that draws on secret documents from the CIA as well as interviews with surviving participants. Hoffman succeeds on both accounts." Library Journal "This painstakingly researched tale reads like le Carré" Details "David Hoffman has written one of the best real-life spy stories ever told. This is a breakthrough book in intelligence writing, drawing on CIA operational cables the holy grail of the spy world to narrate each astonishing move. Hoffman reveals CIA tradecraft tricks that are more delicious than anything in a spy novel, and his command of the Soviet landscape is masterful. Full of twists so amazing you couldn't make them up, this is spy fact that really is better than fiction." The New York Times "David Ignatius,

Washington Post columnist and author of *The Director*—“A fabulous read that also provides chilling insights into the Cold War spy game between Washington and Moscow that has erupted anew under Vladimir Putin. *The Billion Dollar Spy* is an espionage thriller worthy of John Le Carr© but much more than that. It is also an evocative portrait of everyday life in the crumbling Soviet Union and a meticulously researched guide to CIA sources and methods.” I devoured every word, including the footnotes.

—Michael Dobbs, author of *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*

—“A scrupulously researched work of history that is also a gripping thriller, *The Billion Dollar Spy* by David E. Hoffman is an unforgettable journey into Cold War espionage. This spellbinding story pulses with the dramatic tension of running an agent in Soviet-era Moscow—where the KGB is ubiquitous and CIA officers and Russian assets are prey. I was enthralled from the first instance of a CIA officer—going dark—all the way to the terrible, tragic climax.

—Peter Finn, co-author of *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle Over a Forbidden Book*

—“*The Billion Dollar Spy* reads like the very best spy fiction yet is meticulously drawn from real life. It is a gripping story of courage, professionalism, and betrayal in the secret world.

—Rodric Braithwaite, British Ambassador in Moscow, 1988-1992

David E. Hoffman is a contributing editor at *The Washington Post* and a correspondent for PBS’s flagship investigative series, *FRONTLINE*. He is the author of *The Dead Hand*, about the end of the Cold War arms race, and winner of a 2010 Pulitzer Prize. He lives with his wife in Maryland.

If you think you have a strong sense of how espionage was conducted during the Cold War, you’re probably wrong. Histories, and the crowded shelves of spy novels set during the era, offer a cursory and misleading view of the day-to-day reality as it was lived by the men and women who worked for the CIA and the KGB. David E. Hoffman’s outstanding tale about one extraordinary Russian spy for the US and his CIA handlers is truly eye-opening. You won’t be able to look at spycraft in what is called humint—human intelligence—the same way ever again. *The Billion Dollar Spy* was a Soviet engineer named Adolf Tokachev who provided the US with a prodigious volume of technical data about the USSR’s military capabilities from 1977 to 1985. He served as chief engineer of one of several research and development institutes serving the Soviet air force. Under the noses of his bosses and the KGB alike, he brazenly supplied photographs of

many thousands of pages of top-secret data to the CIA, enabling the US to counteract every technical advantage achieved by the USSR in its most advanced combat aircraft. An assessment by the US government of Tokachev's "production" placed the value at two billion dollars, and that was undoubtedly a conservative estimate. There seems to be little question that Adolf Tokachev was the CIA's biggest success story ever in human intelligence – at least among those the agency has revealed to researchers. His portrait hangs in CIA headquarters to this day. Hoffman tells this amazing story with great skill and in minute detail. The book reads like a top-flight spy novel, reeking of suspense. But what is most surprising (at least to me) is the insiders' picture of CIA operations. To call the agency bureaucratic would be a gross understatement: every single action taken by Tokachev's handlers and every single word they communicated to him was first painstakingly reviewed not just by the head of the Moscow station but also by his boss, the head of the agency's Soviet division – and often by the Director of the CIA himself. More often than not, the agency big-wigs second-guessed their field staff, denying multiple requests for money to compensate Tokachev, for the cyanide pill he demanded in case he was discovered by the KGB, and for the spyware he needed to photograph top-secret material he had spirited away from his office at the risk of his life. Yet, as Hoffman writes, Tokachev's material was so valuable back at Langley that he was literally "paying the rent," justifying the CIA's operational budget – and helping the agency satisfy the military customers. That bureaucratic meddling was the first surprise. The second was the picture of tedium and frustration suffered by Tokachev's handlers. Pulling off a single exchange of material at a dead drop might require weeks, with the effort aborted several times for fear of KGB surveillance. Face-to-face meetings with the engineer were often even more fraught with fear. Months went by between meetings, sometimes by design, sometimes by misadventure. On a couple of occasions, Tokachev's wife inadvertently opened the attic window he used to signal for a meeting, creating confusion and anxiety within the CIA station. And the technology designed by the agency's answer to James Bond – sometimes malfunctioned. Third, though by no means a surprise, is the picture Hoffman paints of the damage suffered by the CIA at the hands of its long-time director of counterintelligence, James Jesus Angleton. When his close personal friend, Kim Philby, defected to the Soviet Union after decades of extraordinarily high-level spying, Angleton apparently went off the deep end into paranoia. (Many of his coworkers thought he

was nuts.) As Hoffman writes, “Angleton’s suspicions permeated the culture and fabric of the CIA’s Soviet operations division during the 1960s, with disastrous results . . . If no one could be trusted, there could be no spies.” Hoffman adds that, for Angleton, “everything was labeled suspicious or compromised . . . It’s not a stretch to imagine that the CIA opened up its records on the Tokachev affair as a public relations move to counter all the dreadful publicity it has suffered over the past decade and more. After all, such records are normally classified for fifty years, and Tokachev’s career for the CIA ended only thirty years ago. It’s also sobering to consider the agency’s success with Tokachev in a larger context. As Marc Goodman revealed in his recent book, *Future Crimes*, Chinese government hackers succeeded in stealing top-secret US military data worth hundreds of billions of dollars. David E. Hoffman is a Pulitzer-Prize-winning contributing editor to the *Washington Post*.

Here is a spell-binding story of the late Cold War. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in an apparently permanent deadlock in which neither side was able to gain a decisive advantage. Then one evening in Moscow a man knocked on the window of an American diplomat at a filling station and handed him an envelope. That momentary encounter was to lead to a years long and highly productive relationship which gave the US crucial access to Soviet planning and technological developments. It is not overstating things to say that that meeting was one of the turning points of twentieth century history. David E Hoffman is the ideal writer for this riveting tale, with long experience at the *Washington Post* and PBS and as the Pulitzer Prize winning author of several histories of the Cold War and of Russia. In the 1960s and early 1970s US espionage within the Soviet Union was almost non-existent, thanks primarily to the influence of the brilliant but paranoid James J. Angleton, head of Counter-Intelligence at the CIA. Angleton believed that no Russian defector and no offer of intelligence from Russians could be trusted because they were all part of a complex Soviet plot to mislead the West. It was not until after Angleton was forced to retire in 1974 that the CIA began to develop contacts within the Soviet system, including military and KGB officials who were willing to provide intelligence. The most valuable of these contacts, the so-called billion dollar spy, was the man who rapped on the diplomat’s car window. Adolf Tolkachev was an engineer with high security clearances who willingly provided enormous amounts of information over a period of several years. Tolkachev’s story makes up the bulk of *The Billion Dollar Spy*, but there is also plenty of material about other Soviet spies and about the CIA operatives who worked with them. Hoffman does a fine job of recreating the nerve-wracking tension of being on

duty at the Moscow station, working for months to plan a meeting with a contact which might last only a few minutes or might not even come off at all. Always there was the threat that the KGB was watching and waiting, which would mean certain arrest and eventual execution for the Soviet spy and exposure and expulsion for the American agents working with him or her. Hoffman does just as good a job of describing the lives of Tolkachev and other Soviet spies, the constant tension and fear under which they labored, the tedious and highly dangerous methods of collecting and copying information for the West, and the effect the stress had on them and their families. I found Hoffman's descriptions of the evasions and tricks played by US agents attempting to evade the KGB fascinating, as was Hoffman's story of the disaffected American who eventually betrayed Tolkachev to the Soviets. This book is almost unputdownable, a fascinating chronicle of the last years of the Cold War. Those of us who lived through the 1970s and 1980s knew of the changes in US and Soviet leadership and of the ups and downs of superpower relationships during that era, but very few would have had any idea of the dangerous careers so many men and women led in those years. The Billion Dollar Spy does much to illuminate the dedication and hard work of some whose names may never be widely known, but who nevertheless played crucial roles at a momentous time in history.

First, it's about facts not generally known. It highlights the extreme pressures such CIA handlers must operate under in the center of an avowed enemy that some politicians say is our friend. Shows the reluctance of HQ to respond effectively to new wrinkles in the operation. Second, it underscores the fanatical heroism in an agent in place who so substantially benefited the US in the Big Game. Very good reading.

The narrative showed the complex planning of spying. The portrait painted, of a Soviet citizen's daily life, was not pleasant. The complete control exercised by the state was daunting, unpleasant, and stressful. One can see why Russians defect.

Thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was a great follow-up to the Philby books I'd been reading. The West needed a win and this man provided it, in spades. Well researched, well-written. A page turner.

Never usually read books about military and spying, but this was worth the read. The sacrifice of the man and his perseverance was awesome. Who knows how desert storm would have ended had it



not been for this Russian spy

This is an absolutely mesmerizing account of the CIA at peak performance. The peak performance is all in the CIA station, Moscow however. My experience is with the same area of government and it seems the universal rule is "If you make no decisions you can never be accused of making bad ones.". The wimpy, temporizing of the HQ drones is all too familiar. That being said, five stars to the author. I have a pretty good idea of the depth of his work with FOIA and even more impressive his interviews of the principals. I can not think of any other book, publication, whatever, that got the story so completely and in such depth.

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