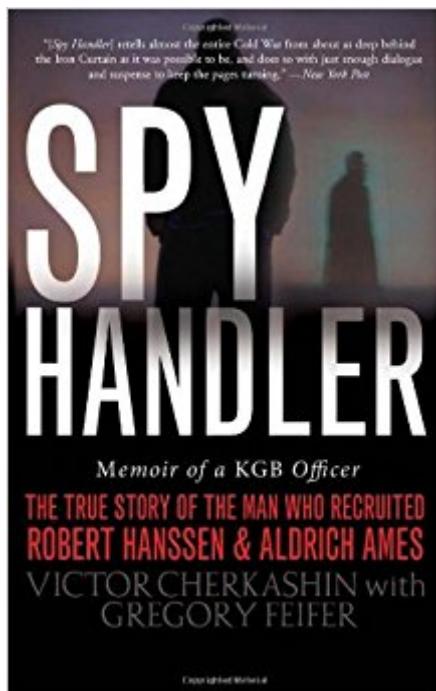


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Spy Handler: Memoir Of A KGB Officer - The True Story Of The Man Who Recruited Robert Hanssen And Aldrich Ames



Synopsis

In his four decades as a KGB officer, Victor Cherkashin was a central player in the shadowy world of Cold War espionage. From his rigorous training in Soviet intelligence in the early 1950s to his prime spot as the KGB's head of counterintelligence at the Soviet embassy in Washington, Cherkashin's career was rich in episode and drama. In a riveting memoir, Cherkashin provides a remarkable insider's view of the KGB's prolonged conflict with the CIA. Playing a major role in global espionage for most of the Cold War, Cherkashin was posted to stations in the United States, Australia, India, and Lebanon. He tracked down U.S. and British spies around the world. But it was in 1985 that Cherkashin scored two of the KGB's biggest-ever coups. In April of that year, he recruited disgruntled CIA officer Aldrich Ames and became his principal handler. Six months later, FBI special agent Robert Hanssen contacted Cherkashin directly, eventually becoming an even bigger asset than Ames. In *Spy Handler*, Cherkashin offers the complete account of how and why both Americans turned against their country, and addresses the rumors of an undiscovered KGB spy-another Hanssen or Ames-still at large in the U.S. intelligence community. Full of vivid detail and dramatic accounts that shed stark new light on the inner workings of the KGB, *Spy Handler* is a major addition to Cold War history, told by one of its major players.

Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Basic Books (November 1, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0465009697

ISBN-13: 978-0465009695

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 98 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #130,787 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #96 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Russia #121 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Espionage #142 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Russian & Former Soviet Union

Customer Reviews

It's not surprising that a book on spying would be tinged with irony. Midway through this gripping but soberly written expose on the Cold War spy game, the author, a former KGB agent, recalls some

advice he gave back in the 1990s to former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, who wanted to know how Cherkashin was able to recruit CIA agents like Aldrich Ames and Robert Hanssen as KGB spies and whether it was possible to prevent treason. "The only way to be entirely safe is to remove people from intelligence gathering," Cherkashin offered--an intriguing comment given the recent renewed emphasis on human intelligence. But throughout the book, Cherkashin proves his point, showing just how porous these agencies are and how operatives deftly remain effective as spies for both sides. Recruited in 1985, Ames and Hanssen made the initial overtures to the KGB, and Cherkashin was there to receive them and their boilerplate motivations for wanting to cross over-money and a sort of renegade patriotism that resolves itself by punishing the very country they serve. While Cherkashin's relationships with Ames and Hanssen are explained, almost more intriguing is the picture he paints of a time when spying was predominantly a human intelligence affair ripe with sex and blackmail. The author, who clearly believes in respect for the enemy, sometimes sounds like an apologist for his country's actions, as well as the actions of Ames and Hanssen. But this lack of sentimentality is what makes the book stand out. 16 page photo pull-out.

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Cherkashin, a retired senior KGB officer, working with Feifer, a former Moscow correspondent for Radio Free Europe, gives readers an insider's view of the spy business from just after World War II through the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. This is at once fascinating and chilling. Cherkashin emphasizes the painstaking, plodding nature of spy work, but he also spikes his account with the stuff of a le Carre thriller: secret meetings, paranoia over others' reactions, and tales of blackmail and seduction in the service of turning selected targets into KGB agents. Although the focus is on Soviet spycraft, Cherkashin's story--especially the recruitment and handling of Americans Aldrich Ames and Robert Hanssen--is interlaced with details about U.S. spying and counterspying. Cherkashin's perspective on Ames' and Hanssen's psyches and on what led to their downfalls is especially riveting. Read this not just as a spy exposé but also as a social history of an especially volatile period in Russia. Connie Fletcher

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A solid book. You can't accept everything it says at face value, but it's well worth reading. Most importantly, you can see the infighting in the KGB in the last days of the cold war, and get a unique view of the Ames and Hanssen cases. Otherwise, it's an interesting and engaging

autobiography. Cherkashin argues that sentences for spies should be reduced, that an intelligence officer's best weapon is the agent's fear of discovery. In the case of Ames, he says that by far the most damaging leak happened in a short dinner at a restaurant-- Cherkashin simply pointed out that any American agents in the KGB might potentially expose Ames. Ames thought it over, and wrote a list of names on a napkin. Like that, human lives were snuffed out and US national security was critically compromised. Up until then (he claims), Ames had only handed them dribs and drabs. It was the fear of discovery and draconian punishment, not KGB bribes, that delivered the holy grail of US intelligence. The author also discusses the infighting in the KGB. Mostly that he wasn't given enough credit and influence for his contributions to Soviet intelligence. KGB head Kryuchkov instead eliminated the American agents one by one, crediting the whole thing to good internal policework (and the implication that before his brilliant leadership things had gotten lax). Of course, the other reason to have done this was to conceal how the Soviets had discovered the moles. Cherkashin came under scrutiny for his contacts with CIA officers and moles inside the KGB. He obviously maintains his innocence and gives a thorough discussion of his version of events. Finally, he argues that American writing on espionage is quick to portray agents recruited in the Soviet Union and elsewhere as patriots and ideologically opposed to communism. Meanwhile, it usually describes Americans recruited to work for the Russians as mentally ill or sociopathically mercenary (the latter isn't totally fair; certainly the WW2-era Soviet agents are usually described as believing communists). Cherkashin argues that issues of pride, office politics, ego, and personal life situations are very important in understanding agents' motivations to betray their countries. And that agents of any power are a complex mix of that plus ideology, mental illness, and other issues. My main complaint about this book is that it's very clearly post-retirement axe-grinding. It also like most espionage books spends most of its time talking about "who / when / where / why" and very little time talking about the stuff that's most interesting to amateurs like me, the what and how of intelligence work: the daily routine and tactics. Since he's living in America, one might have hoped to have gotten a glimpse into sources and methods, but it's not surprising that he didn't touch that stuff.

I came to this book after seeing numerous references to it in "The billion dollar spy". I seem to be reading about cold war spying at the moment. This is the memoirs of Victor Cherkashin. Cherkashin was an officer in the KGB who worked in Washington and most notably ran Robert Ames and Robert Hanssen. Stylistically this book reminds me of "They have their exits" by Airey Neave. Cherkashin is writing a number of years after his his KGB career ended and after the fall of the

USSR. For the most part his telling of events is precise but unemotional and even carries a slightly detached air. Almost as if the events happened to someone else. The book highlights differences in style between the CIA and the KGB in how they operated in each other's territories and how they regarded spies/agents. Both organisations are suspicious of spies (rightly so) but Cherkashin's KGB is less emotionally attached. The CIA had a lot of technology which made up for how hard it was to operate in the USSR. I also thought that Cherkashin's view of agents and their motivation was more realistic than those I've read in CIA/American accounts. Most spying isn't ideological but has more personal reasons at its heart such as career snubs, relationship issues or especially unrealised ambitions. Some of this memoir discusses the internal politics of the KGB. It is in these sections that Cherkashin becomes more passionate. The book seems to have been written as a way of clarifying and clearing his name after a series of accusations made against him in Russia. He is quite happy to say where blame lies but also does a good job of justifying the actions of those he accuses (he sees both sides of the story quite well). Cherkashin's KGB career was mostly a cold war career that spanned the end of the USSR. He clearly has strong feelings of nostalgia for and loyalty to the Soviet system which seems strange to an outsider but has survived his poor treatment at the hands of the KGB archive and living in modern Russia. This is an interesting read and gives a good insight into the mindset of professional intelligence officers and how ruthless they can be. This is not a James Bond/derring CIA book but a fascinating insight into the "other" side of the cold war.

I read Milt Bearden's book first. While the two followed pretty closely, this gave a different perspective as well as some interesting incites from an insider during the breakup of the Soviet Union. The author did a good job of being thorough without being tedious. While it was not a Tom Clancy novel, it was interesting and writing as a story, not a documentary.

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