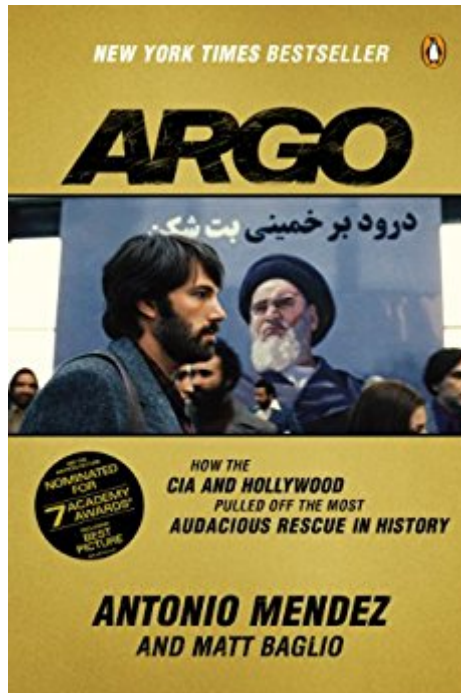


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Argo: How The CIA And Hollywood Pulled Off The Most Audacious Rescue In History



Synopsis

The true, declassified account of CIA operative Tony Mendez's daring rescue of American hostages from Iran that inspired the critically-acclaimed film directed by and starring Ben Affleck, and co-starring John Goodman, Alan Arkin, and Bryan Cranston. On November 4, 1979, Iranian militants stormed the American embassy in Tehran and captured dozens of American hostages, sparking a 444-day ordeal and a quake in global politics still reverberating today. But there is a little-known drama connected to the crisis: six Americans escaped. And a top-level CIA officer named Antonio Mendez devised an ingenious yet incredibly risky plan to rescue them before they were detected. Disguising himself as a Hollywood producer, and supported by a cast of expert forgers, deep cover CIA operatives, foreign agents, and Hollywood special effects artists, Mendez traveled to Tehran under the guise of scouting locations for a fake science fiction film called *Argo*. While pretending to find the perfect film backdrops, Mendez and a colleague succeeded in contacting the escapees, and smuggling them out of Iran. Antonio Mendez finally details the extraordinarily complex and dangerous operation he led more than three decades ago. A riveting story of secret identities and international intrigue, *Argo* is the gripping account of the history-making collusion between Hollywood and high-stakes espionage.

Book Information

File Size: 1355 KB

Print Length: 320 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (September 13, 2012)

Publication Date: September 13, 2012

Sold by: Penguin Group (USA) LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B007V65PLA

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #185,449 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #10

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > Canada > Post-Confederation #23

in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics >

Customer Reviews

I read the book and saw the movie. Tony Mendez is a true life "James Bond". What was fascinating was how ordinary Mr. Mendez makes himself sound like -a wife and kids in the suburbs, an art studio etc. However, after reading the book, you realize how extraordinary he is. Think about how dangerous it was for an American CIA agent to go into Iran at that time or any time since then. In fact it was more dangerous than going into Moscow during the Cold War. In Moscow, you would likely be thrown out of the country but not killed. In the the movie you see Ben Affleck take off his wedding ring before he goes. The book explains that if you were caught, you wanted your captors to think you were single. Imagine the implications. At the same time the sheer audacity of the cover story was something that you wouldn't believe could come out of a government agency. The movie over dramatizes the events that occur to make it a more interesting story; but what makes this caper so successful in reality was how boring it really was. The elaborate Hollywood backstory was necessary both in case the Iranians checked, but also to sell a sceptical White House on trying it and then to sell the hidden Americans that they could actually pull it off. Part of the message here is that disguise is more than makeup, it is the attitude to support it and the backstory was necessary to make people believe it was real. In many ways this was a true "Mission Impossible" mission in the spirit of the TV series. The intersection between Hollywood and the spy world was also amazing. While there wasn't as much action as there would be in a movie (or in the movie Argo) the reality was every bit as dangerous and what distinguishes a true professional is pulling off without triggering any suspicion.

On November 4, 1979, Iranian militants took over the American embassy in Iran. The Americans inside the embassy when the takeover occurred were held hostage for 444 days. The drawn-out crisis made President Jimmy Carter look weak, and he lost the next presidential election to Ronald Reagan. A dozen or so Americans managed to exit the embassy during the siege. Most were captured and brought back, but six ended up on the run. Eventually, they were sheltered by Canadian diplomats in their homes for weeks of boredom from nothing to do and terror at the risk of being discovered. Antonio Mendez and others at the CIA created an outlandish scheme to explain why the six were in Iran and as cover to get them out. Even in the midst of a military crisis, Hollywood rolls on, and Hollywood execs are crazy enough to visit war-torn countries seeking places to film. Using a script for a science fiction movie project that had fallen through a few months

earlier, the CIA created the elusion of a production company scouting locations in Iran. The logistics of such an operation seem overwhelming. The book is thorough without bogging down. Without getting lost, I understood the incredible amount of coordination and attention to detail that was required. One of the parts that struck me had to do with acquiring Canadian passports. The six Americans were to pose as Canadians, and Mendez expected getting permission from Canada to create fake Canadian passports to be a major obstacle. Instead, on arriving in the office of a Canadian official, he and a colleague were astonished to discover that the Canadians had already done the background work necessary to make that happen.

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