**CLOAK & CORKSCREW: WHERE CIA MEETS HOLLYWOOD**

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**Publisher: Earthshine Editions, Santa Barbara**

**Publication date: 5 January 2011**

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) enjoys an intriguing relationship with Hollywood.

Most people believe that the CIA has no jurisdiction within the borders of the United States; that its mission is purely foreign intelligence collection and analysis.

However, the CIA has always legally operated within U.S. borders (outside of headquarters in Langley, Virginia), even if the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), whose national security division assumes responsibility for counter-intelligence operations on U.S. soil, stakes a large claim to such territory.

Consequently, turf wars between these rival intelligence services are not uncommon.

For decades, a division called Domestic Contacts ran the CIA’s U.S. operations. A few years ago, its name was changed to Foreign Research Division.

Today, the operatives of Foreign Research cultivate foreign nationals that attend trade shows and universities inside the U.S., recruiting them to spy in their spheres of expertise upon returning home.

Officers from this division also recruit U.S. citizens traveling abroad, using them for special "access" to people and to places of interest that are otherwise hard to reach.

Such American recruits go mostly unpaid, willing to cooperate purely for patriotic reasons.

Perhaps CIA’s most unique domestic station is in Los Angeles. It is from their office in La-la Land that CIA officers cultivate and recruit Hollywood celebrities to spy for them abroad.

*Why Hollywood celebrities?*

Access.

*How so?*

From time to time, you read in the newspapers about how some of the world’s most ruthless dictators, such as Cuba’s Fidel Castro, and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, receive with open arms some of the best-known American names in showbiz—and then spend quality time with them over long, loquacious dinners.

The public perception is that such Americans are pro-Cuban and/or pro-Venezuelan and perhaps even anti-American.

Foreign dictators use Hollywood stars as propaganda trophies for showing off to their own people (domestic consumption), garnishing sympathy in the United States (foreign media photo ops), and also sticking it to the U.S. government.

But in some cases, these dictators have been rused.

A former CIA operations officer familiar with Hollywood revealed to me that some such visits are sanctioned, and often actually encouraged, by the CIA.

“By my calculation, about one-third of the Hollywood heavyweights who visit scummy dictators secretly report back to CIA,” my source told me. “They are able to provide details that help analysts and profilers determine the physical health and mental state of these dictators—intelligence otherwise hard to come by. Is Fidel slurring his words, perhaps the result of a stroke? This kind of intelligence, which can only be obtained through *access*, is invaluable to the U.S. intelligence community.”

CIA spooks operating in the shadows of *tinseltown* have their work cut out for them.

“The hardest part of their job,” a former senior intelligence official told me, “is stroking the egos of the movie stars who provide access for them—no small task.”

My new book--*Cloak& Corkscrew:  Where CIA Meets Hollywood*--is a fictionalized version of how CIA operates through movie star access agents.

In my novel, Hollywood star Josh Penner meets Venezuela's Hugo Chavez as a CIA access agent.

When the Embassy of Venezuela in Washington DC sends an emissary to contact Penner on Hugo's behalf, the CIA has an obligation to inform the FBI.  Thus a turf war ensues over Penner’s services and priorities.

The hapless emissary is actually a Venezuelan intelligence officer running a high-level spy in the U.S. State Department, who had been honey-trapped in Caracas years earlier.

In the midst of these entanglements, CIA has a new assignment for Penner:  to neuter a rogue former CIA officer intent on revealing vital secrets.  Penner must feign interest in the movie rights to the ex-spy's kiss-and-tell book to effectively prevent them being seen elsewhere—or sold to a faux Russian publisher.