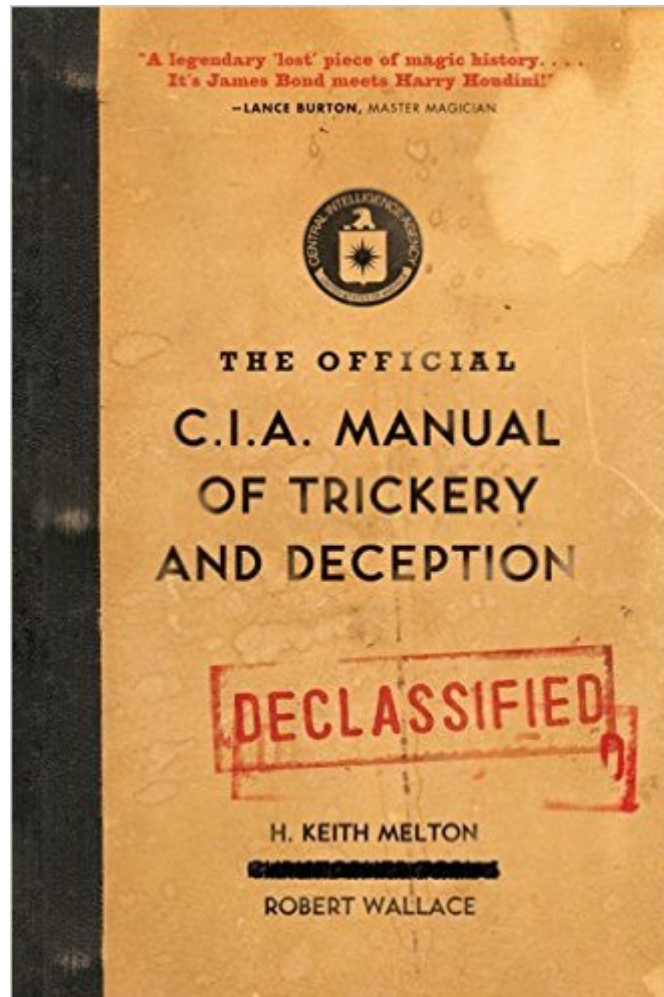


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The Official CIA Manual Of Trickery And Deception



Synopsis

Once a top-secret training manual for CIA field agents in the early Cold War Era of the 1950s, The Official CIA Manual of Trickery and Deception is now available to the general public. An amazing historical artifact, this eye-opening handbook offered step-by-step instructions to covert intelligence operatives in all manner of sleight of hand and trickery designed to thwart the Communist enemy. Part of the Company's infamous MK-ULTRA "a secret mind-control and chemical interrogation research program" this legendary document, the brainchild of John Mulholland, then America's most famous magician, was believed lost forever. But thanks to former CIA gadgeteer Bob Wallace and renowned spycraft historian H. Keith Melton, The Official CIA Manual of Trickery and Deception is now available to everyone, spy and civilian alike.

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Customer Reviews

During the height of the Cold War, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) employed an American sleight of hand artist, a magician by the name of John Mulholland to provide instruction on illusion and deception as part of the sinister and shadowy MKULTRA program. Two of his texts have survived and been declassified, and are reproduced here, along with a brief history of some of the CIA's spookiest programs. The history portion; "The Legacy of MKULTRA and the Missing Magic Manuals" will entertain, delight, and provoke conspiracy theorists everywhere. This section touches on operations of the Cold War, formerly classified experimentation, and gadgets from the sublime to ridiculous. It also discusses the long-standing relationship between magicians and intelligence operations going back to WW I. There are some super vignettes about Harry Houdini and his

stagecraft in there too. The first text by Mulholland is mostly about covert (covert; "An operation that is so planned and executed as to conceal the identity of or permit plausible denial by the sponsor.") administration of liquids or pills, and petty theft. The first section, however, is a superb discussion of the mechanics and psychology of sleight of hand, with a special emphasis on dispelling myths. The second text is about clandestine (clandestine; "An operation sponsored or conducted by governmental departments or agencies in such a way as to assure secrecy or concealment.") signals between operators. Again, this is based on performance magic, like the cues an assistant will give the magician during a mind reading act. Again, worth while reading for aspiring sleight of hand artists. This book will benefit students of the history of the Cold War, the CIA, and espionage in general, as a novel snapshot of efforts by the US intelligence community between WWII and the fall of the Soviet Union. Folks interested in real-life James Bond tricks and techniques will love this book. Magicians and other practitioners of illusion will find material of interest here from a master of the craft, even though the intent of the effects, the mindset of the audience, and enthusiasm for morally dubious behavior might be pretty icky. As a historian and amateur illusionist, this was a darkly fascinating book. E. M. Van Court

Stage magician John Mulholland wrote this pair of manuals for the CIA in the early 1950s. All copies were believed to have been destroyed, though stories of the sleight of hand and secret communication documents have carried down through the decades. One copy of each manual were discovered though, and now declassified, appear here in print. It's an interesting book for both the stage magic and the history of CIA spycraft folks. Though the cover makes it clear that they figure the market will be from those interested in the CIA "trickery and deception." It's not as exciting as a James Bond version would be, unless you can put the movies and fiction aside and feel the thrill of the real deal. These manuals were written to help CIA case officers pass documents to agents without notice, or to hold-out hide small objects. The real nuts and bolts of espionage. Makes sense to go to the magicians who do that sort of thing daily, though with lower consequences of failure. Anyway, it's an odd glimpse into the CIA's past, before electronics and email intercepts, before senate investigations, and with the looming threat of the Cold War a very real part of the story. I enjoyed it.

Question: Are the tricks and deceptions described by John Mulholland in his CIA manual of magic for spies more James Bondesque or Maxwell Smartish? Answer: Definitely the latter. Many of the hocus-pocus methods described in this CIA manual require sleight-of-hand. I say "hocus-pocus"

lovingly, speaking from my vantage as an amateur magician who enjoys reading books about trickery and deception, always on the lookout for tricks that I can add to a future act. In this book you will find descriptions of skills that require practice and lots of it. It will take more than a careful reading of this manual to teach a novice, spy or not, how to master deceptive moves that will fool an audience. Magic is a performing art, not a science. For example, Mulholland devotes 22 pages to the handling of tablets -- poison pills ranging in size from one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter to a pill as large as three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter, bigger pills requiring different handling described elsewhere in the manual. Here the CIA agent-in-training will find detailed instructions for concealing, stealing, palming, and surreptitiously dropping a poison pill into an enemy's drink under her nose. Method One, where the tablet is concealed in a matchbook, works with smokers. Method Two, where the tablet is concealed by a piece of paper, works with smokers and non-smokers alike. Both methods require patter, a smooth and plausible line of gab designed to misdirect the victim's attention to something other than your real intentions. Without the necessary commitment to oft-repeated dry runs, this trick along with many other tricks in this manual are arrant setups for flubs, goofs, and pratfalls in the manner of Maxwell Smart. I will go out on a limb and say that very few people, CIA agents or not, would possess the digital dexterity and showmanship to master the performance skills required by the magic described in this book in the manner of James Bond. One of the maxims of magic is practice, practice, practice. Master magicians, whether professional or amateur, will spend hundreds of hours practicing to become proficient at a sleight that will take only seconds to perform. Neglect practice and these performance skills will rapidly decline. I cannot imagine a CIA agent, for whom magic is not his first love, practicing these skills day after day and week after week (as a magician would) to be ready for a performance that may never materialize. I repeat -- preparation, patter, and performance are not quickly learned nor long maintained without rehearsal, and lots of it. Bottom Line: I really like this book. John Mulholland is my all-time favorite writer of magic books. I recommend this book without reservation for magicians, including aspiring magicians, but not for wishful spies.

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