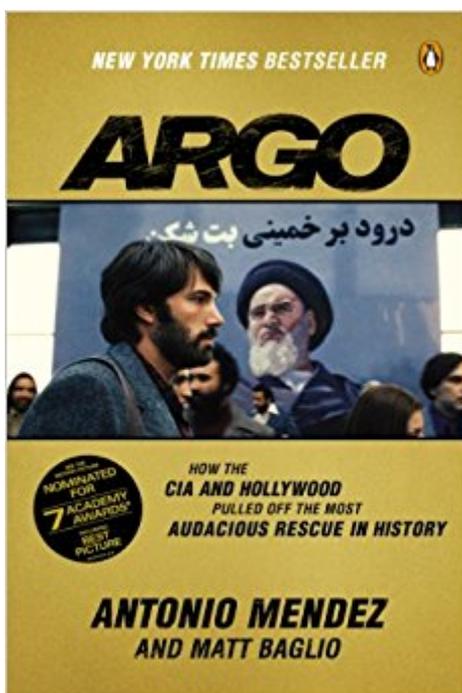


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# Argo: How The CIA And Hollywood Pulled Off The Most Audacious Rescue In History



## Synopsis

The true account of a daring rescue that inspired the film *ARGO*, winner of the 2012 Academy Award for Best Picture. 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

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## Customer Reviews

"It's a fast-paced, straight-forward, and gripping story full of drama and compelling characters. For history buffs and Affleck fans, *ARGO* the book, provides added insight into a wild, if not widely known, incident in the history of American foreign policy and the CIA. Besides being a talented spy, Mendez is also a

gifted storyteller. His latest book is a page turner. Associated Press: "Fascinating story. This book is an exciting read. Deseret News: "ARGO is a mesmerizing book; a fast-paced, irresistible read that's equal parts politics, history and espionage. Shelf Awareness: "This is an amazing and dramatic story of intrigue and deception set against the backdrop of international tension. Booklist: "Fresh and engaging. A solid choice for fans of thrillers and international intrigue. Kirkus: "[A] fast-paced account of a 1979 rescue operation during the Iran hostage crisis of 1979-1981. Details of this dangerous operation inject strong suspense and excitement into the closing chapters. Publishers Weekly: "One of the most daring and courageous clandestine operations during my career involved efforts to rescue Americans taken hostage in Tehran after our embassy was seized on November 4, 1979. Six Americans managed to escape the U.S. compound and flee to the Canadian embassy, where they were hidden. A very brave CIA officer, Tony Mendez, using commercial cover, entered Iran with false identities for the six and, using techniques that ought to remain secret so they can be used again, managed to get them out of Iran. Robert M. Gates, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and former U.S. Secretary of Defense, in his book *From the Shadows*: "This is a fascinating story about how Tony Mendez and the CIA used a bit of technical expertise and a lot of daring and courage to rescue American hostages in Iran. Tony is emblematic of the extraordinary men and women of CIA. Most of their stories cannot be told but fortunately, in *ARGO*, Tony has been able to lift the veil of secrecy just a bit. George J. Tenet, former director of Central Intelligence Agency: "James Bond, as Q comes to life. This gripping, true story of a white-knuckle operation by a little known part of the CIA reads like a thriller. Full of authentic detail and characters, of bravery and drama, it's a must-read for all spy enthusiasts and CIA watchers. Dame Stella Rimington, former general director, MI5, British Intelligence: "The CIA and Hollywood in cahoots, a painter turned spy, an impossible rescue mission with no guns and only one chance at success. *ARGO* has everything. This remarkable white-knuckle spy story is torn from the pages of real life, and will have you up past your bedtime to discover its thrilling endgame. Eric Blehm, author of *Fearless*: "Forget your spy novels, here's how this stuff really works: Two secret agents quietly enter the enemy camp, unarmed but for their wit and experience. Hiding in plain sight, they rescue six virtual hostages under the eyes of their captors, a covert operation seemingly devised in Central Casting. Now their story can be told and it makes for one

hell of read. Peter Earnest, retired CIA officer and Executive Director, International Spy Museum "This true spy story has it all: guile, audacity, and bravery in a struggle with a fanatic and lethal enemy, a crucial role played by a loyal ally, and a marvelous conspiracy with Hollywood. R. James Woolsey, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency "Artist-spy Tony Mendez paints a dramatic portrait of unlikely collaborators Hollywood, the CIA and Canada allied in the common cause of freedom. Mendez fills Argo with the drama, pressure and tension of one of CIA's most spectacular rescue operations. ARGO is proof that espionage reality is more riveting than spy fiction. Robert Wallace, former director, CIA Office of Technical Service "Tony Mendez is a spy's spy. His work saved my neck on numerous occasions. I laugh quietly to myself when I watch Hollywood's version of disguise technology in today's spy movies because Tony did it better. What he did in the Argo operation was spine-tingling espionage at its very best. James M. Olson, former director of CIA Counterintelligence "ARGO is a must read to understand how dangerous risks have been successfully managed by men and women like Tony Mendez operating in secrecy for our protection. William H. Webster, former director, Central Intelligence and Federal Bureau of Investigation

Antonio Mendez served in the CIA for twenty-five years and is a highly decorated CIA officer, one of the top 50 officers in its first 50 years and a recipient of the Intelligence Star for Valor for the ARGO operation. The author of *The Master of Disguise and Spy Dust*, Mendez lives with his family in rural Washington County, Maryland. Matt Baglio has worked for a variety of news organizations and magazines. Author of the bestselling *The Rite: The Making of a Modern Exorcist*, he divides his time between California and Italy.

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. The cooperation of the Canadians was also extraordinary. They actually held a secret session of parliament to allow the Americans to use false Canadian passports (but only for the 6 refugee Americans, Mr. Mendez as a CIA agent had to supply his own fake Canadian passport). It is details like this that make this book so interesting for me.

This book narrates how Tony Mendez, a CIA agent, managed to rescue six American diplomats who were hiding in Tehran after the embassy was taken. And that's pretty much, there's not a lot to add. What annoyed me the most, was a feeling I had once I was done with the book: the feeling that the whole 310 pages-long story could have been told in 50. The book is plagued with personal anecdotes and references of past CIA operations not related at all with the exfiltration from Tehran. In fact, the description in the back cover summarizes perfectly what happens in the book. The book description in Goodreads, is pretty much the book itself:

"Six Americans escaped the embassy and hid within a city roiling with suspicion and fear. A top-level CIA officer named Antonio Mendez devised an ingenious yet incredibly risky plan to rescue them before they were detected). The rest are places, names, dates and details. I didn't like that the author, whenever he introduced a new character, includes a long (sometimes interesting, sometimes boring as hell) description of how they met, when had they worked before and under what circumstances, and a lot of unrelated details. Another thing that really bothered me: Mendez bragging about how no one in the world could had done a better job than him using humble sentences such as "an internal nomination for the top fifty officers in the CIA's first fifty years. Amazingly, I was selected as one of them". Anyway, the book has a fast pace and the author offers a good recollection of events. I was happy to know that I was reading how the CIA actually works and

not how an author believes the CIA works. Even though I didn't like many things about this book, I did enjoy reading it, because of the events and the historical facts and not because of the narration nor the way the book is written. I believe the next time that I have nothing to do, watching Ben Affleck's *Argo*, will be a good idea.

An interesting read. It's the true story of the *Argo* cover story to get the hidden Americans out of Iran. The true story (this book) is a quiet, sneaky, and relatively uneventful escape out of Iran. However, the movie takes theatrical license, whereby the true events are taken to a heightened level of a cat-and-mouse, cloak-and-dagger, guns-a-blazing narrow escape. The fake movie cover story in Hollywood is also over dramatized in the movie. But yes, the movie is great (extremely entertaining), and it deserved all the fame and fortune that it got. However, with this in mind, this book (the real story) will likely leave you flat because it just does not have all the fireworks that the movie has. But Hollywood does that: It takes real stories and has to change things to make them more entertaining. Oh well, it is what it is.

I'm a little puzzled by those who say the book was boring and slow-paced. Did we read the same book? Or does watching the movie give you a completely different take on the book? I haven't seen the movie. I raced through the book, couldn't seem to read it fast enough and found it hard to put down. I did not get the feel of an author who was self-important, as others have viewed him. But perhaps since I did not see the movie, I found that the author's chronicle of his own actions and experience helped me to understand his role in this story and what qualified him to play such an important part. I liked the writing style; it drew me in from the beginning and moved well all the way through. I wonder whether someone not old enough to remember what it was like during the Iran hostage crisis -- and I do (I was 30 and have sharp recollections of the daily news coverage) -- can fully appreciate this story as anything other than an adventure. It really happened, it was a difficult time -- horrible for the hostages, of course, but also painful and divisive for the country -- and I found this book to be a good, very readable story about one aspect of the crisis.

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