



# Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness - A Soviet Spymaster

*Pavel Sudoplatov , Anatoli Sudoplatov , Leona P. Schecter , Jerrold L. Schecter*

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According to KGB archives, Pavel Sudoplatov directed the secretive Administration for Special Tasks. This department was responsible for kidnapping, assassination, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare during World War II, it also set up illegal networks in the United States and Western Europe, and, most crucially, carried out atomic espionage in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. Sudoplatov served the KGB for over fifty years, at one point controlling more than twenty thousand guerrillas, moles, and spies.

But his involvement with the most nefarious Soviet activities-- and the rulers who ordered them-- made Sudoplatov an unwanted witness, and he was arrested in 1953 after Beria's fall. Despite torture and solitary confinement he refused to "confess", disavowing any criminal actions. He spent fifteen years in prison, then struggled two decades more for rehabilitation.

"Special Tasks" is an astonishing memoir and a singular historical document of a man who knew and did too much for the Soviet empire.

## Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness - A Soviet Spymaster Details

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# **From Reader Review Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness - A Soviet Spymaster for online ebook**

## **Melissa says**

Very interesting read, but skips around some, so hard to keep timeline in mind.

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## **Ironman Ninetytwo says**

The excellent foreward from Robert Conquest told me how to read this book. While I'm still a little confused by some stuff, like when Sudoplatov cites western sources presumably unknown to him, and when Sudoplatov's prose is footnoted with citations from Sudoplatov in an unusual way. It's not clear how much was written by Sudoplatov (or the Sudoplatovs) and how much by the Schechters.

This book really brought home the terror of living in the USSR, from someone who acted in a supporting role in many purges and eventually was purged himself. There was no theory supporting these purges, and it is surprising that a totalitarian dictatorship needs purges to support itself. Apparently it does, to retain the perfect mix of dependence and pliance on the part of the dictator's closest companions. Part of the author's thesis is that Khrushchev was not so much a reformer as a participant in the totalitarian government.

If the author is to be believed, US nuclear scientists were penetrated much more fully than usually reported. The case is reasonably documented and does not seem incredible.

It's not fun to be reminded of how awful the USSR was, but it's important.

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## **Raymond says**

Another in the post-Soviet books but probably one of the more important. Sudoplatov was one of the most well-place people in Stalin's NKVD and it is wonderful reading. This book is controversial as to the Soviet spy network among the Los Alamos atomic bomb scientists but I think he is right on a number of points. This is a must read for those trying to gain insight into the 1930's in the Soviet Union. The wartime narrative again defies what the west believes as to Stalin's condition immediately after the invasion.

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## **Hadrian says**

View of the Soviet intelligence services from a relatively high-ranked member. Unique in perspective, very interesting and at times, frightening.

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## **Vasile Corjan says**

for a spymaster some parts in the book he sounds too naive and maybe apologetic

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### **Luka Novak says**

I found out about this book when reading another book about Soviet (counter)intelligence efforts during WW2. As such I was mostly interested in Sudoplatov's escapades during that time. Sadly while that period is covered it's not prominent. Sudoplatov equally talks about his pre-war tasks, WW2, post-WW2 espionage and his alter arrest and trial.

For me the most revealing part is his personality. He is unapologetic, he sees his executions of opponents of regime as justified but when he is on the receiving end (he is arrested soon after Beria) that is in his opinion gross injustice and clear example how regime was corrupt.

Overall an interesting peek into workings of Soviet intelligence and security services, but still one that has to be taken with a grain of salt. Such as claims that Oppenheimer was de facto soviet agent, not active one but one who was willing to talk about his work and NKVD was eager to listen.

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### **Rally Soong says**

An informative book on how Russians ran their intel service. Good info on how Trotsky was knocked off from this former intel officer...and how they stoked the plan to the nuclear bomb. The Rosenbergs were, in fact, spies! Interesting.

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### **Muspell says**

Very interesting inside view to the Soviet secret services and communist state in general.

The author is best known for his part in organizing the assassination of Trotsky and running the nuclear spy ring in the USA and the UK. He also organized underground action against the occupying German armies, among other things.

The most interesting part in my opinion, however, is the description of the weirdest possible intrigues and machinations in the communist administration, where you could just as well be damned if you did, and damned if you didn't. The whole business was based on the idea that if a person, or a whole nation for that matter, was somehow perceived as a problem, they could just be destroyed, all the participants meanwhile thinking they were doing it for the greater good of the human kind.

Typical example would be that the head of the Poison Laboratory, which executed secretly by poison those people who could not be openly arrested and shot, was later accused of, yes, poisoning people and killed in prison himself. Of course he had poisoned people on the orders of the same people that had him arrested because he had poisoned people.

The author himself found himself in prison after Stalin's death. Altogether he spent 15 years in prison. Stalin's successor Khrushchev wasn't actually much different in his policies towards perceived enemies.

Khrushchev had been Stalin's willing executioner, after all.

Some things you learn from the book: how to pretend you've turned catatonic if you're arrested - this was taught to their spies in the west to do if caught red handed - (the author did this after his arrest to win time so as not to be executed) and the following spinal taps performed to test if the state is authentic (the author had it done to him twice).

It's of course difficult to know whether the author tells the truth or gives the whole picture about everything - the man was a professional of deception - but in any case this was a most fascinating, well written book.

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**Barbc says**

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