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**HEADLINE:** Discovery's 3-hour series on **CIA** a spellbinding trip

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**BODY:**

A spellbinding three-part documentary this month is must-see docu-TV for anyone who has ever wondered how Nicaraguan contras, crack in Los Angeles, Afghan guerrillas, presidential assassinations, terrorist bombings, Soviet defectors, the Shah of Iran and old notions of James Bond fit together.

"**CIA:** America's Secret Warriors," March 31 through April 2, one hour each night on cable's Discovery Channel, is the most important exploration of how America operates since Bill **Moyers'** groundbreaking work on the Iran-contra affair aired on PBS almost a decade ago. Given the provocative interviews with agency insiders, we'll still be referring to producer Marc **Levin's "CIA"** film a decade from now.

In advance of the **CIA's** 50th anniversary in July, the film addresses the agency's sometimes successful, often appalling, past and asks if it can be salvaged for the future. Is there a need for a **CIA** when there's no obvious enemy?

The truth is stranger than fiction. Agents' accounts of the so-called "Great Game" of covert action are stunning in their depth and crassness. Old-timers chuckle at how easy it was to fake a revolution in Guatemala. They mourn the passing of the swashbuckling days and resent intrusions into their secret society. Four former **CIA** directors are interviewed, along with a former KGB chief.

The miniseries moves from the '50s, when bright Yale men sought careers with the **CIA's** clandestine espionage branch, to last year's allegations of **CIA** involvement in crack cocaine trafficking in Los Angeles. (The saga continues: Anthony Lake withdrew his nomination

to be **CIA** director this week, saying he was sick of being "a dancing bear in a political circus." In the old days, these guys operated comfortably in the shadows.)

The film's first hour, "Brotherhood," chronicles the elite secret fraternity established in 1947 to win a covert war against the Soviets. Victories in Guatemala and Iran puffed up the agency's image. These were the glory years until failures in Cuba and Vietnam. In 1974, for the first time, a disillusioned agent went public. Philip Agee discusses his tell-all book and several members of the brotherhood talk about feeling betrayed.

The second hour, "Betrayal," provides a look at life in counterintelligence. They call it "LCS," lying, cheating and stealing. "You're lying all the time and a lot of people consider that a mark on your character," retired **CIA** agent and Soviet specialist Colin Thompson says.

Aldrich Ames, the most damaging traitor in the agency's history, convicted in 1994, talks about his 10 years as a mole.

Finally, the fallout is considered in an hour titled "Blowback," the agency's word for unintended consequences. Chalk them up to blowback: the American hostage crisis in Iran in '79, the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in '88, the bombing of the World Trade Center in '93. Former agent Milt Bearden says "(President Reagan's directive) said, 'Provide assistance, lethal and otherwise, to the people of Afghanistan to resist the Soviet invasion.' It didn't say anything about 'at the end of this, make sure nice guys are in charge.'"

The film is in a league with "Watergate," an award-winning "Discovery Journal" project, which similarly brought new data and bold perspectives to a historical event.

Clearly, this kind of intensive, in-depth documentary is something you won't find on traditional network TV.

**LOAD-DATE:** March 20, 1997