

# ASSUME NOTHING



RONALD JOHNSON

# Assume Nothing

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Strategic Book Group

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*I dedicate this book to my wife Nancy  
who has stood by me for over fifty years,  
my daughter Sharon  
who came up with the book's title,  
and to my pet dog Rocky who lays by my desk  
whenever I'm working.*



# Prelude

1990

*Supreme Soviet—Moscow*

The dark, cold, windy weather didn't help the Soviet premier's arthritis, nor his mood, as he stomped across his office in a blustery rage. Finally he calmed his tirade down just long enough to catch his breath. He then walked up so close to the director of the KGB that his finger was poking him in the chest.

The spittle from his angry shouts splattered across the KGB chief's face, as he stood before the premier in stark trembling fear. The premier was in such a rage that he stammered as he shouted at Alexander. "Alexander, I've had enough of your excuses. All I've ever heard out of you is excuses, excuses, excuses. For more than thirty years my predecessors and I have heard nothing but excuses from the KGB. Why can't you find the traitor who is stealing all of our country's most precious secrets? This rascal has been providing the Americans with all our top secrets for over thirty years and you tell me you have no idea who the traitor is?"

"But sir, we've tried everything we could think of to find out who it is. I have a file that fills two filing cabinets going all the way back before 1950."

"What do you mean you've tried everything to catch the traitor? All I ever hear from you is excuses, excuses, excuses. So far all you've ever done is arrest many of our citizens who could tell you nothing. For more than thirty years all your men do is follow CIA agents here in Moscow and after a few months deport them. You arrest all of the citizens they contact and what have you found out—nothing.

“If your spies in America are as good as you say they are, why can’t they provide us with the name of the spy? It is incomprehensible to me that someone has been telling the Americans our most guarded secrets all these years and neither you nor any of your predecessors have been able to find out the name of this traitor.”

“But sir, we are not alone in failing to identify the spy. All this time we’ve have been asking our American agents to find out who the spy is. We’ve even offered them ten million dollars and no one has yet been able to find out the name of the spy. Even Ainsworth has been unable to uncover who the spy is in our midst. All we know is that the name of the spy is the most guarded secret within the CIA. In fact, we don’t even know who the spy’s handler is within their organization. It is that much of a closely guarded secret within the CIA. Apparently only the spy’s handler and the CIA director know his name.”

The premier continued to raise his voice in anger and repeatedly poked his finger in the KGB director’s chest. In an incredulous voice he said, “If it wasn’t so ridiculous, you could make a strong case that it was me and my predecessors who have been providing information to the Americans.

“Alex, tell me something. The stolen information has been so important to our national defense that it is only available to a few people within our government. Are you positive that the Americans don’t have some super secret listening device planted in our building, or on the roof, through which they are able to hear our conversations?”

“That would be a possibility, sir, except for several facts. We continually check the building with the best detection equipment available. Also, the Americans have even learned important information that was discussed when we met elsewhere, and some of the information came from top secret reports.

“My people have checked everyone’s computer and before that every typewriter ribbon was checked—nothing. We even have a detailed record of how many copies have been made on every copy machine in the Kremlin, and have found nothing that would point to who the spy is.

“We have even gone back and double-checked several times all of the information and people who have had access to the information for more than thirty years, and have still come up empty. It’s like the person is a phantom. We’ve even done exhaustive checks on all of the minister’s wives, relatives and mistresses—nothing.”

“Have there been any Americans, or people from our other enemies, who have been in continuous contact with our government officials during all this time?”

“Yes, there is one person, Thomas Snow, but he has been checked out repeatedly and so far we have found nothing to indicate he is the spy.”

“Who is this Thomas Snow?”

“Remember, he is that international banker you gave the medal to last year for all the help he’s been to our country. But even if Snow is the American spy, which I doubt, he doesn’t have the access to the high-level government contacts who possess the information being given to the Americans.”

“Ah yes, I remember giving a medal to an American. You may be right, but refresh my memory on this Thomas Snow.”

“Thomas Snow is an international banker who has worked for the US Department of Treasury for almost forty years. In the fifties and sixties he was a big help to us in tracking down money transfers from Switzerland to high-ranking German officials who fled to South America after World War II.

“At the end of World War II Snow was also most helpful in setting up our international banking program, including the arranging of a large sum from the international banking fund. As far as we know, none of his banking contacts within our country have ever had access to the kinds of information being supplied to the Americans.

“That being said, we do know that Thomas Snow is in contact with the CIA.”

“Well then, there’s your answer. He’s our spy.”

“That’s not so, sir. I also at first thought he was the spy. However, our agents have determined that it was necessary for Thomas Snow to work for the CIA in order to help track down

German fugitives after the war because the CIA is the only American organization that can work outside their country to help apprehend criminals.

“We are sure Snow passed on some information to the CIA from his Russian banking sources, but any information they told him could not begin to compare with the kinds of information being supplied to the Americans. We have checked and double checked him out backwards to Sunday, and every time he comes out clean as the driven Russian snow.

“We also have a fairly extensive amount of data on his wife Mabel, who at one time was a world-famous ballerina, but she also doesn’t have any high-level government contacts.”

“Can we set some kind of trap that would help catch the spy?”

“We’ve tried that in every way imaginable, but so far with only minimal success. Several years ago we caught a high-ranking officer in naval intelligence passing information to the Americans, but he didn’t have access to all of the information the Americans have been receiving. Also, none of the spies we’ve apprehended from Ainsworth’s list were the major spy we seek, since none of them were in our country over the lengthy period the spy has been funneling information to the Americans, plus the Americans are still somehow getting our top secrets.

“The only good thing is that our high-level placements in the American government have been able to keep us informed on most of the secrets that have been passed to the Americans. But nobody is absolutely sure just how much the Americans do know about us, except we know it’s a lot.”

The premier turned and pounded his desk, and as he once again pointed his finger at the KGB director he shouted, “That’s just great. Don’t you guys realize one secret is one too many? It just might be easier if I had the Americans come and run your department, or have them set up a desk here in the Kremlin! We would then at least know who the spy is.”

Calming down a bit, the premier said, “Is it possible that the Americans have some special satellite that can record our conversations?”

“Our scientists say it’s not possible, plus there is no way a satellite can read some of the documents we know are in the Americans hands.”

“Well Alex, it almost seems like the Americans know our plans before we do. We might as well have a press conference and announce them to the whole world. If I thought it would do any good to fire you, I would do it this instant. But that has been done so many times by my predecessors, and all it did was set us back in our efforts to find the spy. So keep trying. There has to be a way to find out the name of the spy.”

“Yes sir. All I can tell you, sir, is we’re trying our best. Everyone within my organization is just as frustrated as you are.”

After the head of the KGB left the office of the premier, the Soviet premier sat back in his chair. After just sitting there for a few minutes he punched the intercom to his secretary and said, “Valerie, I need you to send a notice to all of the Directors. The government will pay twenty-five million rubles to the person who identifies the spy in our midst who we call Superman.”



# Chapter 1

## *Present Day*

**M**y name is William Robert O'Brien III. I'm thirty-six years old and am an investigative reporter for the *New York Times*, having worked there ever since graduating with a degree in journalism from Indiana University. For the most part life has been pretty good for me.

I was beginning to be recognized for my work, and I had almost completely gotten over my latest involvement with a United Nations secretary by the name of Rita who decided some Middle Eastern prince had more to offer than me. Oh well, she deserves what she gets. So after six months with Rita I was once again free of any female entanglements. Overall, things were pretty good.

I had really gotten to love New York and all it had to offer. I felt there was no better place for a journalist to work than the *New York Times*, although I can't say I liked my first year writing obituaries. It's hard to be creative over someone who has died.

It was nine-thirty in the evening on Wednesday and I had just gotten back from dinner at a neighborhood Chinese restaurant. I was sitting in my apartment awaiting the start of the NBA finals between the New York Knicks and the Los Angeles Lakers on television when I happened to notice the light blinking on my answer machine. The call must have come in while I was out having dinner. I went over and pushed the play button without the foggiest idea of who would have the audacity to call me just before the start of the game.

The voice on the recording was male but didn't identify himself. The voice simply said he was calling from Washington D.C. to tell me my grandfather, Thomas Snow, had died unexpectedly.

The man went on to say my grandfather had apparently died of a heart attack. The caller asked me to call the Peace in Our Time Mortuary in Reston, Virginia, where Tom's body had been taken, to make funeral arrangements. The caller further said that the key to my grandfather's house was under the stone statue of a golfer on his front porch.

I hung up the phone and just sat there, stunned at the news. It was hard to believe my last surviving relative had just died. I never knew my parents, who had died in a plane crash when I was a baby. I had never been very close to Thomas Snow, but he was all I had in the way of a family, and now even he had been taken from me.

I decided it was too late in the evening to call the mortuary so the first thing I did the next morning, when I got to work, was to call and make arrangements for Tom's cremation.

I told the man at the mortuary that because of several business commitments, I wouldn't be able to drive down to Washington until late Friday. I said I would appreciate it if he could arrange to have a memorial service for Tom on Sunday evening, and place the appropriate notice of Tom's death in the Washington newspapers. The man at the mortuary, a Mr. Swanson, assured me he would take care of everything for me.

In my job as an investigative reporter, I was busy working on an article that compared the costs and benefits of having the United Nations located in New York City, and I had a Friday story deadline that delayed my departure. It would be interesting to see the reaction of New Yorkers when they saw how much the UN was costing them in taxpayer dollars.

By the time I finished my article it was late Friday. I was already tired but decided I would go ahead and pack a few clothes and drive to Washington to take care of my grandfather's affairs. When I got near the capital it was getting quite late and I was getting sleepy, so I decided to stop and stay overnight at a Best Western motel about twenty miles outside the Washington Beltway.

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