

FARAGÓ LÁSZLÓ

1972

The Game of the Foxes

The Untold Story of German Espionage
in the United States and Great Britain
during World War II.

By Ladislav Farago.

McKay. 696 pp. \$11.95

Reviewed by RICHARD HANSER

It does seem a little late in the day—doesn't it?—for the international spy to be dusted off and taken out for another literary airing. With his codes and covers, and his devilish stratagems for stealing the plans to the fortifications, he may not yet be quite one with Nineveh and Tyre, but he's getting there. Today he seems so quaintly and dimly World War II-ish that he takes his place with the intrepid commando, the gung-ho Marine, and Rosie the Riveter—all cherishable elements of our folklore in their time but now grown a touch fusty, somewhat stale around the edges. The fictional 007 having long since become a widescreen joke, it is a little hard to take US/7-362, his honest-to-god counterpart, very seriously.

Ladislav Farago does, though, and in no less than 696 pages of unrelenting prose. Your average writer can lead a long, productive life without once using the word "spy-master," but Farago uses it four times on one page, and three of the four times in the same sentence. His book is trumpeted on the cover as "more exciting than any spy-thriller," which is a little puzzling, since the book in-

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dubitably is a spy thriller. Its area is German espionage in America and Britain during WW II, a field in which Farago is thoroughly grounded. This is his sixth or seventh book on spying, and he has had some rather special experience at first hand in that curious endeavor. Though a naturalized citizen, and a native of a country with which we were at war, he rose high in U.S. Naval Intelligence, an exploit that not just every immigrant who comes through customs could duplicate. (It is perhaps not necessary to explain that Farago comes from Hungary. Hungarians, as we know, have a knack.)

The Game of Foxes tells how agents of the *Abwehr*, the German Intelligence Service, pulled off such dazzling feats of cloaking and daggering as swiping the Norden bomb sight, trickling spies into sensitive spots in Washington and London, tapping the Roosevelt-Churchill hot line, and the like. We learn much of secret rendezvous

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(here called *Treffs*) between agents, and pilfered documents, and sensational reports relayed to a "Nest" in Hamburg known as "Axt X." Before we are through we are well steeped in what Farago himself calls "the hoary melodrama of espionage and its bizarre rituals." Everything is scrupulously, not to say laboriously, documented, down to the last street number, date, and middle initial. (Well, perhaps not everything. We are never told the name of the Politburo member whose urine sample was stolen by the CIA from the laboratory of "a noted Viennese urologist.")



At the end, though, one wonders whether the game of foxes has been worth the candle. Despite the successes of Nazi espionage—sometimes detailed here with what can only be called misplaced enthusiasm—nothing really decisive was accomplished. The theft of the Norden bomb-sight did not win the air war for Germany. Stealing secrets of Allied shipping and troop movements did not prevent our troops and supplies from getting there, and in overwhelming quantities. Eavesdropping on Roosevelt and Churchill, if it actually occurred, did not save Hitler and Goering and Goebbels from dying like dogs in utter defeat. As the Bible itself says, the little foxes spoil the vines. They do not bring down the house.

Farago's book is the outgrowth of a find he made "in a dark loft of the National Archives in Washington, D.C." The find was a forgotten footlocker which turned out to contain microfilm documents on the internal workings of the *Abwehr* under its enigmatic chief, Admiral Canaris. Farago has based his story on what he calls "the incontrovertible evidence of the [*Abwehr's*] own papers."

An agency's own papers are seldom incontrovertible evidence of anything but the agency's natural desire to make itself look good. From other sources it is possible to get a quite different picture of the *Abwehr*. Others have seen it as a monumentally fouled-up operation, inefficiently run by Canaris (who may have been pouring sand in his own gas tank) and caught in an insane tangle of rivalries with other Nazi intelligence agencies, of which there was a mushroom-like proliferation in the Third Reich.

There is, to be sure, a certain fascination in getting this unexpected peek into all those *Streng Geheim!* papers from that forgotten footlocker, but the fun is a good deal diminished by the circumstance that the *Abwehr*, like Germany itself, was a loser. How much thrill can there be in kibitzing a poker hand, be it held ever so close to the vest, when somebody else wins the pot? It is a little like being made privy to the football play book of 1971 Buffalo Bills. □