



# The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds

By Ian Graham

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### Think You Know Who Your Friends Are?

*Think again...*

From Mata Hari to D. B. Cooper, history is littered with people pretending to be someone else. Some go undetected for years, cultivating their false identities so skillfully, even their spouses don't know. Other frauds go up in flames after one misstep. *The Ultimate Book of Impostors* presents the astonishing true stories behind over one hundred of the craziest and funniest phonies in history, including:

- A fake French government official who managed to sell the Eiffel Tower?twice
- One of the Wild West's toughest and more admired "male" stagecoach drivers, who was actually a woman!
- An Israeli Mossad team that stole the identities of real British and Australian citizens to trap an unsuspecting target for assassination

Packed with fun facts and outrageous accounts of fake pilots, phony princesses, imitation Indians, and serial sham artists, this irresistible book exposes the truth behind the world's wildest fraud?and why they did it?and reveals that even those we think we know best may not be exactly who they seem.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

"True crime buffs will enjoy this well-written book and will find it almost impossible to put down once they start. This work should be in every public library's true crime section; highly recommended" - *Library Journal-STARRED*

"The Ultimate Book of Impostors' is well-researched, accessible, and difficult to put down. Ideal for some light reading, this is a great book to dip in and out of when you have some spare moments. " - *Pop Culture Z*

"Graham exposes the truth behind the world's wildest fraud - and why they did it - and reveals that even those we think we know best may not be exactly who they seem to be." - *Sunday Tribune*

"The *Ultimate Book of Impostors*...includes more than 100 of the craziest and funniest false identities and it's great reading material in Chicago's most miserable winter." - *Village View*

### **About the Author**

Ian Graham is a full-time author based in England who has published more than 30 nonfiction books for children and young adults. He has degrees in applied physics and journalism and has been a freelance journalist and editor for more than 20 years.

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## **Introduction**

### **To Be...Or To Be Someone Else**

That is indeed the question. When I was a youngster, I was a sucker for horror stories. One that stayed with me is "The Ohio Love Sculpture" by Adobe James. In just seven pages it tells the story of an art collector who stumbles across the most magnificent sculpture he has ever seen?three reclining nudes. He has to have it. He offers more and more money, but the stubborn sculptor won't sell. Eventually the collector manages to trick the sculptor into giving up his stunning creation. But before he can pick it up, the sculptor is involved in an incident that brings the police to his home, where they make a chilling discovery:

The artist isn't a sculptor, he's a taxidermist!

This story sowed the seed in my mind at a young age that people are not always what they seem. Decades later, this same idea led me to write this book. The idea of mistaken or deliberately falsified identity is common in fiction, but you don't have to go to the trouble of dreaming up fictitious impostors. As you'll see in this book, there is no shortage of the real thing. History is littered with examples of people who pretended to be someone else.

You may wonder why on earth so many people would risk so much?their lives, families, careers, freedom?simply to put on a different face. In most cases, their various motivations can be boiled down to just four things, the four E's:

- Envy

- Ego
- Escape
- Espionage

Envy of other people's wealth or social status has driven many impostors to claim to be the heir to a kingdom or an aristocratic title. This was especially easy in past times: before DNA testing and photo IDs, how would you know whether someone really was the Earl of this or Duke of that, or a royal prince? A pretender with the right fashion credentials and a regal bearing, coupled with the gift of the gab and bags of confidence, was indistinguishable from the real thing to most people. Add the support of a Machiavellian manipulator, such as a kingmaker, and you're a winner. At least, you hope you're a winner. Many a pretender who failed to convince those more powerful than he ended his days at the point of a sword or in the merciless hands of an executioner. For example, when a woman who pretended to be Margaret, Maid of Norway and daughter of King Erik II of Norway, in the thirteenth century was exposed as an impostor, she was burned at the stake and her husband was beheaded!

Since then, envy of wealth for its own sake has driven some criminals to use fake identities to steal large sums of money or valuable property. Most of them are known for one false identity, but a few are serial impostors who moved seamlessly from one identity to another to suit their needs.

Fantasists boost their ego by becoming someone else with a more interesting, exciting, or exotic life than their own. They seek attention and approval. This group includes the bogus pilots, spies, and war heroes whose false identities command respect and admiration. And of course one of the quickest and easiest ways to escape from the consequences of crime is to adopt a false identity.

At times when there was no such thing as social mobility, some people tried to escape the limits of the class they were born into by becoming someone else. Others escaped the social straitjacket of their time by switching gender, usually from female to male. Women with an ambition to serve as a soldier or sailor in past centuries could do so only by appearing to be men. Some of them served for years without being found out.

Some people have adopted false identities perfectly legally. They are the undercover police officers and secret service agents who infiltrate groups for the purposes of surveillance or espionage. Deep-cover agents sometimes live for years under a false identity, gathering intelligence for law enforcement and national defense agencies.

Beyond these four reasons, there are numerous other motives for wanting to adopt a false identity. For instance, a handful of professional entertainers created a stage persona so successful and so convincing that they started living the role offstage too. Their fans got a shock when the truth of these entertainers' lives was revealed after death.

In most cases, impostors adopt fictitious false identities, but sometimes they steal the identities of real people, alive or dead. Stealing a real person's identity has advantages?they have a real life history with facts that can be verified by anyone who gets suspicious. However, one obvious disadvantage is that if the real person is still alive, he or she may turn up and expose the impostor. One way to get around this is to steal the identity of someone who has died. This was the method used by the assassin in Frederick Forsyth's book, *The Day of the Jackal* to obtain a birth certificate, which he used to apply for a passport in the dead boy's name. But of course anyone who takes the trouble to investigate the impostor is likely to discover evidence of the death. Two real impostors who copied this method were discovered when background checks revealed that they had died years earlier!

You might think imposture would be virtually impossible today, with our photo-ID, online credit checks,

official certificates and licenses, fingerprints and DNA databases to confirm identity. However, the very existence of some of this identity documentation can actually make it more difficult to detect an impostor. Convincing forgeries of official certificates are sometimes taken at face value and no other checks are made. Bogus pilots and doctors continue to foil lax authorities by using fake documents.

The dictionary definition of impostor is clear?an impostor is someone who assumes a false identity for the purpose of deception or fraud. But sometimes real life is not as clear cut. Is someone who exaggerates his military service an impostor? Probably not. But someone who wears a uniform or military decorations he isn't entitled to, even without adopting a false identity, is a different matter. Military and ex-service organizations aggressively seek out impostors in uniform.

At first thought, impostors might seem to be universally reprehensible?tricksters, thieves, and fraudsters without a redeeming feature. But as you read their stories, I hope you will find, as I did, that a few of them are worthy of understanding and sympathy. They adopted false identities simply to get by in a world that would otherwise have rejected them for reasons of gender or race. For example, the name Mata Hari conjures up ideas of spying, prostitution, and exotic dancing, but Mata Hari chose her lifestyle as a way to survive the considerable setbacks and difficulties in her life that might have destroyed a lesser woman. She overcame everything that was thrown at her and not only survived, but also prospered?a rare achievement for a woman on her own in the early 1900s. Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance invented a Native American backstory that made him more acceptable in a society that would otherwise have excluded him. Marvin Hewitt adopted several false identities of high-flying scientists to enable him to achieve his ambition to teach physics, which by all accounts he did very well. These are just a few examples of impostors who certainly deceived people but seem to have done no harm.

Of course, all of the impostors featured in this book are failures, because we know about them. For every impostor who has been discovered and exposed, no one knows how many others have been successful.

So as you read these amazing, hilarious, and bizarre stories, ask yourself this...

Can you be sure your partner, friend, or coworker really is the person you think he or she is?

It may seem unlikely, but it is perfectly possible to be branded an impostor when you're nothing of the sort. If your partner suddenly looks at you as if you're a total stranger, he or she could be suffering from a condition called Capgras syndrome. A sufferer is convinced that a friend or relative has been replaced by an identical impostor. It sounds like the plot of a film like The Invasion of the Body Snatchers, but it's real. It can be triggered by neurological disorders or brain injuries.

## Users Review

### From reader reviews:

#### **Patricia Smith:**

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite guide and reading a e-book. Beside you can solve your trouble; you can add your knowledge by the guide entitled The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds. Try to face the book The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds as your good friend. It means that it can to become your friend when you really feel alone and beside that of course make you smarter than ever before. Yeah, it is very fortuned in your case. The book makes you a lot more confidence because you can know anything by the book. So , we need

to make new experience along with knowledge with this book.

### **Gerald Sosa:**

This The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds book is not really ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you get by reading this book is actually information inside this publication incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. This kind of The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds without we know teach the one who looking at it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't be worry The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds can bring once you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it within your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds having excellent arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

### **David Mathews:**

Your reading 6th sense will not betray you, why because this The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds publication written by well-known writer we are excited for well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who have read the book. Written throughout good manner for you, dripping every ideas and writing skill only for eliminate your hunger then you still skepticism The Ultimate Book of Impostors: Over 100 True Stories of the Greatest Phonies and Frauds as good book not only by the cover but also from the content. This is one e-book that can break don't determine book by its deal with, so do you still needing one more sixth sense to pick this particular!? Oh come on your reading sixth sense already alerted you so why you have to listening to one more sixth sense.

### **Dennis Carson:**

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