

By Henry Allen

You realize the blonde is in on it,

expose and sometime celebration of private intelligence agents, "sober art-security specialists and banker spies, grim protectionists," trembling ex-G-

or all of them-and she's listening to She is siting at the bar at the Class Reunion, where a lot of spook types hang out—Intertal, CIA, FBI, ex-anytwo guys talk.

"Life is living and dying," one says

"That's the whole thing," the other streams of cigarette smoke. They never move their heads, as if they know She listens. These guys wear gray glen-plaid suits and breathe constant someone's watching them, She listens. These and they're

You keep waiting for her to make an excuse and leave. Then you realize she likes it, and it's going to be a long afternoon for the three of them, marking and Frank Snatra singing, "All, or Nothing at All" on the sound system.

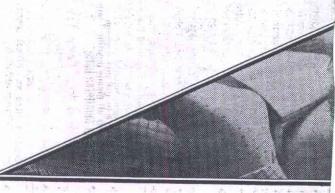
"Washington is a town where secrets are your capital," Hougan says. he writes. men, conspiracy theorists and oil-dipped Texans on a paramilitary binge," as So many of them are in Washington.

at Harvard on medieval lit, and he's worried he'll end up in a suburb. Guys like that ran away to Paris in the '30s. Since World War II, they've run away to Langley." "You take some guy writing a thesis

Night," A mouse dashes under some back tables, "Both ends against the middle," one of the guys at the bar is saying to the blonde, It could be any one of a bunch of spook haunts— Sinatra keens into "Strangers in the

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Mad magazine's "Spy vs Spy" by Antonio Prohias, left, and right, Itm Hougan, by Ken Feil—The Washington Post



Washington has them the way other

towns have literary cafes.

trying to wrap them around the cigar-ettes. He's 35, with a goatee and sly, smokes a lot, with thin, aumost that fingers he keeps moving as if he's says. He lights another Marlboro-he smokes a lot, with thin, almost frail a secret history, and some of these people have the keys to it," Hougan "I really do believe this country has

he's seen in Vietnam—that kind of self-pity." cups because of the terrible things hand, there's the spy at the bar, in his around 11:30 a.m., you see they're im-mensely excited by it. On the other describe it all as drudgery; but after four or five beers, which is to say themselves, fulfilling public expecta-tion. It's fashionable among them to "But they're so one-dimensional, so preoccupied with their conception of

things were happening. In 1910 in-joined the hip disspora by moving to Wiscasset, Maine, where he wrote a Wiscasset, Managdence — Radical romance, having plied the writer's trade on Mediterranean islands such as Ibiza and Mykonos; or in Madison, Wis., in Nostalgia, Narcissism and Decline in the "70s." 1969 when university towns were where Hougan himself is no stranger to

> "white as Oxydol," a Chinese Jew in a kilt, dart guns, a six-inch stack of hundred-dollar bills, Hughes' hench-man Robert Maheu, Washington's own ment Administration. the OSS, CIA and the Drug Enforce-Lucien "Black Luigi" Conein, who has served in the French Foreign Legion, He located the same themes in the twilight zone of espionage, exploring them, oddly enough, in a good-humored style that tips its hat to the pulps breasted bimbo of unusual appetites," Hughes, exploding telephones, "a bignouns and buzz words: now and then, a melange of proper fugitive tycoon Robert Vesco, beaches Howard

for failing regimes in Africa, plotted revolutions, tapped wires for Jimmy Hoffa and stolen IBM computer plans. Of course, it's easy to forget that a lot of what Hougan writes about is failed fantasy. Hougan-its inhabitants have fought This zone gets dangerous, says

American intelligence services, Hougan points out.
Or closer to home, Hougan writes: the mercenaries were to proceed with their assault rifles to a Tripoli prison, sarcastically code-named 'The Hilton.' Libya was squelched by British and would blast their way past the guards Bursting through its gates, the mercs "Wading ashore from rubber rafts," Except that this plot against

Revolution, Wiretaps, Self-Pity and Martinis

In meetings at Duke Zelbert's restaurant, the Class Reunion bar, and [Mitch] WerBell's \$95-a-day suite at Washington's Hay-Adams Hotel, CIA veterans, free-lance spooks and liberhamas. Year's resolution" that would wrest the island of Abaco free of the Ba-

lenced Ingram submachine gun—got enmeshed, as he is wont to, in other legal difficulties, which were sub-But Mitch WerBell — sometimes called "the wizard of whispering death," for his invention of the sisequently resolved in his favor.

"I hear that Mitch is working for the National Caucus of Labor Com-mittees now," says Hougan, referring the "Rockefeller-Carter-CIA-controlled to a militant, volatile group which once claimed it was about to demolish proto-fascist state."

of his machine guns. the table, a lot of tricky spy-tech stuff around—finy tape recorders or one sticking out of them, a bottle of Scotch, steak tartare, some kind of strange magazine, like Spotlight, on "You go up to Mitch WerBell's room at the Hay-Adams, when he's in town," Hougan recalls, "He'll have, say, six buckets of ice with beers

"He'll preside over a court situa-

guy-and always with good humor."

he'd been lying, to scare the hell out of the guy. It turned out to be a pill that would turn the guy's urine bright red." him give a guy a pill. He said, 'Just take it; it's a vitamin.' Then he said Another time, Hougan says, "I saw

bomb Hougan, claiming he was KGB -but only after Hougan told him he wouldn't need him for the book One ex-CIA type threatened

they're still keeping their eyes snug and dead behind chronically narsings, "Call me, maybe it's late, but just call me . . ." The guys at the bar rowed lids. And the blonde is listenhave taken off their new pack of cigarettes. Frank Sinatra Hougan rips the cellophane off jackets,

son they drink so heavily. At one time a guy's working in the Berlin tunnel ing.
"What happens when the intrigue stops?" Hougan says. "That's one reaside a movie theater then he's controlling the lines out-

day, around 4 p.m. The guy answers the door in his pajams, his hands are He'd just got out of jail. It was Sunknew a lot about a murder and some wiretapping I needed to know about "I saw a guy in Falls Church who