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Who Knows What Evil

BY TIMOTHY CROUSE

After three weeks of constant exposure to White House tapes and transcripts, I have begun to succumb to a strange and humiliating disease. The technical term for this affliction is "Mark Lane's Syndrome," but psychiatrists privately refer to it as "Dingbat Paranoia." In its most virulent form, it totally decimates the victim's faculties of skepticism and disbelief, leaving him helplessly in the grip of a conviction that the government is controlled by an unassailable coalition of Teamsters, hoods, millionaire fascists and the CIA. Research into this disease is still in the infant stage, and the most successful cure thus discovered consists of sending the victim to France, where the sight of an entire nation thriving on conspiracy theories is so repugnant that it sometimes shocks him to his senses.

Of course, one always thinks: "D.P. will never strike me." I considered myself to be particularly immune. After all, I am the guy who, not quite two years ago, sat in a hotel dining room and told Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein that, much as I trusted their skill as reporters, I found their stuff a little far out. Yes, I said, their stories were undoubtedly correct—and yet I could not bring myself to believe that crimes were ordered, paid for and then covered up out of the West Wing of the White House, any more than I could believe that the Pope was running the Inquisition in the basement of the Vatican.

Now I am convinced that it was a steady dosage of lies flowing into my brain through those courtroom earphones that weakened my defenses. At first, I felt nothing more than a queasy sense that there was something weirdly exotic about Nixon's lying. His lies seemed to spring from the standard politician's conceit: "By keeping these poor bastards in the dark, you are doing them a favor; the truth would only hurt them." But there was something else. The elliptical, hesitant, stop-and-start pattern of Nixon's speech gave the impression that his brain censored every sentence that came out of his mouth, that some gray cell never stopped flashing a warning. The warning said: "If you ever for a moment cease to be cautious, you will let slip your Unspeakable Secret."

It was while I was trying to imagine the nature of Nixon's secret that a random, irrational thought crept into my

mind: The assassination of John Kennedy was no more a third-rate murder than Watergate was a third-rate burglary. Once that germ was implanted, I succumbed to Dingbat Paranoia. The first identifiable symptom was a constant feeling of profound eeriness which hung on like a low-grade fever. Before long, no theory seemed impossible. Reading over the transcripts of the tapes, I found myself zeroing in on queer little slips of the tongue that never would have bothered me in the past.

On the April 25th tape, for instance, Haldeman is talking to Nixon about the cash paid to the Watergate burglars. "Some of it went to Hunt's lawyer," says Haldeman. "His wife was taking money to a Cuban when her plane was shot down." Why does Haldeman choose the expression "shot down" when the language is full of perfectly

good words like "crashed"? Is he simply indulging his penchant for macho hyperbole, or does he know something that the National Transportation Safety Board was never allowed to find out?

I alarm myself by asking questions like that. I am haunted by a vision of some wild-eyed, illiterate little creep, wearing combat fatigues that he never got in the Army—I can see him sitting in my office, leering at me and asking those same questions in unbearably smug tones. And I can see myself seething with such impatience that I finally get up and throw him out. I have thrown more than one such Dingbat out

of my office. The thought of becoming like these people so terrifies me that I have recently sought medical advice—only to be warned that all Washington physicians are under orders to consign every D.P. case they diagnose to ten-year quarantine in the Ezra Pound Memorial Ward at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Naturally, this news only served to exacerbate my condition.

Still, I like to think that there is a difference between myself and other dingbats. Your run-of-the-mill dingbat sees a Mastermind behind every conspiracy, a Controlling Hand that pulls all the strings. My own theory is that the source of serious mischief is precisely a lack of control. As I see it, the man at the top does not construct any

Lurks

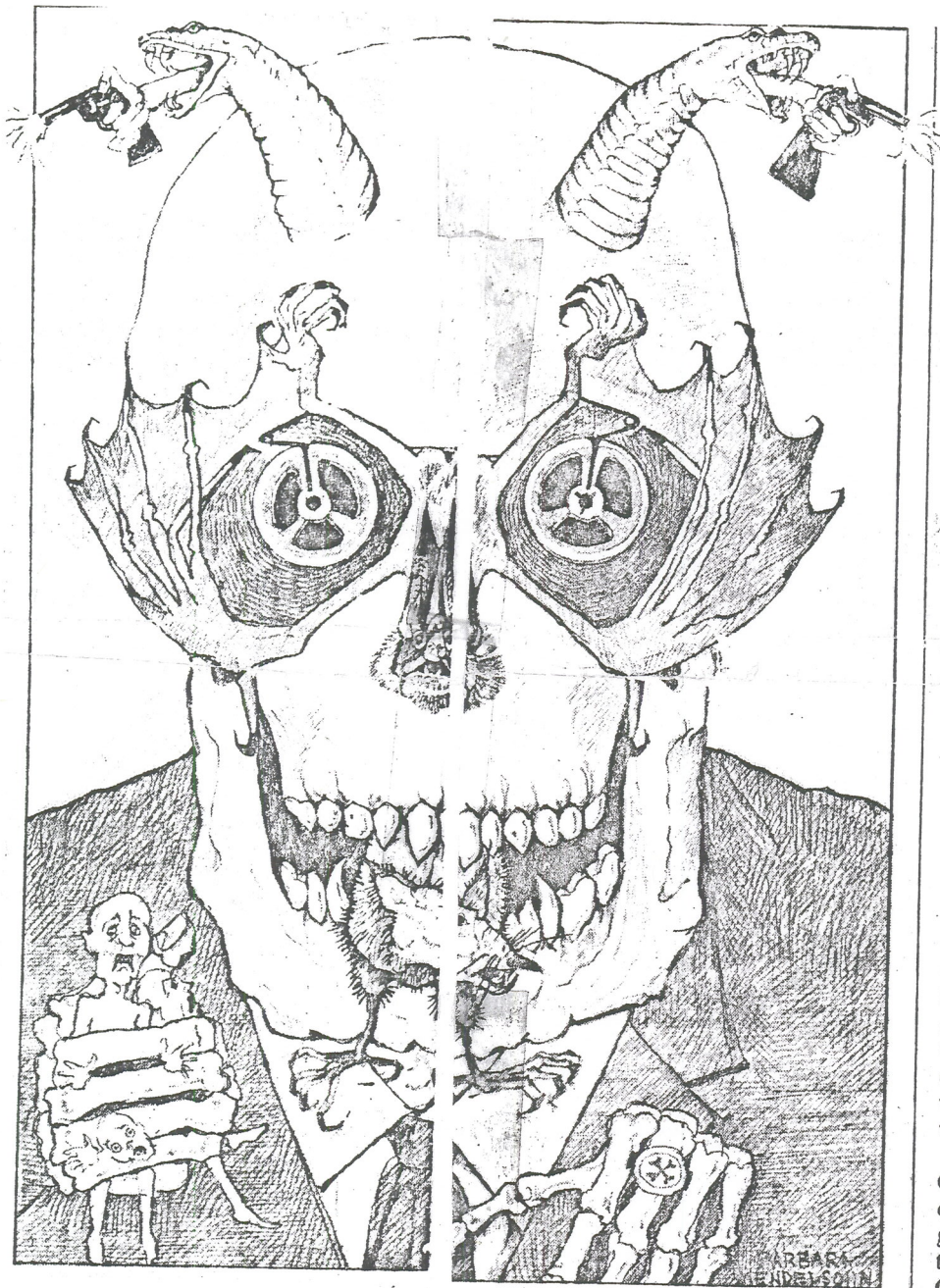
plans and does not know many specifics. But he happens to be the kind of man who hires men who hire fruitcakes. In this case, Nixon hires people like Colson, Krogh and Chapin who go out and engage the services of men like Hunt, Liddy, Segretti, maybe even Arthur Bremer. Once on the payroll, the fruitcakes find themselves underemployed. They sit around thinking up things to do. Every so often, one of the second-level men imagines out loud some wild idea—confident that no one would ever be crazy enough to carry it out. The stray idea may sometimes filter down to the fruitcakes. One way or

another, they eventually conceive an expensive scheme. Then they go back to the second-level men and ask for cash. The second-level men hand over the cash without asking too many questions—anything to get the fruitcakes off their backs. One day many weeks later, the top man wakes up and sees an ugly headline in the newspaper. He starts to ask questions and gets frightening answers. That is when the top man gets scared and starts to plan the coverup.

The flashpoint of any conspiracy is the moment when the fruitcakes get their hands on some cash—but that moment is almost inevitable when fruitcakes are allowed to join organizations that possess enormous funds. That is what makes the CIA and Intertel such

scary institutions. The really interesting question is how much the top man knows about his fruitcakes. One way to measure Nixon's criminal irresponsibility is to determine just how much he knew about Howard Hunt.

At the Watergate trial, Hunt came off as an incompetent adventurer, the sort of bumbling spy that Peter Sellers might play in a movie. But anyone who has read Hunt's book, *Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent*,* knows that he was a dangerous adolescent whom the CIA had trained and encouraged to play the foulest kind of dirty tricks. Having read the book, one



can believe that it was someone very similar to Howard Hunt who engineered the assassination of Allende.

If Richard Nixon knew only two or three facts about Hunt, then he was simply a fool to allow him anywhere near the White House. But if Nixon was well-acquainted with Hunt's record, then there is something very troubling about the fact that he let Hunt roam around the fringes of his administration. I suspect that Richard Nixon knew quite a bit about Hunt, knew precisely the kind of man he was. They had met as far back as the Fifties, as Hunt recounts in his book:

"When then vice-president Richard Nixon and Mrs. Nixon came to Montevideo on the first leg of their action-packed South American swing, I took occasion to recall to the vice-president an earlier meeting with the two of them at Harvey's restaurant in Washington. Nixon had been addressing the Society of Former FBI Agents and was lingering over coffee in the restaurant when Dorothy and I arrived for aftertheater supper and found ourselves seated next to the Nixons. Impulsively, I went over to his table, introduced myself and congratulated him on his pursuit of Alger Hiss. They invited us to join them, and the four of us spent, what was for me, at least, a pleasurable half-hour discussing the foreign and domestic political scene. In Montevideo [where Hunt was CIA station chief at the American Embassy], Nixon remembered the incident, as did his wife. Their interpreter was Colonel Vernon Walters [later to become deputy director of the CIA], whom both Dorothy and I had known well in Paris."

A few years later, Hunt became the CIA's political action chief for the Bay of Pigs invasion; he was assigned to organize a Cuban government-in-exile that would take over in Havana once Castro was overthrown. He found that he had a friend in the Eisenhower White House. "Secretly," writes Hunt, Richard Nixon was "White House action officer for our covert project, and some months before, his senior military aide, Marine General Robert Cushman, had urged me to inform him of any project difficulties the vice-president might be able to resolve. For Nixon was, Cushman told me, determined that the effort should not fail."

Reading these passages, I began to think about Nixon saying on one of the tapes: "This fellow Hunt. He knows too damn much. Hunt will uncover a lot of things." Nixon has a hard time saying Hunt's name on these [Cont. on 38]

*Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent by E. Howard Hunt. ©1974 by E. Howard Hunt. Berkley/Putnam Publishers.

Evil Lurks

[Cont. from 34] tapes, he chokes and stammers on it. It is as if his little sentry gray cell is beeping wildly. "Careful, Dick! Now we are getting very warm."

All of this makes me want to ask a raft of questions about Nixon's relationship with Hunt. Honest to God, I sincerely want to know the answer to these questions and the only thing that bothers me is that learning the truth might be a hundred times more terrible than any sense of stymied curiosity. I would like to know just how closely Hunt worked with Nixon on the Bay of Pigs plan. I would like to know why, on June 23rd, 1972, Nixon thought that he could scare CIA Director Richard Helms into cooperating with the cover-up by having Bob Haldeman tell Helms that an investigation into the break-in might "open up the whole Bay of Pigs thing again." What do Nixon and Helms and Hunt know about the Bay of Pigs that we don't know?

I would also like to know whether Nixon followed Hunt's career after the Bay of Pigs, whether he knew of rumors which held that Hunt kept proposing assassination schemes to the CIA all during the last decade, including one against the president of Panama. And I wonder if Nixon knows anything about the ugly story that immediately after the assassination attempt on Wallace, Chuck Colson ordered Hunt to fly to Milwaukee and retrieve something from Arthur Bremer's apartment.

For the first time in my life, I find myself extremely interested in the persistent story that Dallas police picked up a man who looked very much like Howard Hunt only a few blocks away from the textbook depository on the morning of the Kennedy assassination. And I would especially like to find out

just what Richard Nixon was doing in Dallas from November 20th to November 22nd, 1963.

Can there be any doubt as to the nature of his mission there? Can anyone question that he was working in cahoots with millionaire Batista Cubans and renegade CIA agents, and that his assignment was to launder the final cash payments to the assassins before the deal went down?

My God, did I say that! I only get this way when the fit is on me, when the really wild visions start to swoop in. A terrible blackness fills my brain, and then there are these sudden bursts of red. If only I could divert myself a little, I might be able to regain some sanity. But I am so obsessed with the tapes that the only recreation I can tolerate is to reread the transcripts in search of a few feeble laughs. Every so often, I find a little nugget that amuses me, such as one tantalizing exchange between the president and H.R. Haldeman on a tape of their hour-long chat on the afternoon of April 25th, 1973.

On the president's orders, Haldeman has just spent several hours hunched over a tape machine in a tiny West Wing office, listening to the March 21st tape in which the president assured John Dean that he could raise a million dollars in hush money. Haldeman has had to keep the volume very low, for fear that passers-by in a nearby corridor might find out what he is doing.

Now he is coaching the president, offering ways to explain away that unfortunate million-dollar remark in case Dean should ever repeat it to the prosecutors. At one point, the president seizes on the notion that he and Haldeman have not been directly involved in raising cash for the Watergate burglars. "We didn't furnish any money, thank God," says Nixon.

"Right," says Haldeman, always full of reassurance.

Then Nixon has a guilty thought:

"Remember I told you later that I could get \$100,000?"

"That makes—that rings a bell 'cause you talked about Rose having some money or — something," says Haldeman. "I remember that."

Nixon's response is unintelligible.

This snatch of conversation dovetails nicely with a story dug up in September by Maxine Chesire, the *Washington Post's* society columnist-cum-investigator. Chesire reported that in 1969, Rose Mary Woods's Watergate apartment had been burglarized. The robber made off with everything, and poor Rose Mary did not have a bit of insurance. What was strange, according to Chesire and other sources, was that a prominent jeweler, who appraised Rose Mary Woods's jewels in 1974, put the value of the collection at somewhere between \$150,000 and \$300,000. At the time, Miss Woods was making \$36,000 per annum.

Either Miss Woods had a big day at the track or she had a very generous friend. In all the world (I am told) there are only four people so enamored of Miss Woods that they might have wanted to give her \$300,000 worth of rocks. Three of these people (two beaux and one woman friend), simply do not have the wherewithal to make such a gift. That leaves Rose Mary's boss, a notorious spendthrift who not only showered cloth coats on his wife but also gave at least fifty dollars to charity during the first four years of his administration. How could Mr. Generous have resisted rewarding his secretary with a few trinkets? Somehow one suspects that the gift may have been more like a . . . loan. All the same, there is something Czarist and romantic about this gesture—it is worthy of Nicholas II. "Here, my dear, take these little tokens of my affection, get your passport renewed, and if the worst should come to pass, I'll meet you in Argentina."

What is the real story behind those jewels? The people who know are not about to talk, but the rest of the story may be on one of the hundreds of White House tapes that are stacked in fireproof safes on the fifth floor of the Executive Office Building. Gerald Ford's pardon stipulated that Richard Nixon could repossess his tapes and that after five years he could do with them anything he wanted—including destroy them. A motley crew of litigants—James McCord, Jack Anderson, the Reporters' Committee for Freedom of the Press, the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association—has launched a lawsuit that has temporarily succeeded in preventing Nixon from getting his hands on the tapes. But even if these people finally win their suit—and Nixon's lawyers are fighting them down the line—there is no provision to have any disinterested party listen to the tapes. Even the lawyers in the Special Prosecutor's Office have heard only the 71 tapes which they successfully subpoenaed.

Having lost our political virginity, it is difficult for all of us to remember what it was like to read the first White House tapes. They were literally unbelievable. There is no reason to believe that the unheard tapes are any less incredible. If we are going to avoid another Nixon administration, it is important that we learn everything about the first one. We must know the full extent of the government's corruption before we can really cure it. The proof that those tapes contain other shameful stories, if anybody needs such proof, lies in the fact that Nixon is battling so desperately to get them back. In the past, he did everything in his enormous power to keep from surrendering tapes—and now we know that he had an excellent reason.