

A Plumber's Works

Everybody knows E. Howard Hunt r., the Watergate "plumber" and ex-CIA agent, but how about Howard Hunt the novelist? The 54-year-old Hunt has written 47 books, mostly spy thrillers published under such pseudonyms as Robert Dietrich, David St. John and Gordon Davis. While Hunt is serving out a 15-year sentence for conspiracy at Danbury prison, many of his books are being published. He has written nothing during his first five months in jail (and is not even allowed a typewriter), but seventeen of his spy series—featuring steely CIA agent Peter Ward or Commie-crippling accountant Steve Bentley—are being rushed into paperback reissue. In addition, two new Hunt books are coming out this fall; and Hunt has yet another to sell, "Moscow Calling."

The two new books are a revealing package. **THE BERLIN ENDING** (310 pages. Putnam. \$6.95) is a sexpionage roman à clef Hunt wrote between the Watergate break-in and the death of his wife in an air crash. It follows ex-CIA agent Neal Thorpe's efforts to save the daughter of a treacherous West German foreign minister, one of several seemingly non-Communist world muckamucks secretly in thrall to Moscow. The fictional identity of the blackguard minister was tipped off by Hunt, who sent his editor a news photo of Willy Brandt and Leonid Brezhnev inscribed: "Here's the dirty dog and his master."

Bitter: Hunt's other new book is non-fiction—at least ostensibly—**GIVE US THIS DAY** (235 pages. Arlington. \$7.95). Originally written in 1967 "in a mood of nostalgic bitterness," it narrates his CIA role in the "needless failure" of the Bay of Pigs. Hunt describes how he made a secret trip to Castro's grim new Cuba and returned to recommend to the CIA that Castro be liquidated. He refutes the Kennedy Administration line that the CIA had bungled the job by counting on a popular uprising inside Cuba that never happened. No revolt was planned or expected, insists Hunt. Instead, the CIA was sandbagged at the last minute by the White House's cancellation of air support and forced to shoulder blame that, declares Hunt, should fall on the Pentagon planners who picked the disastrous site.

The book is expectably full of colorful anecdotes. CIA planners wanted to use Cozumel island's airstrip as a refueling base for their limited-range B-26's. But the Mexican Air Force officer in charge demanded a nonnegotiable bribe of four air-conditioned Thunderbird convertibles. Irked at his "brazen venality," the CIA looked elsewhere, in vain. And two familiar characters also appear as anti-Castroites in Hunt's story: Watergate burglars Bernard Barker and Frank Fiorini, alias Frank Sturgis.

Books by writer Hunt raise intriguing questions about agent Hunt. A penciled phone number Thorpe carelessly leaves in his apartment almost leads to a Soviet triumph. Hunt's White House phone number and initials, found in Barker's address book, linked the Nixon Administration to the scandal and proved Hunt's undoing. In one of Hunt's Peter Ward adventures, he describes an unnoticeable metal plate CIA burglars use to secure a forced door. Hunt's own Watergate operatives used glaringly apparent black tape. And in an early novel, "Bimini Run," the Alan Ladd-like hero is "Hank Sturgis"—surely the ancestor of "Frank Sturgis."

Several characters in "The Berlin Ending" are revealing Hunt surrogates. Cer-



Hunt: Foreign intrigue

tainly danger-addicted, romance-ridden Thorpe, who thinks the CIA has gone soft but who handles women like priceless china dolls, is Hunt's young-buck vision of himself. But whose resigned, aching loneliness is that pictured in ailing, aging, ex-CIA chief Alton Regester? He gazes sadly at his dead wife's portrait, eulogizes the "crystalline figures" of spydom's pre-"flotsam" days, murmurs ruefully: "Peace, what crimes are committed in thy name" and "I'm a dinosaur, a species almost extinct." And could that Soviet agent's bitter anxiety over becoming a "burned-out husk to be discarded and forgotten" be empathy from the man blocked from promotion in the CIA who joined a Washington PR firm and then signed on at the White House to plug leaks?

One of Hunt's first endeavors there was to study up on the mysteries sur-

rounding Chappaquiddick. Then the operative used to State Department cover assignments donned his red wig to nudge ITT's Dita Beard into recanting her memo. He doctored cables purporting to show President Kennedy's complicity in Ngo Dinh Diem's assassination.

Fate: Now, suffering from ulcers, 23 pounds lighter, a chained and manacled Hunt has left Danbury prison nineteen times to testify (he is due to appear later this month before the Ervin committee). He is likely to go down as the Willy Loman of the spy business, a dedicated hireling hanging in there in a changing world. What money his books bring in, he declares, goes to lawyers. His four children at the big, brick house in Pottomac, Md., called "Witches Island," are parentless, though good friend William F. Buckley Jr. is acting as "a sort of godfather." Hunt recently complained bitterly that the Watergate "leg men" drew long sentences, while the "prime conspirators" are still free. And he even hinted he suspects betrayal by a double agent in his ranks on that fateful June 17 night.

More poignantly, he says that his wife thought the original ending of "Ending"—in which the good guys, our guys, win—was "too pat." On the way to the airport with the fabled \$10,000, she told Hunt: "The evildoers of the world are not always punished. Sometimes the s.o.b. gets away with it and the good people don't." Hunt says he was just finishing up the new, more pessimistic close to the novel when his son told him of his wife's fatal plane crash. He subtitled the book: "A Novel of Discovery."

—S. K. OBERBECK

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