

Straight Fiction--With Its Quota of Dirty Tricks

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THE BERLIN ENDING. By E. Howard Hunt.
Putnam: 309 pp.; \$6.95.

Reviewed by
John Barkham

THE AUTHOR of this espionage thriller is at present, and presumably for some time to come, an involuntary guest in a Federal prison. E. Howard Hunt is one of the Watergate Seven, a former CIA agent who found time between his undercover activities to write 40 thrillers in paperback and hard covers, some under his own name, others under pseudonyms. As a suspense artist Hunt is not in the same class as writers like John Le Carre, Len Deighton or Robert Ludlum, but because he helped mastermind an episode in one of the greatest Presidential scandals on record, he is worth reading, if only because of what he consciously or unconsciously tells us about himself.

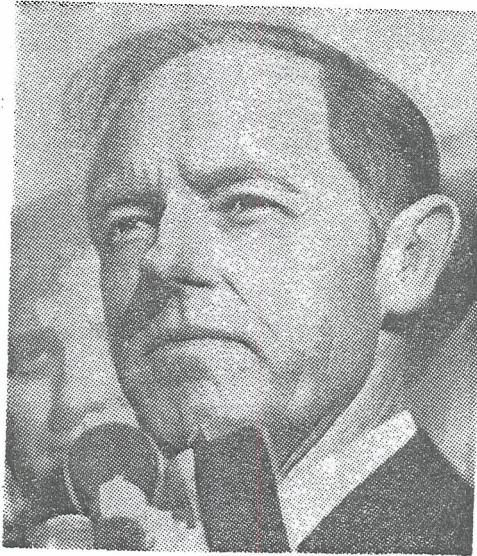
Obviously his background as an undercover operative dating from the OSS of World War II has been a prime source of experience for his fiction. What is not so obvious is for an agent still in the undercover business to surface so consistently in books, often under his own name. Professional spies recoil in horror from publicity. But Hunt has been blithely apotheosizing himself in his fiction for 30 years. Most thriller writers, beginning with

the late Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond, are content to fantasize their dreams and diversions in their fiction. But Hunt has played derring-do in fact as well as fiction.

For a novel based on Watergate we shall presumably have to wait until the continuing scandal has receded into history, although, with much time on his hands these days, it's entirely possible that Hunt's fingers may soon start tapping the prison typewriter.

"The Berlin Ending" is straight fiction complete with its quota of dirty tricks. The hero is Neal Thorpe, a former CIA agent who is now an architect and unhappy at the drawing board. Enter Anna, a beautiful European, to whom he offers a lift from the airport into Washington, just as they do in the movies. Later, again like the movies, she turns out to be deeply involved in international intrigue and calls on him for help.

The girl is the stepdaughter of West German Foreign Minister Klaus Werber, who bears a close resemblance to West Germany's Chancellor Willy Brandt in appearance and Norwegian background. There is this difference, however: Werber has secret Soviet contacts and is classed as an "agent of influence," that is, a government official "so highly placed that he can exercise influence on



UPI Telephoto

E. HOWARD HUNT

government policy." Thorpe (Hunt) is caustic about Werber. "He visits your President, your President visits him." Thorpe, however, knows better: any secret entrusted to the German Foreign Minister will find its way to Moscow.

Except for the roman a clef resemblance to Brandt this could be a standard characterization for any espionage novel of the Cold War period. But Moscow and Washington are now on friendly terms, thus rendering Hunt's fundamental premise nugatory. As a novelist he relies heavily on action. His characters are constantly on the move, stepping in and out of cars, trains and planes in Washington, Tegucigalpa, Stockholm, Berlin.

The KGB are after Anna, who has discovered her stepfather's guilty secret, and Thorpe's job is to protect her. This he does, but at the end she lets him down, as Hunt himself has been let down in real life. On the closing page someone remarks that the Soviets take care of their own. "Unlike the CIA," comments Thorpe sourly.

For the next few months you can expect to see a flurry of Howard Hunt reprints cashing in on his current notoriety. But don't expect anything beyond routine competence. Post-Watergate Hunt — that could be another story.