

Something to Miss on a Rainy Day

Reviewed by
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The reviewer writes for the national desk of *The Washington Post*.

Howard Hunt is a loser with a humid fantasy-life who was subsidized by the American taxpayers, unknown to them until recently, for the better part of a quarter-century. By moonlight, he has been a prolific manufacturer of pulp-grade spy novels, nearly four dozen in all.

He has emerged from the Watergate scandal as a broken man, a convicted bungler. Instead of targeting on the enemies list, he came homing in, like a wayward missile, on the President and the White House.

Failure is not new to Hunt. He played an important role in an overseas version of the Watergate fiasco, the Bay of Pigs horror. Hunt played with Cuban emigres as small boys do with double-edge razors. He and those closest to him always ended up getting cut.

And so it seemed necessary to have a vicarious life in which he succeeded, or at least didn't make such an ignominious mess of things. Howard Hunt escaped into bad novels.

Neal Thorpe, the past-board hero of "The Berlin Ending," is Hunt's fictional self-idealization. He com-

Book World

THE BERLIN ENDING: A Novel of Discovery.

By Howard Hunt

(Putnam's, 310 pp. \$6.95)



Author (and convicted burglar) Howard Hunt. His latest novel "can only be viewed as a piece of psychiatric documentation for the Watergate case."

bines the muscularity of Steve Roper with the political overview of Daddy Warbucks. "Without the condiment of excitement his life

was as tasteless as boiled beef," writes Hunt of his fictional surrogate, Thorpe. "Excitement," it quickly becomes evident, is the pursuit

of fantasies that most men leave behind with other memories of prepubescent life, such as their tenderfoot badge or first overnight.

This is not to suggest that Thorpe-alias-Hunt is an innocent. He appears, rather, to be a case of arrested development. He was bored and dissatisfied with himself and so he had to escape into action. There are shades here of Arthur Bremer. (Hunt in 1960 proposed a plan to his CIA superiors for the assassination of Fidel Castro.)

One of the lessons of Watergate was that men like Howard Hunt, Gordon Liddy, Anthony Ulasevich and the Cuban bugging squads were circulating about like loaded revolvers at public expense under vague White House auspices, trying to savage the enemy.

Who is the enemy? To the Cuban operative, Bernard Barker, the enemy was whoever Howard Hunt said it was—no holds barred.

The enemy in "The Berlin Ending" was a suspected Soviet "agent of influence" who held the position of West German foreign minister (the resemblance Hunt draws between his KGB-directed villain and Willy Brandt is almost too strong to be coincidental). The scheme is to destroy the West German principal by

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compromising him with his Soviet masters.

Hunt is never very far from the Watergate mentality. His catalog of Communist villains is worth describing in brief: a pederastic, opium-smoking French count who is not above strangling stewardesses; a paunchy Russian Jew ("almost the prototype of Streicher's archetypal Jew," writes Hunt with typically jangling redundancy) whose "front" is high international finance; and, finally, the treacherously liberal West German minister, who colludes in the attempted assassination of his own daughter after she learns of his covert Soviet backing.

Hunt's interior life seems to be spun of such stereotypes. How easily Daniel

Ellsberg must have fit into this political demonology.

The spy novel that is written by an ex-spy or intelligence operative is common to our fiction. It is a genre that includes such outstanding contributors as Graham Greene, John Le Carre and Ian Fleming.

In Hunt's case, however, the novel can only be viewed as a piece of psychiatric documentation for the Watergate case. It is far more revealing than anything that Hunt and Liddy may have retrieved from the files of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Prophetically, the counter-espionage scheme of "The Berlin Ending" fails in the end. A nice girl who happens to be a CIA accomplice dies needlessly in the attempted execution of the plan. Thorpe has a moment of bitter reflection. Then he lapses into his familiar condition of boredom with himself.

This sounds suspiciously like Hunt's own predicament in his final years at the CIA when he had fallen into disfavor and was serving out the time required to qualify for a \$20,000-a-year pension.

He was rescued from his ennui by White House aide Charles Colson, who was instrumental in getting him on the payroll, wherein he got an official license to burgle, falsify documents and eventually provide the incriminating link between the Watergate burglary and the Oval Office.

There are undoubtedly those who feel that Hunt, the incorrigible loser, deserves some appropriate expression of national gratitude. Anything but a National Book Award.