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Reviewed by
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The reviewer is the author of "The Fourth Man: The Definitive Account of Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, and Donald MacLean and Who Recruited Them to Spy for Russia."

As might be expected of an author so conversant with the structural and technical weaknesses and strengths of the agency, David Wise, coauthor of "The Invisible Government" and author of "The American Police State," hardly puts a foot wrong in setting the scene for the CIA's outlandish

Book World

SPECTRUM. By David Wise.

(Wiking, 378 pp. \$12.95)

"Operation Spectrum" — the theft in 1965 of 381 pounds of weapons-grade uranium from a nuclear plant in Pennsylvania.

The meticulous realism ends there, alas. The crisp, clear style cannot redeem the sick, black plot, which exposes a mythical director named Graham Townsend ("Towny") Black as a corrupt and power-crazed individual. Black seeks to bend the president of the United States to his malignant will by threatening to wipe out the White House, Washington and presumably the rest of a resisting America with a cunningly secreted hoard of nuclear weapons. Macabre and far-fetched? Yes, indeed. Not even James Bond, the amoral hero of Ian Fleming's wild fantasies, would have been allowed to indulge himself so far. This first novel by Wise is thrilling enough; all it lacks is true characterization and a plot bearing some semblance to probability.

It was aptly said of Sir John Simon, a particularly bad British foreign secretary of the 1930s, that "the only foreigners he really understood were the classical Greeks, and they had been dead a long time." The same

judgment can be applied to Wise's pathetic antihero, Director Black, who certainly does not appear to understand modern Americans.

Allowing for the author's implicit fixation that the CIA, in the wrong hands, may sometimes be made to operate almost as a state-within-the-state, ascribing to itself a higher amorality owing nothing to God or man, I find it hard to resist the conclusion that Towner Black embodies that other ancient Greek warning: "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." In the twilight secret world, whether in Soviet Russia or anywhere else, people do tend to live cut off from mundane reality. They may go mad in extreme cases; but then it is the good novelist's business to sketch in the sorry process, as Graham Greene did with customary finesse when accounting for Doctor Percival's authorized decision in "The Human Factor" to eliminate the wrong mole inside MI6 by tactfully poisoning him, with cocktail nuts. (I have heard senior British secret service executives expressing outrage at Greene's unwholesome lack of delicacy, so I can well imagine the unfavorable reactions that will be shortly stirred among CIA officials, past and present, by this catalogue of Black's baleful misdeeds.)

As for the CIA's station director in London, Robert Travers, who deeply mistrusts his rival and chief and who narrowly escapes assassination in his attempt to unmask him, here again I must admit to finding the character drawing thin and finally unconvincing. After all, Travers did work with Black in the early stages of Spectrum, conniving at the scandalous use of a Catholic confessional (duly bugged) and of a minor CIA operator, masquerading as a shriving priest within, intent on extracting information from a simple workman no longer keen to continue stealing uranium pellets on the CIA's behalf. Where Travers drew the line, a line always invisible to the unspeakable Black, was in condoning the exemplary torture of that simple but uncooperative workman.

Israel, the first beneficiary of Spectrum, was not the only one. In the au-

thor's words, "Black enjoyed being the [Director of Central Intelligence], not only because he wielded great power but because his was secret power . . . He could reach out almost anywhere in the globe from Room 75706. His decisions could mean life or death for men and women thousands of miles from here . . . He could, Black realized, overthrow a prime minister before breakfast or snuff out the life of a minor KGB agent in Macao over afternoon tea."

With considerable ingenuity and attention to technical detail, the author develops and unwinds the final phases of his unlovely plot: Black's attempt to hold the president and American people to ransom by a force of Honest John missiles. The ensuing events are quite dramatic, but the novel ends with testimony before yet another Senate committee on the latest extravaganza perpetrated by a wicked ex-director of the CIA.