

HARPOON OF THE HUNTER. By MARKOOSIE. *Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1970. 7¾ x 8½ inches, 81 pages, illustrated. \$4.95.*

Except in Greenland, stories about Eskimos and Eskimo life are traditionally written by non-Eskimos. Their tales, their legends, their oral traditions have been conscientiously collected by ethnologists, and even some of the most superficial travellers to the north have felt impelled to write at length about the Eskimos.

This slim, attractively produced book is, finally, a step in a new and most welcome direction, a book written by an Eskimo about his people. It was first published in serial form in the Eskimo magazine *Inuttituut*, printed in syllabics, and has now been translated by the author himself into English. Markoosie was the first Canadian Eskimo to obtain a commercial flying licence and he now works as pilot for an aviation company at Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island.

The Harpoon of the Hunter is an epic tale of danger and disaster. Kamik, the 16-year-old hero, goes with his father and seven other men of his camp in pursuit of a rabid polar bear. When the enemies meet, the bear and all the hunters except Kamik are killed. Alone, without dogs, Kamik tries to return to his camp.

A rescue mission from a second camp saves his life in the nick of time, as another polar bear attacks him. Having survived against overwhelming odds, Kamik sees his mother and his bride drown as their sled breaks through the ice. He drifts out to sea on a floe and commits suicide. With its stark theme of ruthless fate (or nature), the tale is akin in spirit to classic Greek tragedy.

This is the impact of the book as a whole, and it is well done. It is in its details that it occasionally breaks down and therein lies a danger not only for this author who, it is hoped, will write more books, but for young Eskimo authors of the future.

The late Joe Panipakuttuk of Pond Inlet, whose stories have often been printed by *Inuttituut*, was an older man and there is a vivid authenticity in the scenes he creates. Markoosie is much younger, grew up in the entirely different environment of a modern settlement, yet the story he has written is set within the past of his people.

When the author describes camp meetings called rather authoritatively by a chief hunter he is, I think, involuntarily projecting present settlement customs into the past. Something similar happens, when Markoosie describes how two hunters visit a neighbouring camp

and as they approach the igloos "In moments there were hundreds of people outside." Only in Alaska could Eskimo camps with so large a population have been found.

More serious is it when the author states: "Wolves and musk oxen roam the land, living on anything they can kill." This may be dramatic, but it just isn't true. Musk oxen are fairly placid herbivores.

And personally I am perturbed by the hunters' use of harpoons to kill polar bears and by the frequently repeated statement that Kamik "Quickly pulled the harpoon out and struck again." According to Boas, Rasmussen, Freuchen, and Jenness Eskimos used lances when hunting polar bears, and in any case a harpoon, once driven into an animal, cannot be quickly pulled out.

Thus this book gives us a good and extremely dramatic story, well told but occasionally flawed by improbabilities and inaccuracies. It is beautifully illustrated with drawings by Germaine Arnaktaujok, an artist and designer living at Frobisher Bay.

Fred Bruemmer

THE BIG NAIL. By THEON WRIGHT. *New York: The John Day Company, 1970. 8¾ x 5½ inches, 368 pages, illustrated with maps and photographs. \$9.75.*

Reading like a detective story, this book wraps up in a neat package most of the pertinent evidence and theories copiously published since 1909, by the principals themselves, their friends and critics, as to whether Dr. Frederick Albert Cook or Rear Admiral Robert Edwin Peary was the first to reach the North Pole, or whether either reached it. Its title is taken from the North Greenland Eskimo designation for the Holy Grail of these two picturesque characters and their numerous predecessors dating back to the Elizabethan era. Its subtitle is "The Story of the Cook-Peary Feud."

At the outset the author points out that the first positively-proved attainment of the North Pole from a land base by continuous travel on the surface of the ice was that of Ralph Plaisted and his party in 1968.

The struggles of both Cook and Peary to get to the North Pole were athletic exploits of little if any scientific value. Therefore, in the light of all the serious exploration carried out in the Arctic before and since their time, why bother to rattle their skeletons at this late date? Wright's reason for pursuing his inquiry, he says, is to try to fill a historical vacuum, for "each man carried the stigma of uncertainty and possible fraud to