

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

his grave." Wright examines the available facts and figures and the personal integrity of his protagonists.

Of the two men, Cook emerges as the more kindly and appealing if not always the more believable. Peter Freuchen is quoted: "Cook was a liar and a gentleman, and Peary was neither." *The Big Nail* indicates that not only was Peary ungallant but also that, besides attacking anyone who got in his way, he tended to ignore, withhold, forget or mix up awkward facts.

At an early age he developed an unquenchable thirst for fame, and when he chose the High Arctic as his field of endeavour he regarded it as his exclusively, resenting the intrusion of any other explorer. According to Wright, the heart of the controversy lay in Peary's sense of Manifest Destiny — that he and no one else was intended to be the discoverer of the North Pole.

In 1909, when Dr. Cook jumped the gun and announced to the world that he had been to the Pole a year before Peary, the latter was furious. He had spent twenty-three years and a lot of money building up to his grand climax. Suddenly stepping into the limelight ahead of him was an interloper with no impressive backing, organization or fanfare. Peary immediately concentrated more on trying to destroy Cook than to prove his own claim.

Our author finds it easier to demonstrate that Peary did not reach the Pole than that Cook either did or did not. Peary had an array of witnesses, some of whom could and did write books and articles as well as talk. Their statements could be evaluated and compared with his, and the starting and finishing times for his final dash were reliably recorded.

In contrast, Cook had with him on his dash only two "inarticulate" Eskimos, so "the only possible evidence is Cook's own account," says Wright. No one who has lived among Eskimos will say that they are inarticulate. Also, their ability to draw and read maps of country they have seen is well known. Furthermore, they have seldom if ever on their own volition ventured over ice or water any great distance beyond sight of land. Thus, should any of them be induced to do so — like Cook's companions — they would never forget it or keep it to themselves for very long, especially if its purpose was to hit some mysterious target considered important by white men.

After Cook had left the scene, Peary landed in North Greenland for his own triumphant assault on the Pole. His aides interrogated Cook's Eskimos, who recalled

(according to Peary) that they had been only two sleeps from land. But Cook (according to his *My Attainment of the Pole*) had instructed them "not to tell Peary of my achievement. . . . I felt him unworthy of the confidence of a brother explorer."

He also wrote that during his trek to the Pole he took the precaution of telling his companions that "almost daily mirages and low-lying clouds were signs of land" so that they wouldn't panic and desert him.

But truth will out, and it seems unlikely either that they would have been fooled day after day by clouds and mirages or that they would have gone on indefinitely telling only part of their story to successive visitors. At Etah in the mid-1920's I was present at an interview with Cook's Eskimos by Inspector A. H. Joy of the R.C.M.P., an outstanding arctic traveller, who was seeking practical information for future patrols. They carefully traced on a map the route they had followed with Cook. It was substantially in accordance with his own published narrative — but it included no prolonged northward excursion.

Cook was vulnerable to attack for reasons other than his inability to prove that he reached the North Pole. Neither could Peary really prove that *he* had reached it, but at least he had a competent witness to testify that he got as close to it as 133 miles, where Captain Bob Bartlett left him after checking his position. However, Cook claimed previously to have climbed to the summit of Alaska's Mount McKinley, which was unfortunate for his credibility. Unlike the floating ice around the North Pole, the mountain did not move and it and its surroundings could be repeatedly scrutinized. Later climbers matched photographs Cook published as having been taken by him at the summit, and demonstrated that they were of a minor and much lower peak well removed from McKinley; and when other men scaled and photographed the real summit, it bore no resemblance to Cook's pictures or description of it. Additional black marks — most of them unjust — completed his downfall, and he spent five years in Leavenworth for promoting "worthless" Texas oil fields some of which subsequently proved productive.

Except for a few staunch supporters such as the immortal Roald Amundsen and the faithful, litigious Ralph Shainwald von Ahlefeldt, Cook was abandoned and vilified, and his unquestionably distinguished career as an explorer in the Antarctic as well as the Arctic — quite apart from his McKinley and North Pole adventures — was generally forgotten.

In recent years there has been a resurgence of sympathy for him among younger explorers and students of the Arctic. For instance, in *Arctic*, December 1964, John Euller offered arguments in his support and declared: "The case for Cook is strong and should be reviewed by fair-minded men." And in 1965, on the 100th anniversary of Cook's birth, Dr. Walter A. Wood, then president of the American Geographical Society, was quoted: "Cook's claims regarding his polar journey should be re-examined."

Whether Dr. Cook ever saw the North Pole or not, his sledge journey among the Queen Elizabeth Islands stands by itself as one of the most remarkable of its kind in the annals of exploration.

Dealing compassionately with Cook, *The Big Nail* sets out relentlessly to topple Peary from his pedestal. It portrays him as a jealous, ruthless, arrogant, vainglorious egocentric; as an explorer who found new lands that either didn't exist or that he inaccurately located or delineated; as an inefficient navigator who did not always know quite where he was or in which direction he was going; as a sledge traveller whose speeds became superhuman when he had no witnesses who were likely to contest them; and, on his climactic polar dash, as an aging "iron" man, his feet crippled by frostbite, dependent on the loyal, skilful and vigorous Matthew Henson, his poorly-rewarded assistant (whom he referred to as his "colored body-servant"), and four Eskimos with their dogs, to carry him on a sled most of the way to and from his farthest north — which he was too proud to admit.

As Wright acknowledges, carefully crediting his sources, various critics at one time or another have brought out all of these points and elaborated on them. He has simply marshalled and presented them anew in entertaining fashion, here and there adding his own interpretations and theories, some few of which may be open to question. He has done an admirable job of research, leaving hardly a stone unturned to accomplish his purpose.

Summing up, he says: "Whatever may be the verdict of historians with respect to Cook, the conclusion as to Peary's claim is inescapable. . . . The perpetuation of the myth that Peary discovered the North Pole has no possible justification in fact or tradition."

Richard Finnie

Ryerson Press, 1970. 7½ x 10½ inches, 152 pages, 61 plates. \$12.50.

To many readers of arcticana, Mr. Bruemmer is a talented writer-photographer whose past specialities have included, more especially, animal photography and illustrated accounts of the life style of those Canadian Eskimos who continue to live with a high degree of self-sufficiency and dignity in the more remote parts of the North.

"The Long Hunt" is Mr. Bruemmer's first book and should provide enjoyable and informative reading to specialist and general reader alike. There is little attempt at analysis, which is perhaps fortunate as the theoretical perspectives which are introduced, namely those of Toynbee on Eskimo culture and Lorenz on culture contact, are likely to find little support from anthropologists who will view them as either dated or trite. Among other impressions the book serves to reinforce the generally-held, if over-simplified, public image of the Eskimo hunter. Of greater value is the more or less detailed daily narrative of a specific polar bear hunt covering 1,200 miles in the Jones Sound, Lancaster Sound and Barrow Strait regions of the arctic archipelago undertaken by two Grise Fiord hunters, their two young sons, the author and twenty-nine sled dogs.

Polar bear hunting for most Eskimo groups has never been a systematic or pronounced phase of the annual round of production. However, in recent years, with increasing cash value of polar bear skins, Eskimo hunters in many localities have come to place more emphasis on this activity. At Grise Fiord the polar bear has always been especially sought, though for largely non-financial reasons until very recently. The degree of involvement in bear hunting was such that the more serious hunters strengthened their dog teams as winter progressed in preparation for the long and demanding hunts that commenced early in April. This book was written just in time; with justifiable concern for the future of the species, polar bear hunting is now subject to strict control by government fiat, a measure that will certainly marshall in the end of these long spring hunts. In combination a small individual quota (amounting to about 1.25 bears per hunter at Grise Fiord), and the now widespread use of skidoos for hunting, further diminishes the likelihood that such journeys will occur in the future. One can only speculate on the effect these new hunting practices, including sport-hunting by tourists, may have on the polar bear stocks in the arctic archipelago. Mr. Bruemmer's narrative indicates that despite the tremen-

THE LONG HUNT. BY FRED BRUEMMER.
Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver: The