

Two new hardcover picture stories

The Projector outshines old Canadian comics

By JOHN OUGHTON

Two recent hard-cover entries into the large format comic book market sit side by side in the York Bookstore. They are The Great Canadian Comic Books, a compilation of World War II strips edited and written by Michael Hirsh and Patrick Lambert, and The Projector, a "visual novel" by Martin Vaughan-James. Vaughan-James' work has appeared in an earlier visual novel, Elephant, Saturday Night magazine, and various other places.

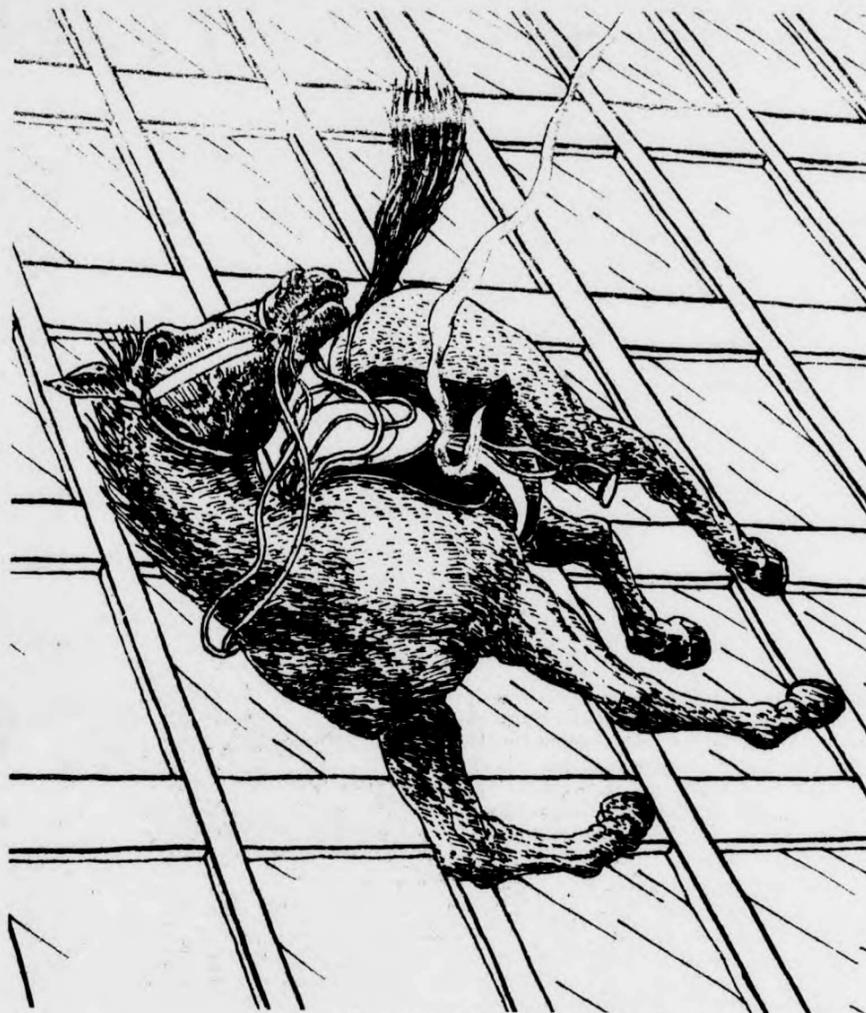
The difference between the two books is roughly comparable to the respective experiences to be had from listening to Bill Haley and the Comets and a good contemporary record such as Zappa's Hot Rats. They're both related to rock, but the former is derivative and only mildly amusing; the latter is relatively original, and takes you a lot further. Hirsh and Lambert deserve some praise for their efforts in getting so many old Canadian comics together, and tracking down a number of their creators. A quick scanning of the contents reveals, however, that most World War II Canadian comics were badly drawn, imitative of American efforts, and both mindlessly chauvinistic (in the good old sense of "nationalistic") and racist.

In short, most of those old comics would have been better left undiscovered. They do seem somewhat "camp" now, but not sufficiently so to justify their being borne along on the great nostalgia wave. Perhaps, as Hirsh and Lambert suggest, the excerpts will be of some value to students of Canadian sociology. To the idle reader like you and me, the book is simply not worth the \$15 price which Peter Martin suggests we pay for it. The method of printing single-page excerpts from the original comic books used by the editors, although necessary to allow covering a number of species of the form, is irritating since the few good sequences are cut off before their conclusion. It could be that the editors had in mind publishing a "Son of the

Great Canadian Comic Books" with all the endings for another \$15.

The Projector, by contrast, is a nice book to handle and to read. The book itself is a good Coach House Press design, laid out on heavy-weight olive-colored paper. The reproductions of Vaughan-James' original pen and ink drawings are excellent. It retails at about \$7.50, still a fair amount of money; but the Projector is probably something you will re-read and show to friends. The plot continues the adventures of the unnamed bald character who appeared in Elephant. It is mostly set in a surreal landscape which contains many recognizable elements of Toronto. According to Vaughan-James, "the purpose of the narrative... should be... the evolution of an arena of words and images within which the reader spectator can perform an active and participatory role." Thus, the book begins with "You are walking down this street again." Many of the graphics are so compelling that you do indeed feel drawn into the book; Vaughan-James is as original and striking an artist as are more famous Americans such as Robert Crumb, Victor Mosco and Rick Griffin.

The subject of the book is that of much modern art: man's alienation and dehumanization in a technological world ruled by big business. However, the visual novel approach allows Vaughan-James more freedom to intermix serious and comic comments than most media would. The dialogues are the weakest part of the book, but many of them are interesting: "There are vast fields of rubber asparagus and crowds of interlocking wooden hats. But under the awesome folds of these only demented children play." Vaughan-James is now working on some experimental short pieces, and formulating ideas for another feature-length work. If he improves as much again as he has since Elephant, these should be very interesting.



Some of the art exhibited in The Projector

Stanley Kubrick's encore to 2001

Clockwork Orange - decadence is portrayed skilfully

If you made the film 2001, what would you do for an encore? Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange could be subtitled Meanwhile, Back on Earth and considered the logical sequel to Space Odyssey.

The story is set in an environment of utter decadence, the collapse of moral authority and the ultimate self-indulgence of ultra-violence. The hero Alex is a teen-age gang leader who, with his trusty 'droogs' mates, travels about the city looking for gang fights. They steal a car to get to the country house of a writer and his wife where they cripple him for life and gang-rape her (to the hero's vocal and choreographic version of Singing in the Rain, that old favorite).

Based on the 1963 satirical science-fiction novel by Anthony Burgess, A Clockwork Orange (Irish slang for an uptight, puritanical Orangeman or protestant made out of machine parts — a puritan robot) is Kubrick's sixth film, and while it is not his most inspired film (2001

was) or his funniest satire (Dr. Strangelove definitely was) it is his very most 'Kubrickian' film. A Clockwork Orange has a great many of those exact and efficient film devices that have come to characterize Kubrick. The film, which is about as comfortable and easy to watch as the films taken in Hiroshima or Nagasaki the day after the Bomb was dropped, has the impact, if not the reality, of that honest-to-God truth of dreams about it.

The truth that dwells in dreams is the stuff of Kubrick's art. A Space Odyssey is the story of human evolution into a superior being, the ultimate dream of the Superego. A Clockwork Orange replete with cruelty, brutality, lust and greed (not to mention utter selfishness and a predator-like independence) is the dream of the Id, the nightmare of the socially-controlled ego.

When Alex the gang-leader is caught after he murders the proprietor of a health farm by bashing in her wizzened old head with a plastic phallus ("Don't touch

that. It's a work of Art!" she screamed), he is sent to prison for 19 years. But Alex cagely behaves himself and takes refuge and comfort in his erotic and masochistic daydreams which he creates by reading the bible (winning thereby the favor of the prison padre). When news comes of a new experimental technique for rehabilitating evil-doers by conditioning them to abhor violence, Alex manages to enrol on the promise of an instantaneous release. But the cure merely allows him to go from a walled prison to one without walls. His former victims now on the ascendant, Alex is driven to commit suicide to escape their evil torments. But he survives and the bad publicity his attempt to 'snuff it' creates, embarrasses the minister responsible for the rehabilitation experiment, and Alex is restored to his former self and publically forgives the minister to get him off the hook in return for promises of future delights.

But describing the plot in a Kubrick film is like describing a

teeming cage as iron bars in the shape of a cube and ignoring what's in it. With Kubrick, film technique, including setting, music, dialogue, color and, finally acting, is the most important and exciting part of the work. In Clockwork the images slowly establish their startling presence in reality itself, such as in the metaphorical and real grab the fake-solicitous petty tyrant bureaucrat priest makes for Alex's balls when he attempts to seduce him and convert him at the same time. The sexual assault both seduction and rape is the physical counterpart of the threat of social control actually occurring instead of merely suggested. It is appropriate, and is true as a dream but performed as reality, it has a bizarre, jolting effect.

Kubrick uses music as if it was really in the scene with the action and some mad genius of a muzak technician had scored the entire world with utterly appropriate background music with completely sterile, amoral taste. Alex's theme music is Beethoven's Ninth Sym-

phony and the overheated sensuality of John Carlos' Moog synthesizer version of "Ludwig Van" does express the fierce determination of Alex to exceed not the expectations of society, but its limitations.

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