

Book review

Books can make the perfect gift



By VINCENT EGAN

Do you find yourself devoid of inspiration as the time for Christmas gift-buying dwindles? There is one ever dependable solution to this perennial problem: Choose a new and interesting book.

Here are notes on some of the current season's offerings to be found in bookstores:

—A Day in the Life of China, edited by David Cohen (Harper and Collins; 224 pages; \$49.95). On April 15, 1989, some 90 photographers (of whom 60 were from the West) shot 140,000 photographs throughout the cities and towns of China, for use in this ninth volume in a series of monumental publications that began with an Australian day in 1981.

By coincidence, the student-led democracy movement in China began during those 24 hours, upon the death of an ousted Communist Party leader - which gives an extra edge to this collection, making it as gripping and fascinating as its eight heavyweight predecessors. Collins' partners in China subsequently withdrew from the project, after Collins refused to delete certain photographs and texts.

—Chronicle of the World, edited by Jerome Burne (Raincoast Book Distribution; 1,290 pages; \$59.95). A massive history of the world from 3.7 million BC onward, written in a journalistic, you-are-there style and arranged in chronological sequence. This is a companion volume to last year's big-selling Chronicle of the 20th Century.

—Dance Canada, by Max Wyman (Douglas and McIntyre; 224 pages; \$60). An absorbing and authoritative history of dance (ballet and modern) and dancers in Canada, by a Vancouver Province columnist, critic and (clearly) diligent researcher. Wyman br-

ings to life some forgotten pioneers of this too often neglected art form, as well as recounting the work of those who keep it alive against long odds. Generously illustrated.

—Benny Goodman and the Swing Era, by James Lincoln Collier (Oxford University Press; 404 pages; \$29.95). An admiring and highly detailed narrative of the career of Goodman (1909-86), the clarinet-playing orchestra leader whose publicity people dubbed him "the King of Swing." Collier demonstrates that, for once, there was some truth to a catch-phrase; Goodman was indeed at the top of the jazzier side of the big-band field throughout a career that started when he was in short pants and continued until the end of his life.

He wasn't exactly Mr. Nice Guy, to judge from the frequent references to him (by his musicians) as a tough task-master, but toughness was essential in the intensely competitive music business. Excellent as Collier's biography is, it has one unfortunate shortcoming: the lack of a detailed chronological discography, at least for the Goodman orchestra's peak period from 1935 to 1942.

—Rhymes of the Midnight Sun: A Robert Service Treasury (McGraw-Hill Ryerson; 191 pages; \$27.95). Service (1874-1958) was the first poet and balladeer that many of us encountered in our elementary-school days. Here is a beautiful designed and thoughtfully chosen collection of his work based on his experiences in the Yukon gold rush, the First World War and his golden years in France. A "must" for the pre-war generation - but any home that has youngsters should have Robert Service, too.

—Images from the Inside Passage, by Victor Wyatt

(Douglas and McIntyre; 144 pages; \$26.95). Largely a compendium of first-rate photographs of Tlingit and Haida Indians of southeast Alaska taken between 1893 and 1910 by pioneer commercial photographers Lloyd Winter and Percy Pond, with an insightful foreword by Dr. Margaret B. Blackman.

—Satellite Images: Photographs of Canada from Space; text by Brian Banks (Camden House Publishing; 120 pages; \$29.95). An extraordinary selection of 80 large-format views of the Canadian landscape taken by the Landstat 5 satellite from 900 km into orbit.

—Odyssey in Time: The Dinosaurs of North America, by Dale A. Russell (University of Toronto Press; 256 pages; \$45). In this age of rapid and tragic extinction of wildlife species, who hasn't reflected upon the fate of the prehistoric dinosaur? It vanished suddenly, the author suggests, when a comet slammed into our planet 65 million years ago. Russell, a curator at Ottawa's National Museum of Natural Sciences (which is associated in the publication of this remarkable volume), has made the study of dinosaurs his life work, and here he tells all - why they developed from lizards, how they existed (one species had to keep moving just to maintain its balance), when they thrived (the Mesozoic era), their favorite areas (such as Alberta's badlands). Eleanor Kish has supplied 15 detailed paintings that are among the book's 135 invaluable illustrations.

—On the Brink: Endangered Species in Canada (Western Producer Prairie Books; 192 pages; \$29.95). A joint project of several scientists, this big-format volume is a handsome yet alarming look at wildlife species that are facing extinction, such as the once-abundant

white beluga whale - decimated by ingestion of some 15 toxic chemicals.

—Leopard in the Afternoon, by Christopher Ondaajite (Lester and Orpen Dennys; 217 pages; \$35). The author, a Bay Street financial executive, has produced a beautifully illustrated and sensitive account of a two-week game-viewing safari to Tanzania.

—Child Finder, by Collin Maxwell and Allan Gould (Prentice-Hall Canada; 255 pages; \$22.95). The disappearance of a child is a constant source of anguish, but never more so than at this season. Colin Maxwell's chosen vocation is finding missing (usually abducted) youngsters, and here - with prolific author Allan Gould - he recounts details of his successes in reuniting families.

—The Day They Took The Children, by Ben Wicks (Stoddart; 160 pages; \$26.95). Half a century ago, with the start of the Second World War, British authorities put into action a long-standing program to evacuate 3.5-million children from London and other major cities, to the relative safety of the surrounding countryside and even to Canada and the U.S. Noted cartoonist Ben Wicks, who was among them, assembled the personal reminiscences of hundreds of them in his 1988 book, No Time to Wave Goodbye, and now in this fully illustrated sequel he presents many more such recollections.

What comes through is some feeling of the anguish that the parents and children felt at being separated at such a stressful time, combined with the later, sobering realization of the deaths of 8,000 children whose parents defied the government and kept them at home in the cities to face the German bombs and rockets.

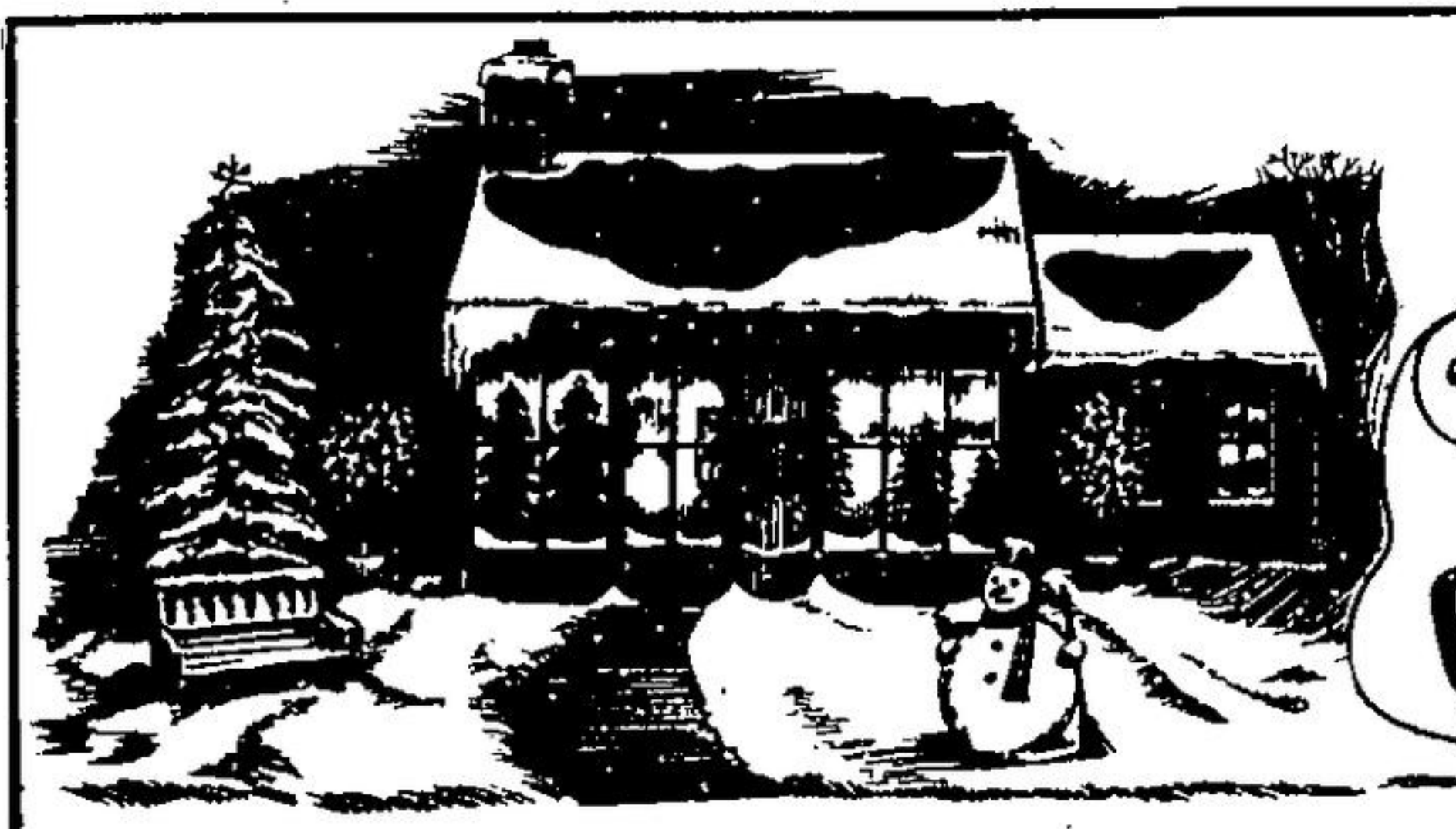
—Vincent Egan is a Toronto-based reviewer and travel writer.

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