

It's summer vacation. I wake early, stretch and jog the Millennium Walkway. Then, I putter in the garden. As the sun rises higher I move indoors, shower, breakfast and settle with a book. I just finished "To Catch a King" by Harry Patterson. This is an outwit-the-Nazis adventure based on a smidgen of historical fact.

It seems that after Edward VIII abdicated the British throne to marry an American divorcee, he left Britain with his bride for the Continent. The Nazis suspected that he might be a sympathizer. As such, he was an excellent candidate to be put on the British throne as a Nazi puppet once the Third Reich conquered Britain. Apparently, there was a plot orchestrated by Von Ribbentrop and authorized by Hitler to make overtures to Edward VIII and if necessary to kidnap him if he was unwilling to join the Nazis of his own accord.

General Walter Schellenberg, a subordinate of Richard Heidrich, is the cynical Nazi protagonist. Schellenberg attempts to implement the plan while covering himself from the consequences of failure. The Nazis High Command demanded success and was chillingly cruel to those who failed to fulfil orders regardless of circumstances.

Hannah Winter, an American jazz singer, Jewish and born in Berlin, collaborates with resistance forces to undermine the plan. "To Catch A King" is filled with action, intrigue and a reminder of the heartless, pathological ruthlessness that was Nazi tyranny.

I also read "The Smile on the Face of the Tiger" by Andrew Osmond and Douglas Hurd. Hurd was a high profile Tory cabinet minister in the UK until recently. His authorship suggests the events described are at least plausible. The plot, set in 1977, assumes that the People's Republic of China issues an ultimatum to the UK to surrender Hong Kong within five days or face the might of the People's Liberation Army. Since it's presently 2001, and Hong Kong was peaceably transferred to the People's Republic of China in 1998, the outcome isn't a surprise.

However, don't toss this book into the recycling bin without reading. Osmond and Hurd capture the considerations and actions of governments suddenly faced with a potentially horrific international crisis. Can you rely on your allies, do you bluff or do you fold? The pace is quick, the details are clear, and the intricacies of the plot unwind rhythmically. The authors describe the role of intelligence services, the media, diplomats and the military. Personal interests, both Chinese and British, are played against ideology and national agendas. There is a mole in British intelligence, the enemy are conniving and a back door is maintained by both parties to escape with honour. If you prefer your enemies to be left-wing communist hordes rather than right-wing fascist Nazis, you'll enjoy this book.

A third book I read is from a cloistered section of the Castlegar Library. Look for books with call numbers like 741.5973 Lar. The code sounds harmless, but you'll discover the side-splitting Far Side collection by Gary Larson. Read "There's a Hair in My Dirt: A Worm's Story." Its plot is an originally bizarre corruption of the Goldilocks fairy tale. Not just single panel, single gag Far Side cartoons, but a short, cleverly illustrated tale with educational merit. Share this with your kids.

Gary Larson, from Tacoma Washington, studied biology not art. He blends biological fact with a sense of humour reflecting his distinction between loving and understanding nature. He has been recognized by the scientific community for his cartooning. Scientists named a newly discovered biting louse and a butterfly in his honour.