

# The Billion Barrel Oil Swindle

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Thus we are told that the energy of natural hyper-velocity impact is "quite great" (p. 82), and the amount of heat generated is "fairly large" (p. 91). Pyroxferroite is said to be abundant (p. 179) whereas it is only a minor accessory of some lunar basalts, earth-crossing Apollo asteroids are said to have diameters of the order of half a kilometre (p. 281), whereas the average is two kilometres, and on p. 301, we learn that the lithosphere of Mercury, possibly 600 km thick, is thin compared with that of the Earth (!), apparently a confusion of composition with physical state. Students are given some guidance into such matters as Rankine-Hugoniot equations, but are virtually on their own when confronted with pseudoternary liquidus diagrams.

The book is of moderate size and is handsomely printed on high gloss paper. Its expert design makes the most of the material presented, with excellent tones to the numerous photographs and generally clear line drawings. Typographical errors are rare. With half of the space devoted to illustrations and tables, and another 15 per cent to lists of references, the book can be said to achieve the author's modest aim of providing an entrée to the subject's vast literature, at least to 1974. However, it is representative of, rather than a solution to, the problem of conveying to the student and professional scientific communities an appreciation not only of the technological achievements but also of the basic scientific results of space exploration.

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## The Billion Barrel Oil Swindle

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By L. A. Sikabonyi  
*Exposition Press, Hicksville, New York,*  
 256 p., 1976.  
 \$8.50

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The most extraordinary statement in this novel of the oil industry appears in the "Author's Note" where he says "Neither

the references to localities in Canada or Alberta, nor any of the events and persons described in this book reflect any actual incidents or portray any real person . . ." If ever there was a *roman à clef* this would seem to be it. Indeed the fictional names of the companies and people involved are so transparent as to make one wonder why they were altered at all. But what relation the story has to the *cause célèbre* involving the author and certain oil companies a few years ago we cannot tell, for, in fact as in fiction, the matter was settled out of court.

The novel is about a geological consultant who has an idea for an oil trap beneath land controlled by a major oil company. The major company has lost interest in this land and so their land man makes a deal with the consultant to 'peddle' the acreage for them. The consultant is allegedly cheated out of his fee and royalty when a firm which he is trying to interest in the prospect takes his information and goes over his head to deal directly with the major. The exploratory well drilled on the prospect results in an important discovery and the consultant sues for his share.

The plot hinges on the interpretation of the oral agreement that the consultant had with major. Nothing was ever written down. And although, in the oil industry, multi-million dollar deals are quite often settled on a handshake, this usually takes place within a group of business executives between whom mutual trust has been built up through the years.

Many years ago, when I was a farmer, this is the way deals were made in the marketplace and it has always struck me as rather ironic that it is in the "villainous" oil business that the practice lingers on when elsewhere distrust and lawyers now hold sway.

But there are limits even to the camaraderie of the oil patch: and it frankly strains one's credulity to suppose that a major company would give a two-man consulting firm an exclusive right to peddle its land or that it would not simultaneously have offered it to any company known to have exploration money available. So perhaps we should take literally the author's claim to be writing a work of fiction.

The main action of the novel takes place in a room at the courthouse where the examination for discovery is being held. The consultant is vindicated, but

has to settle out of court for a sum barely enough to pay his legal fees. His business is boycotted by the industry which sees him as a trouble-maker and his attempt to claim his share of the loot in a business dominated by corporate giants results in personal disaster.

Intertwined with this story are episodes outside the courtroom where naive questioners are given simple lectures on the technicalities of the oil industry. And there are conversations in the business clubs of Calgary where the domination of the major integrated companies is condemned and an alternative structure for the industry advocated by the author through the mouths of various oil men. Sikabonyi knows his oil industry and the book is free from those technical *gaffes* which so often mar books about the business. Alas, in spite of "ghostly" help, it is no work of art. There are too many didactic passages and the only woman who appears as a person rather than an anonymous, but "curvaceous", ministrant is soon turned into the wide-eyed and passive recipient of information about the land tenure system in Alberta.

But I must say I found the book held my attention to the end. Perhaps it is the fascination of reading about one's own business – a sort of narcissism like that which produces all those movies about "show-biz."

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## Meadow Lake Geolog: The Land—Past and Present

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By E. A. Christiansen, C. A. Padbury and R. J. Long  
*Museums Branch*  
*Dept. Tourism and Renewable Resources and Saskatchewan Research Council,*  
*Interpretive Rept.*  
*No. 1, 50 p. 1975.*  
 \$2.00

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Meadow Lake Geolog is in the nature of a primer of Quaternary Geology for the