

Terry Glavin. *A Death Feast in Dimlahamid*. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990. (200 pages) \$14.95.

Salmon run from their oceanic feeding grounds deep into the mountains of northwestern North America. A wealth of these living creatures begin and end their lives in swift, fresh, mountain-fed waters known to newcomers as the Skeena and Bulkley rivers. The people of these places, the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en, know these rivers as the 'Ksan and the Wedzenkwe. Their oral histories tell of an ancient civilization along the two rivers. To the Gitksan it is Dimlahamid. To their Athapaskan partners, the Wet'suwet'en, it is Dzilke.

Hereditary chiefs, empowered by the traditions of their matrilineal houses, continue to be stewards of these lands now and in the future. Their stewardship has been challenged and denied by colonial and multinational interests. In 1987, fifty-four Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs gave notice to the government of British Columbia that it occupied these lands without legal or moral authority. Between 1987 and 1991, their case was heard before Mr. Justice Allan McEachern in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. It is known in court records as *Delgam Uukw v. The Queen*. McEachern rendered his judgment on 8 March 1991. He dismissed their claims. The judgment is under appeal.

Prior to McEachern's judgment, journalist Terry Glavin joined Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en activists attempting to protect their resources from logging by Westar Timber. Their 1989 protest took the form of a blockade on the Suskwa Main road north of Hazelton, B.C. Glavin has had a long and distinguished career as Aboriginal affairs reporter for the *Vancouver Sun*. During his time on the blockade, he came to know the world for which contemporary Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people are fighting. It is a world of which most Canadians are totally unaware. It extends back from contemporary politics and economics into a mythological past that has been thousands of years in the making. *A Death Feast in Dimlahamid* documents what Glavin learned and how he came to learn in the way of these powerful and well-born First Nation people.

Glavin weaves together narratives of the trial, the blockade, the ancient story of Dimlahamid and his experience of a death-feast for Chief and elder Elsie Morrison, whose Gitksan name and title was Waigyet. The book has a deceptively simple narrative style. Only when the reader is well into this compelling story does he or she begin to glimpse how Glavin's reportorial artistry perfectly resonates with the narrative artistry



of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en. On one level, the book provides a well-researched account of events leading into one of the most complex and extensive Aboriginal land trials in Canadian jurisprudence. Within and beyond this reporter's account of events in our own time and place, however, Glavin weaves in and out of the mythic time and place of Dimlahamid. These two strands come together most succinctly in the chapter describing Elsie Morrison's death feast. Here one may find a clear and ethnographically detailed account of a Gitksan potlatch that is far superior to the controversial book on the subject by anthropologist John Adams. With deceptive simplicity, Glavin takes the reader through his own instruction in the meaning of this event.

Through the authority of Glavin's narrative, it becomes obvious that Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en communities have survived as corporate entities precisely because their individual members have passed on. Communities realize their ancient forms of government when they come together to mourn the dead and transfer their names to living successors. Dimlahamid, the ancient community, lives today in the events of the Gitksan feast hall. Glavin justifies the rare honour and privilege of being shown this box of treasures in the intelligence with which he writes about his experience. Unlike Chief Justice Allan McEachern, who rejected the treasures he was offered by these chiefs and elders, Glavin welcomed his gift and reciprocated in the way he knew how, through writing.

Unfortunately, the professional anthropologist will find some errors of fact and judgment about First Nations history in Glavin's book. Even more unfortunately, the non-professional may be led seriously astray. This is a shame, since Glavin's forays into fringe diffusionism seriously detract from the book's otherwise keen focus on the authority of local tradition. His opening suggestion that Northwest Coast people are more like the Japanese than like "Indians" (p. 12) is not part of the current anthropological vocabulary and certainly not part of the First Nations discourse. His statement that the Athapaskan languages "begin in the bush country of northern Quebec" (p. 115) is simply incorrect.

In chapter seven, Glavin embroils himself and the innocent reader in a congeries of speculative and not generally accepted theories deriving from Japan not only the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en but also the Zuni of New Mexico. These theories are not only marginal anthropology, but more seriously, they undermine the essential indigenous genius of the very people his book documents. Dimlahamid does not need to have been stimulated by contact with Japan in order to be valid. It would have been sufficient to point out the validity of a general north-Pacific-rim cultural continuum. Some of the material in this chapter reads more like *Chariots of the Gods* or a trashy conspiracy theory than like the Gitksan and



Wet'suwet'en oral traditions that should have remained Glavin's point of focus.

On the sensitive matter of how to interpret oral traditions about Dimlahamid in relation to physical evidence, Glavin gives a reasonable account of current archaeological opinion, but on the even more sensitive issue of *halait* and *haldowdgets* power in relation to the court case, he might have done better to leave unsaid the little he had been told about these matters. The idea of *halait*s "working on" the Chief Justice during the course of the trial almost certainly should have remained within the realm of oral communication, particularly in light of the devastating decision against the plaintiffs that came down on Friday, 8 March 1991.

Overall, this book succeeds when its focus is local but goes astray when it loses that focus. It succeeds in familiarizing the non-Aboriginal reader with Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en place names, chiefs' names and oral traditions. It succeeds in describing the very personal struggle of determined individuals to follow their culture's ways in the face of powerful outside forces. I would recommend it for use in a Native Studies curriculum with the warning that some explanation and revision on the part of the instructor would be required. Most of the problematic passages could be avoided by simply deleting chapter seven.

Robin Ridington

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Energy, Mines and Resources Canada. "Indian Treaties." *The National Atlas of Canada, 5th Edition*. Ottawa: 1991. Scale 1:7,500,000. Colour, 75 cm x 86 cm. Order no. MCR 4162F from Canada Map Office, Energy Mines and Resources Canada.

This is one of the latest loose-sheet maps produced as part of the fifth edition of *National Atlas of Canada*. This map was produced by the Geographical Services Division, Canada Centre for Mapping, but the research was carried out by R.S. Allen (Treaties and Historical Research Centre, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) and R. Maquire (Treaty Policy Branch, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada).

This treaty map shows the area surrendered in southern Ontario before Confederation, the Robinson and Manitoulin Island treaties, the Douglas treaties on Vancouver Island in the 1850s, and the numbered treaties in western and northern Canada. The locations where the various Vancouver Island treaties were signed are also shown. The provinces of