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ROADS OF TRANSMONTANIA
by Tom King

Roads can be dichotomized according to their destinations: some get you where you want to go, while others lead you to watchlands of glass and steel. Freeways and urban
thoroughfares tend to fall into the latter category. But roads of the
better kind still exist in all parts of Transmontania, and it is to
them that I devote this chapter.

First of all, Transmontania has a certain number of long,
straight, country roads. These are the roads of asphalt and such
which turn up to bare ribbons of cracked concrete. They tend
to be not the usual commercial destinations, but names
(like "Red Arrow Highway"), or—when they are no longer
highways, the kind that haven't yet been spoiled by "progress." They're at their best in summer, when the
sky is softly hazy and the greenery is lush, when the trees
are in their full glory, and when the dappled light, scented
by the dances and lawn-parties, and when manifestations of teen-age life — lanky red
haired boys ogling thick-thighed blondes at the nearby lakes, cars
full of getting lovers at the drive-in movies — are most easily observ

Oftentimes these roads run parallel to the railroad tracks; you
can even race a train once in a while. There will be brick or masonry
tables and, maybe even the remains of some old
Brummer-Beaver signs. The farms by the roadside tend to be really
large and unprepossessing. The fences may be some distance
off the road, and you may see no sign of life apart from a far-off tractor
throwing up a dust-cloud. But, in any case, the principal
monuments along this type of road are not farms, but commercial
establishments foreclosed for more than two years ago.

Here and there (but with increasing rarity nowadays) will appear
an old-fashioned gas station, in the form of a little brick castle or
cobblestone truck stop and a few scattered. men, deplorable
outdoorsy spots. Some places will have a bit of psycho-Indian
flavor about them, left over from the old days, such as a wooden
Indian, a stucco teepee, or a sign shaped like an indians head. (Did you
remember that?) If you're really lucky, you
may come across an old cafe built of concrete or peeling stucco
molded into the shape of a sombrero or a bee hive, or with a giant
statue of Paul Bunyan on top of its roof — all painted in one-brigt
colors.

You'll know you're getting near a town when you pass
an old-fashioned
hotel or cafe. There will be short stakes
lined at
their sides, or you'll notice the roadside
white sign with a red arrow that points to the town.

The main roads become the ballroom of the
state, monumented by the millions of
to, iron-spiked fences, are cracked and upthrust by the roots of aged
trees. On left and right, set close to the street, modest two-storied
Victorian houses sit quietly on lots that somehow seem a few
inches lower than the roadbed. Their low windows and wails are a
favorite place of repose for elderly tomcats (even in winter you can
see their silhouettes behind the chintz curtains).

Fremont Street . . . Union Street . . . An old railroad
upslope, its high embankment faced with mossy, crumbling stone. Beyond
the underpass, Main Street is heavily shaded by a long line of
huge old trees, behind which stand the gables and turrets,
belvederes and brackets, chimney-pots and cornices of the town's
centenarian homes; if you're in luck, you may spot an octagon
house among them.

Jefferson Street, the first traffic-light. On the left, a greystone
Church Gothic; on the right, a small park graced with a Civil-War
monument. This used to be the farm road now.

Main Street storefronts. Some have tasteful moldings around their
window
donnets and doorways, like old-fashioned
trances, while others are decorated with ornate ironwork, and bear
more pretentious inscriptions ("Mercantile Bldg., 1891"). Most have neon signs and plate-glass doors dating from a frenzy of
"modernism."

At the second traffic-light stands the fire-station, red-painted
brick and white concrete, with a big American-LaFrance ladder
tower. Onegment justly fond of their firemen, Doremus
(on both sides of the corner), where you can still buy a "phosphmate"

Washington Street: the courthouse. Tiers of decoration in multicolored stone and concrete climb confidently to a patinated
row . . . Diagonally across the street, Mary's Diner has the only
frontal on the block that hasn't modernized. You can rent
any Big Beer, along with "bombochets" in there; either, Mary is
not a franchise.

State Street . . . Church Street . . . Maple Street . . . Now it's the
same thick black veer: there's another lonely doghouse, these huge
trees, another homely Victorian neighborhood — and the town
is.

Until the highway will go on for as long as you care to follow it,
changing its name occasionally, bending its direction a bit from time
to time, passing down one Main Street after another, for a hundred,
two hundred, five hundred, six hundred miles, another place
— bigger than Texas, bigger than Quebec, bigger than Poland . . .

By contrast, the farm roads of Transmontania are rarely more
than a few miles long. A single road prosperity comprises much
of the land (incidentally, if you can see a mountain of any kind
from where you're sitting — even if only far off on the horizon — you
are not Transmontanian locality). You can find the whole of the
mostly down dale. In the little dales you'll find the classic
Transmontanian farm, eighty acres of sovereignty and self-respect. The big
red gambrel-roofed barn, the surly ox, the old red-painted
hangarlike silo, and some late tallow candle burning the
night and eating in the dark. If you pass by late in the afternoon, after school, you may see a little
girl with blonde pigtails swinging in an old tractor-tire hung by a
thick rope from the barn, or the little boy, looking at his
tricycle, wondering whether, on the job, driving a big tractor across a field, or a
plump farmwife crossing the road to get some letters from
the mailbox.

Then you leave the rolling country and spring sunshine incline you to metaphor,
you might observe that the flocks of white sheep grazing on the
gentle slopes are as much a mirror of the fluctuating clouds as the
cattle
fence, or the clouds' mystery of clouds. Most of the
roads are
largely unpaved, their bones and flesh are the
majority of the farmwomen's hands have been
made of these
most are the greens of Guernseys and Holsteins. Pastures must
have fences, of course, and you'll find one running alongside the road:
— a lonely old fence, generations weathered, half-overgrown with
brush and weeds, with only an occasional ancient
tree to keep it company. Once in a while you'll see an apple
orchard after blossoms on the other side of the fence growing a
row of white currants — the descendants of father's old
(You'll note that a Transmontanian fence, unlike fences further south, is almost
smothered with creepers and other vegetation to the point where you can't see the
end of it.)

Where the road climbs to the top of a ridge or nick, a more state
kind of farmhouse than those in the dales will make its appearance:
it will be a sturdy, red-painted farmhouse with farm
barn, silo and pilastered, its bulk lightened by delicate sunbursts and
gardens. Or it might be a cubist Italianate mansion of orange
or yellow brick, with a little cupola atop its hip-roof and a
tower of belvederes and brackets. Transmontanian architecture
was probably in its early days - in the late fourties
and fifties, for instance — built by that prosperous generation of New Yorkers which
took control of Transmontania in the 1840's and 50's. School's
in the classes of science and fine arts and the arts of
canadian and cultura were
so different from us that their
traits foreign and outlandish: "Llevi Runyan," "Orlando Prado," "Vlad Van
and these are
are about all that remains of their world. Nonetheless, they are
with us yet, in a sense, for their tomstones are likely to be still standing in a
hill-top cemetery nearby — perhaps even with a few
frowns on their former homes — or else in a tiny churchyard
in the dale.

From the very highest elevations, you'll be able to view the land
scape as a whole. More farmhouses, grazing animals, fences,
lowering woodlands, church steeples, barns and silos dotting the horizon
in short, concretized well-being. It's the best sort of countryside
America has to offer, and the equal of anything you'll find in Europe.
(Too bad European visitors rarely get to see it. When they're
done with New York City, they head out West, where the blazing sun glints
off the hangarlike steel barns and galvanized-iron prefabricated out
buildings, and where the desolate plains are relieved only by
farming roads and strange wildflowers and green
flowers.) Our forebears made it this way because they wanted it this
way . . . and they were right.

It's a lonely road, even through rolling country. In the flatter
parts of Transmontania — or the "Old Northwest," as it used to be
called — you will sometimes come upon narrow, straighter farm
roads, and these are paralleled on one or both sides by deep
ditches or drainage canals. These solitary roads carry little traffic
e xcept during Spring planting and Fall harvesting, when you may
encounter an occasional dusty red tractor or aged plow truck
gear. These are the roads the better part of the year will lead you
more often to farm fields than to farmhouses or barns. (If you do pass a
dwelling, it will more than likely be a tall, white frame house, like a
recessed in the hillside and strewed with flowers, or a
green roof; it will have green shutters on the windows, and there
will almost surely be an enormous tall tree planted at each of its
corners.) In a while you may park and go walking, to the land
or driving a combination through the ripened grain. (In years gone
by, they used to never fail to wave at you.) And sooner or later you'll
pass an old one-room schoolhouse, its bell motionless and forever
silent in its little belfry, a goat lounging on the front steps.

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By large, although, there will be little to distract you from the retrospective flow of bumpy asphalt across level land and rounded canals. There is the charm of such roads lies. In November the defunct stubblefields, overgrown by flocks of crows, lie glistening in the pale sun. And in February the wind whips up huge clouds of powdery snow which obscure the old farmsteads and woodlots on the horizon. Amid the quietness, there is plenty of room to think about the day of your birth and the day of your death, and what has happened, if anything, has been...

And finally, Transmontania has its share of old, “unimproved” roads. Though they may be seventy-five or a hundred or a hundred and fifty years old, they have been dirt roads all their lives and seem content to remain so. They are at their best in Winter, when the old gods of Greenland and Lapland and Spitzbergen come down from their mountain to reign over their rightful domain. By the middle of December these barren roads will have become covered with a hard, milky coating of ice several inches thick. The ditches or runnels at either side of them become filled with drifted snow which gorges imperceptibly with the roadbed on still, sunny mornings, and swirls wildly across the ice on dark afternoons when a storm is blowing up. Shadowy stands of birch and spruce and fir, their trunks glistening with snow, hem in these icy tracks and make them seem no narrower than they are. Generally there is not a sound to be heard, except the wind in the trees and the occasional cracking of a snow-burdened bough.

Such roads simply wind further and further into the woods. Some of them were originally laid out for the use of lumberjacks in the days of logging; others were put through for the benefit of hunters and trappers; and a few are so old that no one alive can remember who built them or why. But they all eventually come to a good end in a clearing, or beside a stretch of long-abandoned meadow, or among a wilderness of gray, frozen swamps and frosty deadfalls. There, if you are wearing your boots and your heaviest wool mackinaw, you can plot slowly and quietly deep into the shooting forest, where the animals are hibernating and there is no sign of life or movement. Standing there, listening to the intermittent rustle of falling snowflakes, you can be alone with the North.

These are the roads of Transmontania, more commonly known as the Midwest— the place they say is dull and bland and flat. There are those who have never even seen television nor in travelogues, the roads no chamber of commerce boasts of...

**Chapter 3**

**Starting Over**

I am walking to a selling establishment to buy time because Washington is dirty-gray and I am indistinguishable from any other member of my species. I also have a name. I also sell, sell, sell, so I can buy, buy, buy. Now I want to buy time.

**Chapter 4**

**Confusion**

I am walking, but there are cars all around. Cars. Flashy and fancy cars. I hate cars. I bought one last week.

I wonder where everyone is going? All these people out and about when usually they are contained in a structure which steals space from the outside. People build them and use them to create an illusion of security. They also sell and buy them.

It is Sunday; maybe these people are going to church. Church, 1 an edifice for religious worship; the chief services held there.

A church is also a structure which steals space from the outside.

**Chapter 5**

**Space**

People are abandoning, their cars and beginning to walk. There are people all around me. More and more are coming. My space is dwindling. Dwindling. Dwindling everytime another individual makes his way into the masses. Masses. I am one of the masses. I wonder where they are going?

**People.** People walking, people talking. People carrying possessions. Possessions? Where are they going?


Where are these people going?

I am so massed into this crowd I can hardly see. See. I see a door. The people are stuffing themselves into the door. They are stuffing themselves into the structure of a selling establishment. A structure which steals space from the outside. Let the people have it. Wait. There is a sign above the door. Time Machine. The sign says time machine.

**Chapter 6**

**Constructions**

"You can't select people with the qualities you admire and then blow up the rest of the world." I said that once. High among the qualities you'd admire would be peace, love and compassion. Blowing up the rest of the world would be a contradiction. No one could pull the trigger except someone who should be blown up.

Same with me.

I can't consume to avoid consuming in the future. The beginning would be contradictory to the ultimate goal of the end.

I am leaving. I am leaving. Let the other people buy time. I will stay in my own time. I will come into being as.

**Chapter 7**

AAAAAAAUUUUUUUUUUUUGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHH:
AAAAAAUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUHHHHH!(Scream therapy.)