SE DOEFEL DANER

MAXEY BROOKE
Sweeny, Texas

When the Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded England during the fifth century, they wiped out the native Celts both physically and linguistically. Except for place-names, only a half-dozen or so Celtic words entered Old English. By the ninth century, with the Celts all but exterminated, the Anglo-Saxons settled down to enjoy the good English life.

Then, from the east, came the land-hungry Danes. The role of the Anglo-Saxons reversed from invader to defender -- and they were not so proficient at the latter as at the former. The Danes gained control over much territory and wielded considerable political power. But, in the end, they suffered the fate reserved for all successful invaders of the Island: they became Englishmen.

However they fared in other areas, the Anglo-Saxons won linguistically. At the time of the Norman Conquest, the Anglo-Saxon word corpus has been variously estimated at thirty thousand, fifty thousand, or even more. But fewer than a thousand words of Danish origin were in that vocabulary. Something of the attitude of the Anglo-Saxons can be inferred from those Danish words absorbed.

In the case of a pair of opposites, the adopted Danish word often has the unfavorable connotation. They used the Danish uggligr (ugly) and rangr (wrong) but retained the Anglo-Saxon prettig (pretty) and riht (right). Other pairs were:

DANISH	ANGLO-SAXON
krokr (crook)	streht (straight)
drit (dirty)	clene (clean)
hitta (hit)	missan (miss)
deyja (die)	libban (live)
lagr (low)	heah (high)
illr (ill)	wel (well)
veikr (weak)	strang (strong)

Many words pertaining to violence are of Danish origin:

angr (anger)	utlaga (outlaw)	slatr (slaughter)
rannsaka (ransack)	skirren (scare)	

Other unpleasant words include:

afugr (awkward)	geispa (gasp)	snubba (snub)
dregg (dregs)	myrr (mire)	thrert (thwart)
drupa (droop)	mug (muggy)	

Don't get the idea that all Danish borrowings were dour:

glitra (glitter)	skilja (skill)	thrifast (thrive)
happ (happy)	thrif (thrift)	
husbondi (husband)	traust (trust)	

Perhaps the Bard knew something of this when he wrote about the melancholy Dane.

A NEW CROSSWORD PUZZLE BOOK

Stan Kurzban and Mel Rosen's The Compleat Cruciverbalist (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981; $9.95) looks at crossword puzzles from three viewpoints: the historian (24 pages), the solver (40 pages), and the composer (87 pages). As these page-counts hint, the authors believe that puzzle-solving (especially cryptic clues) can be intellectually stimulating, but the ultimate aphrodisiac is puzzle-composing. (They quote Mencken's "To ... the man who searches painfully for the perfect word ... there is ... the constant joy of sudden discovery".) Besides the personal satisfaction of creating a highly-interlocked structure of words, there is the possibility of seeing one's work in print; the authors give many tips for making puzzles more saleable, but wisely caution that this is a hard market to break into, and no road to riches.

The authors cover all puzzle types: conventional, cryptic, diagramless, acrostic and humorous. The beginning constructor should find especially useful their advice on how to make conventional puzzles more interesting, by selecting an underlying theme (that is, incorporating a set of related words) and by writing clever definitions. To illustrate, they counsel the avoidance of humdrum clues such as 'shade giver' or 'woody plant' for TREE, in favor of 'apple or pear', 'corner', 'picnic umbrella', 'Kilmer's symbol of beauty', '--- of knowledge', 'it grew in Brooklyn', or (groan!) 'da digit after two'.