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The World of Unusual Topicals

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For many years, I felt that the United States 3¢ Fort Bliss commemorative (Scott 976) was among the most unusual and toically rich stamps ever issued. That stamp, shown greatly enlarged below, features as its primary design a rocket lifting off.

However, as you can see if you really squint, that's just the tip of the iceberg! Also represented on the stamp is a yucca (*Agavaceae* family, not cactus), a Spanish mission and a fruit tree (in the upper left and right corners). The central vignette also features an American flag, military compound and troops. But there's much more. The triangular frame that surrounds the vignette also contains a covered wagon, dogs, horses, Indians, a stagecoach, cattle, camel, cactus, artillery, a tank, a truck and airplanes (as well as a few things I can't quite make out). That's at least 19 different topics represented on this one stamp! The value of this type of topical representation has not been lost on other countries over the years, and



I've noted (with both pleasure and dismay) the increasing trend by various postal administrations (including our own) to produce topically rich stamp issues that would, of course, have to be collected by the one growing area in the hobby: topicalists.

The Finland stamp shown enlarged on the front cover was released in 2010, and it – like the Fort Bliss stamp – immediately caught my attention. But in this case it was because of both the attractive design and unusual topics it depicts.

The most notable feature is the pair of fashionable crossed yellow boots. But there is much more. A quick scan of the design reveals also a lamp, telephone, mirror, books, a partial chair, stereo unit and shelving. Depending upon how you examine and classify what's

on this stamp, there are at least seven easily discernable topics represented.

This caused me to take a look at some of the other 2010 issues of Finland, and the realization that that country is now producing a number of topically dense issues.

Shown at left is a sheetlet of Fairy stamps released last January. The sheetlet contains five individually die-cut self-adhesive stamps, each with textured, glittered gowns and specially lacquered shiny wings. Now, as gimmick stamps these already have the thumbs-up symbol and probably the approval of thousands of little girls in Finland. But they are also very topically rich. A closer look at the stamps reveals



flowers, stars, butterflies, music, musical instruments, hearts and all kinds of other goodies. The same goes for the sheetlet of pop music stars shown beneath the Fairy sheetlet on the facing page. Between the individual stamps and sheetlet design, we see the obvious and not so obvious, including women, musical groups, costumes, record albums, stars, planets, musical instruments, trees, water, birds and even snakes. By my informal tabulation, each of these illustrated 2010 issues (and others not shown) has anywhere from six to more than a dozen topics represented.

Some collectors would argue that this trend by “real” postal administrations towards releasing an increasing number of topically rich stamps is a negative and bad for the hobby. Are these stamps designed to appeal to topical collectors? Of course they are – and many of us will buy them. But, after considerable thought, I’d have to disagree that this is a bad thing. Each of these Finnish stamps (as well as those from the United States, Great Britain and many other “real” countries) will be used on mail that will be seen by hundreds of thousands of potential collectors all over the world, each of whom could be attracted to the hobby by the topics depicted on those stamps.

It’s those stamps released by questionable postal entities that will likely never see postal duty with which I take issue. The intent of those so-called stamps is to do nothing more than separate a collector from his or her money ☹️



Philatelic Journals

(Routinely mentioned in *Topical Time*)

Atout Timbres: Aude Ben-Moha, editor, 37 rue des Jacobins, F-80036, Amiens, Cedex 1, France.

Canadian Stamp News: Bret Evans, editor, P.O. Box 28103, St. Catharines, Ontario, L2N 7P8, Canada.

Filacap: José Maurício do Prado, editor, Caixa Postal 06, Cachoeira Paulista SP, 12630-970, Brazil.

Gibbons Stamp Monthly: Hugh Jeffries, editor, 5 Parkside, Ringwood, Hampshire, BH24 3SH, Great Britain.

Israel Philatelist: Donald A. Chafetz, editor, 1943 Altonzono Drive, El Cajon CA 92020-1002 USA.

L’Echo de la Timbrologie: editor, 37 rue des Jacobins, F-80036, Amiens, Cedex 1, France.

Linn’s Stamp News: Michael Baadke, editor, P.O. Box 29, Sidney OH 45365-0029 USA.

Mekeel’s & Stamps Magazine: John L. Leszak, editor, 42 Sentry Way, Merrimack NH 03054-4429 USA.

Philatelic Exporter: Graham Phillips, editor, 7 Parkside, Christchurch Road, Ringwood, Hampshire, BH24 3SH, Great Britain.

Philatelic Exhibitor: Randy L. Neil, editor, P.O. Box 8512, Shawnee Mission KS 66208-8512 USA.

Philatelie Quebec: Guy Desrosiers, editor, 275 Rue Bryant, Sherbrooke, Quebec, J1J 3E6, Canada.

Setempe: Suzie Khumalo, editor, Private Bag X505, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa.

South African Philatelist: Chris Mobsby, editor, P.O. Box 131600, Benoryn, 1504, South Africa.

Stamp Insider: Albert W. Starkweather, editor, 5520 Gunn Hwy. #1406, Tampa FL 33624-2847 USA.

Stamp Lover: Michael M. Goodman, editor, The National Philatelic Society, c/o The British Museum & Archive, Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London WC1X 0DL, UK.

Stamp News Australasia: Kevin Morgan, editor, P.O. Box 1290, Upwey, Victoria, 3158, Australia.

U.S. Stamp News: John Hotchner, editor, P.O. Box 1125, Falls Church VA 22041-0125 USA.