

"I was held captive for a 3-day novel..."

and Atwood didn't even enter!"

Stuart Ross

At the end of one ray of light, where the wall met the floor, a single spider still slept. Soon, it would wake and find itself dead, its long legs curled inwards, dead, cooked by the sun. Its web would slowly fall, fall gently to the floor, and another fat, brown, crawling spider would take its place in the corner of the ceiling, to begin weaving, spinning dancing, the dance of the spider.

I stopped and looked at what I had written. Jeez, there were spiders

everywhere. I hadn't planned it, hadn't even wanted it. Later that afternoon, Juanita Venom, the hero's wife, would turn into a spider herself.

I got out of my seat, walked to the back of This Ain't The Rosedale Library and began heckling Paul Quarrington. He was working on something called *The Man Who Liked To Fall In Love*. Mine was called *Wooden Rooster*. Paul and I had been invited down to Charles Huisken's enigmatically-named Queen St. E. bookshop to be writers-in-residence for the first day of Pulp Press's Fourth International Three-Day Novel-Writing Contest. We were two of about 200 entrants across Canada this year.

I peeked through the magazine racks at Paul's pile of paper. He had so many pages! I'd never catch up. Maybe, but his margins were

narrower than mine. I stole some of his Doritos and returned to my typewriter. A customer in the store had just discovered one of my sex scenes and asked me if I was an aspiring Henry Miller. "Never read'm," I mumbled, slipping back into my seat.

"These are my friends, Mako and Sako."

Carlos stared at the two men. They were a horrifying sight. Their heads resembled nothing so much as deflated balloons. At first, Carlos had thought they were headless.

Jennifer took Carlos' hand. "They may be able to help you, Carlos. They have unique powers."

Carlos stammered. "Th-th-they have no skulls."

It was late Sunday afternoon. *Wooden Rooster* was my second three-day novel. This time I knew my mistakes. I had gone into intensive training a week earlier, reading Mickey Spillane, crummy horror novels, born-again religious pamphlets. But I hadn't counted on getting a fever. And it was becoming pretty hard to concentrate on the fate of Carlos Venom.

Pulp Press, located on Vancouver's Beatty St., had run the contest three times before. There had only been one winner. The Second International Novel Contest had driven notorious poet/playwright Tom Walmsley to create his depraved, brilliant legend, Dr. Tin. The year after, my own *Father, the Cowboys are Ready to Come Down From the Attic* was considered "the most promising entry" of an aborted competition. Outraged, I had sworn I'd never do it again.

"Ross, you hypocrite," I growled, trying to figure out how Carlos would ever be able to live in the deadly Antarctic climate. *Penguins!*

By midnight on Monday, September 7, the contest's closing, I had managed to sort of tie up the loose ends and make some obscure universal statement. Fifty-five pages. Not bad, but could have been longer. I stuffed it all in an envelope and tried to sleep.

The next morning, I boarded the bus for downtown to hand in my entry.

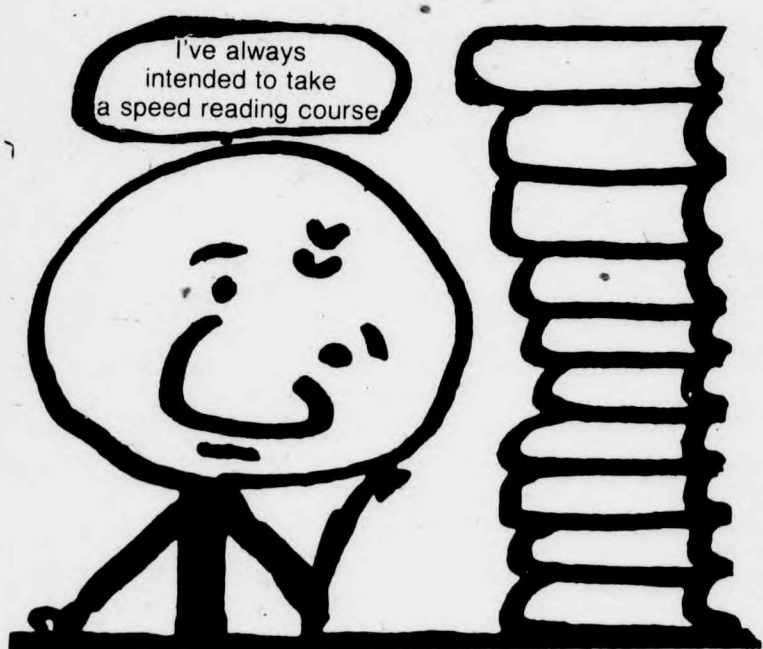
"That's sixty-five cents," snarled the driver.

"Oh, yeah, sorry," I explained. "I was up all weekend writing a three-day novel."

"That's nice. Sixty-five."

I stumbled to the back of the bus and thought about Harold Robbins.

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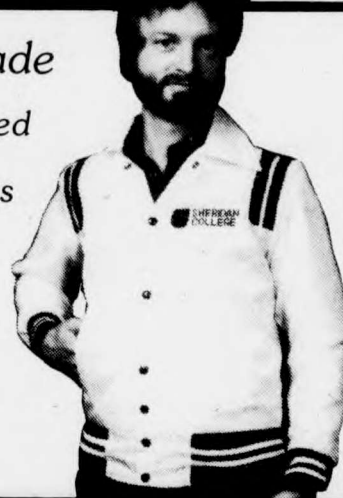


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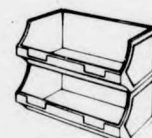


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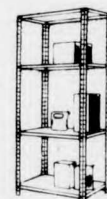
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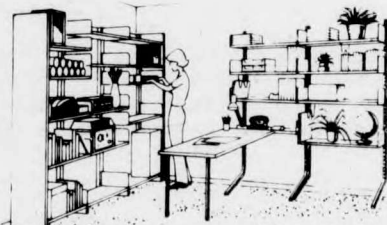
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