

Entertainment

Writing the three-day masterpiece

interview by Elaine Ostry

Imagine starting a novel on Friday and finishing it on Sunday. Imagine the intense mental, physical and emotional pressures of such a weekend. Every Labour Day weekend you too can share this experience by taking part in the Three Day Novel Contest, sponsored by Pulp Press.

It all started in a Vancouver bar. A bookstore owner, William Hoffer, and Stephen Osborne, a publisher, were talking over a few beers about how Voltaire wrote *Candide* in three days. They made a bet that they, too, could crank out a novel in a weekend. Both of them failed to finish their novels, but an idea was born. The next year they decided to try it again, as a formal competition, inviting other writers to participate, with three bookstores as sponsors. The Three Day Novel Competition had begun.

This year marks the ninth year of the contest. The competition has grown to include 60 sponsor bookstores throughout the U.S., England and Australia. Next year Pulp Press hopes to extend the contest to Paris. There is a lot of international interest in the competition, as shown by articles in the *New York Times* and the *L.A. Times*.

The prize of the contest is publication and a national tour, but sales have not matched the interest in the competition itself. The winners have received very good reviews, and "the quality of the literature is not substandard," claims Brian Lamb of Pulp Press.

The contest is unique because the three day novel is a genre in itself, the only genre governed by a time element. It is the only competition of its kind in the world. William French of the *Globe and Mail* calls it "Canada's only truly Canadian contribution to literature".

The competition works on an honours system. First you must register with a sponsor bookstore, Aspen Books is the sponsor in Edmonton. You must obtain an affidavit signed by a witness to prove that you have written the novel in three days. There is no entry fee.

Brian Lamb states that the majority of entrants have never written a novel before. The time constraint of the contest is stimulating to writers lacking discipline.

Although a rough outline made before the competition is acceptable, most writers prefer to write their novels spontaneously. One woman who has participated for several years sets up a table in the middle of a sidewalk in Vancouver and types up her novel there. A previous winner, Marc Diamond, author of *Momentum*, walked around Vancouver before the contest taking random photographs. He pinned them on the wall in front of his typewriter and wrote about these complete strangers and their locales.

This year Pulp Press had a public writing event at EXPO. Fifteen exhibitionist entrants wrote their novels with the general public peering over their shoulders. "It was like a circus," says Lamb.

Writers use the competition as a springboard for their careers. Jeff Dorin, who won with *This Guest of Summer*, had never been published before. He is now writing a second novel with the help of a government grant. b.p. nichol won in 1982 with *Still*, his first novel.

Although Pulp Press has yet to make a monetary profit from the contest, it is obvious that the Three Day Novel Competition has encouraged writers and made an interesting contribution to literature.

review by Scott Gordon

A plot is essential for this kind of thing. No bloody thesis statements, no whimpering introductions, and definitely no desperate conclusions. This is real writing where the authors actually have to think for themselves; no pandering to profs or teachers because this is fiction, the very stuff that words were meant to be

Tuesday, November 4, 1986



used for. I had no plot and it was 2 a.m. I only had 70 hours left of sheer utter sweat, toil, and desperation.

The object of this exercise is to write a novel in three days, of any length, on any subject, just as long as it's written between 12:01 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. during the Labour Day weekend. I had already wasted two hours, and I still had no idea of what I was going to write. So I did the only thing that a looney and/or writer would do; I had a beer.

Sometime around seven in the morning, just as the cartoons were about to begin, I had finally made progress; I had finished one six-pack and was beginning to start on another. I also found some inspiration. Why not write about three people who came out and homesteaded in Alberta at the turn of the century, had sons who died in The Great War, and eventually lost their farms during the Depression? I could call it "Dirt Farming in Alberta". Just as I was really getting into the plot, I realized that this very same theme had been used by about fifteen Alberta writers already.

I finally fell asleep just as the Ewoks were about to be stomped by a giant carrot.

I was exhausted. I had slept twelve hours and was in no mood to write, so I didn't. Enough time left, I thought. I can really power through this beast on Sunday and Monday. No wuckin' furries!

One of the disadvantages of being a university student is that your student friends will either drop by with a box of beer, or suggest going out for a debauch. Being a student who knows all of the student's etiquette (drink, smoke, abuse the first years as much as possible, study only when the mid-term is three hours away, and never, never start an essay either sober or only when you've cleaned your flat top to bottom and you have got no choice because it's due the next day at nine), I answered the phone. It was ringing, but I forgot to mention it above.

"Ya wanna go to the Strath?"
"Can't. Gotta write a book."
"Whaddya mean? Ya kin do that tomorrow."

"Right. See ya at about nine, or ten."

Student etiquette also demands that you speak in the most slovenly voice possible, except in class when you have been asked to comment on something or other, even though you never raised your hand and can't squirm out of it. When that happens, you must speak like a 'normal' human being, just to please your prof. If you can't do that, just say that you didn't read the stuff, and then continue doddling or fall back to sleep.

Saturday, of course, is a wash out. Not only did I not have a plot, I had no desire to write. I just could not get the old creative juices a-flowing. Writer's block.

What a cruel thing to have, particularly when the prize is money and getting your book published.

Sunday. Afternoon. Hangover. Have a bit of the hair of the dog that bit you. No plot. Nothing. Blank pages stare at you. This is beginning to sound like Richard Brautigan. Oh well.

While watching the news I came up with a death-killer idea. Why not use every cliché in the book and then invent some more? Yeah. But where to set it? What target is out there that needs to be taken down a notch? Who do I hate enough to make fun of? Who do I like enough to make fun of?

West Edmonton Mall.

I know. There have been so many wry comments made about that black hole of rampant capitalism. There have even been plays written about a mega-mall, spoofing it. But no one has ever used the Mel Brooks approach, no one has ever used the exaggeration approach. No one has my

mind, not even me. It would be perfect. Targets galore, and all of them deserving. Hell! It might even be entertaining. It might even make someone laugh. Perfect.

But would it win? Would this be my start on the road to the Nobel Prize? Could this mean that I might have a chance of appearing on *Front Page Challenge* and turn around so that I could avoid asking stupid questions to find out the identity of an Axehandle, Alberta woman who had shucked twelve pounds of corn in a minute?

I doubted it. But what the hell, it's worth a shot. Maybe the judges would be stoned when they read it and give me the prize for hallucinogenic reasons. I immediately went to bed to rest up for the grueling ordeal I knew awaited me.

If anyone reading this is a true student, then they know what it is like to do clutch-writing. This form of writing requires all of one's faculties of reason, knowledge, and bullshit powers; like writing an English or Philosophy paper. Just get in there and say what you want to say, and then pad it with useless drivel.

You're stuck. You've left it to the last minute, again. You have to get that paper in, no matter what. You know that there can be no diversion, including beer. You turn off the real you, and become a robot.

I cracked a barley sandwich and sat down at the typewriter. I had the plot, and I had only ten hours to get it down; a beginning, a middle, and an end. This was it. No turning back. I was about to write where no man had gone before. I began.

Once I get an idea into my head, I just go for it. I had the idea, I went for it, and I instantly regretted that I hadn't thought of it before. What the hey, hey? Thirty pages of prose is pretty good in ten hours. And I even used my mind. A novelty, don't you think?

I'm eagerly awaiting the phone call at around midnight tomorrow informing me that I've won. That is, I'll win only if the judges are stoned. Pray for me, please, and if I win, I'll remember the good 'ol U of Hay, and all the help they gave me.

Hahahahahahaha!

OMD slightly schizophrenic

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark
The Pacific Age
(Virgin/A & M)

review by Mike Spindloe

OMD are a kind of encapsulation of the current British music scene, which is to say that they are slightly schizophrenic. On the one hand, they can produce perfectly palatable pop like "If You Leave", from last year's *Pretty In Pink* movie soundtrack, or "Enola Gay", the happiest sounding song about an atom bomb you'll ever hear, while on the other they display a creative intelligence more suited to the avant garde.

The Pacific Age, OMD's seventh album, finds the band moving (like almost everyone else these days) in a more commercial direction without completely forsaking the experimental nature of past albums. True, the band has always been commercially successful in Britain, but the English have always been more receptive to new sounds than North American ears (or at least radio programmers). *The Pacific Age* could be viewed as OMD's attempt to woo the North American public.

In this regard, they certainly deserve at least some measure of success. There are a lot of interesting, if not strikingly original, musical ideas happening within the ten songs which comprise *The Pacific Age*. "Southern", for instance, throws excerpts from Martin Luther King speeches against an insistent, aggressive rhythm in condemning America's own ongoing version of apartheid, which could be

viewed as either a send-up or an imitation of Frankie Goes To Hollywood, depending on how cynical you're feeling when listening to it. The inclusion of the ironic quote that "like anyone else I would like to live a long life" emphasizes the only semi-serious nature of the song.

You can still dance to it, though, which is also true about much of the rest of the album, especially the opener, "Stay", an upbeat blast of synth pop that grabs you by the feet and doesn't let go. One of OMD's main strengths has always been their tasteful use of synthesizers to complement conventional instrumentation, and they've continued to polish their skills herein.

Soothing, ambient textures juxtaposed with funky rhythms within songs make *The Pacific Age* somehow both relaxing and uplifting to listen to. Its biggest failing, therefore, might be the fact that there are few surprises. The songs are tailored to radio length with the result that a song like "The Dead Girls", which begins to develop an interesting instrumental interplay, is cut off just as it starts to really cook.

Overall, however, *The Pacific Age* deserves a positive recommendation for its skillful blending of unusual moods within a relatively accessible framework. The sound is pure digital state of the art, with a credible production job by Steve Hague, enhancing the immediacy and sharpness of the music. OMD are evolving surely and steadily and *The Pacific Age*, while not quite a masterpiece, shows the band composing and playing with confidence and flair.