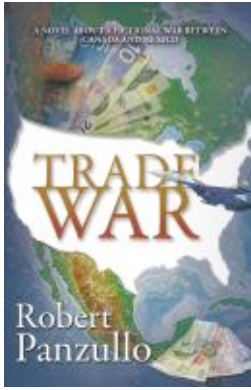


A NOVEL ABOUT A FICTIONAL WAR BETWEEN  
CANADA AND MEXICO

# TRADE WAR

Robert  
Panzullo



*Trade War* is a novel about a fictional war breaking out between Canada and Mexico. The two protagonists' stories are followed from the beginning until the end of the novel. The war is seen through their eyes and how it affects each of them on a personal level. Eventually, the two main characters are slowly drawn into a conflict that affects each of their respective countries on a larger geopolitical scale.

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# ONE

The sweet scent of *datura candidas* permeated the thickening tropical air, keeping the little sanctuary of their open back porch mosquito free. Suddenly almost springlike, the morning was a welcome respite from yesterday's typically searing Tijuana autumn afternoon. The three of them sat sipping guava juice, enjoying the relative quiet before the neighborhood stirred to life. A soft breeze occasionally swirled through the backyard carrying the faint musical refrains of a distant AM radio playing religious themed mariachi music. Violins, trumpets, *guitarrónes* and accordions accompanying a strident Spanish tenor and choir doppelring with each alternative wind gust through their unkempt and wildly burgeoning backyard garden.

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It was 10:30 on a Sunday morning, Mass was over, and their one day of the week to enjoy life together before facing the work week began all over again.

Aída refilled her mother's glass with the guava and milk concoction she had just finished mixing in the blender. Aída's mother, Carolina Flores always looked forward to spending this time of the week with her daughter and her boyfriend José. They were both gone six days a week toiling in the maquiladoras and too tired to converse with much enthusiasm after working their grueling ten hours work days in their respective sweat shops.

Aída was the spitting image of a younger Carolina, and almost her mother's sole reason for living. All of Carolina's hopes for improving her station in life lay with the daughter that she had devoted herself to since the day Aída's rather directionless father left the two of them to fend for themselves while Aída was still in diapers. It had been a trying life, yet Carolina had managed to eke out a paltry existence for the two of them by working a succession of menial cleaning jobs to somehow barely stave off abject poverty and starvation for the last two decades.

Aída had now blossomed into a very desirable young woman and Carolina, in her mind, understandably felt that a small debt of gratitude was not an unreasonable expectation. If pretty young Aída could possibly have inherited some of her wiles and could maybe land a successful young suitor, then Carolina could finally live the good life that she had by now earned ten times over through virtue of the obvious

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selflessness and the magnanimity of her previous, self-inflicted deprivation.

Though Aída had maybe not a conventionally beautiful body, short with a rather stout, and slightly barrel chested trunk, her face was unsurpassably flawless. She had *mestizo* mixed bloodlines that came with most of the standard indigenous facial features, the high cheek bones and liquid black irises which were barely discernible from her pupils had been conflated with Spanish genes giving her a beautifully exotic skin coloring that varied depending on the lighting between a raw and burnt sienna. She usually carried herself with an exuberant and effusively bright demeanor and temperament and this was the distinguishing trait that was obviously in direct opposition to her mother.

The problem for Carolina lay in the fact that Aída's live-in boyfriend didn't appear to be the financial savior that Carolina had been hoping for. José Baez had been dating Aída for two years now and he seemed to be from a lot closer to peasant stock than the aristocratic bloodlines that Carolina had been desiring. He was almost fully Indian in appearance, with a strong back, a good heart and a virtuous soul. He seemed to be graced with a wry sense of humor and although quiet and deferential most of the time, he could show some sparks of latent charisma, despite his often quiet demeanor. He appeared to be a very good man, a devout Catholic (which was fairly important to Carolina), and a hard worker with no apparent vices. He was however, not on any kind of fast track

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to financial independence, nor did he appear to be particularly well-educated.

The conflict that Carolina struggled with was that she actually really did like José and could see that he was an exceptionally honest and scrupulous young man. It was also very evident to her that he and Aída were genuinely compatible and completely in love with each other.

José was originally from a rural area just south of Mexicali where he helped his father raise wheat and sorghum. His father lost his farm when he couldn't compete after the American imports came flooding into the market in the mid 90's. Despondent at his sudden loss of provider status, his father took to enjoying Tecates with lime and salt a little too often and ranted bitterly against the influx of foreign imports from their northern neighbors. He blamed it on that ridiculous trade agreement - NAFTA, and those greedy gringos - the Americans and Canadians always wanting to put their hands in his pocket and each extracting their own respective pound of flesh. It was patently unfair, yet there was nothing he could do to stop it.

It was the epitome of "the vile, sordid side of big business," large corporate giants devouring smaller "mom and pop" operations and making their own version of "smash and grab" thievery of the Mexican countryside. Eventually, after several years of diminishing returns and waning spirits, he finally died a broken shell of a man almost five years ago. Some of his rants hit the mark with young José who, despite being a little too young to grasp



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all of the geopolitical intricacies, was old enough to realize that they had definitely fallen victims to an unfair system of political inequities and injustices. José still to this day guarded a romantic ideal of his early farming years that would never leave him; those were the happiest times of his life.

Life for José however was recently looking decidedly better. Although only 21, he had landed a job in an automotive factory last month and was now earning a full \$2.25 an hour, not bad for someone with no experience or job skills. Combined with Aída's \$1.75 per hour together they had a decent combined income. Putting food on the table was no longer a scary issue. In a place where minimum wage is \$5 per day they were well on their way to the good life, considering how young they were.

Although Carolina doted on Aída, she was still a little less gracious with her affection towards José, but she was starting to come around; especially since he landed that plum job at that auto factory. Maybe he wasn't so shiftless after all.

"How are you getting on over there José, do you like the job?" Carolina semi-grilled José.

Aída quickly shot a glance towards José imploring him to answer carefully.

"Not bad, keeps me busy," José warily answered above the din of the creaking old rocking chair which he was rocking back and forth upon all of the while mashing the cracked and broken tiles of their outdated and spartanly furnished back porch.

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"So do you see a future there, José?" Carolina pressed on a little further.

"He's doing really well mother. He will be in for a good raise by the end of the year," Aída interjected.

"Let's hope so, he's not really making all that much money now," Carolina lightly scolded, her penetrating black pupils burning flaming daggers directly into Aída's, all of the while completely ignoring José.

"Mother, he just started there, give him a little bit of a chance to prove himself for God's sake."

"Watch the profanity Aída," Carolina reproached.

"I'm doing OK, but I think we all know I'd rather be out in the country farming again." José offered diplomatically.

Carolina's eyes rolled at the thought of it.

"Yes, that's a great pipe dream José; now let's talk about how we're going to pay for this month's utility bills which are by-the-way incredibly higher than last month's."

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It was a crisp fall afternoon in Drummondville, a city straddling the Saint-François River in the heart of the French speaking Quebec. Honoré Peletier was helping his wife Soleil extract their three year old daughter Rui from her car seat. Soleil and Rui had just picked Honoré up where he had just been dropped off downtown, after returning from one of his alternating weekends of army reserve duty with the Canadian Forces. He was full of his usual vim as they proceeded up their newly resurfaced macadam driveway towards their single split-level house all the while Honoré was tossing his little girl up in the air and catching her in his arms amidst her fits of joyous laughter.

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There were pink and red flowers lining the walkway all of the way up to their beautifully maintained front portico. The walkway led up to their recently updated, modern glass French doors which lead to their modestly contemporary vestibule. The young Peletier family lived in a meticulously-manicured, superbly fastidious, middle-class neighborhood on the northeast side of Drummondville, an area called Saint-Charles-de-Drummond. No sign of their bourgeoisie status, or even the slightest affectation had been spared in keeping up with the status quo on their particular *Rue*.

It was Soleil who had been the driving force with her insistence that the family present a well-to-do, even slightly ostentatious display of wealth to the outside world. If it was a display that slightly exceeded their actual stature in economic terms, it didn't seem to bother Soleil quite as much as it did to Honoré.

Soleil threw her coat off and immediately made a beeline towards the kitchen. Honoré continued his wrestling match with Rui on the living room floor. Soleil knew that Honoré would be famished after the two hour ride from his base in Shawinigan and she felt a little guilty for not preparing anything earlier.

"Sorry Honoré but I didn't have that much time to start dinner before now," Soleil yelled in from the kitchen in French.

In Drummondville more 95% of the population speak in French only.

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"Well, what did you do all day?" Honoré answered slightly peeved.

"Oh, I don't know, I got caught up reading the Sunday paper most of the day."

Honoré rolled his eyes but then continued returning to the action of bear hugging his daughter and soon he quickly became distracted enough to forget dinner for the moment. He loved his playful roughhousing and Rui was always game for it, even if Soleil almost never seemed to be.

Honoré was tall at 6'3", reed thin with reddish blonde hair and wore a permanently affixed, cheerful expression on his sanguine countenance. He was extroverted and perpetually insouciant. Soleil found his light-hearted demeanor infectious, but it somehow belied a slightly roguish mien that occasionally surfaced during unguarded moments. He loved his hockey however, and the Canadienes first pre-season game was coming on in less than an hour. He had been a defenseman in juniors with a wide wingspan for breaking up passes but then as now he was a little too skinny to be of much use in the corners. Yet hockey had toughened his resolve, just as he enjoyed the physically demanding training and drilling of the primary reserves.

Soleil was a pretty and petite brunette. She had thick black shoulder length hair that stylishly framed her round, freckled pale face and she possessed a small, childlike upturned nose. She was socially and environmentally conscious and fairly opinionated. Possessing an ethically

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egalitarian value system, she had a soft spot for the socially underprivileged and so she had from an early age gravitated to her current career, which was social work. She loved to cook, mostly French cuisine, *tourtiere* - meat pie, butter tarts which both Honoré and Rui loved and of course poutine or *casse-croutes* which are French fried potatoes with cheese curds and smothered in beef gravy which is the national dish of Quebec and which Drummondville has laid claim to inventing.

Honoré decided that he couldn't wait for dinner to be cooked and jumped in the car to pick up some snacks at their local *dépanneurs* or convenience store, before the big game. The September afternoon had dipped to the low 50's, not exactly hockey weather but those Alberta Clippers weren't too far off. As he pulled into the convenience store he had a sudden epiphany, why not call up Gaston and Laurent to stop by and watch the game with him? He pulled out his cell and they both agreed and put in their orders for snacks since he was at the store anyway and they'd give him *des piasses* meaning a few dollars when they met up at his house.

Honoré had a nice 57" flat screen set up in his basement/recreation center and why not as he was doing well enough at work? Every morning Gaston and he would pile into his new Camry and do their one hour and fifteen minute commute down to Montréal splitting the gas money every week. They were both accountants for the Greenstone Group at their national headquarters.

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Greenstone was a premium bottled water company with international ownership. Although Honoré and Gaston were really just two low level grunts stuck in telephone booth sized cubicles, they both earned in the mid \$40's annually, about the average yearly salary for Quebec but better than average for Drummondville.

"The *Habs* look OK this season no?" Gaston interjected.

"Yeah but they'll probably choke again like last year," quipped Laurent.

"No way Laurent, you're an idiot, this'll be their year," added Honoré.

"We've gotta get some good seats for the opener, it's against the Maple Leafs," Gaston said.

"I think it's Laurent's treat this time, I don't think he paid one cent the five or six times we went last year," Honoré joked, elbowing Gaston.

Laurent was still "between jobs" and often suffered the brunt of the humor of the other two though they had all grown up in Drummondville and were really as close as brothers, hockey was the common denominator and mutual interest among the three of them and they still played pickup games occasionally. Laurent may have been the smallest of stature, but he was as scrappy as either of his other two friends while out on the ice.

Soleil came down between the second and third periods with a large plate covered with *Chiens Chauds* - steamed hotdogs covered with the works, the perfect comfort food to munch on while watching the game. She found herself, large

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glass of port wine in hand, engrossed in a nice lengthy conversation with Gaston as it was only a preseason game and total concentration wasn't de rigueur as of yet.

Being the most well educated person in the house, and certainly the most environmentally conscious, Soleil was suddenly borderline lecturing Gaston on his company's flagrant transgressions against the Canadian wilderness which he found surprisingly unpleasant as absolutely none of it was even remotely his fault.

Though at times Gaston found Soleil a little overbearing, she did have some redeeming qualities. If nothing else she genuinely seemed to care about the injustices of the plight of the Canadian everyman. On most occasions he thought that she was a genuinely good person who had a benevolent heart and for whom he had a great amount of respect, if not admiration. On other occasions, and this being one of them, she acted insufferably. Presently she seemed to be a little worse for wear from whatever port wine she was overindulging in.

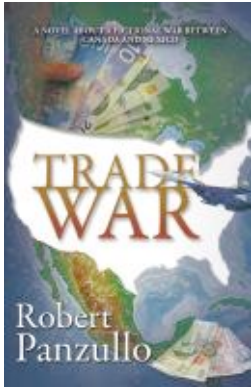
She acted like a rabid prosecutor as she flung accusations on Greentree's expropriation of Canada's natural resources and how their (NAFTA) pending Chapter 11 dispute settlement would set a bad precedent by taking away Canada's proprietary rights to water as private property. Gaston stood up and excused himself because he had suddenly found a renewed interest in the game, preseason or

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not it had to be better than being grilled and badgered on the witness stand by Soleil.

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