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Masked man robs ice cream store during middle of snowstorm

YAKIMA, Wash. (AP) — What's the definition of dumb? How about a guy who tries to rob an ice cream store during a snowstorm?

The heaviest snow of the winter was falling Friday night in Yakima. Andy Weed, owner of a Baskin-Robbins franchise, was about to close early because he hadn't seen a customer in nearly a half-hour.

Then, in walked the guy wearing the ski mask.

"He was saying things like how cold it was outside," Weed said. "I thought it was kind of strange that he was standing there with a ski mask on, but you meet all kinds down here."

The man asked for a scoop of the flavor of the month, and Weed obliged.

Still wearing the mask, the man fumbled for money to pay the tab. He managed to find enough coins, which he plopped on the counter.

Ice cream cone in hand, he started toward the door, but pulled out a small knife and turned back toward the counter. Weed said he jumped back from the cash register as the man started pounding on it to force it open.

"He was cursing and banging on it," Weed said. "I heaved some stuff at him."

The would-be robber was fur-

STRANGER

THAN FICTION

ther hampered by his refusal to drop his cone. Eventually, he gave up trying to open the cash drawer and fled, not even grabbing the money he'd left on the counter, police said.

The man is described as in his 20s, 5-feet-11, about 170 pounds and wearing a cream-colored ski mask, dark clothing and carrying a cone of Swiss chocolate.

Rebel Afghan faction requires men to wear beards at all times

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) — The Taliban rebels who hold much of southern Afghanistan have decreed that unless men grow beards in line with strict Islamic practices, they won't be allowed to work except as street-sweepers, a newspaper reported Sunday.

Street-cleaning is considered among the lowliest of jobs in much of the Islamic world.

Taliban rebels, many of whom are former Muslim religious students, say clean-shaven men are breaking with Islamic rituals, Pakistan's English-language newspaper *The News* reported.

Since entering the Afghan civil war in late 1994, the Taliban rebels have captured much of the southern half of the country and are encamped on the

outskirts of Kabul, the capital.

Where they have assumed control, Taliban leaders have forced residents to live by a strict Islamic code of conduct. Women must give up their jobs, education for girls is limited and men are expected to meet with Muslim prayer and dress rituals.

Leopard lounges on bed in midst of crowded neighborhood

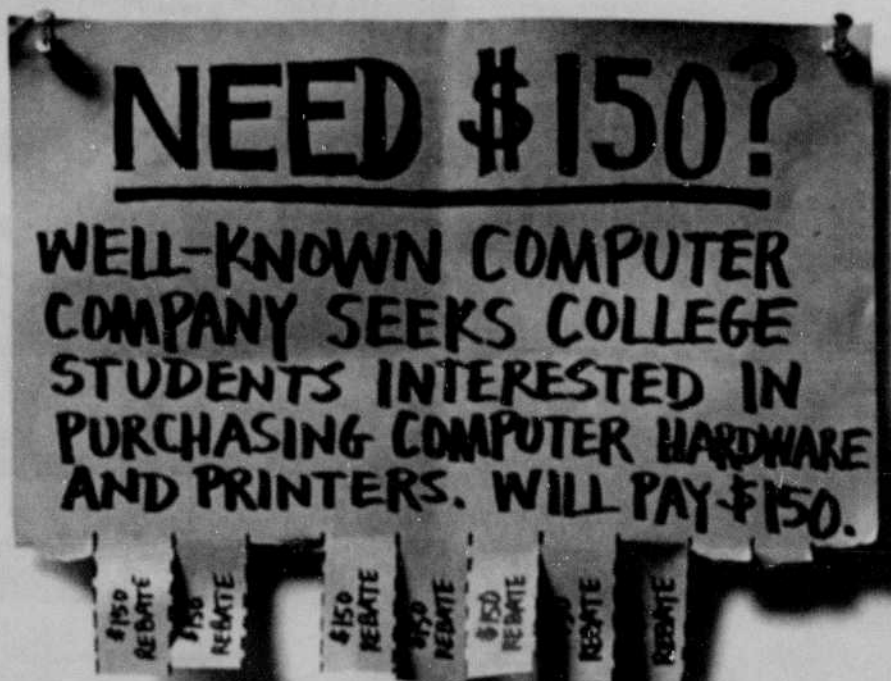
NEW DELHI, India (AP) — It could have been a scene of homey contentment: a man goes for a stroll, comes home and sees a cat stretched lazily on a bed.

It was anything but homey, however, because the cat was a leopard.

Ram Prakash Agarwal found the leopard lying in the guest room of his house in Meerut, a town about 75 miles east of New Delhi, the *Indian Express* newspaper reported Sunday.

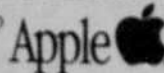
He slammed the door, bolted it and called wildlife wardens. Seven officials from the New Delhi Zoo came to Meerut and, after about 10 hours, managed to coax the leopard — now spooked by the commotion — out from under the bed and shoot him with tranquilizer darts.

Zoo officials said they did not know how the full-grown leopard reached the crowded residential neighborhood; the nearest forests are hundreds of miles away.



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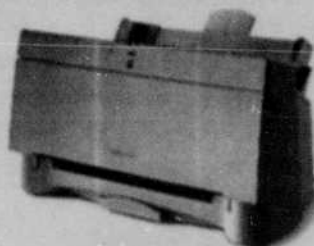
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