



2 Booksellers Launch Literary Contests

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NEW YORK -

It is high season for literary contests.

Two leading booksellers announced competitions Monday, continuing the industry's unending search for new talent and the increasing willingness to let others do the searching.

Amazon.com, Penguin Group (USA) and Hewlett-Packard Co. have launched the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award, which offers a contract with Penguin and a small advance, \$25,000. Meanwhile, Borders Group Inc., Court TV and Gather.com announced "The Next Great Crime Novel" competition, with the winner receiving \$5,000 and a publishing deal through Borders, the superstore chain.

"The Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award is an opportunity for our customers to have an exciting, significant voice in the process of discovering a new novelist," Russell Grandinetti, vice president of books for Amazon.com, said in a statement issued Monday.

"Driving quality manuscript submissions is the key to any successful writing contest," Borders' executive vice president for merchandising and marketing, Rob Gruen, said in a statement. "This puts Borders in a unique position to make a dream come true for an aspiring and deserving writer."

More than 200,000 books come out each year and countless others are written and never released. With publishers unable to keep up with all the unsolicited manuscripts, online literary contests have become a popular way to discover writers and bring them attention, often allowing the public to sift through the submissions.

But the record of success is mixed.

One competition, the Sobol Award, was canceled in January amid criticism of the proposed entry fee, \$85, and other contractual requirements. The contest received few entries despite a promised \$100,000 first prize and a deal with Simon & Schuster's Touchstone imprint.

Touchstone recently published the winners of the well-publicized "First Chapters" writing contest: Terry Shaw's "The Way Life Should Be" and Geoffrey Edwards' "Fire Bell in the Night." As of Sunday night, Shaw's novel ranked No. 65,143 on Amazon, while Edwards' was No. 132,155.

Penguin's director of online sales and marketing, Tim McCall, expects the Amazon winner to do better.

"Amazon has this amazing reach into the reading community," McCall told The Associated Press. "And we think people will be captivated by the way these manuscripts advance through the reviewing process."

Ann Binkley, director of public relations at Borders, which along with Gather.com helped sponsor "First Chapters," acknowledged that sales for the two winners were not "huge," but said they were up to expectations and that the superstore chain "was happy with" them.

"And we will be very aggressive with 'The Next Crime Novel' contest," Binkley told the AP. "The winner will be strongly promoted at our stores. You will be hearing a lot about it."

For the Amazon contest, authors with "an unpublished English-language novel manuscript" can submit their work any time between Monday and Nov. 5. There is no entry fee and all applicants can obtain free proof copies of their books through CreateSpace, a self-publishing service.

Manuscripts will first be evaluated by Amazon's leading customer reviewers, then judged by authors and industry professionals, including "Eat, Pray, Love" memoirist Elizabeth Gilbert, literary agent Eric Simonoff and the president of the National Book Critics Circle, John Freeman.

The winner, to be announced April 7, 2008, will also receive "an entertainment technology package" from Hewlett-Packard that will include a 50-inch plasma TV and a PhotoSmart Digital camera," according to Monday's statement.

The Borders contest is also free and entries can be submitted through Nov. 11, days after Court TV starts a new season of "Murder by the Book," featuring interviews with leading crime novelists. Manuscripts will initially be evaluated by members of Gather.com, the online social network, while judges for the finalists include best-selling authors Sandra Brown, David Baldacci and Harlan Coben.

The winner will be announced Feb. 4, 2008.

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