

**RWA® Mystery/Suspense Chapter presents  
The Daphne du Maurier Award  
For Excellence in Mystery/Suspense  
PUBLISHED DIVISION 2025  
CONTEST RULES**

The Daphne du Maurier Award for Excellence in Mystery/Suspense is a writing contest with two divisions, one for published and one for unpublished authors. The Romance Writers of America Mystery/Suspense Chapter #144's contest is named for Daphne du Maurier, the author of *Rebecca*, a suspense novel with romantic and gothic overtones and a precursor to today's romantic suspense.

The contest provides helpful feedback by trained judges. Winning or placing in the competition adds a boost to the entrant's writing career.

**These rules apply to the Published Division of the contest.**

**Eligibility:**

The Romance Writers of America Mystery/Suspense Chapter #144, also known as Kiss of Death (KOD), is an affiliated chapter of Romance Writers of America, Inc. (RWA®). As an RWA chapter, this chapter must comply with RWA's bylaws and policies and procedures regarding chapters as well as the Chapter Affiliation Agreement. For that reason, children's books and middle grade books are not eligible for entry into the contest.

- The Daphne du Maurier Award for Excellence in Mystery/Suspense is open to any author over the age of 18 who published book-length fiction with a 2024 copyright (See below under Submissions for details).
- For purposes of The Daphne du Maurier Award for Excellence writing contest, an entry is considered published if the novel has been made publicly available either for free or for purchase. This includes all publishing paths: traditional, self/independent publishing, vanity press, online applications, etc.
- All entries must meet the minimum length for their category.
- Membership in Romance Writers of America and/or KOD is NOT a requirement for entry.
- Authors may enter no more than 2 books per category, and each book can only be entered once.
- Entries should not contain problematic content that is potentially insensitive, upsetting, offensive, or inappropriate to specific groups.
- The Romance Writers of America prohibits the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as text generators, plot generators, paraphrasers, summarizers, or translators, in the preparation and submission of contest works

## Published Contest Categories

**Short Romantic Mystery/Suspense:** works with a central romance that have a word count of 40k-65k.

**Historical Romantic Mystery/Suspense:** works over 65,000 words with a central romance set in a time that predates the end of World War II.

**Cozy Mystery:** works over 40,000 words with an amateur sleuth, where sex, violence, and profanity occur off the page. Entries in the category are not required to have a romantic storyline.

**Mainstream Mystery/Suspense:** any work over 65,000 words where the mystery/suspense is the main plot.

**Paranormal (PTTF) Romantic Mystery/Suspense:** works over 65,000 words with a central romance and in which paranormal, fantasy, time travel, and/or futuristic elements play a significant role.

**Long Romantic Mystery/Suspense:** Novels with a central romance that have a word count of 65k and above.

**Novella Mystery/Suspense:** any work between 25,000 and 40,000 words where the mystery/suspense is the main plot. The novella may have other elements, such as romance, paranormal, historical, or contemporary.

## Entry Caps:

Each category is limited to 50 entries. Once entry caps have been met, the website will not allow additional entries. There is no waitlist.

## Changes to categories

If a category does not receive at least 15 entries, it will be combined with another category at the discretion of the Contest Committee. Contestants will be informed before judging begins and will have the option to withdraw their entry and have their entry fees refunded. Please note that the entries will still be judged by the category judges. For example, a historical entry will still be judged by a historical judge.

The novella category has been added in honor of Daphne du Maurier, as her body of work included many short stories and novellas. The spiritual category has been removed, however those entries should choose a category based on their other main elements, such as time frame.

In 2024, we have added the Cozy Mystery Category! In the past the contestants entered the Mainstream Category, but we've had enough interest to create its own category. The Cozy Mystery Category is open for manuscripts written in 2024 that are over 40,000 words. If your cozy mystery is under 40,000 words, please consider entering the novella category. **Entry Timeframe and**

## Deadline:

- The contest opens for entries on January 1, 2024, at 12:01 AM MT.
- A single PDF file copy of your book must be received **ELECTRONICALLY NO LATER** than 11:59 PM Mountain Time, March 15, 2024.
- **CAREFULLY** review all the rules to ensure the PDF is formatted corrected for the contest.

## **Entry Payment:**

- Entry Fee: \$15 for KOD members; \$30 non-KOD members.
- Payments will be made through the contest registration process and may be submitted using PayPal, credit card, personal check drawn on a US bank, or money order in US funds. Links are provided on the entry form. (See more in the How to Enter section below.)
- When paying by personal check or money order you must still complete the payment process section, and then include the invoice and entry numbers on your payment.
- Personal checks and money orders must be postmarked no later than March 15, 2024, made payable to RWA® Romantic Suspense/Mystery Chapter #144 and sent to the chapter treasurer per instructions on the Daphne du Maurier Contest confirmation email.
- Entries without completed profile, entry form, and payment will not be judged. Entry fee will not be returned, and PDF files will be deleted (See How to Enter section below).
- For questions regarding the entry payment process, please email the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chair at: [kodcontest@gmail.com](mailto:kodcontest@gmail.com).

## **Helpful Hints for Determining Category**

A romantic suspense novel requires an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending for the love interests (a happily-ever-after), as well as following the genre conventions for suspense or mystery. A suspense novel may have romantic elements, where there are love interests who do not have an optimistic ending, for example, the Jack Reacher series may have a romance in the story, but the couple separate with no intention of pursuing the relationship. Another example of a story with romantic elements is the movie Titanic, where the romance is throughout the story, but Jack dies at the end. If you aren't sure if your book has romantic elements or a romance, consider entering it in the mainstream category.

- Stories that are entered in the Romantic Mystery/Suspense categories are required to contain a love story (either as the primary or secondary focus of the story) that concludes in an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending.
- For additional guidelines about the definition of the romance genre, visit the RWA website: [https://www.rwa.org/Online/Romance\\_Genre/About\\_Romance\\_Genre.aspx](https://www.rwa.org/Online/Romance_Genre/About_Romance_Genre.aspx)
- Entries in the mainstream mystery/suspense category are not required to contain a romantic storyline, nor any romantic elements.
- If the story contains spiritual elements, please use the appropriate mystery suspense category based on other story elements.
- It is the author's responsibility to enter the work in the correct category. All clarifications as to category should be made prior to submission. If you have questions, please direct them to the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chair at: [kodcontest@gmail.com](mailto:kodcontest@gmail.com).

## **Submissions:**

- For each entry, entrants will electronically submit a single PDF file copy of the published book.

- The file must include the copyright page.
- Maximum size of pdf file cannot exceed 10MB.
- If you are entering a novella that is part of an anthology, please include the anthology copyright page with your PDF file.
- Be sure to enable the accessibility feature to make the document easy for people with disabilities to read.
- Be sure that any DRM, privacy restrictions, and password requirements have been disabled. We need the judge to be able to open the file without a password.
- Novels released before January 1, 2024, are not eligible.
- The contestant **MUST SUPPLY** the entry as a single **PDF FILE FORMAT** with copyright page regardless of publishing venue. If applicable, watermarks are to be placed in the header and/or footer of each page. Watermarks across the body of a page **MUST BE REMOVED** prior to entry.
- NO DISK SUBMISSIONS
- YOUR BOOK MUST BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY.
- NO PRINT BOOKS.

#### **Submission Package:**

- For each entry, entrants will electronically submit a single pdf file copy of the book with the copyright page.
- Single pdf file is limited to 10MB.
- If you have questions, please contact the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chairs at: [kodcontest@gmail.com](mailto:kodcontest@gmail.com). Please include the category you are planning to enter.

#### **How to Enter:**

All entries are registered and uploaded through the Daphne du Maurier Contest website at: <http://www.kodcontest.com/>

**Important: if you have previously entered or judged the Daphne du Maurier Contest, you will already have a profile on the contest website. DO NOT create a new profile.**

Log on to the contest website using the email address you used originally. If you do not remember it, please contact the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chair at: [kodcontest@gmail.com](mailto:kodcontest@gmail.com). Please do **NOT** create a new profile.

- After logging in, click the button that says, "Check Your Profile." Review the information and ensure all fields are complete and accurate. Please include both a secondary email address and an alternate telephone number.
- If you need to make changes, click Edit Profile. Make corrections and click Submit. ○ If information is accurate, click Entries.
- To register your entry, click Enter Published Contest.

- Complete all fields and upload your single pdf file. (File must be PDF with the accessibility feature enabled to make the document easy for people with disabilities to read.)
- Click Save.
- Be sure to make your entry fee payment by clicking Pay Now.
- After you have made your payment, this button will change to “Paid.”
- You will receive a confirmation email for your entry from the Contest Committee. If you do not receive it within a few minutes, please check your “SPAM” or “Junk” folder.
- If you have not received the confirmation within 60 minutes, please contact the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chair at: [kodcontest@gmail.com](mailto:kodcontest@gmail.com)

If you have issues during the registration process, please email the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chair at: [kodcontest@gmail.com](mailto:kodcontest@gmail.com)

### **Complete your Judge Profile:**

All entrants are encouraged to judge the contest. You will not be assigned entries from the category that you have entered. Judge Training will be sent via email in late March. Please complete all training before reading your assigned entries.

### **Judging:**

- Score sheets are based on 100 points.
- Each entry will have three judges. The lowest score will be dropped to eliminate discrepancy judging.
- Judges are asked to make comments on the score sheet.

### **Score Sheets:**

- All judging will be done electronically.
- Score sheets will be returned electronically to Finalists after the conclusion of the winners' announcement at the Annual Awards Ceremony All others will be returned at the conclusion of the first round.
- Entries must meet earn at least 160 points to be considered for a finalist position.
- In the event of a finalist's tie, the third score that was originally dropped will be considered in order to break the tie. If necessary, the story will be reviewed by three more judges.

### **Disqualification:**

Entries that are disqualified will not have their fees refunded. Entries can be disqualified for any of the following reasons:

- Entry was published before January 1, 2024.
- Entry is not the contestant's own work.
- Entry is entered in the wrong category.
- The entry violates the Mission or DEIA statements of the Kiss of Death Chapter.

- The KOD Board determines that the entry does not exemplify excellence in the Mystery/Suspense genre.

**Failure to follow the guidelines may result in disqualification and non-refund of entry fees.**

KOD's Mission Statement: The Romance Writers of America Mystery/Romantic Suspense Chapter #144, also known as Kiss of Death, is organized to promote excellence in mystery/romantic suspense fiction and advance the professional interests of career-focused romance writers within the genre of mystery/romantic suspense through networking and advocacy, dissemination of information, professional education, publications, and other appropriate activities, and to provide continuing support for writers within the romance publishing industry. Our goal is to offer you, the romantic suspense writer, services and support to energize, enhance and showcase your writing experience.

KOD's DEIA Statement: The Kiss of Death Chapter is committed to fostering an inclusive, diverse, accessible, and equitable community by supporting and empowering individuals of any culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, gender identity, age, body shape and size, and by creating a safe community for all. Kiss of Death recognizes that while words have power, actions speak louder. Kiss of Death commits to instilling these values into every aspect of our mission.

**Announcement of Finalists and Winners:**

- Under normal circumstances, Finalists will be notified on or before June 15, 2024.
- Finalists' names and book titles will be posted to the chapter website.
- Winners will be announced during the Awards Ceremony at the Death by Chocolate Party held annually during the RWA National Conference, unless otherwise announced by the Contest Committee.
- All finalists will receive a certificate and a digital medallion stating Finalist or First Place (as appropriate) and a voucher for one COFFIN online class.
- The first place entry in each category will also receive an engraved bookmark or equivalent prize, and an additional voucher for one COFFIN online class.
- The top overall scoring entry will also receive a plaque or alternative award as determined by the contest committee and a third voucher for a COFFIN class.

**If you have questions, please contact the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chair at: [kodcontest@gmail.com](mailto:kodcontest@gmail.com)**