

**RWA® Mystery/Suspense Chapter presents
The Daphne du Maurier Award
For Excellence in Mystery/Suspense
UNPUBLISHED DIVISION 2025 CONTEST RULES**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Maurier Award for Excellence in Mystery/Suspense is a writing contest with two divisions, one for published and one for unpublished authors.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 #144s 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These rules apply to the Unpublished Division of the contest.

Eligibility:

The Romance Writers of America Mystery/Suspense Chapter #144, also known as Kiss of Death, 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, contestants must be over the age of 18, and children's books and middle grade books are not eligible for entry into the contest.

Authors may enter the Unpublished Division if prior to Dec 31, 2024:

- They have never published in book-length fiction (40,000 words or more). –OR– They have never published book length fiction (40,000 words or more) in the mystery/suspense genres. –OR–
- They have not published book-length fiction in any genre the last five years.

Please note:

- Any manuscript that has previously been a finalist in The Daphne du Maurier Award for Excellence is not eligible for entry.
- Members of the KOD Board are not allowed to enter the contest.
- 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
- Membership in Romance Writers of America and/or KOD is NOT a requirement for entry.

- Each author may enter as many manuscripts as they like. However, each manuscript may only be entered in one category and there is a limit of two manuscripts per author in each category.

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.

Entry Timeframe and Deadline:

- The contest opens for entries on January 1, 2025, at 12:01 AM MT. Entries will not be forwarded to judges until all entries are received.
- Entries must be received **ELECTRONICALLY NO LATER** than 11:59 PM Mountain Time, March 15, 2025. You will receive an entry confirmation email.

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 on 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 complete the payment process section and include the invoice and entry numbers on your payment.
- Personal checks and money orders must be postmarked no later than **March 16, 2025**, made payable to **RWA Romantic Suspense/Mystery Chapter #144** and sent to the chapter treasurer per the instructions on the Daphne du Maurier Contest confirmation email.
- Entries without completed profile, entry form and correct payment will not be judged; and any entry fee paid will not be returned (See How to Enter section below.).
- For questions regarding the entry payment process, please email the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chairs at: kodcontest@gmail.com.

Unpublished Contest Categories

Short Romantic Mystery/Suspense: any manuscript with a central romance that (when complete) will have a word count of 40k-65k.

Long Romantic Mystery/Suspense: any manuscript with a central romance that (when complete) will have a word count of 65k and above.

Historical Romantic Mystery/Suspense: any manuscript with a central romance set in a time that predates the end of World War II.

Paranormal (PTTF) Romantic Mystery/Suspense: any manuscript with a central romance and in which paranormal, time travel, fantasy and/or futuristic elements play a significant role.

Cozy Mystery: any manuscript 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 manuscript where mystery/suspense is the main plot. Entries in the category are not required to have a romantic storyline.

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. Therefore, the Jack Reacher story is eligible for the Mainstream Category, but not the Romantic Suspense Category. 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
- 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.

Submissions:

- For each entry, entrants will electronically submit the **FIRST 5,000 words** of the manuscript as a PDF.

- Following the text of the manuscript, include a synopsis of no more than **675 words**. The synopsis is not judged but included for the judges' reference. (See formatting specifics below.)
- The synopsis should include the major character developments and plot points of the story, including the resolution to the mystery and/or other revelations at the end. Yes, this means there are spoilers in the synopsis.

Formatting & Submitting Your Entry:

- One inch margins.
- 12 Pt. or larger Arial, Courier, Times New Roman or similar legible font. (Smaller fonts will not be accepted.)
- Double-spaced.
- Each page should have a one-line header with title and category on the left side; page number on the right side.
- **CONTESTANT'S NAME MAY NOT APPEAR ON THE ENTRY. ANY ENTRY WITH THE CONTESTANT'S NAME WILL BE DISQUALIFIED.**
- Entries must be **PDF**.
- **Be sure to remove your name from all properties. It is your responsibility to ensure your name is correctly removed.**
- **Be sure to enable the accessibility feature to make the document easy for people with disabilities to read.**
- Document name should be the **title** of the manuscript **only**.
- **Combine all manuscript pages and synopsis in one file.** Paste synopsis **after** the manuscript pages. All pages should be in standard manuscript format.

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

Submission Package:

- Entry Form will be filled in at time of submission.
- Entry: No more than 5,000 words. Best advice: don't try to squeeze in as many words to reach the 5,000 word count; it's far more important to end on a hook. This means you may submit less than 5,000 words. **If you submit more than 5,000 words, your entry may be disqualified.**
- Synopsis: No more than 675 double-spaced words. **If you submit more than a 675 word synopsis, your entry may be disqualified.**
- Your entry will be given an entry number and submitted to the coordinator of the category you have selected. You will receive a confirmation email with the entry number.

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 using the email address you used originally. If you do not remember it, please contact the Daphne Contest Chair at: 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 completed. Please be sure to 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 Unpublished Contest.
- Complete all fields and upload your PDF file.
- Click Save.
- Enter whether you are a member of KOD or a non-member.
- 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 Chairs at: kodcontest@gmail.com.

If you have issues during the registration process, please email the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chairs at: kodcontest@gmail.com.

Complete your Judge Profile:

We encourage all entrants 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 unpublished category is judged on a score sheet specific to the requirements of the category.

- Each entry will have four first-round judges. The lowest score will be dropped to eliminate discrepancy judging.
- Judges are strongly urged to make comments on the score sheet.
- The finalists must receive a final score totaling at least 240 points.
- The top three finalists will then be judged by agents and editors. The entry with the highest point value is the winner.

Score Sheets:

- All judging will be done electronically.
- Score sheets will be returned 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.
- In the event of a finalist's tie, the fourth 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:

- The author does not fit the "Unpublished" guidelines outlined in these rules.
- Entry is not the contestant's own work.
- The author has not followed the submission guidelines.
- 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 in early May.
- Winners are usually announced during the Awards Ceremony at the Death by Chocolate Party held annually during the RWA National Conference in July, however, the ceremony may be rescheduled if necessary.
- All finalists will receive an award certificate and digital medallion stating Finalist or First Place (as appropriate), and a voucher for one online COFFIN 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.
- The overall top scoring entry in the Unpublished Division will also receive a decorative plaque or alternative award as determined by the contest committee, a certificate and digital medallion stating Overall Winner, and a third voucher for an online COFFIN class.

If you have questions, please contact the Daphne du Maurier Contest Chairs at: kodcontest@gmail.com.