

## TAILPIECE

### Mangling of the art of writing

The best of the worst, the tops of the lowest: the most awful assaults on the art of writing have been honoured in the annual Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest.

The Bulwer-Lytton contest is administered by San Jose State University Professor Scott Rice, the founder and "grand panjandrum" of the literary disgrace.

Despite the humour that surrounds its awarding, Professor Rice stresses that the competition is not a "joke-writing contest. It really takes a very good writer to deliberately write badly".

The contest gets its name from the 19th century English writer Edward George Bulwer-Lytton whose characteristic turgid style is captured in the opening line to one of his novels: "It was a dark and stormy night...".

This year's No-Ribbon Panel of Undistinguished Judges examined more than 11 000 entries, searching for the most miserable, least readable and rottenest lead sentence to the crummiest novel imaginable.

The top prize, the "creme de la dreck", went to Rachel Sheeley (20), a journalism student at Franklin College in Indiana. This introduction, submitted by Miss Sheeley, brought her to the top - or should it be bottom - of the heap:

"Like an expensive sports car, fine-tuned and well-built, Portia was sleek, shapely and gorgeous, her red jumpsuit moulding her body, which was as warm as the seatcovers in July, her hair as dark as new tyres, her eyes flashing like bright hubcaps, and her lips dewy as the beads of fresh rain on the hood; she was a woman driven - fuelled by a single accelerant - and she needed a man, a man who wouldn't shift from his views, a man to steer her along the right road: a man like Alf Romeo."

Professor Rice said the contest was a gentle reminder to the world of letters that it was acceptable to lighten up, forget the grammar books for a minute and have some fun.

Awards were also made in selected categories.

Mr R.B. Nelson from Nottinghamshire, England, won the section for detective novels: "With the radio squawking that a 4711 was in progress at 37th and 127th, Murphy knocked car 495 into 3rd and headed up 5th at 70, little reckoning, as he thumbed his .38, that this would be the day when his number came up."

Other award-winning performances included -

*Brian W. Holmes (puns)*: "Once a month, when the moon is full, Reverend Jim Bleaker and his lovely wife Teddi invite members of the church to the parsonage for an evening of hymn singing, followed by cookies, tea, and a frenzied orgy on the lawn outside, making sure, of course, to take all the usual precautions for safe sects."

*Joan Mazulewicz (purple prose)*: "The silent snow fell relentlessly, unceasingly, mercilessly from the sordid, sullied surreality of the sky as if some enormous, ethereal diner were shaking grated parmesan on the great, soggy meatball that was earth."

*Michael Stratford (science fiction): "Shirley doubted that her alien escort, composed as he was of vegetable matter, seaweed, and a thick coating of swampy muck, would be a suitable date for the Intergalactic kegger, but he turned out to be a real FUNGI."*

Commendable efforts all!

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