



Fiction From the Heartland Contest

Official Rules

Entries open February 1st, 2026

Contest is limited to 75 entries.

ELIGIBILITY:

- Contest is open to any **unpublished** novel in book-length fiction (40K min.) in the past five years of contest deadline AND uncontracted at the time of deadline.
- The work does not have to be complete.
- Multiple entries allowed in same or different category (separate fees and entries apply).
- An entry may NOT be entered in more than one category.
- You may NOT enter any work that has previously won or finished in the Fiction From the Heartland Contest.
- Current members of Mid-America Romance Authors may not submit works for consideration.

CATEGORIES: (Entry must have a projected minimum length of 40,000 words)

- **Contemporary Romance**
- **Historical Romance**
- **Romantic Suspense**
- **Paranormal Romance** (includes time travel, fantasy and futuristic)
- **Young Adult Romance / New Adult Romance**
- **Inspirational / Sweet Romance**
- **LGBTQ/Diversity welcome in any of the above categories.**

JUDGING:

- First Round
 - Entries will be judged by two (2) judges.

- o In the event that preliminary scores have more than a 40 point difference (20% discrepancy) AND the entry achieved 85% or greater of total points possible from one judge, a third judge will be used and lowest score will be dropped.
- o Each entrant will receive TWO written critiques and score sheets.
- Final Round
 - o **Three** overall finalists from all categories will be judged by **Sharona Wilhelm, owner of Scarsdale publishing, editor and author.**
 - o In the event of a tie for first, second or third place in the final round, first round scores will be used as a tie-breaker.
 - o Final round scores made by editor or agent WILL NOT be released to contestants.
 - o Any comments made by final round judge will be released when all final round judging is complete.

AWARDS:

- First place/highest scored manuscript will receive \$50 and a Certificate.
- Second and third place will receive Placement Certificates.
- Finalists will be notified **June 10st** and posted on our website.

DEADLINES:

- Entries and fees must be RECEIVED by 11:59 p.m. CST March 15th, 2026.
- Failure to send payment or comply with contest rules will disqualify the entry. Fee will not be refunded.
- **Contest is limited to 75 entries.**

FORMAT REQUIREMENTS:

The first page of entry must start with Prologue or Chapter 1. The entry shall NOT exceed 10 pages or 2,500 words, including any prologue. A one-page synopsis is required but will not be judged and not included in word count.

- Please save entry in file format of Title-Category.
 - o *Example: Sweet Enemy-Historical.doc*
- Entry and synopsis should be saved and submitted as 1 file, with synopsis at the end.
- Double spaced and saved in a Word document.
- 1 inch margin on all sides.
- 12 point Courier New or Times New Roman.
- Author name must NOT appear on the manuscript.
- **Entry must not exceed 2,500 words including prologue.**
- Header in entry document.

- o Title/Category on Left.
- o Page numbers on Right.

SUBMISSION PROCEDURES:

- **Fee is \$30 per entry.**
- A separate Entry Form and fee must be submitted with each entry.
- Entry form can be found here: <https://www.marakc.com/ffhcontest2026>
- Paypal Transaction ID will be needed on submission.
 - o Pay via Paypal.
 - o No checks will be accepted.
- Electronic manuscript sample shall be emailed as **PDF** or **Doc** to:
fictionfromtheheartland@marakc.com