

Authors climb soaring purple peaks of bad prose

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — It was the best of prose, it was the worst of prose. Well, actually, it was just the worst of prose.

And the worst of the worst included such phrases as "a shattered computer terminal lying there like a silicon armadillo left to rot on the information highway."

It was the 1994 Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest, an annual tribute to lousy literature named after the British author who opened his 1830 novel "Paul Clifford" with the immortal — or undead — line, "It was a dark and stormy night."

This year's winning entries were no better, said San Jose State University English professor Scott Rice, who announced the results Tuesday.

Hacks from every state of the union entered, along with alleged writers from Canada, Britain, Germany, Australia, Switzerland and Ghana. There were nearly 9,000 entries.

"Considering it's a contest without any standards, we've held to our standards," Rice said.

The winner was Larry Brill, an anchorman for KXAN,

an NBC affiliate in Austin, Texas. Brill said he had an unfair advantage because he writes television news.

His entry:

"As the fading light of a dying day filtered through the window blinds, Roger stood over his victim with a smoking .45, surprised at the serenity that filled him after pumping six slugs into the bloodless tyrant that had mocked him day after day, and then he shuffled out of the office with one last look back at the shattered computer terminal lying there like a silicon armadillo left to rot on the information highway."

The winner is gearing up for bigger things now.

"Everybody has the great American novel in them somewhere," Brill said. "Now that I've made my mark with one sentence, my goal is to string three or four together."

As his prize, Brill will receive a cheap non-armadillo word processor, Rice said.

The vile pun award went to Richard Patching, of Calgary, Canada, with an Arnold Schwarzenegger stretch:

"The ex-weightlifter-director started the rehearsals by telling us, 'Okay, we gonna be baroque composers in dis one: you be Telemann, you be Vivaldi, and I'll be Bach.'"

The romance category prize went to Gini Jones of Santa Fe, N.M., with an entry that included a hero, "his skin aglow with a tan of catfish-fried perfection ..."

The adventure category winner, Leann Roberts of Iron Station, N.C., had her protagonist Nick Savage musing his sled through a blinding snowstorm as he thought, "Next time I'm hooking up the dogs."

There is an obligatory serious side to the competition. Making writers aware of bad prose and hackneyed literary conventions can help them avoid those mistakes in serious work.

But there is little fear everyone will turn to serious work, and Rice expects to have ample entries for future contests.

"I believe nothing is so powerful as a bad idea whose time has come," he said.

Result of cable violence study may not be helpful

WASHINGTON (AP) — By the fall of 1995, the cable television industry may have greater insights into the impact of violent programs on TV viewers, but viewers may not.

That's when the first report is due from an independent group of experts chosen to monitor and analyze violence in programs carried on 25 cable networks and some broadcast stations.

On Tuesday, Winston Cox, the Showtime Networks Inc. chairman, who spearheaded the industry's first effort to monitor programs, said the results would be included in annual reports.

But just how helpful these annual reports will be to consumers is unclear.

"This document ... will not be something that parents will find that easy to use," said Marcy Kelly, president of Mediascope, the California-based nonprofit group the industry selected to coordinate the monitoring program.

Cox disagreed, "We do want to provide a service to the American public."

The intention is to reduce the amount of gratuitous violence in TV shows and to inform consumers, Cox said.

The first report will examine programs between September of 1994 and January of 1995.

The reviews will continue for three years at a cost to the industry of about \$1 million a year, he said.

Mediascope, founded in 1992, receives much of its funding through foundation grants and has done extensive research on TV violence.

The broadcast industry is putting together its own independent monitoring panel that industry executives say should be in place later this year.

Both the cable and broadcast industries are taking the steps in response to public and congressional concern over violence on the airwaves.

Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., who has been critical of violent programs, said he would not push for legislation in light of the industry's plans.

While Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., also hailed the plan, he said he wouldn't back off legislation until the broadcasting industry follows the cable industry's footsteps.

Sen. Ernest Hollings, D-S.C., who has a TV violence bill, also welcomed the monitoring program but believes legislation is still needed.

Study links antihistamines, cancer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration is re-examining three common allergy drugs after Canadian researchers concluded they can promote cancer growth in laboratory mice, even at low doses.

In a study to be published Wednesday in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, researchers at the Manitoba Institute of Cell Biology in Winnipeg report that cancer tumors grew faster and larger in mice injected with loratadine, astemizole and hydroxyzine, three antihistamines.

Two other tested antihistamines, doxylamine and cetirizine, were not found to stimulate cancer tumor growth, said Dr. Lorne J. Brandes, principal author of the study.

"I am very concerned about these findings," said Brandes, "and so is the FDA."

An FDA scientist, Dr. Joseph DeGeorge, said the agency was taking the finding seriously and was conducting research on antihistamines and cancer. However, the scientist said that the relevance to human health of chemical stimulation of tumors in mice "is yet to be proven."

Brandes said that he would not encourage people to stop using antihistamines because benefits outweigh the risks. Patients "should use them for as short a period as possible and only when really needed," he said.

Astemizole is the main ingredient in Hismanal, manufactured by Janssen Pharmaceutica Inc. of Titusville, N.J. Loratadine is found in Claritin, made by Schering-Plough of Madison, N.J. Hydroxyzine is used in at least seven allergy products, but Brandes specifically linked his study with Atarax, made by the Roerig Division of Pfizer Inc. of New York.

All are prescription drugs used to treat symptoms of allergies and hay fever.

Brandes said he earlier gave the results of the study to FDA researchers and was told the federal agency is conducting new studies on effects of the

antihistamines.

"I do believe they're doing a lot to investigate this," Brandes said of the FDA.

A statement from the FDA said that no human clinical studies support the results of Brandes' research.

"The agency does not believe, therefore, that changes in the drugs' labeling or approval status are warranted," the FDA statement said.

However, the FDA said it is trying to duplicate the results of Brandes' studies.

In the Canadian research, Brandes and his associates injected cells for two types of cancer, melanoma and fibrosarcoma, into mice in a lab colony. The rodents were then divided into groups. One group was separated as a control and received placebo shots. Each of the other groups received daily shots of antihistamines.

At the end of 20 days, the mice were killed and their tumors removed and weighed.

The mice injected with loratadine had tumor weights 150 percent to 390 percent larger than the control mice and both melanoma and fibrosarcoma were stimulated. Both cancers also were stimulated in mice on astemizole and tumor weights were up to 184 percent larger than controls. Only melanoma cancer was stimulated in mice on hydroxyzine and tumors were 171 percent larger than in the control group.

Brandes said one important finding of the study was that the mouse cancers responded to antihistamine doses equivalent to those taken by humans. Usually when drugs are tested for cancer causation, the doses used are only barely tolerated by the mice.

Such studies also are usually conducted on mice that do not already have cancer, said Brandes. As a result, that research does not determine if the test drug in clinical doses will stimulate pre-existing cancer, he said.

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Firm admits false missile test results

GARDEN CITY, N.Y. (AP) — An aerospace manufacturer has admitted submitting phony test results about parts for a missile launcher that failed to work during the Persian Gulf War, law enforcement authorities said Tuesday.

The component was removed from use when it was found to be defective in field testing by the U.S. Air Force during the Persian Gulf War, according to the U.S. Justice Department's Michael Cornacchia, who led a two-year investigation.

Some 900 electronic units were

recalled worldwide after it was discovered that the test results were fake and faulty workmanship was found. Problems with the parts were first reported in 1987.

The company, Lucas Aul, a subsidiary of British-owned Lucas Industries, has agreed to plead guilty to a felony charge of failing to conduct government-mandated tests and submitting phony test data.

The company has agreed to pay \$12 million to the government, which includes \$4 million in fines, \$7.5 million in restitu-

tion for the defective parts, and \$500,000 in investigation costs. In addition, the company has consented to accept an outside monitor to oversee operations.

The agreement is subject to a federal judge's approval, scheduled for consideration May 25.

The component, known as the Launcher Electronic Unit, sits between the jet aircraft and the Maverick missile. The pilot communicates firing commands to the missiles through it.

"If it doesn't work, you can't fire the missile," said Cornacchia.

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