



THE OFFICIAL "SNOWED-IN" FANTASY WRITING CHALLENGE

Tea & Tropes 2026

14 Days. 3,000 Words. One Story.

Welcome to the official Snowed-In Fantasy Writing Challenge. This is a timed, skill-based creative writing competition designed to challenge writers to create an original fantasy short story within a two-week writing window.

The competition is intended to celebrate creativity, storytelling, originality, and the wide range of fantasy fiction.

Romance is welcome, but it is not required.

IMPORTANT: All entrants should read the accompanying Official Rules and Regulations before registering or submitting an entry.



Guidelines:

1. Competition Format

- The challenge begins when the official writing prompt and mandatory elements are released.
- Registered entrants will have exactly fourteen (14) calendar days to write and submit their story.
- All entrants receive the same writing period, prompt, and mandatory elements.
- Entry fee is \$25.

2. Writing Schedule

- Writing Challenge Opens: September 16, 2026
- Final Submission Deadline: September 30, 2026 at 11:59 PM Pacific Time
- Late submissions **WILL NOT** be accepted except where the competition organizer determines that a technical failure of the official submission system materially prevented submission.

3. Story Requirements

- Each entry must be an original fantasy short story.
- The maximum length is 3,000 words.
- Any fantasy subgenre is welcome, including romantasy, dark fantasy, gothic fantasy, paranormal fantasy, high fantasy, fairy tales, fantasy adventure, and other fantasy subgenres.
- Romance may be central, secondary, or absent.
- The story must be written specifically for this competition and must not have been previously published.

4. Mandatory Challenge Elements

- The official challenge prompt will contain a set of mandatory creative elements.
- Every submitted story must incorporate all mandatory elements in a meaningful way.
- Examples of possible requirements include a particular phrase, object, character circumstance, or other creative element. The final requirements will be announced when the challenge begins.
- Failure to include a mandatory element will result in an immediate disqualification.

5. Word Count

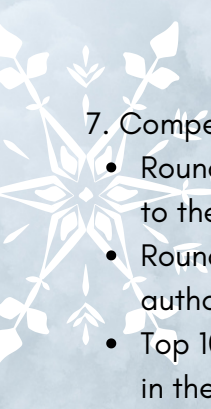
- The maximum permitted length is 3,000 words.
- The official rules will specify exactly what is included in the word count. Entrants are responsible for verifying their final word count before submission.

6. Judging Criteria

- Submissions advancing beyond the initial screening will be evaluated using standardized criteria and will be judged by accredited authors.

Writing Quality	25
Originality	20
Storytelling	20
Character development	15
World Building	10
Emotional Impact	5
Integration of Manditory Elements	5

Total: 100



7. Competition Progression

- Round One: All eligible entries are reviewed and narrowed to the Top 25.
- Round Two: The Top 25 are submitted anonymously to an author judging panel, which selects the Top 10 finalists.
- Top 10: Each finalist's complete story is eligible for inclusion in the official Forbidden Romance Short Story Collection.
- Reader's Choice: If included, readers may anonymously vote online for their favorite Top 10 story before the convention.

Winner Announcement: First, Second, Third, and Reader's Choice winners will be announced at Snowed In on Friday, December 4, 2026.



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Rules & Regulations

1. Eligibility

- Entrants must be at least 16 year of age.
- Each person may only submit one entry.
- Organizers, contractors, judges, and other individuals involved directly with the competition are specifically not eligible to join.

2. Entry Fee

- The competition is a paid, skill-based writing competition. The entry fee is non-refundable except where required by law or where the organizer cancels the competition.
- The organizer may allocate entry revenue among prizes and legitimate competition expenses, including administration, judging, payment processing, marketing, and anthology production.
- Entrant agrees to pay \$25 to join competition.
- The fee is non-refundable.

3. Original Work and Rights

- The submitted story must be the entrant's original work.
- Only ONE entry per writer/entrant.
- Entries may not be previously published, commercially released, submitted as fan fiction, or copied from another person's work.
- Entrants must have the authority to submit the work and must not knowingly infringe another person's copyright, trademark, privacy, publicity, or other rights.

4. Artificial Intelligence

- This competition is not welcome to AI Generated stories- The submitted story must be written by the entrant and may not be generated or substantially written or *rewritten* by generative AI. All stories must be original and written by humans.

5. Submission Deadline

- All entries must be submitted through the official Tea & Tropes website submission method by September 30, 2026 at 11:59 PM Pacific Time.

Late entries WILL be rejected. This is non-negotiable.

6. Judging and Anonymity

- Judging will be based on predetermined criteria and standardized scorecards.
- Stories must be submitted anonymously to the judging panel.
- Judges' scoring and selection decisions are final.
- Only the top 25 will have access to their author judged scores.

7. Top 10 Anthology

- The complete stories of the Top 10 finalists may be reproduced in the official Forbidden Romance Short Story Collection.
- Finalists retain ownership of their copyrights. The competition agreement will provide Forbidden Romance with the limited, non-exclusive rights necessary to reproduce, distribute, sell, and promote the anthology and the competition.

- Any additional publication of the First Place story on the Forbidden Romance website will be governed by the rights granted in the competition agreement.

8. Reader's Choice

- If Reader's Choice voting is offered, it will take place anonymously online before the convention.
- Voting will be governed by the official voting rules, including eligibility, voting limits, and the voting period.
- Reader's Choice is separate from the judges' determination of First, Second, and Third Place.

9. Prizes

- Cash prizes will be awarded to First, Second, and Third Place.
- Reader's choice is an honorary position and is not monetarily compensated.
- The total prize pool will be determined by the number of eligible paid entries.

10. Winner Announcement

- Competition winners will be announced at the Snowed In fair on Friday, December 4, 2026.
- Winning entrants will not be required to attend the event in order to remain eligible for an awarded prize, subject to the final official rules.

11. Disqualification

- An entry may be disqualified for plagiarism, copyright infringement, false information, material violation of the submission requirements, prohibited AI use, manipulation of judging or voting, harassment, or other conduct expressly prohibited by the official rules.

- Disqualification decisions will be made by the organizer based on the official rules and applicable law.
- No refunds will be distributed to disqualified entries.
- Attempting to manipulate judging or Reader's Choice voting;
- Multiple submissions where only one entry is permitted;
- Harassment, intimidation, stalking, or abusive conduct;
- Making credible threats of harm toward any person, organization, property, animal, or other entity;
- Promoting or advocating hatred, discrimination, or violence against individuals or groups based on protected characteristics; This includes anything deemed within the submitted writing.
- Conduct that creates a reasonable safety concern for competition participants, judges, organizers, staff, or attendees;

12. Organizer Rights

- The organizer reserves the right to correct administrative errors, replace a judge when necessary, modify non-material scheduling details, or cancel/postpone the competition when circumstances outside the organizer's reasonable control make that necessary.
- Any material change affecting entrants will be communicated through the official competition channels.

13. Acceptance of Rules

By submitting an entry, the entrant acknowledges that they have read and agree to the Official Rules and Regulations and any additional terms presented during registration.

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PARTICIPANT ENTRY, RIGHTS & RELEASE AGREEMENT

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read, understood, and agree to the Official "Snowed-In" Fantasy Writing Challenge and the accompanying Official Rules and Regulations.

I understand that participation in the competition is voluntary and that submission of my story constitutes my agreement to the terms outlined in those documents and this Agreement.

1. Originality and Ownership

I represent and warrant that:

- The story I submit is my original work.
- I am the sole author and owner of the submitted work, except for any material specifically disclosed and permitted under the Official Rules.
- My submission does not knowingly infringe upon the copyright, trademark, publicity, privacy, or other rights of any third party.
- My submission has not been previously published or publicly released in violation of the Official Rules.
- I have the legal authority to submit the work to this competition.
- I am at least 16 years of age.

2. Author Ownership

I understand that I retain ownership and copyright of my submitted story.

Participation in the competition does not transfer ownership of my story to Tea & Tropes.

However, if my story is selected as a Top 10 finalist, I grant Tea & Tropes LLC the limited rights necessary to:

- Reproduce my story in the official competition anthology;
- Distribute and sell the anthology;
- Promote the competition, anthology, and finalists;
- Use my name, author name, story title, and approved biography in connection with the competition and anthology;
- Display or otherwise reproduce my story as reasonably necessary to conduct and promote the competition.

Any additional publication of my story, including publication on the Tea & Tropes website, will be subject to the rights and terms specifically stated in the Official Rules and/or a separate written agreement.

3. Promotional Permission

I grant Tea & Tropes LLC permission to use my name, photograph, author biography, story title, and other information I voluntarily provide for reasonable promotional purposes relating to the competition, anthology, Snowed In, and Tea & Tropes related promotion.

This permission does not transfer ownership of my intellectual property.

4. Competition Judging

I understand that the competition is judged according to the criteria established in the Official Rules and Regulations.

I understand that the Top 25, Top 10, and final winners are selected according to the competition's stated judging procedures.

Except in cases of demonstrated administrative error, fraud, or violation of the Official Rules, I agree to respect the final determination of the competition judges.

5. Reader's Choice

If Reader's Choice voting is offered, I understand that it is a separate audience-selected award and that voting will be conducted according to the Official Rules.

I understand that Reader's Choice does not replace or alter the judges' determination of First, Second, or Third Place.

6. Release and Limitation of Liability

To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, I release and hold harmless Tea & Tropes LLC, its owners, organizers, employees, contractors, judges, representatives, sponsors, and affiliated parties from claims arising out of my voluntary participation in the competition, including claims relating to judging decisions, placement, selection of finalists, Reader's Choice voting, or failure to win a prize, except to the extent caused by conduct that cannot legally be waived or released.

Nothing in this Agreement is intended to waive any right or remedy that cannot legally be waived.

7. No Guarantee of Selection or Publication

I understand that payment of the entry fee does not guarantee that my story will advance beyond any round of the competition.

I understand that only stories selected as Top 10 finalists are guaranteed consideration for inclusion in the official competition anthology, subject to compliance with the Official Rules and any required publication agreement.

8. Agreement to Official Rules

I confirm that I have had an opportunity to review the Official "Snowed-In" Fantasy Writing Challenge and the Official Rules and Regulations.

I agree to comply with those rules and understand that violation of the rules may result in disqualification.

I understand that the final competition documents and this Agreement constitute the terms governing my participation.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Legal Name:

Signature:

Pen Name / Author Name (if applicable):

Email:

Story Title:

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How to Submit

Before submitting your story, please carefully review the following requirements. Submissions that do not follow the required format may be disqualified or returned for correction before the deadline.

1.) **Your Submission Must Be Anonymous**

DO NOT include your name anywhere in your story file.

This competition uses anonymous judging to ensure that submissions are evaluated based on the writing rather than the identity, reputation, or social media presence of the author.

Your identity will be collected separately through the official submission form and will not be provided to judges.

2.) **Cover Page**

Every submission must begin with a separate cover page containing only the following information:

STORY TITLE

Logline / One-Sentence Summary

Word Count: XXXX words

Do not put your name on the cover page.

3. **Story**

The story should begin on the page immediately following the cover page.

The story must:

- Be an original fantasy short story
- Be no more than 3,000 words
- Follow the official Snowed-In writing prompt
- Include all required competition elements
- Be written specifically for this competition
- Follow all requirements outlined in the Official Rules and Regulations

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How to Submit

4. Accepted File Formats

Your submission must be uploaded as **one file** in one of the following formats:

.PDF

.DOC

.DOCX

Please do not submit links or screenshots.

5. File Name

To help maintain anonymity, **do not put your name in the file name.**

Please name your file using your **story title only.**

For example:

TheWitchOfWintersEnd.pdf or **The_Witch_of_Winters_End.docx**

Do **not** submit a file named:

YOURNAME_TheWitchOfWintersEnd.pdf

IMPORTANT

Your submission file should contain NO identifying information.

Your name and contact information will be collected separately through the Tea & Tropes competition submission form. This allows the judging panel to review the stories anonymously.

Once your submission has been uploaded, it can not be edited or resubmitted.

Good luck, writers.

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