"It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents--except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness."

--Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, *Paul Clifford* (1830)

An international literary parody contest, the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest honors the memory of Victorian novelist Edward George Earl Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873).

The goal of the contest is simple: entrants are challenged to submit bad opening sentences to imaginary novels.

Although best known for *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), which has been made into a movie three times and originated the expression "the pen is mightier than the sword," and phrases like "the almighty dollar," Bulwer-Lytton opened his novel *Paul Clifford* (1830) with the immortal words that the *Peanuts* beagle Snoopy plagiarized for years, "It was a dark and stormy night."

Recent Winning Entries

Winner: Grand Prize

"Hmm . . ." thought Abigail as she gazed languidly from the veranda past the bright white patio to the cerulean sea beyond, where dolphins played and seagulls sang, where splashing surf sounded like the tintinnabulation of a thousand tiny bells, where great gray whales bellowed and the sunlight sparkled off the myriad of sequins on the flyfish's bow ties, "time to get my meds checked."

Winner: Adventure

Leopold looked up at the arrow piercing the skin of the dirigible with a sort of wondrous dismay -- the wheezy shriek was just the sort of sound he always imagined a baby moose being beaten with a pair of accordions might make.

Winner: Children's Literature

Joanne watched her fellow passengers - a wizened man reading about alchemy; an oversized bearded man-child; a haunted, bespectacled young man with a scar; and a gaggle of private school children who chatted ceaselessly about Latin and flying around the hockey pitch and the two-faced teacher who they thought was a witch - there was a story here, she decided.

Winner: Fantasy Fiction

"Toads of glory, slugs of joy," sang Groin the dwarf as he trotted jovially down the path before a great dragon ate him because the author knew that this story was a train wreck after he typed the first few words.

Winner: Science Fiction

Timothy Hanson, Commander of the 43rd Space Regiment in the 52nd Battalion on board the USAOPAC (United Space Alliance Of Planets Attack Carrier) and second in command to Admiral L. R. Morris of the USAOP Space Command, awoke early for breakfast.

Winner: Western

Nobody knew just who the steely-eyed stranger was, where he came from, where he was headed, or what his intentions were while he was in Dodge City; but he wasn't an hombre you'd want to stick your tongue out at or flip off, and any man who tried to tickle him would be asking for a long stay in a pine box, if you know what I mean.

Other categories include Detective Fiction, Romance, Vile Puns, Purple Prose, Historical Fiction, and Spy Fiction.

Official Rules

- **Each entry must consist of a single sentence but you may submit as many entries as you wish.**
- **Sentences may be of any length BUT WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT ENTRIES NOT GO BEYOND 50 OR 60 WORDS, and entries must be "original" (as it were) and previously unpublished.**
- **Surface mail entries should be submitted on index cards, the sentence on one side and the entrant's name, address, and phone number on the other.**
- **The official deadline is April 15.**
- **Wild Card Rule: Resist the temptation to work with puns like "It was a stark and dormy night."**
- **Finally, in keeping with the *gravitas,* high seriousness, and general bignitude of the contest, the grand prize winner will receive . . . a pittance.**

Send your entries to:
Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest
Department of English
San Jose State University
San Jose, CA 95192-0090

Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest. March 2008. San Diego State University. 15 October 2008. [http://www.bulwer-lytton.com].