



## **WRITERSWORLD Newsletter - Issue No. 77**

### **£50,000 to get a book on recommended list**

**By: Robert Winnett and Holly Watt: First published in the The Sunday Times of London May 28, 2006**

BRITAIN'S biggest bookseller is demanding payments of £50,000 a week from publishers to get books on its supposedly impartial list of "recommended" reads in the run-up to Christmas this year.

The WH Smith scheme is the most expensive in a range of confidential deals being operated by retailers to promote lists that consumers believe are based on independent assessments of a book's quality.

No authors appear on recommended lists unless their publishers pay the fees, and those refusing to pay may not even find their titles stocked.

Other big booksellers which charge for places on schemes such as "book of the week" or "recommended" are Waterstone's and Borders, which owns Books Etc. The most expensive is WH Smith's "adult gold" scheme, which is currently being presented to publishers who are expected to pay £50,000 a week per book for a place.

This guarantees a prominent position in the store's 542 high street shops and inclusion in catalogues and other advertising. For the critical four-week Christmas sales period, it would cost a publisher at least £200,000 per book.

With WH Smith selling between 30% and 40% of the most popular books in the run-up to Christmas, titles securing a place on the scheme are assured a successful sale.

The schemes were first exposed by The Sunday Times five years ago but, with fees having risen as much as ten-fold, publishers say that it is getting "out of hand".

A director of one leading publisher said: "If you pay this fee in December your book will be a bestseller. But only a handful of the biggest publishers can now afford the fees so the book charts are totally skewed."

WH Smith is understood to run up to 25 different endorsement schemes at any one time in its stores. These include charging £15,000 for a book to be named "read of the week" during the year and recommended tags on certain titles.

For example, last week Londonstani by Gautam Maltani was described as a "must-have novel . . . compulsive, page-turning", while Getting Out of the House by Isla Dewar was a "delicious and unputdownable read".

Waterstone's charges £10,000 for its "book of the week" and offers a range of recommendation schemes. Its stores are peppered with tags which boast "we highly recommend" or "we love this book" with mini-reviews.

Borders also charges fees for a range of recommendation schemes including "fiction buyer's favourite" and the "new in" range. However, in both Waterstone's and Borders local "staff picks" are not thought to be paid for.



One publisher claimed yesterday that he had books "recommended" and positively reviewed in marketing literature by bookshops before the books had even been read.

A spokeswoman for WH Smith confirmed last week that publishers paid for endorsements. "The publishers present their books to us and we present our packages," she said. "The purpose is to drive sales for customers. We negotiate who takes the places in the adult gold scheme which is over-subscribed. This is standard across the book industry".....**THE END**

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