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HarperCollinsCanada, Cooke Agency, UBC announce annual fiction prize winner

*BOOK OF SANDS wins publishing deal, representation
Runners up receive editorial one-on-one with HarperCollins*

TORONTO—HarperCollinsCanada announced today the inaugural winner of a new annual writing prize: the HarperCollinsCanada/UBC Prize for Best New Fiction. *BOOK OF SANDS* will be published by HarperCollinsCanada in 2015, and author Karim Alrawi will be represented by The Cooke Agency.

This prize is a collaboration of HarperCollinsCanada, The Cooke Agency and the University of British Columbia, and is open to currently enrolled students and previous graduates of the UBC Creative Writing Program. Winners of the prize are offered literary representation by The Cooke Agency and an advance and a contract to be published by HarperCollinsCanada.

“We are honoured to be publishing a first novel by a writer of such distinction from the UBC MFA program,” said Iris Tupholme, Vice-President, Executive Publisher and Editor-in-Chief at HarperCollinsCanada. “Among many strong submissions, this novel stood out in its scope and its achievement in capturing so vividly a personal story set amidst the Arab Spring. Karim Alrawi writes with passion and precision about Tarek, a young husband who is forced to flee the city of Cairo with his daughter, when he mistakenly becomes involved in a political demonstration, leaving behind his pregnant wife, unsure when he will be able to return.”

The award’s jury wrote: “Although *BOOK OF SANDS* is set against the backdrop of the Arab Spring of 2011, the novel is not only about a social and political revolution, but also about the determination to live honestly and with grace in the midst of chaos, and about the duty and connection of family. The importance of storytelling in everyday life is one of Alrawi’s primary themes. His use of magic realism, quantum mechanics and (yes!) math gives this manuscript depth and power. Alrawi’s writing is like the fine pattern of a Turkish carpet or the filigreed script on the interior of a mosque: it is beautiful, it is enduring and it has meaning.”

“I am both surprised and delighted to be receiving this award,” said Karim Alrawi. “Surprised because I know that many of my colleagues, students and alumni of UBC, are such amazing writers, and delighted because as a first time novelist trying to get attention for my work, this competition is a wonderful and rare opportunity to place my manuscript with a major publishing house. I would like to add that at a time of volatility and uncertainty in the industry, by supporting this award, HarperCollinsCanada continues to prove its commitment to Canadian literature, which in itself is worthy of admiration.”

Egyptian-born Canadian Karim Alrawi is a journalist, magazine writer and award-winning professional writer for theatre, radio and television. He was the editor in chief of *ARABICA* magazine, a leading Arab-American publication, and has taught playwriting and theatre at various universities in the US, Egypt and

Canada. He has worked extensively with the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights. As a result of his human rights activity and the subject matter treated in his Arabic plays, he was arrested and detained by Egyptian State Security in 1993. After his release he became president of Egyptian PEN then accepted a Fulbright scholarship to Pennsylvania State University. He was resident writer at Iowa State University, Pennsylvania State University, The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Oakland University and at Meadow Brook Theatre (MBT) in Michigan. He taught playwriting at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. In the aftermath of 9/11, he was a part of the official Canadian government delegation to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conference on Good Governance in the Arab World. Alrawi was a member of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Programme on Governance in the Arab Region. In 2003, Alrawi with two colleagues, set up the Arab Development and Media Network (ADAM Network), a not-for-profit company that provided support and training in the use of new media, at no charge, to journalists from the Middle East and North Africa. He returned to Egypt in 2011 to participate in the revolution through civil disobedience. Now, he is a graduate of the University of British Columbia's Creative Writing MFA and is currently the University of Iowa's International Writing Program's Honorary Writing Fellow during the fall of 2013. He lives in Vancouver.

The inaugural year for the prize coincides with the 50th anniversary of the UBC Creative Writing Program. A shortlist of three finalists, chosen by the Cooke Agency and the editorial group of HarperCollinsCanada, was announced in Vancouver at the Vancouver Writers Festival on October 25th. Finalists Michelle Kaeser, for BLUE LIKE HEAVEN, and Kirsten Madsen, for THE CANTILEVERED UNIVERSE, receive an editorial one-on-one session with a HarperCollins editor.

HarperCollinsCanada imprints include HarperCollinsPublishers, HarperPerennial, Collins, HarperTrophyCanada, HarperWeekend and Patrick Crean Editions. These imprints publish the finest writers from Canada and around the world, including such fiction authors as Nancy Richler, Dianne Warren, Dan Vyleta, Emma Donoghue, Lawrence Hill, Shilpi Somaya Gowda, Cathy Marie Buchanan, Barbara Gowdy, Thomas King, Dennis Bock, Heather O'Neill, Hilary Mantel, Richard Ford, Jonathan Franzen, Amy Tan, Shaena Lambert, Anne Giardini, Michael Cunningham, Kenneth Oppel, Natalee Caple, Rachelle Delaney, Jackie Baker, Paul Harding, among many others. HarperCollins is committed to publishing new writers and to building authors' careers. HarperCollinsCanada published the first books by UBC MFA graduates Michael Christie and Kelli Deeth as well as debut short story writers and novelists Ayelet Tsabari, Janie Chang and Rebecca Silver Slayter. HarperCollinsCanada publishes fiction, non-fiction, reference books and books for children.

The Cooke Agency is one of Canada's largest and most successful literary agencies. It is over 20 years old and represents more than 150 clients who have been published in territories all around the globe – many of them bestselling authors who have won and/or been nominated for the most prestigious awards in the English language.

The UBC Creative Writing Program is Canada's oldest and largest teacher of writers. It has fostered the talents of hundreds of notable Canadian writers, and remains at the forefront of literary training. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the program, which was founded in 1963 by Earle Birney.

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