10G - for 24 hours

Teams will create mini-movies on the run

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Exactly a minute before midnight yesterday, two dozen teams of aspiring filmmakers were given a six-word plot: "A mystery involving an unwanted gift."

Listort for NEWS

Competitors in 24-Hour Movie Marathon wait for their midnight cue to start work on their mini masterpieces.

Armed with the scant screenplay, digital equipment and gallons of coffee, the teams, from across the U.S. and Canada, left the East Village location of DV Dojo, a Manhattan digital video school and film center, and dispersed to various corners of the city.

Each had just one full day to make a 10-minute film for the second annual 24-Hour Movie Marathon, a contest sponsored by Filmmaker magazine and DV Dojo.

Strategies differed.

"We're thinking a lot of people are going to be stuck in the New York City area, so we're going to drive two hours upstate to give our project a rural feel," said Peter Blomquist, 29, of Manhattan, who planned to ride in the backseat writing the script with his co-director, Jeff Wiens, 29.

Mike Jansen, 40, who came from Indianapolis for the competition, said 24 hours was enough time for at least a little planning.

"We're heading back to the hotel to map out what story we want to

tell, what kind of characters we want and what locations we'll need."

Shown to public today

The films made by the teams, which included seven from New York City and one from Long Island, will be shown to the public at 12:30 p.m. and 4 p.m. today at the United Artists Tribeca theater on West St. The winner, decided by a panel of judges as well as by audience votes, will receive $10,000.

The event was started by filmmakers Charlie Weisman, 29, and Matt Flamm, 31, as a way for young auteurs to get their work seen without having to come up with the high fees often required by film festivals. It was also a way of having all entrants compete on an even playing field.

Contestants for the marathon entered regional contests in September, submitting short films on various subjects. Each of the 24 winning teams from that first round received $1,000 for travel, accommodations and equipment rental and services.

Last year, 35 teams competed. This year, 279 teams from six countries made it to the final round.

"We wanted a festival where filmmakers could test their skills against each other, where winners aren't based on money or connections - just what ability people have and how they use what minimal resources they've got," says Weisman.

Little time, no budget and minimal resources put a premium on improvisation, said Jay Sterrenberg, 20, a junior from Sarah Lawrence University, whose team of five people is made up of classmates.

"If we get stuck in a traffic jam, we'll get out and film it," Sterrenberg said.

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