



Matthew Cushing

Author, Editor, Reviewer, Blogger

Newsletter 017, 2025Q3

Site: www.matthewcushing.com

Bluesky: [@mcushing.bksy.social](https://bsky.app/profile/mcushing.bksy.social)

Hello!

September is halfway over and the trees are already starting to turn here in Connecticut. Our house had a beautiful sugar maple in the back yard that always turned spectacular reds and oranges, but sadly it died over the winter (a killer fungus) and we had to have it removed. A reminder of how wonderful trees are. As Joyce Kilmer said, "I think that I shall never see; A poem lovely as a tree."

I have spent the summer working on stories for a couple of anthologies. A fictional account of the Cerro Grande wildfire that burned in Los Alamos went to the Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers who were looking for fictional takes on true stories. And a near-future story about the government turning to a nonagenarian for help reprogramming an old satellite provides a commentary on treatment of the elderly. More on that story below.

With the completion of these short stories, I should finally have time to jump back into my novels. I have beta reading feedback for *The Osect Indiscretion* that I need to incorporate before sending out to a wider audience, including potential agents. Unless I change my mind (again), my next novel will be a time travel horror/thriller, and I've started working through the opening scenes. I had planned to turn my voodoo clarinet short story "Blue Note G" into a full-fledged novel—and I still plan to—but difficulties working through the ending have led me to put it on hold while I work on other things and think more about the story.

In other news, I've started working as a volunteer First Reader for Uncharted Magazine, which means I help them read through their slush pile of all submissions to identify those stories worthy of a second look and possible publishing. It has given me a new perspective on the publishing process—as well as seeing what other authors are submitting.

It seems there is never enough time to do all the things I want, but I've still managed to add a few posts to my blog (see below) and make some book recommendations. I enjoyed these books. If you read speculative fiction and give them a try, I hope you do, too.

Otherwise, have a wonderful Fall. Enjoy!

Astonishing News

AN IHRAM PRESS RAPID RESPONSE PUBLICATION

AMERICA'S SLIDE TOWARDS

AUTHORITARIANISM

An anthology of writers and artists speaking
out about America's unique—and terrifying—
political moment.

EDITED AND CURATED BY TOM BLOCK AND LISA ZAMMIT

"The Rite to Vote" Included in *America's Slide Toward Authoritarianism*

The International Human Rights Art Movement is publishing a Rapid Response anthology titled *America's Slide Toward Authoritarianism* to mark this turbulent moment in history. Authors and artists from around the world submitted work, and my short story "The Rite to Vote" was accepted. This story was originally written in 2020 and was one of six Finalists for the 2021 Roswell Award (out of 500+ international submissions.) This is the first time the story will be published.

Fitting the theme, "The Rite to Vote" follows eighteen-year-old Kendra as she embarks on her first voting experience. However, as the process unfolds and the inner workings of government revealed, Kendra's idealism is shaken.

I am thrilled and proud to have my work included in this anthology. If my work connects with anyone, I will have succeeded as an author. I hope people consider picking up a copy. The anthology is now available for pre-sale at \$16.50 until its publication date on October 1. After that, copies will be \$24. Here is the pre-sale link: <https://donorbox.org/america-s-slide-pre-sale>



"Commercial Break" Included in Splinter Press Anthology *Earthish*

Back in March, representatives from Splinter Press reached out to me asking if I would be interested in writing a story for inclusion in their upcoming *Earthish* anthology. The request bowled me over. While generally struggling and competing to get stories published in various magazines and anthologies, to be asked was a major milestone for me, and I quickly agreed.

All the publishers' stories take place in the same extended "Splinterverse" where, in attempts by beings in the future to travel back in time, bubble universes--often just containing Earth or our solar system but nothing more--are created. This approach allows for everything from alternate history to space opera on versions of Earth that don't bump into one another.

Stories were due to the publisher on September 15, and I submitted a new story called "Commercial Break." Taking place in a hundred-year future where corporations run the government, the story follows 95 year-old Ellie who is forced to watch commercials in order to receive her government pension and benefits. But when her 70 year-old software programming expertise is needed, she seizes the opportunity to make life a bit better for the elderly.

The Kickstarter for this anthology launches in October and publishing is targeted for early 2026. More information to come in future newsletter editions.



Speculative Literature Foundation Grant Finalist

In my third year of applying, I am a Finalist for the Older Writers Grant sponsored by the Speculative Literature Foundation.

The \$1000 grant is geared toward writers over 50 who have yet to earn "professional status" per the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. Professional status marks a certain level of income received from writing activities, and though I am on my way, I have not yet achieved that status.

Grant proceeds can be used for anything, though I would likely apply the proceeds to writing classes and conferences. Other than the age requirement, selection is based on the quality of writing.

Announcement of the winner should be in October if not earlier. Fingers crossed.

Latest Blog Posts



My Take on the All-Time Top 10 Science Fiction Series

With hundreds of series from which to choose—spanning both the annals of network TV and the shadows of streaming services—a list of only ten series is sure to spark conversation if not controversy. But the series listed here are simply based on my opinion—a wholly subjective ranking system. That said, I did consider a few characteristics of the shows that make me stop on the channel whenever they are on or binge watch them from beginning to end over and over.

Criteria

Apart from just pure immersion and enjoyment into the show, there were three main characteristics I considered to both identify my top ten and then rank them:

Characters – The best shows are character-driven, and realistic, three-dimensional, flawed characters make a show stand out. Characters that try their best, follow a code, face dilemmas, sometimes screw up, and learn from their mistakes reflect how those of us in the

real world try to live our lives. Top characters may not be perfect—indeed, they may have deep personal traumas and flaws—but they are inspiring.

Plot – Of course I also like a good story (who doesn't?), but this is more about a story line that works to bring out the most of the characters. Series with recurring issues and overarching story arcs tended to rank higher than purely standalone-episode series where stories and even characters changed.

Realism – Stories with an element of realism—not so much in terms of special effects (though those are nice) but in the dark, grittiness of reality—scored higher. Situations with people facing survival with food and shelter as dwindling resources place characters into more believable situations.

To see the list, click: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/top-ten-science-fiction-series>



Do You Prefer a Good Book or a Good Story?

Which would you rather read, a good book or a good story? The difference between the two has arisen a few times over the past couple of years as I've learned more about writing and publishing novels—and, of course, reading them.

But which is more important? Which is better?

A Good Book

This another way to say a literary book. Literary fiction seems to be particularly hot in current publishing circles, and when I've asked various people what literary means, it invariably comes down to language. Literary novels are “denser”, for lack of a better term.

Settings are richer, more immersive. Characters are not just three-dimensional, but truly detailed. We can not only recognize them as extraordinary people, but also see something about ourselves in them—something we aspire to achieve.

Read more at: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/good-book-or-good-story>



Censorship vs. Cultural Sensitivity

A recent debate sprang up in my online critique group over whether or not to publish a particular story on the website. The story had won an award and publishing was part of the prize. But the story contained a word—a name, actually—within a context that likely would have offended a certain demographic of people. (I'm intentionally being vague in order to examine the broader issue instead of the specific instance.)

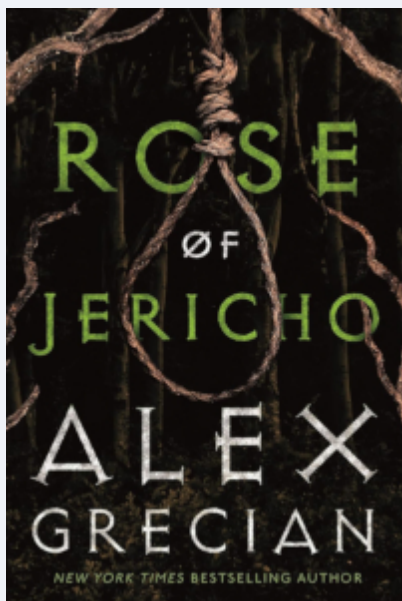
Some thought the name should be edited out; that our group should not publish the work unless edited. Censored. Others thought that, though provocative, usage was clearly within the bounds of the story, so the work should be allowed to be published as written. Untouched. A middle group disagreed with censorship but thought a warning that some readers may find the content offensive should go at the top.

The question raged: at what point should we allow people to read what they want and take responsibility for their reading choices versus preemptively censoring the story for them? The debate has stayed with me.

To read the full article, go to: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/censorship-vs-cultural-sensitivity>

Book Recommendations

Read reviews for other titles on my website at:
<https://www.matthewcushing.com/blog/categories/review>



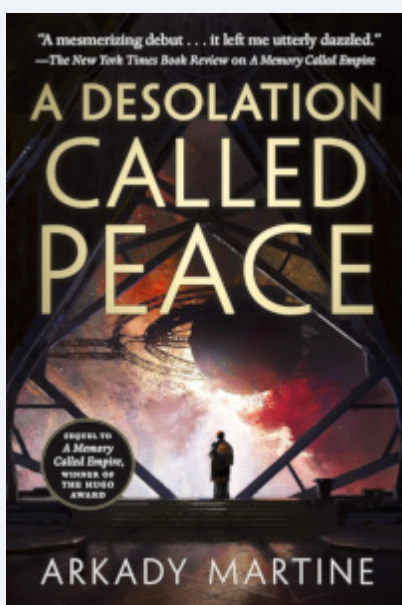
Rose of Jericho
by Alex Grecian

The sequel to *Red Rabbit*, Alex Grecian weaves another weird west tale where the dead don't die, angels visit, and our witch heroines must set things right.



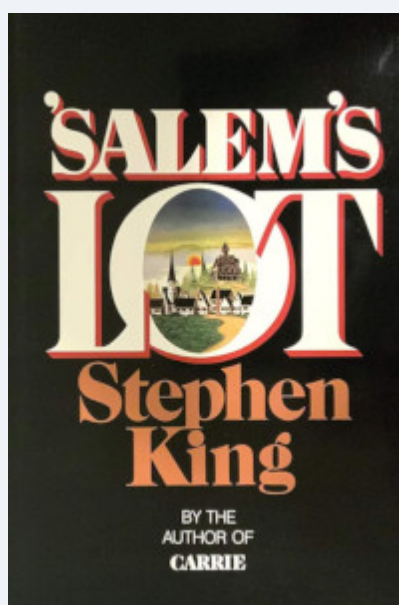
The Devils
by Joe Abercrombie

The best book I've read in the past few years, this is a 600-page fantasy (not horror) in an alternate history with an excellent cast of well-written characters.



A Desolation Called Peace
by Arkady Martine

The sequel to her Hugo-winning *A Memory Called Empire*, this next chapter follows Mahit and Three Seagrass as they help save the Teixcalaanli Empire from aliens.



'Salem's Lot
by Stephen King

King's second-ever book considers the impact of an ancient vampire taking residence in a small Maine town and how it impacts the locals. Which is badly.

Writing Humor

If you ever think English is not a weird language,
just remember that read and lead rhyme and read and lead rhyme.
But read and lead don't rhyme, and neither do read and lead.

Thanks for Reading

A heartfelt **Thank You** to everyone who has subscribed to this newsletter. Your support of my writing is both invaluable and motivating. If you want more up-to-date information on what I'm doing--from what I'm reading to what I'm working on--please visit my website at www.matthewcushing.com. Or, you can follow me on Threads at [@mhcushing](https://www.threads.net/@mhcushing) or Bluesky at [@mcushing.bksy.social](https://bsky.app/profile/mcushing.bksy.social).

If you know anyone who loves speculative fiction (science fiction, fantasy, horror, time travel, dystopian, utopian, steampunk, solarpunk, climate fiction, space opera, urban fantasy, supernatural, etc.), please forward them a copy of this newsletter and encourage them to sign up!

Klaatu Barada Nikto, Live Long and Prosper, and Nanoo Nanoo!

Matthew Cushing

Copyright (c) 2021-2025 Matthew Cushing. All Rights Reserved.

This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

You've received it because you've subscribed to my newsletter.

[Unsubscribe](#)

