



Matthew Cushing

Author, Editor, Reviewer, Blogger

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Site: www.matthewcushing.com
[@mhcushing](https://twitter.com/mhcushing)

Twitter:

Well, 2023 is off to a raging start! There's so much going on that it has been difficult to find time to write. But that doesn't mean the stream of ideas for books, stories, and screenplays has slowed down. I try to capture everything into a notebook, but I'm sure I've left great (well, maybe "good") ideas unwritten and forgotten.

Much of my time has been spent volunteering for my writer's group, Speculative Fiction Writers, as we look to implement a more formal organizational structure, including electing Officers, ratifying Bylaws, and collecting dues. It's been a lot of work pulling everything together, but there are great people involved and it's been satisfying knowing we're ensuring the group will endure for years.

Still, there are some new articles on my website, a few which I've included in this newsletter. I've also included some book recommendations and an excerpt from a recent short story about an alien infiltration into our government.

News & Notes

AI: A Tool for Creatives or the Death of Imagination?



Advanced algorithms already influence many aspects of our lives, from ads to product recommendations to telemarketers to design engineering, and they have been doing it for years. Now, these algorithms are advancing on artistic fields, creating digital artwork and writing digital novels. Are they the panacea for delivering ultimately-personalized content, or are they the death of human imagination?

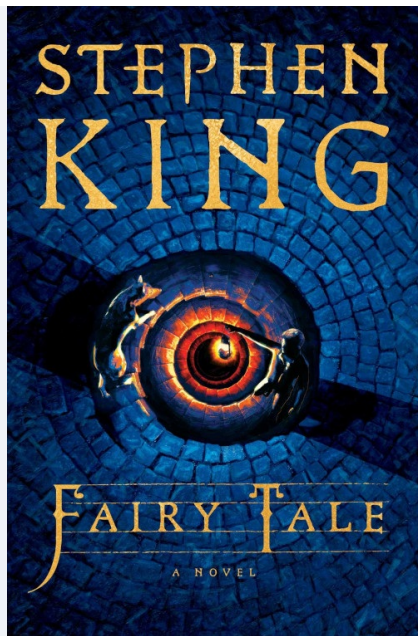
Before digging into that dilemma, I first have to address the ridiculous fact that we refer to these programs as 'artificial intelligence.' They are nothing of the sort. There is no intelligence in today's A.I. – a term too recklessly thrown about and completely incorrect. These machines don't make decisions. They don't have taste. And they certainly don't have ethics. They are amalgamators. Nothing more.

No computer system has yet passed the Turing test (or as I like to call it, a precursor to the Voight-Kampff test) where a human can't tell the difference between responses from a computer or another human with greater than 70% accuracy. There is no intelligence there.

And when it comes to the creative arts... *Read the rest of the post at:*
<https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/a-i-a-boon-to-or-death-of-imagination>

Review of Stephen King's *Fairy Tale*

This book is exactly what the cover says: a fairy tale by Stephen King. The story is both familiar with



elements integrated from a pantheon of fairy tales and new with supernatural oddities and twists that only Stephen King's odd imagination can provide.

All elements of a classic fairy tale exist, including a common person who, through a positive character trait, learns of a great secret, explores that secret, finds an evil enchantment, and becomes the hero by chasing the evil away. And though there are some King-esque twists—replete with a supernatural darkness that any fan might expect—the story still includes the ultimate criteria of a fairy tale: a happy ending.

But what makes this book stand out, as is the case with the majority of King's works, is the quality of the character development and storytelling. Charlie Reade is a relatable hero, and his relationship with the cantankerous Mr. Bowditch and his loyal dog Radar, is poignant and touching relationship. The first third of this book is a moving, emotional read that in itself is worthwhile, and this is before we even reach the fairy tale world.

King effortlessly weaves in the backstories of these two main characters such that we understand their motivations and actions - and the reason for Charlie's quest into the fairy tale land of Empis. Charlie must face dwarves and giants, solve mazes and puzzles, and even survive a tournament to the death, all the while encountering charming friends and hideous foes. But where the real-world characters have a history that make them compelling, the characters of Empis lack that depth. Once in Empis the stakes, though higher, seem less important than Charlie's family and relationships in the real world. And maybe that's how it should be.

At just over 600 pages, this is an epic story, but with King's immersive storytelling, it is a fast-paced, engaging read.



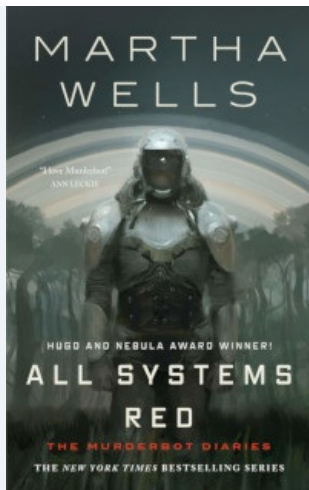
Looking for an Online Writers' Group or Critique Group?

I'm likely biased, but for me, Speculative Fiction Writers has been a welcoming group of authors, helping me as an author in many ways. From story structure and plotting, to character development, to pacing and tension, to basic grammar and punctuation--and so many more areas!--my writing has improved such that my writing has pulled in a couple of awards and I've received interest from agents.

And one of the best aspects of this group (though there are many) is everything is done online. Meetings occur weekly via Zoom where the entire group discusses any and everything from marketing books to spec fic in the news to conferences to the latest writing techniques before breaking into smaller groups for critique and in-depth discussion.

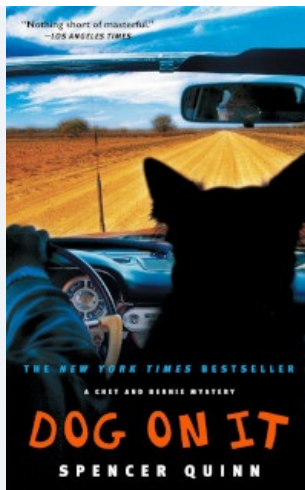
If you're a writer of speculative fiction, whether you're a published author, aspire to be one, or just write sci-fi, fantasy, or horror stories for fun, and want to improve your writing skills, check out Speculative Fiction Writers at specificwriters.com. Sign up to audit a session and find out if the group works for you.

Book Recommendations



***All Systems Red* by Martha Wells**

Follow an introverted, soap-watching killing machine as she tries to figure out who is attacking the scientists under her protection.



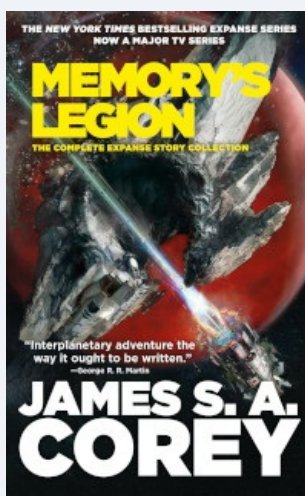
***Dog On It* by Spencer Quinn**

Bernie is an overweight detective. Chet is his dog—and the narrator of the mysteries they investigate.



***Left-Handed Booksellers of London* by Garth Nix**

When the magic of the Old World bleeds into the modern world, the left-handed booksellers search for the cause of the intrusion.



***Memory's Legion* by James S. A. Corey**

If you loved The Expanse series, these additional short works add backstory to characters and historic events.

Writing Excerpt - *Infiltration*

The Tahoe raced down the winding, two-lane road, trees blurring past the windows.

"Can you please slow down? You're going to make me puke."

Neither man sitting up front responded, and the SUV whipped around a corner, pressing Sig into the door and digging the armrest into his ribs. Cheap body spray and stale upholstery added to his queasiness.

Bile rose in his throat. Sig gagged and swallowed with a grimace.

"How about cracking a window?" Fresh air might keep all bodily fluids in their correct compartments.

The rear windows dropped an inch.

"Thanks." Sig laid the sarcasm on thick, but the goons with their earpieces showed no reaction.

Approaching a twelve-foot, chain-link fence topped with razor wire, the Tahoe slowed abruptly, throwing Sig forward and knocking his head into the front seat.

Maybe the snark did get through.

The bright yellow boom at the security gate swung upward, and the driver floored the throttle, launching Sig back. The Tahoe raced through, and the Marines standing guard jumped aside to avoid being clipped.

Past the gate, the trees made way for a parking lot and a six-story office building. Covered in mirrored glass panels, the building was boxy and generic—like every other office building—and lacked any sign, nameplate, or logo.

The SUV screeched to a stop under a rear portico, and a young gentleman with coiffed hair, a manicured beard and wearing a charcoal suit hurried down the steps. With a thousand-watt smile, he grabbed the rear door handle and whipped the door open.

“Dr. Schiffer?” The man leaned in extending a hand, and when Sig gripped it expecting a handshake, he yanked Sig out of the car. “Thank you so much for coming out this morning.”

Sig checked his shoulder for a dislocation. “I had little choice.”

The man shrugged with an it-is-what-it-is grin and gestured toward the door. “Sir, if you’ll follow me.”

“Wait just a minute.” Sig stepped back. “Who are you?”

“I’m Rodney, special assistant to the Deputy Director. I’m here to escort you inside.”

“Deputy Director of what agency?”

Rodney turned for the door, trotting up the steps. He called over his shoulder, “The CIA, of course.”

Sig’s stomach dropped to the floor.

A Note of Humor

A common argument in my family whenever we go out:

You said ‘No more books!’

I said “No, more books!”

Thank You

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 Twitter [@mhcushing](https://twitter.com/mhcushing) if Elon Musk hasn't run it into the ground.

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

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