



Newsletter 020, 2026Q2

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Hello everyone!

Incredibly, 2026 is nearly half over! After a brutal winter and hesitant spring, things are busting out all over in Connecticut!

A much-anticipated anthology has finally hit the shelves. *Earth(ish): Tales of the Splinterverse* went on sale in mid-May—more on that below. The anthology contains my short story “Commercial Break” about a no-nonsense nonagenarian who is forced by the oppressive GovCorp to watch commercials to keep her pension coming. But when GovCorp needs her help, she’s not going to give it for free. “Commercial Break” was fun to write, and there’s a short excerpt below.

In other cool news, IHRAM’s anthology *America’s Slide Towards Authoritarianism* was named an Indie Book Awards Finalist for social justice. So proud to have my short story “The Rite to Vote” included.

Much of the time this quarter was spent submitting stories to writing contests and applying to grants, not to mention keeping up with my blog. And my writing group has asked me to give a presentation on building an author website. I’ve had to access knowledge from my previous life in e-commerce. There’s so much to do, and I haven’t even mentioned the stories I’m writing now! More on that in my next newsletter.

In the meantime, I hope you find some things of interest, see some books you might like to read, and have a laugh at the absurdity of the English language.

Enjoy!

News & Notes



Earth(ish): Tales from the Splinterverse Releases

In the Splinterverse, immortal beings have arrived on Earth far in the future and have brought with them time travel technology. But each time future humanity tries to use this

technology to reach a different era in its past, a new, separate pocket universe is created. The new pocket-universe Earth is an exact duplicate of the real Earth (Earth Prime) at that time but diverges along its own timeline path.

My story "Commercial Break" takes place on an iteration of Earth that initially splintered from Earth Prime in 2050 where stars vanish and society panics. Ellie Newton-Woode was a programming genius at NASA when everything was shelved. Forty years later, the new GovCorp needs Ellie's help, but at age 95, her time doesn't come cheap. (*Read the short excerpt below.*)

A blog post covers more about my invitation to participate, my process, and my story:
<https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/release-of-the-splinterverse-anthology-earth-ish>

Read a review of my story at SpecFicWriters:
<https://specficwriters.com/earthish-anthology-highlights-matthew-cushing-and-paul-martz/>

You can also purchase a paperback at Amazon:
<https://www.amazon.com/Earth-ish-Splinterverse-SPLINTER-PRESS/dp/1960108239/>

OR, if you prefer a hard cover edition, they are available directly from Splinter Press:
<https://splinterpress.com/products/splinterverse-anthology>



America's Slide Towards Authoritarianism **Earns Distinction**

This anthology by the International Human Rights Art Movement (IHRAM) pulls together short stories, poetry, and artwork from around the world inspired by the current political climate in the United States. It includes my story "The Rite to Vote" about how our democratic privilege might change if things keep going as they are. "The Rite to Vote" was a finalist for the Roswell Award in 2021, and I'm happy to finally see it published.

If you enjoy stories about social justice and want to support artists and authors, you can purchase a copy on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Americas-Slide-Towards-Authoritarianism-international/dp/B0FSRPV37F>



"Under Pressure" Earns Honorable Mention

My short story "Under Pressure" has earned an Honorable Mention from the first quarter 2026 contest of Writers of the Future. "Under Pressure" follows ocean ranger Silje as she encounters underwater technology from the past--technology that could drastically help her small, coastal village. But only if she can catch it.

This is my fourth Honorable Mention recognition from Writers of the Future.

Latest Blog Posts



Vagueness Is Not Tension

Tension is the second-most critical element of a successful story—the first being a relatable, engaging main character. Tension, also known as drama or conflict (in the broadest sense of the word,) is what makes the reader turn the page. It is the emotional driver of the story.

Tension must be organic, and it must be specific. **Don't blindfold your reader.** Vague descriptions or intentional obfuscation of details does not create tension.

Read more at:

<https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/vagueness-is-not-tension>



Don't Fear the Rules of Writing

I've encountered frequent comments about the unspoken rules of writing that "this rule doesn't make sense" or "I don't need that rule" or even "why do we even have these stupid rules?"

Rules are important. IMO, to become a successful writer, you need to understand how stories are constructed and why. Why start with an inciting incident? Why is there a climax? Why does the hero need an emotional arc? There are reasons for everything, and they mostly have to do with reader engagement.

See why the rules of writing should be embraced at:

<https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/don-t-fear-the-rules-of-writing>



Mysteries vs. Thrillers

Most readers love a whodunnit story. A trail of clues to follow and reasoning to understand. These types of stories fall into two major categories: mysteries and thrillers. In both types, something dramatic has occurred—a murder or a bomb threat, for example—and we (the reader) want to understand who did it and why. Often, these two genres are thrown together into the same category—one where something needs to be figured out—but they are really two different animals.

This post examines these genres' differences, their similarities, and some cases where they may be blended together.

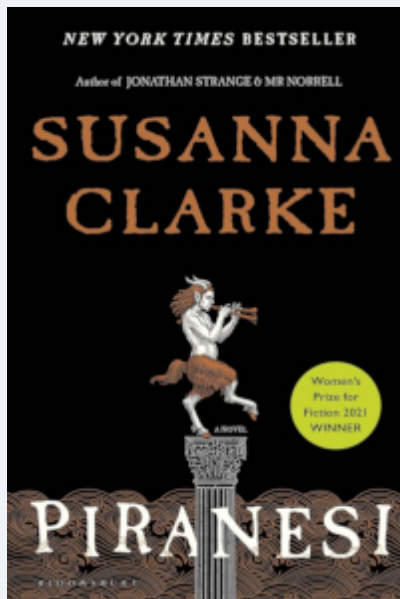
Keep reading at:

<https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/mysteries-vs-thrillers>

Book Recommendations

Read reviews for other titles on my website at:

<https://www.matthewcushing.com/blog/categories/review>



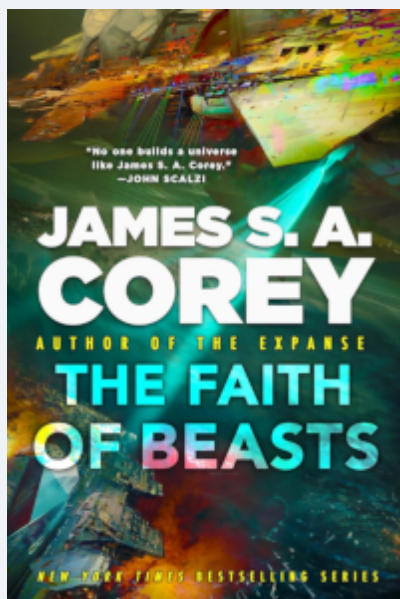
Piranesi
by Susanna Clarke

Piranesi lives in a fantastical place, full of statues in endless hallways. He's carved out a life and is generally happy, until he starts to discover his past.



King Sorrow
by Joe Hill

A good rule of thumb is never summon a dragon. It may eliminate your problems, but guess what happens when *you* become *its* problem? Yep. Not good.



The Faith of Beasts
by James S.A. Corey

Book two in the Captive's War series, the remnants of humanity carve their niche and



Snake-Eater
by T. Kingfisher

Escaping a bad situation, a woman travels to the desert to live with her aunt, only to

even thrive under the oppressive Carryx.
That is, until they discover free humans.

find her aunt has passed. She inherits the
house--and an unexpected house guest.

Writing Excerpt - Commercial Break

*With the release of the *Earth(ish)* anthology, my short story "Commercial Break" is available in its entirety. Here's a short excerpt.*

Ellie accessed her content stream, and the blast of information thrust her back into her chair. Her aged retinas and eardrums struggled to keep up with the torrent of information. A lifetime of personal use—a life well-lived—had worn them out. More pain than content reached her brain. But she had to watch.

Advertisements for everything from antacids to xylophones to hot dogs to computer cores, one after another after another after another, flooded her senses. She tried to let her mind wander, but the halo monitored her attention and paused the countdown on her quota. Ellie pushed the pain aside, refocused, and absorbed as much as she could. Her quota slowly decreased. Too slowly.

A knock at the door paused the halo, and Ellie ripped it from her head. Throwing it across the room into the bin crossed her mind, as it did every time she used it, but a replacement would arrive, and her quota increased to cover the cost. She tossed it onto its charger and hauled her slight frame out of her armchair.

After a moment to catch her balance, she shuffled to her front door.

"Yes?" she called as she peered up at the small vid screen embedded in the back of the door. Two suited individuals stood outside. Based on their builds, one was a petite woman, while the other was an average-height, thick-chested man. Full-face masks concealed their identities—whether from the public or from themselves, Ellie didn't know. The digital oval masks presented white stick-figure expressions on a black background.

GovCorp agents. Damn.

Writing Humor

Whoever said the English language isn't absurd? Here's a fun game: Place the word "only" anywhere in the following sentence and see how the meaning changes.

She told the paladin that she kills goblins.

Only she told the paladin that she kills goblins. (Nobody else said anything.)
She only told the paladin that she kills goblins. (She didn't show him or write it down.)
She told only the paladin that she kills goblins. (Why was he so special to hear her secret?)
She told the only paladin that she kills goblins. (The only one left, who was he going to tell?)
She told the paladin only that she kills goblins. (She could have said other things.)
She told the paladin that only she kills goblins. (For goblin killing, call her to get it done.)
She told the paladin that she only kills goblins. (No maiming or injuring allowed.)
She told the paladin that she kills only goblins. (All the trolls breathed a sigh of relief.)

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 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

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