



Newsletter 007, 2022Q4

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It's been a wild and wonder autumn season as winter and the holidays quickly approach. I had a welcome surprise at this year's Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers' conference in September. More on that below. Busy on my novel, I've spent less time blogging, reading, and reviewing this quarter, so I don't have as many articles as normal. Hopefully, I'll be back in the groove in 2023. In the meantime, enjoy what's below, and most importantly, **have a fantastic holiday season!**

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## News & Notes

### ***Winner, Winner, Chicken Dinner!***



In a stunning turn of events, my debut novel *The Osect Indiscretion* won the 2022 Gold Rush Literary Award for science fiction. A finalist last year as well, I was still overjoyed that my work won the award.

The judge turned out to be a literary agent searching for science fiction books, and unknowing who he was at the time, actually pitched my book to him during the conference. He chuckled, letting me know that he judged by book, and though he couldn't tell me who had won the contest - this was early in the conference before the winners were announced - he expressed high interest in the book. Huzzah!

I'm now working to get the book polished up so I can formally submit it for representation. All fingers crossed.

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## **Five Must-Read Sci-Fi Books**



Are you a science fiction fan or unsure of the genre? As part of a larger effort where I identified my Top 50 science fiction books of all time, I considered which would be the five books that best exemplify the genre, the five books that all lovers of sci-fi should have on their shelf, the five books that would convert any reader into a science fiction fan. In my estimation, these are those books (in publication order):

1. ***Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley**, published 1818 – One of the very first books that focuses on science as the driver of a fantastic tale.
2. ***Childhood's End* by Arthur C. Clarke**, published in 1953 – From the first golden age of science fiction, this is a thoughtful story about first contact. It has also influenced many other sci-fi stories including Independence Day and V.
3. ***The Andromeda Strain* by Michael Crichton**, published in 1969 – Without aliens or distant worlds, this story shows how science and the rigors of the scientific method can be used to save humanity.
4. ***Neuromancer* by William Gibson**, published in 1984 – Another book that blazes a new trail, establishing the dark, urban aesthetic known as cyberpunk and considering how artificial intelligence might impact society. This story influenced movies such as Blade Runner and The Fifth Element.
5. ***Leviathan Wakes* by James SA Corey**, published in 2011 – The start of a nine-book series entitled The Expanse, this sci-fi political and military thriller presents a highly realistic possible future as humans stretch out into our solar system. It also has some of the best supporting characters ever written.

As can be imagined, it was incredibly difficult to identify five books out of dozens that are worthy of representing the sci-fi mantle. But these selections represent a cross-section of types of science fiction stories, showing the immense variability within the genre. For the full list of my selection of the Top 50 science fiction books, please check out the post on my site.

<https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/top-50-sci-fi-books-of-all-time>

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**Spec Fic Writers Winter Newsletter**



The winter issue of “Other Worldly News” from the Speculative Fiction Writers, is now available online. Access is free and contains news about members of the group, speculative fiction writers and books, and opportunities for writers and readers. Follow along with members who publish in many of the speculative fiction sub-genres including: science fiction, fantasy, horror, dystopian, weird west, fairy tales and more.

Visit <https://specficwriters.com/newsletters/winter-2022.pdf> to read the issue and sign up to get it regularly.

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### Three Books for Writers



Whether a beginning writer, a seasoned veteran, or someone interested in learning how writers work, here are three books that every author should have on their shelf. They are indispensable help in plotting, writing, and formatting.

- **Save the Cat Writes a Novel** - Think you have a story? You need more than a plot. That's just the 'A' story. There's also a 'B' story which covers the emotional journey about your main character. And what makes your protagonist tick? Who are their antagonists and what drives them? Then, once you know your characters, does the story progress as readers expect? Are there challenges, allies, and a midpoint victory? Do the bad guys close in and the protagonist lose all hope before they get their shit together and come out victorious? Save the Cat makes sure you hit all the beats.
- **The Emotion Thesaurus** - Don't just say someone is happy or sad, that they are angry or overjoyed. Show it through their emotions. Show the reader how tears streak down their face leaving trails of salt, how their leg bounces and they wring their hands during a tense interview, and how they lick their lips and tremble with anticipation. The Emotion Thesaurus adds more feeling to your writing.
- **The Chicago Manual of Style** - The CMOS is a tome of expertise on properly formatting and punctuating fiction writing so that readers understand what you're trying to convey.

Understanding how to present internal thoughts, text messages, or characters who curse in a foreign language help keep readers immersed in your story.

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## Writing Excerpt - *The Champion of Arctica*

*For the holidays, instead of including only a few paragraphs, I've decided to include my full flash fiction story *The Champion of Arctica* originally published in the *Speculative Fiction Writers' anthology Joy to the Worlds*. This holiday tale considers what it takes to become Santa. Enjoy!*

As the last adversary fell with a squelch and a belch on the arena's packed snow, Krixus of clan Kring realized he had done it. He had vanquished the strongest contender from each rival clan, corporation, and nation. He had won the centenary contest. An honor above all others.

With this victory in the Holiday Party Melee, the final event of the competition, he had proven superior in confection eating, fruitcake throwing, photo bombing, carol singing, and extreme merry-making. The mass of competitors had wilted at Krixus' sheer energy, passion, and joviality. Overmatched, the smart had withdrawn before the foolhardy passed out and collapsed.

His festive battle-rage subsided, the silence of Krixus' singular focus broke, and the elven crowd's roar crashed upon him. The warmth of victory rushed through his body, making his tired muscles tingle. Steam rose from his bare, swole torso, glistening from effort, and though the temperature was well below freezing, the cold neither affected nor bothered him.

He wiped sweat and fudge from his brow and savored the ordeal of challenges he had endured that day.

He rubbed the piece of carved antler woven into his long, white beard. A token of his prowess in reindeer wrangling, it declared his knowledge of husbandry, training, and riding surpassed all others. His speed had nearly matched that of the beasts, and no other competitor had compared with his ability to manage a team of eight, particularly in aerial maneuvers. While others had required red-nosed reindeer to light their way, Krixus had needed no such help.

As the elven king tried to quiet the crowd, Krixus touched the wide black belt around his waist, golden buckle glistening in the light, and caressed the fresh gouges in the leather, each the mark of a snag that had tried to slow him as he competed in the chimney climbing challenge. No matter the obstacle, he had repeatedly delivered gifts, gobbled up treats and milk, and climbed up the chimney to the roof well ahead of all others, exhibiting his unmatched strength, dexterity, and appetite. Bloody, soot-caked scrapes marked his shoulders, and cookie crumbs riddled his beard, but he paid them no mind.

He grasped the thick fabric of the empty red sack, steeped in magic enhancements by the sciencemancers of his clan, folded and tucked into his belt. Whether loaded with hundreds of packages or lumps of coal, his stamina in stacking and delivering presents or stuffing stockings bested all others in the field.

He rubbed the ruby-inlaid gold ring on his finger, a memento of his graduation from Harvard Business School. An expert in the global manufacture and distribution of toys, consumer electronics, and textiles—particularly neckties and socks—his business acumen revealed the toy-making knowledge of his competitors as naïve and childish.

And now, with his victory in the Melee, his domination was complete and coronation assured. He would wear the mantle bestowed by the elven king on the best and strongest, the man most worthy to bridge the worlds of elf and human.

Thousands of red poinsettia leaves rained down upon him, smelling of cinnamon and peppermint. Shouts of approval accented the thunderous applause. Krixus closed his eyes and basked in everything the crowd gave.

Jingling bells quieted the boisterous spectators, and Krixus opened his eyes.

A voice called down from the shadows of the elven king's box. "Who are thou, human, the new Champion of Arctica?"

Krixus spread his arms wide and tilted his head back so all in the coliseum and heavens above could hear him evoke the title he'd won and deserved.

"I AM SANTACUS!"

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## Holiday Thought

When it comes to the craziness and commercialism of Christmas, it is easy to lose focus of what really makes the holiday wonderful - the coming together of family and friends. And for inspiration each year, I turn to Ellen Griswold:

"I don't know what to say, but it's Christmas, and we're all in misery."

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As always, **thank you** to everyone who takes the time to read this newsletter and support my writing! If you get a chance, please check out my website at [www.matthewcushing.com](http://www.matthewcushing.com) for the latest and greatest information on my stories and novels, in-person events, my reading list, and blog posts on any and all topics concerning science fiction, fantasy, horror, or the supernatural.

Follow me on Twitter at [@mhcushing](https://twitter.com/mhcushing). Comments and retweets are always welcome! And if you know someone who loves speculative fiction, 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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