



Newsletter 018, 2025Q4

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Hello!

Happy New Year! Though I usually try to get my winter newsletter out during December, a busy holiday season has delayed me until now. But, I'm happy to say the holidays were enjoyable and relaxing—a nice respite from some of the hectic nature of 2025 (both with my writing and with society in general.)

Since September and my fall newsletter, I've spent a lot of time preparing the story for my second novel, tentatively titled *Airstream Dream*. October was filled with planning, researching, and organizing timelines, character sketches, plot beats, and general histories of both 1985 and 1962 New England (it's a time-travel mystery.) November was dedicated to writing the first, rough draft as my critique group organized an internal Novel Writing Month, and I got about 30k words written—a good start. December was about recovery and catching back up with everything else I'd put on hold. Nothing like starting yet another new project!

Now that 2026 is underway, I've got a long list of more than enough stories to work on, but I'm always finding more! So much fun! So much to do! So much promise for the new year!

And I hope 2026 is just as exciting for you!

## News & Notes



### Reader for *Uncharted Magazine*

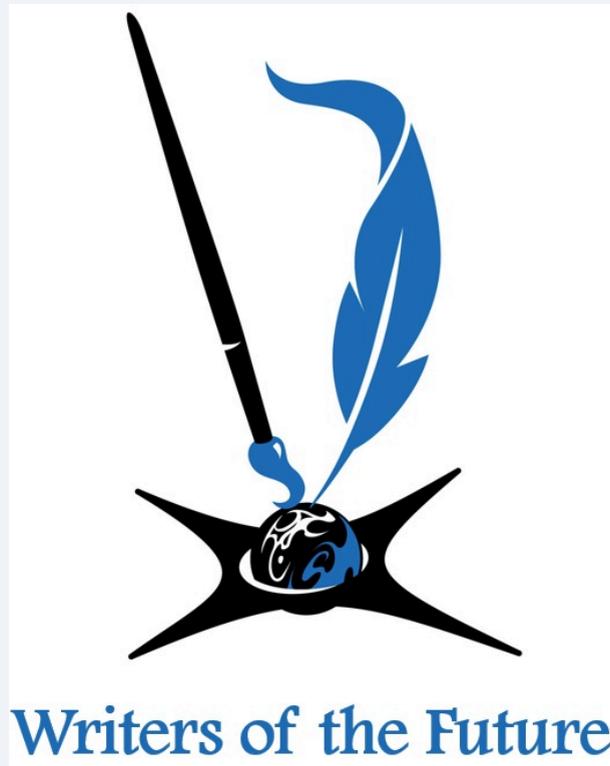
In continued efforts to improve my writing craft, I continue to write short stories and submit them for publication. And like most authors, a very high percentage of submissions are rejected. (Check out my blog post on Year in Review: 2025 below for some stats, if you're interested.) Most rejections are form letters, so it is difficult to understand what held the story back. What it the characters? The plot? The pacing?

To help understand what stories work and which don't, I volunteer for a Reader position with Uncharted Magazine, one of the high-end online speculative fiction magazines. I read ten short stories per week, and it is interesting seeing them from the other side of the table. Some stories come in that clearly still need some editing and cleanup. Others are well-written but tell stories that have been told over and over. Only a very few are exceptional,

offering a new take or new twist and are engaging with impeccable writing skills. Those are the stories that eventually get published.

Now I've a much clearer understanding of where my stories fit into that spectrum and what I need to do to improve them to the next level.

Check out Uncharted at [www.unchartedmag.com](http://www.unchartedmag.com)



## **"Intersection" Earns an Honorable Mention**

My short story "Intersection" has earned an Honorable Mention from the fourth quarter 2025 contest of Writers of the Future. "Intersection" follows professional trumpet player Robbie Johns as he struggles to land consistent work, and in a moment of despair makes a Faustian wish that attracts slick, unscrupulous agent Lucius Olskratt. But aging trumpet master Al Rayure shows up at Robbie's door offering another path, knowing just who Olskratt really is.

A retelling of the Crossroads urban legend where blues guitarist Robert Johnson supposedly sold his soul to the devil for mastery of the guitar, "Intersection" offers a modern vibe and unexpected twist.

This is my third Honorable Mention recognition by Writers of the Future.

**Latest Blog Posts**

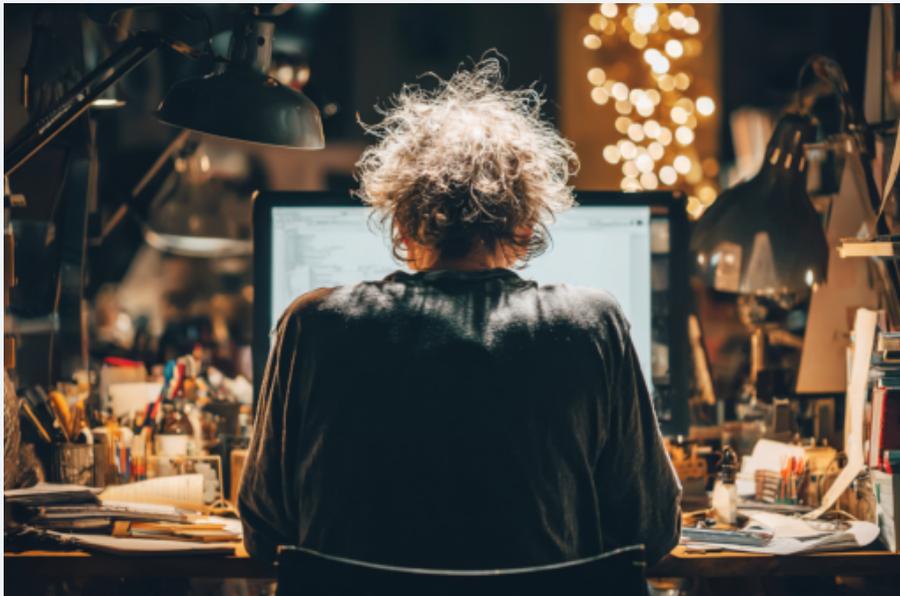


## **Year in Review: 2025**

Though I didn't quite accomplish every thing I set out to do in 2025 (who does?), it was still another successful year in the development of my burgeoning writing career. From writing to editing to publishing, and from short stories to novels, progress was made across the board.

Click here to see how things worked out for me in 2025: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/2025-year-in-review>

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## **Participating in Novel Writing Month**

Of the many techniques available to help an author write their novel, focusing a dedicated time on cranking out the first draft is one of the best. NaNoWriMo, or the National Novel Writing Month organization, led this effort for authors for years. That is until a scandal among the leaders basically killed the organization. And though other organizations have tried to fill this space, none have truly established themselves.

So, when my online critique group—which is a bit of a misnomer as we have over 100 members and offer much more than just critiques—organized an internal Novel Writing Month, I was fully on board. With the idea of my next novel coalescing in my brain—forget that I’m still editing and polishing my first novel!—this was an opportunity I couldn’t miss.

Read about how I had to prepare as well as grind through the month: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/participating-in-novel-writing-month>

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## Multiple POVs is NOT Head Hopping

Complex stories engage multiple characters in a variety of situations, and it is completely acceptable to tell those stories from more than one character viewpoint. But multiple character points of view (POVs) does not necessarily mean head-hopping which should be avoided at all costs.

Click here to examine the subtle but key differences: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/multiple-povs-does-not-mean-head-hopping>

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## The Ethics of Spurious Awards

Being a writer is hard, and finding success can be harder. We all look toward getting published, whether we write novels or short stories, as we want to share our stories with the world (and hope people read them and enjoy them.) There's also the financial side that cannot be overlooked, even if it is difficult to find success.

Though writing well and showing excellent craft and storytelling is the surest way toward success and publication, it may still take building a set of bona fides to help authors establish themselves.

But there are an unethical few who look to bypass the work and go straight to "success."

Click here to read the full article: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/ethics-of-spurious-awards>

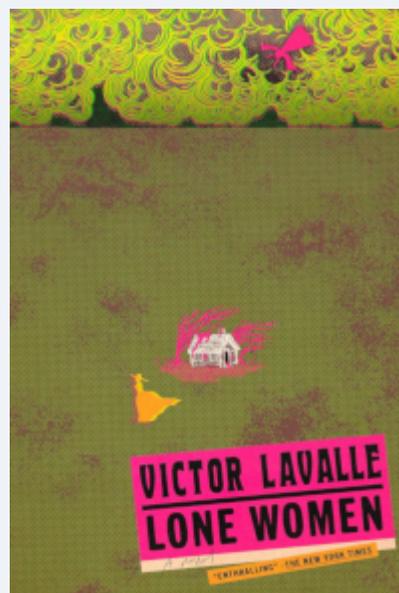
## Book Recommendations

Read reviews for other titles on my website at:

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

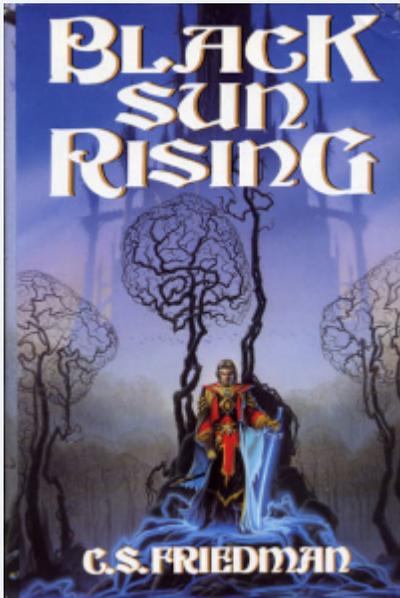


*The Stainless Steel Rat*  
by Harry Harrison



*Lone Women*  
by Victor LaValle

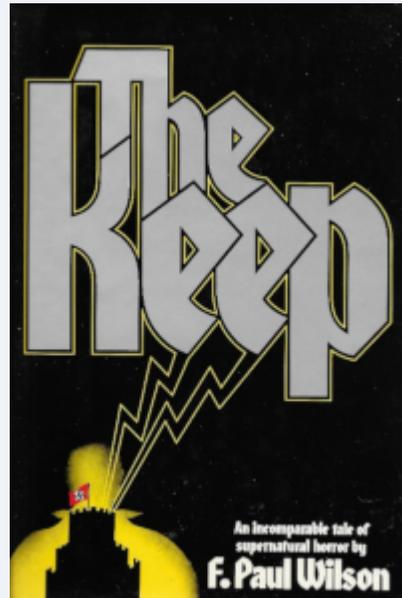
A classic work following The Stainless Steel Rat, a con-man extraordinaire who is hired by the galactic police to find and capture his nemesis.



***Black Sun Rising***  
by CS Friedman

An engaging space fantasy where heroes fight for the survival of humanity while villains learn there are always worse and more powerful villains.

A weird west horror tale about black women settlers on the Montana prairie who have to deal with dark family secrets as well as discrimination.



***The Keep***  
by F Paul Wilson

Set in a medieval castle in Romania during World War II, the occupying Nazis unleash an ancient malevolence with which only a local Jewish scholar can help.

## Writing Excerpt - *Suppression*

Hell raged on the horizon.

Fire Captain Roger Buckley studied the blazing wildfire from an exposed mountain ridge. Three miles separated him from the inferno, but that distance rapidly shortened. Brush burned in areas of high intensity, crackling, popping and eating up ground. The vanguard attack. Behind followed a roaring crown fire, sending chills up his spine. Stiff thirty mile-per-hour winds carried the fire from tree to tree, and months without meaningful rain made sure everything was tinder dry and ready to burn.

And burn it had for three days—since some uninformed yahoo in the National Park Service ignited a prescribed burn. Admittedly, piles of fallen logs, thick brush, and dead needles from decades of neglect choked the forest floor. It needed to be cleared. But not now. Not in these conditions. Winds from the desert southwest brought nothing but dry, hot air, like bellows into a forge.

And they were the hammer.

“Alright, you sons a’ bitches!” Squad Leader Rojas yelled to the troop of Hot Shots standing along the ridge with Buckley. “You ready to get after this beast?”

The dozen grizzled veterans adjusted their packs and equipment. They didn’t yell back. They didn’t need to.

Buckley tightened his helmet strap and pulled down his goggles to meet the cloth mask over his nose and mouth. He hadn’t planned on getting into the mix when he drove up to the ridge. He simply wanted to get a sense of the scope of this wildfire. A lay of the land. What it would give and where it would fight. But the teams were short-handed and tired. And he’d not send firefighters anywhere he wouldn’t go himself.

## Writing Humor

A math limerick by Leigh Mercer, published 1948 in *Notes and Queries*:

$$\frac{12 + 144 + 20 + 3 \cdot \sqrt{4}}{7} + (5 \times 11) = 9^2 + 0$$

If that's not readily obvious, try:

*A dozen, a gross, and a score,  
Plus three times the square root of four  
Divided by seven  
Plus five times eleven  
Is nine-squared and not a bit more!*

## 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](http://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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