

Newsletter 021, 2026Q3

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Happy Fall!

I can't believe that summer is already over. Days are shortening much too quickly, and there is a nip in the evening air. Soon, leaves will be changing here in New England.

There's no News & Notes this edition. Things have been quiet for me on the writing front. I've still included the last few posts from my blog as well as some book reviews. I've actually included a couple more than I usually do as I've read some really good speculative books lately.

My focus the past few months has been on my novels. I'm still editing my first novel (*The Osect Indiscretion* – a light sci-fi mystery/thriller) but hope to have it to a level at which I can send it out to a few friends for their feedback. I want to get a few more opinions—and possibly even more editing—before I send it to agents. When I can, I'm also writing the draft of my second novel (*Airstream Dream* – a time travel drama/mystery) and still have a way to go. I'll likely be participating in a Novel Writing Month this November where I'll focus on getting more words down on the page. Hopefully, that will get me to a complete first draft.

With my focus on my novels, I haven't spent any time writing or submitting short stories. I did enter a couple of writing contests—and received some quality feedback from the judges. I'll keep submitting when I can. My first anniversary as a Reader for Uncharted is this month, and I've included a link to a post about what I've learned over the past year.

Fall is also usually conference time as I make my way out to Denver for the annual Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers conference, but I decided to opt out for this year. I am bummed to miss Stephen Graham Jones as the keynote speaker. I'll be looking to attend some type of workshop or conference next year.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter, and thanks for reading and supporting my writing!

Latest Blog Posts



Top Speculative Roles of Sir John Hurt

In 2017, the world lost a great actor and a mainstay of speculative fiction movies and television shows.

Sir John Hurt was a legendary dramatic actor and a pillar of the English stage, performing in Shakespearean plays like *MacBeth* and *King Lear*. His dramatic abilities stretched to Hollywood where he received acclaim for roles in *Midnight Express* (where he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor), *I, Claudius* on PBS, the movie adaptation of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, and most notably as John Merrick in *The Elephant Man* (where he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor.)

Read more at:
https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/top-speculative-roles-of-sir-john-hurt

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What I've Learned as a First Reader

What does it take to get a story published by a top speculative fiction magazine?

That's a question I've been trying to answer for a couple of years. I've tried several times, and after having stories included in a variety of free or token-paying markets, I've wondered on how to take the next step and get published in a pro-paying market.

Last summer, I started a volunteer position with *Uncharted Magazine*—an online speculative fiction magazine—as a First Reader, i.e. someone who helps read through the incoming submissions (the "slush pile") and identify those stories worthy of further consideration. I thought seeing how the process worked from the publishing side might shed some light on what I need to for my own stories.

Read more: https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/what-i-ve-learned-as-a-first-reader

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Top Ten Best Recent Speculative Fiction Books

I get asked a lot what I'm currently reading or whether I've read any good speculative books lately. As a speculative author, I try to keep up with what is being published. I like to read what other authors are doing and what types of stories are getting traction in the market. Plus, I just like to read a good story!

Here are the top ten speculative fiction books I've read that have come out in the past few years. In a couple of cases, I've included all the books in the series as all of them are worthwhile reads. Many of them are award winners, so I'm not the only one bringing attention to these titles.

See the list at: https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/top-ten-best-recent-speculative-books

Book Recommendations

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



Light from Uncommon Stars
by Ryka Aoki

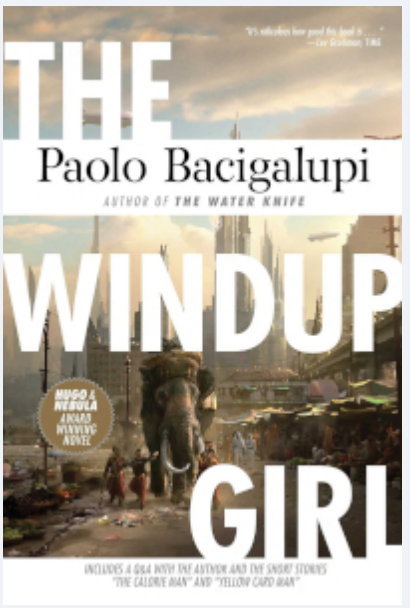
Katrina is a violin prodigy, and Miss Satomi is a world-renown violin teacher in need of a student (and a seventh soul to send to hell.) A story of acceptance and family.



The Bewitching
by Silvia Moreno-Garcia

Told in three time periods, different generations of a Mexican family have fought against witches, and now Minerva must fight for survival in New England.



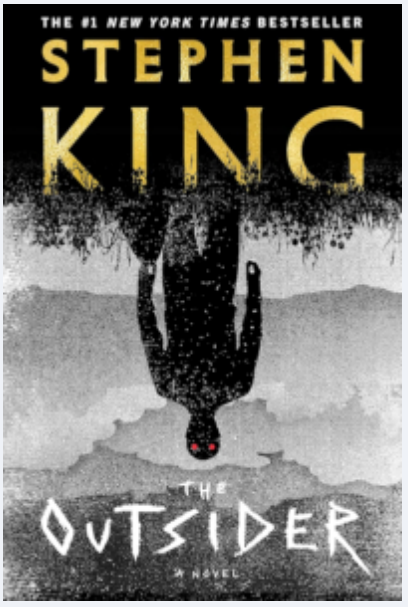


A Drop of Corruption
by Robert Jackson Bennett

Book two of the Ana and Din series, the story follows the investigators as they try to solve a murder in a protectorate that is looking for an excuse to leave the kingdom.

The Windup Girl
by Paolo Bacigalupi

In 23rd century Thailand, climate change has ravaged the earth and gene hackers help biotech firms create resistant grains - if they're not stolen first.



The Outsider
by Stephen King

Framed for a crime he didn't commit, Terry is killed on his way to court. But when similar cases are discovered, Det. Ralph tracks down a malevolent skinwalker.



Nettle & Bone
by T. Kingfisher

When a princess' older sister is married off to become queen, she is sent to a convent to ensure no competing heirs. But there was nothing said against learning magic.

Writing Excerpt -*Parts Is Parts*

This is an excerpt of a ghost story I wrote over a decade ago.

The next morning our real estate friends, Joan and Jeff, stopped by for breakfast.

"So, how was your parents' New Year's Eve party last night?" Joan asked Leena in the course of conversation.

With a glance at me, Leena snickered. "It was long. Too long, and my parents didn't serve any food."

"Oh no!" Joan's eyes went wide in mock horror. "Were you two starving all night?"

"For most of it," I said. "On our drive home, we found a Mickey Ds still open."

"We hadn't been to one in ages," Leena added. "They had the most delicious nuggets. I'm not a fan of fast food, but these were probably the best I've ever had."

"They were open early New Year's Day?" Joan asked. "I thought most places would be closed. How lucky to find them."

"I know," I said. "They were the only place open in the entire town of Colitas."

Jeff furrowed his brow. "You don't mean that little wide spot at exit 43, do you?"

"Yeah, that's it. Only gas stations and fast food. Everything was closed but this place. Their sign lit up the whole area." I caught the odd glance between Jeff and Joan. "Why?"

"Because that location has been closed for years," Jeff said. "It's boarded up."

"Well, it must have reopened," Leena said.

"Nope," Jeff added. "I was there last week. My firm has the note on that property. We've been looking for a buyer but nobody wants to go near the place."

"Why?" Leena asked.

"Because of who the former owner was," Joan said.

I looked at Leena for clarification but she shook her head.

"I keep forgetting how new you two are to this area," Joan added. "That restaurant was owned by Silas Frye, that creepy serial killer guy. The one who confessed to dozens of murders but would never say how he disposed of the bodies? Some said he was a cannibal. His victims were said to be on the menu."

“Yeah,” Jeff added, “he was executed around this time last year. In fact, I think it was on New Year’s Eve. His last meal was nuggets. You know, anything can taste like chicken.”

This story is based on a “nugget” of truth. I did have a strange experience going through a Mickey Ds drive-through in the wee hours one morning coming back from a party. It was the only place open off a highway exit, and its sign lit up the whole area. The speaker was staticky, and I never really saw the people inside, other than a person in a hoodie handing over the food. As soon as I pulled forward to the exit, the entire place went dark, sign and all. They must have closed. Just a surreal experience. But the nuggets were delicious!

Writing Humor

Another in the Oddities of the English Language series:

“I do not know where family doctors acquired illegibly perplexing handwriting; nevertheless, extraordinary pharmaceutical intellectuality counterbalancing indecipherability transcendentalizes intercommunication’s incomprehensibleness.”

This sentence is fascinating because the first word is one letter long, the second word is two letters, the third word is three letters, the eighth word is eight letters long and so on… the twentieth word is twenty letters long!

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.

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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