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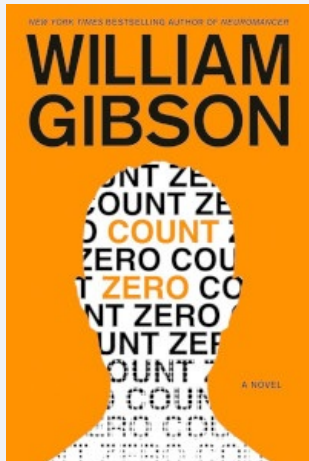
Happy Holidays, everyone! I hope this latest edition of my newsletter finds you well, spending time with family, and enjoying the season.

I don't have a lot of updates this quarter, so this edition may be a bit shorter than others. I'm still editing, reworking, and polishing *The Osect Indiscretion* which seems to be a never-ending process. I hope to have it in a state for alpha and beta readers within the next few months.

I really want to wrap it up as ideas for my second novel keep bursting out of my head as my brain wants to switch gears and move on to the next story. Tentatively titled *Blue Note Gothic*, my second book will expand greatly on the characters and world I created in my short story "Blue Note G" about a jazz prodigy who inherits a voodoo clarinet that grants wishes—but at a cost and not always as expected. I can't wait to get started.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy these book suggestions, links to recent blog posts on my website, and a holiday flash fiction piece.

## Book Recommendations



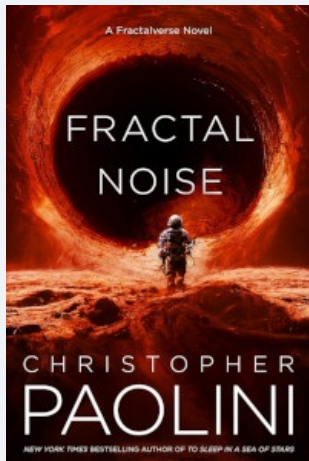
**Count Zero**  
by William Gibson

The follow-up to *Neuromancer* and second book of the Sprawl trilogy, AI voodoo gods are affecting the Matrix.



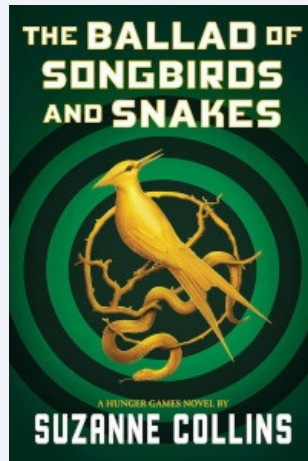
**To Fetch a Thief**  
by Spencer Quinn

A Chet and Bernie mystery, the duo investigates the disappearance of a circus elephant.



**Fractal Noise**  
by Christopher Paolini

A mission to discover the nature of an immense hole on a planet strains the very sanity of the team.



**The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes**  
by Suzanne Collins

A prequel to the Hunger Games, follow the events that shape young

## Recent Blog Posts

- Too many enjoyable science fiction television shows were cancelled after one season. These are my favorites: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/top-one-season-sci-fi-shows>
- Read how AppleTV's production of Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* compares to the influential novels: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/review-of-asimov-s-foundation-book-and-series>
- Netflix is teeming with compelling political thrillers that rival any Hollywood blockbuster. Here are eight worth watching: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/top-eight-political-thrillers-on-netflix>
- The winter edition of Worlds of Imagination, the newsletter of Speculative Fiction Writers Association (my writing group) is out, and I'm the member of the month: <https://specficwriters.com/NL23winter>

## Flash Fiction - *Guiding Flight*

*This complete short story was originally published in the holiday-themed flash fiction anthology Joy to the Worlds.*

The capsule lurched as it reappeared into normal spacetime, the time leap complete.

"Oomph!" The captain grunted as the seat harness dug into her shoulders, the adaptive inertial fibers woven into her flight suit providing less protection than expected.

Similar groans escaped the rest of the bridge crew.

An alarm blared. "Proximity alert! Proximity alert!"

"Status!" The captain twisted in her chair toward the navigator.

"We're out of position, ma'am." The navigator's hands flew over his console as he studied the readouts. "We're just outside lunar orbit and on a direct vector to gravitational capture."

*That can't be right.* The captain's mind raced. Target coordinates were for the void between the orbits of Mercury and Venus. At the time of arrival, both planets should have been on the far side of the sun, shielding their trajectory from the few celestial observers on Earth and allowing a clandestine approach.

But neither Mercury nor Venus had moons.

"Lunar orbit of what?" The captain tried to keep her voice calm, wanting to reassure the crew. This variation of events wasn't included in any of the pre-flight simulations.

"Earth, sir!" the navigator shouted. "We are now inside the moon's lunar orbit and on course toward Earth's atmosphere. Both velocity and approach angle are well outside safety limits."

*My God!* Bile rose in her throat. 'Out of position' was an understatement. They had arrived on top of their target.

"Emergency one-eighty pivot and full deceleration burn, NOW!" The captain punched a button, activating the ship-wide comms. "All hands. Brace! Brace! Brace!" She hoped everyone remained secured in their jump chairs. The bulkheads would pulverize anyone moving about during the extreme deceleration.

*God will surely protect them.*

Her ears popped as a pressure wave rocked through the ship. Blackness consumed the edges of her vision as the thrust pressed her into her seat.

*The mission is lost.* Captaining the first official time flight after all the tests and trial runs had been the honor of a lifetime. Since she was a little girl, she had prayed that she would one day leave her mark on society and positively impact Earth's forty billion inhabitants.

After extensive worldwide debates about the crew and destination, the International Spacetime Agency answered her prayers and selected her to lead this mission to witness and record the most influential, impactful, and holy birth known throughout history. Religious and secular scholars alike had thousands of questions they wanted resolved.

And she blew it. Now, with time ripples radiating through this locus of spacetime, a second trip was impossible. The captain touched the crucifix around her neck. *Maybe there are things we're just not meant to know.*

The ship rattled under the strain of the burn, the walls buckling as if they might collapse at any moment. Through clenched teeth, the captain asked the navigator, "Are we going to make it?" The roar of the engines and metallic clanking of the bulkheads and consoles made hearing difficult.

"I don't know," the navigator shouted through the din, his voice pitched higher. "We need three minutes of full burn to clear the Earth."

The captain ran the calculations in her head. As she came to an answer, she took a deep breath and grasped her crucifix. A calmness enveloped her. *God's will be done.*

"Gentlemen. It's been an honor."

###

The caravan of travelers and camels huddled together in the slack of two large dunes, finding minimal protection as the sandstorm raged around them.

In a small, cloth tent shaking from the violent storm, Melchior of Persia lamented, "It is no use. Between the darkness of the night and the blinding sand, I can no longer see the star. We have lost our way."

"We will never find it now," added Gaspar of India. "We will never make it in time."

Balthasar of Arabia nodded in agreement. "This is the worst storm I have ever seen. If there's no break, we will die here in this sea of sand."

Huddled on a plush Persian rug, surrounding a single flickering candle, they prayed.

A servant pulled back the flap and stuck his head inside. "My lords! Please come— there is something you must see!"

The three kings scrambled from the tent, and though the haboob howled with furious wind and blasting sand, a light in the night sky had appeared. To the west, a bright shooting star, closer and more intense than anyone had ever seen, streaked down from the heavens.

"My God." The winds dulled Gaspar's shout to a whisper.

Balthasar set himself against the gale and thrust his arms into the air.

"Praise to God. We are saved!" His silk robes rippled and snapped.

Melchior's heart jumped at the sight. "Pack the tent! Prepare the camels! God has shown us the way."

And the caravan continued to Bethlehem.

## A Touch of Holiday Spirit

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

--Ellen Griswold, *Christmas Vacation*

## 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](http://www.matthewcushing.com). Or, you can follow me on X or Threads at [@mhcushing](https://twitter.com/mhcushing)

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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