



Newsletter 014, 2024Q4

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I can't believe the holidays are already upon us and 2024 is quickly drawing to a close. There's a tension in the air - more political than jovial - as we wait to see what 2025 brings.

For me, I will continue to edit my novel with hopes of landing an agent and eventually getting that bad boy published. I will also be starting my next novel - a supernatural horror story about a voodoo clarinet - with lots of planning and outlining before I start putting words on the page. Ideas for a third and fourth novel as well as a screenplay are also all floating around my skull, so I hope to make a lot of progress this year.

And, of course, I'll continue to write short stories because they are such a fun distraction. I have one story accepted to an anthology that should come out next year (details on that to follow), and I hope to get others into a few more publications.

I hope this season brings happiness and good tidings to you and your family, and may 2025 be an even better year!

## Featured Article



### How I Use Robert Heinlein's Five Rules of Writing

Writing short stories is a different animal than writing a full-length novel. Though some elements are similar—both require a plot and a character to follow, preferably one who might learn something—other aspects are quite different. Most obviously is the time it takes to complete a work and get it to market.

It takes me anywhere from two to four weeks (and sometimes longer) to fully plan, write, and edit a short story until its ready for market. I know other writers who can knock them out in a week or two. Novels take years.

But like the market for novels, the market for short stories is highly competitive. There are publications that pay professional rates, others that pay token amounts, and even others that don't pay at all, but every one gets flooded with submissions each open period. With a faster time to market come faster acceptances, which can be career affirming, and faster rejections, which can be soul crushing, particularly when receiving many of them back-to-back. Except for best-selling authors who are invited to submit, most authors only have a small percentage of submissions accepted.

That's where these rules for writing come in. They are a helpful reminder that all writers face these issues, and these rules can help overcome the desires to quit and stop writing that a mountain of rejections can produce.

## Latest Blog Posts



### Swapping Tenses to Engage the Reader

One idiom I have heard a lot regarding writing—regarding many things, actually—is to first learn the rules before trying to break them. I have been writing seriously for several years, taking classes, writing stories, and trying to improve the quality of my craft. And it was only recently that I finally understood this idiom with regard to writing, at least in part.

While studying Ursula K. LeGuin’s book on writing titled *Steering the Craft*, I have learned that changing tenses when doing flashbacks can both help set off the time shift as well as further engage the reader.

Check out the full article at: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/swapping-tenses-to-engage-the-reader>



### Loving English - Contronyms

One of my favorite aspects of writing is simply engaging with the English language. There are many fascinating (and weird) aspects to English that appeal to me as they become tools to help shape a narrative.

Though synonyms and antonyms are standard tools in the writer's toolkit, I enjoy exploring more exotic variations like homonyms (words that sound alike but with different spellings and definitions) to subtly shift a meaning, metonyms (words that are used as a substitute for something closely related to it) to provide variety, and heteronyms (words that are spelled the same but pronounced differently with different definitions) to throw expectations.

But one of my favorite types of words are contronyms, which are words that are spelled the same but have opposite meanings. If you've ever heard the phrase, "Have a nice trip?" right after a stumble, you've encountered a contronym as trip can mean either a successful journey or a short, unsuccessful one.

See the list at: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/loving-english-contronymns>



## A Peek at My TBR

Though I'm sure many avid readers have an extensive "To Be Read" (TBR) pile, I doubt few compare with the TBRs of writers who, by their very nature, read and absorb vast amounts of writing in all its forms.

I write speculative fiction, mainly focusing on either science fiction or paranormal/horror stories. But that's not to say that fantasy, time travel, or alternate history stories don't interest me. In fact, I read well outside the genres in which I write. I love mysteries, thrillers, and the occasional literary fiction.

And sometimes, a wayward biography, history, or science book (even textbooks) will get a read. I'm a firm believer that broad reading habits lead to both better writing habits and a better general understanding of the world.

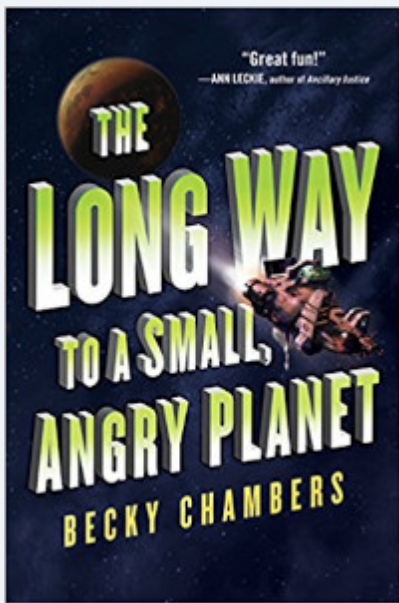
My TBR currently has 94 titles on it. These are books that I already physically own and sit on my shelves. (I'm also a big believer in physical copies of books instead of electronic versions, but that's a topic for another post.) I also have another 124 titles queued up to purchase, either due to personal recommendations, awards, or high reviews. And tomorrow, these numbers might be higher.

See my current TBR at: <https://www.matthewcushing.com/post/a-peek-at-my-tbr>

## Book Recommendations

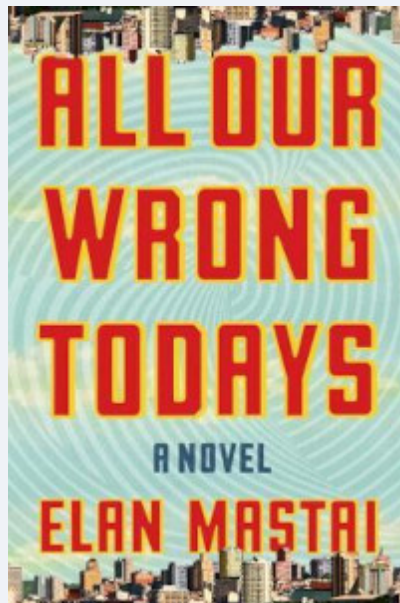
Read reviews for these titles and others on my website at:  
<https://www.matthewcushing.com/blog/categories/review>





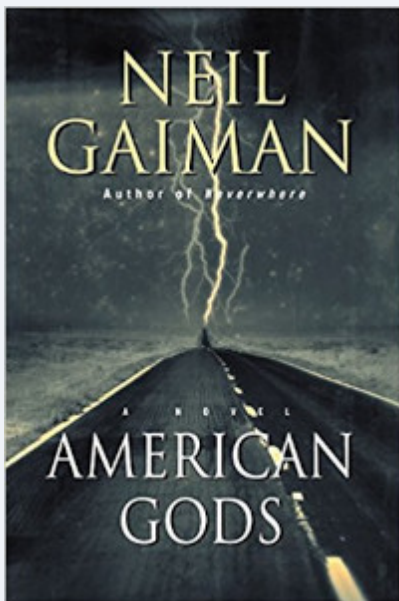
***The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet***  
by Becky Chambers

First in the Wayfarer series, this uplifting science fiction story follows Rosemary as she joins the crew of the Wayfarer as they create wormholes for interstellar travel.



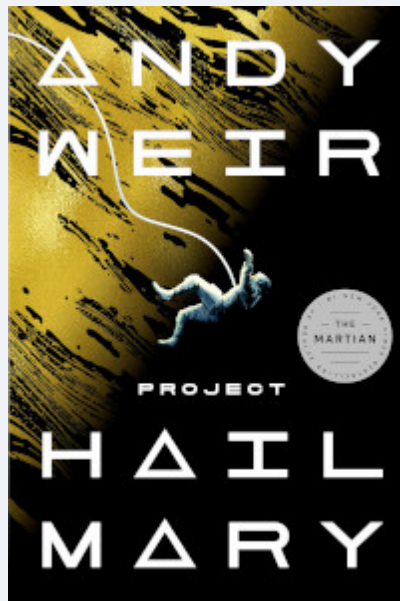
***All Our Wrong Todays***  
by Elan Mastai

A favorite book about time travel, Tom Barren accidentally interferes with the first time travel experiment, changing both his life and the entire timeline.



***American Gods***  
by Neil Gaiman

If gods represent our cultural norms, what happens when the old gods of earth, beauty, and death fight against new gods of media, tech, and globalization?



***Project Hail Mary***  
by Andy Weir

Even better than *The Martian*, this story follows Ryland Grace as he wakes with amnesia in the middle of a lone mission to save the Earth.

## Writing Excerpt - *Out With a Bang*

*The call for this piece was a short (around 200 words) piece about "a good death." Let me know if the ending was at all a surprise.*

It's time for me to die. I sense it in my core.

But I'm not sad. I've had a good life, even if I'm not what I once was. I'm much bigger now, and my complexion has darkened, turning much redder with spots all over. Where did

they come from? I've always had some, but lately, it seems they're everywhere. And my temperature is definitely cooler. I just can't make heat like before.

As the center of attention, everyone wanted to be close, always circling around. But now, my closest companions have disappeared. Four remain nearby, some with dozens of little ones of their own. But they all see me in a different light.

I remember when this family first came together—what a chaotic time. Plenty of upheaval and turmoil until everyone discovered their own path. A parasitic infection bloomed throughout our family, but it eventually went away, leaving us in peace.

The moment is near, but I'm not going out quietly. No. The universe will know I was here. With my death, everything I was will be cast out to the cosmos, starting the cycle anew. And they will see me one last time.

They will know I was Sol.

## Writing Humor

*An interesting quote about English:*

"Yes, English can be weird. It can be understood through tough thorough thought, though."

- David Burge

## 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 X or Threads at [@mhcushing](https://twitter.com/mhcushing). I'm also now 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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