



WINTER 2023 EDITION

Happy Holidays from the Speculative Fiction Writers Association! We hope your holidays are filled with gift-bearing dragons, caroling aliens, and joy-inducing strains of mutant mistletoe—as well as a visit from the most famous elf of all!

Our group celebrates all things speculative fiction—from science fiction to magical realism, urban fantasy to historical fiction, time travel to supernatural horror. If it asks a question, our members are there looking for answers. We hope you enjoy this edition of *Worlds of Imagination*.

In This Newsletter...

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- Keeping the Words Flowing with *Flow State* by Paul Martz
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- Add Emotional Depth to Your (Bland) Characters by R.C. Beckett

MEET OUR MEMBER

Matthew Cushing



My passion for writing speculative fiction started in high school when I added elements of futuristic technology, magic, or mystery to English assignments. Short stories of adventure, alien worlds, and androids soon followed, echoing the stories I had read since childhood when I grew up reading the ABCDs of science fiction: Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, and Philip K. Dick—along with Robert Heinlein, Ursula K. Le Guin, William Gibson, and Douglas Adams. Though I enjoy reading any well-told adventure, stories with an underlying commentary on humanity, society, or politics carries more weight and interest, particularly if they include an element of humor.

Through most of my life, writing speculative fiction has been an emotional and creative outlet I enjoyed in the evenings or on weekends. But in 2019, prior to the global pandemic, changes in life circumstances provided the opportunity to focus on my writing with the intent of becoming a published author. With story ideas in hand, I

joined Speculative Fiction Writers Association, an online critique group, to improve my craft.

In 2021, my short story “The Rite to Vote” – a humorous satire on the difficulty and futility of becoming a voter – was a Finalist for the Roswell Award (presented by Omega Sci-Fi Project), garnering a live reading by science-fiction actor David Blue. With famed science fiction author Larry Niven one of the judges that year, the success of my story bolstered my confidence in both my career direction and ability. In 2022, my debut novel *The Osect Indiscretion* was named the Winner of the Gold Rush Literary Awards (presented by Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers) for speculative fiction after being a Finalist the year before.

The support of speculative fiction as a genre as well as other authors is important to me, and I have participated as a judge in both the 2021 inaugural Self-Published Science Fiction Competition established by Hugh Howey, and this year in the speculative fiction category of the Gold Rush Literary Awards. I also continue to support the development of speculative fiction writers through the Speculative Fiction Writers Association where I am now President of the organization.

From my home in coastal Connecticut, I am currently deep in the editing process for *The Osect Indiscretion*, planning out my second novel – a gothic horror story about a voodoo clarinet prodigy – tentatively titled *Blue Note Gothic*, and developing a portfolio of short stories.

Visit my website at www.matthewcushing.com or follow me on X/Twitter (@mhcushing), BlueSky (@mcushing.bsky.social), or Threads (@mhcushing).

BOOK REVIEW



Elaine Clark



Book Series for Binge Reading

Book Review by Elaine Clark
Tammie Painter's *Circus of Unusual Creatures*

Tammie Painter is the author of *The Circus of Unusual Creatures* series I have recently been binge reading. Not such a binge since there are only four books in the series so far. The narrator of the stories is Duncan, aka Brutus Fangwrath, Deadliest Dragon in the West. He loves omelets pretty much more than anything and drinks wine (and other alcoholic beverages) by the bucket. Duncan is one of the performers in Ely Zinzendorf's Circus of Unusual Creatures (hence the

title of the series). Zin, as most people call him, is a satyr with a heart of gold but a firm eye on the bottom line.

In *Hoard it all Before*, the first book in the series, Opening Day for the circus is ruined by the death of Duncan's handler, Porter Kohl. Yes, Duncan is a "tame" dragon. In Duncan's words, "We need a handler to motivate us to get us off our lethargic hindquarters." Along with Duncan the dragon and Zin the satyr, you will meet:

- Fergus, the chain-smoking unicorn who is a sucker for a comfy lap;
- Flora, a centaur who is always pushing aroma therapy and various herbal remedies on anyone who will listen. She also does aura readings.
- and Boris, the head brownie in charge of the teams of brownies who do the cleaning and fixing for the circus.

as well as other creatures including a behemoth, shape-shifting squirrels, and plenty of others.

The other protagonist in this series is Cordelia Quinn who is accused of Porter's death, partly because she has aspirations of being dragon-handler for Brutus Fangworth, the Deadliest Dragon in the West. So, getting rid of Porter puts her next in line as handler. Duncan, with the help of several of the other members of the circus team, have to solve the murder. Boris, the brownie leader, once worked for a detective so he is the titularly head of the investigation, though Duncan and the others do a lot more of the work.

The books are written in first person, past tense and involve some sort of crime detecting, mostly murder. One thing Tammie Painter does in the books, that put me off at first, was including interjections of people talking to Duncan as if they are looking over his shoulder as he writes the story. After I got used to it, I thought it a fun device. Until the third book, *Fangs a Million*. That third book was not as well put together as the first two. Now I'm off to read the fourth one in the series.

---Elaine Clark is a retired Community College Math Professor and an avid reader. Elaine began her writerly career when she took an undergraduate creative writing class and was so appalled at what she wrote she didn't come back to writing fiction until fifteen years later. She now aspires to write really good speculative fiction that includes references to mathematics, quantum physics, and the shape of the universe. She lives with her supportive husband and various cats near Albuquerque, New Mexico.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Keeping the Words Flowing with Flow State

by Paul Martz



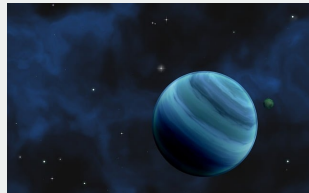
I attended the recent RMFW Gold Conference, looking for ways to increase my creative output. It takes me months to write a 4k-word short story. Unless I become more productive, completing a novel will be Herculean.

Nikki Terpilowski's session on flow state promised a solution, but flow state sounded kind of woo woo to me. Light a candle and meditate? I'd have better luck sacrificing a ram to the nine Greek muses. And so, with skepticism in my head, desperation in my soul, and coffee in my cup, I stumbled into *The Mindful Writer: Techniques for Tapping Into Your Inner Creativity*.

Surprisingly, flow state is a real thing. The evidence includes changes in brain waves consistent with concentration, production of certain neurochemicals, and documented increases in performance. I should've known flow was real. As a life-long musician, I have entered flow state thousands of times. If I can tap into flow state while playing drums, I ought to be able to tap into it while writing fiction, too.

Read the rest of the article on the *Speculative Fiction Writers Association* blog at <https://specficwriters.com/keeping-the-words-flowing-with-flow-state/>

SPECULATIVE FICTION BECOMES SCIENCE FACT



- Astronomers find the “perfect” solar system - <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-67488931>
- Physicists catch glimpse of elusive isotope Nitrogen-9 - <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/physicists-elusive-isotope-nitrogen-9>
- Vela's exploded star is highest energy pulsar ever seen - <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/vela-exploded-star-highest-energy-pulsar>
- New computer analysis hints volcanism killed the dinosaurs, not an asteroid - <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/new-computer-volcanism-killed-dinosaurs-asteroid>

MEMBER NEWS



KELLY SANFORD

At the recent Royal Palm Literary Awards presented by the Florida

Writers Association, Kelly Sanford brought home two awards. Her novel *The Timber Ghost* won GOLD for mixed genre novel and was Third Runner-up for the Grand Award of Unpublished Novel of the Year. Additionally, her short story "The Emergency" won BRONZE for Unpublished Short Story. Congratulations to Kelly, who thanked member Colleen Mueller for attending in her stead and accepting the awards.



PAUL MARTZ

His flash fiction piece "More Than Electric Sheep" won Uncharted's AI Flash Contest and will have his story published by Uncharted in January 2024. Congratulations to Paul on both the win and publication!

SCIENCE FICTION DICTIONARY

The Science Fiction Dictionary has added new genre definitions over the past several years.



<https://sfdictionary.com>

Africanfuturism - a subgenre of science fiction that heavily features elements of African history or culture

Grimdark - a subgenre of (esp. fantasy) fiction characterized by a nihilistic, violent, and dystopian atmosphere or setting

New Weird - a genre that incorporates elements of fantasy, science fiction, and horror, typically in a complex urban setting.

OUR WEBSITE

Imagine a critique partner reads your first chapter and says:

- Your characters don't show much emotion.
- The protagonist is kind of flat.
- What's his name? The main guy. He needs more backstory.



If you have had those comments, perhaps you need to read the latest post on our website.

- I don't have much sympathy for the main character.
- Who is the protagonist?



In the post, R. C. Beckett discusses ways to give personality to bland characters.

<https://specificwriters.com/add-emotional-depth-to-characters/>

Thanks For Reading!

If you want to know more about the Speculative Fiction Writers Association, read our blog full of articles on writing and critiquing, or learn about our members, please visit us at

<https://specificwriters.com>

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specificwriters@gmail.com



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