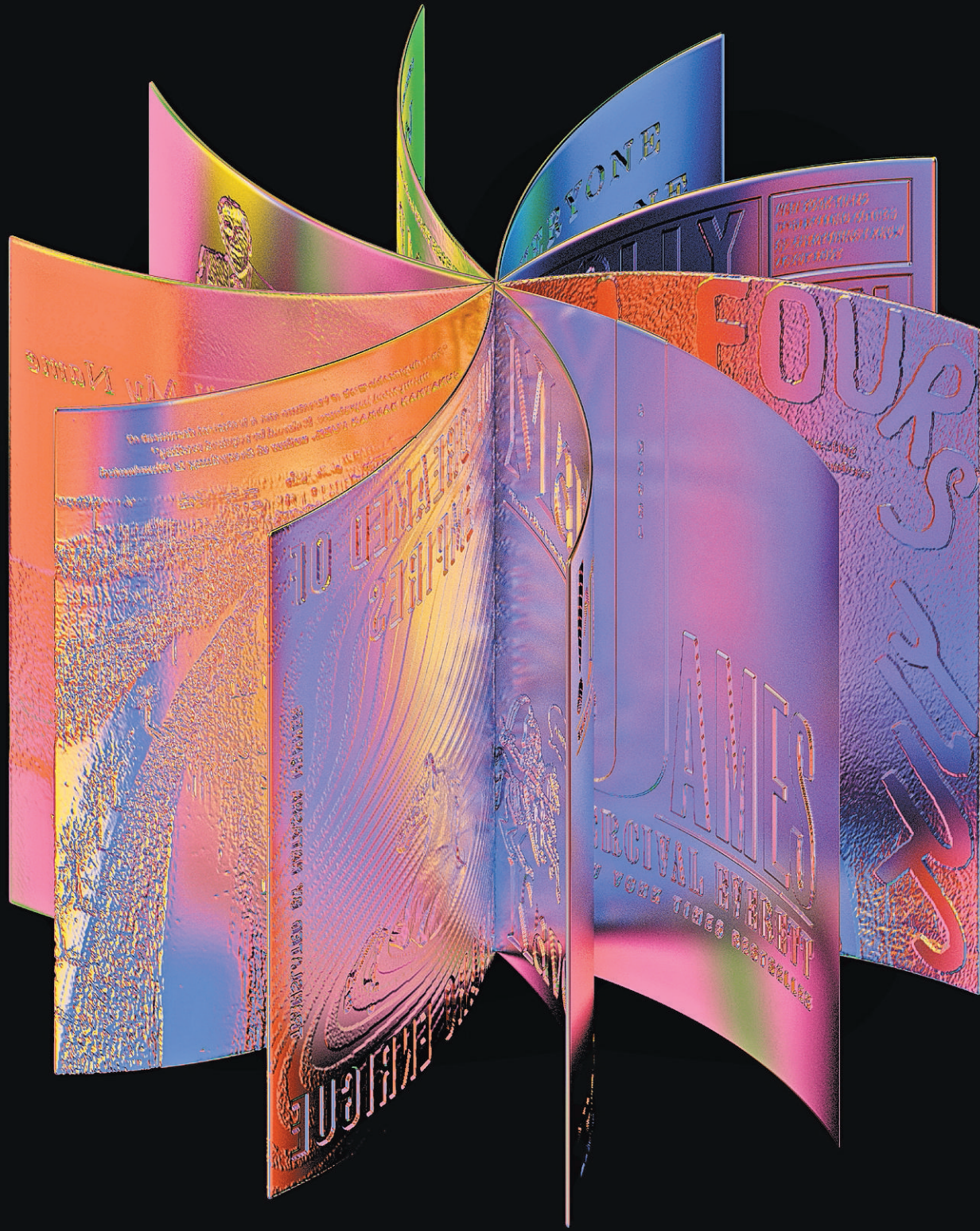


The New York Times

# Book Review

DECEMBER 15, 2024

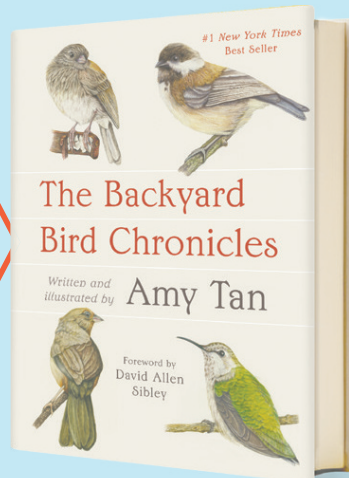


THE BEST BOOKS OF 2024

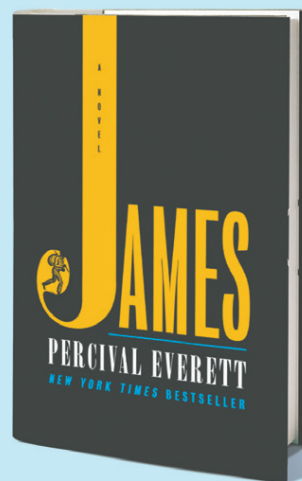


# Wrap up your holiday shopping here

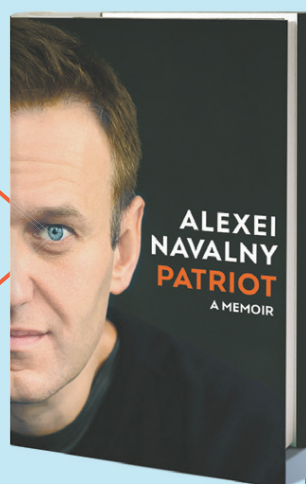
Foreword by  
David Allen Sibley  
"Spectacular."  
—Ann Patchett



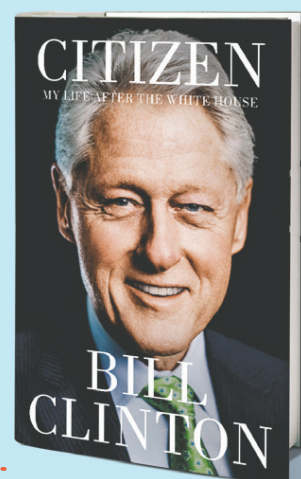
The bestselling  
National Book Award winner



Alexei Navalny's final  
letter to the world.

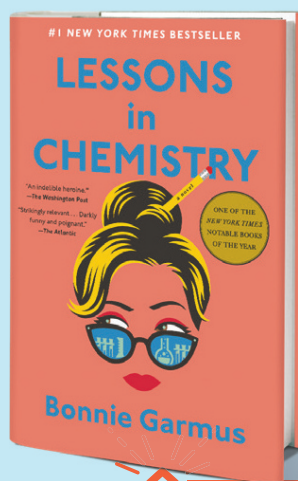
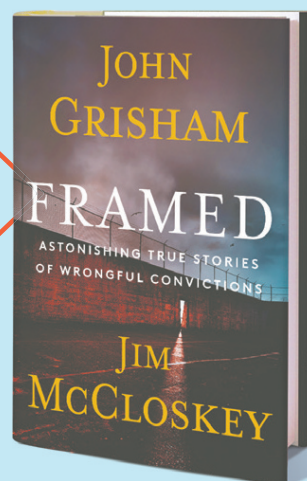


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## ODYSSEY OF HIGH HOPES

A boy's harrowing, captivating and funny rollercoaster ride across the slopes of the American Dream.



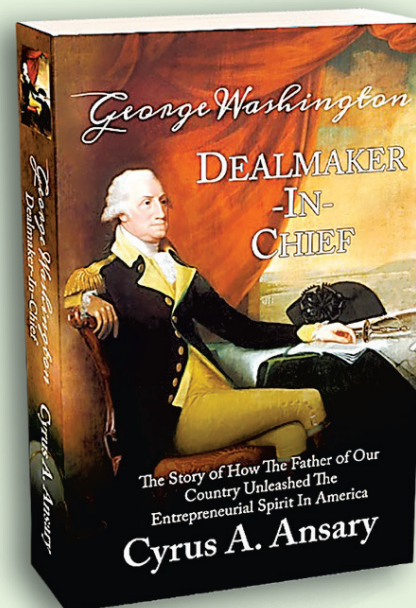
From the dark and crime-infested tenements of South Tehran to the pinnacle of global finance, *Odyssey of High Hopes*, is the inspiring story of a skinny teenager's hell-for-leather determination to rise above poverty and obscurity to secure a coveted American education.



### BOOKS AVAILABLE ON AMAZON

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# Corporate Strategy and Sustainability

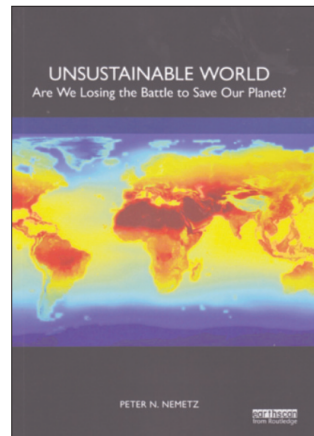
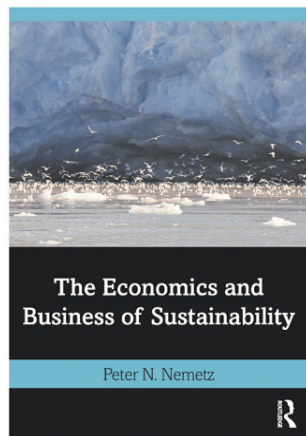
From Excellence to Fraud

Peter N. Nemetz



A comprehensive review of the quest for corporate sustainability, and the momentous consequences of our success or failure.

Also by the author:



<https://www.routledge.com/Corporate-Strategy-and-Sustainability-From-Excellence-to-Fraud/Nemetz/p/book/9780367773120>

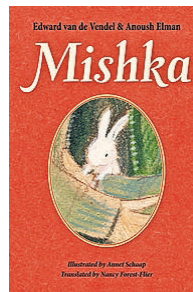
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## Newly Published / Children's



**THANK YOU, EVERYTHING**, by Icinori. Translated by Emilie Robert Wong. (Enchanted Lion, \$29.95, ages 4 to 8.) Inspired by the Japanese belief that after 100 years of service objects acquire a soul, and by how often the Japanese say “thank you,” this coffee-table-worthy picture book is a catalog of wonders from which children can create their own narratives.



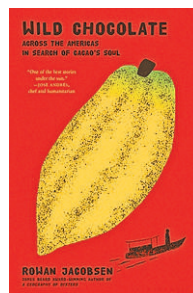
**MISHKA**, by Edward van de Vendel and Anoush Elman. Illustrated by Annet Schaap. Translated by Nancy Forest-Flier. (Levine Querido, \$15.99, ages 7 to 10.) A new pet bunny, the title character of this award-winning Dutch chapter book, is the catalyst a refugee family needs to open up about their flight from Afghanistan.

**BERT, THE BOWERBIRD**, by Julia Donaldson. Illustrated by Catherine Rayner. (Boxer Books, \$18.99, ages 3 to 6.) In their second collaboration, the author of “The Gruffalo” teams with the Kate Greenaway medalist to create a ravishing, rhyming tale about a bird breed’s unusual courting behavior.

**MR. KRUP’S PUP**, by Eva Lindström. Translated by Annie Prime. (Astra, \$18.99, ages 4 to 8.) “A ball? . . . Oh. Thanks,” Mr. Krup’s unimpressed pup replies after he puts the moon on the kitchen table in Lindström’s latest droll dream of a picture book. She briefly plays with it, until the sun shines through the window.

## ...Also Out Now

**OCEAN: A History of the Atlantic Before Columbus**, by John Haywood. (Pegasus, \$35.) This history of seafaring draws on a variety of disciplines to explain the centuries of developments that enabled the “discovery” of the Americas.



**WILD CHOCOLATE: Across the Americas in Search of Cacao's Soul**, by Rowan Jacobsen. (Bloomsbury, \$28.99.) Jacobsen tracks the history of chocolate from its origins in South America 4,000 years ago to its mass production today, blending history and political commentary with evocative food writing.

**THE WORLD WITH ITS MOUTH OPEN: Stories**, by Zahid Rafiq. (Tin House, paperback, \$17.95.) Set in Kashmir, Rafiq’s rich collection draws the interior lives of ordinary characters — a reporter, a grieving brother and a struggling shopkeeper — as they endure loss and injustice.

**THE PRISONER OF ANKARA**, by Suat Dervis. Translated by Maureen Freely. (Other Press, paperback, \$16.99.) Originally published in 1957, this meditative novel follows an ex-convict in Ankara as he reflects on his derailed life 12 years after killing his cousin.

**BERNIE WEBER: MATH GENIUS SERIES**

BY MATTHEW J. FLYNN

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### OTHER TITLES BY MATTHEW J. FLYNN

### THE COURT OF LAST RESORT

A Chicago Federal Judge is obsessed with perfect justice. While juries acquit some criminals, their verdicts are reversed at night.

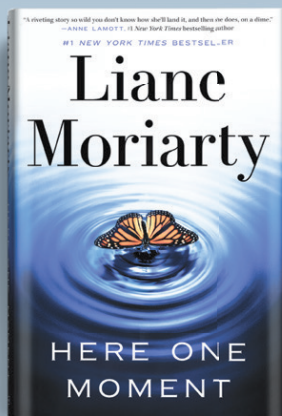
### CONFESSIONS OF A CHURCH LAWYER

Explains the split in the Catholic Church between Renaissance bishops and Counter-Reformation bishops, by the lawyer who represented the Church under then-Archbishop (now Cardinal) Timothy Dolan, and Archbishop Rembert Weakland. Proposes a path to the future for the Church.

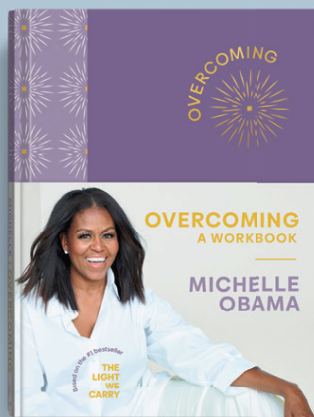
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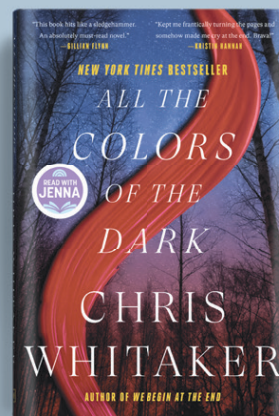
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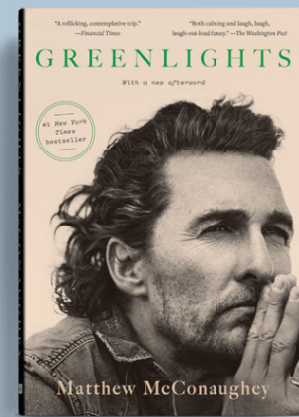
"Unputdownable . . . [a] propulsive, philosophically rich saga."  
—*Oprah Daily*



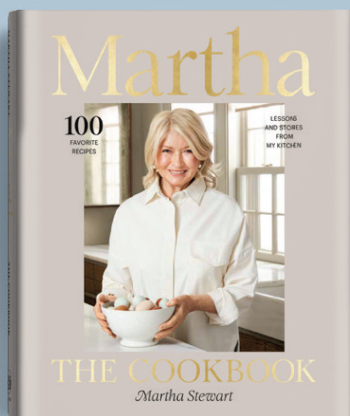
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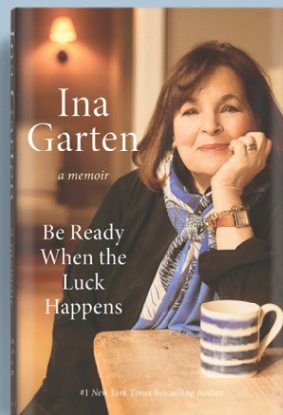
"Kept me frantically turning the pages and somehow made me cry at the end!"  
—*Kristin Hannah*



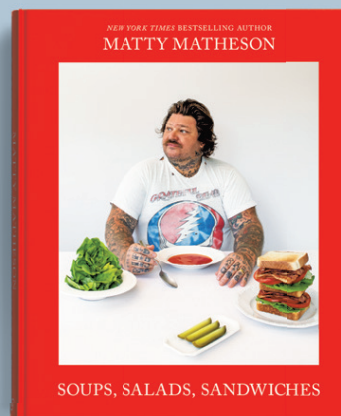
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**School Trip**

TO THE EDITOR:  
Upon reading the last sentence of Dave Kim's charming essay "Pilgrimage to Heidiland" (Dec. 1), I wasn't sure whether the tears that had sprung to the corners of my eyes were the result of laughter or nostalgia,

perhaps both. How well I remember loving Johanna Spyri's book, which was the catalyst for a lifelong fantasy.

The journey to Heidiland struck me deeply. While the author breaks down the possible meaning of the adventure with his son, he only alludes to the aspect of the trip that most touched me: We

do such things as travel through the Swiss Alps to discover a corny and enchanting "Heidi" re-creation because we love our children and would do nearly anything to bring joy, curiosity and wonder into their lives. Dave Kim gets a gold star.

KAREN LAUSA  
ENGLEWOOD, COLO.

TO THE EDITOR:  
Dave Kim's son's indifference to his father's favorite children's books made me feel right at home. My parents, both high school French teachers, considered "Le Petit Prince" a wonderful book. I considered it a wonderful remedy for insomnia.

FELICIA NIMUE ACKERMAN  
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

**CORRECTIONS**

Because of an editing error, a subheading with a review on

Nov. 17 about "Selling Sexy," by Lauren Sherman and Chantal Fernandez, referred incorrectly to Roy and Gaye Raymond, the founders of Victoria's Secret. They were husband and wife; they were not "a gay couple."

The Up Close feature on Nov. 17, using information from the publisher, referred incorrectly to a new American edition of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" that includes illustrations by Tove Jansson. Delacorte Press published an edition with Jansson's illustrations in 1977. It is not the case that the book, first published in Sweden in 1966, "has finally been published in the United States." The error was repeated in the subheading. Also, a picture caption with the article misidentified one of the characters in an illustration from the book. She is the Duchess, not the Queen of Hearts.

**BOOKS@NYTIMES.COM**

Letters for publication should include the writer's name, address and telephone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

**WHAT OUR READERS ARE READING**

"The beautiful descriptions of Scotland's coast and islands in **THE BLUE HOUR**, by Paula Hawkins, brought back memories," writes Kristine Pioch.

"I just started **A GRAVE IN THE WOODS**, the 17th book in the Bruno, Chief of Police series, by Martin Walker," writes Linda Scott. "I have read them all. So has my 90-year-old mom. A series for all ages!"

**THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, the BAD GUYS MAKE THE BEST GIFTS!**

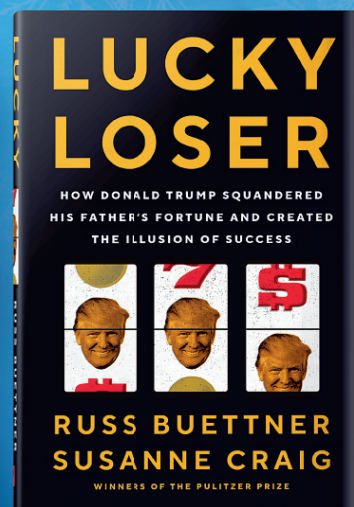
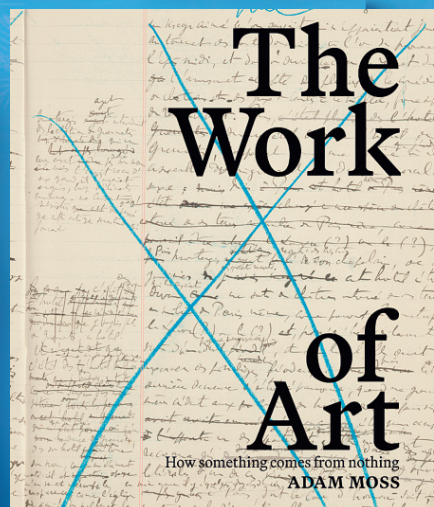
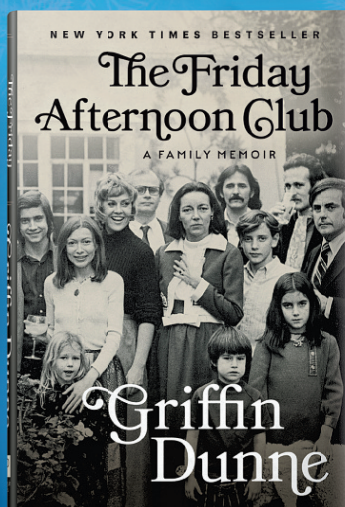
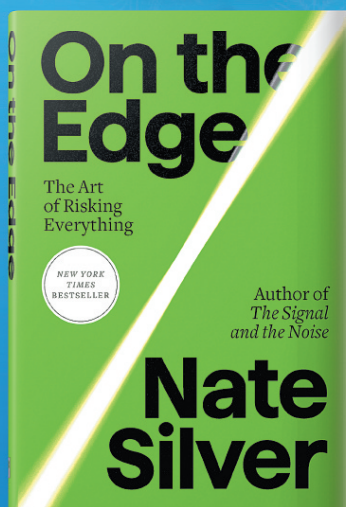
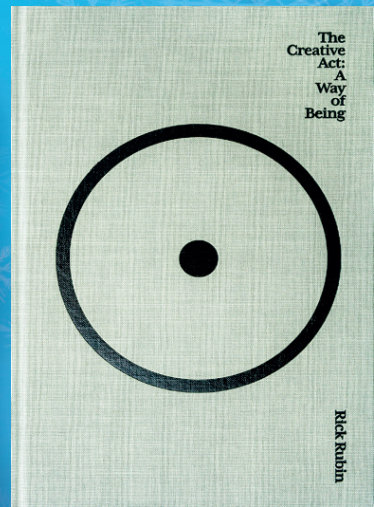
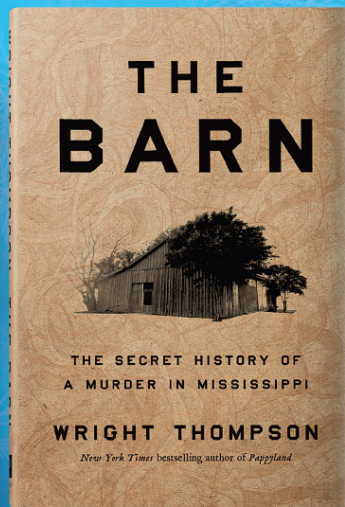
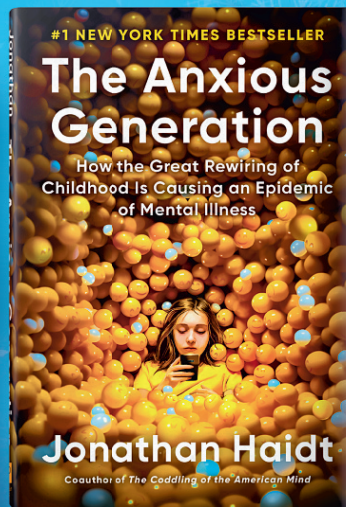
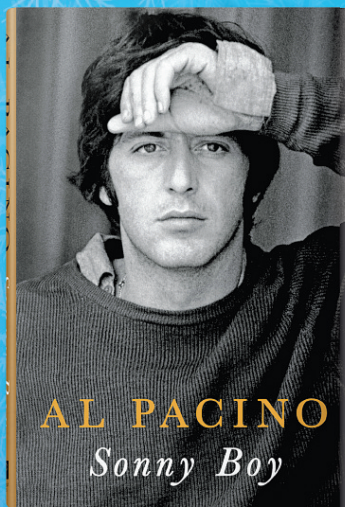
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# Book Your Holidays

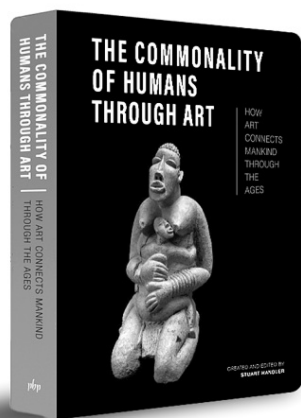


 Penguin Press

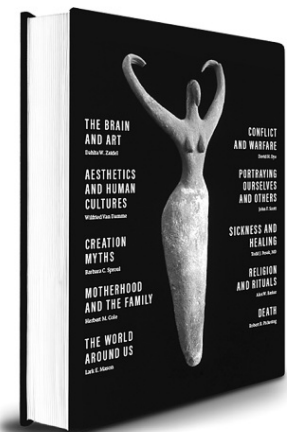
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**By the Book**



**S.E. Hinton**

The author of ‘The Outsiders,’ who’s watched the stage musical of the novel become a Tony Award-winning hit this year, leans on Dave Barry for post-election comfort: ‘You can’t read a page without laughing.’

**What books are on your night stand?**

I am currently rereading “Middelmarch” (it takes rereading), and “The Last of the Wine,” by Mary Renault. Socrates is a character in that book. So is Plato. To have them appear casually in a novel, yet be very faithful to what we know of them, is great.

**How do you organize your books?**

I have a beautiful library, organized by subjects: History (early to late), Author Biographies, Exploring, Women’s Studies, Journalism, Entertainment, English Fiction, American Fiction and Children’s Books. The Paranormal books are organized by Ghosts and Hauntings, Reincarnation, Coincidences, Strange but True.

**Why so many books on the paranormal?**

I have had many strange things happen in my life.

**Describe your ideal reading experience (when, where, what, how).**

Any time, on the sofa, with good lighting,

my cat and a small glass of wine.

**What’s the last great book you read?**

“Demon Copperhead.” I don’t know a whole lot of Dickens but I know “David Copperfield” inside and out. I love the way Barbara Kingsolver followed some of the plot. Also, Demon is a great narrator.

**What books are you embarrassed not to have read yet?**

I wish I knew more Shakespeare.

**Have you ever gotten in trouble for reading a book?**

I’ve gotten into trouble for writing a book [“The Outsiders”] when I was supposed to be doing classwork.

**What books might we be surprised to find on your shelves?**

I have all of Jane Austen’s books, plus Jane Austen studies, and a very good collection of Dave Barry’s books. Right now I’m reading a whole lot of Dave Barry because of the election. You can’t

read a page without laughing. That’s my comfort read.

**How have your reading tastes changed over time?**

I don’t read a lot of fiction nowadays. I prefer history, memoirs and biographies. And I no longer read horse stories, which was all I read as a kid.

**When did you last read “The Outsiders”?**

I haven’t read it in years.

**What do you think has been the key to the success of “The Outsiders” musical?**

Great cast, great direction, great songs.

**How do you feel about the absence of “Gone With the Wind,” which in the novel is important to Ponyboy and Johnny?**

When I wrote “The Outsiders” at 16, “Gone With the Wind” was my favorite book. It no longer is. So I approve the absence.

**Can you recall the first time you read Robert Frost’s “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” which also features prominently in the book?**

Yes. I was wandering around my creative writing classroom when I came across the poem in a magazine. I thought it fit in the novel I was writing, went home and wrote it in.

**How do you sign books for your fans?**

Stay gold! Of course.

**You mentioned to New York magazine that you’ve written fan fiction that features “The Outsiders” characters. Can you say more?**

I do kind of regret telling people that. I had fun doing it. I don’t want to say more. I say, “The good ones are mine.”

**Do you expect to publish another novel?**

I’m working on a screenplay. If a story comes to me, I’ll write a novel.

**You’re organizing a literary dinner party. Which three writers, dead or alive, do you invite?**

Homer, Mary Renault, Jane Austen. I’d ask Homer if he thinks he’s writing history or fiction. Mary Renault is the writer who’s influenced the way I think about things like envy and jealousy and nobility. Jane Austen is my favorite writer. I reread her all the time and find something new every time.

**Would you cook?**

I’d cater that dinner. My cooking days are long past. □

*An archive of previous By the Book interviews is available at [nytimes.com/books](http://nytimes.com/books).*



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# THE 10 BEST BOOKS



# OF 2024

AT THE BOOK REVIEW, we spend all year getting ready for this moment. We begin debating our annual best-of list in the spring, going to the mat for what we love. By fall, we're preparing for rhetorical slugfests. We aim to pick the books that made lasting impressions: the stories that imprinted on our hearts and psyches, the examining of lives that deepened what we thought we already knew.

## FICTION

### ALL FOURS

BY MIRANDA JULY

July's second novel, which follows a married mother and artist who derails a solo cross-country road trip by checking into a motel close to home and starting an affair with a young rental-car worker, was the year's literary conversation piece, dubbed "the talk of every group text — at least every group text composed of women over 40" and "the first great perimenopause novel" in just two of many articles that wrestled with its themes. Sexually frank and laced with the novelist's loopy humor, the book ends up posing that most universal question: What would you risk to change your life?

#### EXCERPT

This could be the turning point of my life. If I lived to be 90 I was halfway through. Or if you thought of it as two lives, then I was at the very start of my second life. I imagined a vision quest-style journey involving a cave, a cliff, a crystal, maybe a labyrinth and a golden ring.

### GOOD MATERIAL

BY DOLLY ALDERTON

In Alderton's brisk, witty sophomore novel, a 35-year-old struggling comedian in London tries to make sense of a recent breakup at the same moment when the majority of his friends seem to be pairing off for life. Cue snappy dialogue, awkward first dates and a memorable quest for a new home; toss clichéd gender roles, the traditional marriage plot and

a ho-hum happily ever after. Not only does Alderton cement herself as a latter-day Nora Ephron, she also puts her own mark on the classic romantic comedy form. There are no second fiddles in "Good Material"; every character sings. And there is a deeper message, revealed in a surprise twist, having to do with independence, adventure and charting your own course.

#### EXCERPT

There is a jumper and a shirt hanging on the washing line in my mum's garden that look like they're holding hands in the breeze. I stand at my bedroom window and watch their interplay change with the direction of the wind. I watch until exactly 7:03 p.m., when I pick up the phone to the woman I've loved for three years, 10 months and 29 days, who dumped me and smashed my heart like a sinewy piñata eight days and 22 hours ago.

### JAMES

BY PERCIVAL EVERETT

It takes a lot of ambition, skill and vision to reinvent one of the most iconic books in American letters, but Everett demonstrates he possesses those virtues in droves in "James." The novel is a radical reworking of Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn," this time telling the story not from Huck's perspective, but from the point of view of the enslaved man who accompanies Huck down the Mississippi River: Jim (or, as he clarifies, James). From James's eyes, we see he is no mere sidekick but rather a thinker and a writer who is code-switching as illiterate and fighting desperately for freedom. Everett's novel is a literary hat trick — a book that highlights the horrors in American history and complicates an American classic, all while also emerging as a work of exquisite originality in its own right.

#### EXCERPT

I waited at Miss Watson's kitchen door, rocked a loose step board with my foot, knew she was going to tell me to fix it tomorrow. I was waiting there for her to give me a pan of corn bread that she had

made with my Sadie's recipe. Waiting is a big part of a slave's life, waiting and waiting to wait some more. Waiting for demands. Waiting for food. Waiting for the ends of days. Waiting for the just and deserved Christian reward at the end of it all.

### MARTYR!

BY KAVEH AKBAR

Cyrus Shams, an Iranian American aspiring poet and recovering drug addict, wallows in a post-college malaise in a fictional Midwestern town. He's working dead-end jobs and halfheartedly attending A.A., while grieving his parents' deaths and, increasingly, fantasizing about his own. Cyrus is lost and sad, but this captivating first novel, by an author who is himself a poet, is anything but. As Akbar nudges Cyrus closer to uncovering a secret in his family's past, he turns his protagonist's quest for meaning — involving a road trip to New York and a revelatory encounter in the Brooklyn Museum — into an indelible affirmation of life, rife with inventive beauty, vivid characters and surprising twists of plot.

#### EXCERPT

Maybe it was that Cyrus had done the wrong drugs in the right order, or the right drugs in the wrong order, but when God finally spoke back to him after 27 years of silence, what Cyrus wanted more than anything else was a do-over.

### YOU DREAMED OF EMPIRES

BY ÁLVARO ENRIGUE

History has long been Enrique's playground, and his latest novel (translated by Natasha Wimmer) takes readers to 16th-century Tenochtitlan, or what is now Mexico City. Hernán Cortés and his men have arrived at Moctezuma's palace for a diplomatic — if tense and comically imbalanced — meeting of cultures and empires. In this telling, it's Moctezu-

ma's people who have the upper hand, though the emperor himself is inconveniently prone to hallucinogenic reveries and domestic threats. The carnage here is devilishly brazen, the humor ample and bone-dry.

#### EXCERPT

He had been assigned a place at the table between the priests of Xipe and Tezcatlipoca. Draped like a cape around the shoulders of the former was the decaying, blackened skin of a warrior sacrificed who knows when, while the latter's matted locks, neither cut nor washed since he'd taken orders at the temple, were crusted with many moons of sacrificial blood: quail daily, sometimes turtle or wolf, but on major festival days — of which there was one each month — warrior blood, preferably Tlaxcalteca.

### NONFICTION

#### COLD CREMATORIUM

BY JOZSEF DEBRECZENI

Debreczeni, 39 when he was deported from his native Hungary to what he calls “the Land of Auschwitz,” would later memorialize the experience in a book that defies easy classification. First published in 1950, and now translated into English by Paul Olchvály, “Cold Crematorium” is a masterpiece of clinical, mordant observation. In a cattle car he watches a fellow deportee whose hand retains the gestures of a habitual chain-smoker; newly arrived at Auschwitz, he encounters the lousy barroom pianoplayer he avoided back home. This is more than gallows humor; it's a stubborn fight to stay human and place the unimaginable in the context of the known. Look elsewhere for platitudes — Debreczeni witnessed, and reported, the best and worst of mankind and showed it to us to use as we will.

#### EXCERPT

The long train, comprised of low boxcars with German insignia, was grinding to a halt.

“We're stopping,” the word spread among the barely conscious, listless crowd.

We suspected that we were

nearing our destination. We'd been herded aboard two and a half days earlier in Backa Topola, and since then we'd stopped just twice, and only for a minute or two.

### EVERYONE WHO IS GONE IS HERE

BY JONATHAN BLITZER

Blitzer, a staff writer at The New Yorker, presents a timely analysis of the situation at America's southern border, placing the blame for today's screaming headlines firmly on post-Cold War U.S. policy. His kaleidoscopic narrative moves between the Central American insurgencies that flooded this country with refugees, and the shifting policies that worsened the fallout. We meet morally pragmatic domestic politicians, a tireless activist who's moved from El Salvador to Chicago, Los Angeles teenagers ensnared in gang pipelines. None of it is simple; all of it has a terrible cost. Blitzer handles his vast topic with assurance and grace, never losing sight of the human element behind the global crisis.

#### EXCERPT

On a bright, humid evening in early August 2019, 10 Honduran migrants met to pray in the basement of a Mexican housing complex called Solidarity 2000. They were far from home and farther from their destination. Most had previously been deported from the United States, but none of them could stay in Honduras, so they were making the journey again. Their reasons varied. One was being hunted by criminals. Another had been going hungry. When I met them, they were biding their time in Tapachula, a city along the Guatemalan border, squatting in a semi-abandoned building.

### I HEARD HER CALL MY NAME

BY LUCY SANTE

When the veteran literary and cultural critic came out as transgender in 2021, at the age of 66,

she described in an email to her loved ones the devastating realization that her “parallel life” — the one presented to her by a “gender-swapping” app that shows her how she would have looked as a girl and then a woman at various junctures in her life — had passed her by. “Fifty years were under water, and I'd never get them back.” As she reflects on her upbringing as the “only child of isolated immigrants,” her early adulthood in 1970s New York and her career of seeking truths through writing while hiding an important truth about herself, Sante fearlessly documents a transformation both internal and external, one that is also a kind of homecoming.

#### EXCERPT

The dam burst on Feb. 16, when I uploaded FaceApp, for a laugh. I had tried the application a few years earlier, but something had gone wrong and it had returned a badly botched image. But I had a new phone, and I was curious. The gender-swapping feature was the whole point for me, and the first picture I passed through it was the one I had tried before, taken for that occasion. This time it gave me a full-face portrait of a Hudson Valley woman in midlife: strong, healthy, clean-living. She also had lovely flowing chestnut hair and a very subtle makeup job. And her face was mine.

### REAGAN

BY MAX BOOT

This elegant biography of the 40th president stands out for its deep authority and nimble style. Boot, a historian and foreign policy analyst, grew up idolizing Ronald Reagan, but after a decade of research, he finds himself asking whether his onetime hero paved the way for Donald Trump, the man whose ascent to power led Boot to abandon the right. The book is a landmark work that shows how Reagan emerged from his New Deal roots to become a practiced Red baiter and racist dog whistler before settling into the role of the optimistic all-American elder statesman. “It is no exaggeration,” Boot writes,

“to say that you cannot fully comprehend what happened to America in the 20th century without first understanding what happened to Ronald Reagan.”

#### EXCERPT

Outside, the jacaranda trees and jasmine vines were in bloom, the jasmine filling the air with sweet, heavy perfume and the jacaranda bursting in a profusion of purple. But the dying man was not aware of the seasons or the flowers or even his own family. He could no longer recognize his loving wife of 52 years — his indispensable, though sharp-elbowed, companion and consigliere during his rise from president of the Screen Actors Guild to the president of the entire nation.

### THE WIDE WIDE SEA

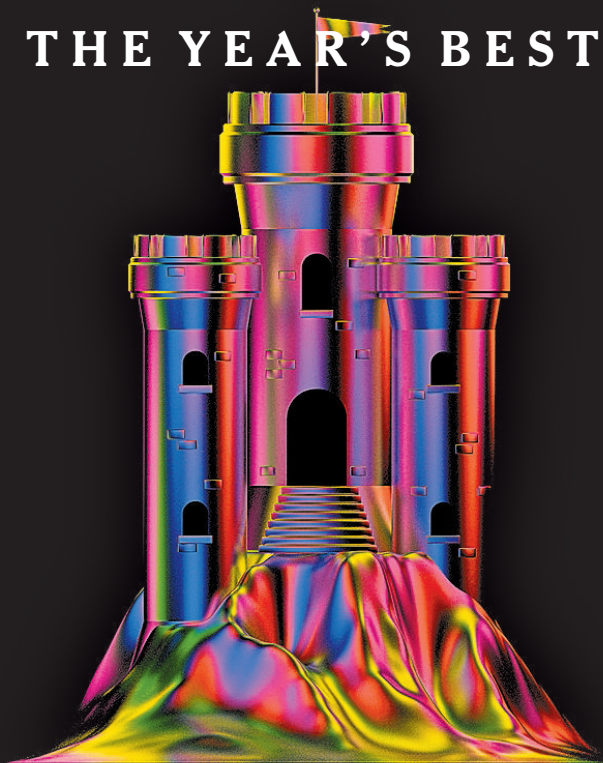
BY HAMPTON SIDES

In this masterly history, Sides tracks Capt. James Cook's third and final voyage across the globe, painting a vivid portrait that blends generations of scholarship with the firsthand accounts of European seafarers and the oral traditions of Indigenous Pacific islanders. The story begins in Britain when the last embers of the Enlightenment are going out, as curiosity and empathy gave way to imperial ambition. Between tales of adventure and depictions of Polynesian culture, Sides probes the causes of Cook's growing anger and violence as he reckons with the fallout of what he and others had wrought in expanding the map of Europe's power.

#### EXCERPT

On the night the ships appeared, some fishermen were out on the ocean, working by torchlight. One of them, a man named Mapua, was bewildered by what he saw: An enormous silhouette approached, rising high above the surf, fire burning at its top. It had holes on its side, Mapua noticed, and a long spear in front like the sharp nose of a swordfish. Then a second creature appeared, much like the first. Mapua had no idea what they were, but he was sure they were something malevolent.

# THE YEAR'S BEST



# HISTORICAL FICTION

BY ALIDA BECKER

MAYBE IT'S THE LUCK of the publishing draw, maybe the emotional weather, but my choices for the 10 best historical novels seem to have more bite than in past years. Here they are, ready to be argued about, in alphabetical order.

**ALIDA BECKER** was an editor at the *Book Review* for 30 years. She was the first winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for excellence in reviewing.

## BLACK BUTTERFLIES

BY PRISCILLA MORRIS

A searing portrait of the siege of Sarajevo during the early months of the Bosnian war, as experienced by an artist who, having sent her family to safety in England, becomes stranded in her beloved city while daily life descends into a desperate struggle for survival. Although her studio has been destroyed in the relentless bombing and she has lost touch with her husband and daughter, she finds solace in the tenacity of her friends and neighbors.

## BURMA SAHIB

BY PAUL THEROUX

In the autumn of 1922, a 19-year-old Etonian named Eric Blair

becomes an officer in the British forces ruling over the Burmese sector of the Raj. Expecting to find himself through his work, instead he discovers just how ill-suited he is to the whole imperial project. Theroux's nicely sardonic evocation of these few years suggests that the tensions and hypocrisy of colonial life played an important part in forming the writer who would soon be known as George Orwell.

## CLEAR

BY CARYS DAVIES

Ivar is the last inhabitant of a tiny remote island in mid-19th-century Scotland, speaker of a dying language and caretaker of a dying tradition. When an impoverished minister is hired to evict him, an unexpected — and deeply affecting — bond is formed. In the final days of the Highland Clearances,

the fate of Ivar's homestead is sealed, but perhaps some of his heritage can be salvaged.

## THE EMPUSIUM

BY OLGA TOKARCZUK

The Polish Nobel's subtle and provocative response to Thomas Mann's "The Magic Mountain" is likewise set in a German sanitarium on the eve of World War I. Subtitled "A Health Resort Horror Story," it's a good deal more. As its young hero submits to the ministrations of his doctors and the musings of his fellow patients, larger — and often darker — philosophical arguments unspool.

## HELD

BY ANNE MICHAELS

The Canadian poet's multigenerational family saga was a finalist for Britain's Booker Prize. An elegant jigsaw of images and observations, it begins in the trenches of World War I with a soldier's impressions of what's essentially a "450-mile grave" and ends in the near future as one of his descendants explores the streets of a city on the Gulf of Finland.

## JAMES

BY PERCIVAL EVERETT

A brilliantly subversive — and often slyly humorous — retelling of Mark Twain's classic "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," as seen from the perspective of Huck's enslaved runaway companion. Of course, Jim turns out to be a far more complicated character than Twain's original would suggest. Among the final contenders for the Booker Prize, this novel won the National Book Award last month.

## STAR 111

BY LUTZ SEILER

An autobiographical picaresque that reconstructs the exhilarating yet often terrifying experiences of individual East Germans in that brief period between the collapse of the Communist regime and reunification. Its central charac-

ter, a 26-year-old aspiring poet, drifts through East Berlin's anarchic underground squatter scene after his parents abandon their home and flee to a refugee camp in the West.

## THIS STRANGE EVENTFUL HISTORY

BY CLAIRE MESSUD

Inspired by the French-Algerian heritage of her own grandparents, Messud eloquently explores seven decades and several generations of one itinerant family's quest for a sense of belonging. Beginning in 1940 and ending in the present day, her narrative moves gracefully between North Africa and Europe, with detours to North and South America and even Australia.

## THE WILDES

BY LOUIS BAYARD

A wonderfully witty and often heartbreaking depiction of the consequences of Oscar Wilde's scandalous downfall — not for the playwright himself, but rather his wife and two sons. After the initial marital implosion in rural England, the narrative moves to the Ligurian coast, where Constance Wilde lives in exile under an assumed name. Then it's on to the battlefields of World War I France, followed by a stop in 1920s Soho, where the youngest Wilde comes face to face with the man who, as his mother once put it, "set off an explosion that never stops exploding."

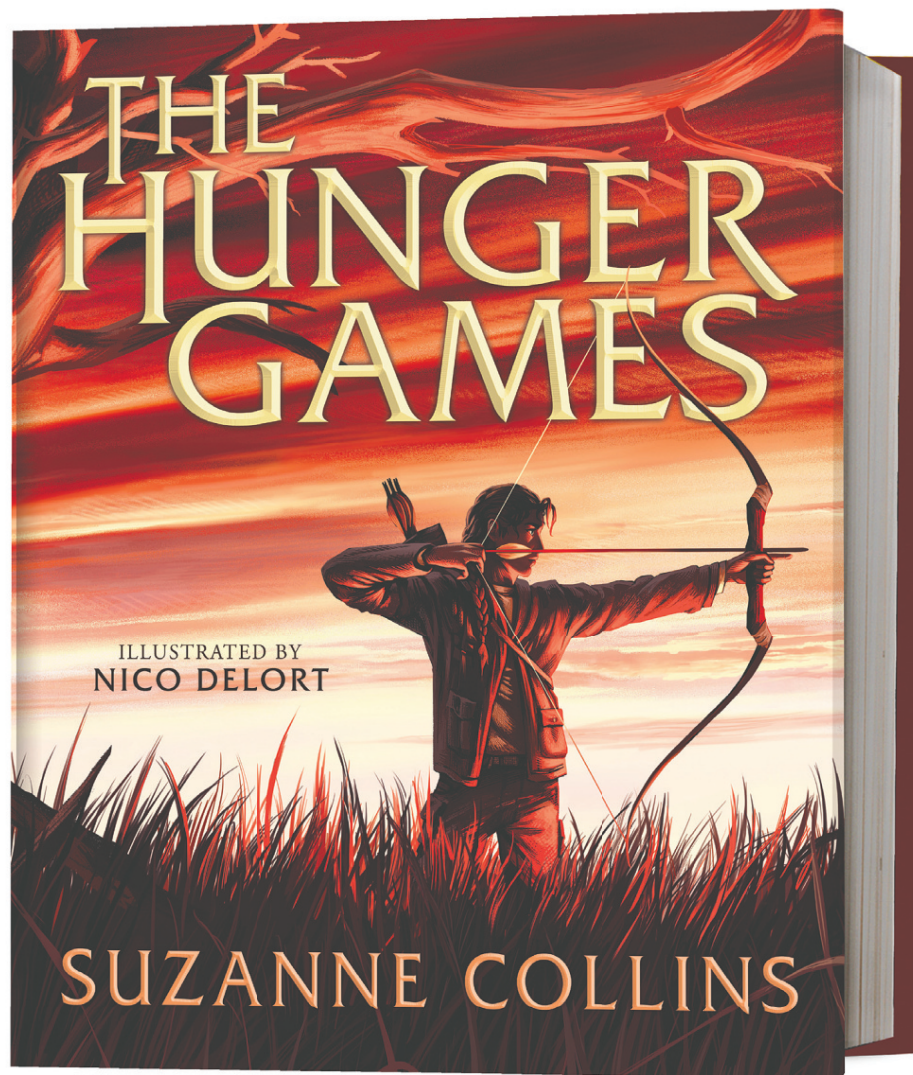
## YOU DREAMED OF EMPIRES

BY ÁLVARO ENRIGUE

An acerbically comic take on the Spanish conquest of Mexico, this rollicking tale pokes delicious (and often hallucinatory) fun at both the indolent court of Moctezuma and the bickering, befuddled entourage of the conquistador Hernán Cortés. Neither side has much of a clue about the other, with predictably disastrous consequences. □

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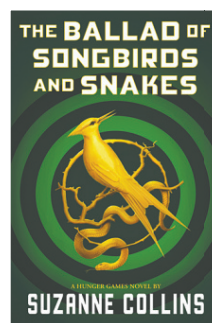
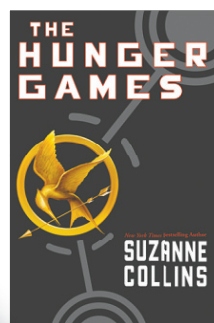
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# THE YEAR'S BEST



# THRILLERS

BY SARAH LYALL

THIS YEAR BROUGHT an array of excellent thrillers in multiple genres, from domestic mysteries to geopolitical adventures. (Plus the usual complement of serial killers.) As always, it's hard to whittle down the list to just 10, but the books here are designed to appeal to a broad range of tastes. What you choose depends on what sort of unease thrills you the most.

**SARAH LYALL** is a writer at large for *The Times*, writing news, features and analysis across a wide range of sections.

## HAVOC

BY CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN

This deliciously nasty tale of resentment and revenge is set in a hotel in Egypt, where an elderly woman who enjoys meddling in the lives of others has set up residence. The arrival of another guest — a boy of 8 who can match her, diabolical deed for diabolical deed — threatens to destroy her carefully constructed spider web of intrigue. Bollen writes with wit and style about an increasingly unhinged battle of wills between two unlikely opponents.

## THE SEQUEL

BY JEAN HANFF KORELITZ

Korelitz delivers another sizzler of a story about literary theft and

murder. Readers of her earlier book, "The Plot," will welcome the return of Anna Williams-Bonner. Posing as a grieving widow and promoting her novel — a fictionalized account of her husband's death — she gets a note from someone who appears to know too much about her past. Anna has a lot to hide, and a knack for eliminating her enemies.

## BRIGHT OBJECTS

BY RUBY TODD

In 1997, the residents of a small Australian town are awaiting the arrival of a comet last seen more than 4,000 years ago. Meanwhile, a young widow is desperate to find out who drove the car that killed her husband, and a number of townspeople are falling under the spell of a charismatic cult leader. The prose burns bright in this luminous novel.

## THE WINNER

BY TEDDY WAYNE

Hired to teach tennis in an exclusive New England enclave one summer, young and impecunious Conor O'Toole breaks Tennis Pro Rule No. 1: Do not sleep with any sexy but possibly unhinged divorcées. (And if you do, don't also sleep with their daughters.) Wayne has a pitch-perfect understanding of this tiny slice of American privilege, a way of getting the reader to sympathize with Conor as his life takes a desperate turn. The tension is almost unbearable.

## THE HUNTER

BY TANA FRENCH

Old alliances and subtle resentments bubble beneath the surface in the rural Irish village where Cal Hooper, the ex-cop from Chicago who featured in French's previous novel, is still figuring out how to fit in. The arrival of a smooth-talking Englishman with a dodgy get-rich-quick scheme touches off a series of startling events. This expertly plotted book revolves around a murder tucked in the middle, but the real mysteries lie in the insular community.

## NOBODY'S HERO

BY M.W. CRAVEN

Lethal weapons used in this romp — starring Ben Koenig, a former U.S. marshal who's unable to feel fear — include a credit card, a hairpin and, in a particularly gruesome moment, a shard of bone protruding from the mangled leg of the person wielding it. There's a complex plot involving something called the Acacia Avenue Protocol that imagines a scenario too awful to contemplate and some hilarious observational humor amid the mayhem.

## THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE ALPERTON ANGELS

BY JANICE HALLETT

A true-crime writer reinvestigates a bizarre 18-year-old incident in a provincial English town, where members of a cult who claimed to

be angels in human form persuaded a teenager that her baby was the Antichrist. (Several people died violently, though not the baby.) Hallett unspools her compelling and unusual story through texts, emails, WhatsApp messages, newspaper clippings, interview transcripts and the like, so the reader gets the fun of playing detective along with the characters.

## WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?

BY DERVLA MCTIERNAN

Nina, 20, never comes home from a weekend spent away with her controlling and squirrely boyfriend, who claims she was fine when he left. Despite its title, this disturbing, enthralling book is less about what happened to Nina (you'll find out soon enough) than about how the couple's unlucky parents — all terrified and desperate in their own ways — respond to the unspeakable situations in which they find themselves.

## THE NIGHT GUEST

BY HILDUR KNÚTSDÓTTIR

This exquisitely creepy novella features Þórunn, a seemingly rational Icelandic woman who doesn't understand why she's so tired all the time or why she's been waking up with dirt (among other things) on her hands. Then one morning, her fitness app reveals that she walked 17 miles in her sleep. Trust me, the nightmarish truth is worse than anything you can imagine.

## THE GOD OF THE WOODS

BY LIZ MOORE

When a 13-year-old girl goes missing from her summer camp in the Adirondacks in 1975, it feels like one tragedy too many for her well-off parents, whose son, then age 8, disappeared 14 years earlier. Using multiple points of view and setting the story in two different but equally absorbing timelines, Moore explores class dynamics, family secrets, generational guilt and the difficulties of adolescence in this immersive book. □

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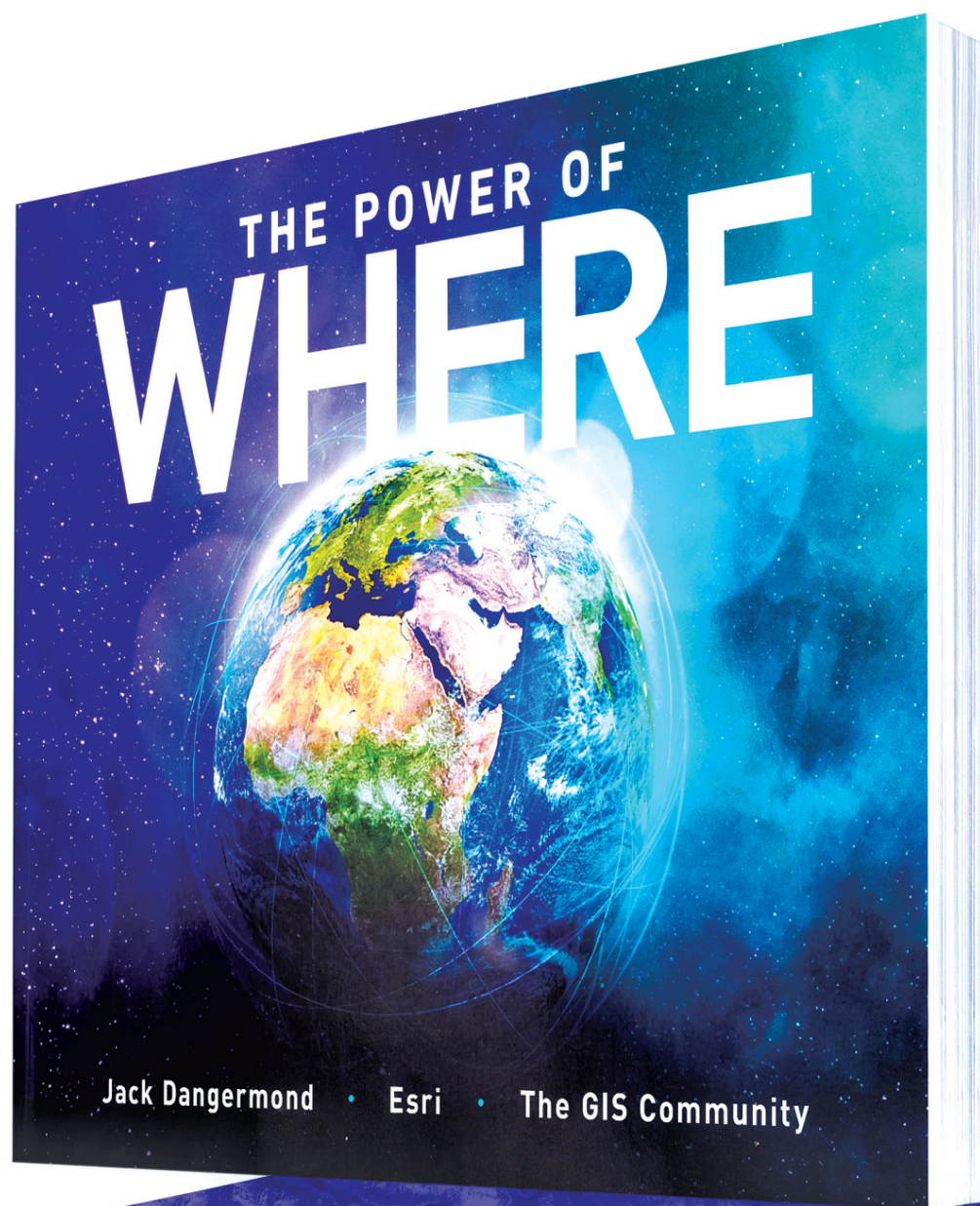
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TED Founder, Architect, and Designer



Jack Dangermond is internationally recognized as the leading visionary in the field of geospatial technology. His work helps build resiliency for governments and businesses worldwide and fosters harmony between natural and built environments. Dangermond was recognized by *TIME* as one of the 100 most influential climate leaders in business for 2024.

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# THE YEAR'S BEST



# ROMANCE

BY OLIVIA WAITE

A CRITIC'S best-of list is on some level a confession: You can deduce a lot about my year from the stories I found solace in. So in addition to the expected delights of this year's romances — lush historical eras, dazzling space battles, scenes of love triumphant — there's a resonant thread of grief running through the fractured timelines, vengeful heroines and small-scale victories of the books below.

**OLIVIA WAITE** is the Book Review's romance fiction columnist. She writes queer historical romance, fantasy and critical essays on the genre's history and future.

## YOU SHOULD BE SO LUCKY

BY CAT SEBASTIAN

In my favorite romance of the year, "You Should Be So Lucky," a widowed reporter and a failing baseball player find solace together after staggering losses. The pages overflow with that cathartic, bittersweet feeling you get when you're telling someone about the worst day of your life, and you're both laughing because the list of catastrophes just keeps going.

## NOT HERE TO MAKE FRIENDS

BY JODI MCALISTER

This year I was drawn to romances that defy despair, like this masterly novel set behind the

scenes of a reality dating show. Lily, a widow, is a ball of fury and vengeance, bouncing gloriously off the producer Murphy's cut-throat manipulation of the other contestants. They're not good people, but they're great fun to watch.

## RULES FOR GHOSTING

BY SHELLY JAY SHORE

For top-notch drama, this year's medal goes to "Rules for Ghosting." Ezra is trying to move forward with a new apartment and a new crush, but his family's needs and the ghost of his crush's dead husband keep tangling him up in the past. Funeral homes have become increasingly visible as romance settings since the pandemic; here actual ghosts haunt the quiet and tender moments, and it's the scenes at family holi-

days that leave you rattled and gasping.

## A LOVE SONG FOR RICKI WILDE

BY TIA WILLIAMS

We edge further into light supernatural with this not-quite time-slip romance that stretches from the Harlem Renaissance to the modern day. Charming and vibrant, this is one of those novels where the author's powers make you doubt, just a little, that the magic trick is going to work this time. That delicious bite of uncertainty makes Ricki and Ezra's final chapters so much sweeter.

## THE MINISTRY OF TIME

BY KALIANE BRADLEY

and

## TIME AND TIDE

BY J.M. FREY

Time travel and time-slips are coming back into vogue and two novels really stood out for me, to the point where I couldn't choose between them. "The Ministry of Time" pulls historical figures into the near future, where romantic entanglements complicate a mysterious government project. "Time and Tide" sends a modern disaster bi back in time to meet an authoress bound by the homophobic social taboos of Austen's England. Bradley's book is sci-fi dystopia, while Frey's curtsies to the bonkers, bodice-ripping yarns of Johanna Lindsey and Bertrice Small. But both stories fascinate by committing to the idea that chronological dislocation is itself a kind of violence.

## THE EARL WHO ISN'T

BY COURTNEY MILAN

Milan wraps up her Wedgeford Trials series with characteristic wit in this novel, in which an earl's secret son and a firebrand with a printing press grapple with long-simmering passion in a majority-Asian town in Victorian England. (I feel about Wedgeford the same way I feel about Terry Pratchett's Ankh-Morpork: I know it's not a real place, but it ought to be.) We deserve more gorgeously written books that

care this much about joy, justice, community and the world.

## A SHORE THING

BY JOANNA LOWELL

Lowell's novel, full of uncommon delights, brings us a trans painter turned bicycle mechanic, a botanist in need of the painter's artistic skills and an excuse for a bicycle race down the Cornish coast. We also have conversations about the arts and sciences, and about fearing you'll never rediscover inspiration once you've let it slip through your fingers.

## SWORDCROSSED

BY FREYA MARSKE

Marske's newest fantasy takes place in a city teeming with guild politics and competition where a wool merchant's son, Matti, hires a swordsman for his upcoming wedding, then finds himself falling for the swordsman instead of the bride. This one's spicy and heisty and cozy in just the right balance.

## LADY EVE'S LAST CON

BY REBECCA FRAIMOW

This is a heist romance that really sticks the landing. With heist romances, you're always waiting for the moment when the mark becomes more important to the lead than the money, and Fraimow finesses this transformation with a confident hand. Eve is diamond-sharp and dazzling, an unforgettable showstopper.

## LONG LIVE EVIL

BY SARAH REES BRENNAN

In the brash and bloody "Long Live Evil," Rae, 19, leaves behind a body dying of cancer and is reborn as the villainess in her favorite fantasy series, where she proceeds to try to rewrite the narrative. Technically this isn't a finished romance — it ends on an unpulled punch of a cliffhanger, and I am happy to show off the bruise until we get Book No. 2. The gorgeous, smoldering rage at the heart of this story will keep me warm all winter. □



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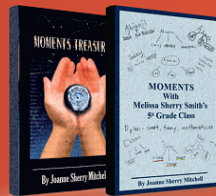


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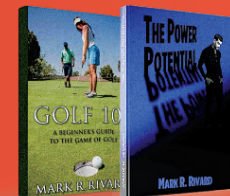


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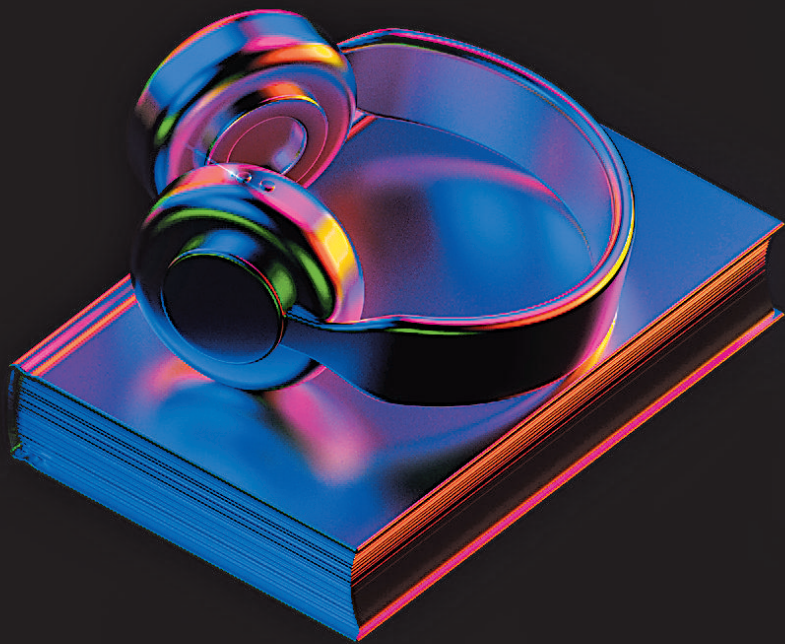


<p><b>BREAKING FREE FROM THE INNER CRITIC</b> by Kalie Marino Empowers readers to overcome self-doubt and embrace self-acceptance with practical insights.</p>	<p><b>FULL CIRCLE: A LOVE STORY OF LIGHT, LOSS &amp; REDEMPTION...</b> by J Karston Buli An epic suspense thriller romance journey on HOW to heal and reunite with your true love.</p>	<p><b>LIVING A POSITIVE LIFE IN A NEGATIVE WORLD</b> by Linda S. Plunkett, PhD Provides strategies to stay positive and thrive despite life's challenges.</p>	<p><b>WHEN BLACK PANTHERS PROWLED AMERIKA</b> by PAM Explores the Black Panther Party's impact and fight for justice in a pivotal era.</p>	<p><b>HOPE: HOW OTHER PEOPLE ENDURE</b> by Karen Marchione Shares inspiring stories of resilience and hope through adversity.</p>
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<p><b>MECÁNICA CUÁNTICA RELATIVISTA Y NO RELATIVISTA: LAS DOS A LA VEZ</b> LUIS GRAVE DE PERALTA</p>	<p><b>LAST STAGE MANAGER STANDING</b> DANIEL B. MORGAN</p>	<p><b>CHURCH BOY LOVE</b> ADRIAN D. NELSON</p>	<p><b>MY INNER CHILD MUST BE HEARD</b> CORINA ZALACE</p>	<p><b>RADICAL ENCOUNTERS</b> WANDA MARIE BIAS</p>	<p><b>Understanding UAPs/UFOs: Implications for National Security and Air Safety</b> MIGUEL A. MORENO, PH.D.</p>	<p><b>Released</b> TONJA GUERRERO</p>	<p><b>THE DEVIL'S STONE</b> MARIE REINDORP</p>	<p><b>Prophet, Seer, and Revelator Holy Joe! Just Judy</b> JUST JUDY</p>
<p><b>Designed Illusions VIA DIVINE POWER</b> PJ RICCHIUTI</p>	<p><b>BLUE FIRE</b> R.J. MIKELIONIS M.D.</p>	<p><b>I ARRIVED LATER... SO WHAT? I AM ALSO HERE</b> W. KPANGBALA SENGBE SR., BBA, MSW, EdS, LICSW(p)</p>	<p><b>12 Simple Words</b> JOHN W. KENNEDY, PH.D., DESA</p>	<p><b>Human Origins</b> DON HAINESWORTH, M.Sc., M.PHARM., M.Eng.</p>	<p><b>THE FACE LOOKING COMPANY</b> ROBERT LEE MARTIN</p>	<p><b>Doctor, What if it Were Your Mother?</b> VICTOR G. VOGEL, MD</p>	<p><b>Are You Ready? How to Build a Legacy to Die For</b> DR. KIMBERLY HARMS</p>	<p><b>A JOURNEY THROUGH CANCER with Faith and Hope</b> CHUCK RUDOLPH</p>
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<p><b>THE FOUR SEEDS</b> MARY GRACE KLUKOSKY</p>	<p><b>THE LIFE OF A RUNNING MAN</b> ROBIN T. BROWN</p>	<p><b>THE TRAIN OF THOUGHT ANOMALIES</b> RICHARD DARDIS</p>	<p><b>Words from the Maestro</b> JOYCE H. HYNES</p>	<p><b>Athena the Brave</b> NINA M. KELLY</p>	<p><b>DOORS</b> C. ALLISON DEVESLY</p>	<p><b>OUT OF MANY ONE</b> JEAN DUFORT BAPTICHON</p>	<p><b>Which Way Is Detroit?</b> HERBERT J. STRATHER</p>	

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# THE YEAR'S BEST



# AUDIOBOOKS

BY LAUREN CHRISTENSEN

FROM VERTIGINOUS, ensemble-cast excursions through the dark web and French Polynesia to searing inner monologues of the antebellum South, the Brooklyn rave scene and American music royalty: The year's best audiobooks are exceptional not just for their writing, but for the vocal performances that make these narratives particularly absorbing in your ear.

LAUREN CHRISTENSEN is an editor at the Book Review.

## JAMES

BY PERCIVAL EVERETT  
Read by Dominic Hoffman

Several times during this retelling of Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" from the perspective of the titular enslaved man, a white character notices James's standard English cadence with shock and asks: "Why are you talking like that?" With impressive comedic timing and vocal agility, Hoffman skips nimbly between James's natural eloquence and the "slave filter" he uses to hide it from white people, deepening a project that hinges on vernacular as both signifier and tool of liberation.

## ALL FOURS

BY MIRANDA JULY  
Read by the author

A 45-year-old workaholic with a husband, child and an unspecified "creative" career embarks on a solo road trip but never makes it more than half an hour from home, thanks to a sexy young Hertz employee who washes her car windows and is apparently worth sacrificing not just a vacation but an entire life. July reads her feverish, hedonistic new novel in what feels like one breath, her raspy monotone barreling through a motel-room affair, flashbacks of her child's birth and existential negotiations with her evolving sexuality, motherhood, perimenopause and mortality.

## THE WIDE WIDE SEA

BY HAMPTON SIDES  
Read by Peter Noble

This Odyssean account of an 18th-century maritime expedition in search of the Northwest Passage puts Captain Cook's contributions — to the British Empire, to modern cartography, to Western perceptions and misperceptions of Polynesian history and culture — in a 21st-century context. Noble reads the full range of Cook's encounters with the same pathos and subtlety he gives to Sides's considerations of Cook's command, curiosity and intellect.

## REJECTION

BY TONY TULATHIMUTTE  
Read by Micky Shiloah, Allyson Ryan, Quincy Surasmith, Dan Bittner, André Santana, Marcha Kia, Eunice Wong and Madeleine Maby

An ensemble cast reads this outrageous collection of linked stories: a gay Asian man whose sexuality remains "theoretical" until the very end, when he spells out an excruciating sexual fantasy for a custom-order porn site; a late-20-something publishing admin who licks her romantic wounds by committing casual racism in a tonally flawless group chat. The narrators do justice to both Tulathimutte's impressive control of language and to his wholly distinct characters.

## FROM HERE TO THE GREAT UNKNOWN

BY LISA MARIE PRESLEY  
AND RILEY KEOUGH  
Read by Riley Keough and Julia Roberts

When she died in 2023, Presley left behind an unfinished memoir and hours of interviews she recorded for it, shards of a life that have been gathered into a whole by her daughter. Presley's life is so slippery and complex it feels right to hear it through a prism of multiple viewpoints. Roberts gives pained and powerful expression to Presley's writing; Keough fills in the gaps with her own memories, her delicate voice laden with fresh grief; and Presley's own recordings interrupt with the haunting effect of a ghost.

## LONG ISLAND

BY COLM TÓIBÍN  
Read by Saoirse Ronan

Ronan, who starred in the 2015 movie adaptation of Tóibín's 2009 novel, reprises her role as the whip-smart and plucky Irish émigré Eilis Lacey, who in 1951 travels by steamer across the Atlantic, dividing her attention and sympathy between two homes. In her gentle, stoic delivery, Ronan renders Eilis's dramas — the Brooklyn boardinghouse where her crippling loneliness morphs slowly into a gossipy sort of community; her Italian American suitor and the wrenching pain of loss — as matters of great sentiment, humor and dignity.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

BY EMILY WITT  
Read by the author

Reading her memoir of sex, drugs and late-stage capitalism, Witt's voice cracks (as far as I can tell) only once, but her vocal restraint signals the tenderness of her wounds as she traces her relationship with an unstable computer programmer named Andrew; her immersion in the Brooklyn rave scene; and her dismay over the first Trump presidency. After years of sharing an apartment, so many drug trips and a general disdain for anything that smells of "the totalizing ideological stranglehold of capitalism," the couple implode — and their comedown feels as inevitable as the political and epidemiological circumstances that surround it.

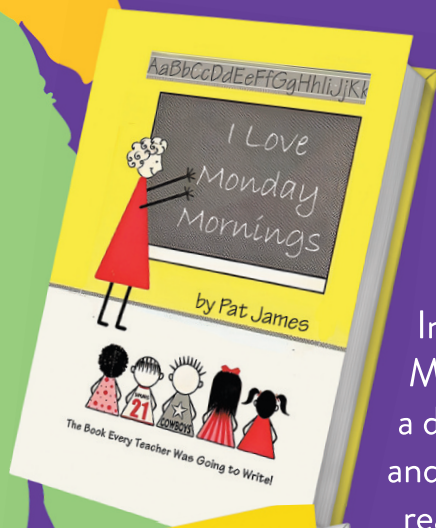
## WHALE FALL

BY ELIZABETH O'CONNOR  
Read by Gwyneth Keyworth and featuring Dyfrig Morris, Gabrielle Glaister, Jot Davies and Nick Griffiths

On an island off Wales during World War II, 18-year-old Manod faces the unappealing prospect of becoming a fisherman's wife until she is hired by a pair of English ethnographers as their translator and assistant. Keyworth's voice is soft and melancholy, slipping easily between English and Welsh as she conveys the dramas of the teenager's love life and the gray isolation that surrounds her. □



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## oo I Love Monday Mornings

In “Don't Miss School on Mondays!” and “I Love Monday Mornings,” Pat James recounts her life as a dedicated first-grade teacher with warmth, insight, and a deep commitment to her students—inviting readers into her lifelong adventure of teaching.



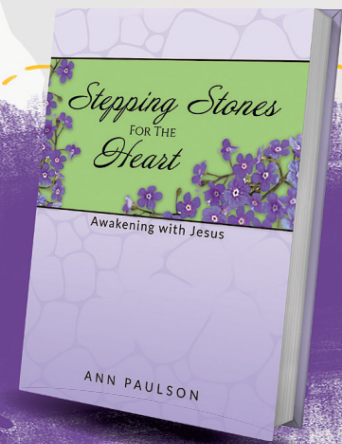
With humor, wisdom, and compassion, James captures the essence of what it means to be a teacher who truly loves her students. These books are essential reads for anyone looking to rekindle their passion for education or understand the joy and challenges of teaching young minds.



## Don't Miss School on Mondays!



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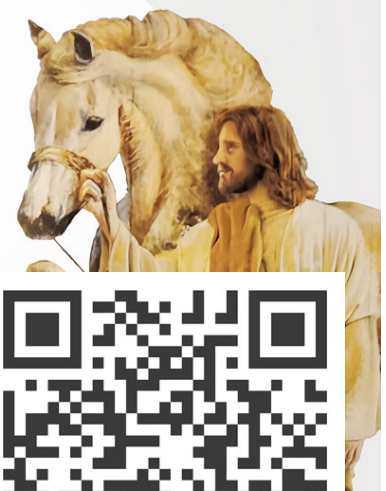


BY ANN PAULSON

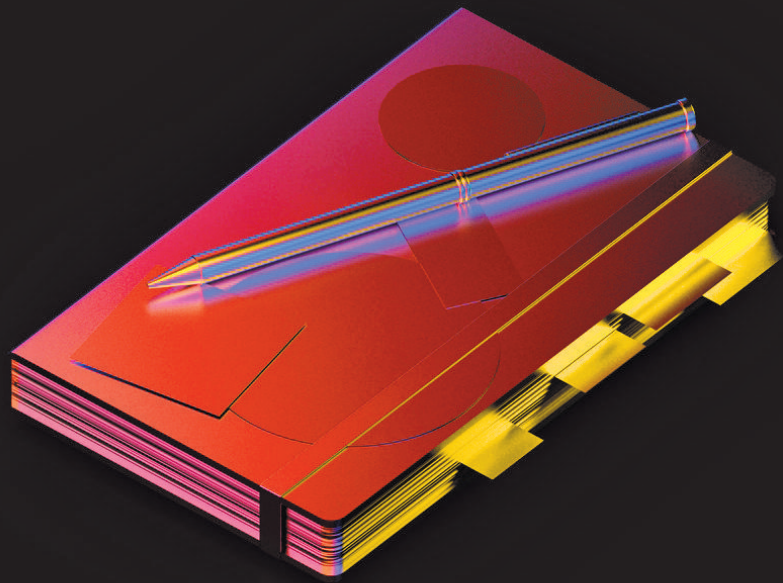
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# THE YEAR'S BEST



## POETRY

BY ELISA GABBERT

“There are plenty who’d hardly/ recognize me now, I used to be/ that cruel.” In another poem, “Refrain,” Phillips writes that a “ring of aspens” are “how forgiveness might look/in the face, say, if it had a face, and forgiveness/ were real.”

But the poems keep insisting the emotion is not quite that: “not/regret, which I still can’t believe in —/I’ve tried.” (Phillips’s syntax always wants another clause, another comma — precision and contradiction.)

It might be more accurate to say these are poems about belief, and its slantwise relationship to knowledge. In one he writes: “Meanwhile, how the wind sometimes makes/the slenderest trees, still young, bend over/makes me think of knowledge conquering/ superstition, I can almost/believe in that — until the trees, like/fear, spring back.”

There’s a constant slippage between the tenor and the vehicle of metaphors, such that objects of abstract comparison feel as real as the real — or it’s all vaguely unreal, as in “Troubadours,” whose landscape seems mythical. “The trees grew quiet,/like thinking.” Are the trees *like thinking*, or does the thought manifest trees?

### THE SELECTED SHEPHERD

BY REGINALD SHEPHERD

I already wrote about this book, so I won’t go on at much length here, but I can’t pass up another chance to keep Shepherd’s name in the conversation (he died in 2008). Edited by Jericho Brown, this is a rich introduction to Shepherd’s work, which is elegant, erudite and wry, every poem an argument for language as a way of life. “I wanted something musical for you . . . a lark, an air/of spring somewhere, my voice not clouded under error/just this once . . . I suppose I die/a little every day, not noticing it yet,” he writes in “A Plague for Kit Marlowe.” And, from the opening to “For My Mother in Lieu of Mourning”: “It takes a thing so long to be true.”

### THE OPENING RITUAL

BY G.C. WALDREP

Waldrep’s latest book is characteristically dense with meaning, metaphor and image, a super-concentrated lyricism I could absorb only a few pages at a time.

The longer poems in particular verge on spiritually exhausting. But I took so much from them.

These poems are often connected to a physical place, a church or monument or somewhere holy, and seem wrested from the singularity of any experience: You were there, and only you, and you will never live through *that* time again. From the first of three poems titled “The Holy Spirit as a Vowel in Early Snow”: “We raise the future/as if from a deep well, hand over hand./The future is dark & wet like well water &/sings in me, a weakness.”

Physical pain and suffering are often present: “The wound/ begins to finger-spell against my thigh.” “The body records its absences . . . We, being matter, are negotiated.” This sounds so serious, but there’s wit here too, a kind of raised eyebrow: Life is absurd. Or poetry is absurd, in response — and yet. “It is easy to imagine hunters here, so why not do it: /hunters.” Or, from “Creation Myth Suite”: “The deer do not know/the earth is round./Somehow/they bear their young/anyway, in Vermeer’s/blond glow.”

### PLAT

BY LINDSEY WEBB

Obliquely based on the Plat of Zion, Joseph Smith’s unrealized vision for a utopian city, “Plat” has a fascinating spatial sensibility; its thinking is architectural.

One section posits a garden where grieving happens: “Even in shadow the garden’s washed and washed with color until it glows with a special kind of light, as if radiating from the category itself.” This garden is “desolate and difficult to access,” Webb writes. “The dead release their new data every year: not easy. Not nothing.”

The structures these poems build offer an alternative to unacceptable realities: “I open a door to splinter the apparently seamless barrier/between cause and effect . . . The plat goes on hoarding its future like a sucked-in breath.” “I consider escaping through the second life of description.”

I keep returning to these pages, with their blocks of language like small rooms, to pass again through their estrangement: “Here reminds me of the world. Of sewing my life to a curtain.” “We can’t speak to each other except through a curtain, a gateless gate . . . We can only forgive each other through a *vestibule*.” □

I SURPRISED myself recently, talking with a friend about poetry, by using the word *religion*. I was thinking of structure and practice — the way that returning to foundational texts or the writing desk makes a certain order of experience more possible. The ritual, importantly, removes the burden of decision for some length of time as to what you’ll do with your body. This frees up room in the mind. I was thinking, too, of something like submission — the willingness to be overpowered. I have never been religious, but to the extent that’s a lack it’s one that poetry can assuage.

As ever, I can’t claim to have read all the books published this year or to say which are “best.” But these are some that I loved most, that taught me something, that I’m already rereading.

ELISA GABBERT’S collections of poetry and essays include, most recently, “Normal Distance” and “Any Person Is the Only Self.” Her *On Poetry* columns appear four times a year.

### WRONG NORMA

BY ANNE CARSON

When I first read Carson’s work, in college, I’d never seen anything like it: the mix of prose and verse, the noisy intrusion of academic citations. I was so struck that I *wished* to be influenced. (In my experience, true influence, deeper than imitation, can take many years.) “Wrong Norma” gathers pieces that are sometimes recognizably poem-like, but often read more like essays or fictions. “1=1” gives a strong impression of autobiography, though it’s written in the third person: An unnamed “she” goes swimming. “Swimming has a stoniness, water being as different from air as stones,” Carson writes. “Water is uninterested in itself.”

“Poverty Remix” begins with a sestina, but the bulk of the piece is an eight-part “appendix” on words and themes in the poem. In one she writes: “Tzetzes says that

Hipponax says the scapegoat was fed fat, then garlanded, then beaten, then killed, then burned, then thrown in the sea. But Tzetzes lived centuries after Hipponax, who was anyway a poet and may have made stuff up.”

“Thret,” probably my favorite piece in the book, reads like a tiny crime novel with speculative elements. It’s hilarious and startling. All poems, of course, could be “fiction” or “nonfiction,” but Carson’s experiments laugh at these distinctions. Shelving her book with “poetry” offers a loophole — you’re not allowed to ask.

### SCATTERED SNOWS, TO THE NORTH

BY CARL PHILLIPS

This slim and beautiful book has a deep strain of something like guilt or regret, as suggested in the opening lines of “Fist and Palm”:



BEST BOOKS OF 2024



Jo Ellen **CAPPS-LAYNE**  
www.joelencappslayne.com

This book tells the story of Abigail (Abby) Thornton, a young woman with intellectual disabilities who suffers from an undiagnosed psychiatric condition. The plot highlights the injustices Abby faces and the support from the few who care about her. Witness how Abby's turbulent journey escalates through a series of crises, including fire, murder, and strangulation.

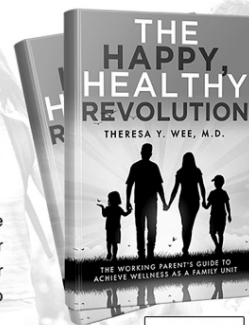


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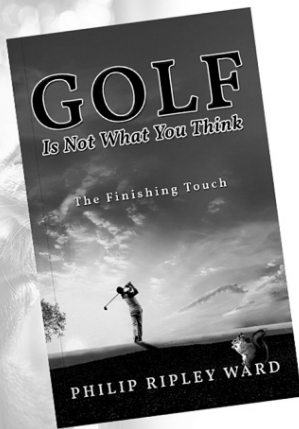


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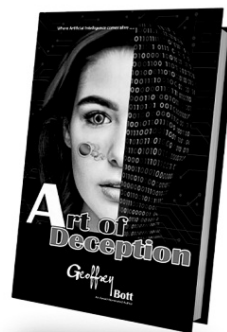


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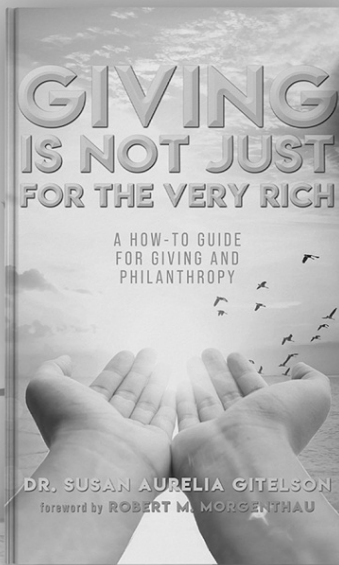
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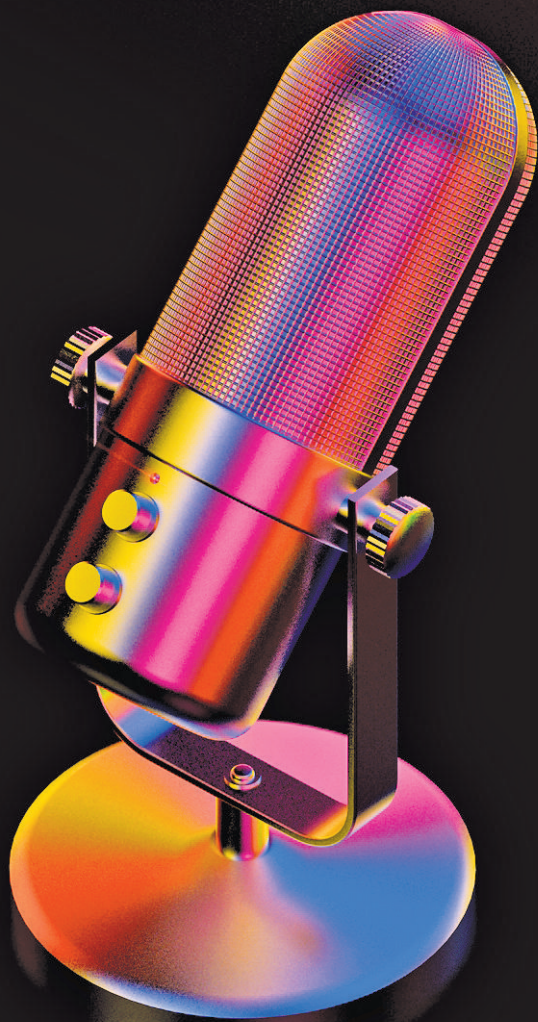


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# THE YEAR'S BEST



## PODCAST INTERVIEWS

APPARENTLY PODCASTS are a big deal! Luckily for the Book Review, we've been hosting one for more than 15 years, providing a space for our writers and editors to discuss what they're reading as well as to interview authors about their latest works. The host, Gilbert Cruz, picked a few of his favorite conversations from the past year.

### ELIN HILDERBRAND SWAN SONG

**GC:** So, you're doing great. People love these books. What are you doing? Why is this the last one?

**EH:** Yeah, this is a very intentional retiring. What I found in the last three or four years is that it's gotten markedly more difficult for me to come up with fresh takes on Nantucket, on the beach, on the scandals and dramas that would be appropriate for a beach book. I've done them all. I've set books at restaurants, I've set books at hotels, I've set books during weddings, I've ventured over to the Vineyard, I've done a historical novel, I did a murder mystery. I am — quite frankly — at the end of my journey. So I decided rather than just spin the thread out until it snaps and somebody says, "This is just not as good as her other ones," that I would very intentionally say, "OK, the Nantucket summer books are coming to an end."

**GC:** How did you tell your publisher, "Hey, this really reliable spot in your summer schedule that makes you a decent amount of money, every year. I think I'm done with that"?

**EH:** Well, I didn't tell them. I announced it, without telling them, because I did not want them to throw money at me. I'm human, and I might have succumbed.

I really feel like every single one of my books from the time I started until now has been as good as or better than the book that came before. And it's just not sustainable. That's why I'm trying to dismount before we get there, to the inevitable decline.

### LEIGH BARDUGO THE FAMILIAR

**GC:** You have incorporated magic into all of your books. I think something that all readers of fantasy are curious about and really obsess over is what they call the "magic systems," the rules that establish what can and cannot be done. I'm curious, generally, how you come up with those.

**LB:** Look, I think people tend to focus a lot on this idea of world building within fantasy or science fiction and around magical systems as if they are something different from other kinds of power, and they're just not, OK? If you are reading a political thriller set in Washington, D.C., somebody is going to have to make you understand the way that power flows, right?

Whether it's on a macro level with the government and the players in the government, or if it's on a micro level within an office, like a lobbyist's office, or somebody's family, that is a power system that is alien to the reader. They are looking for signals to understand how it operates so that they can almost forget about it and engage deeply with the character's plight.

That is the way I approach magic systems too. Magic is a metaphor. Right? It is an open door for a particular kind of possibility in a story. You have to constrain that possibility so that the reader doesn't feel that anything is possible, because that eliminates the ability to navigate a world. Once you create those constraints, then it's just operating the same way that economic influence does, that social influence does.

If you've ever been around somebody with charisma, that is like being in the presence of magic. You are enchanted. You don't even know why you're enchanted. They're saying ridiculous things, but you're nodding along. That, to me, is an exciting way of viewing the world. And if you think about the way that somebody very wealthy moves through the world, the way that they burn through second chances, that's also a kind of magic.

So that's the way I think about magic systems. And then they're constrained by the needs of the story and the stakes I need to create for the characters.

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**NICK HARKAWAY**  
KARLA'S CHOICE

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**GC:** I came to George Smiley and your father's books after having seen the Gary Oldman film, and now I've gone back and watched the Alec Guinness mini-series. I have a completely different view in my mind that is suffused with everything that is Gary Oldman.

He presents a very different view of George Smiley. You have written, or you have said, that you believe your father had a little trouble writing George Smiley because he had been overwhelmed by the presentation of the actor Alec Guinness as his character, and it messed with him for a bit.

**NH:** Guinness was in our lives. He was this very sweet, slightly overwhelming, gentle presence for a little while.

The phone would ring. And I, as a child, had been schooled in how to answer the phone — we never admitted my dad was in the house. But Guinness would ring up and you would get that voice, "Hello, I wonder if I could possibly speak to Mr. David Cornwall?" and I would say to my mom across the room, "It's Alec Guinness on the phone." And then you'd get, "How did he know it was me?"

For Dad, seeing Guinness do this extraordinary performance of Smiley overwhelmed his ability to hear the character. And I get that, because if you read the books you find a slightly different voice. And when my dad came to write after seeing Guinness, the cadences of Guinness's voice came into his head, rather than the cadences of the original.

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**ISABEL WILKERSON**  
THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS

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**GC:** Your book "The Warmth of Other Suns" took its title from

Richard Wright, the author of "Black Boy." When did you know that was the title? Very evocative. Were there other titles that were in the running?

**IW:** That is a great question because this book was a nameless orphan child for most of the time I was working on it. I did not have a title. It actually peeved me and worried me over the course of the time I was working on this book — 15 years.

I was reading the annotated version of "Black Boy," and the endnotes in the back that were describing the process through which he wrote this book. And what happened with him was that he wrote the full book, but the Book of the Month Club decided that they did not like the second half.

And so they said, we will only choose this book for the book club — which meant a lot to him, of course — if you remove the second half, which was about his experiences in the North. And so he had to quickly figure out how was he going to close this book when half of it was missing and the conclusion that he had in mind was no longer available to him.

So he ended up having to rush to come up with some ending. And in that ending was some of the most beautiful language that I think he ever came up with. And among the things that he wrote in that new ending was, "I was leaving the South to fling myself into the unknown. I was taking a part of the South to transplant an alien soil, to see if it could grow differently, if it could drink of new and cool rains, bend in strange winds, respond to the warmth of other suns, and perhaps to bloom."

When I saw those words — which have been deleted from the book that we have, "Black Boy," which is now what he intended to be, the full first and second half — I knew instantly that was the epigraph and it was from the epigraph that the title came.

**GC:** It's been a few years since this book came out. I'm wondering how people talk to you about it, what you think it put into the world.

**IW:** It's been 14 years, and I have actually been on the road with this book almost the entire time

with the exception of Covid — and then we were doing zooms. So it has had a really long lifespan that I could never have anticipated.

One of the things that it's become is a kind of validation for the people who were part of this Great Migration, who often did not speak about it, even to their own children. And it's given them the kind of a platform through which to share their experiences. And that's been such a fulfilling experience. I will often hear from their children and grandchildren, and sometimes they will say to me with gratitude that this book was the last book that their mother, their father, their grandparent happened to have read before they left this planet. When they say that, it's deeply meaningful to me because at the end of these people's lives, they had had a chance to have this kind of conclusion, and a sense that they were part of something bigger than themselves. And I take that as one of the unexpected honors of this work.

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**SARAH JESSICA  
PARKER**

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**GC:** The reason that you're on this podcast is not just because you are a book enthusiast and a book evangelist, which you are, but also because you're actually part of the publishing industry now. So how did that start?

**SJP:** It was a peculiar entry and I should say that I did not feel deserving even of the inquiry. I happened to be at a luncheon that was also attended by Molly Stern, who at the time was a big fancy editor at Crown, and she came to say hello because she had seen me photographed carrying a book by one of her authors, Gillian Flynn.

And we started talking about books, very quickly and in a very surfacey way. I mentioned that I had been trying to get my hands on a book that was yet to be published here in the States, and I had been combing strange and obscure book websites and chats. She asked me the name of the book and I said, "Oh, it's this book by this gentleman named Herman Koch and it's called 'The Dinner.'"

And she said, "That's my book."

And I said, "Oh my gosh, do you think I could get a copy?" She sent me, very soon after that, a stack of books. Among them was of course "The Dinner," but in the middle of that stack was a book that was probably six months out from publishing called "A Constellation of Vital Phenomena." And after having pursued "The Dinner," for so long, I am confounded as to why I passed up the opportunity to read that book right away and reached for "A Constellation of Vital Phenomena."

And about 40 pages in, I was just gobsmacked. I really couldn't get over what I was reading. I was mystified by how this author who was unknown to me had come to create what I thought was such a huge achievement. And so I reached out to Molly and said, "I don't know if there's anything I could ever do for this book." And we, from there, started a book club.

And about two years into that, Molly said, "I'd like to talk to you about publishing books."

I thought she was mad and said, "I didn't go to college. I barely graduated high school." And she said, "This is how it could work. And this is how you could feel ready. And these are the great folks that you would work alongside who you could learn from."

And so there I was in the publishing world and my first imprint was SJP for Hogarth. That's how I started. And it's been, as you can imagine, an extraordinary and privileged experience.

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**LEV GROSSMAN**  
THE BRIGHT SWORD

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**GC:** What was your history with Arthurian legend?

**LG:** Like a lot of people, I fell in love with Arthur through "The Sword in the Stone" — the T.H. White novel — and "The Once and Future King." I was very obsessed with that book. I have a clear memory of when I was in eighth grade. I was in gym class, and we were playing dodgeball, and I had this vision of the other guys on my dodgeball team as the knights at the table, and it suddenly felt much more exciting. It

was a real obsession of mine.

I was much older when I began to think that there might be something more to say about the story. I for most of my life felt like the story of Arthur had been told and we didn't really need another. I began to wonder what it would take to write an Arthur story that felt like it was relevant and urgent, in this world that we live in now.

**GC:** One thing that you tried to do, as you noted, is focus on the members of the Round Table that were on the edges, maybe not as famous as Lancelot and Galahad, and each of them in their own way. A type of person who if their full identity had been known at the time — certainly in the case of Bedivere, who's gay, and Dinadan, who is a trans character — would not have been allowed to join the Round Table.

When did you know that these were the characters that were going to lead your story?

**LG:** You instinctively home in on these people whose experiences have not really been told. The Arthur story has been told for more than a thousand years. But has anybody really explained where Sir Palomides came from? He's a Muslim knight. He's riding around Arthur's Britain. He's chasing the questing beast. How did he get there? What is his back story? He's mostly comic relief, even in T.H. White. And I thought it was time somebody took him seriously and told his story. And that, that, that's how "The Bright Sword" happened, really.

**GC:** Another way in which you make your story feel of the time is that you primarily write it with a modern vernacular. How did you decide when to say something that felt very modern and sarcastic and when to just have someone speak in the more highfalutin tone of the time?

**LG:** It evolved as I worked on the book. I studied, quite closely, writers like Hilary Mantel who write historical fiction, but not in this way that feels very "ye olde." I wanted the knights to be talking to each other in a way that felt casual.

Because of course these guys hung out together every day in the great hall of Camelot. They

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didn't think of themselves as speaking in flowery Middle English. They needed a vernacular to speak in. It's supposed to feel like these are real people, and they have real relationships with each other, and they ought not to feel of the past, it ought to feel like we have gone back there with them. They will occasionally speak like old-fashioned knights, but, generally speaking, they talk like us, because they are like us.

**GC:** I always ask writers about research. I didn't think I would be able to ask you that question, though, given that this is a fantasy novel about King Arthur. But here's so much detail about the history of Britain, about the legacy of the Roman occupation. Talk a little bit about how much history you had to read.

**LG:** It was a lot. I am no historian, and I had to learn about the

history because even if Arthur is a fantasy, he needs those details to make him feel real and grounded.

Arthur lives in a very strange time, which we call the Dark Ages. It was this sort of post-colonial moment in Britain's history where Rome had occupied it for three and a half centuries and then departed quite suddenly, leaving behind a kind of wasteland of ruins and confusion and conflict. And that was the world that Arthur lived in.

Then of course there was all the fighting. I personally am a man of peace, but the battles and the fights were very important to me. I even went so far as to take a few classes in long sword combat, to feel what it felt like to have a sword in my hand.

**GC:** What a dream for anybody who loves fantasy.

**LG:** I feel like it was not the instructor's dream to coach me on

my long sword moves. I don't know that I would have made much of a knight myself, but, by golly, I tried.

## LIZ MOORE

### THE GOD OF THE WOODS

**GC:** How do you start writing a mystery? What comes to you first? And then, how do you build upon it?

**LM:** I never outline in advance. The only things I know going in are the setting and the time period. And I know at least a few of the main characters who will populate that place. And I know only the first problem that they face. Every time I write, I convince myself that I can't possibly stick the landing and that I've written myself into a corner.

**GC:** And when you're working on a mystery like this, how do you know when is the right moment to parcel out a particular piece of information?

**LM:** It's a math problem at a certain point. I let myself just write whatever I feel like writing for a very long time when I'm generating a first draft. But at a certain point I do have to get organized, and the question of how do I maintain narrative tension comes up for me in the second and third and fourth and fifth drafts, and some of that is like, What would be a rhythmically interesting way to end this chapter?

And also, what would be a turn, an interesting turn, that raises a question that isn't answered until later? So it's throwing a baseball up and then catching it three chapters later. There's not a science to it, but it's something that I do play around with. I must have

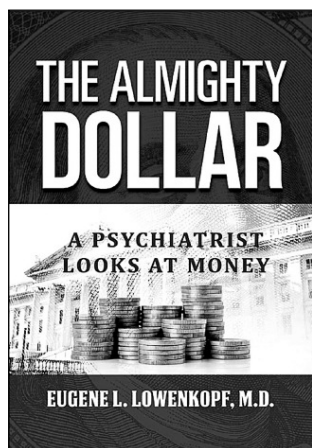
reversed or scrambled up the order of all of the chapters in this novel, dozens and dozens of times.

**GC:** And you're keeping track on a conspiracy board. What are you doing?

**LM:** A murder board? No, a word doc, just a word doc.

**GC:** Much less interesting!

**LM:** I know. This is the first novel I ever tried to use Scrivener. I tried and failed. I got really excited about it because somebody pitched me on the idea that you can just lift whole chapters and move them around with ease. But I got overeager and I didn't read the instructions in advance. And then in trying to download it at the end, it was so mangled in formatting that it took hours and hours to unmangle it. And so I just went back to Microsoft Word. □



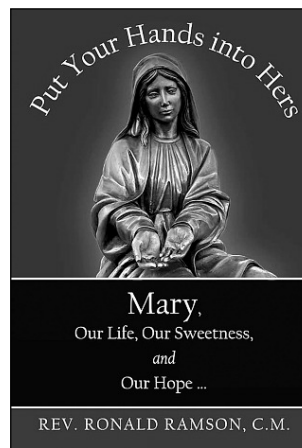
### Eugene Lowenkopf, M.D.

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Money was invented about 5000 years ago and has proved essential to civilization. It has also become so charged with emotions that it dominates events throughout life and looms large in all interpersonal transactions. This book looks at all aspects of the money/mind relationship from the viewpoint of a psychiatrist who has dealt with the problems that money produces and the problems that it supposedly resolves. There are chapters dealing with important stages in the life cycle such as childhood, adolescence, marriage, maturity, retirement, old age and death as well as chapters concerned with special topics such as divorce, poverty, wealth, gambling, stealing, philanthropy and hoarding. The author illustrates these issues with cases drawn from his professional work and from history, literature, current events, and popular culture and personalities. He shows the reader how many of their personal psychological problems can be remedied by more realistic attitudes to money and activities dealing with it, which in fact is how psychotherapy works.

Book is available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble



### Rev. Ronald Ramson C.M.

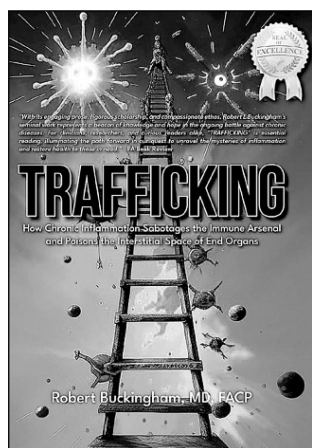
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Website: [www.ronaldramson.com](http://www.ronaldramson.com)

Is Mary a valid intercessor for today or a relic of the past, nice to know of, nice to look at, but nothing more? What do many pray? "Hail, holy Queen, our life, our sweetness, and our hope." Does Mary inspire our hearts and minds? Is she a vessel of hope? Do we feel a mother's love? Three essential concepts intentionally run through this book, if not explicitly certainly implicitly: a mother's love, hope, and inspiration. In all the apparitions of the mother of Jesus to persons throughout the centuries, she has exemplified three qualities: a mother's love, hope, and inspiration. Yes, at times, she has given people a mission, but underlying that mission are those salient qualities.

Book is available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble



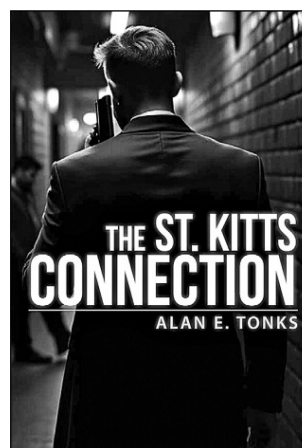
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Trafficking is a compelling book that places the capillary endothelial cell front and center managing the interstitial space battle between anti and chronic inflammatory signaling and metabolic rhythms. A must read for those curious into delving into the cause-and-effect basic science of this battle and how lifestyle choices integrate with the success or failure of the anti-inflammatory outcome.

Book is available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble



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A young commercial banker gets fired from his job as Vice Chairman at a Florida bank. In his search for employment, he meets a couple of Canadian real estate developers who offer him a job managing all of their real estate holdings including an offshore bank in St. Kitts. He soon finds himself in the middle of a major international drug smuggling and weapons trading conspiracy and before he can walk away, federal agencies close down the US operation and charge the Canadians for their crimes. Two years later he is dragged back into a situation where drug trafficking and international political issues, brokered in St. Kitts, affect the outcome of a general election in India and the ultimate assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, India's former Prime Minister. Story is based on actual events that includes a bank failure, murder and illegal financial activities.

Book is available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble



# THE YEAR'S BEST



# CRIME & MYSTERY

BY SARAH WEINMAN

I'VE LONG BELIEVED that crime fiction runs along a spectrum between order and chaos, where the two seemingly disparate states are always intertwined, ever-changing, never settled. It makes sense that a genre offering a window into the way we really function in society and behave with one another would embrace constraints while also constantly subverting them. This year's standout authors understood the assignment: to push boundaries, to reflect the world in its messy glory rather than in tidy narratives.

**SARAH WEINMAN** is the *Book Review's* *Crime & Mystery* columnist.

## THE GOD OF THE WOODS

BY LIZ MOORE

My crime novel of the year is "The God of the Woods," which I had the great fortune of reading while at a writing residency. Somehow that change of scene — in a picturesque environment akin to the Adirondack summer camp where the 13-year-old daughter of the camp's wealthy founders disappears one night in 1975 — heightened my attention to Moore's note-perfect story, which is about the price of power, the enormity of loss and the ease of scapegoating. I expect to be thinking about this novel years from now.

## CAHOKIA JAZZ

BY FRANCIS SPUFFORD

The narrative audacity of "Cahokia Jazz" isn't altogether surprising for anyone who has read Spufford's previous novels. Here he sets out to chronicle a vanished world that never had the chance to blossom, and allows it to breathe through the jagged, jazzy rhythms of hard-boiled detective fiction. In Spufford's brilliant telling, 1920s-era Cahokia is a thriving, Indigenous-led American state roiling with racial tension. When an outsider arrives to investigate a murder, the ties that bind this supposed utopia can only blow apart.

## THE HUNTER

BY TANA FRENCH

Crime fiction fans were lucky to get a new novel from French, who has long displayed a languid but total command of the genre's storytelling possibilities. "The Hunter" is a follow-up to "The Searcher," bringing back the American expat and ex-cop Cal Hunter, who's building a new life in an Irish village and mentoring a local teen, Trey Reddy. But when Trey's no-good father reappears with a get-rich-quick scheme, murder follows. French takes her sweet time unwinding the tale, and the reader's patience is amply rewarded.

## ROUGH TRADE

BY KATRINA CARRASCO

"Second book syndrome" has caught on as shorthand for the quality dip that is said to often follow a successful debut. But there are three sophomore efforts, all series novels, that equal or exceed their predecessors. The first is "Rough Trade," Carrasco's historical thriller featuring the gutsy, Pinkerton-trained opium smuggler Alma Rosales, which brims with the sights and smells of late-19th-century Tacoma, where secrets swirl and betrayals mount.

## HALL OF MIRRORS

BY JOHN COPENHAVER

Copenhaver's "Hall of Mirrors" brings back the crime-obsessed duo Judy Nightingale and Philippa Watson for a haunting exploration of closeted lives and shadow selves in 1950s Washington, D.C., as they track a serial killer they tried and failed to thwart years ago.

## BLESSED WATER

BY MARGOT DOUAIHY

"Blessed Water" brings back Douaihy's New Orleans nun-slash-private eye, Sister Holiday, introduced to blistering effect in "Scorched Grace." This time, the chain-smoking Holiday, "tattooed from my jawline to my toes," discovers a body in the river "clad

in all black, like me." It's a priest, and as she investigates his murder, the city storms.

## SMOKE KINGS

BY JAHMAL MAYFIELD

Three debuts stood out from the rest this year. The first, "Smoke Kings," is Mayfield's examination of whether there can ever truly be restitution for the harm done to generations of Black people in America. If the only way is to do so by force, what are the moral costs?

## SWALLOW THE GHOST

BY EUGENIE MONTAGUE

Similar provocations suffuse Montague's "Swallow the Ghost," though her questions revolve around the making and breaking of crime narratives. I loved the way the three seemingly disparate sections, in markedly different styles, coalesce around deeper questions of whose story is most worth telling.

## MAY THE WOLF DIE

BY ELIZABETH HEIDER

Heider is off to a roaring series start with her debut, which introduces the Italian investigator Nikki Serafino working the beat (and wrestling with personal demons aplenty) in seedy, beautiful, baroque Naples.

## NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

BY ROBYN GIGL

Finally, I continue to press Gigl's books into readers' hands with urgency, especially her fourth and best effort featuring the transgender New Jersey lawyer Erin McCabe. Gigl writes crackling courtroom scenes and ratchets up the suspense with every chapter, but the depth with which she renders Erin, her love for (and complicated relationships with) her family and friends, is what sticks with me. The personal is political, especially now, but character and humanity are what propel this series to continued excellence. □

maybe “love” is too soft-focus a word for the mix of awe, exhilaration and, occasionally, nausea I felt while reading about the book’s unlucky protagonists — abject rejects whose identities are both nurtured and warped by the internet. In his review, my colleague Dwight Garner described being entranced by “Rejection” despite its “emotional barbarity.” Tulathimutte writes with virtuosic brio about loneliness and humiliation. I found myself perversely heartened by his depraved genius. His book is what I needed to read this year: bleak, funny and utterly ruthless.

#### DWIGHT GARNER

This year’s best books mattered because they offered refuge from the wheels grinding in our heads. They made us feel less alone and reminded us that we are still sane.

Sanity and humor so often walk hand in hand. In his memoir “Knife,” Salman Rushdie wrote that the 1989 fatwa against him, and his stabbing onstage in 2022 by an Islamic extremist, resulted in no small part from “a quarrel between those with a sense of humor and those without one.”

“Knife,” published in April, is harrowing from front to back. But for Rushdie, humor bubbled up organically from pain — his book is packed with wit. In his honor, and to confirm my own sanity, here’s a look back at moments from a year’s reading that made the corners of my mouth slide upward.

I liked learning, in Mary V. Dearborn’s biography of Carson McCullers, that McCullers and the burlesque star Gypsy Rose Lee, who were housemates in Brooklyn, liked to chase fire trucks down the street because both loved a good conflagration.

I liked that Joseph Epstein, in his memoir, “Never Say You’ve Had a Lucky Life,” said a career has five stages: “(1) Who is Joseph Epstein? (2) Get me Joseph Epstein. (3) We need someone like Joseph Epstein. (4) What we need is a young Joseph Epstein. (5) Who is Joseph Epstein?”

I liked Tony Tulathimutte’s observation, in his story collection “Rejection,” that certain primal bummers are not on the “Official

Registry of Politicized Traumas.” He also gave us one girl’s trick to seem like a chowhound: Take a big, showy initial bite of your meal, then push the rest around.

Before I read “The Notebooks of Sonny Rollins,” it hadn’t occurred to me that saxophonists must watch what they eat so as not to have “an accidental elimination” while playing.

Before I read Robert Hilburn’s biography of Randy Newman, I didn’t know Newman was kind of lying in interviews when he said his song “Short People” was about prejudice. “I just thought it was funny,” he said.

“The Art of Dying,” a posthumous collection of writings by the New Yorker art critic Peter Schjeldahl, came out this year. He was ill with cancer when he compiled it. He wrote: “I swatted a fly the other day and thought, *Outlived you.*”

Schjeldahl also got off perhaps the best sentence in Tricia Romano’s “When the Freaks Came Out to Write,” a wonderful oral history of The Village Voice: “Meeting deadlines, you know, interfered with taking drugs.”

On the topic of drugs, Glenn Loury divulged in “Late Admissions,” his memoir, that he once smoked crack in an airplane at 30,000 feet. He’d hidden it in his shoe.

In a world of balding men with buzzed heads, I miss certain old-school comb-overs. (Picture William Kunstler’s hair, not Rudy Giuliani’s.) It was a treat, in Rachel Kushner’s moody spy novel “Creation Lake,” when her narrator admired a comb-over that was not “meant to falsify” but was “a guileless celebration of what remains.”

“I couldn’t love a man who couldn’t spell, it was impossible,” Sheila Heti wrote in “Alphabetical Diaries.” “Why does so much of my life seem to depend on a Duane Reade?” one of Garth Risk Hallberg’s characters asks in his novel “The Second Coming.” In Danzy Senna’s novel “Colored Television,” a character explains that of course Black families don’t celebrate Black History Month — “it’s a holiday created for white people.”

In his electric novel “James,” a retelling of “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” Percival Everett has his Black characters run their speech through a “slave filter” to

pacify white people. The narrator instructs enslaved children, including a girl named February, how to get by:

The children said together,  
“And the better they feel, the safer we are.”

“February, translate that.”  
“Da mo’ betta dey feels, da mo’ safer we be.”  
“Nice.”

Álvaro Enríquez’s hallucinogenic novel “You Dreamed of Empires,” set in 1519 in what is now Mexico City, was among this year’s best. I liked it in part because, as I wrote in my review: “This is the sort of novel in which no one’s armor fits quite right. Toenails, before clip-pers, are awful to trim. Insufficiently wiped buttocks are itchy at every moment. Sometimes a warrior will find himself alone, performing the act that the Boy Scout handbook will later forbid.”

Calvin Trillin, in his collection “The Lede,” wrote about journalists who coin phrases they hope will enter the language. Trillin had high hopes for his own: “D.T.S. — Disappearing Tush Syndrome,” which describes “the tendency of older men’s hindquarters to flatten out.”

I am still moping because, in my review of “Paper of Wreckage,” an oral history of The New York Post, I omitted the book’s best line. The reporter Steve Dunleavy was (allegedly) having sex with the fiancée of one of his editors in a snowbank outside Elaine’s — that’s a decent story already — when the conjoined pair was hit by a snowplow.

I described all that. Here’s what I left out: Dunleavy injured his foot, and Pete Hamill, upon hearing this story, said, “I hope it’s not his writing foot.”

Such are some fragments that, in 2024, shored up my ruins.

#### ALEXANDRA JACOBS

I am thinking a lot these days about how biography, and to some extent memoir, is soon to change irrevocably. Modern subjects don’t send or save very many handwritten letters, and many have abandoned diaries and datebooks for social media and Google Calendar — which will be a lot harder and less fun for re-

searchers of the future to riffle through.

Given this, and the fast-moving, electronically filtered and fractured present, it was a pleasure this year to disappear into some old-fashioned brush portraits of cultural titans. I hoisted Katherine Bucknell’s book about Christopher Isherwood wondering how the writer of the stories that inspired “Cabaret” could possibly deserve almost 900 pages, and ended it wanting to revisit the *other* almost 900-page biography of him, all the rest of his work, and that of his famous “friends” as well.

(Besides, as Joel Grey suggested recently in The New York Times, “Cabaret” is seeming more timely than ever.)

Brad Gooch on the artist Keith Haring; Deborah Jowitt on the dancer-choreographer Martha Graham; her longtime Village Voice colleague Cynthia Carr on the Warhol superstar Candy Darling; the late Bill Zehme (with an assist) on Johnny Carson; and Philip Gefter on the evolution of “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” from play to movie — all were noble memorials to the monoculture and a reminder to rise from my velvet-upholstered chaise longue occasionally and get the heck out of the house to experience some art, ballet, nightclubs, comedy and drama. Sara B. Franklin’s homage to the storied editor Judith Jones reminded me that I won’t lose feminist points by occasionally tying on an apron and trussing a chicken once I’m back.

I also adored the messy, everything-on-the-table “sex, drugs, and opera” memoir “Seeing Through,” by Ricky Ian Gordon, a rare and probing look at the life of a working composer.

And — in a year when cats entered the chat in a big way — I was very glad to take up “My Beloved Monster,” Caleb Carr’s meow-moir about his golden Siberian, Masha, even more so because the author died less than two months after it was published. My favorite books are those that send me, like a highly specific algorithm, to piles of other books: in this case those by the Beat writers with whom Carr’s exceedingly difficult father, Lucien, consorted.

Speaking of brush portraits: Nicholson Baker’s “Finding a

Likeness: How I Got Somewhat Better at Art” is a beautiful experiment in an alien medium, from a writer like no other, that The New York Times criminally neglected to review. (His novel “The Mezzanine” did make our Funny Books list!) It would make a great holiday gift.

And speaking of aliens: Even though it came out in January, don’t sleep on Marie-Helene Bertino’s “Beautyland,” about a girl receiving faxed missives from superiors in outer space! A perfect little polished garnet of a novel.

Closer to home, Miranda July’s “All Fours” didn’t win the National Book Award for fiction — that honor went to Percival Everett’s superb “James” — but it was the book women in 2024 were talking most about, in hushed urgent tones — yes, even more than Sally Rooney’s “Intermezzo.” All the debate about libido, artistic expression, body image, parenting, fidelity and friendship July inspired was like a giant consciousness-raising session in a virtual sunken living room.

Sales of romance novels are up since the pandemic, my colleague Alexandra Alter reported — and sex in the world of literary fiction is thriving as well, far from the conventional marriage plot. The heroine of R.O. Kwon’s “Exhibit” strays from her vanilla husband to explore sadomasochism with a ballerina. Susan Minot, who years ago wowed with “Lust” and “Evening,” showed that she’s still got it, probing the carnal thrill and emotional fallout of a divorced woman’s affair with a much younger man. And of course Sonia Purnell reminded us, with her new biography of the diplomat Pamela Harriman, that women have been enjoying sex for a long time.

Other than those about the churn and conflict in our capital — which Harriman’s career, from Churchill to Clinton, can help contextualize — the review I wrote that caused the most ruckus was a pan of Anne Lamott’s “Somehow: Thoughts on Love.” Her fans are *passionate*, and after she posted her disappointment on X, I got a pile of poison-pixel emails.

Let me state again for the record, I admire Lamott. Just not this particular book. <<Hides under chaise longue.>> □

# THE YEAR'S BEST



# SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY

BY AMAL EL-MOHTAR

OF THE MANY great books I read this year, the following 10 have stayed with me, undergirded my thoughts as I go about my days and provoked excellent, chewy conversations about craft and pleasure, empire and resistance. While I'm a little haunted by the violence publishers seem to be doing to the very concept of a series — claiming sequels are stand-alones, while insufficiently supporting and labeling the parts of actual series — I hope you find something to enjoy among these fantastic works.

**AMAL EL-MOHTAR** is a Hugo Award-winning writer and the co-author, with Max Gladstone, of *This Is How You Lose the Time War*. She is the Book Review's science fiction and fantasy columnist.

## THE BOOK OF LOVE

BY KELLY LINK

"The Book of Love" is a landmark, the kind of fantasy novel that has its own gravity and distorts the genre terrain around it. Set in a small town called Lovesend, it tells the story of teenagers who return from the dead and must compete to remain alive by completing magical tasks. A tender tribute to romance novels, fairy villains and fairy lovers, "The Book of Love" does justice to its name.

## RAKESFALL

BY VAJRA CHANDRASEKERA

Chandrasekera's second novel shifts wildly in structure and narration to dazzling result. Souls

recur in various combinations and circumstances, organized around how to endure fascism and kill kings. A TV show that is perhaps reality gives way to a play about beings who reincarnate over thousands of years, which gives way to a murder mystery involving a cybernetically enhanced near-immortal who wakes from an ancient sleep. Ambitious and kaleidoscopic.

## IN UNIVERSES

BY EMET NORTH

This is a haunting and hopeful book, as precise and lingering as the pressure of a finger in a delicate, vulnerable place. Each chapter explores how the life of a gender-fluid researcher named Raffi could change in the wake of different choices. Sometimes wrecked by climate disaster or alien invasion, Raffi's world nev-

ertheless offers small spaces of intimacy. A gently devastating debut.

## THE MELANCHOLY OF UNTOLD HISTORY

BY MINSOO KANG

Kang braids a horror-inflected narrative of a raconteur about to be killed by his emperor, a mythic tale of discord between the gods, and a story of a recently bereaved present-day history professor, in a spellbinding book that invites us to question who is telling stories about whom. It's also — unexpectedly — superbly funny.

## THE PRACTICE, THE HORIZON, AND THE CHAIN

BY SOFIA SAMATAR

Small but perfectly formed, this novel is set on spaceships stratified into social hierarchies. At the bottom are laborers bound by an enormous chain, in the middle are people who are policed but mostly free, and at the top are unburdened people whose whims shape the lives of those beneath them. Written with Samatar's usual grace, "The Practice" reads like a précis of her body of work.

## EXORDIA

BY SETH J. DICKINSON

Dickinson's science-fiction debut is a first-contact story about a Kurdish war orphan and the warmongering six-headed snake alien she meets in Central Park. Scrutinizing ethics, theoretical physics and the military-industrial complex, "Exordia" is so brilliant that I'm including it in this list despite its decidedly non-stand-alone ending, for which I feel the publisher owes me either an apology or the next two volumes in quick succession.

## THE MERCY OF GODS

BY JAMES S.A. COREY

By contrast, "The Mercy of Gods" explicitly launches a series, harrowing in a more measured way,

combining campus novel and science-fiction thriller. An alien empire of giant creatures called the Carryx descends on the human-colonized planet Anjiin, slaughtering an eighth of the population and abducting the planet's elites to test them for "usefulness" on other worlds.

## THOSE BEYOND THE WALL

BY MICAIAH JOHNSON

This is a stand-alone sequel to "The Space Between Worlds," Johnson's postapocalyptic debut. Here, travel through the multiverse is possible but comes with the risk of being crushed to death by a cosmic "backlash." But someone has figured out how to shift that risk from the traveler to others, and innocent people are being killed. Stopping this will require old nemeses and unlikely friends to unite against a common enemy.

## THE TAINTED CUP

BY ROBERT JACKSON  
BENNETT

Bennett's perfectly executed fantasy mystery novel introduces two dynamic detectives in a strange world, as if Nero Wolfe were solving mysteries in Area X. Dinios Kol is an "engraver," able to remember crime scenes in perfect detail; his employer, Ana Dolabra, is an ostracized investigator whose sensory sensitivity often requires her to wear a blindfold. When a wealthy man is spectacularly murdered, Ana and Din are called in to solve the crime.

## LONG LIVE EVIL

BY SARAH REES BRENNAN

"Long Live Evil" launches a series. I cannot stress this enough. This careening meta-fantasy delight, in which a young dying woman enters her little sister's favorite fantasy novel as its villain, stole a night's sleep from me as I reveled in it, convinced that it would end cathartically if I could just stay up long enough. *But there is no end.* There will be more, which is good, but only next year, which is terrible. □

# THE YEAR'S BEST



## HORROR

BY GABINO IGLESIAS

READERS, GOOD NEWS: We're in a golden age of horror. The year 2024 was packed with amazing — and amazingly diverse — horror novels, novellas and collections. It brought highly anticipated returns of horror legends and bold introductions of new voices to the genre; featured a range of topics, from cosmic horror to haunted houses; and explored a variety of cultures, with deep dives into Latin America, spotlights on Korean Americans and more.

With so many great releases, selecting only 10 books for this column was a hard task. But out of all of the fantastic new horror books published this year, these titles stood out.

**GABINO IGLESIAS** is a writer, editor, literary critic and professor, and the author of *The Devil Takes You Home*. His latest book is *House of Bone and Rain*.

### NOT A SPECK OF LIGHT

BY LAIRD BARRON

Superb. That's what I called Barron's "Not a Speck of Light" in my review this year. The collection is beautifully written, intensely creative, relentlessly gloomy and extremely violent. It's a perfect mix of horror and crime that takes readers on a bleak, unforgettable journey into darkness both human and supernatural.

### YOU LIKE IT DARKER

BY STEPHEN KING

Want another amazing collection? Look no further than King's latest book. He is in fine form here, delivering more of what has made him the King of Horror: spooky encounters, supernatural may-

hem, plenty of violence and King's unique brand of darkness. This stellar book is as entertaining as it is creepy.

### THE EYES ARE THE BEST PART

BY MONIKA KIM

This impressive debut novel features an engaging Korean American family narrative and deftly tackles Asian fetishization, all in a delightfully gory tale about a young woman's budding obsession with eating human eyes. "The Eyes Are the Best Part" is as emotional as it is brutal, and proves that Kim is an author to watch.

### WOODWORM

BY LAYLA MARTÍNEZ

Martínez's excellent novel, which was translated from the Spanish by Sophie Hughes and Annie McDermott, follows a woman and her mother who live in a malicious house. Isolation is a silent character here, and so is trauma. The combination of real and paranormal monstrosities, along with the novel's unremittingly eerie atmosphere, makes this a profoundly unsettling book that is as much about a haunted house as it is about haunted people.

### MODEL HOME

BY RIVERS SOLOMON

Solomon's novel takes a new approach to the "evil house" trope. The novel is about three sisters forced to return to their haunted childhood home after the mysterious deaths of their parents. Solomon puts the malevolent building in the back seat and focuses instead on a plethora of topics like depression, motherhood, sexuality, gender, trauma and growing up in a hostile environment with a strong, demanding mother. The result is a wonderfully surprising haunted house story that is also a sharp excavation of the human issues that plague us all.

### THROUGH THE NIGHT LIKE A SNAKE

EDITED BY SARAH COOLIDGE

This collection features 10 spooky works from 10 of the best writers of "narrativa de lo inusual" — narrative of the unusual. Memorable entries include a tale about exploring an old fascist's home and a drama of murder and insanity with a twist ending for the ages. With its spread of authors and stories, "Through the Night Like a Snake" offers a sweeping look at what is happening in the rich world of Latin American speculative fiction.

### REMEDY

BY J.S. BREUKELAAR

"Remedy" is a brutal and claustrophobic novel that explores the existential crisis of a group of people violently yanked from their lives by a monster and stuck in a mirror world with new identities. The story is full of questions and shady characters, but what stands out is Breukelaar's poetic prose, which carries this emotional and strange book.

### SHE'S ALWAYS HUNGRY

BY ELIZA CLARK

These stories come at you like the best punches of a great boxer: fast, hard, with devastating precision and from strange angles. Clark demonstrates remarkable range, with a tale of body horror, a yarn about an immortal being ruling over a postapocalyptic world, a chronicle of human cruelty and more, making this a collection that is as impossible to categorize as it is to put down.

### BLOOD LIKE MINE

BY STUART NEVILLE

Neville's latest is a gruesome, action-packed monster novel about a mother and daughter with a terrible secret, on the run from an obsessed and crumbling detective. But at its tender core, the book is actually about family and love. This is a terrific novel that takes the fast pace and tension of crime fiction and injects it with the explosiveness of a great vampire story.

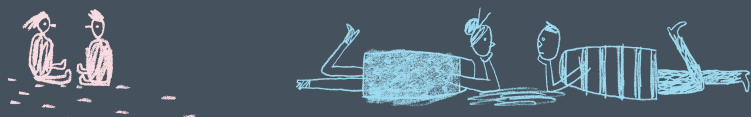
### THE UNMOTHERS

BY LESLIE J. ANDERSON

This novel follows a journalist who is sent to a small town to report on a curious rumor and ends up discovering a much more complex and terrifying world instead. What makes "The Unmothers" so special is its chilling atmosphere. There are animals trapped in the walls, horses with human eyes, strange rituals. If you love getting lost in a creepy small town, this outstanding novel is one you won't want to miss. □

In celebration of 20 years of the  
*New York Times* “Modern Love” column

# HONEST *LOVE STORIES* YOU’LL WANT TO READ OVER AND OVER AGAIN



Many of the most popular and unforgettable essays from the *New York Times* “Modern Love” column—featuring contributors including Ayelet Waldman, Amy Krouse Rosenthal, Veronica Chambers, and more. This is the perfect book for anyone who’s loved, lost, or pined for true romance: in other words, anyone interested in the endlessly complicated workings of the human heart.



SCAN TO START READING

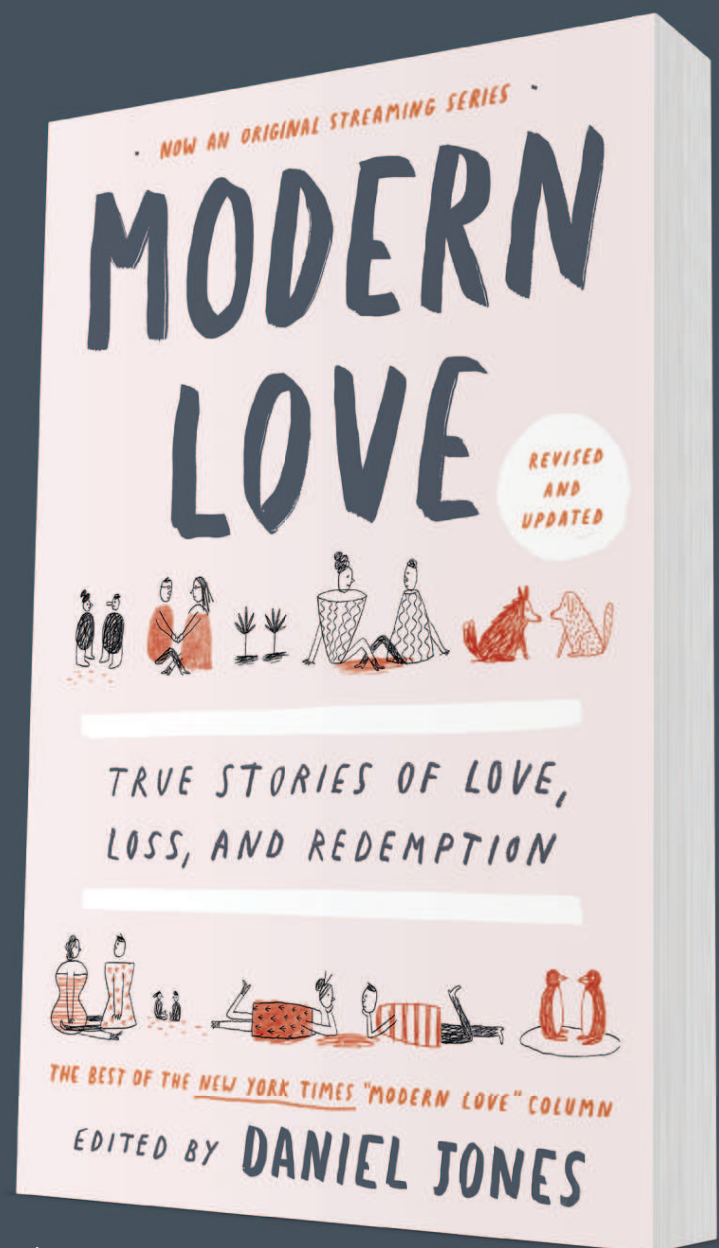


[prh.com/modernlove](https://prh.com/modernlove)

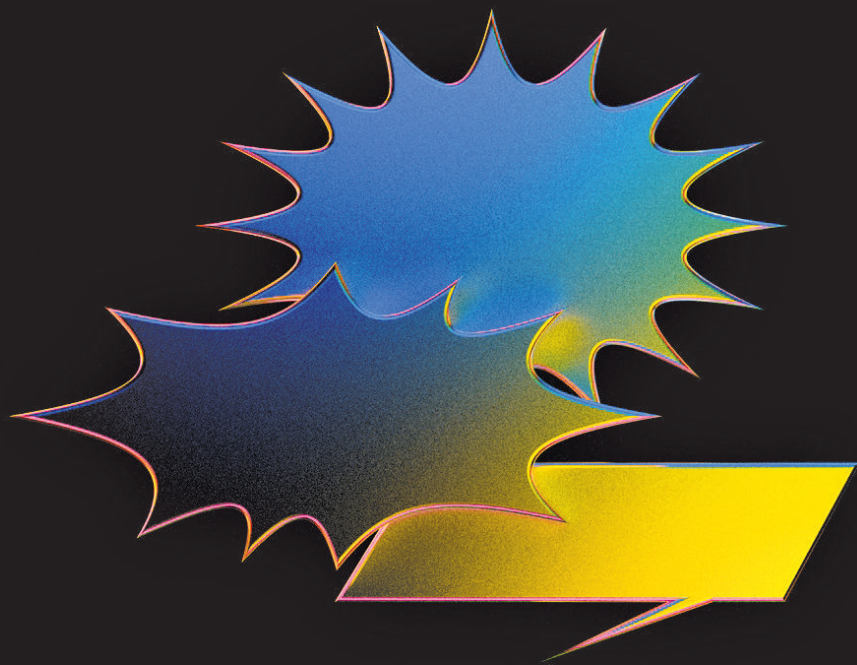
Penguin Random House collects and processes your personal information. See our Notice at Collection and Privacy Policy at [prh.com/notice](https://prh.com/notice).



AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD



# THE YEAR'S BEST



# GRAPHIC NOVELS

BY SAM THIELMAN

THE YEAR 2024 was an especially good year for comics readers who had been waiting a long time. Olivier Schrauwen brought his magisterial “Sunday” to a close after five years. After 15, Chris Ware published the third volume in his trilogy of “Datebook” comics adapted from his sketchbooks. And Charles Burns finally completed and published in English the project he’d been serializing in French — “Dédalles” to our European friends, “Final Cut” to us.

**SAM THIELMAN** is a reporter and critic based in Brooklyn. In addition to his monthly column for *The Times*, he has written about comics and graphic novels for *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic* and *Slate*.

## SUNDAY

BY OLIVIER SCHRAUWEN

How much can happen in a day? Schrauwen suggests that pretty much everything can — his vast graphic novel plumbs the depths of slapstick humor and scales dizzying philosophical heights, and it all takes place on the day before his hero Thibault’s birthday in 2017. Thibault’s travails are fictionalized (though his name really does belong to Schrauwen’s cousin) but his inner life is as simultaneously capacious and petty as anyone’s, and the book makes him into a sort of Joycean figure, seen in every possible circumstance and thus as exasperating and as sympathetic as any one of us.

## BLURRY

BY DASH SHAW

The characters in “Blurry” are constantly telling one another stories that give the book its daring narrative structure: Each story contains all the subsequent tales until the book’s center, where they begin, one by one, to resolve. Readers may remember similar gambits from prose novels like David Mitchell’s “Cloud Atlas,” but Shaw’s firm naturalism grounds this book in his own memorable characters. It’s a meditation on perceptions of perceptions, each narrator coloring his or her own recollection and all the recollections within it.

## FINAL CUT

BY CHARLES BURNS

Rarely has a cartoonist dissected his own desires as unsentimentally as Burns does in “Final Cut.” He gives us two protagonists, Brian and Laurie, and in so doing splits apart the two preoccupations he’s spent decades exploring: monsters and romance. Brian is a monster-movie-obsessed teen with a big crush on Laurie; Laurie is awkward, shy and harboring a secret crush on Tina. To Laurie, Brian is one of many people she can’t trust with her true self. From Brian’s perspective, Laurie is perfect and unattainable. It’s a point of view that keeps him from the kind of human connection that could salve his crippling loneliness.

## PROCESSING

BY TARA BOOTH

The intersection of lavishly painted art comics and jokes about body hair is woefully underpopulated, but Booth is doing her part. In her generous collection “Processing,” there’s no topic too intimate for the artist, and its openness is an ongoing gift to readers anxious for a laugh and troubled by the state of the beautiful, often oppressive world.

## GRAND ELECTRIC THOUGHT POWER MOTHER

BY LALE WESTVIND

Westvind’s wonderfully complex book of interlinked short stories, “Grand Electric Thought Power Mother,” brings comics as close to Cubism as anything I’ve read. Its first story, drawn only in blue ink, is narratively its simplest as well. Each subsequent story adds a new visual layer — pencil shading, Risograph colors, gutters full of narration — and elaborates further on the first tale’s themes. By the final story, Westvind’s heroine and her disembodied grandmother are exploring archives that seem to contain at least some of the preceding adventures in a beautiful sci-fi cityscape rich with oranges and purples.

## DEN VOLUME 4: DREAMS AND ALARUMS

BY RICHARD CORBEN

Comic art nerds have waited decades for readable editions of the classic underground sci-fi series “Den,” and Dark Horse is finally answering their pleas with this series of handsome reprints, all lovingly restored by José Villarubia. Corben’s “Den” comics, originally published between 1973 and 1994, pay tribute to Edgar Rice Burroughs, but his visual style is unmistakably his own. In “Dreams and Alarums,” the fourth of five volumes, his figures are as vivid and kinetic as ever, and that eccentric energy is tempered by a disciplined and complex plot. Corben’s stories pay tribute to Edgar Rice Burroughs, but his visual style is unmistakably his own.

## FIREBUGS

BY NINO BULLING

In “Firebugs,” Bulling elegantly draws a story of a romance at its end in the midst of a world that seems to be headed for disaster as well. The parallels are never heavy-handed and the characters seem about to step off the page and explain themselves to you. All this nuance lives in so few lines that the book’s images are a collection of little miracles.

## THE ACME NOVELTY DATE-BOOK, VOLUME THREE

BY CHRIS WARE

For any other artist, “The Acme Novelty Date-Book, Volume Three” might be an add-on — a way to sate fans between big, more polished projects. But there is no other level of polish than perfection for Ware, and so his third collection of his own sketchbooks can be assembled with the previous volumes to form a completely unique kind of comics memoir, in which the author is dragged kicking and screaming into happiness by his daughter, who comes along at just the right time. Ware’s work is always formally diverse — his last major work was a jigsaw puzzle — but here that’s even more true than in his fiction, to the reader’s great benefit. □

# THE YEAR'S BEST



# CHILDREN'S BOOKS

BY JENNIFER KRAUSS

HERE ARE THE year's most notable picture, chapter and middle grade books, selected by our children's books editor.

## PICTURE BOOKS

### ANIMAL ALBUMS FROM A TO Z

BY CECE BELL

Twenty-six artfully designed, winningly goofy, faux-vintage record jackets gently spoof vinyl's golden age, with animals standing in for iconic performers. One tune on each album gets the full treatment: lyrics by Bell plus an audio track composed and produced by her real-life musician pals.

JENNIFER KRAUSS is the children's books editor at the Book Review.

### PEPPER & ME

BY BEATRICE ALEMAGNA

Alemagna pays whimsical and moving tribute to the way children process the yucky yet intriguing surprises served up by their bodies in this reluctant love story between a young girl and the huge scab that appears after she scrapes her knee.

### SOMETHING ABOUT THE SKY

BY RACHEL CARSON  
ILLUSTRATED BY  
NIKKI MCCLURE

McClure brings Carson's long-forgotten, soulful serenade to the science of clouds (written for the TV program "Omnibus" in response to a child's request for

"something about the sky") to lyrical cut-paper life in a tender visual poem that's as boldly defiant of category as Carson herself.

### THERE WAS A SHADOW

BY BRUCE HANDY  
ILLUSTRATED BY LISK FENG

Handy's words and Feng's images exquisitely intertwine to cast shadows in a new light: Three children and a dog frolic in a meadow, accompanied by their jubilant doubles, then rest under the canopy of a tree, where shade equals sanctuary, before making their way home as day gradually stretches into night.

### THE YELLOW BUS

BY LOREN LONG

In art done entirely by hand — with graphite and charcoal pencil, X-acto blades and acrylic paint (never mind the 10-foot-long three-dimensional model Long built of the setting, and lit like a cinematographer) — this touching ode to joy follows a single school bus on its route through a valley that changes with time, technology and weather, until the steadfast yellow vessel becomes one with nature.

### CHAPTER BOOK

#### A DAY WITH MOUSSE

BY CLAIRE LÉBOURG

For Mousse, Lebourg's green-striped titular creature, living happily alone by the sea, every day is full of sweet rituals — like sipping coffee and listening to the radio while watching the tide come in (straight into his living room, where he takes his morning swim) — until one day a walrus named Barnacle washes up and disturbs his solitary bliss.

### MIDDLE GRADE

#### AMAZING GRAPES

BY JULES FEIFFER

In the legendary cartoonist's first graphic novel for young readers, about a fractured family's madcap attempts to find one another in a prismatic world called "the Lost Dimension," we see the illustrator of "The Phantom Tollbooth," now 95, at his most fluid, fierce and free.

#### LOUDER THAN HUNGER

BY JOHN SCHU

Schu's harrowing and life-affirming autobiographical novel in verse, about an anorexic boy who learns to talk back to his inner bully — with the help of therapy, a love of literature and a ferocious passion for Broadway shows — is one of very few books for adolescents to address eating disorders from a male point of view, and it roars.

### THE MYTHMAKERS

BY JOHN HENDRIX

This fascinating graphic-novel-style biographical study of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien — with charming, expressive drawings and a framing narrative featuring a jaunty lion and a genteel wizard — makes a powerful case that if these two men had never met, it's likely neither would have written their greatest works and 20th-century pop culture would have taken an entirely different course.

### ONE BIG OPEN SKY

BY LESA CLINE-RANSOME

Telling the story of one Black family's perilous covered-wagon journey from the South to the West through the eyes of three brave female characters — an 11-year-old girl, her pregnant mother and a young teacher they meet along the way — Cline-Ransome's evocative, meticulously researched novel in verse, a mix of richly textured description and vibrant dialogue, adds (hitherto absent) women's voices to the history of the late-19th-century Black homesteaders movement.

### PLAIN JANE AND THE MERMAID

BY VERA BROSGOL

As flecks from fairy tales we know and love sparkle across the pages of this graphic novel like antique glitter, to be spun anew, Brosgol rescues her heroine from the imagination of Hans Christian Andersen, relieving her of the agony his protagonists often suffer and giving her the power to breathe underwater — the chance of a "happily," rather than only the darkening fate of an "ever after."

### WILDFUL

BY KENGO KURIMOTO

Kurimoto's captivating debut graphic novel, about a girl who finds solace and meaning after the death of her grandmother when she follows her dog through a hole in a fence, rivals "The Secret Garden" in its joyful reverence for nature. □

# Best Sellers

The New York Times

For the complete best-seller lists, visit [nytimes.com/books/best-sellers](http://nytimes.com/books/best-sellers)

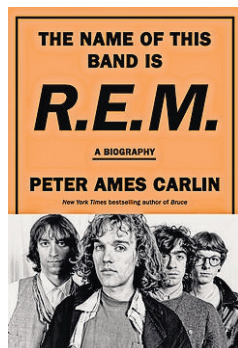
## COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF NOVEMBER 24-30

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	6	<b>WICKED</b> , by Gregory Maguire. (Morrow) A misunderstood girl named Elphaba is declared a witch; the basis of the musical and the film.	3	1	1	<b>CHER: THE MEMOIR, PART ONE</b> , by Cher. (Dey Street) In the first part of her memoir, the multiple award-winning pop culture icon traces her childhood and forays into the world of entertainment.	2
2		<b>THE HOUSE OF CROSS</b> , by James Patterson. (Little, Brown) The 33rd book in the Alex Cross series. Three candidates to the Supreme Court are violently attacked.	1	2	5	<b>FRAMED</b> , by John Grisham and Jim McCloskey. (Doubleday) Our criminal justice system viewed through the struggles of 10 wrongfully convicted people to achieve exoneration.	7
3	8	<b>FOURTH WING</b> , by Rebecca Yarros. (Red Tower) Violet Sorrengail is urged by the commanding general, who also is her mother, to become a candidate for the dragon riders.	71	3	3	<b>MELANIA</b> , by Melania Trump. (Skyhorse) The former and future first lady describes her work as a fashion model, marriage to Donald Trump and time in the White House.	8
4	7	<b>THE WOMEN</b> , by Kristin Hannah. (St. Martin's) In 1965, a nursing student follows her brother to serve during the Vietnam War and returns to a divided America.	43	4	2	<b>THE SERVICEBERRY</b> , by Robin Wall Kimmerer. (Scribner) The author of "Braiding Sweetgrass" illuminates how the gift economy in the natural world works and draws lessons for our economy; with illustrations by John Burgoyne.	2
5	4	<b>JAMES</b> , by Percival Everett. (Doubleday) A reimagining of "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" shines a different light on Mark Twain's classic, revealing new facets of the character of Jim.	6	5	10	<b>BE READY WHEN THE LUCK HAPPENS</b> , by Ina Garten. (Crown) A memoir by the cookbook author and Food Network host known as the Barefoot Contessa.	9
6	12	<b>A COURT OF THORNS AND ROSES</b> , by Sarah J. Maas. (Bloomsbury) After killing a wolf in the woods, Feyre is taken from her home and placed inside the world of the Fae.	34	6	6	<b>THE BACKYARD BIRD CHRONICLES</b> , by Amy Tan. (Knopf) Essays and drawings by the author of "The Joy Luck Club," which depict a search for peace through birding.	8
7	2	<b>NOW OR NEVER</b> , by Janet Evanovich. (Atria) The 31st book in the Stephanie Plum series. Caught between two fiancés and not knowing what to do, Plum gets back to business as a bounty hunter.	2	7	9	<b>CONFRONTING THE PRESIDENTS</b> , by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard. (St. Martin's) The conservative commentator evaluates the legacies of American presidents.	12
8	15	<b>THE HOUSEMAID</b> , by Freida McFadden. (Grand Central) Troubles surface when a woman looking to make a fresh start takes a job in the home of the Winchesters.	73	8	11	<b>REVENGE OF THE TIPPING POINT</b> , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Little, Brown) Through a series of stories, Gladwell explicates the causes of various kinds of epidemics.	9
9	5	<b>TO DIE FOR</b> , by David Baldacci. (Grand Central) The third book in the 6:20 Man series. Devine digs into the deaths of an orphan's parents and uncovers a large conspiracy.	3	9		<b>THE DEMON OF UNREST</b> , by Erik Larson. (Crown) The author of "The Splendid and the Vile" portrays the months between the election of Abraham Lincoln and the beginning of the Civil War.	23
10	13	<b>COUNTING MIRACLES</b> , by Nicholas Sparks. (Random House) A man in search of the father he never knew encounters a single mom and rumors circulate of the nearby appearance of a white deer.	9	10		<b>FROM HERE TO THE GREAT UNKNOWN</b> , by Lisa Marie Presley and Riley Keough. (Random House) Presley's memoir, which was completed by her daughter.	7

The New York Times best sellers are compiled and archived by the best-sellers-lists desk of the New York Times news department, and are separate from the editorial, culture, advertising and business sides of The New York Times Company. Rankings reflect unit sales reported on a confidential basis by vendors offering a wide range of general interest titles published in the United States. **ONLINE:** For complete lists and a full explanation of our methodology, visit [www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers](http://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers).

## Editors' Choice / Staff Picks From the Book Review



**THE NAME OF THIS BAND IS R.E.M.: A Biography**, by Peter Ames Carlin. (Doubleday. 447 pp. \$32.)

With its jangly guitars, wistful harmonies and perfectly shaped songs, the indispensable rock band R.E.M. was magic from the start, a college radio darling in the early '80s before breaking into the mainstream. Carlin's biography chronicles its rise in the music scene of Athens, Ga., and the evolution of its sound.



**TIME OF THE CHILD**, by Niall Williams. (Bloomsbury Publishing. 304 pp. \$28.99.)

Set during the lead-up to Christmas in 1962 in the fictional Irish town of Faha, where Williams has set two other novels, this moving father-daughter story follows a widower and his 29-year-old daughter as they go through the motions of daily life while concealing core truths about themselves — until a founding child upends their comfortable routine.



**CHER: The Memoir, Part One**, by Cher. (Dey Street Books. 432 pp. \$36.)

In this first volume of a frank, no-nonsense memoir, Cher traces her path to stardom, with and without Sonny Bono. The result is a confident testament to resilience, chronicling a grim childhood and relationships with controlling men.

The full reviews of these and other recent books are online: [nytimes.com/books](http://nytimes.com/books)



**BERNIE WEBER: MATH GENIUS SERIES**

BY MATTHEW J. FLYNN

Published by Speaking Volumes



**CHINA CODE**

Bernie proves the Riemann Hypothesis, threatening Chinese Military encryption. When Chinese assassins come to the U.S. to kill Bernie, Black and Latino gangs rise up to defend him. Advance Praise: “Flynn uses well Dickens’s technique of giving each character his or her distinctive speech. There is the pleasure of authentic dialogue, class markers, ethnic dialect, jargon, slang, foreign words, buzzwords, cant, and unwitting self satire.”

**HUNTING BERNIE WEBER**

Bernie can deduce the prime factors of any large number, the basis of modern cryptography. The CIA hunts Bernie to get his secret, with hilarious results.

Advance Praise: “What A Confederacy of Dunces did for New Orleans, Flynn does for Milwaukee.”

**MILWAUKEE JIHAD**

ISIS plans to blow up the Capitol during the State of the Union speech. Bernie has to break their quantum encryption to stop them.

**OTHER TITLES BY MATTHEW J. FLYNN**

**THE COURT OF LAST RESORT**

A Chicago Federal Judge is obsessed with perfect justice. While juries acquit some criminals, their verdicts are reversed at night.

**CONFESSIONS OF A CHURCH LAWYER**

Explains the split in the Catholic Church between Renaissance bishops and Counter-Reformation bishops, by the lawyer who represented the Church under then-Archbishop (now Cardinal) Timothy Dolan, and Archbishop Rembert Weakland. Proposes a path to the future for the Church.

AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD

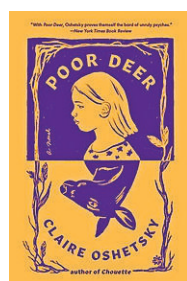
**PRINT / HARDCOVER BEST SELLERS**

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5	10	<b>COUNTING MIRACLES</b> , by Nicholas Sparks. (Random House) A man in search of the father he never knew encounters a single mom and rumors circulate of the nearby appearance of a white deer. 10	5	8	<b>BE READY WHEN THE LUCK HAPPENS</b> , by Ina Garten. (Crown) A memoir by the cookbook author and Food Network host known as the Barefoot Contessa. 9
6	8	<b>IRON FLAME</b> , by Rebecca Yarros. (Red Tower) The second book in the Empyrean series. Violet Sorrengail’s next round of training under the new vice commandant might require her to betray the man she loves. 56	6	7	<b>CONFRONTING THE PRESIDENTS</b> , by Bill O’Reilly and Martin Dugard. (St. Martin’s) The conservative commentator evaluates the legacies of American presidents. 12
7		<b>CHRISTMAS IN BETHEL</b> , by Richard Paul Evans. (Gallery) An emergency medical technician develops a relationship with an author who is not completely honest with her. 1	7	9	<b>REVENGE OF THE TIPPING POINT</b> , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Little, Brown) Through a series of stories, Gladwell explicates the causes of various kinds of epidemics. 9
8	6	<b>TO DIE FOR</b> , by David Baldacci. (Grand Central) The third book in the 6:20 Man series. Devine digs into the deaths of an orphan’s parents and uncovers a large conspiracy. 3	8		<b>THE DEMON OF UNREST</b> , by Erik Larson. (Crown) The author of “The Splendid and the Vile” portrays the months between the election of Abraham Lincoln and the beginning of the Civil War. 22
9	2	<b>THE MIRROR</b> , by Nora Roberts. (St. Martin’s) The second book in the Lost Bride series. 2	9	13	<b>FROM HERE TO THE GREAT UNKNOWN</b> , by Lisa Marie Presley and Riley Keough. (Random House) Presley’s memoir, which was completed by her daughter. 8
10		<b>WICKED</b> , by Gregory Maguire. (Morrow) A misunderstood girl named Elphaba is declared a witch; the basis of the musical and the film. 1	10	6	<b>THE ANXIOUS GENERATION</b> , by Jonathan Haidt. (Penguin Press) A look at the mental health impacts that a phone-based life has on children. 36

An asterisk (\*) indicates that a book’s sales are barely distinguishable from those of the book above. A dagger (†) indicates that some bookstores report receiving bulk orders.

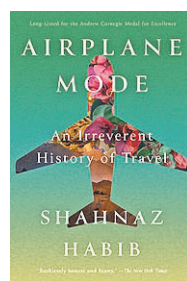
**Paperback Row / BY MIGUEL SALAZAR**



**POOR DEER**, by Claire Oshetsky. (Ecco. 240 pp. \$16.99.)

Oshetsky’s novel is a beautiful and haunting portrayal of the grief and guilt that accompany a child in the years after her friend is accidentally killed.

Our reviewer, MJ Franklin, called Oshetsky “the bard of unruly psyches,” who shows “how loss warps our realities, and how that distortion can be both a coping mechanism and a destructive force.”



**AIRPLANE MODE: An Irreverent History of Travel**, by Shahnaz Habib. (Catapult. 288 pp. \$16.95.)

“People from the third world do not travel,” Habib, an Indian American immigrant, once heard in graduate

school, “they immigrate.” This perspective informs her irreverent, wide-ranging account, which draws on memoir, history and literature to examine who is able to travel and how the pastime has shaped our world.



**GIRLFRIEND ON MARS**, by Deborah Willis. (Norton. 384 pp. \$19.99.)

Told in alternating perspectives, this novel follows an ambitious woman competing on a reality show for a trip to Mars and her

mopey marijuana-farming boyfriend back in Vancouver. While this plot could make for breezy reading, as Alex Beggs wrote in her review, “Willis cuts deep with insight that orbits the age-old, just-took-a-bong-hit question: What does it mean to be real?”

# AUDIO MONTHLY BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF NOVEMBER 3-30

THIS MONTH	Audio Fiction	MONTHS ON LIST
1	<b>THE BOYFRIEND</b> , by Freida McFadden. (Hollywood Upstairs) A series of recent deaths causes Sydney Shaw to become suspicious of the handsome doctor she started dating. Read by Victoria Connolly and Robb Moreira. 9 hours, 19 minutes unabridged.	2
2	<b>LIGHTS OUT</b> , by Navessa Allen. (Zando) As Aly and Josh live out their dark fantasies, someone with sinister intentions impinges on them. Read by Elena Wolfe and Jacob Morgan. 13 hours, 38 minutes unabridged.	2
3	<b>HERE ONE MOMENT</b> , by Liane Moriarty. (Random House Audio) Passengers on a short and seemingly unremarkable flight learn how and when they are going to die. Read by Caroline Lee and Geraldine Hakewill. 15 hours, 52 minutes unabridged.	3
4	<b>THE MIRROR</b> , by Nora Roberts. (Macmillan Audio) The second book in the Lost Bride series. Read by Brittany Pressley. 13 hours, 48 minutes unabridged.	1
5	<b>FOURTH WING</b> , by Rebecca Yarros. (Recorded Books) Violet Sorrengail is urged by the commanding general, who also is her mother, to become a candidate for the dragon riders. Read by Rebecca Soler and Teddy Hamilton. 20 hours, 47 minutes unabridged.	19
6	<b>NOW OR NEVER</b> , by Janet Evanovich. (Simon & Schuster Audio) The 31st book in the Stephanie Plum series. Read by Lorelei King. 7 hours, 37 minutes unabridged.	1
7	<b>THE WOMEN</b> , by Kristin Hannah. (Macmillan Audio) In 1965, a nursing student follows her brother to serve during the Vietnam War and returns to a divided America. Read by Julia Whelan. 14 hours, 57 minutes unabridged.	10
8	<b>TO DIE FOR</b> , by David Baldacci. (Hachette Audio) The third book in the 6:20 Man series. Read by Zach Villa, Mela Lee, Cassandra Morris et al. 11 hours, 58 minutes unabridged.	1
9	<b>JAMES</b> , by Percival Everett. (Random House Audio) A reimagining of "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" shines a different light on Mark Twain's classic, revealing new facets of the character of Jim. Read by Dominic Hoffman. 7 hours, 50 minutes unabridged.	1
10	<b>A COURT OF MIST AND FURY</b> , by Sarah J. Maas. (Recorded Books) The second book in the Court of Thorns and Roses series. Read by Jennifer Ikeda. 23 hours, 16 minutes unabridged.	7
11	<b>IRON FLAME</b> , by Rebecca Yarros. (Recorded Books) The second book in the Empyrean series. Read by Rebecca Soler and Teddy Hamilton. 28 hours, 16 minutes unabridged.	10
12	<b>ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK</b> , by Chris Whitaker. (Random House Audio) Questions arise when a boy saves the daughter of a wealthy family amid a string of disappearances in a Missouri town in 1975. Read by Edoardo Ballerini. 14 hours, 37 minutes unabridged.	5
13	<b>A COURT OF WINGS AND RUIN</b> , by Sarah J. Maas. (Recorded Books) The third book in the Court of Thorns and Roses series. Read by Amanda Leigh Cobb. 25 hours, 9 minutes unabridged.	6
14	<b>THRONE OF GLASS</b> , by Sarah J. Maas. (Bloomsbury) An assassin named Celaena Sardothien fights to win her freedom and to protect her world. Read by Elizabeth Evans. 13 hours, 3 minutes unabridged.	3
15	<b>THE WEDDING PEOPLE</b> , by Alison Espach. (Macmillan Audio) A woman who is down on her luck forms an unexpected bond with the bride at a wedding in Rhode Island. Read by Helen Laser. 11 hours, 37 minutes unabridged.	3

THIS MONTH	Audio Nonfiction	MONTHS ON LIST
1	<b>REVENGE OF THE TIPPING POINT</b> , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Hachette Audio) Gladwell explicates the causes of various kinds of epidemics. Read by the author. 8 hours, 25 minutes unabridged.	2
2	<b>CHER: THE MEMOIR, PART ONE</b> , by Cher. (HarperAudio) The pop culture icon traces her childhood and forays into the world of entertainment. Read by Stephanie J. Block and the author. 15 hours, 47 minutes unabridged.	1
3	<b>THE ANXIOUS GENERATION</b> , by Jonathan Haidt. (Penguin Audio) A look at the mental health impacts that a phone-based life has on children. Read by Sean Pratt and the author. 10 hours, 33 minutes unabridged.	9
4	<b>HILLBILLY ELEGY</b> , by JD Vance. (HarperAudio) The vice president-elect looks at the struggles of the white working class. Read by the author. 6 hours, 49 minutes unabridged.	6
5	<b>BE READY WHEN THE LUCK HAPPENS</b> , by Ina Garten. (Random House Audio) A memoir by the cookbook author and Food Network host known as the Barefoot Contessa. Read by the author. 8 hours, 47 minutes unabridged.	2
6	<b>NEXUS</b> , by Yuval Noah Harari. (Random House Audio) The author of "Sapiens" delves into how societies and political systems have used information and gives a warning about artificial intelligence. Read by Vidish Athavale. 17 hours, 29 minutes unabridged.	3
7	<b>GREENLIGHTS</b> , by Matthew McConaughey. (Random House Audio) The actor shares snippets from the diaries he kept over 35 years. Read by the author. 6 hours, 42 minutes unabridged.	49
8	<b>THE REAL ANTHONY FAUCI</b> , by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (Skyhorse) The anti-vaccine advocate gives his take on the former chief medical advisor to the president. Read by Bruce Wagner. 27 hours, 20 minutes unabridged.	7
9	<b>FROM HERE TO THE GREAT UNKNOWN</b> , by Lisa Marie Presley and Riley Keough. (Random House Audio) Presley's memoir, which was completed by her daughter. Read by Riley Keough and Julia Roberts. 5 hours, 42 minutes unabridged.	2
10	<b>THE WAR ON WARRIORS</b> , by Pete Hegseth. (HarperAudio) The former "Fox & Friends Weekend" host shares his experiences serving in the Army and his views on the American military. Read by the author. 8 hours, 10 minutes unabridged.	2
11	<b>ELON MUSK</b> , by Walter Isaacson. (Simon & Schuster Audio) The author of "The Code Breaker" traces Musk's life. Read by Jeremy Bobb. 20 hours, 27 minutes unabridged.	10
12	<b>THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE</b> , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin Audio) How trauma affects the body and mind. Read by Sean Pratt. 16 hours, 17 minutes unabridged.	49
13	<b>FRAMED</b> , by John Grisham and Jim McCloskey. (Random House Audio) Our criminal justice system viewed through the struggles of 10 wrongfully convicted people to achieve exoneration. Read by Michael Beck and the authors. 13 hours, 55 minutes unabridged.	2
14	<b>THE MESSAGE</b> , by Ta-Nehisi Coates. (Random House Audio) The author of "Between the World and Me" travels to three locations to uncover the dissonance between the realities on the ground and the narratives shaped about them. Read by the author. 5 hours, 20 minutes unabridged.	2
15	<b>DINNER FOR VAMPIRES</b> , by Bethany Joy Lenz. (Simon & Schuster Audio) The actress, known for her role on "One Tree Hill," describes her time in a cult and how she stepped away from it. Read by the author. 8 hours, 17 minutes unabridged.	2

## Congratulations to SAR Alumni and Winners of the National Book Award for Nonfiction



2024

**Jason De León**

*Soldiers and Kings*

2013–14 SAR Fellow



2023

**Ned Blackhawk**

*The Rediscovery of America*

1996–97 SAR Fellow



2021

**Tiya Miles**

*All That She Carried*

2007–8 SAR Fellow



**School for Advanced Research**

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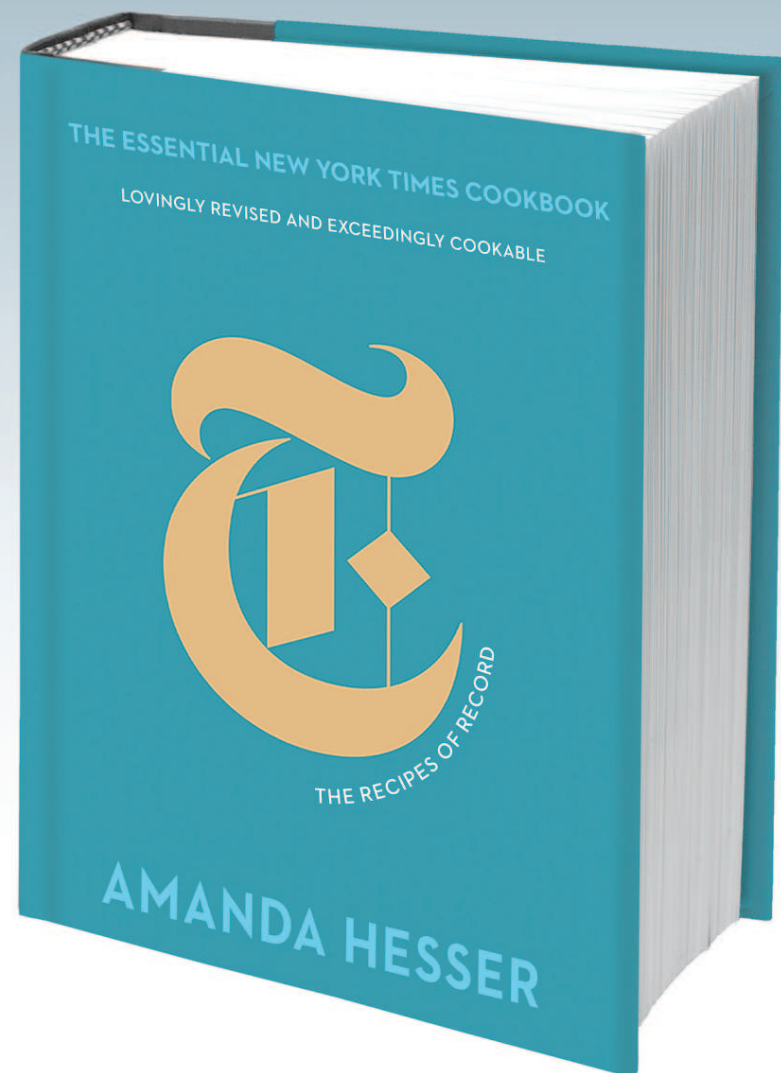
Audiobook rankings are composed of sales in the United States of digital and physical audio products from the previous month. Sales of titles are statistically weighted to represent and accurately reflect all outlets proportionally nationwide. Free-trial or low-cost trial audiobook sales are not eligible for inclusion. Publisher credits for audiobooks are listed under the audiobook publisher name. **ONLINE:** For more lists and a full explanation of our methodology, visit [www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers](http://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers).

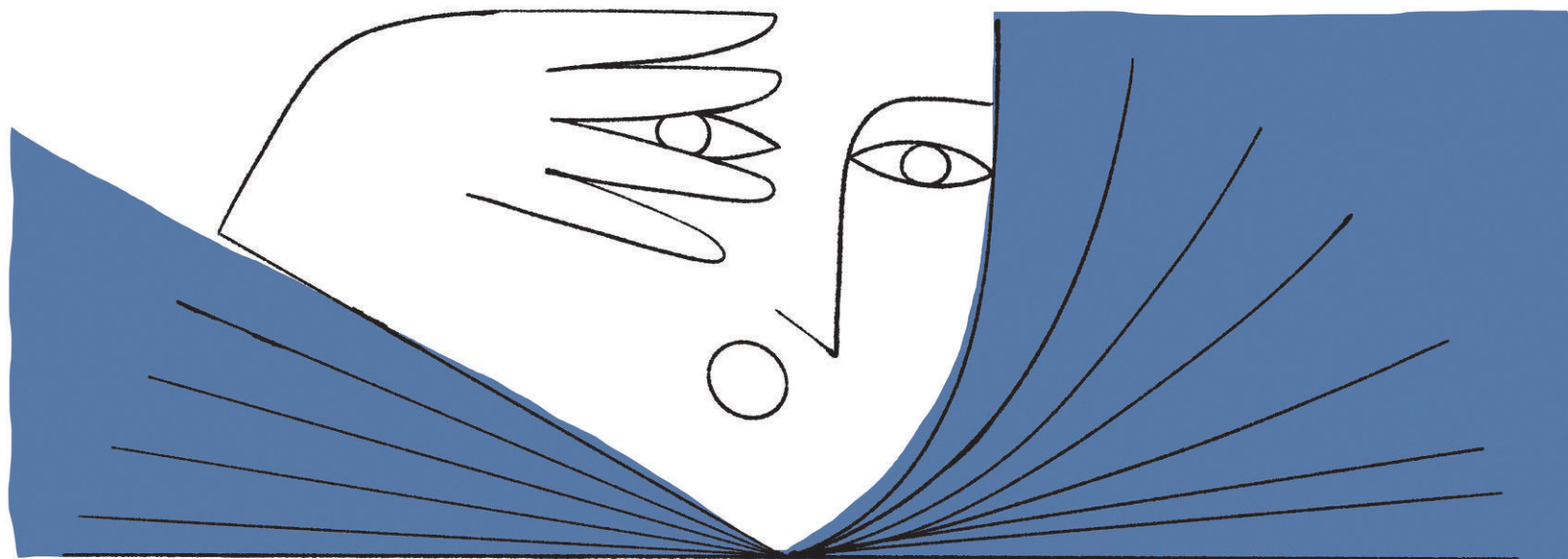
**David Eyre's Pancake**  
**Pamela Sherrid's Summer Pasta**  
**1940s Caesar Salad**  
*—meets—*  
**Samin Nosrat's Sabzi Polo**  
**Todd Richards's Fried Catfish with Hot Sauce**  
**J. Kenji López-Alt's Cheesy Hasselback Potato Gratin**

"A gift from heaven."  
—INA GARTEN

"In a world constantly  
searching for the trendy,  
I find comfort in a book  
celebrating the delicious."  
—YOTAM OTTOLENGHI

  
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Dear readers,  
What I admire about the thrillers I recommend today (and I say this as someone so skittish that I read Henry James with a paw clamped over one eye): They give you no chance to chicken out. You are indicted as a co-conspirator on the first page. These books waste no time and neither will I. You can't say you haven't been warned.

**“My Sister, the Serial Killer,”**  
by Oyinkan Braithwaite

Fiction, 2018

“Ayoola summons me with these words — Korede, I killed him.

“I had hoped I would never hear those words again.”

Talk about an efficient opening! We're in Lagos, Nigeria, plunked in the crossfire of a knotty sibling dynamic. Korede, the older daughter, is responsible to a fault, a neat freak, “composed only of hard edges.” Ayoola, her sister, is unthinkably gorgeous, indolent, childish — and deadly. The opening scene's murder is her third kill. Chapters move at a pleasingly staccato clip, headed by nervy chapter titles: Bleach, Body, Knife, #3.

Korede brings a cool precision to all she does, whether it's managing the staff at the hospital where she is head nurse or pouring homemade ammonia solution over the bloodstains in her trunk. She is in love with a colleague, and is gutted when he begins to pursue Ayoola.

In an attempt to alleviate her guilt, she confesses to a comatose patient, which inevitably backfires. Somehow, despite this crucible of pent-up frustration, there's room for compassion and even humor.

For a novel with a not-insignificant body count, the murders take a back seat to the sisters' interpersonal drama. Korede's corrosive jealousy is somehow more noxious than her blood-scouring cleaning agent, and it's a marvel to witness. Here she is, in a fit of romantic pique: “I console myself with the knowledge that even the most beautiful flowers wither and die.”

**READ IF YOU LIKE:** #Cleantok, the third season of “Arrested Development,” “Killing Eve”

**AVAILABLE FROM:** The “staff favorites” table of the local bookstore, waiting rooms, wherever books are sold

**“The Master Key,”**  
by Masako Togawa;  
translated by  
Simon Grove

Fiction, 1962

Indoor cat that I am, I gravitated right away to the bones of this story: prickly loners who need a hobby, catnapping receptionists and, yes, purloined keys. By the first three pages, I was hooked. There's a traffic accident, a case of disguised gender and a bushel of questions, and that's all *before* we learn about the kidnapping of a young child that's at the heart of the novel.

Welcome to the K Apartments for Ladies, a community for single women in post-World War II Japan. The building is home to plenty of eccentrics, and as it turns out, plenty of secrets. You might never look at a violin the same way after finishing this novel.

The apartment tower is about to be shifted over by four meters, with the inhabitants still in place during the move. The physical displacement, it turns out, is the least disruptive part of the reno-

vation; the building's history and its residents' most shameful detours are necessarily brought to light.

(I was inspired to dive into Tokyo noir after picking up some books by the author Natsuo Kirino, best known among English readers for her novel “Out” — an ingenious story that centers on four women who work at a bento factory and explores a seamier side of the city, complete with yakuza and illicit baccarat and prostitutes and murder. The translation is a bit wooden to my ear, but we're living in a golden age of Japanese literature available in English; maybe Sam Bett or David Boyd or Margaret Mitsutani could be persuaded to take it on?)

**READ IF YOU LIKE:** “Only Murders in the Building,” snippy bridge club conversations, lesser-explored corners of Japanese society

**AVAILABLE FROM:** EBay, book resellers, recently excavated holes near you

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# A Life in Three Acts

EXPLORING MIKE MCCARTHY'S JOURNEY THROUGH HIS TRILOGY

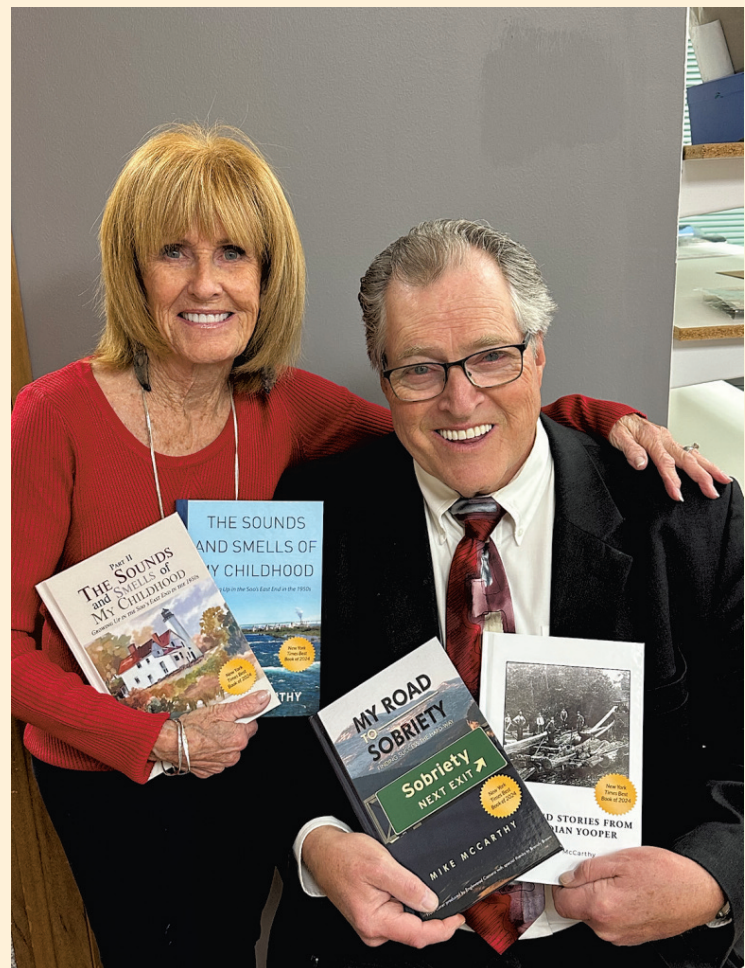
Mike McCarthy's literary trilogy is an intimate blend of memoir, cultural nostalgia, and redemption—a nod to his literary inspirations Mitch Albom and Walter Macken. Much like these authors, McCarthy crafts tales that interweave personal reflection and cultural essence, and in his own series, he takes readers through the full spectrum of life's trials, triumphs, and reflections.

McCarthy's journey begins with **The Sounds and Smells of My Childhood**, a touching tribute to his experiences from the 1950s. Through vivid depictions of family gatherings, the soothing scents of homemade dishes, and the echoing sounds of communal living, he captures a time of innocence and simplicity. McCarthy depicts a distinct era—one infused with patriotism, dedication to family, and authentic happiness, transporting readers to a realm where sensory experiences of life influenced personal identity and destiny. This memoir stirs a widespread longing for a bygone era that many believe has slipped away, illustrating a picture of a period when communities were united and life unfolded at a softer tempo.

The second installment, **My Road to Sobriety**, shifts from naivety to a deeper exploration of the human condition. In this instance, McCarthy narrates his difficult fall into alcoholism and his path to recovery. A tale of grief, perseverance, and belief, he expresses a poignant truth that resonates with the challenges faced by countless Americans. In portraying the impact of addiction and the redemption he discovered through sobriety, McCarthy presents a narrative of recovery and optimism.

McCarthy's trilogy concludes with **Songs and Stories from a Canadian Yooper**, a collection of reflections from an aging man who's seen life's highs and lows. Rooted in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and historic Sault Ste. Marie, this volume pays homage to the immigrant spirit and small-town resilience. With humorous stories, sincere recollections, and a feeling of closure, McCarthy pays tribute to his origins and the insights gained throughout his journey. His insights on life's transient moments are touching and imbued with a profound respect for the legacy and resilience of his family and community.

The trilogy format, McCarthy explains, holds a spiritual resonance. Just as the number three can symbolize the Holy Trinity or the unity of mind, body, and spirit, his three-part series echoes this structure—each book distinct yet unified. For McCarthy, these memoirs are more than stories; they're a gift to readers seeking inspiration and reflection. Each chapter offers a window into his life, a universal exploration of shared experiences that resonate across generations and backgrounds. McCarthy's trilogy invites readers to reflect, connect, and, perhaps most importantly, remember.



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