

RECENTLY READ BOOKS RECOMMENDATIONS

2025

December

1. Age of Revolutions: Progress and Backlash from 1600 to the Present by Fareed Zakaria

In this book, the author masterfully investigates the eras and movements that have shaken norms while shaping the modern world going from the historical—Dutch Republic, the Glorious Revolution in England, the French Revolution, and the industrial revolution in England and the United States—to the recent—globalization, technology, identity, and geopolitics. He combines intellectual range, deep historical insight, and uncanny prescience to frame and illuminate our turbulent present.

2. The Associates: Four Capitalists Who Created California by Richard Rayner

Known as the “Big Four”, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, Collis Huntington, and Mark Hopkins became the force for the transcontinental railroad, becoming wealthy from its development and sustained their power by lying, bribing, wheedling and, when necessary, arranging for obstacles, both human and legal, to disappear. This is their story.

3. The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America by Russell Short

The story of New Netherland, the Dutch colony which pre-dated the Pilgrims and established ideals of tolerance and individual rights that shaped American history. “Astonishing...A book that will permanently alter the way we regard our collective past.”

4. Jump by Tim Maleeny

When the most hated landlord in San Francisco takes an unexpected jump off the roof of his own building, it's not too hard to find suspects. The author “smoothly mixes wry humor and a serious plot without sacrificing either.”

5. Moonflower Murders by Anthony Horowitz

“An inventive, labyrinthine mystery that is ‘catnip for classic mystery lovers.’” “Brilliantly clever, relentlessly suspenseful, full of twists that will keep reader guessing with each revelation and clue, the book is a deviously dark take on vintage English crime fiction from one of its greatest masterminds.”

6. More Everything Forever: AI Overlords, Space Empires, and Silicon Valley's Crusade to Control the Fate of Humanity by Adam Becker

“This ‘smart and wonderfully readable’ expose shows why Silicon Valley's heartless, baseless, and foolish obsessions—with escaping death, building AI tyrants, and creating limitless growth—are about increasing oligarchs power, not preparing for the future.”

7. Source Code: My Beginnings by Bill Gates

The origin story of one of the most influential and transformative business leaders and philanthropists of the modern age. “A surprisingly candid memoir of the Microsoft mogul’s early years...Reading this book feels like watching someone take a well-known black-and-white sketch, fill in the details, and paint it in vivid color.”

8. Table for Two by Amor Towles

This book of short stories spans the 20th century, bringing characters into tableaux of deceit and desire. “This may be Towles’s best book yet. Each tale is as satisfying as a master chef’s main course, filled with drama, wit, erudition, and most of all, heart.”

November

1. Agent Sonya: The Spy Next Door by Ben Macintyre

This true-life spy story is a “masterpiece” about the woman code-named Sonya, a high-ranking soviet intelligence officer who, along with her fellow-spy husband, lived in a quiet village in England with their three children. Over the course of her career, she was hunted by the Chinese, the Japanese, the Nazi’s, M15, M16, and the FBI—and she evaded them all.

2. The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness by Jonathan Haidt

A must-read for all parents: the generation-defining investigation into the collapse of youth mental health in the era of smartphones, social media, and big tech—and a plan for a healthier, freer childhood.

3. The Freaks Came Out to Write: The Definitive History of the Village Voice, the Radical Paper That Changed American Culture by Tricia Romano

A rollicking history of America’s most iconic weekly newspaper, told through the voices of its legendary writers, editors, and photographers.

4. The Guide by Peter Heller

A heart-racing thriller about a young man who is hired by an elite fishing lodge in Colorado, where he uncovers a plot of shocking menace amid the natural beauty of the sun-drenched streams and forests.

5 History Matters by David McCullough

In this posthumous collection of thought-provoking essays, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning historian affirms the value of history, how we can be guided by its lessons, and the enduring legacy of American ideals.

6. Inferno by Dan Brown

The latest book in the author’s Robert Langdon thrillers that began with “Angels and Demons” and “The DaVinci Code.” “A book-length scavenger hunt...jam-packed with tricks.”

7. The Island of Sea Women by Lisa See

A mesmerizing new historical novel about female friendship and devastating family secrets on a small Korean island where women are in charge and the men take care of children. “A beautiful story about the endurance of friendship when it is pushed to its limits.”

8. Murder by Lamplight by Patrice McDonough

As a deadly cholera epidemic burns its way through Victorian London in the winter of 1866, a trailblazing female physician and a skeptical Scotland Yard detective reluctantly team up to stop a sadistic killer in this dark, atmospheric, historically rich mystery.

9. The Plaza: The Secret Life of America’s Most Famous Hotel by Julie Satow

The thrilling, unforgettable history of how one illustrious hotel has defined our understanding of money and glamor, from the Gilded Age to the Go-Go Eighties to today’s Billionaire Row.

10. She Rides Shotgun by Jordan Harper

A propulsive, gritty novel about a girl marked for death who must fight and steal to stay alive, learning from the most frightening man she knows—her father. “A gripping and emotionally wrenching novel that upends our most long-held expectations about heroes, villains, and victims.”

11. Trespassers at the Golden Gate: A True Account of Love, Murder, and Madness in Gilded Age San Francisco by Gary Krist

The sensational, forgotten true story of a woman who murdered her married lover in Gilded Age San Francisco and the trial that epitomized the city’s transformation from raucous frontier town into modern metropolis. It is a rollicking narrative that recounts this astonishing story and its surprisingly modern echoes that probes what it all meant.

October

No meeting

September

1. Apple in China: The Capture of the World’s Greatest Company by Patrick McGee

This scrupulously reported and “astonishing” book rivets with its portrayal of how Apple allowed itself to become dependent on China for a huge percentage of its manufacturing, making it vulnerable and unwittingly laying the groundwork for the Asian superpower to rival the U.S. in technological expertise. “Phenomenal...a jaw-dropping book” (Jon Stewart).

2. Automatic Noodle by Annalee Newitz

A cozy near-future novella about a crew of leftover robots opening their very own noodle shop in post-war San Francisco. “This is a story—about building community despite adversity, fighting for your rights and individuality, and creating art that you want to see in the world—that I didn’t know I needed right now. And it was so much fun to read!”

3. Best of All Worlds by Kenneth Oppel

A family on vacation in their cabin in the woods wake to find themselves transported to an unknown location, under a sky-high dome they cannot escape, where their basic needs for survival are met by an unknown source. “The author builds to a heart-stopping pitch in drawing a story that feels very much of our moment, where our very human choices collectively lead to humanity’s eventual fate.”

4. Big Bad Wool: A Sheep Detective Story by Leonie Swann

An enterprising flock of sheep must get to the bottom of just who—or what—is leaving a trail of grisly destruction in its wake. “This clever, tense mystery features the ultimate amateur sleuths as they ponder curious human motives, attempt to change their fortunes by eating tarot cards, and borrow a harebrained scheme from a not-so-secret spy in an attempt to thwart the beast that’s been stalking them.”

5. How Iceland Changed the World: The Big History of a Small Island by Egil Bjarnason

The book takes readers on a tour of history, showing them how Iceland played a pivotal role in events as diverse as the French Revolution, the moon landing, and the foundation of Israel. Again and again, one humble nation has found itself at the frontier of historic events, shaping the world as we know it.

6. If Cats Disappeared from the World by Genki Kawamura

A young man diagnosed to have only a few months to live is made an offer by the devil: an extra day of life each time he agrees to make one thing from the world disappear. “A heartwarming, funny, and profound meditation on the meaning of life.”

7. Master, Slave, Husband, Wife: An Epic Journey from Slavery to Freedom by Ilyon Woo

The Pulitzer-Prize-winning biography about an enslaved couple who escaped from Georgia in 1848, with the light-skinned wife disguised as a disabled white gentleman and her husband as her manservant. “An American love story—one that would challenge the nation’s core precepts of life, liberty, and justice for all—one that challenges us even now.”

8. My Own Words by Ruth Bader Ginsburg

“A comprehensive look inside the Supreme Court justice’s brilliantly analytical, entertainingly wry mind, revealing the fascinating life of one of our generation’s most influential voices in both law and public opinion.”

9. The Nature of the Beast by Louise Penny

The 11th book in the author’s Chief Inspector Gamache detective series involves a young boy known for telling tall tales who disappears, possibly the victim of a monster who once visited the village and set down roots who has resurfaced.

10. Skinwalkers by Tony Hillerman

The 7th book in the author’s series set on the Navajo reservation with policemen Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee is a riveting tale of sorcery, secrets, and murder. “Choice reading for plot, characters, and superb setting.”

11. The 25th Hour by David Benioff

A fireman who is about to start a seven-year stretch in the federal penitentiary in 24 hours for drug-dealing prowls New York City with his girlfriend and his two best friends from high school—a high-flying bond trader and an idealistic teacher. “The tone is dark and intense, its elegant style is cut on the raw side, and the characters come from places we’ve all been.”

12. When We Were Widows by Annette Chavez Macias

In this heartfelt story about finding love in loss, three widows are forced under the same roof, where they’ll need to overcome grief, anger, and old secrets to put their family back together. “Despite the melancholy subject, this novel is sweet and light, ultimately filling the reader with hope.”

August

1. A Grave Talent by Laurie R. King

In a small community outside San Francisco, a series of shocking murders has occurred, the victims far too innocent and defenseless. A female detective, newly promoted to Homicide, and her seasoned male partner are called on to investigate.

2. A Reporter’s Life by Walter Cronkite

“Immediately engrossing—a splendid memoir.” The story of a modest man who succeeded extravagantly by being himself. His memoir is a short course on the flow of events in the second half of the 20th century—events the world knows more about because of his journalistic work.

3. Erasure by Percival Everett

A blistering satire about race and publishing. A critically acclaimed novelist whose career has bottomed out and whose last manuscript has been rejected, seethes as he sees the meteoric rise of a first-time novelist he sees as untalented. In his rage and despair, he dashes off a novel he intends to be an indictment of the new authors book that he doesn’t intend to publish, but it is and becomes “the next big thing.”

4. How the World Made the West: A 4,000 Year History by Josephine Quinn

An award-winning Oxford professor makes a forceful argument, and tells a story with great verve, that the West is, and always has been, truly global. In particular, she argues that reducing the backstory of the modern West to Greece and Rome impoverishes our view of the past.

5. Latinoland: A Portrait of America’s Largest and Least Understood Minority by Marie Arana

“A perfect representation of Latino diversity.” Drawing from hundreds of interviews and prodigious research to give us both a vibrant portrait and the little-known history of our largest and fastest-growing minority, the book is “a work of prophecy, sympathy, and courage.”

6. *The Mesopotamian Riddle: An Archaeologist, a Soldier, and a Clergyman, and the Race to Decipher the World's Oldest Writing* by Joshua Hammer

“An adventure tale for puzzle lovers and Indiana Jones fans alike, the book follows three free-spirited Victorians on their twenty-year quest to decipher cuneiform, the oldest writing in the world.” “From the ruins of Persepolis to the lawless outposts of the Ottoman Empire, the book whisks the reader off on an intellectual adventure in a quest to understand where we came from and where we perhaps might go.”

7. *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* by Richard White

The transcontinentals were pivotal actors in the making of modern America, but the triumphal myths of the golden spike, Robber Barons larger than life, and an innovative capitalism all die in this book. Instead the author gives the reader a new vision of the Gilded Age, often darkly funny, that shows history to be rooted in failure as well as success. “A powerful book, crowded with telling detail and shrewd observations.”

8. *Sleeping Giants* by Sylvain Neuvel

“A page-turning science fiction thriller fueled by an earthshaking mystery and a fight to control a gargantuan power.” It starts off with a young girl who falls into a hole in the earth and wakes to find herself in a pit with walls glowing with intricate carvings. When firemen come to rescue her, they see she is in the palm of a giant metal hand.

9. *Vera, or Faith* by Gary Shteyngart

“A poignant, sharp-eyed and bitterly funny tale of a family struggling to stay together in a country rapidly coming apart, told through the eyes of their wondrous ten-year-old daughter.” “A novel you can read in one sitting that will stay with you forever.”

July

1. *The Lady in the Lake* by Raymond Chandler

Authored by the hardboiled crime fiction master, this is the story of a couple of missing wives—one a rich man's and one a poor man's—who have become the objects of Phillip Marlowe's investigation.

2. *Less* by Andrew Sean Green

The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of a struggling novelist who travels the world to avoid the awkward wedding of his ex-lover that is full of humor and “arresting lyricism and beauty.”

3. *Marie-Britt Was Here* by Fredrik Backman

A warm, humorous, and captivating story about a woman rediscovering herself after a personal crisis. “Funny and moving, sweet and inspiring, this novel celebrates the importance of community and connection in a world that can feel isolating.”

4. The Project: How Project 2025 Is Reshaping America by David A. Graham

“An urgent topic-by-topic guide to Project 2025, with everything you need to know about how the second Trump administration is remaking America—from a go-to authority at The Atlantic.” He offers much-needed context and distills the essential elements of this sprawling document and its strategy for transforming—and radically empowering—the executive branch.

5. The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane by Lisa See

A moving novel about tradition, tea farming, and the bonds between mothers and daughters from “one of those special writers capable of providing both poetry and plot.” Set in a remote mountain village in China peopled by a minority tribe, the book paints an unforgettable portrait of a little known region and its people.

6. What’s Next: A Backstage Pass to The West Wing, Its Cast and Crew, and Its Enduring Legacy of Service by Melissa Fitzgerald and Mary McCormack

A behind-the-scenes look into the creation and legacy of The West Wing by two of its cast members, with compelling insights from cast and crew exploring what made the show what it was and how its impassioned commitment to service has made the series and relationships behind it endure.

June

1. Absolution by Alice McDermott

“A riveting account of women’s lives on the margins of the Vietnam War” set mainly in Saigon in 1963. “The book talks about folly and grace, obligation, sacrifice, and the quest for absolution in a broken world.”

2. The Best Week That Never Happened by Dallas Woodburn

After her parents’ bitter divorce a teenage girl wakes up to find herself on the Big Island of Hawaii with no recollection of how she got there but is able to connect with her best childhood friend who lives there. As the week unfolds, she will experience the magic of first love, the hope of second chances, and the bittersweet joy and grief of being human.

3. Daughter of Fire by Sofia Rubieda

“For a young woman coming of age in sixteenth-century Guatemala, safeguarding her people’s legacy is a dangerous pursuit in this mystical, empowering, and richly imagined historical novel.” “A gorgeous, gripping tale of one young woman’s struggle to find herself amid the terrors of colonialism and the desperate need to uphold the heritage of her people.”

4. Fever Beach by Carl Hiaasen

“A wildly entertaining Florida caper—a razor-sharp send-up of modern American life, packed with misfits and mayhem.” “Heavily plotted but peppily paced, the book is bursting with quips and blazing with anger.”

5. Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Born to a deeply religious Islamic upbringing in Somalia, but leaving the country for Europe to escape an arranged marriage, the author makes a powerful plea for a Muslim Reformation as the only way to end the horrors of terrorism, sectarian warfare, and the repression of women and minorities. “The author is one of Europe’s most controversial political figures and a target for terrorists. She is a notably enigmatic personality whose fierce criticisms of Islam have made her both a darling of conservatives and popular with leftists. Soft spoken but passionate.”

6. Major Pelligrew’s Last Stand by Helen Siminson

When retired Major Pelligrew strikes up an unlikely friendship with Mrs. Ali, the Pakistani village shopkeeper, he is drawn out of his regimented world and forced to confront the realities of life in the twenty-first century. “Written with a delightfully dry sense of humor and the wisdom of a born storyteller, the book explores the risks one takes when pursuing happiness in the face of family obligation and tradition.”

7. Natchez Burning by Greg Iles

The author’s first novel in a trilogy that interweaves crimes, lies, and secrets past and present in a mesmerizing thriller featuring a lawyer/former prosecutor. “A whopping tale, filled with enough cliff-hanging crises for for an old summer-long movie serial. Yet there are still enough unresolved matters at the end for two planned sequels.”

8. Nobody’s Hero by M.W. Craven

A man without fear is in a race against time to find a woman who knows a secret that could take down the United Staes. “Exhilarating and darkly comic...The author effectively mixes the unvarnished brutality and high body count of Lee Child with the black humor of Nick Herron. A must read.”

9. Orbital by Samantha Harvey

An eloquent meditation on space and life on our planet through the eyes of six astronauts circling the earth in 24 hours that won the 2024 Booker Prize. “Profound and contemplative, the book is a moving elegy to the environment and our planet.”

10. The Princess Spy: The True Story Of World War II Spy Aline Griffith, Countess of Romanones by Barry Loftus

The hidden history of an ordinary American girl who became one of the OSS’s most daring World War II spies before marrying into European nobility. “As exciting as any spy novel.”

11. The Splinter Effect by Andrew Ludington

A time-traveling archaeologist maneuvers through the past to Rome and Constantinople to recover a long-lost menorah. The author “debuts with a rip-roaring thriller and demonstrates a knack for fleet action sequences.” “Readers who love adventure, time travel, science fiction, and history will find a new favorite series here.”

12. *Where Tyranny Begins: The Justice Department, the FBI, and the War on Democracy*
by David Rohde

How Donald Trump used threats, co-option, and conspiracy theories to bend DOJ and FBI officials to his will to a greater extent than publicly known—and how Merrick Garland, other prosecutors, and judges failed to hold him accountable before the 2024 election. “A thoroughly researched and carefully balanced new book.”

May

No meeting

April

1. *The Color of Water: A Black Man’s Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride

The well-known author explores his mother’s past as well as his own upbringing and heritage. The book “touches readers of all colors as a vivid portrait of growing up, a haunting meditation on race and identity, and a lyrical valentine to a mother from a son.”

2. *A Death in Cornwall* by Daniel Silva

The 24th book in a thriller series involving a legendary spy and art restorer. “A dazzling tale of murder, power, and insatiable greed that will hold readers spellbound until they turn the last page.”

3. *Extinction* by Douglas Preston

A page-turning thriller that explores the possible and unintended dangers of the very real effort to resurrect the woolly mammoth and other long-extinct animals. “One of the most heart-stopping, terrifying climaxes of any novel I’ve read in recent years.”

4. *Robert B. Parker’s Hot Property* by Mike Lucia

The 53rd book in the series featuring the private investigator Spenser. “A thrilling story filled with suspense, violence, corruption and witty one-liners.”

5. *Lustrum* by Robert Harris

The second the in the historical novel series about the famous, senator, orator, and consul Cicero. “A study in the timeless enticements and horrors of power.”

6. *The Puppet Show* by M.W. Craven

In this CWA Dagger Award winner from 2019, the mystery involves a disgraced policeman in rural England who teams with a brilliant but naive and socially awkward data analyst to investigate a series of horrific murders in which the victims are tortured before being burned alive. The plot is intricate, the setting comes alive, the characters are interesting, there is unexpected humor, and the unraveling of the story causes the reader to question who the real monster(s) is (are).

7. Sly and the Family Stone: An Oral History by Joel Selvin

“A first-hand account of both the kaleidoscopic talent that drove Stone to the top and attracted so many people to him, and the madness he soon descended into and never truly returned from, a victim of ego, drug abuse, sycophants, and the era....It amounts to a definitive history of one of the rock generation’s greatest and most tragic artists.”

8. The World for Sale: Money, Power, and the Traders Who Barter the Earth’s Resources by Javier Blas and Jack Farchy

The book lifts the lid on one of the least scrutinized corners of the world economy: the billionaire commodity traders who buy, hoard, and sell the earth’s resources. It is the story of how a handful of swashbuckling businessmen became indispensable cogs in global markets, enabling an enormous expansion in international trade and connecting resource-rich countries—no matter how corrupt or war-torn—with the world’s financial centers.

March

1. Dark Wire: The Incredible True Story of the Largest Sting Operation Ever by Joseph Cox

The inside story of the largest law-enforcement sting operation ever, in which the FBI created its own tech start-up to wiretap the world. “A painstakingly investigated expose, this book reveals the true scale and stakes of this unprecedented operation through the agents and crooks who were there.”

2. Educated: A Memoir by Tara Westover

An unforgettable memoir about a young woman who, kept out of school, leaves her survivalist family and goes on to earn a PhD from Cambridge University. “Beautiful and propulsive... Despite the singularity of the author’s childhood, the questions her book poses are universal: How much of ourselves should we give to those we love? And how much must we betray them to grow up?”

3. The Frozen River by Ariel Lawhon

A gripping historical mystery inspired by the life and diary of Martha Ballard, a renowned 18th-century midwife who defied the legal system and wrote herself into American history. “Clever, layered, and subversive, this book introduces an unsung heroine who refused to accept anything less than justice at a time when women were considered best seen and not heard.”

4. Not the End of the World: How We Can Become the First Generation to Build a Sustainable Planet by Hannah Ritchie

“This eye-opening book will transform how you see our biggest environmental problems—and explain how we can solve them (Bill Gates).” Despite all the doom and gloom projected by the media, the author provides data that show that we’ve made so much progress on our major problems that we could be on track to achieve true sustainability for the first time in human history.

5. Olga Dies Dreaming by Xochitl Gonzales

The tale of a status-driven wedding planner grappling with her social ambitions, absent mother, and Puerto Rican roots—all in the wake of Hurricane Maria. It is a story that examines political corruption, familial strife, and the very notion of the American dream—all while asking what it really means to weather a storm.

6. The Three-Body Problem by Cixin Liu

Set against the backdrop of China's Cultural Revolution, a secret military project sends signals into space to establish contact with aliens. An alien civilization on the brink of destruction captures the signal and plans to invade Earth. Meanwhile, on Earth, different camps start forming, planning to either welcome the superior beings and help them take over a world seen as corrupt or to fight against the invasion. "The result is a science fiction masterpiece of enormous scope and vision."

7. Tom Lake by Ann Patchett

Told against the backdrop of a family on a Michigan cherry farm at the time of Covid, the book is a meditation on youthful love, married love, and the lives parents have led before their children were born. Both hopeful and elegiac, it explores what it means to be happy even when the world is falling apart. "The result is a rich and luminous story, told with profound intelligence and emotional subtlety, that demonstrates once again why the author is one of the most revered and acclaimed literary talents working today."

February

1. Be Ready When the Luck Happens: A Memoir by Ina Garten

The Barefoot Contessa of cooking and author of 13 best-selling cookbooks shares her personal story with readers. She brings her past and her process to life in a high-spirited and no-holds-barred narrative that chronicles decades of personal challenges, adventures (and misadventures) and unexpected career twists, all delivered with her signature combination of playfulness and purpose.

2. The Geography of Genius: Lessons from the World's Most Creative Places by Eric Weiner

The author travels the world from Athens to Silicon Valley—and back through history too—to show how creative genius flourishes in specific places at specific times. "A superb travel guide: funny, knowledgeable, and self-deprecating." The author reevaluates the importance of culture in nurturing creativity and offers a practical map for how we can all become a bit more inventive.

3. How Big Things Get Done: The Surprising Factors That Determine the Fate of Every Project, From Home Renovations to Space Exploration and Everything in Between by Bent Flyvbjerg and Dan Gardner

An Oxford professor tries to help the general reader understand why some projects succeed and others fail. He identifies the errors in judgment and decision-making that lead projects, both big and small, to fail, and the research-based principles that will make you succeed with yours.

4. Pachinko by Min Jin Lee

Four generations of a Korean family fight to control their destiny in 20th-century Japan. “Profoundly moving, this is a story of love, sacrifice, ambition, and loyalty.” “Stunning...Despite the compelling sweep of time and history, it is the characters and their tumultuous lives that propel the narrative.”

5. Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy by John Le Carre

The classic novel of a high-level British spy nearing the end of his career who takes on the task of finding a mole who has penetrated the highest level of British intelligence. “Le Carre’s masterpiece...the greatest spy novel of all time. (NPR)”

6. The Truth in the Light: An Investigation of Over 300 Near-Death Experiences by Peter Fenwick

The experiences described in this book are all first-hand accounts from people who wrote to the International Association of Near Death Studies in Great Britain. The author says the field is intriguing for two major reasons: First, it is very common and secondly it is cross-cultural. The book is “an honest account told in the spirit of inquiry. The author explores several reasons for the experiences but never discounts that they could actually be real experiences of a life beyond this one.”

7. World on the Brink: How America Can Beat China in the Race for the Twenty-First Century By Dmitri Alperovitch

The author believes that China is planning to invade Taiwan in the coming years and that this will have dire consequences for the United States and the world as a whole if it is not deterred. “This sharp, timely book is the essential blueprint for preventing a catastrophe.”

January

1. After Annie by Anna Quindlen

The author’s trademark wisdom on family, friendship, and the ties that bind are at the center of this novel about the power of love to transcend loss and triumph over adversity. “A quietly revelatory gleaming gem of a book.”

2. Age of Revolutions: Progress and Backlash from 1600 to the Present by Fareed Zakaria

The book explores the revolutions—past and present—that define the polarized and unstable age in which we live. The author masterfully investigates the eras and movements that have shaken norms while shaping the modern world, including seventeenth century Netherlands, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution. He then probes four present-day revolutions—globalization, technology, identity, and geopolitics.

3. The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine by Rashid Khalidi

“A landmark history of one hundred years of war waged against the Palestinians from the foremost U.S. historian of the Middle East, told through pivotal events and family history.”

4. A River Runs Through It and Other Stories by Norman Maclean

The title novella is recognized as one of the great American tales of the twentieth century and its author as one of the most beloved writers of our time. Set in western Montana, these stories are the “finely distilled product of a long life of often surprising rapture—for fly-fishing, for the woods, and for the interlocked beauty of life and art.”

5. Salvation of a Saint by Keigo Higashino

The second book in a mystery series featuring physics professor Manabu Yukawa, also known as Detective Galileo, involves a case of impossible murder, where instincts clash with facts and theory with reality. “The author is at his mind-bending best, pitting emotion against fact in a beautifully plotted crime novel filled with twists and reverses that will astonish and surprise even the most attentive and jaded of readers.”

6. The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller

“At once a scholar’s homage to “The Iliad” and a startling work of art, it is a book I could not put down.” “A thrilling, profoundly moving, and utterly unique retelling of the legend of Achilles and the Trojan War.”

7. The Spy Coast by Tess Gerritsen

A retired CIA operative in small-town Maine tackles the ghosts of her past in this fresh take on the spy thriller. “This is an ingenious, spellbinding novel that moves from Bangkok to Maine, seductive settings where secrets are kept and lives upended. It is utterly thrilling, full of morally complex characters and a life-and-death chase into the past and back again.”

8. Twixt Land and Sea Tales by Joseph Conrad

A classic collection of three sea stories that rank with the most mature and romantic of the author’s work—a writer considered among the greatest of creative writers.

9. Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don’t Know by Adam Grant

This book examines the critical art of rethinking: learning to question your opinions and open other people’s minds, which can position you for excellence at work and wisdom in life. It’s an invitation to let go of views that are no longer serving us well and prize mental flexibility, humility, and curiosity over consistency.

2024

December

1. Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time by Dava Sobel

The dramatic human story of an epic scientific quest and of one man’s forty-year obsession to find a solution to the thorniest scientific dilemma of the day—“the longitude problem.” It is also a fascinating brief history of astronomy, navigation, and clockmaking, and opens a new window on our world.

2. The Men Who United the States: America's Explorers, Inventors, Eccentrics, and Mavericks, and the Creation of One Nation Indivisible by Simon Winchester

A fascinating popular history that illuminates the men who toiled fearlessly to discover, connect, and bond the citizenry and geography of the U.S.A. from its beginnings. "A fresh look at the way in which the most powerful nation on earth came together.

November

1. The Age of Grievance by Frank Bruni

A lucid, powerful examination of the ways in which grievance has come to define our current culture and politics, on both the right and the left. "Brilliant...Bruni writes with humor, insight, and precision." "A wise and humane book for our foolish and cruel era."

2. Almost Surely Dead by Amina Akhtar

A psychological thriller with a twist. The book is a chilling account of how one woman's life spins out of control after a terrifying—and seemingly random—attempt on her life. "A witty, fresh psychological thriller that's part stalker thriller and part ghost story."

3. The Bandit Queens by Parini Schroff

A young Indian woman finds the false rumors that she killed her husband surprisingly useful—until other women in the village start asking for help getting rid of their own husbands. "A radically feel-good story about the murder of no-good husbands by a cast of unsinkable women."

4. Myth America: Historians Take On the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past by Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer (Editors)

In this incisive and authoritative book, America's top historians set the record straight on the most pernicious myths about our nation's past. The contributors "take direct aim at the lies that are the lifeblood of the myths that grip American culture and politics today."

5. Storm Front by Jim Butcher

As a professional wizard, Henry Dresden knows firsthand that the "everyday" world is actually full of strange and magical things—and most of them don't play well with humans. He is pulled into the darkest depths of magical Chicago when the police department bring him in to consult on a double murder done with black magic.

6. Table for Two by Amor Towles

The New York stories in this book, most of which take place around the year 2000, consider the fateful consequences that can spring from brief encounters and the delicate mechanics of compromise that operate at the heart of modern marriages. "A knockout collection....Sharp-edged satire deceptively wrapped like a box of chocolates."

October

1. Big Trouble by Dave Barry

“A ferociously funny novel of love and mayhem in south Florida”, featuring a drifter who sleeps in a tree, two arms-dealing Russian hoods, a pair of two-bit losers who hustle tourists, a pretty illegal alien, a boozy embezzler, a psychedelic South American toad, and two klutzy New Jersey hitmen.

2. Calico by Lee Goldberg

“An explosive, page-turning investigative thriller with a mind-blowing twist” that also incorporates the Western and science fiction genres when a body is found in 2019 with elements of both the current time and a century earlier.

3. Elderhood by Louise Aronson

The author, a noted geriatrician, uses stories from her quarter century of caring for patients and draws from history, science, literature, popular culture, and her own life to weave a vision of old age full of joy, wonder, frustration, outrage, and hope about aging, medicine, and humanity itself. “Exquisitely written, wise, and engaging.”

4. The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store by James McBride

The discovery of a skeleton at the bottom of a well when construction workers start digging the foundation for a new development uncovers the long-held secrets of a dilapidated neighborhood where American Jews and African Americans lived side-by-side and shared ambitions and sorrows. “A murder mystery locked inside a Great American Novel....Charming, smart, heart-blistering, and heart-healing.”

5. Material World: The Six Raw Materials that Shape Modern Civilization by Ed Conway

The story of six fundamental materials that have created empires, razed civilizations, and fed our ingenuity and greed for thousands of years—sand, salt, iron, copper, oil, and lithium. The book is “a celebration of the humans and human networks, the miraculous processes and the little-known companies, that combine to turn raw materials into things of wonder.”

6. The Riders Come Out at Night: Brutality, Corruption, and Cover-Up in Oakland by Ali Winston

A critical look at the systematic corruption and brutality within the Oakland Police Department and the more than two-decades-long saga of attempted reforms and explosive scandals. “An explosive, gut-wrenching narrative account that is a must-read for anyone interested in criminal justice reform and a book that easily threads the needle between non-fiction journalism and true crime.”

7. The Sweetness of Water by Nathan Harris

An award-winning “miraculous debut” novel set in the waning years of the Civil War that tells of the unlikely bond between two freedmen who are brothers and the Georgia farmer whose alliance will alter their lives, and his, forever. “With candor and sympathy, the author creates an unforgettable cast of characters. Equal parts beauty and terror, the book is as gripping as it is moving.”

8. We Solve Murders by Richard Osman

From the author of The Thursday Murder Club series come a novel about a retired detective who has moved to a small English village where he is enjoying the quiet life and his daughter-in-law, a highly trained and skilled private security provider for high-risk clients who becomes a target herself. “Madcap fun, with an entertaining new cast of characters and the author’s trademark wit. Delightful!”

September

1. Caesar by Christian Meier

This biography is “the definitive, modern account of Caesar’s life and career, and places him in the wider context of the crisis of the Roman Republic. Written specifically for a general readership, this authoritative, stimulating book serves, among other things, as a reminder to those who believe that men are mere servants of historical forces that the great individual still has an unarguably significant part to play.”

2. Close Range: Wyoming Stories by Annie Proulx

The author’s masterful language and fierce love of Wyoming are evident in this collection of stories about loneliness, quick violence, and wrong kinds of love. “These are stories of desperation, hard times, and unlikely elation set in a landscape both brutal and magnificent.”

3. Crook Manifesto by Colson Whitehead

This is the follow-up to the author’s “Harlem Shuffle” and part two of his projected Harlem Saga trilogy. It continues the story of furniture store owner and part-time fence Ray Carney into the 1970s. The book is “a darkly funny tale of a city under siege, but also a sneakily searching portrait of the meaning of family. The author’s kaleidoscopic portrait of Harlem is sure to stand as one of the all-time great evocations of a place and time.”

4. The Demon of Unrest: A Saga of Hubris, Heartbreak, and Heroism at the Dawn of the Civil War by Erik Larson

The author brings to life the pivotal five months between the election of Abraham Lincoln and the start of the Civil War in this “riveting examination of a nation in tumult.” “A feast of historical insight and narrative verve...This is the author at his his best, enlivening even a thrice-told tale into an irresistible thriller.”

5. The Fallen by T. Jefferson Parker

The hero of this detective novel is a homicide detective in San Diego who has synesthesia, a neurological condition where your senses get mixed up—in his case to see voices as colored shapes provoked by the emotions of the speakers, not the words themselves. “A carefully woven novel of suspense, the book brings to life a superb cast of characters against the all-too-real backdrop of a city fighting for its survival.”

6. Fear the Worst by Linwood Barclay

The protagonist is an average guy who sells cars and whose ex-wife has moved in with another man. His worst nightmare happens when his daughter vanishes into thin air and no one at the hotel where she supposedly worked has ever heard of her. “The author’s pacing is impeccable...an uncomfortably plausible tale...a page-turner that keeps the reader guessing until the end.”

7. German Boy: A Child in War by Wolfgang W. E. Samuel

A vivid, true memoir of a boy in a family of Germans who tried to flee the advancing Russian troops at the end of World War II and their fight for survival as the tables are turned and, for reasons the young boy is too young to understand, the broken family suffered arbitrary arrest, rape, hunger, and constant fear.

8. The Lost City of the Monkey God: A True Story by Douglas Preston

The author “takes readers on a true adventure deep into the Honduran rain forest in this riveting narrative about the discovery of a lost civilization—culminating in a stunning medical mystery.” “Suspenseful and shocking, filled with colorful history, hair-raising adventure, and dramatic twists of fortune, the book is the absolutely true account of one of the great discoveries of the twenty-first century.”

9. No Ordinary Assignment: A Memoir by Jane Ferguson

“A haunting memoir of disarming honesty...a remarkable testament to the anguish and beauty of foreign correspondence.” Jane Ferguson has covered nearly every war front and humanitarian crisis of our time—Yemen during the Arab Spring, the Homs rebel camp in Syria, Kabul as one of the last six journalists from all Western countries at the height of the airport fiasco, and Ukraine. Coming from a poor farm in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, she willed and wheedled herself into foreign correspondence and reported with an open-hearted humanity we rarely see in conflict stories.

10. Shut Up, This Is Serious by Caroline Ixta

The story of two Latina teens in East Oakland as they discover that the world is brimming with messy complexities. The book is a “fierce, intimate examination of friendship, chosen family, and the generational cycles we must break to become our truest selves.”

11. Sleepless City by Reed Farrel Coleman

“A tour-de-force! The pace is relentless, the plot smart, the lead character a hero for his times.” He’s a cop with conflicted loyalties and a divided soul still fighting his own private war with his own personal code. He can both find a criminal who’s vanished and make a key witness disappear.

12. Snowflower and the Secret Fan by Linda See

The book is a “brilliantly realistic journey back to an era of Chinese history (the nineteenth century) that is as deeply moving as it is sorrowful. With period detail and deep resonance, this lyrical and emotionally charged novel dives into one of the most mysterious of human relationships—female friendship.”

13. The Story of Edward Sawtelle by David Wroblewski

“A mystery, a thriller, a ghost story, and a literary tour-de-force...an authentic epic, long and lush, full of back story and observed detail...the author exercises a certain magic that catches and holds our attention, a magic that is undeniably his own.” Born mute, speaking only in sign, the protagonist leads an idyllic life on his family’s farm until tragedy strikes and he is forced to flee into the neighboring wilderness. “Filled with breathtaking scenes, the book is a meditation on the limits of language and what lies beyond, a brilliantly inventive retelling of an ancient story, and an epic tale of devotion, betrayal, and courage in the American heartland.”

August

1. Basket Case by Carl Hiaasen

“A rollicking and hilarious novel” by “Florida’s most entertainingly indignant social critic.” This is the story of an investigative reporter relegated to exile on the obituaries desk who decides to find out what really happened in a fishy scuba “accident.”

2. Blood Lines by Nelson DeMille

The story of Army CID Special Agents who are “the warriors the world needs” that are on the hunt for the cold-blooded murderer of one of their fellow agents. They come to realize that the murder was merely the prelude to a much more sinister future event—unless they can unravel the mystery in time to stop it.

3. Judgment at Tokyo: World War II on Trial and the Making of Modern Asia by Gary J. Bass

“A landmark, magisterial history of the trial of Japan’s leaders as war criminals—the largely overlooked Asian counterpart to Nuremberg.” “Nothing less than a masterpiece. With epic research and mesmerizing narrative power.” This is a riveting story of wartime action, dramatic courtroom battles, and the epic formative years that set the stage for the Asian postwar era.

4. The Napoleonic Wars: A Global History by Alexander Mikaberidze

In this ambitious and far-ranging work, the author argues that the Napoleonic Wars can only be fully understood in an international perspective. “Skillfully narrated and deeply researched, here at last is the global history of the period, one that expands our view of the Napoleonic Wars and their role in laying the foundation of the modern world.”

5. San Fransicko: Why Progressives Ruin Cities by Michael Schellenberger

This is a book that skewers progressives for the mishandling of America’s faltering cities in their attempts to solve the problems of homelessness, inequality, and crime. According to the author, “the real problem is an ideology that designates some people, by identity or experience, as victims entitled to destructive behaviors. The result is an undermining of the values that make cities, and civilization itself, possible.”

6. Two Wheels Good: The History and Mystery of the Bicycle by Jody Rosen

A panoramic revisionist portrait the nineteenth-century invention that is transforming the twenty-first-century world. “Combining history, reportage, travelogue, and memoir, the book sweeps across centuries and around the globe, unfolding the bicycles’s saga from its invention in 1817 to its present-day renaissance as a ‘green machine’, an emblem of sustainability in a world afflicted by pandemic and climate change.”

July

1. Astor: The Rise and Fall of an American Fortune by Anderson Cooper and Katharine Howe

A quintessential American story of ambition, invention, destruction, and reinvention. “In this unconventional, page-turning historical biography...the authors chronicle the lives of the Astors and explore what the Astor name came to mean in America—offering a window into the making of America itself.”

2. The Chinese Groove by Kathryn Ma

A buoyant, good-hearted, and sharply written novel about a blithely optimistic immigrant with big dreams, dire prospects, and a fractured extended family in need of help—even if they don’t know it yet. “The author’s iteration of the young migrant story is imbued with inherent optimism.”

3. Hot Dog Money: Inside the Biggest Scandal in the History of College Sports by Guy Lawson

The inside story of disgraced fraudster turned undercover FBI informant Marty Blazer and the greatest scandal in the history of the NCAA. “Over a period of three years, covertly recording thousands of hours of conversations with coaches from many of the leading college teams, Marty reveals a large-scale epidemic of deception, bribery, and fraud within the NCAA.”

4. The Last Green Valley by Mark Sullivan

A compelling and inspiring novel of heroism and courage in the dark days at the end of World War II, inspired by the true story of one family’s incredible tale of daring, survival, and triumph. The story is “a brutal, complex, and ultimately triumphant tale that illuminates the extraordinary power of love, faith, and one family’s incredible will to survive and see their dreams realized.”

5. The Mysterious Case of Rudolph Diesel by Douglas Brunt

The hidden history of Rudolph Diesel, one of the world’s greatest inventors, whose enemies included both Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and John D. Rockefeller, and his mysterious disappearance on the eve of World War I. “Equal parts Walter Isaacson and Sherlock Holmes, the book yanks back the curtain on the greatest caper of the 20th century in this riveting history.”

6. The Searcher by Tana French

“This hushed suspense tale about thwarted dreams of escape may be the author’s best one yet, its own kind of masterpiece.” It follows an ex-Chicago policeman’s attempt to find a quiet life in a pretty spot in Ireland where nothing much happens. The author “weaves a masterful, atmospheric tale of suspense, asking what we sacrifice for truth and justice, and what we risk if we don’t.”

7. The Teachers by Alexandra Robbins

“A riveting, must-read, year-in-the-life of three teachers, combined with reporting that reveals what’s really going on behind school doors.” “Interspersed among the teachers’ stories—a seeming scandal, a fourth-grade whodunit, and teacher confessions—are hard-hitting essays featuring cutting-edge reporting on the biggest issues facing teachers today, such as school violence, outrageous parent behavior, and inadequate support, staffing, and resources coupled with unrealistic mounting demands; the ‘myth’ of teacher burnout; the COVID-19 pandemic; and ways all of us can help the professionals who are central both to the lives of our children and the heart of our communities.”

8. What Went Wrong with Capitalism by Ruchi Sharma

The author argues that a century of expanding government has distorted financial markets, stoked massive inequality, and soaked America in debt. “Superbly written and cogently argued. Fear of risk, over the last half-century, has robbed American capitalism of its capacity for robust growth.”

June

1. Althea: The Life of Tennis Champion Althea Gibson

“A captivating book that brilliantly reveals an American sports legend long overlooked that tells the riveting story of a woman who overcame daunting odds—on the tennis court and off—to stand at the world pinnacle of her sport and became an inspiration to many.”

2. Circe by Madeline Miller

“A bold and subversive retelling of the goddess’s story that brilliantly reimagines the life of Circe, formidable sorceress of The Odyssey.” “With unforgettably vivid characters, mesmerizing language, and page-turning suspense, the book is a triumph of storytelling, an intoxicating epic of family rivalry, palace intrigue, love and loss, as well as a celebration of indomitable female strength in a man’s world.”

3. Disloyal by Michael Cohen

The inside story of the “real” President Trump, by his former attorney and personal advisor. “This is the most devastating business and political horror story of the century.” “At the heart of the book, we see how Cohen came under the spell of his charismatic ‘Boss’ and, as a result, lost all sense of his moral compass.”

4. Lady Tan’s Circle of Women by Lisa See

An immersive historical novel inspired by the true story of a woman physician in 15th century Ming China. The author deftly portrays the inherently enthralling story of this woman while providing the reader with accurate descriptions of life, particularly for women, as well as details of the practice of medicine at this time in China. “Engrossing...rich...packed with historical detail...Women’s friendships in a world where they have little freedom shape a quietly moving book.”

5. The Longest Minute: The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906 by Matthew J. Davenport

“The spellbinding true story of the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco and how a great earthquake sparked a devastating and preventable fire”, drawn mainly from letters, diaries, and memoirs. “Meticulously research and gracefully written, the book is both a harrowing chronicle of devastation and the portrait of a city’s resilience in the burning aftermath of greed and folly.”

6. North Woods by Daniel Mason

A sweeping novel about a single house in the woods of New England, told through the lives of those who inhabit it across the centuries— “a time-spanning, genre-blurring work of storytelling magic.” “Dazzling...a brave and original book which invents its own form. It is both intimate and epic, playful and serious. To read it is to travel to the limits of what the novel can do.”

7. The Old Woman with the Knife by Gu Byeong-mo

The kinetic story of a 65-year-old female assassin who faces an unexpected threat in the twilight of her career. “An electrifying, singular, mordantly funny novel about the expectations imposed on aging bodies and the dramatic ways in which one woman chooses to reclaim her agency.”

8. People of the Book by Geraldine Brooks

Inspired by a true story, the novel traces the harrowing journey of the famed Sarajevo Haggadah, a beautifully illuminated Hebrew manuscript created in 15th century Spain. When a rare book expert finds tiny artifacts in its ancient lining, she begins to unlock its deep mysteries and is plunged into the intrigues of fine art forgers and ultranationalist fanatics. “Intelligent, thoughtful, gracefully written, and original.”

9. Small Mercies by Dennis Lehane

“Thought-provoking, engaging, enraging, and can’t-put-down entertainment.” A “superb” thriller, it is an all-consuming tale of revenge, family love, festering hate, and insidious power, set against one of the most tumultuous episodes in Boston’s history.

10. The Sun Walks Down by Fiona McFarlane

The story, set in a small town in the South Australian outback in 1883, follows a young boy’s disappearance during a sandstorm. “Told in many ways and by many voices, the novel pulses with love, art, and the unbearable divine. It arrives like a vision, mythic and bright with meaning.”

11. Unscripted: The Epic Battle for a Media Empire and the Redstone Family Legacy by James B. Stewart

“Jaw-dropping...an epic tale of toxic wealth and greed populated by connivers and manipulators.” The shocking inside story of the struggle for power and control of Paramount Global, the multibillion-dollar empire controlled by the Redstone family, and the dysfunction, misconduct, and deceit that threatened the future of the company.

12. Watership Down by Richard Adams

“The classic yarn of discovery and struggle” about a band of rabbits trying to hold on to their place in the world. “Spellbinding...Marvelous...A taut tale of suspense, hot pursuit, and derring-do.”

May

1. Endangered Eating: America’s Vanishing Foods by Sarah Lohman

The author tells of the food traditions that are in danger of being lost and how we can save them. “Animated by stories yet grounded in historical research, the book gives readers the tools to support community food organizations and producers that work to preserve local culinary and rare, cherished foods—before it’s too late.”

2. A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them by Timothy Egan

“With narrative elan, the author gives us a riveting saga of how a predatory con man became one of the most powerful people in 1920s America, Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, with a plan to rule the country—and how a grisly murder of a woman brought him down. Compelling and chillingly resonant with our own time.”

3. Hit the Target: Eight Men Who Led the Eighth Air Force to Victory over the Luftwaffe By Bill Yenne

The Eighth, formed after Pearl Harbor, was the first U. S. air force designated to operate overseas and the first bomber command on either side of World War II to commit to strategic daylight bombing. “The story of the Mighty Eighth is told through its men, whose careers paralleled the early history of aviation and who helped to revolutionize airborne warfare and win World War II.”

4. The Last Lighthouse Keeper: A Memoir by John Cook and John Bauer

A beautiful memoir from one of Tasmania’s last kerosene lighthouse keepers: a story about madness and wilderness, shining a light onto the vicissitudes of love and nature. “Evocatively told, the book is a love story between a man and a dying way of life, as well as a celebration of wilderness and solitude.”

5. Night Owl by Andrew Mayne

An explosive thriller in which a shocking act of sabotage draws a retired spy into a deadly conspiracy. “The pace never flags.”

6. Paradise by Patricia Wolf

On a stunningly beautiful stretch of coastline on Australia’s Gold Coast, a young mother is brutally murdered and her daughter is left in a coma, with her life hanging in the balance. A police inspector recovering from injuries sustained in his previous case is pulled into the dark twists and turns of this home invasion gone wrong, vowing to find the men responsible.

April

1. Alone: Britain, Churchill, and Dunkirk: Defeat into Victory by Michael Korda

“One of the most miraculous military rescue missions in modern history comes alive in this superb and panoramic account of Dunkirk.” “No one can evince the drama of what actually happened at Dunkirk in the year 1940 with as great narrative skill and superb delineation.”

2. Big Little Lies by Liane Moriarty

“The novel is a brilliant take on ex-husbands and second wives, mothers and daughters, schoolyard scandal, and the little lies that can turn lethal.”

3. Chatter by Ethan Kross

The book reveals the hidden power of our inner voice and shows how to harness it to combat anxiety, improve physical and mental health, and deepen our relationships with others.

“Brilliantly argued, expertly researched, and filled with compelling stories, the book gives us the power to change the most important conversation we have each day: the one we have with ourselves.”

4. Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas by Mari Sandoz

This narrative tale of the legendary military leader of the Oglala Sioux is “one of the great stories of the West and written in the spirit of the sages, with a scrupulous regard for truth and history.”

5. Dr. Zhivago by Boris Pasternak

The story of the life and loves of a poet/physician during the turmoil of the Russian Revolution.

“One of the very great books of our time (The New Yorker).”

6. The Golden Gate by Amy Chia

“A sweeping, evocative, and compelling historical thriller that paints a vibrant portrait of a California buffeted by the turbulent crosswinds of a world at war and a society about to undergo massive change.” The book “brings to life a historical era rife with turbulent social forces and groundbreaking forensic advances, when race and class defined the very essence of power, sex, and justice, and introduces a fascinating character in a mixed race detective and former Army officer who is still reckoning with his own history.”

7. The Great Siege, Malta 1565: Clash of Cultures: Christian Knights Defend Western Civilization Against the Moslem Tide by Ernie Bradford

“A compelling and thoroughly researched account of the Great Siege of Malta that recalls not just an epic battle, but a clash of civilizations unlike anything since the time of Alexander the Great. It is a superior, readable treatment of an important but little-discussed epic from the Renaissance past—an astonishing tale.”

8. Last Hope Island: Britain, Occupied Europe, and the Brotherhood That Helped Turn the Tide Of War by Lynne Olsen

A groundbreaking account of how Britain became the base of operations for the exiled leaders of Europe in their desperate struggle to reclaim their continent from Hitler. “A fascinating chronicle of the Anglo-American alliance that recalls with vivid humanity that brief moment in time when the peoples of Europe stood together in their effort to roll back the tide of conquest and restore order to a broken continent.”

9. Outback by Virginia Wolf

The disappearance of two German backpackers in the vast Australian outback is the case taken up by an inspector on leave in his hometown in this deeply atmospheric thriller, the first in a new crime series.

March

1. An American Dreamer: Life in a Divided Country by David Finkel

A man navigates the deep divisions in America today and discovers that sometimes change can start by finding common ground with your neighbors. The author’s account is “poetic, profound, and irresistibly page-turning.” “The book illuminates with the deepest sympathy the feelings and lives of many people in America today, and it is a brilliant chronicle of one person’s everyday experience of frustration, confusion, and hope.”

2. The Ascent by Adam Plantinga

When a high security prison fails, a down-on-his-luck cop and the governor’s daughter have to team up if they’re going to escape in this “jaw-dropping, authentic, and deeply gripping” (Harlan Coben) novel. “Truly excellent” (Lee Child).

3. Cannery Row by John Steinbeck

Unburdened by the material necessities of life, the denizens of Cannery Row discover rewards unknown to more traditional society. The area is just a few blocks long, but the story it harbors is suffused with warmth, understanding, and a great fund of human values. The book focuses the acceptance of life as it is—both the exuberance of community and the loneliness of the individual.

4. Canoeing with the Cree by Eric Severeid

The renowned journalist’s classic account of his odyssey with a friend on a 2,250-mile journey in a canoe from Minneapolis to Hudson Bay. “Two high school graduates make an amazing journey showing indomitable courage that carried them through to their destination. Humor and a spirit of adventure made a grand, good time of it in spite of storms, rapids, long portages and silent wildernesses.”

5. The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right by Atul Gawande

This book shows what the simple idea of the checklist reveals about the complexity of our lives and how we can deal with it. The author makes a compelling argument that we can do better in dealing with ever-advancing technologies by using the simple checklist, describing how it can bring about striking improvements in a variety of fields, from medicine and disaster recovery to professions and businesses of all kinds.”

6. The Trial by Rob Rinder

“Filled with twists, turns, and a cast of unforgettable characters, the book is the unputdownable fiction debut by broadcaster and barrister Robert Rinder.” The protagonist is a young barrister-in-training who is assigned to take part in a high-profile and gripping case that takes him from the murky world of Chambers to the splendor of the Old Bailey. (The author’s non-fiction book, “Rinder’s Rules: How to Make the Law Work for You”, a collection of real-life stories of things gone wrong for which he provides sound legal advice, is now in its ninth edition and has been praised as both incredibly informative and unbearably funny.)

February

1. Anxious People by Fredrik Backman

The story of a bank robbery gone wrong and the resulting hostage situation that brings people together. “A quirky, big-hearted novel...Wry, wise, and often laugh-out-loud funny, it’s a wholly original story that delivers pure pleasure.”

2. Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life by Dacher Keltner

From a foremost expert on the science of emotions, a groundbreaking and essential exploration into the history, science, and greater understanding of awe. “Revealing new research alongside an examination of awe across history, culture, and within his own life, the author shows us how cultivating awe in our everyday lives leads us to appreciate what is most humane in our human nature.”

3. Botticelli’s Secret: The Lost Drawings and the Rediscovery of the Renaissance by Joseph Luzzi

A combination of artistic detective story and rich intellectual history, the book shows not only how the Renaissance came to life, but also how Botticelli’s art helped bring it about—and most important, why we need the Renaissance and all it stands for today. “Brilliantly conceived and executed, the book is a riveting search for buried treasure.”

4. A Dangerous Fortune by Ken Follett

Epic in scale, the novel tells of the dramatic highs and lows of a wealthy family in Victorian England in the aftermath of the mysterious drowning of a schoolboy at an exclusive school.

5. Lights Out by Elise Hart Kipness

This exciting debut novel is a fast-paced thriller that follows a sports reporter’s journey off the court—and into a world of murder and deception. “A unique protagonist, an interesting setting, and a story that grabs you from the beginning and keeps on building.”

6. The Portal: San Francisco’s Ferry Building and the Reinvention of American Cities by John King

A two-time Pulitzer finalist explores the story of American urban design through San Francisco’s iconic Ferry Building. The narrative spans the rise and fall and rebirth of the Ferry Building and is rich with feats of engineering and civic imagination as well as the colorful figures who fought to preserve its character.

7. This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage by Ann Patchett

Blending literature and memoir, the author examines her deepest commitments—to writing, family, friends, dogs, books, and her husband—creating a resonant portrait of a life.

January

1. Being Mortal by Atul Gawande

When it comes to the inescapable realities of aging and death, what medicine can do often runs counter to what it should do. “Riveting, honest and humane, the book shows how the ultimate goal is not a good death but a good life—all the way to the very end. self in a desperate race to prevent an unthinkable conflict between Russia and the West.

2. A Dirty Job by Christopher Moore

A pretty normal guy with a normal life whose wife is about to give birth to their first child suddenly has people start dropping dead around him, and everywhere he goes a dark presence whispers to him from beneath the street. It seems he has been recruited for a new position as Death. “Dizzily inventive and hypnotically engaging, the book is laugh-out-loud funny.”

3. The Drunkard’s Walk: How Randomness Rules Our Lives by Leonard Mlodinow

“An intriguing and illuminating look at how randomness, chance, and probability affect our daily lives that will intrigue, awe, and inspire.” “The author writes in a breezy style, interspersing probabilistic mind-benders with portraits of theorists.”

4. Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm by Thich Naht Hanh

A powerful and practical guide to overcoming our debilitating uncertainties and personal terrors by a Vietnamese Buddhist Zen Master. The author “explores the origins of our fears, illuminating a path to finding peace and freedom from anxiety and offering powerful tools to eradicate it from our lives.”

5. Grant by Ron Chernow

“This is America’s greatest biographer bringing to life one of our finest but most underappreciated presidents.” “With lucidity, breadth, and meticulousness, the author finds the threads that bind the disparate stories of his life together, shedding new light on the man whom Walt Whitman described as ‘nothing heroic...and yet the greatest hero.’ ”

6. Homegrown: Timothy McVeigh and the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism by Jeffrey Toobin

“The definitive account of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the enduring legacy of Timothy McVeigh, leading to the January 6 insurrection.” “A powerful retelling of one of the great outrages of our time and a warning for our future.”

7. *The Money Kings: The Epic Story of the Jewish Immigrants Who Transformed Wall Street And Shaped Modern America* by Daniel Schulman

“The incredible saga of the German-Jewish immigrants—many with now familiar names—who profoundly influenced the rise of modern finance (and so much more).” “Along the way, they would shape the destiny not just of American finance but the millions of Eastern European Jews who spilled off steamships in New York Harbor in the early 1900s.”

8. *Night Train to Turkestan: Modern Adventures Along China’s Ancient Silk Road* by Stuart Stevens

The story of four friends who embark on an unlikely 5,000-mile quest along China’s Ancient Silk Road in an attempt to retrace the steps of a famous journey made in 1936 by Peter Fleming, an eccentric British writer/traveler who, like his brother, Ian Fleming, had a flair for exceptional adventures. “Crammed with unforgettable characters and unforgettably funny scenes, the book is a rare, high-spirited romp across a country where travelers are greeted with ‘Comrades, we welcome you to your journey. Please do not spit everywhere.’”

9. *Penelope in Retrograde* by Brooke Abrams

“In this witty and heartfelt novel, a romance writer with a passion for astrology reluctantly travels home for Thanksgiving to make amends with her estranged family...and possibly manifest her own happily ever after.” “Rounded out with a quirky cast, the book will leave readers with a real sense of the family dynamics at play here.”

10. *Prequel: An American Fight Against Fascism* by Rachel Maddow

The author traces the fight to save American democracy back to World War II, when a handful of committed public servants and brave private citizens thwarted far-right plotters trying to steer our nation toward an alliance with the Nazis. “A ripping read...well rendered, fast-paced, and delivered with assurance. The parallels to the present day are strong, even startling.”

11. *Shogun* by James Clavell

“This is the author’s tour-de-force, an epic saga of Pilot-Major John Blackthorne, and his integration into the struggles and strife of feudal Japan. Both entertaining and incisive, the novel is a stunningly dramatic re-creation of a very different world.”

2023

December

1. *The Art Thief* by Michael Finkel

One of the most remarkable true crime narratives of the 21st century, the story of the world’s most prolific art thief that reads like fiction. He never stole for money, keeping his treasures in a single room upstairs in his mother’s house where he and his girlfriend could admire them. Carrying out more than 200 heists over nearly 8 years—in museums and cathedrals all over Europe—the thief, along with his girlfriend who served as lookout, stole more than 300 objects worth over \$2 billion during daylight hours until it all fell apart in spectacular fashion.

2. Dark Ride by Lou Berney

Well-written with indelible characters, this thriller centers on a young slackard, content with just getting by in life, who is thrust into action after he observes two children sitting alone on a bench who show signs of physical abuse and no one in authority appears willing to follow up. The story follows the protagonist as he gains a new sense of himself along with growing courage, moral fiber, and cunning.

3. How to Murder Your Employer: The McMasters Guide to Homicide by Rupert Holmes

“A fantasy academy laid out like a combination of Hogwarts, Downton Abbey, and a ‘White Lotus’-like resort dedicated to the art of murder where students study how best to ‘delete’ their most deserving victim.” “A fiendishly funny mix of witty wordplay, breathtaking twists and genuine intrigue, the novel will gain you admission into a wholly original world, cocooned within the most entertaining book about well-intentioned would-be murderers you’ve ever read.”

4. Hurts So Good: The Science and Culture of Pain On Purpose by Leigh Cowart

An exploration of why people all over the world love to engage in pain on purpose—from dominatrices, religious ascetics, and ultramarathoners to ballerinas, icy ocean bathers, and sideshow performers. “By participating in many of these activities herself, and through conversations with psychologists, fellow scientists, and people who seek pain for pleasure, the author unveils how our minds and bodies find meaning and relief in pain—a quirk in our programming that drives discipline and innovation even as it swallows us whole.”

5. Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia by Peter Pomerantsev

“A journey into the glittering, surreal heart of Russia, where even dictatorship is a reality show.” “Dazzling yet piercingly insightful, the book is an unforgettable voyage into a country spinning from decadence into madness.”

6. Oath and Honor: A Memoir and a Warning by Liz Cheney

“A gripping first-hand account of the January 6th, 2021, insurrection from inside the halls of Congress, from origins to aftermath, as Donald Trump and his enablers betrayed the American people and the Constitution—by the House Republican leader who dared to stand up to it.” The author “tells the story of this perilous moment in our history, those who helped Trump spread the stolen election lie, those whose actions preserved our constitutional framework, and the risks we still face.”

7. Red Storm Rising by Tom Clancy

“A chillingly authentic vision of modern war, the book is as powerful as it is ambitious. Using the latest advancements in military technology [at the time of its publication in 1987], the world’s superpowers battle on land, sea, and air for ultimate global control. It is a story you will never forget. Hard-hitting. Suspenseful. And frighteningly real.”

November

1. The Alice Network by Kate Quinn

“In this enthralling novel, two women—a female spy recruited to the real-life Alice Network in France during World War I and an unconventional American socialite searching for her cousin in 1947—are brought together in a mesmerizing story of courage and redemption.” “An unforgettable tale of little known wartime glory and sacrifice.”

2. All is Not Forgiven by Joe Kenda

The case of a murder of a beloved Colorado philanthropist and society figure whose husband, a gambler and womanizer, appears to have an airtight alibi in this debut novel by TV’s Homicide Hunter.

3. All the Sinners Bleed by S. A. Cosby

A Black sheriff. A serial killer. A small town ready to combust. “Powerful and unforgettable, this book confirms the author as one of the most muscular, distinctive, grab-you-by-both-ears voices in American crime fiction.”

4. The City of Fallen Angels by John Berendt

“Turning to the magic, mystery, and decadence of Venice, the author gradually reveals the truth behind a sensational fire that in 1996 destroyed the historic Fenice opera house. Encountering a rich cast of characters, he tells a tale full of atmosphere and surprise as the stories build, one after the other, ultimately coming together to portray a world as finely drawn as a still-life painting.”

5. A Cool Breeze on the Underground by Don Winslow

“One of America’s greatest storytellers” introduces an unusual private eye—a graduate student who grew up on the streets of New York, usually on the wrong side of the law, was “adopted” by a PI who gave him a detailed course in investigation techniques and introduced him to the Bank, an exclusive institution with a sideline in keeping its wealthy clients happy and out of trouble. In payback for the Bank’s financing his education, he goes to London to search for the runaway daughter of a prominent senator with vice-presidential ambitions.

6. Crimson Lake by Candace Fox

A mystery involving a Sydney police officer tainted as a likely perpetrator of a brutal child abduction even though he has been released for lack of evidence, who flees north to maintain a low profile in a small town, but finds himself drawn into a case with an eccentric private investigator who is herself a convicted murderer. Lee Child: “Complex, human characters, meaty story, fine writing, and a great sense of place—this is one of the best crime thrillers of the year.”

7. Cutting for Stone by Abraham Verghese

“An enthralling family saga of Africa and America, doctors and patients, exile and home. Filled with mystical scenes and deeply felt characters, the author is something of a magician as a novelist.” The novel “shows how history and landscape and accidents of birth conspire to create the story of a single life.”

8. Daylight by David Baldacci

“In this gripping mystery, an FBI Agent’s search for her sister clashes with a military investigator’s high-stakes case, leading them both deep into a global conspiracy—from which neither of them will escape unscathed.”

9. Elon Musk by Walter Isaacson

“This is the astonishingly intimate story of the most fascinating innovator of our era—a rule-breaking visionary who helped to lead the world into the era of electric vehicles, private space exploration, and artificial intelligence. Oh, and took over Twitter.”

10. Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal by Mary Roach

“The irresistible, ever-curious, and always best-selling author returns with a new adventure to the invisible realm we carry around inside.” “Like all of her books, this one is as much about human beings as it is about human bodies.”

11. I Came as a Shadow: An Autobiography by John Thompson

“The long-awaited autobiography from Georgetown University’s legendary coach, whose life on and off the basketball court throws America’s unresolved struggle with racial justice into sharp relief.”

12. Killers of the Flower Moon by David Grann

“A twisting, haunting true-life murder mystery about one of the most monstrous crimes in American history,” the story of a conspiracy to take over the new-found oil wealth of the Osage Nation in Oklahoma through systematic murder.

13. The Maid’s Diary by Loreth Anne White

“A cunning, twisty, and unsettling novel of psychological suspense with a startling conclusion,” this is the story of a snoopy maid who one day sees something she cannot unsee in the home of her brand-new clients. “As the homicide cop investigating the case begins to uncover the secret that has sent the lives of everyone involved on a collision course, she realizes that nothing is quite as it seems and that no one escapes their past.”

14. Poverty by America by Matthew Desmond

“The Pulitzer-Prize-winning author reimagines the debate on poverty, making a provocative and compelling argument about why it persists in America—because the rest of us benefit from it.” “Elegantly written and fiercely argued, this compassionate book gives us new ways of thinking about a morally urgent problem.”

15. Ten Discoveries That Rewrote History by Patrick Hunt

The world’s greatest archaeological finds and what they tell us about lost civilizations. “Part travel guide to the wonders of the world and part primer on ancient world history, this book by a renowned archaeologist captures the awe and excitement of finding a lost window into ancient civilizations.”

October

1. By the Sea by Abdulrazak Gurney

Beautifully written story by the winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature, himself a refugee in England after escaping the turmoil in his native Zanzibar in the early 1960s. Evocative of the prejudice and difficulties faced by asylum-seekers, the book tells the intertwined story of two families in colonial and post-colonial East Africa where misunderstandings leading to betrayal and hatred remain unresolved for decades until two men both find themselves immigrants in England and almost by luck meet.

2. A Man of Iron: The Turbulent Life and Improbable Presidency of Grover Cleveland by Troy Senik

“A thoroughly engaging and enjoyable biography of the honest, principled, and plain-spoken president whose country has largely overlooked him.” “With prodigious research, rich detail, and lively prose, the book is a vivid and compelling biography joining the ranks of presidential classics.”

September

1. And There Was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle by Jon Meacham

The story of Lincoln from his birth on the Kentucky frontier in 1809 to his leadership during the Civil War to his tragic assassination. “Lincoln’s story illustrates the ways and means of politics in a democracy, the roots and durability of racism, and the capacity of conscience to shape events.”

2. The Covenant of Water by Abraham Verghese

“A stunning and magisterial epic of love, faith, and medicine, set in Kerala, South India, following three generations of family seeking the answers to a strange secret.” “A shimmering evocation of bygone India and of the passage of time itself, the book is a hymn to progress in medicine and to human understanding.”

3. Out of Bounds by Jim Brown

“In this outspoken and fearless autobiography, Jim Brown, arguably the greatest football player who ever lived, shares his story in the same way he played the game: full throttle, pull no punches, and don’t spare a drop.

4. Shoe Dog: A Memoir by the Creator of Nike by Phil Knight

“In this candid and riveting memoir, the Nike founder and board chairman shares the inside story of the company’s early days as an intrepid start-up and its evolution into one of the world’s most iconic, game-changing, and profitable brands.”

5. Trust by Herman Diaz

“Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, this is a genre-bending, time-skipping story about New York City’s elite in the roaring ‘20s and Great Depression.” “Buzzy and enthralling...A glorious novel about empires and erasures, husbands and wives, staggering fortunes and unspeakable misery...Fun as hell to read.”

August

1. A Drink Before the War by Dennis Lehane

The first in the author's series of two smart and tough private investigator partners weaned on the blue-collar streets of Boston's Dorchester area. Wonderfully written, with unforgettable characters, and a strong sense of place, the author is a master of the moral and practical calculus in determining "the right thing to do."

2. Alaric the Goth: An Outsider's History of the Fall of Rome by Douglas Brin

"Written in an enchanting and effortless style that transports you back in time, the book masters the art of bringing the past to life in a thrilling fashion and making it relevant to today." "Combining vivid storytelling and historical analysis, the author reveals the Goth's complex and fascinating legacy in shaping our world."

3. Annihilation by Jeff VanderMeer (first book in The Southern Reach Trilogy)

A novel that "reads as if Verne or Wellesian adventurers exploring a mysterious island had warped through into a Kafkaesque nightmare world." "A gripping fantasy thriller." "Through potent and unrelenting tension, the author achieves a level of emotional manipulation that should appeal to anyone who embraced the paranormal phenomena and maddening uncertainties of "Lost."

4. Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are? By Frans de Wall

"A passionate and convincing case for the sophistication of nonhuman minds." The book "explores the oddities and complexities of animal cognition to reveal how smart animals really are and how we've underestimated their abilities for too long."

5. Bewilderment by Richard Powers

"With its soaring descriptions of the natural world, its tantalizing vision of life beyond, and its account of a father and son's ferocious love, this book is the author's most intimate and moving novel. At its heart lies the question: How can we tell our children the truth about this beautiful, imperiled planet?"

6. Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine, and the Murder of a President by Candice Millard

The extraordinary account of James Garfield's rise from poverty to the American presidency and the dramatic history of his assassination and legacy. "Meticulously researched, epic in scope, and pulsating with an intimate human focus and high-velocity narrative drive, the book brings alive a forgotten chapter of U.S. history."

7. Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead by Olga Tokarczuk

"A brilliant literary murder mystery" by a recent winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. "Extraordinary, the novel is funny, vivid, dangerous, and disturbing, and it raises some fierce questions about human behavior."

8. The Ferryman by Justin Cronin

A riveting novel about a group of survivors on a hidden island utopia where the truth isn't what it seems. "Next to impossible to put down...exciting, mysterious, and totally satisfying." "An intricate mystery that deals with loss and devastation on levels both personal and global."

9. The Heat Will Kill You First: Life and Death on a Scorched Planet by Jeff Goodell

This "masterful, bracing investigation exposes through stellar reporting, artful storytelling, and fascinating scientific explanations an explosive new understanding of heat and the impact that rising temperatures will have on our lives and on our planet."

10. Lord of Light by Roger Zelazny

On a colony planet, a band of men has gained control of technology, made themselves immortal, and now rules their world as the gods of the Hindu pantheon. Only one dares oppose them, he who was once Siddhartha and is now Binder of Demons, Lord of Light. "Funny, wise, and infused with a sense of wonder and knowledge."

11. Red Roulette: An Insider's Story of Wealth, Power, Corruption, and Vengeance in Today's China by Desmond Shun

This "powerful and disturbing" book is narrated by a man who, with his wife, rose to the top levels of power and wealth in China—and then fell out of favor. It shows "how the Chinese government keeps businesses in line—and what happens when businesspeople overstep."

12. Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt

"An ultimately feel-good but deceptively sensitive novel, memorable and tender, about an elderly woman who does menial cleaning work at the local aquarium, a young man at loose ends with a chip on his shoulder, and a sentient octopus. "This novel is a gentle reminder that sometimes taking a hard look at the past can help uncover a future that once felt impossible."

13. The Shadow Docket: How the Supreme Court Uses Stealth Rulings to Amass Power and Undermine the Republic by Stephen Vladeck

An acclaimed legal scholar's "essential" expose of the Supreme court's increasing use of unsigned, unexplained orders to change the law—all behind closed doors. The book "could help bring more principle, accountability, and 'procedural regularity' to the justices' work—and help stop a controversial institution going completely off the rails."

14. Unsheltered by Barbara Kingsolver

A story of about two families, in two centuries, navigating what seems to be the end of the world as they know it. The author "brilliantly captures both the price of profound change and how it can pave the way not only for future generations, but also for a radiant, unexpected expansion of the heart."

15. Worse Than Nothing: The Dangerous Fallacy of Originalism by Erwin Chemerinsky

The book explains why originalism (the belief that the meaning of a Constitutional provision is fixed when it is adopted) is a flawed, incoherent, and dangerously ideological method of Constitutional jurisprudence. The author offers a “concise, point-by-point refutation of the theory and argues that it cannot deliver what it promises—and if it could, no one would want what it is selling.

July

1. The Blessing Way by Tony Hillerman

The first in the author’s mystery series set in the Navajo Nation. Because, although he was not Navajo himself, he portrayed the area and its people so well, accurately, and vividly, the author was awarded the Navajo Tribe’s Special Friend of the Dineh Award.

2. Chagall: A Biography by Jackie Wullschläger

As a pioneer of modernism and one of the greatest figurative artists of the twentieth century, Marc Chagall achieved fame and fortune, and over the course of a long career created some of the best-known and most-loved paintings of our time. Yet behind this triumph lay struggle, heartbreak, bitterness, frustration, lost love, exile—and above all the miracle of survival. While the author explores in detail Chagall’s complex relationship with Russia, as an art critic she also provides a breadth of knowledge of his work while as a biographer she she brings Chagall the man fully to life.

3. CivilWarLand in Bad Decline by George Saunders

“This debut short story collection from the author has grown in esteem from a cherished cult classic to a masterpiece of the form, inspiring a generation of writers along the way.” “He hatches an unforgettable cast of characters, each struggling to survive in an increasingly haywire world.

4. From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life by Arthur C. Brooks

The roadmap for finding purpose, meaning, and success as we age. “Drawing on social science, philosophy, biography, theology, and eastern wisdom, as well as dozens of interviews with everyday men and women, the author shows us that true life success is well within our reach.”

5. The Greatest Invention: A History of the World in Nine Mysterious Scripts by Silvia Ferrara

“In this exhilarating celebration of human ingenuity and perseverance, a trailblazing Italian scholar sifts through our cultural and social behavior in search of the origins of our greatest invention—writing.” “A code-cracking tour around the globe, the book chronicles a previously uncharted journey, one filled with past flashes of brilliance, present-day scientific research, and a fleeting glimpse of writing’s future.”

6. The Plot Against America by Phillip Roth

“The chilling bestselling alternate history of what happens to one family when America elects a charismatic, isolationist president—Charles Lindbergh in the 1940 election against Franklin Roosevelt—whose government embraces a folksy anti-Semitism and negotiates a cordial ‘understanding’ with Adolph Hitler and the Japanese government.”

7. The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler by David L. Kertzer

“The most important book ever written about the Catholic Church and its conduct during World War II in its relations to the Nazi and fascist regimes before and during the war.” “This remarkably researched book is replete with revelations that deserve the adjective ‘explosive.’”

8. The Secret History of Wonder Woman by Jill Lepore

“Within the origin of one of the world’s most iconic superheroes hides a fascinating family story—and a crucial history of feminism in the twentieth century.” “Everything you might want in a page-turner—skeletons in the closet, a believe-it-or-not weirdness in its biographical details, and something else that secretly powers even the most ‘serious’ feminist history—fun.”

9. The Sentence by Louise Erdrich

“Dazzling....A hard-won love letter to readers and to booksellers, as well as a compelling story about how we cope with pain and fear, injustice and illness by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author. The author “creates a wickedly funny ghost story, a tale of passion and a complex marriage, and a women’s relentless errors—all occurring among indigenous people in Minnesota.”

10. A Story Like the Wind by Laurens van der Post

“The author’s incomparable knowledge of Africa illuminates this epic novel, set near the Kalahari Desert, about a boy on the verge of manhood, his experiences with the wonder and mystery of a still-primitive land, and his secret friendship with the Bushman whose life he saves.” “Unforgettable. The book is about the spirit in our flesh, about its power to see, and its incredible power to endure and triumph.”

11. We Don’t Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Modern Ireland by Fintan O’Toole

“A celebrated Irish author’s magisterial, brilliantly insightful chronicle of the wrenching transformations that dragged his homeland into the modern world.” “Like reading a great tragicomic Irish novel.” A remarkably compassionate yet exacting observer, the author in coruscating prose captures the peculiar Irish habit of ‘deliberate unknowing,’ which allowed myths of national greatness to persist even as the foundations were crumbling.”

June

1. Accidental Gods: On Race, Empire, and Men Unwittingly Turned Divine
by Anna Della Subin

A provocative history of men who were worshipped as gods that illuminates the connection between power and religion and the role of divinity in a secular age. “At once deeply learned and delightfully antic, the book offers an unusual keyhole through which to observe the creation of our modern world. It is that rare thing: a lyrical, entertaining work of ideas.”

2. Booth by Karen Joy Fowler

“An epic and intimate novel about the family behind one of the most infamous figures in American history: John Wilkes Booth.” “The book is a startling portrait of a country in the throes of change and a vivid exploration of the ties that make, and break, a family.”

3. The Ocean at the End of the Lane by Neil Gaiman

“A haunting novel that explores the awesome power of memory, friendship, and sacrifice.” “A book about the truths—some wonderful, some terrible—that children know and adults do not.” Named Book of the Year by the UK National Book Awards, the novel is “a groundbreaking triumph of storytelling as delicate as a butterfly wing and as menacing as a knife in the dark.”

4. River of the Gods: Genius, Courage, and Betrayal in the Search for the Source of the Nile by Candace Millard

The harrowing story of one of the great feats of exploration of all time and its complicated legacy. “A lean, fast-paced account of the almost absurdly dangerous quest by Richard Burton and John Speke to solve the geographic riddle of their era.”

5. Void Moon by Michael Connelly

“A riveting, breathless thriller.” The beautiful female protagonist of this novel executes a heist that goes very wrong and is suddenly on the run—with a near-psychotic Vegas “fixer” killing everyone who knew about the job.

May

1. Bleeding Heart Yard by Ellie Griffiths

“A stunning legal thriller. Jaw-dropping red herrings, head-banging twists and turns, and Rashomon-like alternative narratives add to the briskly paced plot, which builds to a reconstruction of the original crime and a bombshell revelation.”

2. Cochrane: The Real Master and Commander by David Cordingly

Nicknamed the Sea Wolf by Napoleon, Thomas Cochrane was one of the most daring and successful naval heroes of all time. The author “tells the rip-roaring story of the archetypal Romantic hero who conquered the seas and, in the process, defined his era.”

3. The Consequences by Manuel Munoz

“Shimmering stories set in California’s Central Valley by a virtuoso story writer.” “With an unflinching hand, Munoz depicts the Mexican and Mexican-American farmworkers who put food on our tables but are regularly and ruthlessly rounded up by the immigration authorities, as well as the quotidian struggles and immense challenges faced by their families.”

4. The Edge of Sadness by Edwin O’Connor

“A realistic Christian novel of hope in a non-Christian age.” “The author succeeds in delineating poignantly the overwhelming spiritual storms of the soul which assail the conscientious clergyman.”

5. The Ethiopian Affair by Michael Barrington

A captivating thriller about a joint attempt by the CIA and British intelligence to investigate a potential attempt by terrorists to kidnap the American ambassador to Ethiopia that takes the reader to Somalia, Kenya, El Salvador, England, and the USA as well as Ethiopia. “This page-turning suspense novel reaches an unusual, dramatic, and unanticipated conclusion,”

6. Like a Champion by Vincent Chu

“In eighteen stories that shine a light on people who are far from champions, the book is an ode to underdogs and longshots, sad office parties and one-sided basketball games, disappointed worker bees and hopeful lovers.” “The brilliance of this collection is not only these complex portrayals but the surprising twists that make us nod in recognition at what makes us hopeful and human. A fun and deeply moving read!”

7. The Pigeon Tunnel: Stories from My Life by John Le Carre

“In this memoir, the author is as funny as he is incisive, reading into the events he witnesses the same moral ambiguity with which he imbues his novels.” “He endows each happening with vividness and humor, now making us laugh out loud, now inviting us to think anew about events and people we believed we understood.” “Best of all, he gives us a glimpse of a writer’s journey over more than six decades, and his own hunt for the human spark that has given so much life and heart to his fictional characters.”

8. Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious by D.H. Lawrence

Two profound essays by one of the English language’s most famous and controversial authors. Initially intended as a response to psychoanalytic criticism of his novel Sons and Lovers, these works progressed into a counterproposal to the Freudian psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious and the incest motive. “They offer a bold synthesis of literary theory and criticism of Freudian psychology.”

9. The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt by Toby Wilkinson

“A rich portrait of ancient Egypt’s complex evolution over the course of three millennia.” “Filled with new information and unique interpretations, the book is a riveting and revelatory work of wild drama, bold spectacle, unforgettable characters, and sweeping history.”

10. Samuelson Friedman: The Battle over the Free Market by Nicholas Wapshott

The author “brings narrative verve and puckish charm to the story of two giants of modern economics—Paul Samuelson (a towering figure in Keynesian economics) and Milton Friedman (a conservative champion of “monetarism”)—and their braided lives and colossal intellectual battles.”

11. Starry Messenger: Cosmic Perspectives on Civilization by Neil deGrasse Tyson

“Bringing his cosmic perspective to civilization on Earth, the author shines new light on the crucial fault lines of our time—war, politics, religion, truth, beauty, gender, and race—in a way that stimulates a deeper sense of unity for us all.”

12. Unnatural by Deven Greene

“A fascinating and thought-provoking medical thriller about the ethical dilemma of genetic manipulation.” “Murder and genetic engineering make for an action-packed story with strong characters, hidden motives, and twists and turns, with much of the story set in China.”

13. The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder by David Grann

“A page-turning story of shipwreck, survival, and savagery, culminating in a court martial that reveals a shocking truth. The powerful narrative reveals the deeper meaning of the events on the Wager, showing that it was not only the captain and crew who ended up on trial, but the very idea of empire.”

14. When We Were Orphans by Kazuo Ishiguro

Seeking to investigate the alleged kidnappings of his parents twenty years earlier, the novel’s protagonist travels to war-torn Shanghai. “Masterful, suspenseful, and psychologically acute, the novel offers a profound meditation on the shifting quality of memory, and the possibility of avenging one’s past.”

15. The Widows of Malabar Hill by Sujata Massey

In 1920s India, Bombay’s only female lawyer is investigating a suspicious will on behalf of three Muslim widows living in full purdah when the case takes a turn for the murderous. “Inspired by the woman who made history as India’s first female attorney, the novel is a richly wrought story of multicultural 1920s Bombay.”

16. World Order by Henry Kissinger

The former Secretary of State provides “an astute analysis that illuminates many of today’s critical international issues.” “A deep meditation on the roots of international harmony and global disorder that is provocative and articulate, blending historical insight with geopolitical prognostication.”

April

1. Cinema Speculation by Quentin Tarantino

“Organized around key American films from the 1970s, this book is as intellectually rigorous and insightful as it is rollicking and entertaining. At once film criticism, film theory, a feat of reporting, and wonderful personal history.”

2. Five Decembers by James Kestrel

“A gripping thriller, a staggering portrait of war, and a heartbreaking love story.” “Spanning the entirety of World War II, the book is a beautiful, masterful, powerful novel that will live in your memory forever.”

3. The Key and Diary of a Mad Old Man by Junichiro Tanizaki

“These two modern classics by the great Japanese novelist both utilize the diary form to explore the authority that love and sex have over all.”

4. The Lioness by Chris Bohjalian

“A luxurious African safari turns deadly for a Hollywood starlet and her entourage in this riveting historical thriller.” “The best possible combination of Hemingway and Agatha Christie—a gorgeously written story about the landscape and risks of Africa, whose edge-of-your-seat plot makes it impossible to put down.”

5. Putin’s World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest by Angela Stent

A renowned foreign policy expert examines how Putin has created a paranoid and polarized world—and increased Russia’s status on the global stage. “The book examines the country’s turbulent past, how it has influenced Putin, the Russians’ understanding of their position on the global stage and their future ambitions—and their conviction that the West has tried to deny them a seat at the table of great powers since the USSR collapsed.”

March

1. Adrift: America in 100 Charts by Scott Galloway

“An urgent examination of the future of our nation—and how we got here.” The author looks to the past —from 1945 to present day—to explain just how America got to this precipice, telling the story of our nation through 100 charts.

2. Blackett’s War: The Men Who Defeated the Nazi U-Boats and Brought Science to the Art of Warfare by Stephen Budiansky

The story of an intensely private, bohemian physicist who did as much as anyone to defeat Nazi Germany by revolutionizing the Allied anti-submarine effort through the disciplined, systematic implementation of simple mathematics and probability theory.

3. Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver

“Equal parts hilarious and heartbreaking, this is the story of an irrepressible boy nobody wants, but readers will love.” Set in the mountains of southern Appalachia, the book is about a boy born to single mother in a single-wide trailer, with no assets beyond his dead father’s good looks and copper-colored hair, a caustic wit, and a fierce talent for survival.

4. I Will Have Vengeance by Maurizio de Giovanni

This is the first in a series of masterful crime novels set in fascist Italy, with Commissario Ricciardi who, through visions, is able to see the final seconds in the lives of victims of violent deaths. The case involves the brutal murder of the world’s greatest tenor at Naples’ San Carlos Theater.

5. The Lion House: The Coming of a King by Christopher de Bellaigue

“Narrated through the eyes of the intimates of Suleyman the Magnificent, the sixteenth-century sultan of the Ottoman Empire, the book animates with stunning immediacy the fears and stratagems of those brought into orbit around him: the Greek slave who becomes his Grand Vizier, the Venetian dealer who serves as his go-between, and the Russian consort who becomes his most beloved wife.” “The author tells the story not just of rival superpowers in an existential duel...but what it means to live in a time when a few men get to decide the fate of the world.”

6. *Midnight in Washington: How We Almost Lost Our Democracy and Still Could*
By Adam Schiff

“The fascinating inside account of American democracy in its darkest hour, from the rise of autocracy unleashed by Trump to the January 6 insurrection, and a warning that those forces remain as potent as ever—from the congressman who led the first impeachment of Donald J. Trump.”

7. *Monkeewrench* by P. J. Tracy

The first in a mystery/thriller series featuring members of a software company in Minneapolis called Monkeewrench and two teams of detectives—one in Minnesota and one in Wisconsin. When the software team develops a video game called Serial Detective, a real-life serial killer mimics the first two scenarios exactly. They have to decide whether to tell the police or protect themselves by concealing a horror they thought they had erased and left behind. This book is marked by vividly drawn characters at all levels.

8. *Path Lit by Lightning: The Life of Jim Thorpe* by David Maraniss

The story of the Native American athlete who rose to world fame as a mythic talent who excelled at all sports. He won gold medals in the decathlon and pentathlon at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, was an All-American football player at the Carlisle Indian School, the star of the first class of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and played major league baseball for John McGraw’s New York Giants. But despite his colossal skills, his life was a struggle against the odds racism imposed, but he never succumbed.

9. *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria: Birthplace of the Modern Mind* by Justin Pollard and Howard Reid

“In this compulsively readable narrative, the authors bring one of history’s most fascinating and prolific cities to life, creating a treasure trove of intellectual and cultural origins.” “Sparkling with fresh insights on science, philosophy, culture, and invention, this is an irresistible, eye-opening delight.”

10. *Wild Tales: A Rock & Roll Life* by Graham Nash

“A candid and riveting autobiography that belongs on the reading list of every classic rock fan.” “Nash has valuable insights into a world and time many think they know from the outside but few have experienced at its epicenter, and equally wonderful anecdotes about the people around him: the Beatles, the Stones, Hendrix, Cass Elliott, Dylan, and other rock luminaries.”

February

1. *And Finally: Matters of Life and Death* by Henry Marsh

An unflinching and deeply personal exploration of death, life, and neuroscience. “Eligiac, candid, luminous and poignant, the book is ultimately not so much about death, but rather about life and what matters in the end.”

2. An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us by Ed Yong

“A dazzling tour of the radically different ways that animals perceive the world that will fill you with wonder and forever alter your perspective, by a Pulitzer Prize-winning science journalist.”
“Funny, rigorous, and suffused with the joy of discovery, the book takes us on what Marcel Proust called ‘the only true voyage—not to visit strange lands, but to possess other eyes.’”

3. The Lost Ones by Samuel Beckett

A short and concise metaphor for human society and our pitiful individual existence within the collective. “Here is human motivation, hope and loss reduced to essence, small repeated gestures echoed in a repetitive language of intense poignance and beauty.”

4. The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver

The story is told by the wife and four daughters of a fierce, evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1958. “Powerful...the author has with infinitely steady hands worked the prickly threads of of religion, politics, race, sin and redemption into a thing of terrible beauty.”

January

1. Aristotle’s Way: How Ancient Wisdom Can Change Your Life by Edith Hall

Aristotle developed a humane program for becoming a happy person which has stood the test of time, comprising much of what today we associate with the good life: meaning, creativity, and positivity. “In expert yet vibrant modern language, Hall lays out the crux of Aristotle’s thinking, mixing affecting autobiographical anecdotes with a deep wealth of classical learning.”

2. Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole by Susan Cain

“The author...explores the power of the bittersweet personality, revealing a misunderstood side of mental health and creativity while offering a roadmap to facing grief in order to live life to the fullest.” “Bittersweet grabs you by the heart and doesn’t let go.”

3. How Far the Light Reaches: A Life in Ten Sea Creatures by Sabrina Imbler

“A fascinating tour of creatures from the surface to the deepest ocean floor, inviting us to envision wilder, grander, and more abundant possibilities for the way we live.” The book explores themes of adaptation, survival, sexuality, and care at the same time the mixed-race and gender-fluid author weaves the wonders of marine biology with stories of their own family, relationships, and coming of age.

4. Klara and the Sun by Kazuo Ishiguro

The story of an “Artificial Friend” with outstanding observational qualities, who, from her place in the store, watches carefully the behavior of those who come in to browse, and of those who pass on the street outside. “An intriguing take on how artificial intelligence might play a role in our futures...a poignant meditation on love and loneliness.”

5. Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus

The story of a formidable, unapologetic, and inspiring scientist in 1960s California whose career takes a detour when she becomes the unlikely star of a beloved cooking show. “Laugh-out-loud funny, shrewdly observant, and studded with a dazzling cast of supporting characters, Lessons in Chemistry is as original and vibrant as its protagonist.”

6. Once an Eagle by Anton Myrer

“A remarkable novel...utterly engrossing...it is an astute study of the mind and character of a good general and a good man. And it is a brilliant inside view of the life of a career officer in peace and war.” “Simply the best work of fiction on leadership in print.” The novel tells the story of two soldiers who are adversaries over a lifetime—from World War I to Vietnam—one who puts duty, honor, and the men he commands over self-interest and the other who brilliantly advances by making the right connections behind the lines and in Washington’s corridors of power.

7. Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan

Keegan distills the years of suffering and torture that young girl and women underwent in Ireland’s Magdalene laundries at the hands of Catholic nuns in “a hypnotic and electrifying short tale that transcends country, transcends time.” It tells a “deeply affecting story of hope, quiet heroism, and empathy along with a remarkable portrait of love and family.”

8.. Suspect by Robert Crais

The coming together of two members of the LAPD, both suffering from their own form of PTSD—one a detective who was severely wounded and his partner killed in a brutal robbery/murder and the other a canine that was retired from the military after it was shot and its handler killed by sniper fire in Afghanistan. “An intense, fast-paced, and thrilling page-turner.”

9. Troublesome Young Men: The Rebels Who Brought Churchill to Power and Helped Save England by Lynne Olson

A riveting history of the daring politicians who challenged the disastrous policies of the British government on the eve of World War II. The book highlights several young (and now mostly unremembered) Tory politicians who took the unpopular position of opposing Neville Chamberlain’s policy of appeasement and pushing for a replacement that ultimately resulted in Churchill’s ascension to the Prime Minister’s office.

11. Wench by Dolen Perkins-Valdez

An enchanting and unforgettable novel based on little-known fact that tells the story of four Black enslaved women in the years preceding the Civil War. “A startling and original work of fiction that raises provocative questions of power and freedom, love and dependence.”

2022

December

1. Cork Dork: A Wine-Fueled Adventure Among the Obsessive Sommeliers, Big Bottle Hunters, and Rogue Scientists Who Taught me to Live for Taste by Bianca Bosker

“With boundless curiosity, humor, and a healthy dose skepticism, the author takes the reader inside underground tasting groups, exclusive New York City restaurants, California mass-market wine factories, and even a neuroscientist’s fMRI machine she attempts to answer the most nagging question of all: what’s the big deal about wine?”

2. The Dog Stars by Peter Heller

In this gripping story of a man who has somehow survived a flu epidemic that has killed everyone he loved and devastated the world, the author provides “an ode to friendship between two men...the strong bond between a human and a dog, and a reminder of what is worth living for.” Beautifully written, it is an ‘end-of-the-world novel that is more like a rapturous beginning.”

3. Driving on the Rim by Thomas McGuane

“The unforgettable story of a housepainter turned doctor in Montana who finds himself on a darkly funny journey to salvation in this ‘irrepressibly comic and optimistic novel.” When he is accused of negligent homicide in the death of his former lover, he finds himself ostracized by his colleagues and realizes just how small his little village really is.

4. Kolymisky Heights by Lionel Davidson

“Fast-moving, exhilarating, and starring a highly unusual hero, this book is an unforgettable thriller with a spectacular denouement.” Per the iconic author Phillip Pullman: “The best thriller I have ever read.”

5. Rumpole a la Carte by John Mortimer

Six tales featuring everyone’s favorite barrister, the irascible Horace Rumpole—disheveled, polemical, and immensely fond of cigars, Wordsworth, and Chateau Thames Embankment—whose wife he immortalized as She Who Must Be Obeyed.

6. Stolen Focus: Why You Can’t Pay Attention—and How to Think Deeply Again by Johann Hari

A groundbreaking examination of why our ability to pay attention is collapsing and how to get our attention back. “The author went on an epic journey across the world to interview the leading experts on human attention—and he discovered that everything we think we know about this crisis is wrong.”

November

1. Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy

The classic story of one of the most loved and memorable heroines in literature. It addresses the very nature of society at all levels—of destiny, death, human relationships, and the irreconcilable contradictions of existence.

2. Brave New World by Aldous Huxley

“One of the most profound dystopian works.” It is “a searching vision of an unequal, technologically advanced future where humans are genetically bred, socially indoctrinated, and pharmaceutically anesthetized to passively uphold an authoritarian ruling order—all at the cost of our freedom, full humanity, and perhaps our souls.”

3. Call Him Jack: The Story of Jackie Robinson, Black Freedom Fighter by Yohuru Williams

“An enthralling, eye-opening portrayal of the barrier-breaking American hero as a lifelong, relentlessly proud fighter for Black justice and civil rights.” “An exciting biography that recovers the real person behind the legend, reanimating this famed figure’s legacy for new generations, widening our focus from the sportsman to the man as a whole, and deepening our appreciation for his achievements on the playing field in the process.”

4. The Daughter of Time by Josephine Tey

“One of the best mysteries of all time” which recreates one of history’s most famous and vicious crimes—the supposed killing of the two princes in London Tower by Richard III. A Scotland Yard detective, recuperating from a broken leg, becomes fascinated by a picture of the king and determines to find out once and for all what kind of man Richard Plantagenet really was and who really killed the two princes.

5. An Honest President: The Life and Presidencies of Grover Cleveland by H. P. Jeffries

A biography of the only president to be elected to two non-consecutive terms reveals a tough, honest, courageous leader who took responsibility for his own actions and wasn’t afraid to take on corruption where he saw it.

6. Kingdom of Characters: The Language Revolution That Made China Modern by Jing Tau

The author argues that the most daunting challenge to modernizing China was a linguistic one—the century-long fight to make the formidable Chinese language accessible to the modern world of global trade and digital technology. “With larger-than-life characters and an unexpected perspective on the major events of China’s tumultuous twentieth century, she reveals how language is both a technology to be perfected and a subtle, yet potent, power to be exercised and expanded.

7. The Man Who Invented Motion Pictures: A True Tale of Obsession, Murder, and the Movies
By Paul Fischer

A “spellbinding, thriller-like” history about the invention of the motion picture and the mysterious, forgotten man behind it—detailing his life, work, disappearance, and legacy. “An absorbing tale, elegantly written and brilliantly told, with the plot twists and surprise ending worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster.”

8. Night, Forgotten by Meghan Joyce Tozer

“A dramatic and undeniably addictive psychological thriller about a young woman whose life changes in an instant, and nothing is ever the same.” After being sexually assaulted but unable to remember anything about the incident, the protagonist is desperate to solve the mystery of what happened to her and is driven to more and more erratic behavior until the truth about that night is revealed.

9. Portrait of a Thief by Grace D. Li

“Oceans Eleven meets The Farewell in a lush, lyrical heist novel inspired by the true story of Chinese art vanishing from Western museums; about diaspora, the colonization of art, and the complexity of the Chinese-American identity.”

10. Razor Girl by Carl Hiaasen

A lovable con woman and a disgraced detective team up to find a redneck reality TV star in this novel in which the author “meets his usual sky-high standards for elegance, craziness, and mike-drop humor.”

11. Three Days at Camp David: How a Secret Meeting in 1971 Transformed the Global Economy by Jeffrey E. Garten

The author, a former dean of the Yale School of Management and Under Secretary of Commerce, chronicles the meeting at which President Nixon unilaterally ended the last vestige of the gold standard—breaking the link between gold and the dollar—which transformed the entire global monetary system. Based on extensive historical research and interviews with several participants, the author analyzes the impact of this change on the American economy and world markets, and explores its ramifications now and for the future.

12. Victory. Stand! Raising My Fist for Justice by Tommy Smith

The author looks back on his childhood growing up in rural Texas through to his stellar athletic career, culminating in his historic victory and podium protest at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. “Phenomenal...Timely and timeless, a must-read not just for sports fans but for everyone.

October

1. American Zion: Cliven Bundy, God, and Common Lands in the West by Betsy Gaines Quammen”

“A deep, fascinating dive into a uniquely American brand of religious zealotry that poses a grave threat to our national parks, wilderness areas, wildlife sanctuaries, and other public lands; it also happens to be a delight to read.”

2. City Dark by Roger A. Canal

“A vanished mother, the grip of darkness, a lifelong mystery. Forty years later, a prosecutor faces them all again, this time as a murder suspect in a pulse-pounding legal thriller of psychological suspense.”

3. Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law by Mary Roach

“An irresistible investigation into the unpredictable world where wildlife and humans meet.”
“Combining little-known forensic science and conservation genetics with a motley cast of laser scarecrows, langur impersonators, and trespassing squirrels, the author reveals as much about humanity as about nature’s lawbreakers.”

4. Horse by Geraldine Brooks

“A discarded painting in a junk pile, a skeleton in an attic, and the greatest racehorse in American history: from these strands, a Pulitzer Prize winner braids a sweeping story of spirit, obsession, and injustice across American history.” “Based on the remarkable true story of the record-breaking thoroughbred Lexington, Horse is a novel of art and science, love and obsession, and our unfinished reckoning with racism.”

5. The Last Trial by Scott Turow

“Two formidable men collide in this ‘first-class legal thriller’ about a celebrated criminal defense attorney and the prosecution of his lifelong friend—a doctor accused of murder.”
“Full of deep insights into the spaces where the fragility of human nature and the justice system collide, this book is a masterful legal thriller that unfolds in page-turning suspense—and questions how we measure a life.”

6. March by Geraldine Brooks

From Louisa May Alcott’s beloved classic Little Women, the author has animated the character of the absent father and crafted a story “filled with the ache of love and marriage and with the power of war upon the mind and heart of one unforgettable man.” With pitch-perfect writing, the author follows March as he leaves behind his family to aid the Union cause in the Civil War, where his experiences utterly change his marriage and challenge his most ardently held beliefs.

7. Master and Commander by Patrick O’Brian

The classic first novel of the epic Aubrey/Maturin series, widely considered “the best historical novels ever written.” It begins the legendary friendship that anchors this beloved saga set against the thrilling backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars. The author “provides endlessly varying shocks and surprises—comic, grim, farcical and tragic.”

8. Men in My Situation by Per Petterson

“A tender, merciless portrait of a life going to pieces.” The protagonist’s life is in a tailspin when he is unable to process the grief of losing his parents and brothers in a tragic ferry accident. However, when his daughter has a crisis of her own and reaches out, he must find a way to respond to someone who, after everything, still needs him.

9. Miracle at Midway by Gordon W. Prange

This “stirring, even suspenseful, narrative” is the first book to tell the story of the epic battle from both the American and Japanese sides. It reveals how America won its first and greatest victory of the Pacific war—and how easily it could have been a loss.

10. The Spinster by Chloe Laube

The protagonist is trapped—doomed to spinsterhood unless she can escape her mother’s household. “The Spinster is pure fun.” “The author’s writing style and sense of humor made the book so captivating, I could not put it down.”

11. Squeeze Me by Carl Hiaasen

“A hilarious novel of social and political intrigue, set against the glittering background of Florida’s gold coast.” “Irreverent, ingenious, and uproariously entertaining, the novel perfectly captures the absurdity of our times.”

September

1. Firebird by James Carroll

Set in post-World War II Washington, DC, this book is the chilling story of the theft by the Soviet Union of America’s precious atomic secrets, in what has been called the most fateful act of espionage in the 20th century. It is also a disturbing examination of our political and moral disenchantment.

2. The Flower Boat Girl by Larry Feign

Historical fiction based on the true story of a young woman working on a floating brothel at the beginning of the 1800s in China’s Canton delta who is captured by pirates, marries the pirate chief, assumes leadership after his death, and becomes the head of perhaps the largest pirate fleet of its time.

3. Noir by Christopher Moore

An “absurdly outrageous, sarcastically satiric, zany noir novel set on the mean streets of post-World War II San Francisco featuring a diverse cast of memorable characters, including a black mamba.” “Think Raymond Chandler meets Damon Runyon with more than a dash of Bugs Bunny and the Looney Tunes All Stars.”

4. November Road by Lou Berney

“Set against the assassination of JFK, a poignant and evocative crime novel that centers on a desperate cat-and-mouse chase across 1960s America—a story of unexpected connections, daring possibilities, and the hopes of a second chance.” When people say they want to read a really good novel, the kind you just can’t put down, this is the kind of book they mean. Exceptional.”

5. Pnin by Vladimir Nabokov

A story by the master novelist about a professor of Russian, a tireless lover, who takes the wrong train to deliver a lecture in a language he cannot master. He is the focal point of subtle academic conspiracies he cannot begin to comprehend, yet he stages a faculty party to end all faculty parties forever.

6. The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains by Nicholas Carr

This book asks whether, as we enjoy the internet's bounties, are we sacrificing our ability to read and think deeply? It includes a deep examination of the cognitive and behavioral effects of smartphones and social media.

7. Who Killed Jane Stanford?: A Gilded Age Tale of Murder, Deceit, Spirits and the Birth of a University by Richard White

A premier historian penetrates the fog of corruption and cover-up still surrounding the murder of a Stanford University founder to establish who did it, how, and why. "Against a backdrop of Honolulu's early 20th century machine politics, rogue policing, tong wars, and heated newspaper rivalries, the author's search for the murderer takes us into Jane Stanford's imperial household and the academic enmities of the university." "White writes with clarity, precision, and a bone-dry sense of humor."

August

1. The Art of Eating by M.F.K. Fisher and Joan Reardon

Julia Child: "The author's wit and fulsome opinions on food and those who produce it, comment on it, and consume it are as apt today as they were decades ago when she composed them."

Alice Waters: "This comprehensive volume should be required reading for every cook. It defines in a sensual and beautiful way the vital relationship between food and culture."

2. The Autobiography of Mark Twain by Mark Twain

The book comprises a rambling collection of anecdotes and ruminations rather than a more typical autobiography. He thought his autobiography would be most entertaining if he went off on whims and tangents in non-sequential order.

3. Bolivar: American Liberator by Marie Arana

Walter Isaacson: "A brilliant biography that reads like a wonderful novel but is researched like a masterwork of history."

"Drawing on a wealth of primary documents, the author vividly captures the early nineteenth-century South America that made Bolivar the man he became—fearless general, brilliant strategist, consummate diplomat, dedicated abolitionist, gifted writer, and flawed politician."

4. The Diamond Eye by Kate Quinn

"Based on a true story, the book is a haunting novel of heroism born of desperation, of a mother who became a soldier, of a woman who found her place in the world and changed the course of history forever." As World War II began, Lyudmila Pavlichenko, who had earned a marksmanship certificate for her own reasons, became a lethal hunter of Nazis known as Lady Death and was sent to America on a goodwill tour to solicit American support for the Russian effort.

5. Dream On, Dancing Queen by Chloe Laube

While on a cruise with her best friend in the Mediterranean Sea, the American heroine falls for a debonair Italian man and begins an odyssey filled with pasta and passion. What begin as his somewhat innocuous temper tantrums, however, morph into startling mood swings, striking fear in her heart.

6. Frequently Asked Questions About the Universe by Jorge Cham and Daniel Whiteson

“Delightful, funny, and intelligent.” This witty, entertaining, and fully illustrated book is an essential troubleshooting guide for the perplexing aspects of reality, big and small, covering space, time, gravity, and much more.

7. Grendel by John Gardner

New York Times: “An extraordinary achievement.”

The classic and much-lauded retelling of Beowulf that follows the monster Grendel as he learns about humans and fights the war at the center of the Anglo-Saxon classic.

8. The Last Winter: The Scientists, Adventurers, Journeymen, and Mavericks Trying to Save the World by Porter Fox

“One man’s ‘curiously thrilling joyride’ of travelogue, history, and climatology, across a planet on the brink of cataclysmic transformation.” “In this deeply researched, beautifully written, and adventure-filled book, the journalist author travels along the edge of the Northern Hemisphere’s snow line to track the scope of the drastic change caused by the shrinkage of winter, which will literally change everything.”

9. Manhattan Phoenix: The Great Fire of 1835 and the Emergence of Modern New York by Daniel S. Levy

This book vividly shows how the Great Fire of 1835, which nearly leveled Manhattan, also created the ashes from which the city was reborn. The author “charts the city’s almost miraculous growth during the early 19th century by focusing on the topics that shaped its destiny, starting with the fire but including water, land, disease, culture, and politics, interweaving the lives of New Yorkers who took part in its transformation.”

10. Patriot Number One: American Dreams in Chinatown by Lauren Hilgers

The deeply reported story of one indelible family transplanted from rural China to New York City, forging a life between two worlds. The story centers on the leader of a village uprising against a corrupt local government who also instigated a series of pro-democracy protests who, with his wife, escapes to America. “With a novelist’s eye for character and detail, the author captures the joys and indignities of building a life in a new country—and the stubborn allure of the American dream.”

11. *Six California Kitchens: A Collection of Recipes, Stories, and Cooking Lessons from a Pioneer of California Cuisine* by Sally Schmitt and Troyce Hoffman

“The quintessential California cookbook, with farm-to-table recipes from the author, a pioneering female chef and original owner of the French Laundry in the Napa Valley.”
“With gorgeous food and sense-of-place photography, this is a masterful, story-rich cookbook for home and aspiring chefs who cook locally and seasonally, food historians, fans of wine country, and anyone who wants to bring the spirit of Northern California home with them.”

12. *Two Nights in Lisbon* by Chris Pavone

Stephen King: “There’s no such thing as a book you can’t put down, but this one was close.”

The story of a recently married woman, accompanying her husband on a business trip to Lisbon where he vanishes from their hotel the morning after their arrival. “With sparkling prose and razor-sharp insights, the author delivers a stunning and sophisticated international thriller that will linger long after the surprising final page.”

13. *Truman* by David McCullough

The Pulitzer-prize winning biography by one of America’s most beloved and distinguished historians. Filled with vivid characters and dramatic events, the author not only captures the man—a more complex, informed, and determined man than ever before imagined—but also the turbulent times in which he rose, boldly, to meet unprecedented challenges.”

July

1. *Alibi* by Joseph Kanon

One of the best psychological mystery/thrillers ever. Set in post-war Venice just after World War II, this richly detailed, somewhat slow-moving book explores the moral dimension of trying to live and survive in a fascist country at war. It beautifully and accurately describes the Venetian environment, but its exceptional achievement is in the psychological depth and conflicting emotions the author gives all the significant characters in the book,

2. *The Changing World Order: Why Nations Succeed or Fail* by Ray Dalio

An examination of history’s most turbulent economic and political periods to reveal why the times ahead will likely be radically different from those we’ve experienced in our lifetimes—but similar to those that have happened many times before. The author describes a “Big Cycle” that “has driven the successes and failures of all the world’s major countries throughout history, revealing the timeless and universal forces behind these shifts and using them to look into the future, offering practical principles for positioning oneself for what’s ahead.”

3. *Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Anthony Doerr

“A wildly inventive, humane, and uplifting book for adults that’s infused with the magic of childhood reading experiences.” The author tells the stories of “dreamers and outsiders whose lives are glorious entwined” even though they live centuries apart. His “dazzling imagination transports us to worlds so dramatic and immersive that we forget, for a time, our own.”

4. Custer's Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America by T.J. Stiles

The author paints a portrait of Custer both deeply personal and sweeping in scope, proving how much of his legacy has been ignored. "He demolishes Custer's historical caricature and casts surprising new light on one of the best-known figures in American history, a subject of seemingly endless fascination."

5. The Eighth Sister by Robert Dugong

"A pulse-pounding thriller of espionage, spy games, and treachery." The story involves a former CIA case officer who, desperate for money, accepts his former bureau chief's offer to travel to Moscow to locate a Russian agent believed to be killing members of a clandestine U.S. spy cell.

6. The Last Days of Light by Graham Moore

"A thrilling historical novel about the nature of genius, the cost of ambition, and the battle to electrify America." "A marvelous legal thriller set in a world of invention and skullduggery, populated by the likes of Edison, Westinghouse, and Tesla, it is a beautifully researched, endlessly entertaining novel."

7. The Matchmaker: A Spy in Berlin by Paul Vidich

"A chilling cold war spy novel set in 1989 West Berlin, where an American woman targeted by the East German secret police must confront the truth behind her German husband's mysterious disappearance." "This book reaches a new level of moral complexity and brings into stark relief the often contradictory nature of spycraft."

8. North to Paradise: A Memoir by Ousman Umar

"The inspiring true story of one man's treacherous boyhood journey from a village in Ghana to the streets of Barcelona—and the path that led him home." "A visceral true story about the stark realities of life along the most dangerous migrant route across Africa that is also a portrait of extraordinary resilience in the face of unimaginable challenges, the beauty of kindness in strangers, and the power of giving back."

9. Numbers Don't Lie: 71 Stories to Help Us Understand the Modern World by Vaclav Smil

"An essential guide to understanding how numbers reveal the true state of our world—exploring a wide range of topics including energy, environment, technology, transportation, and food production." "Urgent and essential, with a mix of science, history, and wit—all in bite-sized chapters on a broad range of subjects—the book inspires readers to interrogate what they take to be true."

10. The Sixth Man: A Memoir by Andre Iguodala and Carvell Wallace

The book traces Iguodala's journey from his childhood in his Illinois hometown to his Bay Area home court today, including his experience of conflict and racial tension in a professional league made up largely of African-American men. "On drive, on pain, on accomplishment, on the shame of being given a role, and the glory of taking a role on. This is a powerful memoir of life and basketball that reveals new depths to the superstar athlete, and offers tremendous insight into the most urgent stories being told in American society today."

11. What It Took to Win: The History of the Democratic Party by Michael Kazin

The story of the United States' most enduring political party and its long, imperfect, and newly invigorated quest for "moral capitalism," from Andre Jackson to Joseph Biden. The author "traces the parties fortunes through vivid character sketches of its key thinkers and doers," while also exploring the records of Democratic Presidents. "This is the best single history we have about the Democratic Party."

June

1. A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess

One of Esquire's 50 Best Science Fiction Books of All Time, it has been described as "A brilliant novel...A savage satire on the distortions of the single and collective minds." It is a frightening fable about good and evil and the meaning of being human."

2. The Dictionary of Lost Words by Pip Williams

Based on historical records and intensive research by the author, this is a "captivating and slyly subversive fictional paean to the real women whose work on the Oxford English Dictionary went largely unheralded." "A marvelous tale about the power of language to elevate or repress." This book should be particularly interesting to readers who read and enjoyed Simon Winchester's The Professor and the Madman. While the protagonist is fictional, many of the major people in the book were real and played key roles in bringing the OED to fruition.

3. The Druid (The Dawning of Muirwood) by Jeff Wheeler

"Wheeler loads his tale with magic, intrigue, and believably conflicted characters. Readers will be impatient to know what happens next." In this fantasy novel, "Wheeler once again blends exciting confrontations with depth of characterization and superb world building."

4. Last Summer Boys by Bill Rivers

"In this rapturous coming of age debut, a naive-yet-determined Appalachian boy will go to any length to save his family over the course of one life-changing summer." "...a heartwarming tribute to innocence, first love, and the unbreakable bond of brotherhood."

5. King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa by Adam Hochschild

In the 1880s, as the European powers were carving up Africa, King Leopold II of Belgium seized for himself the vast and mostly unexplored territory surrounding the Congo River. Carrying out a genocidal plundering of the Congo, he looted its rubber, brutalized its people, and ultimately slashed its population by ten million—all the while shrewdly cultivating his reputation as a great humanitarian. It is also the deeply moving portrait of those who fought Leopold: a handful of missionaries, travelers, and young idealists who went to Africa for work or adventure and unexpectedly found themselves witnesses to a Holocaust. "Hochschild brings this largely untold story alive with the wit and skill of a Barbara Tuchman."

5. The Lincoln Lawyer by Michael Connelly

A charismatic defense attorney, who works out of the back of his Lincoln Town Car, takes on a slam-dunk case involving a Beverly Hills playboy—but as it spirals into a nightmare, he finds himself in a fight for his life. Written by the author of the Harry Bosch detective novels.”

6. Seven Brief Lessons on Physics by Carlo Rovelli

“One of the year’s most entrancing books about science.” “Clear, elegant...a whirlwind tour of some of the biggest ideas in physics.” In this brief volume (only 81 pages), the author, a renowned physicist and teacher in his own right, makes intelligible for the lay person the major concepts of physics including the general theory of relativity, quantum mechanics, thermodynamics, the smallest components making up the universe, the overall makeup of the cosmos, the origins of the universe, time, and black holes.

May

1. The Accidental President: Harry S. Truman and the Four Months That Changed the World by A. J. Baime

“A hypnotically fast-paced, masterful reporting of Harry Truman’s first 120 days as president, when he took on Germany, Japan, Stalin, and a secret weapon of unimaginable power—marking the most dramatic rise to greatness in American history.”

2. All Creatures Great and Small by James Herriot

This first memoir of the now famous Scottish veterinarian in the Yorkshire Dales of England covers his start in the area where he “discovers the wondrous variety and never-ending challenges of veterinary practice as his humor, compassion, and love of the animal world shines forth.” “Herriot is the most entertaining, most thoroughly likable, most engaging person to have come along in a long time, and the stories he has to tell are fascinating.”

3. The Bomber Mafia by Malcolm Gladwell

“While the book focuses on the early history of aerial bombing, more broadly it tells a lot about humanity, the pace of technological change, and the outsized impact that some individuals can have on history.”

4. The Chinese Bell Murders by Robert van Gulik

This is one of the first of a series of mysteries by the author (who was a Dutch diplomat and noted scholar of Chinese and Japanese culture, history, and language) using as his protagonist the magistrate Judge Dee, a historic figure who lived in Tang Dynasty China in the seventh century. Following the Ming Dynasty detective novel form, the book covers three separate mysteries, each interesting itself, but the real magic of the book is how it accurately portrays life in a village in ancient China and how the Chinese justice system worked.

5. The Final Solution: A Story of Detection by Michael Chabon

This novella is “a short, suspenseful tale of compassion and wit that re-imagines the classic detective story” that won the Aga Khan Prize for Fiction and the National Jewish Book Award. It tells the story of a nine-year-old boy who has escaped from Nazi Germany to England, his gray parrot, and the 89-year old former sleuth whose time is now mainly spent on beekeeping who gets involved in his case.

6. How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Fight for the Soul of America by Heather Cox Richardson

In this book the author argues the the Union’s (and democracy’s) blood-soaked victory in the Civil War was ephemeral. Rather the system that had sustained the defeated South moved westward and there established a foothold by instituting a new male oligarchy in the mining, cattle, and oil industries. The book “exposes a complex ideology that has swaddled white supremacy and its political, legal, economic, and physical violence in the language of freedom and rugged individualism, and, in doing so, repeatedly slashed a series of self-inflicted wounds on American democracy.”

7. I’ve Got My Eyes on You by Mary Higgins Clark

The “Queen of Suspense” comes through with a “thrilling investigation asking what we truly know about those we trust, and the secrets lying in even the most idyllic of neighborhoods.”

8. Native Tongue by Carl Hiaasen

A hilarious crime fiction novel in which dedicated, if somewhat demented, environmentalists battle sleazy real estate agents in the Florida Keys. “Hiaasen’s supply of interesting and wacky characters seems endless, as are his ideas for scenarios to put them in.”

9. Power and Thrones: A New History of the Middle Ages by Dan Jones

“Not only an engrossing read about the distant past, both informative and entertaining, but also a profoundly thought-provoking view of our not-really-so-‘new’ present.” “A rich and complicated reappraisal of an era whose legacy and lessons we are still living with today.”

10. Why We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams by Matthew Walker

“A fascinating dive into the purpose and power of slumber.” The book “provides a revolutionary exploration of sleep, examining how it affects every aspect of our physical and mental well-being.” The author also provides actionable steps toward getting a better night’s sleep every night.

11. Year Zero: A History of 1945 by Ian Buruma

The book “covers a great deal of history without minimizing the complexity of the events and the issues. It is well written and researched, full of little-known facts and incisive political analysis. What makes it unique among hundreds of other works written about this period is that it gives an overview of the effects of the war and liberation not only in Europe, but also in Asia.”

April

1. Blood and Thunder: The Epic Story of Kit Carson and the Conquest of the American West by Hampton Sides

“The author shows us how this illiterate mountain man understood and respected the Western tribes better than any other American, yet willingly followed orders that would ultimately devastate the Navajo nation. Rich in detail and spanning more than three decades, this is an essential addition to our understanding of how the West was really won.”

2. Fortune Favors the Dead by Stephen Spotswood

“A wildly charming and fast-paced mystery written with all the panache of the hardboiled classics.” Razor-sharp style, tons of flair, and all the most satisfying elements of a really good noir novel, plus plenty of original twists of its own.”

3. My Absolute Darling by Gabriel Tallent

“A brilliant and immersive, all-consuming read about one fourteen-year old girl’s heart-stopping fight for her own soul.” “Shot through with striking language in a fierce natural setting, the book is an urgently told, profoundly moving read.” Per Stephen King: “The word “masterpiece” has been cheapened by too many blurbs, but My Absolute Darling absolutely is one.”

4. Origin: A Genetic History of the Americas by Jennifer Raff

The story of who the first peoples in the Americas were, how and why they made the crossing, how they dispersed south, and how they lived based on a new and powerful kind of evidence: their complete genomes.

5. The Postmistress of Paris by Meg Waite Clayton

Inspired by a real life Chicago heiress who worked with an American journalist to smuggle artists and intellectuals out of France during World War II. “It is the haunting story of an indomitable woman whose strength, bravery, and love is a beacon of hope in a time of terror.”

6. The Premonition: A Pandemic Story by Michael Lewis

“The author’s taut and brilliant non-fiction thriller pits a band of medical visionaries against the wall of ignorance that was the official response of the Trump administration to the outbreak of COVID-19.”

7. The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary by Simon Winchester

This book is the unforgettable story of the madness and genius that contributed to “one of the greatest literary achievements in the history of English letters.”

8. The Rainmaker by John Grisham

A down-and-out lawyer takes on the case of a devastated family in an insurance dispute. The case, which starts small, “explodes into a thunderous, multi-million-dollar war of nerves, skill, and outright violence.”

9. A Swim in a Pond in the Rain by George Saunders

Based on a class on Russian Short Stories in Translation the author teaches at Syracuse University, he pairs seven essays of Socratic analyses with seven iconic short stories by Chekhov, Tolstoy, Gogol, and Turgenev to help explain how fiction works and why it’s more relevant than ever in these turbulent times. “A deep exploration not just of how great writing works but of how the mind itself works while reading, and how the reading and writing of stories make genuine connection possible.”

10. The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA by Evan Thomas

The story of the CIA’s early days as told through the careers of four glamorous, daring, idealistic men who ran covert operations for the American government from the end of World War II to Vietnam. “In the end, they were too idealistic and too honorable, and were unsuited for the dark, duplicitous life of spying.”

March

1. The Codebreaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing, and the Future of the Human Race by Walter Isaacson

The story of the Nobel Prize winner who, along with her colleagues, discovered CRISPR, a revolutionary gene editing tool that will allow us to cure diseases, fend off viruses, and have healthier babies. The book also “probes larger themes: the nature of discovery, the development of biotech, and the fine balance between competition and collaboration that drives many scientists.”

2. Down to a Soundless Sea: Stories by Thomas Steinbeck

A collection of stories by the son of John Steinbeck that “resonates with the rich history and culture of California, recalling vivid details of life in Monterey County from the turn of the century through the 1930s. The author accomplishes an amazing feat: his stories have the feel of classic literature, but his haunting voice, forceful narrative drive and dazzling Imagery are unmistakably his own.”

3. Eating to Extinction: The World’s Rarest Foods and Why We Need to Save Them by Dan Saladino

The author, a food journalist for the BBC for over 20 years, traveled the world to experience and document our most at-risk foods before it’s too late. “Over the past few decades, globalization has homogenized what we eat, and done so ruthlessly. The numbers are stark: of the roughly six thousand plants once consumed by human beings, only nine remain major staples today. Just three of these—rice, wheat, and corn—now provide 50% of all our calories.” Besides the loss of flavors, smells and textures, this homogenization has led to a lack of resilience in the face of climate change, pests, and parasites.

4. The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt by T. J. Stiles

“The dramatic story of the combative man and American icon who, through his genius and force of will, did more than perhaps any other individual to create modern capitalism.” “Epic in its scope and success, the life of Vanderbilt is also the story of the rise of America itself.”

5. Hard Cash Valley by Brian Panowich

The successful use of an autistic boy’s exceptional affinity with animals by his larcenous brother to gather all the winnings from a high stakes illicit cockfighting tournament in rural Georgia leads to torture and death in an attempt to locate the boy and control his talent. “The plotting is skilled, as is the sleuthing, and the landscape is stunning. But it’s the hard-jawed characters, with their tough talk and scarred souls, who really get under your skin.”

6. The Judge’s List by John Grisham

The protagonist follows the trail of a serial killer in what one critic calls “John Grisham’s most surprising, chilling novel yet.” “Bristling with high-tech detail and shivering with suspense.”

7. The Ministry of the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson

“A masterpiece of the imagination, using fictional eyewitness accounts to tell the story of how climate change will affect us all. It’s setting is not a desolate, post-apocalyptic world, but a future that is almost upon us.” The best science-fiction nonfiction novel I’ve ever read.”

8. The Revenant: A Novel of Revenge by Michael Punke

“A thrilling tale of betrayal and revenge set against the nineteenth century American frontier, the astonishing story of real-life trapper and frontiersman Hugh Glass.” “A remarkable tale of obsession, the human will stretched to its limits, and the lengths that one man will go to for retribution.”

February

1. A Conspiracy of Paper by David Liss

Set in 18th-century London, the book is “one of the wittiest and most suspenseful historical novels in recent memory, as well as a perceptive and beguiling depiction of the origin of today’s financial markets.”

2. The Apollo Murders by Colonel Chris Hadfield

“An exceptional thriller and exciting journey into the heart of the Cold War and the space race written by a former astronaut.” The author “captures the fierce G-forces of launch, the frozen loneliness of space, and the fear of holding on to the outside of a spacecraft orbiting the Earth at 17,000 miles per hour as only someone who has experienced all of these things in real life can.”

3. The Chancellor: The Remarkable Odyssey of Angela Merkel by Kati Marton

“The definitive biography of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, detailing the extraordinary rise and political brilliance of the most powerful—and elusive—woman in the world.” It’s a “riveting political biography, an intimate human portrait, and a revelatory look at successful leadership in action.”

4. The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity by David Graeber and David Wengrow

“A dramatically new understanding of human history, challenging our most fundamental assumptions about social evolution—from the development of agriculture and cities to the origins of the state, democracy, and inequality—and revealing new possibilities for human emancipation.” “This is a monumental book of formidable intellectual range, animated by curiosity, moral vision, and a faith in the power of direct action.”

5. The Earth is The Lord’s by Taylor Caldwell

“A magnificent epic based on the early life of Genghis Khan” The author “transports readers to a distant world and sheds light on one of history’s most enigmatic figures. Readers who are fans of James Clavell and James Michener should enjoy this book.

6. Gordo by Jaime Cortez

“Shedding profound natural light on the inner lives of migrant workers, the author’s short story collection ushers in a new era of American literature that gives voice to a marginalized generation of migrant workers in the West.” “Funny and incredibly charming, despite highlighting the acute poverty of the camp’s Latino migrant residents, the author masterfully navigates adverse conditions of migrant life while prioritizing the way people adapt to their circumstances—managing to find joy and amusement, love and triumph, that which makes us delightfully human—amid the challenge.”

7. The Lincoln Highway by Amor Towles

“A captivating piece of historical fiction that is a rollicking cross-country adventure, rife with unforgettable characters, vivid scenery, and suspense that will keep readers flying through the pages.” “Wise and wildly entertaining, permeated with light, wit, and youth.” “A classic that will be read for years to come.”

8. Midnight in Europe by Allen Furst

Paris 1938. As the shadow of war darkens Europe, democratic forces on the Continent struggle against fascism and communism, while in Spain the war has already begun. In this espionage novel, “the author paints a spellbinding portrait of a continent marching into a nightmare—and the heroes and heroines who fought back against the darkness.”

9. Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil: A Savannah Story by John Berendt

“Elegant and wicked, this may be the first true-crime novel that makes the reader want to book a bed and breakfast for an extended weekend at the scene of the crime. The author “skillfully interweaves a hugely entertaining first-person account of life in this isolated remnant of the Old South with the unpredictable twists and turns of a landmark murder case.”

10. On Trails by Robert Moor

The book is “a wondrous exploration of how trails help us understand the world—from invisible ant trails to hiking paths that span continents, from interstate highways to the internet.” “With a breathtaking arc that spans from the dawn of animal life to the digital era, On Trails is a book that makes us see our world, our history, our species, and our ways of life anew”

11. The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805 by Richard Zacks

“A real-life thriller—the true story of the unheralded American who brought the Barbary Pirates to their knees.” The author “brings this important story of America’s first covert op to life.”

12. Silverview by John Le Carre

In his last completed novel, the author turns his focus to the world that occupied his writing for the past 60 years—the secret world itself. “Silverview is the mesmerizing story of an encounter between innocence and experience and between public duty and private morals.” The author “seeks to answer the question of what we truly owe to the people we love.”

13. The Splendid and the Vile by Erik Larson

An intimate chronicle of Winston Churchill and London during the Blitz—an inspiring portrait of courage and leadership in a time of unprecedented crisis. “The Splendid and the Vile takes readers out of today’s political dysfunction and back to a time of true leadership, when, in the face of unrelenting horror, Churchill’s eloquence, courage, and perseverance bound a country, and a family, together.”

14. Stalin’s Ghost by Martin Cruz Smith

One of the author’s mystery novels involving Moscow police investigator Arkady Renko, who must walk the fine line between solving the investigation and maintaining a level of political correctness. “The dialogue is witty and well done, and the characters are very interesting.” The author “never skips an opportunity to add some acid to the backdrop and then pour some sarcasm over it, which serves the main character’s attitudes and way of life.”

15. Talk to Me by T. C. Boyle

“A lively, thought-provoking novel that asks us what it would be like if we could really talk to the animals.” “A wide-ranging and hilarious novel exploring what it means to be human, to communicate with another, and truly know another person—or animal.”

16. Why Fish Don't Exist: A Story of Loss, Love, and the Hidden Order of Life by Lulu Miller

Part biography, part memoir, part scientific adventure, the book is a wondrous fable about how to persevere in a world where chaos will always prevail." It follows the life and career of David Starr Jordan, a taxonomist, who would be credited with discovering nearly a fifth of the fish known to humans in his day, but whose collections were destroyed by catastrophe several times, yet he rebuilt his collections each time rather than give up. When her own life started to unravel, the author wondered whether Jordan's life and attitude might be a model for how to go on when all seems lost.

January

1. The Coffee Trader by David Liss

Set in Amsterdam in 1659, the book follows the protagonist, a once wealthy Jewish merchant who has suddenly lost almost everything, who tries for one last chance at success by trying to corner the market on anew commodity called "coffee."

2. Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage by Haruki Murakami

"The remarkable story of a young man haunted by a great loss, of dreams and nightmares that have unintended consequences for the world around us, and of a journey into the past that is necessary to mend the present."

3. Exit by Belinda Bauer

The story of an older man, retired and widowed, who is part of a group that helps people who have chosen to die with dignity. When a mistake occurs, however, his life is about to change forever. "A heart-pounding, heartbreaking, and often hilarious crime novel in which it's never too late for life to go fatally wrong." A quick read with indelible characters.

4. The Lost Girls by Heather Young

"A stunning novel that examines the price of loyalty, the burden of regret, the meaning of salvation, and the sacrifices we make for those we love, told in the voices of two unforgettable women linked by a decades-old family mystery at a picturesque lake house."

5. The Painter by Peter Heller

After having shot a man in a bar, a famous artist has served his time and has since struggled to manage the dark impulses that sometimes overtake him. He now lives a quiet, largely isolated life until a brutal act of new violence rips quiet life wide open and he must deal with men dead set on retribution. A beautifully written story with a deeply flawed but humane protagonist and memorable side characters.

December

1. Adolph Hitler by John Toland

The first book that anyone who wants to learn about Hitler or the war in Europe must read...a marvel of fact." A long read at 1120 pages, it provides remarkable detail on how various forces in the German hierarchy enabled it and contrasting opinions from individuals involved in the decision-making or on the sidelines."

2. Bluebird, Bluebird by Attica Locke

"A rural noir suffused with the unique music, color, and nuance of East Texas." "A layered portrait of a black man confronting his own racial ambivalence told with a pointed and poignant bluesy lyricism." "An emotionally dense and intricately detailed thriller, roiling with conflicting emotions steeped in this nation's troubled past and present."

3. The Body: A Guide For Occupants by Bill Bryson

A guide to the human body, how it functions, its remarkable ability to heal itself, and the ways it can fail. "Full of extraordinary facts and irresistible Byronesque anecdotes, it leads to a deeper understanding the miracle that is life in general and you in particular."

4. The Boys: A Memoir of Hollywood and Family by Ron Howard and Clint Howard

"By turns confessional, nostalgic, heartwarming and harrowing, the book is a dual narrative that lifts the lid on the Howard brothers' closely held lives. It's the journey of a tight four-person family unit that held fast in an unforgiving business and two brothers' who survived to become fulfilled adults."

5. The Distant Dead by Heather Young

"Powerful...a breathtaking read, with flawed and authentic characters who hit so close that at times it is impossible not to root for them." This unforgettable thriller brings a small American town to vivid life, filled with complex, flawed characters wrestling with the weight of the past, the promise of the future, and the bitter freedom that forgiveness can bring."

6. Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line by Deepa Anappara

The book plunges the reader into a neighborhood slum in India to trace the unfolding of a tragedy through the eyes of a child as he has his first perilous collisions with an unjust and complicated wider world." "Drawn on real incidents and a spate of children's disappearances in metropolitan India, this is an extraordinarily moving, flawlessly imagined book that is a triumph of suspense and captures the fierce warmth, resilience, and bravery that can emerge in times of trouble."

7. *The End of Everything: (Astrophysically Speaking)* by Katie Mack

A look at five ways the universe could end and the mind-blowing lessons each scenario reveals about the most important concepts in cosmology. “Guiding us through cutting-edge science and major concepts in quantum mechanics, cosmology, string theory, and much more, the book is a wildly fun, surprisingly upbeat ride to the farthest reaches of all that we know.”

8. *Mozart: The Reign of Love* by Jan Swafford

“The definitive biography of one of the most lauded musical geniuses in history.” He went at every piece of his life, and most noticeably his social life, with tremendous gusto. Mozart was “a man who would enrich the world with his talent for centuries to come and who would immeasurably shape classical music.”

9. *Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich

Inspired in part by the rhetoric surrounding welfare reform in America—that any job can be a ticket to a better life—the author decided to join the low-wage work force in various parts of America to test the hypothesis. She quickly discovered that no job is truly “unskilled”, that even the lowest occupations require mental and muscular effort. The book “reveals low-rent America in all its tenacity, anxiety, and surprising generosity—a land of Big Boxes, fast food, and a thousand different stratagems for survival.”

10. *Razorblade Tears* by S. A. Cosby

Two ex-cons, one White and the other Black, with nothing in common other than a criminal past and their murdered, married gay sons that each had rejected. “In their quest to do better for their sons in death than they did in life, they must confront their own prejudices as they rain down vengeance upon those who hurt their boys.” “A tour-de-force, action-packed, and profound.” “Provocative and fast-paced, the book is a story of bloody retribution, heartfelt change—and maybe even redemption.”

November

1. *Almond* by Won-pyung Sohn

The story of a young South Korean boy born with a brain condition that makes it hard for him to feel emotions like fear and anger, and of his devoted mother and grandmother who provide him with a safe and content life until a tragedy happens to both of them. Struggling with his loss, the boy begins to open himself up to new people. “A boldly original piece of fiction, plumbing the depths of the human condition with plenty of humor along the way.”

2. *Bruno, Chief of Police* by Martin Walker

The first book in a mystery series about a policeman in the South of France involves the murder of an elderly North African soldier who fought in the French Army. The book’s emphasis leans more toward the protagonist’s quirks and interests, as well as life in a small village. “A wonderfully crafted novel as satisfying as a French pastry but with none of the guilt or calories.”

3. The Burning Girls by C. J. Tudor

“An unconventional vicar must exorcise the dark past of a remote village haunted by death and disappearances in this explosive and unsettling thriller.” “Tudor’s uncanny twisty plot is populated with intriguing, damaged characters and the slow-burning suspense leads to a crackling ending” while providing a fair dose of humor.

4. Dead Mountain: The Untold True Story of the Dyatlov Pass Incident by Donnie Eichar

In February 1959 a group of nine experienced hikers in the Russian Ural Mountains died mysteriously on an elevation known as Dead Mountain. Eerie aspects of the mountain climbing incident have led to decades of speculation over the true stories and what really happened. “Here for the first time is a historical non-fiction account of the real story of what happened that night on Dead Mountain.”

5. Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes by Tamim Ansary

A rich story of world history as it looks from a new perspective: with the evolution of the Muslim community at the center. “With storytelling brio, humor, and sympathy to all sides of the story, the author illuminates a fascinating parallel to the world narrative usually heard in the West.”

6. The Howe Dynasty: The Untold Story of a Military Family and the Women Behind Britain’s Wars for America by Julie Flavell

The author traces the family from its modest roots to the exploits of the three high-ranking British military brothers who fought first with, then against their American compatriots as the latter sought independence from their mother country. The emphasis though, is on the influence of the women in the dynasty in promoting their careers and protecting their reputations.

7. Last Best Hope: America in Crisis and Renewal by George Packer

The diagnosis of America’s descent into a failed state and the envisioning a path toward overcoming our injustices, paralyzes, and divides. To point to a more hopeful way forward, he looks for a common identity and finds it in the passion for equality—the hidden code—that Americans of diverse persuasions have held for centuries. “Americans seeking to understand our current moment—which is to say, most Americans—will find much to profitably ponder in these pages.”

8. Other People’s Dirt: A Housecleaner’s Curious Adventures by Louise Rafkin

“Armed with a battery of house keys, the author takes us on an intimate tour of people’s lives, introducing us to unsuspecting clients and to a diverse group of housecleaners who have seen their fair share of dirt.” “An amusing, touching memoir of the author’s experiences on the job.”

9. Polk: The Man Who Transformed the Presidency and America by Walter R. Borneman

“The first complete and authoritative biography of a president often overshadowed in image but seldom outdone in accomplishment.” He fought for and won tariff reductions, reestablished an independent Treasury, brought Texas into the Union, bluffed Great Britain out of the lion’s share of Oregon, and wrested California and much of the Southwest from Mexico, serving as an expansionist president and decisive statesman.

10. The Seasons on Henry's Farm: A Year of Food and Life on a Sustainable Farm by Terra Brockman

"The book opens a window into what sustainable farming really entails and why it is vital and relevant to everyone who eats. Though rooted in the rolling oak-hickory hills and fertile fields and flood plains of the Mackinaw River Valley, the book ranges widely, incorporating literary, scientific, and culinary reflections occasioned by the week-by-week events of farm life."

October

1. The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley

The extraordinary story of the charismatic black leader told with "blistering honesty" and his growth from a bitter, self-destructive petty criminal to an articulate political activist who emphasized self-respect and self-help for African-Americans.

2. Harlem Shuffle by Colson Whitehead

"An ingenious story that plays out in a beautifully recreated New York City in the early 1960s. It's a family saga masquerading as a crime novel, a hilarious morality play, a social novel about race and power, and ultimately a love letter to Harlem", written by the winner of two recent Pulitzer Prizes.

3. Lethal Passage: The Story of a Gun by Erik Larson

"This devastating book illuminates America's gun culture—its manufacturers, dealers, buffs, and propagandists—but also offers concrete solutions to our national epidemic of death by firearm."

4. The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois by Honoree Fanonne Jeffers

In a combination of historical and modern story, the protagonist, in an attempt to come to terms with her own identity, "embarks on a journey through her family's past, uncovering the shocking tales of generations of ancestors—indigenous, black, and white—in the deep South. In doing so, she must learn to embrace her full heritage, a legacy of oppression and resistance, bondage and independence, cruelty and resilience that is the story—and the song—of America itself."

5. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave. Written by Himself

The memoir by the impassioned abolitionist, brilliant writer, newspaper editor, eloquent orator, and former slave.

6. The National Dream: The Great Railway 1871-1881 by Pierre Berton

"In 1871, a tiny nation, just four years old—its population well below the 4 million mark—determined that it would build the world's longest railroad across empty country, much of it unexplored. The decision—bold to the point of recklessness—was to change the lives of every man, woman, and child in Canada and alter the shape of a nation.

7. On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century by Timothy Snyder

A historian of fascism offers a guide to surviving and resisting America's turn towards authoritarianism. The book is a "call to arms and a guide to resistance, with invaluable ideas for how we can preserve our freedoms in the uncertain years to come."

8. The Overstory by Richard Powers

Winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, this book, is "a sweeping, impassioned work of activism and resistance that is also a stunning evocation of—and paean to—the natural world." In the framework of writing about trees, the author tells the story of a handful of people who "learn how to see that world and who are drawn up into its unfolding catastrophe."

9. The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age by David E. Sanger

This book provides the startling inside story of how the rise of cyberweapons transformed geopolitics like nothing since the invention of the atom bomb. "Moving from the White House Situation Room to the dens of Chinese government hackers to the boardrooms of Silicon Valley, the author, a New York Times national security correspondent, reveals a world coming face-to-face with the perils of technological revolution where everyone is a target."

10. Remember: The Science of Memory and the Art of Forgetting by Lisa Genova

A fascinating exploration of the intricacies of how we remember, why we forget, and what we can do to protect our memories, written by a Harvard-trained neuroscientist.

11. Shuggie Bain by Douglas Stuart

"An unforgettable story of a sweet and lonely boy who spends his 1980s childhood in run-down public housing in Glasgow, Scotland." "A heartbreaking story of addiction, sexuality, and love, the book is an epic portrayal of a working-class family that is rarely seen in fiction."

September

1. Black Ice by Brad Thor

On vacation abroad, America's top spy has to decide whether to return to his job or resign. When his deadly past comes calling, though, he's got no choice at all. If he succeeds, he'll walk away with everything. If not, the U. S. and its allies will be at the mercy of one of the world's most dangerous actors.

2. Blacktop Wasteland by S. A. Cosby

The winner of the 2020 Anthony Award for best hardback mystery book of the year, the New York Times Book Review calls it a "roaring, full-throttle thriller, crackling with tension and charm." It tells the story of of an honest mechanic, loving husband, and hard-working father whose dire economic circumstances force him to, for one last time, revisit his previous life as the best getaway driver east of the Mississippi.

3. 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World by Elif Shafak

“A moving novel on the power of friendship in our darkest times”, the book follows a young Turkish woman in the pulsating moments after she’s been murdered when she enters a state of heightened awareness as her brain is still active for 10 minutes and 38 seconds. In her death, “the secrets and wonders of modern Istanbul come to life.”

August

1. The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War by Don Doyle

A bold and fascinating account of the international dimensions of America’s defining conflict. The book frames the Civil War as a pivotal moment in a global struggle that would decide the survival of democracy.

2. Dead by Dawn by Paul Doiron

A Maine game warden fights for his life after being attacked following his agreement to investigate a cold case involving a suspicious drowning that was ruled an accident.

3. In Five Years by Rebecca Serle

An ambitious and workaholic New York lawyer falls asleep next to her long-time boyfriend, but wakes up to find out it is five years later in a different apartment and she is lying next to a different man. It is too real to be a dream, but what else could it be? She lives the next five years haunted by the experience and doing everything in her power to keep it from coming true. The book interestingly explores prescience, inevitability, and the impossibility of understanding the context of events despite their unfurling exactly as you have foreseen them.

4. The Lacuna by Barbara Kingsolver

A fascinating story of life in Mexico and the United States in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s through the eyes of a young man torn between two worlds, including his work with Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

5. The Last Billable Hour by Susan Wolfe

A humorous and readable mystery involving a young man who has recently joined a successful and cutthroat law firm in Silicon Valley, unappreciated and underestimated, who becomes a key asset to a female detective who is investigating the murder of a partner in the firm found in his office the night of a staff party. The book’s author is a lawyer herself and makes all the machinations and legal situations believable.

6. This Is How They Tell Me the World Ends: The Cyberweapons Arms Race by Nicole Perlroth

The untold story of the cyberweapons market—the most secretive, invisible, government-backed market on earth—and a terrifying first look at a new kind of global warfare.

July

1. Almost a Miracle—John Ferling

Comprehensive and engaging account of the American Revolutionary War. It was voted best book of 2007 by the New York American Revolution Round Table.

2. The Big Book of Espionage: The Most Complete Compendium of Double Agents, Dead Drops and Duplicitous Deeds Ever Collected—Otto Penzler (Editor)

Includes short stories written by Ian Fleming, Eric Ambler, Jeffrey Deaver, Lee Child and many more.

3. Dirt: Adventures in Lyon as Chef, Father, and Sleuth Looking for the Secret of French Cooking—Bill Buford

Beautifully written account of the author's experience in France.

4. Housekeeping—Marianne Robinson

Evocatively written novel of transience, family, and memory. Heavy subject matter treated with a light touch and wonderful writing.

5. The Mountain Sings—Nguyen Phan Que Mai

A sweeping epic of a multigenerational family in North Vietnam, written in beautiful prose.

6. Open Season—Archer Mayor

The first in a series of police crime novels, whose author uses an unassuming voice and down-to-earth style, while displaying a profound understanding of his region (small-town Vermont) and the protagonist's intuitive ability to relate to the people who live there.