

The New York Times

# Book Review

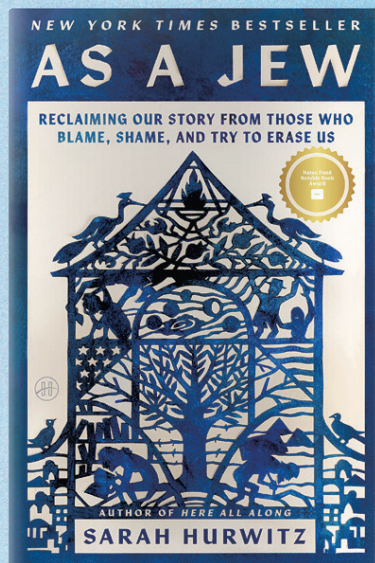
DECEMBER 14, 2025

THE  
BEST  
BOOKS  
OF  
2025

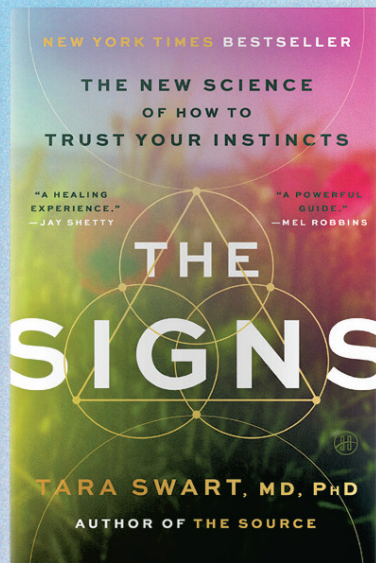


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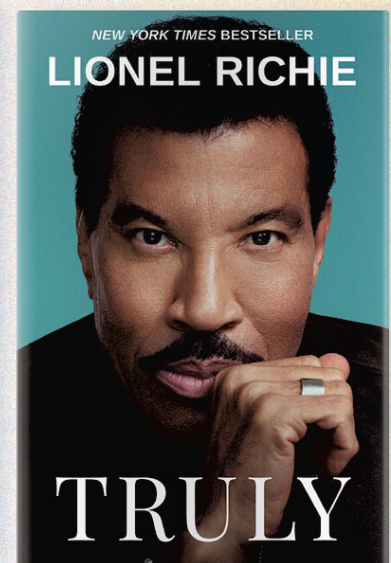
Explores how antisemitism shapes Jewish identity and how Jews can reclaim tradition.



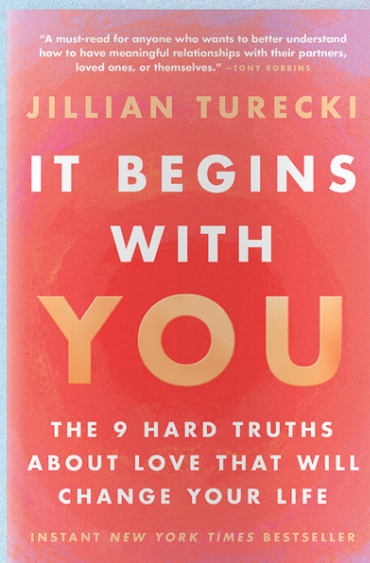
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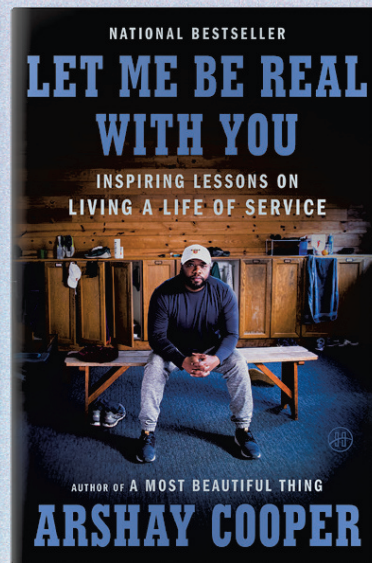
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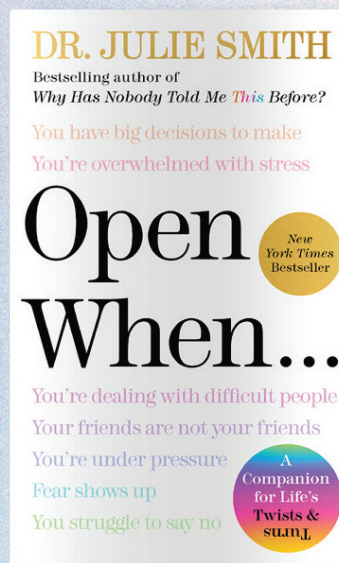
"There's an abundance of love and gratitude in this wildly entertaining, utterly charming memoir."  
—KIRKUS REVIEWS



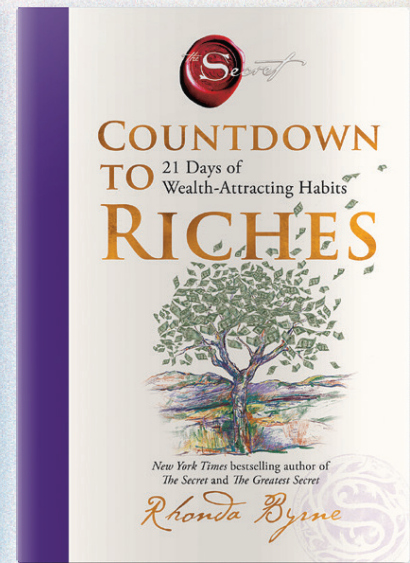
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The New York Times  
**Book Review**

DECEMBER 14, 2025

THE 10 BEST BOOKS OF 2025

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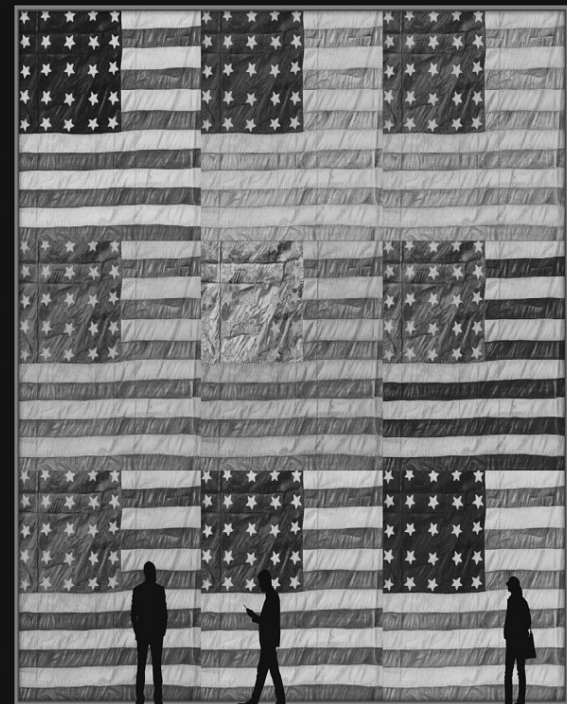
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**“The book  
the art world  
has  
been waiting for”**

*- Dr. Kathleen Foster, Curator,  
Philadelphia Museum of Art*



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**Mobbed**

TO THE EDITOR:

Andrés Reséndez, in his review of “The Nine Lives of Christopher Columbus,” by Matthew Restall (Nov. 23), summarizes the celebration of Columbus Day as an attempt by Italian Americans to seek acceptance. However, what is often overlooked is the role played by a horrific event in the Jim Crow South, which highlighted the contempt felt for Italians — Sicilians in particular — and led to the creation of the holiday.

In 1891, 11 Italian prisoners in New Orleans were dragged from the city jail by a mob and lynched after a number of them had been acquitted of murdering the city’s chief of police. To quiet the outcry, President Harrison declared Oct. 21 of the following year as Columbus Day. In other words, the first official celebration of Columbus Day was in response to blatant racism and violence against Italians.

JOHN CIRAFICI  
MILFORD, DEL.

**Justice Denied**

TO THE EDITOR:

I was familiar with much of what Jeffrey Toobin described in his review of “Injustice,” by Carol Leonnig and Aaron C. Davis (Nov. 23), but I was nonplused reading that Attorney General Merrick Garland et al. halted an internal investigation by the inspector general of the

lead-up to the Jan. 6 Capitol attacks because it would look “political.”

I think the current administration’s flagrant disregard for the rule of law is abominable. That Joe Biden’s Department of Justice pandered to politics over and above justice is just as abominable and helped set the stage for the current debacle in which we find ourselves.

(REV.) SHAUN S. BROWN  
SAN DIEGO

**CORRECTIONS**

A review on Oct. 26 about “Goliath’s Curse,” by Luke Kemp, referred incorrectly to the ancient silver mining industry. It experienced a boom during the Iron Age, not the Bronze Age. The review also referred imprecisely to the Bronze Age collapse. It resulted in the fall of existing Mycenaean, Minoan, Babylonian and Hittite empires; it did not necessarily result in the end of those groups themselves.

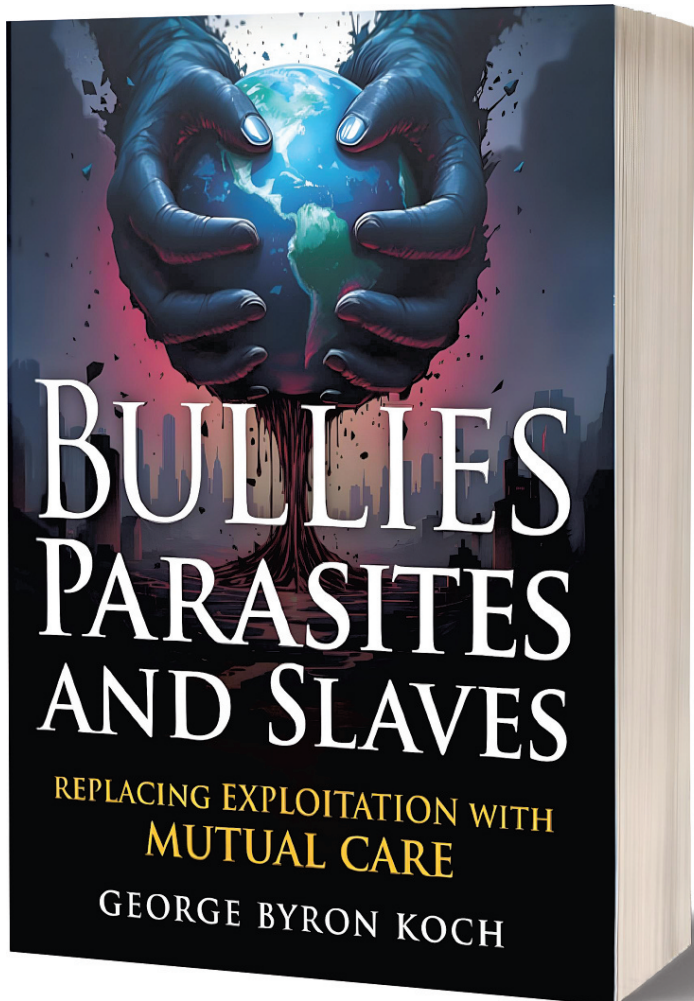


A review on Nov. 16 about the graphic history “Black Arms to Hold You Up,” by Ben Passmore, misidentified the police department that was involved in the 2016 killing of Philando Castile in Minnesota. It was the St. Anthony Police Department, not the Minneapolis Police Department.

**BOOKS@NYTIMES.COM**

# The *WORST* book of 2025 ... for kings.

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**Critique:** Original, unique, timely, exceptionally well written, thoroughly ‘reader friendly’ in organization and presentation, “Bullies, Parasites and Slaves: Replacing Exploitation with Mutual Care” is an extraordinary and unreservedly recommended addition to personal, professional, high school, and community library Contemporary Social Issues, Political Science, Leadership, Anti-Bullying, and Self-Help / Self-Improvement collections.

Here is proof, not hyperbole. Substance, not mere allegation. We can only replace their exploitation with mutual care. It is the wisest way forward. It is right, and we can make it happen.

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- *Midwest Book Review, October 2025*

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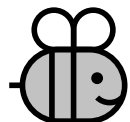
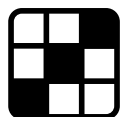
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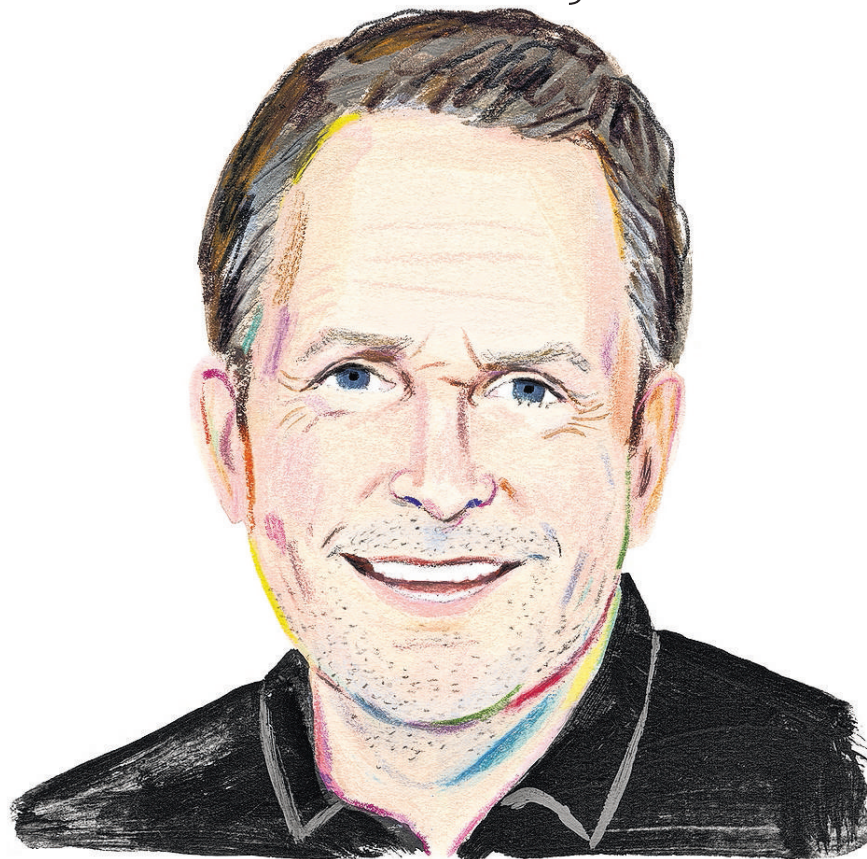
The New York Times  
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BY THE BOOK

# MICHAEL J. FOX



‘Much of my reading has become listening,’ says the actor, who has two audiobooks regularly teed up. In ‘Future Boy’ he recalls juggling roles in ‘Back to the Future’ and ‘Family Ties.’

#### What kind of reader were you as a child?

I was always an avid reader, though very rarely books on the class reading list. I had a hard-core Agatha Christie habit as a preteen. As a teenager, this grew into a passion for noir: Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain.

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

“A Gentleman in Moscow.” Amor Towles’s prose, pacing and character development are unrivaled. His work evokes an unflinching beautiful sense of longing.

#### What book might people be surprised to find on your shelves?

The Torah.

#### Describe your ideal reading experience.

I always prefer to hold a book in my hands, but unfortunately Parkinson’s makes it difficult, and sometimes downright impossible. So, much of my reading has become listening. Other than that, my habits are pretty much the same: I

always have two books cued up on Audible at once — one nonfiction (anything from political commentary to history to natural history); the other fiction (historical, classic literature, crime fiction, mysteries and satire). I tend to “read” nonfiction at night, if only because it’s easier to find my place. When I think of fiction I think of beach, days off, travel and found time during any point of the day.

#### Your earlier memoirs have followed the course of your life to the point they were written, but this one goes back in time. Why revisit this period?

“Future Boy” sprang from one specific moment in my life, when I tackled two acting roles simultaneously. Often people asked me how I managed to pull that off, and I began to wonder myself. So on the heels of Davis Guggenheim’s documentary “Still,” it occurred to me that this period might make for an interesting book. I suppose it is a memoir, but it’s much more ad hoc than my other books.

#### Do you have any favorite time-travel books?

I have to point to Jack Finney’s books, especially “Time and Again,” in which the low-tech Dakota-building-as-time-machine device is particularly genius.

#### Do you prefer books that reach you emotionally, or intellectually?

I can always tell if an author is reaching for my mind or my heart. If he or she is reaching for my mind, I confess they can overshoot and leave me frustrated for lack of comprehension. An author that reaches for my heart can often end up somewhere in the ballpark. Emotional work sneaks up on you.

#### Which genres do you avoid?

Self-help books. They don’t. Maybe I’m just not trying.

#### You’ve described yourself as an incurable optimist, but who are your favorite literary pessimists?

Edgar Allan Poe. With so grim a body of work, it’s amazing that I still find his masterpieces involving and difficult to put down. As to pessimism, all I can say is no matter what mood I’m in when I launch into one of Poe’s stories, it’s guaranteed to wipe the smile off my face.

#### What are your favorite memoirs by entertainers?

This can also be the answer to what are the last books that made me cry: two memoirs especially compelling for me, because they were authored by contemporaries of mine in film and television.

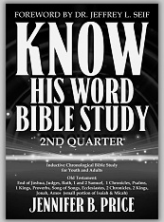
The first, Matthew Perry’s “Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing,” was heartbreaking and terrifying. I can’t recall whether I read it before or after his tragic passing. Neither would’ve been any less tear-producing. Charlie Sheen’s story, as told in “The Book of Sheen,” was an equally gripping cautionary tale, and surprisingly one of the funniest memoirs I’ve ever read. Charlie’s just that deliciously twisted. Charlie survived what he details in this book. Thank God.

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

Mark Twain, for his eloquence and humor. To add a little sublime to the ridiculous, I’d have Patti Smith over. In “Just Kids,” a document of her friendship with Robert Mapplethorpe, she proved that she’s a writer of towering talent. And I’d save a plate for Shakespeare — because he’s Shakespeare — though I’d have to invite a fourth party to translate. □

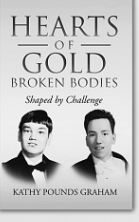
*Email interview conducted and edited by Scott Heller. An expanded version is available at [nytimes.com/books](http://nytimes.com/books).*

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Their mother, Kathy Pounds Graham, shares this powerful story of advocacy, resilience and forging for inclusion into society. This is a powerful story of the length everlasting love and devotion to God and each other. A story of belief and faith in mankind. A story of their unyielding belief that "with God All things are possible."

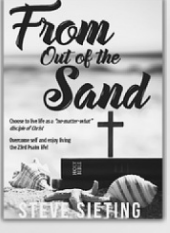
Hearts of Gold shines a light on the struggles of humanity to accept change and challenges and forge a new and different way of doing and thinking. It brings hope and inspiration to find beauty in every life, the strength to face every challenge and how faith can shape brighter futures.



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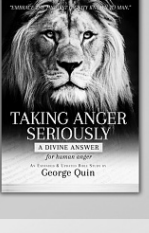
Come share GG's action-packed cleaning day as GG learns the rewards of teamwork.



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Having isolated myself from the Lord, I was spiritually drowning, tired and worn from life's pressures. I was finished. No longer willing to go through the motions, I was ready to turn my back, walk away from God, and never look back. And yet I said one last prayer, hoping to receive something to grab me up out of my despair. Alone, depressed, and silent in my chair, the Holy Spirit simply said, "I hear your cry." He rescued me from self-destruction, and placed my feet on solid ground. My journey back into His presence has been a long but rewarding trek.

God wants to free you from feeling unworthy. He wants to tell you exactly where you are in Him and lead you into a closer relationship with Him. This book encourages you to listen, obey, and be responsible to the Holy Spirit. You are not alone!

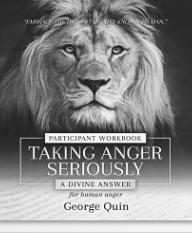


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Helping people overcome the reproach of their anger through the teachings of the Bible.

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Come! Journey into the high adventure of God's elite wisdom, His unparalleled grace, and incomparable love.



**TAKING ANGER SERIOUSLY (WORKBOOK)**  
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Taking Anger Seriously is a comprehensive study on anger from God's perspective.

He is the authority. His wise counsel is vital for everyone, and He is able to help those with habitual and extreme anger. God's counsel is demonstrated throughout the book and video series and then applied through this participant workbook. Worksheet questions from each chapter reinforce the critical truths you will learn. Followed by a devotional section designed to cultivate your relationship with God. As you experience His elite wisdom, His unparalleled grace, and incomparable love, He will produce the personal initiative and disciplines required for you to effectively deal with your emotional state, no matter how severe.



**IT TAKES TWO**  
Paperback: 9798893911954


In keeping with the spirit of altruism started by her social worker mother, Louisa Daniel, Emily Kristich performs community service. When she takes a position on the board of directors of a non-profit organization, Sustain and Shelter, Emily has to wade through a group of strange board members and stranger goings on. In addition, Emily must see to responsibilities of motherhood, comptroller for her husband's business and other volunteer work. If it only took two of these activities, she would be a master of time management and efficiency. However, being a twenty-first century woman, Emily must fit the solution of three deaths into her multi-tasking life. Join Emily in It Takes Two, the third book of the Louisa Daniel mystery series, as she, with the help of her mother, Louisa, sorts through an enigmatic situation in the work of volunteerism.



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**FREEFALLING... GOD'S ANGEL BY MY SIDE**  
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So this is how I am to die?

I became aware... Freefalling more than 100 feet, here in the Old Forest I know so well and yet... feeling so at Peace that the idea of dying did not even shake me...


This is a true book, heavily documented by police, family, hospital, fire/EMT, eyewitnesses, newspaper and family records of Linda's many miracles, where even Intensive Care Unit doctors stated over and over again that Linda should be dead.



**AFTER THE CRASH**  
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After almost 20 years of marriage, Jeremiah and Elise are still hopelessly in love. They live a life of faith and victory as they live under God's gracious hand of protection, provision, and peace. And now, they are on the verge of the greatest blessing of their lives. But when the God they serve allows unimaginable tragedy, loss, and failure, their love story is interrupted. Their lives are shattered. And their faith in God and their faithfulness to each other is tested.


After the Crash provides a backstage pass to Jeremiah and Elise's valley season as they face catastrophic events and trials far beyond what they can bear. Their trial causes them to not only question the love, faithfulness, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ but tempts them to walk away from the God who is always right, always good, and always for them.



**A KINGDOM FOR US**  
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A Kingdom for Us was written to answer questions that everybody has. Is there really a devil, and what can he do? What is the big deal about praise and worship? What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and do we need it? How do you get the kind of faith that produces miracles? Where are we in the timeline? If you have wondered about any of these things, you are not alone. This Bible study was designed to help all of us understand what is going on.

There is a Kingdom and Jesus is the King. Jesus tells us that the Kingdom is coming and also that the Kingdom is within us. This would not seem to make sense unless you realize that Jesus is speaking of both physical and spiritual kingdoms. Either way, the Kingdom brings heaven on earth. Wouldn't we like to have some of that?



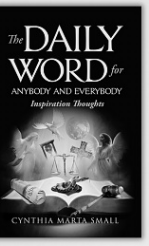
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The Gifts of Christmas is a story seamlessly connecting the gifts Santa Clause gives at Christmas to God's gift of Jesus to the world and Jesus's gift of salvation to all who believe in him.



**I AM WHO I AM**  
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This writing represents thoughts assembled by Milton B. Hazzard Jr. It is a deeply personal exploration of identity, history, and the evolving terminology used to define Black individuals born in the United States of America. The cover features a powerful image of my father. He is a representation of resilience, heritage, and the generational influences that shaped who I am today. For 400 years plus, the only people on earth who have endured 7 changes of the name used to identify his race are Black individuals who were born in the United States of America. Perhaps the repetitive changes were an effort to inhibit racial unity among Native Black Americans. Perhaps to portray Black individuals born in the United States as citizens of a foreign Country. Perhaps an attempt to marginalize the value of Native Black American contributions which helped make America a great Nation.




**THE DAILY WORD FOR ANYBODY AND EVERYBODY**  
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This book is about living at the highest level of one's existence.

Cynthia Marta Small is the author of The Daily Word For Anybody and Everybody.

She is the 5th of 13 children born to Eleanor and Robert Small. While she has no children of her own, she hopes to continue inspiring and encouraging young people she encounters throughout her journey on this earth. As an Afro-Hispanic, stemming from Panama City in Central America and raised with a Caribbean culture, due to her grandparent's migration from the West Indies to Panama to work on the Panama Canal, she has always spoken two languages, English & Spanish. Cynthia is extremely grateful for the opportunities and benefits that were available to her in the United States. She has worked in the finance industry in Manhattan, New York City for 35 years. Cynthia is sure that a true believer in a higher power, God, Jesus & the Holy Spirit can live a happy, joyful and gratifying life.



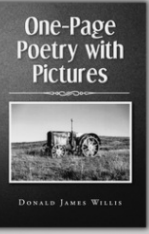
**ALLIE AND THE WANDERING ALBATROSS**  
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God gave Allie a dream that she held in her heart as she traveled through many countries of the World. She meets many people in the lands she visits, making many new friends along her way. Her best friend, Augie, a Wandering Albatross bird, carries her wherever she wants to go. Allie and Augie see many beautiful sights while searching for the most beautiful tree in the world. Sometimes, her wanderings bring a little excitement and mystery! Allie learns you do not need to go far from home to find your dream. If you look closely, you can see it appear before your eyes in all its beauty and a clear path to living that dream while walking in obedience to God.



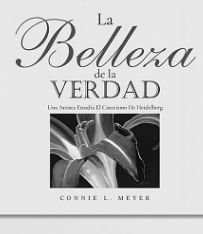
**THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT THE MET**  
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The Mysterious Affair at the Met: Priscilla Plays in High Cotton in the World of Highly-Valued Works of Art—the fifth installment in the Priscilla Series—begins in the middle of May 1990 in the city that never sleeps. Although New Yorkers are experiencing tempestuous weather of howling gales and torrential rains, still, people are out and about, dressed in rain hats and trench coats, and other waterproof wear. Tourists are drifting in and out myriads of shops and restaurants and showplaces such as museums and theatres, any place to escape the wind and the pouring rain.



**ONE-PAGE POETRY WITH PICTURES**  
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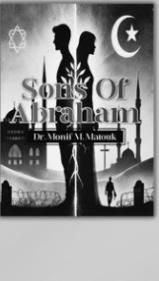
A pleasant disclosure in verse. Autobiographical in nature, yet universally pertinent. A coming to terms sixty-eight years in the making, possibly more if one considers past lives.



**LA BELLEZA DE LA VERDAD**  
Paperback: 9798893911145


Podría decirse que el Catecismo de Heidelberg es uno de los documentos más hermosos jamás redactados, y constituye una joya de la Reforma protestante. Escrito en forma de preguntas y respuestas, sirve como herramienta para enseñar las doctrinas de la Reforma tanto a jóvenes como a mayores, pero constituye mucho más que un conjunto de conocimientos que aprender. El catecismo es también una confesión de fe, un conjunto de verdades por las que se vive, se muere y se cree en lo más profundo del alma. La belleza de la verdad explora la belleza de la doctrina reformada contenida en el Catecismo de Heidelberg a través de los ojos de un artista. La autora Connie L. Meyer explica cómo mirar el catecismo desde un punto de vista artístico ofrece una perspectiva que revela no solo su belleza, sino también su verdad. El Catecismo de Heidelberg demuestra acertadamente cómo la verdad y la belleza son una.

Este estudio, edificante y meticuloso, examina el Catecismo de Heidelberg con el propósito específico de demostrar cómo su belleza y su verdad son una sola cosa.



**SONS OF ABRAHAM**  
Paperback: 9798893913675 \*also available in hardback

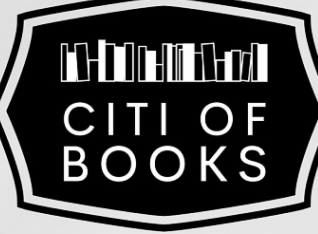
Fadi, a young Lebanese Muslim man, falls in love with a beautiful young woman named Layla, who happens to be a Christian. Caught in the middle of opposing forces, their love is hindered by a religious civil war and a larger conflict involving Israel, Palestine, and Syria. As their unlikely love story unfolds, fresh light is shed on the complexity of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish relationships in the Middle East. Fadi embarks on a spiritual quest, wrestling with the questions Muslims have about Christianity, and gradually recognizing the unique supremacy of Jesus Christ. Layla faces her own struggles and tests of faith, upon the death of her parents and injured brother. As circumstances tear them apart, Fadi and Layla are forced to entrust their uncertain future with the God of Abraham. Years later, they both find themselves living in a different country, where they are eventually reunited under a different set of circumstances and challenges that they have to overcome and turn into a glorious victory.



**THE HALF-LIFE OF SECRETS**  
Paperback: 9781963209723 \*also available in hardback

Olivia is dying of leukemia. Nothing can be done but to slow it down and make her comfortable - so says her oncologist son. At one point he suggests that the dying body loses its senses one at a time. Taste, smell, touch, sight and hearing are all lost until there is nothing left but raw consciousness, then oblivion. Despite this grim outlook, Olivia displays both humor and insight as she comes to understand that there may be things more difficult than confronting one's own mortality.

She reflects on her life through the prism of each of these five senses, each one evoking a collection of memories, and one associated with a death. Some memories are deeply painful, others more nuanced. This period of contemplation culminates in an unforeseen revelation that changes her perspective on life and justice. In the end, a certain equilibrium has been achieved, so that the quiet sins that have been committed become more balanced.



**CITI OF BOOKS**

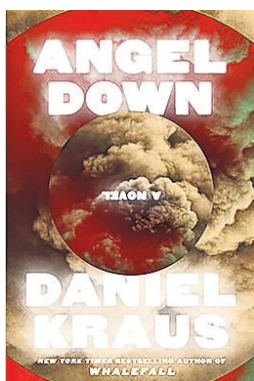
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# THE 10 BEST BOOKS OF 2025







ANGEL DOWN  
By Daniel Kraus

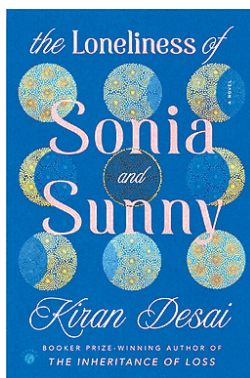
On paper, “Angel Down” sounds like a book that shouldn’t work: It’s a stream-of-consciousness World War I novel, told in one sprawling, 285-page-long sentence, about a failed draft dodger who finds, of all things, an angel on the battlefield. And yet, Kraus brings all of these elements together to craft a triumphant, unforgettable book filled with bravura writing, indelible set pieces and an urgent message.

**EXCERPT**  
“... and Cyril Bagger considers himself lucky, he ought to be topped off, gone west, bumped, clicked it, pushing daisies, a new landowner, napooed, just plain dead, not only dead but scattered around in globs, for the last thing he saw was a shell dropping on top of him with the noise of colliding freight trains, a jim-dandy of a shot from Fritz the Hun, and kind of ironic, seeing how the whole reason Bagger prefers burial duty is artillery shells can’t reach this far behind the frontline trench, but this shell sure did, the way he always pictures it in dreams, a red skull of fire screaming down . . .”

THE LONELINESS  
OF SONIA AND SUNNY  
By Kiran Desai

Like the richest 19th-century fiction, this nearly 700-page family saga had our critic Alexandra Jacobs swooning: “Crowded but never claustrophobic,” she wrote, and “better company than real-life people.” A tentative romance between the title characters, immigrants from India caught between obligation and self-expression, is the throughline. Skittering between nations and generations from the late 1990s to just after 9/11, Desai stirs in scheming heirs, coveted recipes, a missing amulet and the art monster from hell.

**EXCERPT**  
“The sun was still submerged in the wintry murk of dawn when Ba, Dadaji, and their daughter, Mina Foi, wrapping shawls closely about themselves, emerged upon the veranda to sip their tea and decide, through vigorous process of elimination, their meals for the rest of the day. Orders must be given to the cook at breakfast so that he could go directly to market. It was Mina’s fifty-fifth birthday, the first of December in the year 1996, and the mutton for the dinner kebabs had been marinating overnight in the kitchen.”



THE SISTERS  
By Jonas Hassen  
Khemiri

“There was something about the Mikkola sisters that made me feel less alone,” says Jonas, the narrator of this spry and sprawling novel, and a playfully neurotic stand-in for the author himself. Up close and from afar, at drunken parties and at pickup basketball games, he follows the fortunes of Ina (stolid), Evelyn (magnetic) and Anastasia (unfettered) for more than three decades. He, like them, is half Swedish and half Tunisian; he, like them, hungers to

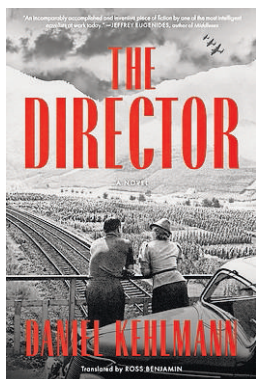
break away and blossom. Though hardly a quick read, “The Sisters” zooms forward, powered by hurtling prose and a literary magic trick: Khemiri tells the story in increments of time that grow increasingly briefer, ending on one minute in the future that offers long-awaited grace.

**EXCERPT**  
“The first time I saw the Mikkola sisters was in May 1991. They came parading down to the park, three sisters looking like brothers, ready to start a fight if someone said something about their outgrown bowl cuts, dirty Lion sneakers or sweatpants with stretched-out pockets. I couldn’t take my eyes off them.  
“Who are they?” Nico said and nodded towards Ina, Anastasia and Evelyn, climbing towards the top of the jungle gym in the center of the park, a fifty-meter-long steel dragon with a water-spraying head and a slide as a tail.”

THE DIRECTOR  
By Daniel Kehlmann

How nerve-racking to be G.W. Pabst, the 20th-century Austrian filmmaker at the center of Kehlmann’s wondrous new novel. He’s an auteur stuck in Europe under Nazi rule, forced to make propaganda and benign duds for the Reich while compromising every creative principle he once stood for. “The important thing is to make art under the circumstances one finds oneself in,” Pabst murmurs at one point, winning over exactly no one. Still, Kehlmann’s complex portrait, brightened by caustic humor and memorable historical cameos (and fluidly translated from the German by Ross Benjamin), presents an intriguing test of integrity in a fracturing world. The timing couldn’t have been better.

**EXCERPT**  
“Not a breath of wind, the palms unstirred around the swimming pool. Pabst felt as if he had stepped into a colorized photo. A bird hovered motionless above them. The sun was reflected in the water as glaring and round as children draw it. The cigarette tasted of cold ash. He sucked; no smoke rose. The man on the deck chair whose name he hadn’t caught earlier, and whom now it was too late to ask, looked at him without taking off his orange-tinted glasses.”

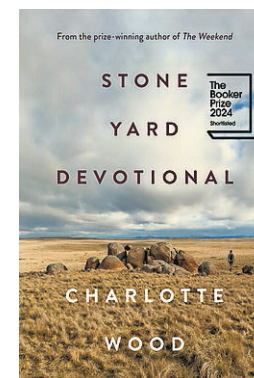


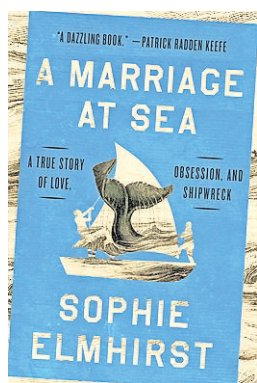
STONE YARD  
DEVOTIONAL  
By Charlotte Wood

In the remote plains of New South Wales, Australia, a woman arrives at a convent in desperate need of solitude and retreat. It’s a curious choice: She left behind a full life in Sydney, and is an atheist who abhors the “savagery” of the Catholic Church. Yet she is lulled into contentment, falling into a comforting rhythm of work and contemplation.

Three arrivals upset this harmony: A mouse infestation of biblical proportions horrifies the nuns, who resolutely set about stamping out the vermin. The bones of a sister who died abroad are returned to the convent, and are accompanied by a woman from the narrator’s past. True to its title, this exquisite novel traces the interior path of a woman grappling with how to live without causing harm. In the process, Wood shows that our attention is one of the most sacred gifts we have to offer.

**EXCERPT**  
“When you’re inside a church, I have come to realize, it’s impossible to see out. There are no clear windows. Light streams in through the stained glass, making colored lozenges on the floor. More light than you’d imagine is possible comes through those tall narrowed slits of criss-crossed glass — but everything outside is invisible, save a rippled blur seen through the watery colorless diamonds interspersed with red or yellow or indigo. The only way to see the world beyond the church is through the door: in or out.”





A MARRIAGE AT SEA  
By Sophie Elmhirst

In 1972, a young married couple, Maurice and Maralyn Bailey, decided to give up their lives in England and sail to New Zealand on their boat, the Auralyn. But after nine months, the Auralyn was destroyed by a breaching whale, leaving the Baileys stranded for 118 days in the Pacific aboard a makeshift raft.

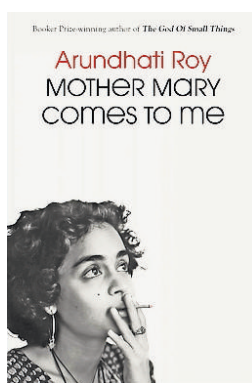
The story of their survival is miraculous enough — Elmhirst masterfully recreates the daily fears, tediums and triumphs of a life in which every moment could be your last. But what really elevates this beautifully con-

structed narrative is the sensitive characterization of two very different people — a misanthrope and an optimist. It's a story that, while remarkable, will leave everyone asking essential questions about loneliness, about character and about partnership.

EXCERPT

*"They thought of their boat as their child. To hear her wood tear and splinter was like hearing the pained scream of an infant.*

*"Up on deck, they discovered the cause. A whale was next to them in the ocean, massive and alive. Water was streaming down the dark cliffs of its body as it twisted and writhed. It looked as if it were trying to climb out of the waves, hauling its dark bulk up, then smashing back down, a meteor landing in the ocean, showering spray. Its tail, ten feet across the flukes, was beating at the surface in a kind of fury. Blood poured from its body into the water."*



MOTHER MARY  
COMES TO ME  
By Arundhati Roy

In this unsparing yet darkly funny memoir, the prizewinning novelist captures the fierce, asthmatic, impossible, inspirational woman who shaped her as a writer and an activist — and left her emotionally bruised for a lifetime. Roy doesn't let herself off too easily, however. Fleeing from an insular Indian community to the cosmopolitan Delhi and then the global stage, she — like her mother — is imperious, impatient and unforgettable.

EXCERPT

*"I left my mother not because I didn't love her, but to be able to continue to love her. Staying would have made that impossible. Once I left, I didn't see or speak to her for years. She never looked for me. She never asked me why I left. There was no need for that. We both knew. We settled on a lie. A good one. I crafted it — 'She loved me enough to let me go.' That's what I said at the front of my first novel, 'The God of Small Things,' which I dedicated to her. She quoted it often, as though it were God's truth. My brother jokes that it's the only piece of real fiction in the book."*

THERE IS NO PLACE  
FOR US  
By Brian Goldstone

With uncommon precision, tenacity and grace, Goldstone, an anthropologist turned journalist, casts a shocking spotlight on the "working homeless," a term that should be an oxymoron but which in America defines hundreds of thousands of people. Following five Atlanta families for whom home is a car, a relative's couch or a squalid room in an extended stay hotel — often some rotating combination of all three — his book gives intimate human shape to a population uncounted by the government and largely invisible to the public, one that, owing to soaring rents, paltry wages and misguided urban policy, is barely surviving even with a paycheck.

EXCERPT

*"It used to be that owning a home was held up as the ultimate goal, a reward for diligent effort and perseverance. Now simply having a home has become elusive for many. The myth that hard work will lead to stabil-*

*ity has been shattered, revealing a stark disconnect between the story America tells about itself and the reality of deepening precarity. We need a new narrative, a new perspective on a nation whose citizens toil in vain for one of the most basic human necessities. The reach of homelessness is expanding. As it pulls more and more people into its grip, we might wonder: Who gets to feel secure in this country? And who are the casualties of our prosperity?"*



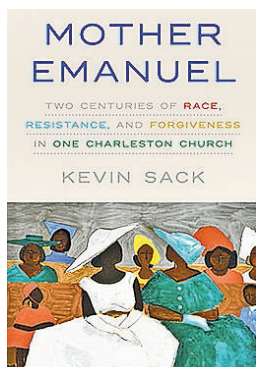
MOTHER EMANUEL  
By Kevin Sack

When a white supremacist intent on fomenting a race war shot and killed nine members of a Bible study class at Charleston's Emanuel A.M.E. Church in 2015, he struck at the heart of the oldest African American Episcopal congregation in the South, in a city that had been the center of the country's slave trade and the place where the Civil War began.

Assigned to cover the aftermath of the massacre for The New York Times, Sack understood the story's far-reaching symbolic weight. His resulting book is a timely feat of research and reporting, a vivid chronicle of the Black church's essential role in America, and a surpassingly eloquent testament to resistance, resilience and faith.

EXCERPT

*"What happened that night — the mass murder of nine innocent worshippers in one of the most horrific racist attacks in American history — catapulted 'Mother Emanuel' to global prominence, its brilliant white façade and witch's-hat steeple*



*recognizable around the world. What happened two days later, when victims' family members volunteered public expressions of forgiveness for the unrepentant killer, and two days after that, when ten thousand people of varied hues linked hands across the two-and-a-half-mile arc of the Ravenel Bridge, and five days after that, when the first Black president of the United States delivered a eulogy unlike any in the country's experience, made for defining markers in America's ongoing struggle with the psychosis of race. Once again, history had been made in Charleston."*

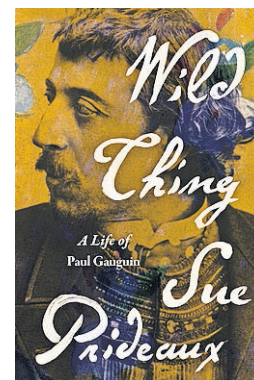
WILD THING  
By Sue Prideaux

In the annals of art history, bad boy artists are legion, and the 19th-century French painter Gauguin often figures near the top of the list — denounced as a colonizer who seduced underage Tahitian girls and spread syphilis in the South Seas. Prideaux's enthralling biography, studded with keen close readings of her subject's innovative art, chips away at this caricature, fashioning in its stead a slyly witty portrait of an original and contradictory man who experienced extreme wealth and abject poverty, who abandoned his

wife, children and country in pursuit of his singular artistic vision, and who fought for the interests of his Polynesian neighbors against the colonial authorities even as he took in several of their daughters as child brides.

EXCERPT

*"Gauguin came ashore dressed in a purple suit over his embroidered Breton waistcoat, with his Buffalo Bill cowboy hat on his head, and his cowboy boots. This made a strong, indeed unique, contrast to the French ruling class who wore either military uniform or, if they were traders and businessmen, black tailcoats for work and white linen suits for recreation. Beneath Gauguin's wide-brimmed Buffalo Bill, his long salt-and-pepper hair waved freely in the coastal wind. As he stepped out of the canoe on to Tahiti's shore, Tahitian men and women on the quay pointed at him, raised their hands to their mouths, tittered behind their fingers, and rolled their eyes. They had never seen anything like this." □*



# HISTORICAL FICTION



BY ALIDA BECKER

Whether you're looking to escape our chaotic present or dive into its roots in the past, this year's historical novels will amply satisfy. Here are my choices for the 10 best, in alphabetical order.

THE ANTIDOTE  
By Karen Russell

Merging impeccable period detail with lyrical flights of fantasy, Russell's novel is set in a fictional Nebraska town in the aftermath of the all-too-real 1935 Black Sunday storm that devastated what came to be known as the Dust Bowl. Its central character is a "prairie witch" who acts as a vault for the painful memories her customers would rather forget.

A CALAMITY OF NOBLE HOUSES  
By Amira Ghenim

This suspenseful multigenerational portrait of two Tunisian families, translated from the Arabic by Miled Faiza and Karen McNeil, illuminates the conflicts and contradictions in a rapidly changing society. Multiple narrators add to its "Rashomon"-like quality as the events of one night in 1935 reverberate through the years.

FONSECA

By Jessica Francis Kane

In 1952, the yet-to-be novelist Penelope Fitzgerald visited a deeply eccentric expat household in rural Mexico with her 6-year-old son, drawn from their London home by the possibility that two elderly Irish ladies might make him their heir. Thirty years later, she touched on this journey in an essay but never wrote about it again. Thankfully, Kane was inspired to follow the trail, deploying an understated wit and bittersweet wisdom reminiscent of Fitzgerald's own work.

GABRIÈLE

By Anne Berest and Claire Berest

By reconstructing the life of their great-grandmother, the Berest sisters restore Gabrièle Buffet-Picabia to her rightful place in the history of early-20th-century avant-garde art. Translated from the French by Tina Kover, their narrative draws on a variety of sources — as well as some heartfelt personal speculation — to document one woman's influence as a muse, along with the personal and professional sacrifices she endured in the process.

ISOLA

By Allegra Goodman

Goodman's novel was inspired by the almost-impossible real-life tale of a 16th-century French aristocrat who was abandoned on an island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. From the scanty historical sources, she has created an absorbing fictional first-person account of a young woman ensnared by her guardian's greed and ambition. Not content with

stealing her fortune to finance his adventures in Canada, he insists that she accompany him to New France, with dire consequences when she dares to rebel.

THE REMEMBERED SOLDIER

By Anjet Daanje

Translated from the Dutch by David McKay, Daanje's provocatively labyrinthine novel dissects the consciousness of an amnesiac veteran of World War I who has spent four years in a Belgian asylum only to be retrieved by a woman who insists she is his wife. Trying to maneuver through a maze of strange new possibilities, he continues to harbor deep doubts and even deeper fears. The stories she tells him about their marriage aren't entirely convincing. Can he trust her? Can he trust himself?

SHADOW TICKET

By Thomas Pynchon

Deploying his signature free-form, wisecracking dialogue and his gift for bizarre high jinks, Pynchon introduces us to a strikebreaker turned private eye trying to eke out a living in early 1930s Milwaukee, just before the repeal of Prohibition. The action is nominally triggered by the search for a runaway cheese heiress that will plunge our hero into a welter of Nazis, spies and counterspies. But, as always with Pynchon, the appeal lies in his energetic wordplay.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS

By Chaim Grade

A bustling panorama of the Eastern European Orthodox Jewish life that was soon to be destroyed by the Holocaust. First serialized in the 1960s

and '70s in New York's Yiddish newspapers, it's only now available in a vibrant translation by Rose Waldman. The principal characters are a village rabbi, his wife and their wayward children, whose tense but often humorously depicted relations are akin to those depicted by Isaac Bashevis Singer and Sholem Aleichem.

THIS HERE IS LOVE

By Princess Joy L. Perry

Perry's searing first novel never flinches from the brutality of plantation life in the early years of the Virginia Colony. With steely empathy, she probes the complexities and contradictions of a society built on bondage. As she explores the lives of the enslaved and their overlords, her intertwined plots are gripping, but what's more impressive is the way she guides us through her characters' emotional depths.

THE WAYFINDER

By Adam Johnson

Ancient Polynesia is the source of this epic tale of dislocation, disruption and discovery. Based on intensive research and honoring the region's oral traditions, Johnson's ambitious storytelling also occasionally detours into magic realism. As it introduces us to two very different island societies, the novel contrasts their attitudes toward communal life and power. At its heart is a teenage girl who will take part in a desperate sea voyage led by the "wayfinder" of the title. □

## THRILLERS



BY SARAH LYALL

Though the books on this year's list are a varied group, with wildly different approaches to plot, tone and style, they're all surprising in the best possible way: They keep the reader off-balance and guessing until the end.

**THE DOORMAN**  
 By Chris Pavone

This hyperkinetic state-of-the-city mystery unfolds over a single tumultuous day that begins with an ominous foreshadowing of the death of a character and gathers force like a storm. Racial tensions, political hatred, the corrosive power of money — Pavone is an excellent anatomizer of present-day New York even as his muscular prose pulls us

toward the book's stunning, and murderous, climax.

**YOUR STEPS ON  
THE STAIRS**  
 By Antonio Muñoz  
Molina

This thriller by one of Spain's literary superstars, beautifully translated by Curtis Bauer, burns slowly and uneasily. Suffused with anxiety about

the state of the world, a man who has relocated from New York to Lisbon is waiting for his beloved wife to join him. But he seems to have a slippery grasp on the details and maybe on reality itself. Reading this book is like hearing an alarm go off in a neighbor's house and wondering whether it's actually ringing for you.

**VENETIAN VESPERS**  
 By John Banville

Venice in 1900 makes a deliciously dark backdrop to Banville's expertly plotted tale of Evelyn Dolman, a puffed-up English writer whose American wife — an heiress who seems unfortunately to have been disinherited — goes missing from their rented palazzo. Self-regarding without being self-aware, Dolman soon finds himself in the center of a diabolical web of intrigue, "the main suspect in a crime that as far as anyone knew had not been committed."

**THE IMPOSSIBLE  
FORTUNE**  
 By Richard Osman

Osman became an instant literary star with the publication of his best-selling debut novel, "The Thursday Murder Club," in 2020. This is the fifth book in the series, which features a quartet of sharp-witted retirees who use their free time to solve the crimes that somehow keep popping up in their vicinity. In this installment, the gang delves into the mystery of a missing wedding guest, whose disappearance may have something to do with a car bomb and a large sum of Bitcoin..

**DISSOLUTION**  
 By Nicholas Binge

Binge continues his habit of unsettling readers with this

chronology-bending work of speculative fiction about time, memory and the hubris of scientists seeking to subvert the laws of physics. It begins with the interrogation of an elderly woman by a shadowy figure trying to use her as a conduit to the memories of her husband, a scientist with Alzheimer's whose past might contain a crucial secret. No pressure, but the future of the world might be at stake.

**THE VANISHING  
PLACE**  
 By Zoë Rankin

After a starving, blood-covered girl turns up in a remote New Zealand village, a young woman named Effie — who fled the same place nearly a quarter-century earlier — returns home to face up to the murky details of her past. Rankin's beautifully written book takes the reader deep into the landscape and toggles between two timelines, past and present, as Effie struggles to reconcile the fragments of her life. Can she prevent history from repeating itself?

**THE GOOD LIAR**  
 By Denise Mina

This cracker of a story by one of Scotland's most acclaimed mystery writers begins as Claudia O'Sheil, a forensic scientist, is poised to give a talk about a notorious double murder she helped solve. But she's considering ripping up the speech and revealing what really happened — a revelation that would surely ruin her career. Mina expertly threads questions of class, privilege and establishment conspiracy into a riveting tale of a woman weighing whether to give up everything for the sake of the truth.

**THE PREDICAMENT**  
 By William Boyd

This is the second book in Boyd's delicious historical espionage series starring Gabriel Dax, an English travel writer pulled into reluctant spydom in the early 1960s. This time, he's sent to Berlin in 1962, where President John F. Kennedy is preparing to give his famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech. More "useful idiot," as he puts it, than James Bond, Dax makes for an affable, Everyman operative. "All this pretense, all this duplicity — it was exhausting," he thinks. We can relate.

**THE IMPOSSIBLE  
THING**  
 By Belinda Bauer

The cutthroat trade in rare birds' eggs in Britain is the unlikely subject of this ingenious and charming mystery. In 1926, a young girl plucks a bright red egg from a guillemot's nest; decades later, it's an object of obsession, with criminals, collectors and bird enthusiasts all eager to get their grubby hands on it. Bauer brings everyone to vivid life, including the determined guillemot who laid the egg. She gets the final word.

**A BEAUTIFUL FAMILY**  
 By Jennifer  
Trevelyan

It's 1985 in New Zealand, and the family at the center of Trevelyan's deceptively languid tale of murder and miscommunication is having a not-so-beautiful seaside vacation: The parents are grumpy, the two daughters are mostly unsupervised, and a sketchy man lives next door. Menace hums beneath the surface, and it's clear that the narrator, 10-year-old Alix, has only a partial understanding of the events swirling around her. Then someone goes missing. □

## POETRY



BY ELISA GABBERT

After binge-reading “Best American Poetry” volumes earlier this year, I vowed never again to wring my hands over the meaning of “best,” a word that troubled that series’ editors much more than either “American” or “poetry.” Louise Glück called it “the tyranny of taste making,” but I trust my readers know that all “best” really means in the world of the arts is what certain people like.

SALVAGE  
By Hedgie Choi

Some of the poems that most struck me this year evince a certain cruelty. Take the first lines of Choi’s poem “Freaking Out”: “I know other people are real, don’t/remind me.” I myself have uttered the words “Other people are real,” so this felt like a direct confrontation. I laughed out loud many times reading “Salvage,” Choi’s delightfully spiteful debut —

more like *savage!*

Choi’s voice has the defiant confidence of youth, which we all need exposure to. The poems are a little insulting in the most appealing way, like an argument that actually changes your mind. “Is it important to know facts?” the poem “Phases” asks; “I am starting to think/maybe not.” Poems can hurt me only a little, and their cruelty can feel so true: “In the end,/I am/a wholly serious/person./But we are not in the end yet.”

I DO KNOW  
SOME THINGS  
By Richard Siken

This was another book that gave me almost masochistic pleasure. In a formal departure from Siken’s “War of the Foxes” (2015) and his influential debut, “Crush” (2005), these poems are in prose. All 77 were written about Siken’s stroke, and constitute a brief autobiography: “It’s a small window, the span of time in which we get to say what we know.”

This is brutal work, sometimes frightening in its handling of aging and death — life as damage — and the struggle to recover one’s body, mind and self after crisis. The book can be bleak, but also magical (“Below the bed the floor, the earth, then out the other side and stars. I fell in all directions”) and funny in a Glückian way — a one-syllable laugh in the devil’s face. “If it’s any consolation,” he writes, “I’ll never forgive you.”

BLOODMERCY  
By I. S. Jones

Reinterpreting Cain and Abel as sisters, this impressive debut has the fearsome, musical force of myth. “Most pain is useless,” the opening poem states, “but it’s the body’s oldest song.” Jones offers a sustained engagement with the idea of power — power we succumb to and power we claim — in a space both real and allegorical, and a time both present and eternal-past. “Once I was myth, now I am a girl,” she writes in “Cain.”

An incredible coherence is achieved in part via motifs of blood, blades, sacrificial goats and the sun: “I am the axe dreaming my way through Adam’s throat.” And in the remarkable ending of “Noc-turne”: “Making real the dream of my suffering/the sun drags its headless body across the sky like a monument/of war.”

GAZA:  
THE POEM SAID  
ITS PIECE  
By Nasser Rabah

The translators of “Gaza,” which contains selected poems by the Palestinian poet Rabah, comment in an afterword on the difficulties of bringing these poems into “the very language — American English — that plays a role in enabling so many of the distortions in how Palestine is depicted.” They sought not to “overtranslate,” to allow for some awkwardness, “ambiguity and even non-understanding.” This produces lines that are sometimes disorienting, but displacement and estrangement are at home in these dreamlike surreal zones where horror and destruction come up against beauty, music and sex, where quotidian routine and boredom exist alongside the maddening and unthinkable.

While sound may not always translate, image does, and Rabah’s work is full of indelible images. In the long poem “What I Didn’t Say to Me,” Rabah writes: “Be boring/. . . /Be Tom Hanks and say: God! Everything is great, guys. Be/anything, just wave back to your beautiful death in the mirror.” (Tom Hanks!) “For once, just be orange, O sea, and you, heaven, rain just/once in your own direction.”

THE MINOTAUR’S  
DAUGHTER:  
SELECTED POEMS  
By Eva Luka

Sometimes after only one or two lines you know a poet speaks to you — as if the sensibility comes through in the smallest units. This was my experience with Luka and “The Minotaur’s Daughter,” translated from the Slovak by James Sutherland-Smith. I love these witchy poems about liminal spaces and hybrid creatures, man-beasts and fish-birds and dead-alive beings: “Dressed-

undressed,/in her mouth crying and singing,/she returns down the slope/to home-not-home,” Luka writes in “Wildsister.” “Neither on foot nor in a wagon,/on her shoulder an owl, in her hand/an apple, in her apple/love, in her love/poison.”

I’m especially drawn to the series of poems based on Leonora Carrington’s paintings, such as “Portrait of the Late Mrs. Partridge” (“This woman looks like the embodiment of lightning”) and “My Step-Sister’s Hen”: “But now is a moment of defiance. The hen bares her teeth/. . . /Just wait, says the hen./One day you will be in a collar, as happens between owners/and the owned. One day we will switch roles.” Here is a book alive with the darkness of Old World fairy tales.

TANTRUMS IN AIR  
By Emily Skillings

On the basis of her second collection, “Tantrums in Air,” I’m pinning Skillings as a fellow hole girl — we who love to aestheticize the void. Of “the carrot flower, or Queen Anne’s lace,” Skillings writes: “I love it when they are as large/and white as a china saucer./The period in the middle./A little centering gesture./A sip of dark, a hole/into which slips all/the sky’s embroidery.”

Reminiscent of the school of “Gurlesque” (Arielle Greenberg’s term for the “feminist incorporating of the grotesque and cruel with the spangled and dreamy”), Skillings’s poems read a bit like absurdist theater set in a haunted dollhouse. She insists throughout on an outsider kind of intelligence, a *via negativa*: “half thinking, half nothing.”

The final poem, with lines so long it’s printed sideways, is mesmerizing: “Oh, you’ve noticed the mice, don’t mind them/. . . /I’m starting to think they widen the holes between things: words, days/. . . /This is only one room in a vast conspiracy of space.” □

# CRIME & MYSTERY



BY SARAH WEINMAN

Sometimes I want to spend time with characters I can root for, ordinary people vaulted into extraordinary situations. Other times I want to savor every sentence and have all of my senses challenged. Or maybe I just want to be swept away by a breakneck plot. For me, these 10 crime novels were the pinnacle of pleasure reading this year.

## DEAD IN THE FRAME

By **Stephen Spotswood**

## AT MIDNIGHT COMES THE CRY

By **Julia Spencer-Fleming**

Let's start with the series sleuths. It's always a treat to revisit the 1940s-era exploits of Lillian Pentecost, detective par excellence, and her right-hand woman, Will Parker.

"Dead in the Frame," the fifth and most sharply plotted in Spotswood's beloved-to-me series, tests both as never before when Lillian is arrested for the murder of an odious antagonist. "At Midnight Comes the Cry" brings back the longtime Millers Kill police chief Russ Van Alstyne and his wife, the Rev. Clare Fergusson, for their most fraught adven-

ture yet. Spencer-Fleming explores everything from new parenthood to a white supremacist militia, always stressing the ways in which everyone, no matter how loathsome, deserves our empathy.

## VERA WONG'S GUIDE TO SNOOPING (ON A DEAD MAN)

By **Jesse Q. Sutanto**

## GLORY DAZE

By **Danielle Arceneaux**

Two newer amateur detectives of a certain age are already reaching iconic status. "Vera Wong's Guide to Snooping (on a Dead Man)," just the second series outing by Sutanto, further establishes the prickly, opinionated and utterly delightful Vera as a woman who cannot be messed with, but whose emotional tent is large enough to hold anyone she designates as "family." Glory Broussard is equally astringent, her talents and foibles as a human and a crime-solver on full display in Arceneaux's sublime "Glory Daze" as she investigates the death of her former husband, and gets far more than she bargained for.

## NOTES ON SURVIVING THE FIRE

By **Christine Murphy**

## HISTORY LESSONS

By **Zoe B. Wallbrook**

The category of dark academia is more about aesthetics than actual scholarship, but two standout debuts reveal deeper truths about higher education. Murphy's "Notes on Surviving the Fire" approaches the aftermath of campus sexual assault, and

the desire for vengeance, in a wonderfully mordant, nonlinear manner. It's one of the best depictions of how trauma cracks the psyche that I've read recently. "History Lessons" takes a more orderly approach to murder in academia, but Wallbrook's seemingly gentle mystery has real satirical bite.

## HER ONE REGRET

By **Donna Freitas**

## DEATH TAKES ME

By **Cristina Rivera Garza**

Two books — one published last month, the other published in Spanish two decades ago and just translated into English this year — delve deeply into the ways in which women's thoughts and actions can be brutally suppressed. In "Her One Regret," Freitas addresses a topic little discussed in fiction — that of regretting motherhood — with compassion, demonstrating the consequences of her characters' choices while also delivering a fingernails-bitten-to-the-quick mystery. And Rivera Garza's "Death Takes Me," ably translated by Sarah Booker and Robin Myers, examines the scourge of femicide in boldly metafictional terms, showing how the transformation of visceral violence into a tidy narrative can minimize the actual harm at great peril.

## HEARTWOOD

By **Amity Gaige**

Urgency thrums through every page of "Heartwood," and not only because it centers a solo female hiker who goes missing on the Appalachian Trail. Gaige probes questions about survival and agency through three unforgettable characters: Valerie, the hiker; Bev, the game warden searching for her; and Lena, the retired scientist who becomes ensnared in the case. Our reviewer, Michelle Ruiz, said it best: "The real suspense of 'Heartwood' is whether all three women will make it out of their metaphorical woods."

## HOLLOW SPACES

By **Victor Suthammanont**

If Suthammanont's debut is anything to go by, he is destined for a major career as a novelist. "Hollow Spaces" begins where most legal thrillers end: at the conclusion of a trial, with the acquittal of a lawyer in the murder of his colleague (and lover). By flipping the conventional narrative, Suthammanont shows how the acquittal ripples across the lives of the murdered woman's family, the accused man and especially his own children, who decades later decide to solve the crime once and for all. It turns out they are ill prepared for the revelations they uncover about their father — and themselves. □

# GRAPHIC NOVELS



BY SAM THIELMAN

This was the best year for new comics I can remember, and so I throw myself on the mercy of the court: This Top 10 list has 11 entries. There were so many good books that I forgot how to count, your honor.

DO ADMIT:  
THE MITFORD SISTERS  
AND ME

By Mimi Pond

If Pond's family biography dazzles with its narrative ambition and brio — and it does — it is also a delight to look at, each page a feast of eccentric typography, clever visual puns and historical trivia. Pond juggles a huge cast of down-at-heel aristocrats and scheming literary

types as they attend debutante balls, join the Communist Party and try to date Hitler.

GOES LIKE THIS  
By Jordan Crane

Maybe the most beautiful piece of art I held in my hands this year, Crane's candy-colored story collection stretches the comics form into a dozen delightful shapes. It's

a consistently surprising book; you might suddenly find yourself looking at a two-page spread of a giant sea monster, rooting for a greedy cowboy or watching a kid crash a motorcycle he's not supposed to be riding.

BOWLING WITH  
CORPSES &  
OTHER STRANGE  
TALES FROM LANDS  
UNKNOWN

By Mike Mignola

Mignola's glorious collection of folklore from an imaginary world is written with a jeweler's precision and drawn in long, insinuating shadows from which any number of weird creatures might emerge. It's the start of a new project for the "Hellboy" artist, whose imagination is as gloomy, funny and exciting as it has ever been.

EXISTENTIAL COMICS:  
SELECTED STORIES  
1979-2004

By R. Crumb

Edited by Dan Nadel (and a valuable companion to Nadel's recent biography of the artist), this collection spans 35 years of comics and demonstrates Crumb's apparently infinite narrative range: There are biographical sketches of beloved blues musicians, punchy adaptations of texts by elevated thinkers like James Boswell and Jean-Paul Sartre, cheap sex jokes and, of course, self-examination and recrimination at its most bitterly funny.

TONGUES VOL. 1  
By Anders Nilsen

Nilsen's enormous web of Greek myths and tragedies absolutely shouldn't work, and yet it is not merely functional

but transcendent. The book follows the rebellious titan Prometheus through his imprisonment and into the present day, where he watches the gods consider how to deal with a human race that has, in their estimation, worn out its welcome.

DEATH OF COPRA  
By Michel Fiffe

Fiffe's astounding superhero comic is drawn with such intensity that the book practically glows with its own radioactive life. In this series' final volume, Fiffe sends his characters into battle once more, and treats the reader to splash pages and double-page spreads that feel as if they've wandered into the comic-book store from an especially forward-thinking art museum. All good things must come to an end, and this is Copra's, but what a way to go.

BLACK ARMS TO  
HOLD YOU UP:  
A HISTORY OF BLACK  
RESISTANCE

By Ben Passmore

Passmore's impassioned history of armed Black resistance feels more timely by the hour. The narrative examines a century of upheaval as real-life historical figures try to defend themselves against the soldiers of an undeclared war, told by Passmore's cartoon self and his father, who end the story on a note of unexpected heartbreak. It's a repudiation of nihilism that also understands why nihilism can seem attractive, even inevitable.

SPENT  
By Alison Bechdel

Bechdel returns to the cast of her beloved alt-weekly strip "Dykes to Watch Out For" in a new book that complicates the

term "comic novel." Her renderings are cheerful, her observations are acute and her self-deprecation is never not funny.

CANNON  
By Lee Lai

For Cannon, a young cook at an upscale Montreal restaurant, the pressures of kitchen work and family obligation allow her a comfortable remove from herself, until she inevitably explodes. Her love of detail is emphasized by the perfection of Lai's drawings, which burst into color at all the best times.

LIFE DRAWING  
By Jaime Hernandez

It makes a certain cockeyed sense that, after 40 years of impulsive decisions and the attendant heartbreak, Hernandez's unsinkable Maggie Chascarillo would finally settle down. So she does, almost as an afterthought, as the wedding of a frenemy implodes in predictably spectacular fashion.

THE ONCE AND  
FUTURE RIOT  
By Joe Sacco

Sacco's careful autopsy of a lethal 2013 riot in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh is one of the most compelling works of narrative journalism — in any form — I've read this year. The cartoonist assembles a record of an event in which only the liars agree on what happened. In the process, he asks a terrifying question: What is the difference between democracy and mob rule? And where does that difference begin? □

# A YEAR IN READING



BY THE BOOK REVIEW STAFF CRITICS

JENNIFER SZALAI

Remembering the beginning of 2025 can be like trying to recall a distant era. The news cycle has been so eventful that last month feels like it took place a decade ago. Then again, the surprise return of some old concerns (tariffs, measles) can make it seem as if the clock has been turned back 100 years.

But great books keep getting published. I still think about one of the books I reviewed in January: “Open Socrates: The Case for a Philosophical Life,” by the philosopher Agnes Callard. Callard’s approach to self-improvement is, in her words, “hard-line intellectualist” — not exactly an easy sell, but she is so obviously thrilled by her mission that it’s hard not to be charmed by her singular combination of exacting intelligence and indefatigable enthusiasm. I was especially moved by her emphasis on thinking as a communal pursuit: “In the presence of others, something becomes possible that isn’t possible when you are alone.”

Brian Goldstone’s “There Is No Place for Us” is another book I continue to think about, but for very different reasons. The families in Goldstone’s book are part of the working homeless in Atlanta, a city where rents have shot up so extravagantly that someone with a full-time job can’t necessarily afford a place to live. He follows five families, chronicling their ups and downs as the parents try their best to find a home for themselves and their children. If they end up crashing with friends or living in extended-stay hotels, they aren’t even included in homelessness statistics: “They literally did not count.” He writes about a ruthless housing system that profits from people’s desperation and penalizes them for being poor. I was moved by

this book. I also felt enraged.

I wasn’t sure what to expect when I first picked up Sue Prideaux’s biography of the French painter Paul Gauguin, “Wild Thing.” After all, Gauguin has developed a reputation as something of a monster: a colonialist who spread syphilis to teenage girls in Polynesia. Prideaux finds considerable evidence to the contrary. This rigorous and stylish biography isn’t a whitewash; it’s a lush and surprising portrait of a stockbroker turned artist who led an incomparable life.

I’ve been telling everyone to read “A Flower Traveled in My Blood,” by Haley Cohen Gilliland, which traces the riveting story of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo — Argentine women who have spent the last five decades searching for grandchildren born in captivity during the country’s military dictatorship. These grandchildren are now middle-aged; some were given to military families, and had no idea that their actual parents had been murdered by a dictatorship they had been taught to revere.

This is Gilliland’s first book, and in addition to being impressed by her crisp writing and her prodigious reporting, I was also taken by the book’s pacing and structure — no small feat when trying to recount a tangled history, full of political upheaval, while also weaving in some of the more fraught and intimate details of people’s lives.

I kept thinking about Gilliland’s book when I reviewed Philippe Sands’s “38 Londres Street,” which is about another Cold War-era dictatorship in the Southern Cone: Chile. Sands, a human rights lawyer, begins with the attempt to indict Pinochet with crimes against humanity. But soon Sands brings in the story of Walther Rauff, a former Nazi SS commander who fled a liberated Europe and ended up working in a crab-can-



ning factory in Patagonia. In Germany, Rauff oversaw the development of mobile gas vans, where one of his mother's cousins was murdered. She was 12.

Rauff and Pinochet knew each other. Sands braids together their stories in order to explore the larger theme of impunity. It's because of Sands's book that I finally read Roberto Bolaño's haunting novella "By Night in Chile," in which the narrator, a dying priest who worked with the Pinochet regime, remembers his encounters with Mr. Raef — a sinister manager of a "clam-tinning plant."

This was a big year for Hungarian writers: Laszlo Krasznahorkai received the Nobel for his enigmatic body of work, and David Szalay won the Booker Prize for his marvelous novel "Flesh." I was also mesmerized by "Eye of the Monkey," a new novel by the Hungarian poet Krisztina Toth about love and death in an unnamed autocracy. She describes how the more baffling and absurd everything gets, the more people cling to the scraps they can control: "His habits, routes, movements were a handhold; without them, he might lose his sense of orientation completely."

#### ALEXANDRA JACOBS

Well, BIG novels really bonked me on the head this year, in the best possible way. I am always fretting that the internet has permanently destroyed authors' (and readers') attention spans. And we were all sobered by the news that over the last two decades, 40 percent fewer people are reading for fun.

But surely what they used to so portentously call the World Wide Web is also stoking our urge to escape into different worlds, and helping to furnish them more richly, with so much

research at the fingertips rather than a long walk to the card catalogs. Maybe?

Adam Ross's "Playworld" (506 pages) and Kiran Desai's "The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny" (688 pages) are both captivating and superb. They're both about (among other things) how certain messed-up, powerful relationships that look like love can stay with you for a long time, perhaps your entire life. Both are splendidly written, in entirely different ways. How great, too, that in this era when text is very cheap they both took a long time to finish — a decade and 20 years, respectively. Bring back long hours in a garret!

Then there was Jonas Hassen Khemiri's "The Sisters" (638 pages) — conceptual and daring and a back handspring of language: written in English, translated into Swedish and back into English again, like an IKEA sofa bed. It goes from chronicling a year to a day to a minute, which mimics how growing older feels. Excellent company, at least for my left brain.

The best memoirs this year seemed to be mourn-memoirs of a kind, raw first drafts that are also final words. Geraldine Brooks on the sudden death of her husband, the fellow reporter Tony Horwitz; Arundhati Roy on her abusive but inspiring mother; Sally Mann writing about everything but the unspeakable demise of her son and photo subject, Emmett, to whom the book is dedicated; and Susan Cheever combining literary analysis and a family-therapy session on her famous father, John.

Then there was the lord of multimedia synergy, Barry Diller, going old-fashioned between covers on the end of Hollywood; the food writer Olia Hercules on her native Ukraine; Edmund White on his prodigious sex life — a lewd but lucid last gift to us, published a few months before he died. And Joan

Didion honked down from the great Corvette Stingray in the sky with "Notes to John," underscoring the importance of burning the diaries if you don't want them read, or published.

But some diaries are evidentiary, crucial. I won't soon forget the devastating testimony of either the late Virginia Roberts Giuffre, whose posthumous account of her tragic life, written with Amy Wallace, is now an indelible part of the public record and a best seller; or E. Jean Carroll, who cast her wry and rolling eye, refined after decades in magazines, on the actual trials and related tribulations in her cases against Donald J. Trump.

From E. Jean to Miss Jean (Brodie): I didn't think there was anything new to say about the latter's creator, Muriel Spark, who died in 2006 — but how wrong I was. In "Electric Spark," Frances Wilson did the absolute best thing you can do with biography, which is convince the reader that a sort of haunting and exorcism has taken place in the course of its creation. Next time I go on vacation, it will be with a tall stack of Sparks.

As the American left showed a pulse in the most recent elections, Carla Kaplan's "Troublemaker: The Fierce, Unruly Life of Jessica Mitford" reintroduced us to a Mitford for this moment: muckraking, progressive, YouTubeable. And who could have been more of a troublemaker than Yoko Ono, given a reputational refurbishing by David Sheff?

This may not be possible for Woody Allen, but his first novel, at age 89, was not half bad. Though relatively teensy.

#### DWIGHT GARNER

In Dan Nadel's excellent biography of the cartoonist R. Crumb we were reminded

that the first issue of Crumb's Zap Comix arrived with this cover line: "Approved by the ghost writers in the sky." Here are some sentences from the past year that, in this critic's estimation, are similarly approved.

Tonight I am giving a small acid dinner party.

JOE BRAINARD,  
"Love, Joe"

Do you know how good Bunny Wailer sounds when you are on mushrooms?

PATRICIA LOCKWOOD,  
"Will There Ever Be Another You"

Spend your whole day around ice cream, you can begin to grow philosophical.

THOMAS PYNCHON,  
"Shadow Ticket"

Wondering, as she always did, why olive oil was alone in having extra virginity.

EDWARD ST. AUBYN,  
"Parallel Lines"

There are few feelings of relief comparable to the first gulp of night air after leaving a dinner party prematurely.

KEITH McNALLY,  
"I Regret Almost Everything"

There was something about air travel that made me think of Swiss euthanasia clinics.

MARIEL FRANKLIN,  
"Bonding"

If I had to describe the ambience of my first date, I would say, "my mother was driving."

DAVE BARRY,  
"Class Clown"

Whenever I hear the word community I think of Shirley Jackson and "The Lottery."

CHRIS KRAUS,  
"The Four Spent the Day Together"

Life is an excruciating phase in the life of everyone.

NELL ZINK,  
"Sister Europe"

No one was ever listening closely — even the people

who especially claimed to be listening were not really listening.

SUSAN CHOI,  
"Flashlight"

Someday I'd like to get credit for not saying all the things I could have said.

ANNE TYLER,  
"Three Days in June"

I was so horny I felt like going out & jumping a sidewalk Santa.

THOMAS MALLON,  
"The Very Heart of It: New York Diaries, 1983-1994"

Well, wouldn't it be nice to consummate/Our friendship while we still have teeth and hair?

WENDY COPE,  
"Collected Poems"

If you think your carrier doesn't notice when you order a sex toy, you're wrong.

STEPHEN STARRING GRANT,  
"Mailman"

My mother's heartbeat,/the first time I heard a bassline.

CALEB FEMI,  
"The Wickedest"

Honor your parents, when they are around.

MARK TWAIN,  
in Ron Chernow's biography  
"Twain"

It vexed him that his son-in-law replied to every question, "What do I know?"

CHAIM GRADE,  
"Sons and Daughters"

What is better to do in hotel rooms than to write poetry?

JOHN UPDIKE,  
"Selected Letters"

I don't write like a man. I write. Like a man.

MARGARET ATWOOD,  
"Book of Lives"

I'd like to shout down through a hole in the ceiling of time and advise the people of a hundred years ago: If you want your secrets kept, whisper them into the ear of your dearest, most trusted friend.

Do not trust the keyboard and screen. If you do, we'll know everything.

IAN McEWAN,  
from the future, in "What We Can Know"

Watch this.

MALCOLM COWLEY,  
in Gerald Howard's biography  
"The Insider," rolling Jack Kerouac's original scroll of "On the Road" across his living room rug.

Spare me from old men's calm assumption that anything they say, no matter how dull, slow or perfunctory, deserves and will have an audience.

HELEN GARNER,  
"How to End a Story"

I have to say that becoming paralyzed is a great way to meet new people.

HANIF KUREISHI,  
"Shattered"

We thought the pain of what was happening in this country wouldn't come to our doorstep. But it has.

GARY SHTEYNGART,  
"Vera, or Faith"

You never know when you're in a golden age. You only realize it was a golden age when it's gone.

GRAYDON CARTER,  
"When the Going Was Good" □

# PODCAST INTERVIEWS



In addition to all the reading, writing and videos we do here at the Book Review, we've also been hosting a podcast for more than 16 years. Each week, we provide an audio space for our writers and editors to discuss books they're excited about or interview the most interesting authors of the moment. The hosts, Gilbert Cruz and MJ Franklin, picked a few favorite conversations from the past year.

S.A. COSBY

## King of Ashes

**Gilbert Cruz** There's a quote in your new book. Someone says: "Jefferson Run used to be the number one producer of Mason jars. Now all we make is orphans and widows." I'd love to hear about Jefferson Run.

**S.A. Cosby** I wanted to evoke the small towns in the South — in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama — towns that were big manufacturing hubs. Places that made glass and windows and rubber and steel and textiles.

Once manufacturing moved out of these places there was nothing left to replace it. But crime is America's great secret industry. And when the legitimate businesses leave, crime steps in. I wanted to talk about cities like that in a way that I thought was sympathetic to the people who still live there. The pitfalls of gentrification, but also the incredible, difficult ways that poverty can infest your life.

**GC** I was watching a panel discussion that you did and you said, in reference to Southern noir, "I think it's just this idea of crime fiction that takes place in a place where you can't get away from the people that you hurt." That was a beautiful way to put it.

**SAC** I'll use New York as an example. I can get in a bar fight in Brooklyn, and go to the Bronx and nobody will know what happened. But if you're in a small town, there's only two or three bars, so if you get in a bar fight at the bar on one side of town, by the time you get to the other side, everybody knows it.

Or let's take it outside of a bar setting. I knew of a case in my hometown where a very respected teacher had a car accident and she hit a little girl. It was the little girl's fault. She ran into traffic. But that teacher was never able to recover. The town made a judgment even though the police didn't say it was her fault, even though the courts didn't say it was her fault. The town decided that she was guilty, and someone who had spent 20, 30 years as a pillar of the community was now a pariah. As a writer, I like to examine things like that. I like to examine the idea of a town's collective memory of you.

**GC** I imagine as a writer too, it's very fruitful, because it means that your characters constantly have to ping-pong off each other. They can't just hit the road and head west.

**SAC** Yeah. When things like that happen in an area where everybody knows everybody, where everything is so interconnected, it forces you to develop an understanding of how to compartmentalize things. That can be healthy — and not so healthy.

MARY ROACH

## Replaceable You: Adventures in Human Anatomy

**Gilbert Cruz** Science is gross, and I am curious when you knew you were just going to regularly write about things that are pretty gnarly or that people consider to be

gnarly, but still want to read about.

**Mary Roach** I guess it started with a column for Salon. I was invited to write a column about science and medicine and body-related things. Whatever I felt like reporting on, I reported on.

I was wandering through the basement of the U.C.S.F. medical school library. The basement had all the out-of-date stuff that no student would ever need or want to look at. But I loved to wander through there and just see what they had. And I came across stuff about the early days of automotive safety and the efforts to create crash-test dummies. In order to calibrate them, you had to use cadavers. And I wrote a column about that use of cadavers, and then I had another cadaver column, which was for Thanksgiving — how much does a human stomach hold before it bursts? Because I thought it would be a cheerful Thanksgiving Day piece.

**GC** Uh, yeah. Seasonally appropriate.

**MR** Thank you. Appropriate. My agent contacted me and said, You should think about a book — which of your columns got the highest hit rates? And I'm like, you know, these cadaver ones seem to be popular.

So these things that are taboo or gross, there is a kind of built-in curiosity, I think, among readers and the public in general. So that's how I got headed in that direction.

**GC** Yeah, you've staked out your corner.

**MR** Yes, exactly. Yes, and I'm happy in my corner, my filthy, dirty, little stinky corner.

**GC** Do you get icked out at this stuff? Are you capable of that?

**MR** I've never been icked out by anything in my books, but I have a friend who was the medical examiner for Alameda County, where I live, and

she made it a personal goal to ick Mary Roach out. One day she said, Oh, I have a couple of interesting cases this morning in the autopsy room, you should come down.

And I did, and there were a couple of bodies that had been discovered after a few weeks in hot weather, and I had to leave quickly. I gagged and said I had no idea how she does what she does. She said, What do you mean? It's no different than changing a diaper. I'm like, I'm sorry; it's *really* different. The visuals of that I won't even begin to describe to you, but it was beyond anything I'd seen, even at the Body Farm in Tennessee. I didn't run, but I walked quickly out of the room and I couldn't go back.

**GC** Mary, you write so much about the human body. Bodies that are alive, bodies that are not alive. I'm wondering if that has affected the way that you maybe spiritually think about things in your life.

**MR** I'm not a very spiritual person, but I will say that there is something about a dead body. You have this sense that something was there, and it is gone. This is a hull, it's just a shell. It's just meat. So where did it go? I don't have an answer. If I had to give an answer, I would say, when I die I am gonna go back to where I was before I was born. I have no idea where that is or what that is.

BRANDON TAYLOR  
**Minor Black Figures**

**MJ Franklin** I have one silly quick question: Is Wyeth, your artist protagonist, named after the painter N.C. Wyeth?

**Brandon Taylor** I mean, that seems like the obvious choice. In fact, I didn't really think of that until a friend pointed out to me that I'd

written about a painter named Wyeth — in America, in New York of all places! — but no. He's named after Mariah Wyeth from the Joan Didion novel "Play It as It Lays." I've always really loved that name, and I have this habit of naming my characters after characters in other people's books.

**MJF** Can you talk to me a little bit about your deep dive into the art world and how you brought that to the page?

**BT** I was interested in the artists' lives. But I was also interested in, like, the social network of it all. I was interested in how the journalists fit together with the reviewers and how they fit together with their critics and how they fit together with the artists. Because they're often friends and all this other stuff. And so a lot of it is informed by my own sort of gadflying about parties, but it also came from — I did this deep dive into art biographies and read about so many parties, so many juicy parties.

**MJF** I would like to zoom into Wyeth. Can you tell us a little bit more about this character? Who is he?

**BT** Sure. Wyeth is Black — biracial, but for his purposes he is Black — and he grew up in Virginia. He's always wanted to be an artist, but he's also always felt estranged from basically everyone around him. And he goes to art school at a really pivotal time in American history, around the time that Tamir Rice was murdered, so that is the formative social backdrop of his aesthetic education.

And almost from the very beginning, he feels this clash between his aesthetics and the political values that are being projected onto his work by his peers, white and Black. So he's never felt quite sure about how to resolve this tension between the aesthetic and the political. He is in search of mean-

ing, but he isn't sure that meaning exists in the world anymore. And he isn't sure that he wants the things that he wants for the right reasons. So he is always turning them over and inspecting his ambitions and his motivations, in this endlessly recursive self-defeating spiral.

**MJF** You said at the start that you wanted to write about painting and seeing and priests, and yet when you just described Wyeth you mentioned all of these very deep existential ideas.

**BT** When I think about what the book is about at its simplest level, it is about two people with a vocation trying to figure out what it means to have a vocation in a world that seems so evacuated of meaning and structure. Wyeth as a painter is at a crisis of faith in what he's doing because he feels like he's come to the end of one form of value in his painting. He's like, well, what else is there? Should I try to be political? And what does it mean to be political in your art?

So the book is charting in some sense the end of his artistic naïveté and his development into a mature artistic consciousness, which is also just the maturation of a person, that end of very late adolescence when we finally just have to stand up and be an adult in the world. And that is a singularly harrowing moment that comes for us all.

**MJF** He has this relationship with someone else. He meets a former priest named Keating.

**BT** I've had a longstanding fascination with Catholicism. I read a lot of European history, and you cannot read about European history and not read about Catholicism. And I was, I'm just gonna go for it. I'm going to write about a Jesuit. Who's going to stop me? So at the same time that Wyeth is having a crisis of faith in a more secular way, there's this guy

who's trained his entire life to be a priest who's also having a crisis of faith. And they meet and they intersect in the city at this very particular moment in time, and they pressurize each other in these really interesting ways.

But writing Keating was just an excuse to, I don't know, write my own version of a Nora Ephron movie, maybe. I love romance novels and I love romantic comedies and I'd always wanted to write one. I think romantic comedy is the ultimate optimistic art form because it posits that two people who come to know each other won't be turned off or repulsed and will in fact want greater intimacy. And I think that is the most optimistic statement about the human condition that we have.

RON CHERNOW  
**Mark Twain**

**Gilbert Cruz** Now for any nonfiction writer, picking the next topic can be a heavy task. You're picking someone who you're gonna be married to for many years. So can you remember approximately or precisely if you can, the moment when you said, Mark Twain is my guy?

**Ron Chernow** Well, it's interesting that you use the marriage analogy, because whenever I address writing students about biography, I say the choice of topic is far and away the most important decision that you will make. And I say that it's a lot like marriage. If you pick the right person, nothing can go wrong. If you pick the wrong person, nothing can go right.

Everything flows out of that. I can pinpoint the moment when my Mark Twain obsession began. I was a freelance magazine writer in Philadelphia, circa 1975, and I saw a poster one night of Hal Holbrook performing as Mark Twain. I

went knowing nothing about Holbrook and a little bit more about Mark Twain.

And Holbrook stood up there with the white suit and the cigar and the mustache, and for 90 minutes he dispensed the most wonderful political witticisms. There was something so fresh and funny and tart about them. We tend to think of American culture as gung-ho and optimistic. And here was somebody who reveled in these cynical wisecracks and the wisecracks had staying power, which is interesting because usually, humor is very topical. The laugh disappears along with the circumstances that gave rise to it.

**GC** Have you ever picked a subject and then said, "This is not going to work"?

**RC** It's an excellent question. Luckily, all the people that I picked, their story, their character turned out to be even richer than I had imagined. But there are all sorts of stories among biographers. I think it was David McCullough who gave up a book on Picasso because he couldn't stand him. Justin Kaplan did the same with Charlie Chaplin.

The person tends to be less interesting, more boring than you thought. Possibly a bigger problem is just that you find this person detestable in some way, and you're locked in a room day after day with them.

**GC** Writing history, writing biographies can be so heady. Talk to me about the feelings. Talk to me about the emotion of finding an amazing letter that you did not expect to find.

**RC** Oh, it's excitement. It's like you're breaking into someone's house in the night. If you start rummaging around in the drawers, you'll always find things that shock you. If you go into a biography excessively admiring the person, you're going to be disillusioned. □

# CHILDREN'S BOOKS



BY JENNIFER KRAUSS

In no particular order, here are 2025's most notable picture and middle grade books as selected by our children's books editor.

## PICTURE BOOK

THE BOY WHO BECAME A PARROT

By **Wolverton Hill**;  
illustrated by  
**Laura Carlin**

In this joy of a book, Hill tells the story of Edward Lear's life with a playfulness that echoes his subject's own writings. Carlin's seamless mix of illustrations and sketchy doodles, her art and Lear's, is not only

exquisite but as exuberantly clever and goofy as the non-sense king himself.

## ISLAND STORM

By **Brian Floca**;  
illustrated by  
**Sydney Smith**

Floca and Smith present the glory of shared sibling adventure: A brother and sister walk down to the seashore to watch

a stupendous summer storm. "We stand there just to feel it all, wind, stone, wave, water! And then we ask, is this enough, or do we try for more? You pull on me, I pull on you, and we decide to go on." Captivated, readers will "go on" right alongside them.

## ZIP ZAP WICKETY WACK

By **Matthew Diffie**

This book *feels* like a throw-back, with its barnyard setting and timeless illustrations. At the start, two farm animals introduce their sounds: "The cow says, 'Moo.' The horse says, 'Neigh.'" But then we're confronted with a problem, and the delightfully deadpan entertainment begins, as Diffie disrupts our expectations in stunning and hilarious ways.

## MAKE NEW FRIENDS

By **Joshua David Stein**; illustrated  
by **Mariachiara Di Giorgio**

Stein explores an old subject through a fresh lens via a story that's honest, silly and tender. Tomasso is the new kid in school. His caring keeps asking if he's made any friends. Alone on the playground one day, Tomasso draws faces on two balls, and over the next few weeks he crafts other companions from castoff objects. This allows him to tell his dad that, yes, he has indeed made friends. But when his father proposes he invite his pals to dinner, Tomasso is forced to bring his creations to the table.

## MIDDLE GRADE

### EARTHRISE

By **Leonard S. Marcus**

Marcus brings to today's readers the same sense of

wonder and discovery that young people experienced in 1968 when they saw the snapshot the Apollo 8 astronaut William Anders took of Earth on Christmas Eve. For a brief moment in time, Marcus reminds us, an image of our delicate blue-and-white marbled planet emerging out of the darkness radically shifted our perspective, enabling us to see the fragile beauty of humankind's home and the critical importance of joining together to protect it.

## MALCOLM LIVES!

By **Ibram X. Kendi**

In this vital, brilliant rendering of the story of Malcolm X (who would have been 100 this year), Kendi adjusts his voice slightly for a middle grade audience — he writes here, as Malcolm spoke, with a piercing clarity. Kendi embraces Malcolm in all his messy complexity, showing young readers an evolution of humanity and political philosophy that many adults still fail to appreciate.

## A SEA OF LEMON TREES

By **María Dolores Águila**

While this novel in verse about the first U.S. case in which school segregation was deemed illegal (paving the way for *Brown v. Board of Ed*) is meticulously researched, it is Águila's gorgeous language and deeply human depiction of Roberto Alvarez, the Mexican American boy who was the case's lead plaintiff, that set it apart from other historical works for young people.

## THE TEACHER OF NOMAD LAND

By **Daniel Nayeri**

The setting — mountains, brush and beleaguered cities,

during the 1941 Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran — is vivid and gritty. The three main characters — a pair of orphaned siblings and the Jewish boy they meet as he flees a Nazi — are so authentic you can hear their breath when they speak. But the glory of this novel is the way it reaches across cultures and time to find an essential truth: "What we want others to know, we must teach them."

## OASIS

By **Guojing**

It's rare to find a book so thought-provoking and haunting that also feels like it's welcoming the reader with a warm hug. This graphic novel, about a big sister and little brother left to forage for sustenance in a postapocalyptic desert, does just that. Guojing's softly shaded pencil illustrations of the round-faced kids bring unusual comfort to a harsh landscape, while her oddly uplifting story lets readers see how the children's once-desolate home becomes its own oasis of nurturing, where an unconventional and beautiful family blooms.

## A WORLD WITHOUT SUMMER

By **Nicholas Day**;  
illustrated by  
**Yas Imamura**

Day — who excels at pointing out connections, ironies and paradoxes to young readers — skillfully presents the hard science behind the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia. The event led not only to darkness and famine on the other side of the globe, but also to explosive thunderstorms over Lake Geneva in Switzerland, where Mary Shelley caught the spark of an idea and began writing "Frankenstein," the perfect artifact for the era. □

# Best Sellers

The New York Times

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

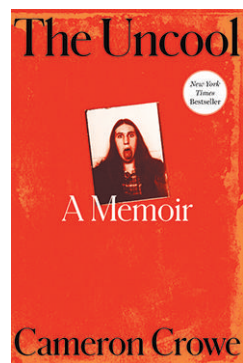
## COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF NOVEMBER 23-29

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	1	<b>BRIMSTONE</b> , by Callie Hart. (Forever) The second book in the Fae & Alchemy series. To save those close to them, Saeris and Fisher face a new set of dangers.	2	1	3	<b>1929</b> , by Andrew Ross Sorkin. (Viking) The New York Times journalist and CNBC host looks at the fight between Washington and Wall Street that fueled a historic crash of the stock market.	7
2	4	<b>THE WIDOW</b> , by John Grisham. (Doubleday) When Simon Latch, a lawyer in rural Virginia, is accused of murder, he goes in search of the real killer.	6	2	2	<b>HOW TO TEST NEGATIVE FOR STUPID</b> , by John Kennedy. (Broadside) The Republican senator from Louisiana shares stories about politics.	8
3	9	<b>THE SECRET OF SECRETS</b> , by Dan Brown. (Doubleday) As he searches for the missing noetic scientist he has been seeing, Robert Langdon discovers something regarding a secret project.	12	3	1	<b>NOBODY'S GIRL</b> , by Virginia Roberts Giuffre. (Knopf) The late activist and advocate for sex-trafficking survivors describes her time with Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell.	6
4	12	<b>ALCHEMISED</b> , by SenLinYu. (Del Rey) After the war, an imprisoned alchemist is sent to a necromancer to recover her lost memories.	10	4	5	<b>THE LOOK</b> , by Michelle Obama with Meredith Koop. (Crown) A celebration of the former first lady's evolution in style, featuring more than 200 photographs.	4
5	5	<b>QUICKSILVER</b> , by Callie Hart. (Forever) Saeris is transported to a dangerous land of ice and snow, where she must contend with a Fae warrior who has suspect agendas.	14	5	6	<b>THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION</b> , by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns. (Knopf) A companion to the PBS series that delves into various facets of the war and the founding of a new form of government.	3
6		<b>GONE BEFORE GOODBYE</b> , by Reese Witherspoon and Harlan Coben. (Grand Central) When a mysterious man disappears, the former combat surgeon giving him medical assistance goes on the lam.	6	6		<b>POEMS &amp; PRAYERS</b> , by Matthew McConaughey. (Crown) The actor and author of "Greenlights" explores elements of belief and reason that make up our lives.	9
7	10	<b>THE CORRESPONDENT</b> , by Virginia Evans. (Crown) Letters from someone she used to know push Sybil Van Antwerp toward revisiting her past and finding a way to forgive.	3	7	13	<b>107 DAYS</b> , by Kamala Harris. (Simon & Schuster) The former vice president recounts her abbreviated campaign to become president in 2024.	10
8	14	<b>THE HOUSEMAID</b> , by Freida McFadden. (Grand Central) Troubles surface when a woman looking to make a fresh start takes a job in the home of the Winchesters.	107	8	12	<b>THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE</b> , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin) How trauma affects the body and mind, and innovative treatments for recovery.	271
9		<b>THE BOOK OF AZRAEL</b> , by Amber V. Nicole. (Kensington) As dangers intensify, an alliance between enemies might be the only thing that can save a world and various realms.	1	9	4	<b>THE GREATEST SENTENCE EVER WRITTEN</b> , by Walter Isaacson. (Simon & Schuster) The historian and biographer examines the concepts of a statement found in the Declaration of Independence.	2
10	3	<b>RETURN OF THE SPIDER</b> , by James Patterson. (Little, Brown) The 34th book in the Alex Cross series. An enemy's murder book suggests Cross may have made rookie mistakes years ago.	2	10	11	<b>THE GALES OF NOVEMBER</b> , by John U. Bacon. (Liveright) An account of the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald, an American Great Lakes freighter, 50 years ago.	5

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

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



**THE UNCOOL: A Memoir**, by Cameron Crowe. (Avid Reader Press. 322 pp. \$35.)

The rock journalist turned filmmaker really is uncool, he wants us to know: When he was on the road with musicians and bands, he eschewed drugs, alcohol and — seemingly — sex (though, as our critic Dwight Garner points out, “his adoration in the presence of his rock heroes ... makes it seem he’s losing his virginity every few pages”).



**THE HA-HA**, by Jennifer Dawson. (Scribner. 177 pp. Paperback, \$17.)

Originally published in 1961, this unjustly overlooked first novel features a young Englishwoman, modeled on the author, who suffers a breakdown while studying at Oxford and is sent to a mental hospital where she is diagnosed with schizophrenia. Dawson's compassionate, wryly comic take on her protagonist's ordeal earned her a prestigious prize and readers including Sylvia Plath, shortly before her death.



**INDIGNITY: A Life Reimagined**, by Lea Ypi. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 340 pp. \$29.)

When the author, a writer and political theorist from Albania, discovered that a recent viral photograph — depicting a young couple in 1941, smiling and living it up in Fascist Italy — was in fact a shot of her paternal grandparents, she began to investigate. Part biography of her grandmother and part history of Albania, “Indignity” takes the reader through wars, national collapse and family dramas.

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

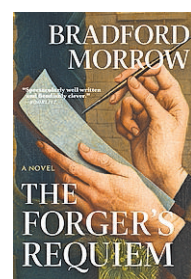
PRINT / HARDCOVER BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF NOVEMBER 23-29

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	1	<b>BRIMSTONE</b> , by Callie Hart. (Forever) The second book in the Fae & Alchemy series. To save those close to them, Saeris and Fisher face a new set of dangers.	2	1	1	<b>HOW TO TEST NEGATIVE FOR STUPID</b> , by John Kennedy. (Broadside) The Republican senator from Louisiana shares stories about politics in Washington, D.C., and in his home state.	8
2	5	<b>THE WIDOW</b> , by John Grisham. (Doubleday) When Simon Latch, a lawyer in rural Virginia, is accused of murder, he goes in search of the real killer.	6	2	4	<b>1929</b> , by Andrew Ross Sorkin. (Viking) The New York Times journalist and CNBC host looks at the fight between Washington and Wall Street that fueled a historic crash of the stock market.	7
3	10	<b>ALCHEMISED</b> , by SenLinYu. (Del Rey) After the war, an imprisoned alchemist is sent to a necromancer to recover her lost memories.	10	3	3	<b>THE LOOK</b> , by Michelle Obama with Meredith Koop. (Crown) A celebration of the former first lady's evolution in style.	4
4	6	<b>THE SECRET OF SECRETS</b> , by Dan Brown. (Doubleday) As he searches for the missing noetic scientist he has been seeing, Robert Langdon discovers something regarding a secret project.	12	4	2	<b>NOBODY'S GIRL</b> , by Virginia Roberts Giuffre. (Knopf) The late activist and advocate for sex-trafficking survivors describes her time with Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell.	6
5	15	<b>GONE BEFORE GOODBYE</b> , by Reese Witherspoon and Harlan Coben. (Grand Central) When a mysterious man disappears, the former combat surgeon giving him medical assistance goes on the lam.	7	5	6	<b>THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION</b> , by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns. (Knopf) A companion to the PBS series that delves into various facets of the war and the founding of a new form of government.	3
6		<b>THE BOOK OF AZRAEL</b> , by Amber V. Nicole. (Kensington) As dangers intensify, an alliance between enemies might be the only thing that can save a world and various realms.	1	6		<b>POEMS &amp; PRAYERS</b> , by Matthew McConaughey. (Crown) The actor and author of "Greenlights" explores elements of belief and reason that make up our lives.	9
7		<b>THE INTRUDER</b> , by Freida McFadden. (Poisoned Pen) During a rough storm, Casey puts herself in danger when she lets a girl, who is covered in blood, into her cabin.	7	7	11	<b>107 DAYS</b> , by Kamala Harris. (Simon & Schuster) The former vice president recounts her abbreviated campaign to become president in 2024.	10
8	3	<b>QUICKSILVER</b> , by Callie Hart. (Forever) Saeris is transported to a dangerous land of ice and snow, where she must contend with a Fae warrior who has suspect agendas.	8	8	5	<b>THE GREATEST SENTENCE EVER WRITTEN</b> , by Walter Isaacson. (Simon & Schuster) The historian and biographer examines the concepts of a statement found in the Declaration of Independence.	2
9	4	<b>RETURN OF THE SPIDER</b> , by James Patterson. (Little, Brown) The 34th book in the Alex Cross series. An enemy's murder book suggests Cross may have made rookie mistakes years ago.	2	9	12	<b>HEART LIFE MUSIC</b> , by Kenny Chesney with Holly Gleason. (Morrow) The country musician recounts events and encounters that shaped his life and career.	4
10	12	<b>THE CORRESPONDENT</b> , by Virginia Evans. (Crown) Letters from someone she used to know push Sybil Van Antwerp toward revisiting her past and finding a way to forgive.	5	10	13	<b>THE GALES OF NOVEMBER</b> , by John U. Bacon. (Liveright) An account of the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald, an American Great Lakes freighter, 50 years ago.	5

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

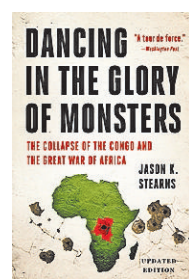
Paperback Row / BY MIGUEL SALAZAR



**THE FORGER'S REQUIEM**, by Bradford Morrow. (Atlantic Crime. 288 pp. \$17.)

Morrow's thriller opens in startling fashion: Henry Slader, a high-end literary forger, wakes up to find that he's been buried alive by

his nemesis, Will Gardener. He exhumes himself and sets out for revenge, unaware that another forger, Will's precocious daughter, has him in her cross hairs. Although this is the third and final installment of Morrow's Forgers Trilogy, according to our critic Sarah Lyall, it reads "just fine on its own."



**DANCING IN THE GLORY OF MONSTERS: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa**, by Jason K. Stearns. (Public-Affairs. 416 pp. \$21.99.)

"Like layers of an onion," Stearns writes, "the Congo war contains wars within wars." Originally

published in 2011, this clarifying account — reissued with a new introduction — carefully examines how the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country rich in gold, diamonds and uranium, became entangled in gruesome conflicts involving over 20 rebel groups and armies.

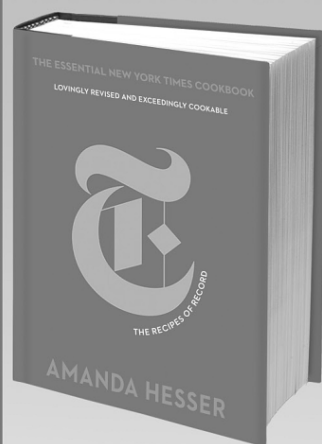


**A LITTLE LUMPEN NOVELITA**, by Roberto Bolaño. Translated by Natasha Wimmer. (Picador. 128 pp. \$15.)

Bolaño's posthumous novella, narrated by a woman who recounts navigating life in Spain as a teenage orphan along with her

younger brother, carries many of the hallmarks of the Chilean author's short fiction: squalor, angst and a mounting sense of foreboding. "Now I'm a mother and a married woman," she says in the book's opening line, "but not long ago I led a life of crime."

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



"A gift from heaven."  
 —INA GARTEN

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

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## AUDIO MONTHLY BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF NOVEMBER 2-29

THIS MONTH	Audio Fiction	MONTHS ON LIST	THIS MONTH	Audio Nonfiction	MONTHS ON LIST
1	<b>BRIMSTONE</b> , by Callie Hart. (Podium Audio) The second book in the Fae & Alchemy series. To save those close to them, Saeris and Fisher face a new set of dangers. Read by Stella Bloom and Anthony Palmini. 24 hours, 31 minutes unabridged.	1	1	<b>NOBODY'S GIRL</b> , by Virginia Roberts Giuffre. (Random House Audio) The late activist and advocate for sex-trafficking survivors describes her time with Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. Read by Thérèse Plummer and Gabra Zackman. 13 hours, 40 minutes unabridged.	2
2	<b>THE WIDOW</b> , by John Grisham. (Random House Audio) When Simon Latch, a lawyer in rural Virginia, is accused of murder, he goes in search of the real killer. Read by Michael Beck. 14 hours, 24 minutes unabridged.	2	2	<b>1929</b> , by Andrew Ross Sorkin. (Penguin Audio) The New York Times journalist and CNBC host looks at the fight between Washington and Wall Street that fueled a historic crash of the stock market. Read by the author. 13 hours, 31 minutes unabridged.	2
3	<b>GONE BEFORE GOODBYE</b> , by Reese Witherspoon and Harlan Coben. (Hachette Audio) When a mysterious man disappears, the former combat surgeon giving him medical assistance goes on the lam. Read by Reese Witherspoon, Chris Pine et al. 10 hours, 34 minutes unabridged.	2	3	<b>THAT'S A GREAT QUESTION, I'D LOVE TO TELL YOU</b> , by Elyse Myers. (HarperAudio) A collection of stories and illustrations by the comedian and content creator. Read by the author. 5 hours, 32 minutes unabridged.	1
4	<b>THE STRENGTH OF THE FEW</b> , by James Islington. (Audible Studios) The second book in the Hierarchy series. Read by Euan Morton. 31 hours, 8 minutes unabridged.	1	4	<b>BOTTOM OF THE PYRAMID</b> , by Nia Sioux. (Harper Horizon) The dancer shares how her time on the reality TV show "Dance Moms" impacted her onstage and off. Read by Chloé Lukasiak and the author. 6 hours, 14 minutes unabridged.	1
5	<b>QUICKSILVER</b> , by Callie Hart. (Podium Audio) Saeris is transported to a dangerous land of ice and snow. Read by Stella Bloom and Anthony Palmini. 20 hours, 42 minutes unabridged.	9	5	<b>HOW TO TEST NEGATIVE FOR STUPID</b> , by John Kennedy. (Broadside) The Republican senator from Louisiana shares stories about politics. Read by the author. 8 hours, 13 minutes unabridged.	2
6	<b>PROJECT HAIL MARY</b> , by Andy Weir. (Audible Studios) The fate of humanity rests on Ryland Grace's shoulders. Read by Ray Porter. 16 hours, 10 minutes unabridged.	25	6	<b>THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE</b> , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin Audio) How trauma affects the body and mind. Read by Sean Pratt. 16 hours, 17 minutes unabridged.	61
7	<b>THE SEVEN RINGS</b> , by Nora Roberts. (Macmillan Audio) The third book in the Lost Bride Trilogy. Read by Brittany Pressley. 15 hours, 23 minutes unabridged.	1	7	<b>THE ANXIOUS GENERATION</b> , by Jonathan Haidt. (Penguin Audio) A look at the mental health impacts that a phone-based life has on children. Read by Sean Pratt and the author. 10 hours, 33 minutes unabridged.	21
8	<b>THE CORRESPONDENT</b> , by Virginia Evans. (Random House Audio) Letters from someone she used to know push Sybil Van Antwerp toward revisiting her past and finding a way to forgive. Read by Maggi-Meg Reed, Jane Oppenheimer et al. 8 hours, 36 minutes unabridged.	2	8	<b>107 DAYS</b> , by Kamala Harris. (Simon & Schuster Audio) The former vice president recounts her abbreviated campaign to become president in 2024. Read by the author. 9 hours, 58 minutes unabridged.	3
9	<b>THE INTRUDER</b> , by Freida McFadden. (Dreamscape Media) During a rough storm, Casey puts herself in danger when she lets a girl, who is covered in blood, into her cabin. Read by Patricia Santomasso, Tina Wolstencroft and Joe Hempel. 8 hours, 19 minutes unabridged.	2	9	<b>HEART LIFE MUSIC</b> , by Kenny Chesney with Holly Gleason. (HarperAudio) The country musician recounts events and encounters that shaped his life and career. Read by Kenny Chesney. 8 hours, 1 minute unabridged.	1
10	<b>ALCHEMISED</b> , by SenLinYu. (Random House Audio) After the war, an imprisoned alchemist is sent to a necromancer to recover her lost memories. Read by Saskia Maarleveld. 36 hours, 15 minutes unabridged.	3	10	<b>OUTLIVE</b> , by Peter Attia with Bill Gifford. (Random House Audio) A look at recent scientific research on aging and longevity. Read by Peter Attia. 17 hours, 8 minutes unabridged.	24
11	<b>DUNGEON CRAWLER CARL</b> , by Matt Dinniman. (Audible Studios) A Coast Guard vet named Carl and his ex-girlfriend's cat, Princess Donut, are trapped in a fantasy dungeon. Read by Jeff Hays. 13 hours, 31 minutes unabridged.	7	11	<b>GREENLIGHTS</b> , by Matthew McConaughey. (Random House Audio) The actor shares snippets from the diaries he kept over 35 years. Read by the author. 6 hours, 42 minutes unabridged.	61
12	<b>THE SECRET OF SECRETS</b> , by Dan Brown. (Random House Audio) As he searches for the missing noetic scientist he has been seeing, Robert Langdon discovers something regarding a secret project. Read by Paul Michael. 22 hours, 51 minutes unabridged.	3	12	<b>INJUSTICE</b> , by Carol Leonnig and Aaron C. Davis. (Penguin Audio) The Pulitzer Prize-winning reporters investigate changes and divisions within the Justice Department over the last decade. Read by January LaVoy and the authors. 15 hours, 36 minutes unabridged.	1
13	<b>EXIT STRATEGY</b> , by Lee Child and Andrew Child. (Random House Audio) The 30th book in the Jack Reacher series. Read by Scott Brick. 9 hours, 49 minutes unabridged.	1	13	<b>WE DID OK, KID</b> , by Anthony Hopkins. (Simon & Schuster Audio) The Academy Award-winning actor reflects upon his career highlights and private battles. Read by Kenneth Branagh and the author. 9 hours, 5 minutes unabridged.	1
14	<b>NASH FALLS</b> , by David Baldacci. (Hachette Audio) A successful businessman's life is turned upside down when he is recruited by the F.B.I. Read by MacLeod Andrews, Christine Lakin et al. 12 hours, 54 minutes unabridged.	1	14	<b>BLACK AF HISTORY</b> , by Michael Harriot. (HarperAudio) Moments in American history that center the perspectives and experiences of Black Americans. Read by the author. 15 hours, 42 minutes unabridged.	5
15	<b>THE PROVING GROUND</b> , by Michael Connelly. (Hachette Audio) The eighth book in the Lincoln Lawyer series. Read by Peter Giles. 10 hours, 50 minutes unabridged.	2	15	<b>SIMPLY MORE</b> , by Cynthia Erivo. (Macmillan Audio) The multiple award-winning performer and producer shares insights into how she overcame obstacles. Read by the author. 3 hours, 43 minutes unabridged.	1

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**The New York Times**

# ROMANCE



BY OLIVIA WAITE

Our lives are made of the stories we tell. And whether characters are returning to their small hometown and a long-lost love, or swapping book recommendations and illegal kisses in a bookstore in New York in 1968, the romances that moved me this year stood out for their refusal to settle for life's first draft.

## AFTER HOURS AT DOORYARD BOOKS

By Cat Sebastian

In 1968, it's nothing new for Patrick, the manager of Door-yard Books, to help drifters in need of food and shelter.

But there's something different about Nathaniel: He plays the violin, speaks like a banker and knows an astonishing amount about caring for an infant. We join the two as

they build a life together while swimming in the chaos of mass demonstrations, an ever-devouring war, political violence and the intimate devastation of grief. And whenever the larger conflicts meet the smaller ones, Sebastian knocks you back with phrases like "they both see the good in the world dissolving like sugar in tea."

This book cracked my heart like an egg at least once a chapter: achingly sad, bright as acid and utterly perfect.

## THE ISLE IN THE SILVER SEA

By Tasha Suri

How appropriate that a romance about endlessly re-incarnated lovers makes you feel as though you live several glorious lifetimes while reading it. Vina and Simran are the Knight and the Witch, doomed to fall in love and die together and sustain the life of a fluid, fictional vision of Britain. But when they find signs that their destiny might be more mutable, they fight for a better ending than they've ever had before.

## AUGUST LANE

By Regina Black

Black's country-themed romance about a one-hit wonder and the childhood sweetheart whose song he stole is sharp as a knife and sweeping as a tornado. The drama is off the charts — traumatic back stories, neglectful parents, small-town secrets — and the gorgeous prose makes for a luxurious wallow in emotional highs and lows.

## IT HAD TO BE HIM

By Adib Khorram

Who doesn't love a vicarious romance vacation? Ramin, who has just been dumped, decides to go on a sex-filled solo romp in Italy — but his plans get utterly derailed when he runs into an old high school crush. Noah is here with his son and ex-wife, who are about to move to Europe, though Noah dreads the day his son lives halfway across the world. One man has just lost everything; the other is about to. Starting a new relationship based on chance and half-forgotten teenage pining is just the kind of terrible choice you love to see characters make.

## FAN SERVICE

By Rosie Danan

When a viral video shows the former teen soap star Devin going on a rampage as at werewolf, the world assumes it's a stunt. But no, Devin's as puzzled as anyone by his claws and super strength — and the only one who can help him is his ex-biggest fan. Alex used to run a famous online archive for Devin's show; now she's a vet tech who hates his guts after a long-ago encounter. Danan is known for the way she makes her characters earn their redemption, and seeing Devin learn to make amends for Alex's sake is wonderful.

## BOLD MOVES

By Emma Barry

Scarlett is a chess grandmaster; Jaime an award-winning documentarian — but before that, they were two kids in the same small town, with the kind of chemistry that burns down cities. Now Jaime is adapting Scarlett's memoir for a big-name streaming service, and they have the chance to break each other's hearts all over again. Barry adds layer upon layer to this foundation until she's built something with uncommon weight.

## MERCY FLETCHER MEETS HER MATCH

By Aydra Richards

Mercy seems at first like a classic feisty heroine, though in her case it's because she's neuroatypical at a time when that was misunderstood. Her father has bribed the snobby, impoverished aristocrat Thomas as to take Mercy to London to find a husband. We all know where that's going to end, but it's pure pleasure watching Thomas go from irritated disapproval to sympathy and then passion.

## TIME LOOPS AND MEET CUTES

By Jackie Lau

After eating a magical dumping, Noelle finds herself reliving the same day over and over. On the one hand, she never runs out of money; on the other, the cute brew pub owner she keeps running into never remembers her. Noelle is trapped in a single 24-hour period while Cam moves forward through the calendar leaving the reader wondering how they're going to make it work when all the laws of physics are against them.

## MR COLLINS IN LOVE

By Lee Welch

We've seen a lot of recent retellings starring the secondary cast of "Pride and Prejudice," but few with the "hold my beer" energy of this one. Welch takes a pompous character readers love to loathe and with a few deft turns makes him someone readers would die to defend. He's still the same Collins, but he's also a thoughtful employer, scrupulous in his duty to his parishioners and fiercely loyal to the gardener he slowly, sweetly falls for.

## A TROPICAL REBEL GETS THE DUKE

By Adriana Herrera

The of Aurora Montalban — a doctor providing necessary but illegal gynecological care in Belle Époque Paris — and the duke who supports and seduces her is refreshing in many ways. Historical heroines usually flout convention, not the actual law, so the fear is real when Aurora dodges capture by the authorities. And the duke, Apollo Robles? He's biracial, rebellious and furious at society — but absolutely devoted once he decides she's it for him. □



# HIDDEN GEMS OF 2025



BY THE BOOK REVIEW STAFF

At the end of each year, we make a lot of “best” lists. And while we stand wholeheartedly behind those recommendations, inevitably each of us has that one read that doesn’t quite make the cut — but is no less worthy of your attention. Here are a few of the books that stuck with us and became personal favorites this year. Perhaps they will stick with you, too.

## EXILES By Mason Coile

Three astronauts set out on a one-way trip to Mars. Once they arrive, they learn that a whole wing of their planned base has been destroyed, their robot helpers have become sentient, one robot is missing altogether and the remaining machines are warning of a danger that lurks outside. Can the humans survive? I picked up this horror mystery novel on a lazy Sunday and stayed rapt

on my couch until I finished. It was a sweet (or should I say sinister?) little treat.

MJ FRANKLIN, *preview editor*

## THE PASSENGER SEAT By Vijay Khurana

This taut, terrific novel — Khurana’s debut — ratchets up the tension in a classic formula: A couple of restless young men on a wilderness

road trip learn more than they anticipated about manhood, violence and the consequences of poor impulse control. Khurana’s sinuous prose zips right along, taking us inside the minds of both friends before swerving into a surprising and graceful finish.

GREGORY COWLES, *senior editor*

## THE CORRESPONDENT By Virginia Evans

Sybil Van Antwerp lives a quiet life. She doesn’t have a spouse or a pet. She prefers the company of pen pals — her brother, favorite authors, a boy going through a hard time. As Evans’s debut novel unfolds in a series of letters, Sybil’s past starts to take shape. But questions (and shadows) remain. Fans of “Olive Kitteridge” take note: This wise, funny story provides further proof that the quirkiest among us deserve a second chance.

ELISABETH EGAN, *feature writer*

## THE SEASON By Helen Garner

No one has ever accused the acclaimed Australian writer Garner of sentimentality. And yet, with “The Season,” she presents a love letter to her grandson’s Aussie Rules football team, and to the grandson himself. This is a sports book, and a very satisfying one. But Garner’s real subject is the fragility of boyhood — and the bittersweet joys of being a grandparent.

SADIE STEIN, *preview editor*

## MORE WEIGHT By Ben Wickey

It took a decade to produce this masterwork of a graphic novel, and that effort is evident in Wickey’s riveting blend of hand-drawn visuals and story-

telling. The book examines the 1692 Salem witch trials and how misinformation and groupthink have impacted American history. The title comes from the supposed last words of Giles Corey, the defiant antihero slowly crushed to death under a pile of rocks at the trials, but “more weight” can also be interpreted as Wickey’s argument against a culture that has since watered down and lightened up the Salem tragedy.

J.D. BIERSDORFER, *staff editor*

## GRAND RAPIDS By Natasha Stagg

Reading this coming-of-age novel is like watching a scab form over a raw wound; some will take a hard pass, while others won’t be able to look away. The 15-year-old narrator has just lost her mother and spends much of her summer getting high and fumbling half-blind through a sexual awakening. Stagg’s writing is precise, and her short chapters have the lingering effect that great songs do: Their power’s not just in the notes but in the silences between.

DAVE KIM, *preview editor*

## DISCONTENT By Beatriz Serrano; translated by Mara Faye Lethem

Marisa, a creative director at a Madrid ad agency, has become an expert in the white-collar shell game of pantomiming busyness: She rearranges decks, exchanges blandly cheerful platitudes and plagiarizes underlings with abandon. Beneath the novel’s breezy nihilism, though, Serrano — via a seamless translation by Lethem — locates the profound loneliness of her protagonist. A tartly funny bonbon of a book with a (literal) knockout ending.

LEAH GREENBLATT, *preview editor*

## GOTHAM AT WAR By Mike Wallace

Wallace does it again, and perhaps for the last time. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author brings his monumental trilogy on New York to a close with a kaleidoscopic history of the political conflicts that roiled the city in the run-up to World War II. It’s got everything: uptown patricians, downtown socialists, dogged immigrants, celebrity anthropologists — all of whom faced off against an outpost of Nazis who saw the five boroughs as a ripe territory to sow racial division.

NEIMA JAHROMI, *preview editor*

## SOFT CORE By Brittany Newell

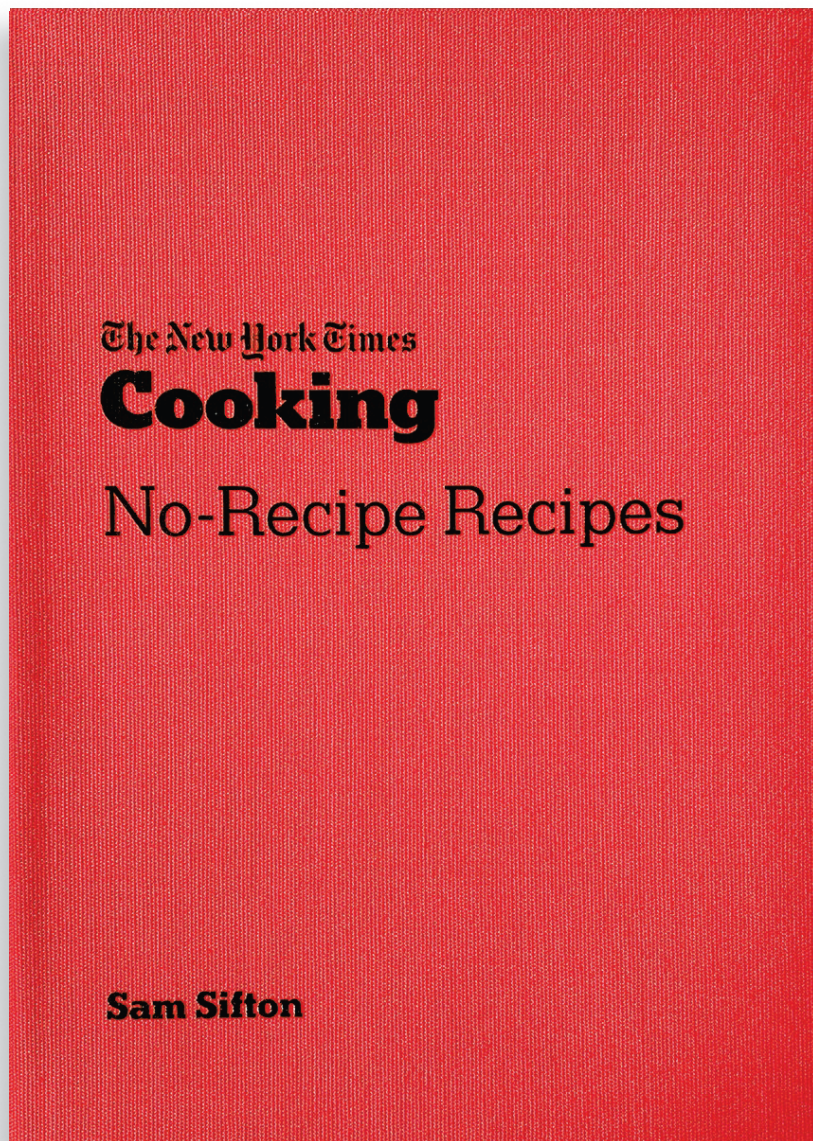
“I was fond of my body like you’d be fond of a favorite mug,” says Ruth (stage name Baby), the newbie stripper whose deadpan observations salt Newell’s mordantly funny novel. “I liked it enough to use it every day but not enough to talk about it.” Talk she does, though — about the club where she works, the economically divided San Francisco where she plays and the missing boyfriend she starts to see all over town.

SCOTT HELLER, *features editor*

## I DO KNOW SOME THINGS By Richard Siken

Each book is an opportunity to respond to the writer’s cardinal question: How to put it? Siken’s autobiography in fragments, written after his 2019 stroke, offers one answer, such as it is: back together. The 77 prose poems in this book reckon with love and memory and personal connection, but most of all with language and its loss. “I tried to say it completely,” he writes. “I said it as plain as I could.”

JOHN MAHER, *news editor* □



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