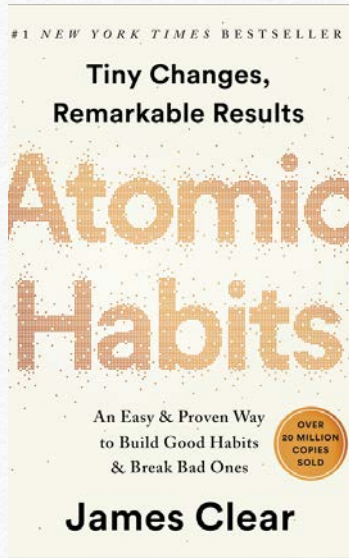


2024 Best Reads

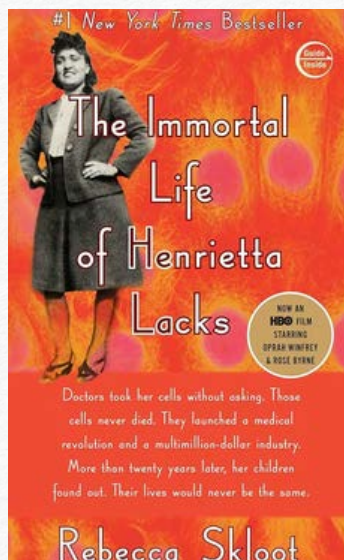


Sara Arippol

Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones

James Clear

Atomic Habits explores how small, consistent changes in behavior can compound over time to produce remarkable results. I chose this book because it provides a practical, step-by-step guide to habit formation, emphasizing the power of tiny habits and systems over traditional goal setting. Clear's approach is actionable and realistic, offering strategies to make good habits easier and bad ones harder to repeat. I've implemented some of his strategies and have seen long-lasting changes in my daily routine, mindset, and overall productivity, both personally and professionally. It's helped me become more consistent and intentional; therefore, I highly recommend it to anyone looking to improve their life.

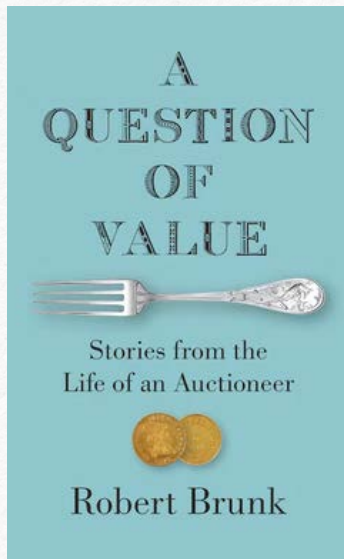


Olivia Canie

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Rebecca Skloot

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks is a great read that blends elements of biography, science, and ethics in a way that is both compelling and deeply human. It explores the scientific significance of Henrietta's immortal cells, known as HeLa cells, which have been used to advance medical science in countless ways — the development of the polio vaccine, cancer treatments, and much more. However, these cells were taken from her without her knowledge or consent. The book raises important ethical questions about medical experimentation, consent, and racial inequality, encouraging readers to think critically about how science intersects with human rights.



Daniel Casse

A Question of Value: Stories from the Life of an Auctioneer

Robert Brunk

We have accumulated so much stuff. Is it worth anything? This turns out to be a complex question of economics, markets, hoarding, and sentimentalism. Robert Brunk, the founder of a well-established North Carolina auction house, probes the deep attachment we have to old things — and the frequent misconception that they are worth far more than they really are. His life as an auctioneer exposed him to gun collectors, crystal chandeliers, mountains of stamps and coins, barns full of rickety, unwanted furniture, and the rare, neglected vase that sells to a Chinese buyer for millions of dollars. This is a highly readable reflection on materialism and price. Anyone who has ever bought something old will be confronted by an unsentimental assessor who understands its real value.

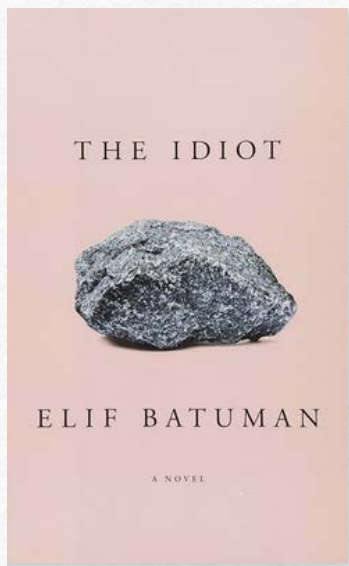


Olivia Clift

Sociopath: A Memoir

Patric Gagne

Patric Gagne details her personal journey with sociopathy in this memoir. She describes feeling different from an early age and how she came to receive a sociopathy diagnosis in college. Gagne later became a clinical psychologist focusing on sociopathy, after being told there was no hope for a normal life. In this book, she challenges the stereotypes and stigma associated with sociopathy and shares her experiences of building meaningful relationships. This is a great read for anyone working in the mental health field.

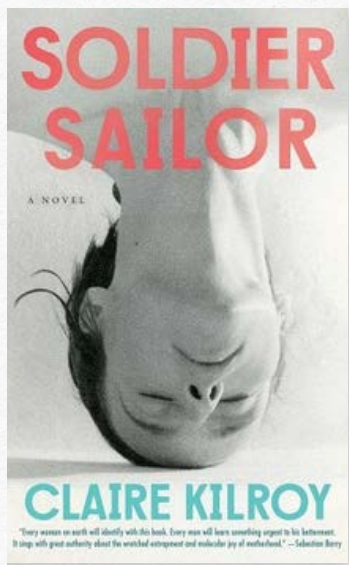


Mary Davis

The Idiot

Elif Batuman

The Idiot has dry humor, introspection, and sharp observations. It captures the tension between words stuck in your throat and the torrent of thoughts threatening to spill out. With a good dose of linguistic philosophy and coed adventures, it makes you want to learn and live more. I highly recommend the sequel, *Either/Or*, as well.

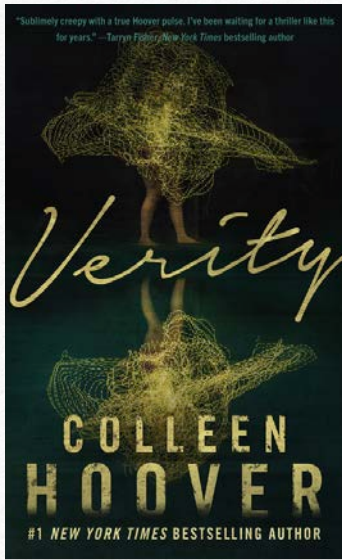


Cassie Dormond

Soldier Sailor

Claire Kilroy

This was my first foray into memoirs about motherhood, and it was full of direct hits. The book captures the first chaotic year-ish of Claire's son's life and is full of anecdotes and insights that are somehow simultaneously funny, heartbreaking, sweet, infuriating, and tear-jerking (somewhat like parenthood itself, I'd argue). If a quote might convince you to read it: "*We all go bustling about, pushing shopping trolleys or whatever, acting like love of this voltage is normal; domestic, even. That we know how to handle it. But I don't.*"

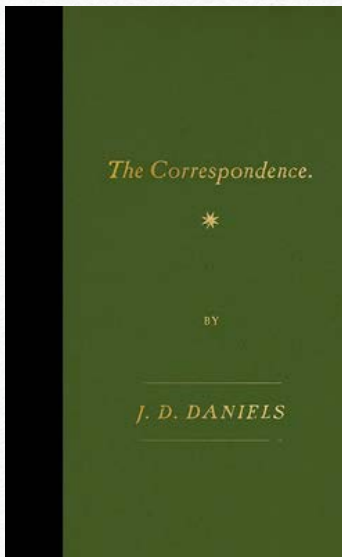


Kim Durante

Verity

Colleen Hoover

Verity is the perfect after-work thriller that keeps you hooked from the very first page. With its eerie atmosphere, unsettling twists, and morally ambiguous characters, it's a gripping psychological mystery that's hard to put down. The story dives into the secrets of a successful but enigmatic author, as a ghostwriter uncovers chilling truths while working in her home. It's a great escape after a long day — fast-paced, thought-provoking, and full of surprises that have you questioning every character's motives.

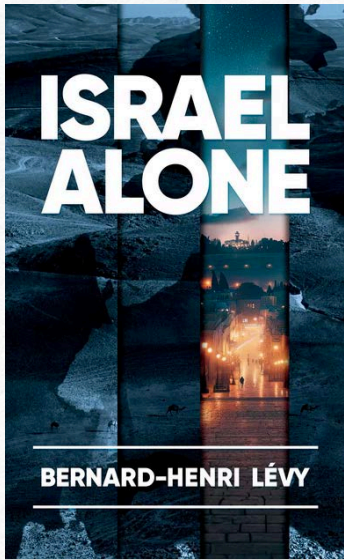


Emma Edney

The Correspondence

J.D. Daniels

A series of 6 letters written from J.D. Daniels' experience as a janitor, an adjunct professor, a drunk, a night watchman, an exterminator, a dutiful son, a psychiatric patient, and a Brazilian jiu-jitsu fighter. Daniels takes us from the highways of his native Kentucky to the Balearic Islands and from the Pampas of Brazil to Cambridge, Massachusetts with traveling companions composed of sailors, teachers, and Southern Baptists on fire. Daniels questions how far psychoanalysis can get us and tells us that civilization can't save us from ourselves. He discovers that the self is the correspondent, the past is a destination, and we're all stuck in the mud. *The Correspondence* is a complete work about a work-in-progress — the self-portrait of a writer slowly coming into his own. Or so they say.

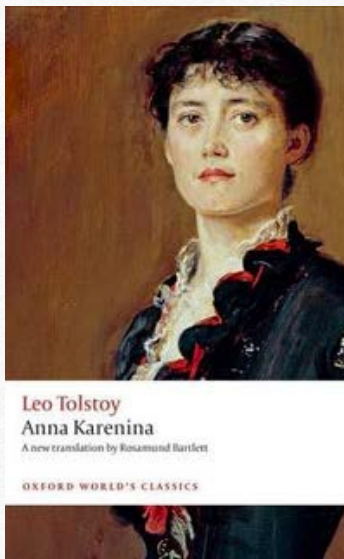


Mike Hodin

Israel Alone

Bernard-Henri Lévy

Bernard-Henri Lévy explores the unique challenges facing Israel as a small nation in a complex and often hostile region. Drawing from his personal experiences, Lévy reflects on Israel's history, its struggles for security, and its role as a democracy in the Middle East. The book offers an insightful look at the resilience of the Israeli people, the cultural and historical significance of the country, and the ongoing challenges it faces in balancing its identity with the pressures of a changing world.

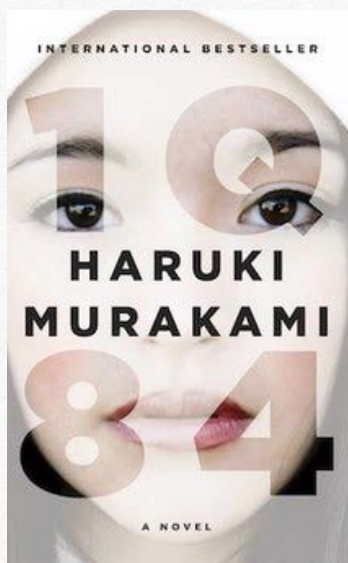


Mark Hoffmann

Anna Karenina

Leo Tolstoy

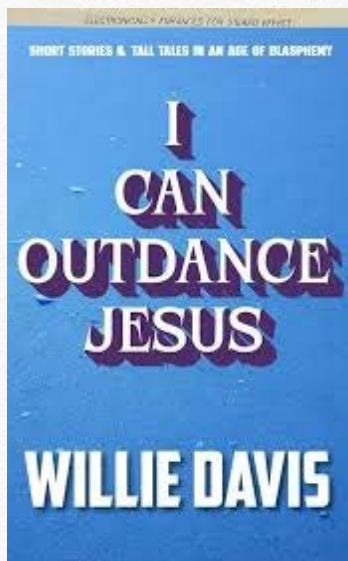
No one wants to read Tolstoy. I get it, even if I disagree. So go for the audiobook. Pre-election, I got sucked into the podcast political doom loop. It was exhausting and unhelpful. I traded Michael Barbaro for *Anna Karenina* and haven't looked back. Gyllenhaal's narration brings luxury and sensuousness to the story that I missed when I read the paperback tome so many years ago. This winter, do yourself a favor. Instead of spending 20 minutes each morning listening to the latest terrible thing that's happening, spend 20 minutes listening to Gyllenhal read Tolstoy.



1Q84

Haruki Murakami

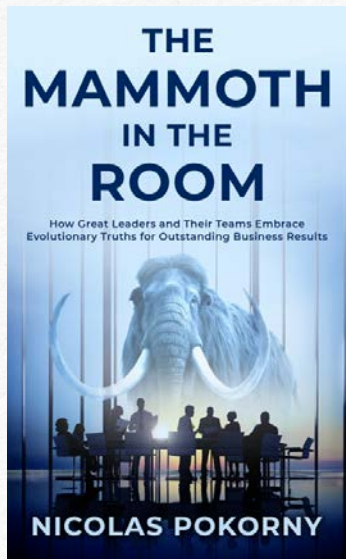
Japanese mega-novel for the win! It's weird, long, diced up, disorienting, and fun. Part thriller, part polemic, part philosophical treatise, it's unlike any other book you'll ever read about vomiting Japanese goats.



I Can Outdance Jesus

Willie Davis

I Can Outdance Jesus offers hilarious and endearing short stories of Appalachian people. Not enough books do what this book does: make you both laugh and sympathize. Also, the author is a longtime friend, so buy his book to be nice to a very nice guy.

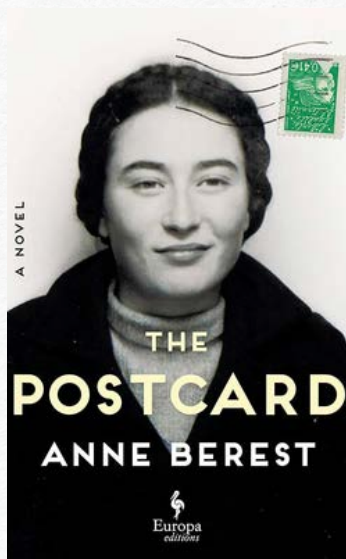


Drew Holzapfel

The Mammoth in the Room: How Great Leaders and Their Teams Embrace Evolutionary Truths for Outstanding Business Results

Nicolas Pokorny

Nicolas Pokorny is an expert in pharmaceutical organization management, a client, and a friend. The advice he provides in the book is perfect for anyone who is trying to figure out how to be more effective in large organizations, whether you work in the organization or consult for the organization.



Caroline Hubbard

The Postcard

Anne Berest

Anne Berest's *The Postcard* is an engaging and poignant tale of the search for family secrets and lost identity. Set in contemporary France, it follows one woman's quest to uncover her family's harrowing experiences during the Holocaust. Beautifully translated, it dives into a world of mystery, self-discovery, and confrontation. I couldn't put it down.

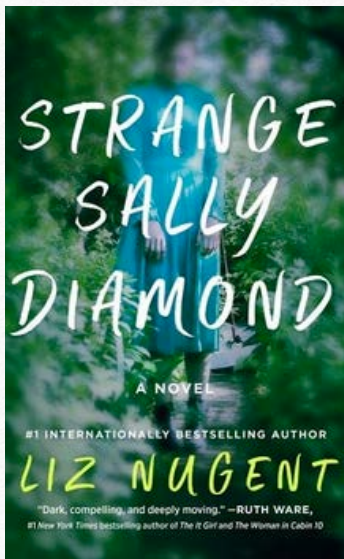


Kira Jones

Fake It 'til You Make It

Laura Carter

If you're like me, sometimes you want a light, playful rom com. Here's one I particularly enjoyed.



Jill Keasel

Strange Sally Diamond

Liz Nugent

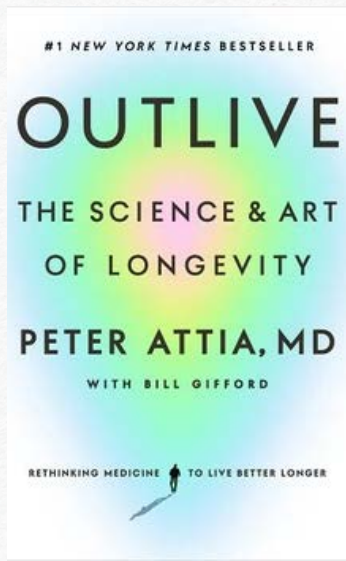
Full disclosure, my favorite genre is “disturbing,” and this book is that. Sally Diamond is a socially awkward woman who followed her father’s instructions and tossed him out in the rubbish when he died. Obviously, this causes Sally to be thrown into the spotlight and the world, both of which she had successfully avoided during her previous 40 years of life. Gradually, you will discover why she is so awkward and why her father had kept her sheltered from society. As you learn about the details of her past, the once completely dependent and vulnerable Sally grows and begins to create a life of her own. This part of the story is the reward for all of the darkness. Hopefully, you will fall in love with Sally Diamond as I did.



The Wishing Game

Meg Shaffer

On occasion, I like to switch things up and read something that is just 100% delightful. Shaffer tells the story of Jack Masterson, a reclusive bestselling children's book author who hasn't written a book in years — but he suddenly reemerges with a new book. He most certainly doesn't need to intensify everyone's enthusiasm for the new book, but he does by creating a contest surrounding it. Four people will be invited to come to his private island, Clock Island, to compete for the only copy of this new book. Knowing that winning the book will change their life forever, everyone is desperate to be selected. The competition is filled with riddles, adventures, and cleverness from start to finish.

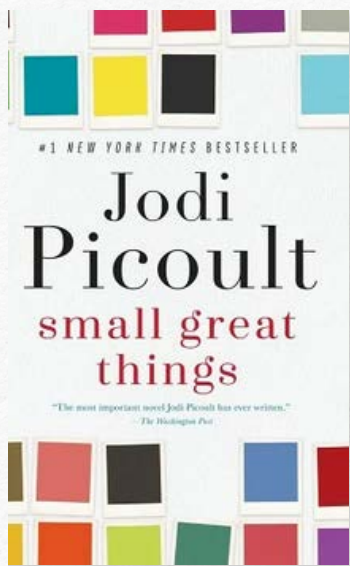


Kattie Krewer

Outlive: The Science and Art of Longevity

Peter Attia, M.D.

Society often talks about the value of living longer, but not as much about the value of living *better* for longer. For the majority of the world, the last decade of life is full of medical concerns, lack of mobility, and health decline. But what if we started thinking about our last decade in our 30s, 40s, or 50s? Dr. Attia discusses the science behind how we can have a healthier last decade and overall better quality of life as we age, moving towards a longer lifespan and a longer healthspan.

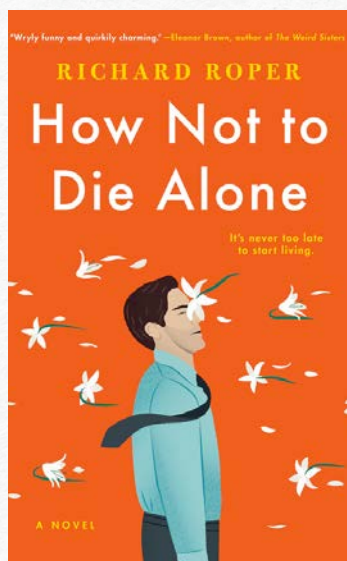


Olivia LeSueur

Small Great Things

Jodi Picoult

Small Great Things is a powerful exploration of race, privilege, and justice told through the gripping story of a Black nurse accused of harming a newborn. Picoult masterfully weaves perspectives, challenging readers to confront their own biases while immersing them in an emotionally charged narrative. This thought-provoking novel is both a page-turner and a conversation starter.

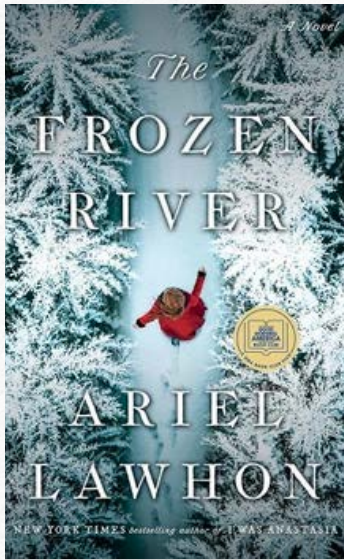


Emily Lizotte

How Not to Die Alone

Richard Roper

How Not to Die Alone combines humor with emotional depth, exploring themes of loneliness, self-doubt, and the importance of human connection. The story follows Andrew, a man who spends his days helping others with funeral planning while struggling with his own isolation. Roper's writing strikes a perfect balance between wit and poignancy, making it both an enjoyable and thought-provoking read. It's a great reminder of the value of relationships and personal growth, and I found it to be a refreshing, uplifting story in a year that's been anything but predictable. I think many of us will find it both entertaining and meaningful. PSA: the title is sure to spark some interesting conversations if you happen to be reading it in a public space — like a bar!



Susannah Loss

The Frozen River

Ariel Lawhon

Inspired by the diary of eighteenth-century midwife Martha Ballard, *The Frozen River* weaves the story of a small-town murder into a powerful narrative on female courage. Both timeless and timely, it's a sharp reminder of how women throughout history have endured and triumphed.

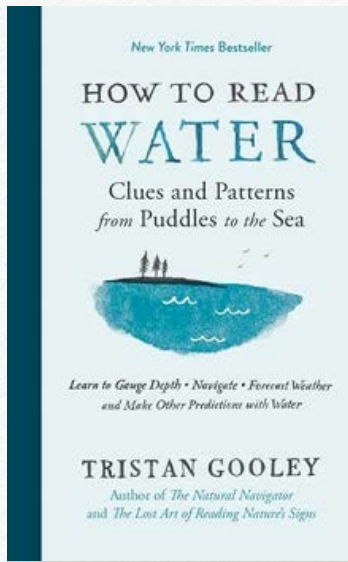


Matt McEnany

Disfrutar Volume 2

Oriol Castro, Eduard Xatruch, and Mateu Casañas

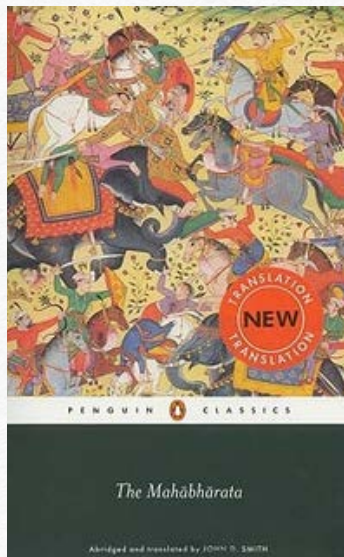
This was a tremendous birthday gift from my wife. This catalog of the complete work and recipes of a 3-Michelin-Star restaurant in Barcelona over a two-year period is an invaluable resource for learning the most advanced cooking techniques. Each recipe has a link to a video which shows exactly how to make every component. Informative, sophisticated, and accessible.



How to Read Water: Clues and Patterns from Puddles to the Sea

Tristan Gooley

I grew up on an island. I grew up on boats; it is obvious to me that you can read the way that water moves, but I have never thought to describe that, and would not be able to formalize any such methods, as is done here. A revelation. Among other skills, learn how to predict the weather from a shore's water level; why different parts of a lake feel as if they are at different temperatures as you swim through them; and where to find water on land, or land from the water. If you finish and cannot get enough of learning about the many forms of water, I would also recommend, as a companion piece, *The Cloudspotter's Guide* on identifying different species of clouds and why they form the way they do.



The Mahābhārata

Ramesh Menon

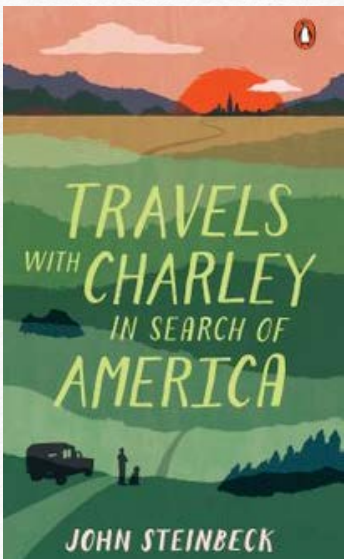
This is the Indian epic, written in the third or fourth century. I have the memory of hearing once that *The Mahābhārata* contains a version of every possible story. This translation, by Ramesh Menon, is incredibly readable. An excellent choice if you want to lose yourself to a novel for six months to a year and emerge forever changed. At one point, I genuinely wanted to give my son a name from *The Mahābhārata*, but relented. I think on its central theme of duty often.



Disco Elysium

Unknown

I watched my wife go through this just before my son was born this year. At around 1 million words, this isn't so much a "game" as what is called a "visual novel." Visual novels are typically truly awful — and yet here, a miracle. *Disco Elysium* is both fascinating and powerful. A detective story, it takes many of the ideas of media like *True Detective* season 1 or *Fargo* and expands, expands, expands. Imagine a world in which the novel was just invented: you are nearing the end of the novel's first year, and three books have been released. The first two are AI-generated slop; the last is *Crime and Punishment*. I'm not saying *Disco Elysium* is as good as *Crime and Punishment*. I am saying though, that like a work like *Crime and Punishment*, it completely forces you to reconsider what its genre can do.

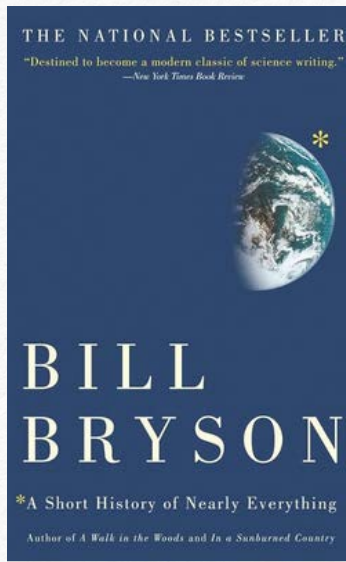


Connor McLaughlin

Travels with Charley: In Search of America

John Steinbeck

Travels with Charley chronicles the author's journey across the United States in 1960 with his poodle, Charley, in a specially designed camper. As Steinbeck encounters diverse regions and people, he reflects on the state of America, its cultural divisions, and the changing landscape of his homeland.

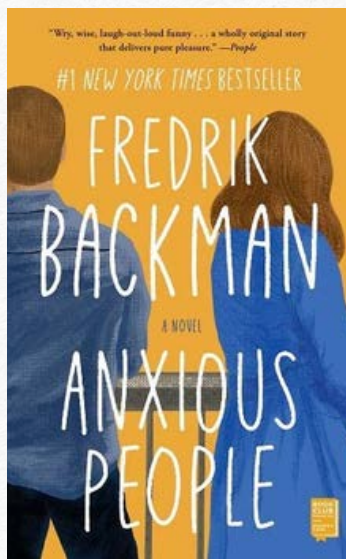


Cortland Mercer

A Short History of Nearly Everything

Bill Bryson

Sweeping in scale and humbling in implication, Bryson succinctly and effortlessly articulates how much we understand about, well, everything. It turns out we know almost nothing, and what we do know we've only known for a comically and cosmically brief period. Infinitely readable, Bryson chronicles the scientific achievements we all take for granted, but don't actually understand. How would you, after all, measure the precise diameter of the earth, go about discovering a new element, or theorize the existence of spacetime?

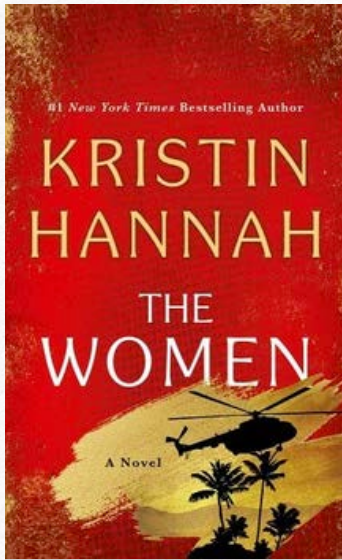


Florence Mooser

Anxious People

Fredrik Backman

Anxious People is a heartwarming and humorous exploration of the messiness of human relationships and the anxieties we all carry. Set against the backdrop of a failed bank robbery turned hostage situation at an open house, the novel introduces a cast of quirky, multi-dimensional characters whose secrets and struggles intertwine in surprising ways. Bonus: the Netflix series is great!



Chandler Pearson

The Women

Kristin Hannah

The Women offers a powerful exploration of women's lives during one of the most divisive times in our country's history. Through a fresh take on a familiar topic, Hannah captures the profound trauma of the Vietnam War and the challenges of reintegration faced by the women who served. Heartbreaking and unforgettable, this is the story of the women who were there – and its message stays with you long after you finish reading.

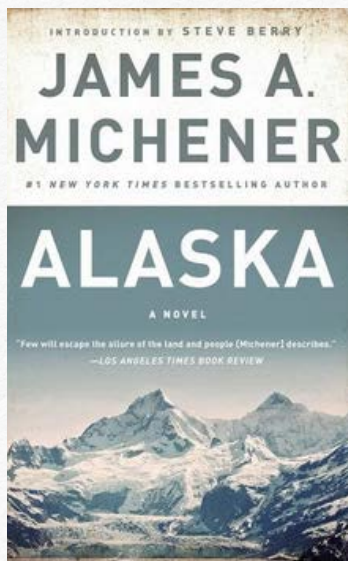


Charles Pennell

You Dreamed of Empires

Álvaro Enrigue

This is a novel with an alternate history of the Aztecs and Cortes, under 250 pages. A banger.

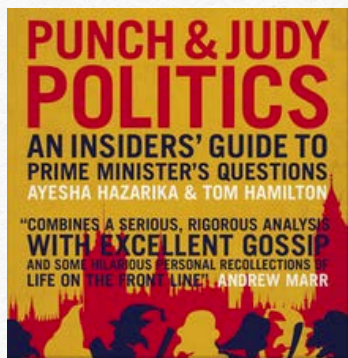


Michiel Peters

Alaska

James A. Michener

I like to read books about my holiday destination when I'm there. This year, I took Michener's portrait of how Alaska became what it is today with me on a trip from the Inside Passage to Anchorage. Michener mixes fictional characters with actual historical events to paint a lively picture of history. I found it an entertaining — although quite long — read that provides context and background, whether you're actually in the biggest U.S. state or at home.



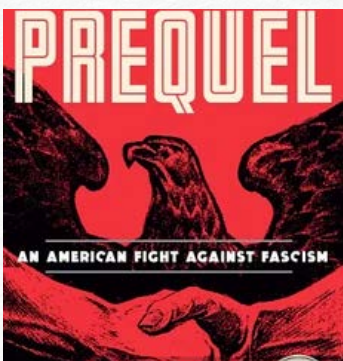
Katy Riddick

Punch & Judy Politics: An Insiders' Guide to Prime Minister's Questions

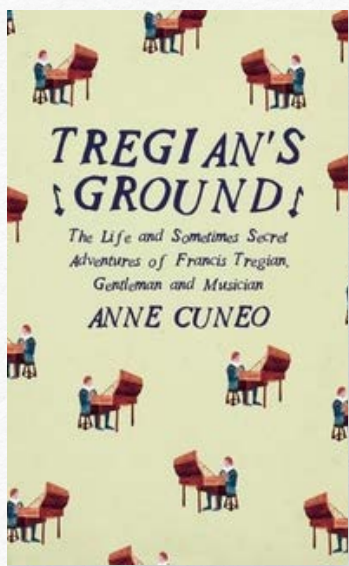
Ayesha Hazarika and Tom Hamilton

Prequel: An American Fight Against Fascism

Rachel Maddow



Both picks were originally shared with me by my mom because *gestures vaguely at everything*, but the first one reminds me of a treasured government affairs game called "On the Record" where a group of players cast votes on whether or not a series of astoundingly anti-factual sentences are a real quote from a government leader, or entirely made up. I fondly remember playing with colleagues in the UK based entirely on questions to the Health Minister and then rededicating myself to promoting health education. The second is an interesting story of defeating fascism where it threatens democracy.

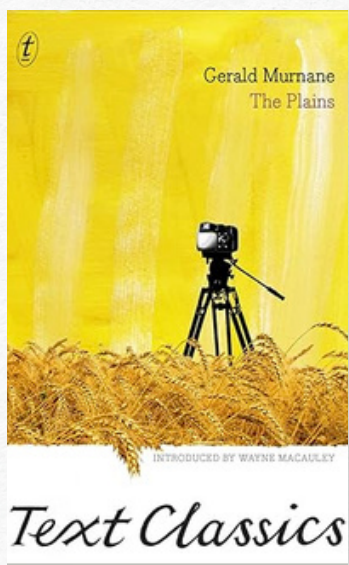


Sophie Robert

Tregian's Ground: The Life and Sometimes Secret Adventures of Francis Tregian, Gentleman and Musician

Anne Cuneo

The best stories are often about people who truly lived. This book recounts the life of Francis Tregian, born in Cornwall in 1574. His family was stripped of their possessions and forced into exile due to the persecution of Catholics in England. The author brings us a captivating story of a brave and endearing man who had to assume new identities, master numerous languages, and live in different countries across Europe to evade his persecutors and pursue his passion for music. I chose this book, especially as Tregian spent his final days in Switzerland, not far from Lausanne. Truly inspiring!

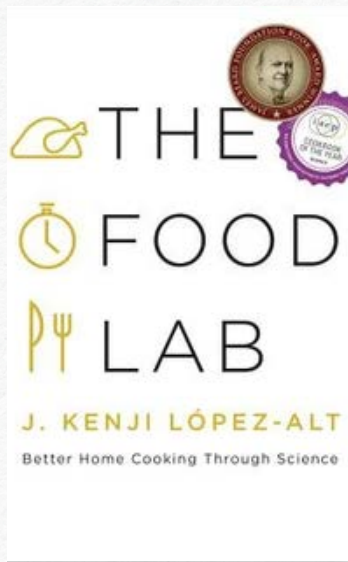


Sagar Sane

The Plains

Gerald Murnane

In 2018, I came across a New York Times deep dive about a semi-famous Australian novelist named Gerald Murnane. After reading the article, I convinced myself I needed to immediately consume all his books. Five and a half years passed — and I had not read a single word of Murnane. Then, in March of this year, feeling guilty about my failure to follow through, I forced myself into the local library and started to put in interlibrary loan requests for all of Murnane's titles. I made it through four — the first of which was Murnane's acclaimed 1982 book, *The Plains*. Now, I must admit, I was completely unprepared for the experience of reading this book. Like most of Murnane's work, *The Plains* fails to adhere to any regular narrative structure, an important feature of the author's style that had slipped my mind in the intervening period. Yet, Murnane's flaunting of writing conventions is precisely what makes this — and all his books — worthwhile. If you're interested in trying something a little different, I would strongly recommend reading *The Plains* — or any of Murnane's other works.

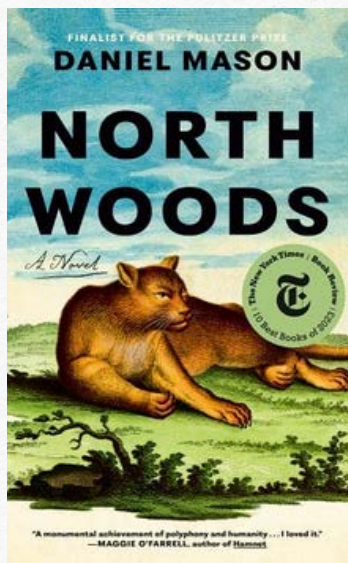


Emily Scholler

The Food Lab: Better Home Cooking Through Science

J. Kenji López-Alt

The Food Lab: Better Home Cooking Through Science is like having a food-loving scientist as your sous-chef. This book breaks down the science behind cooking in a way that's fun, approachable, and useful. Whether it's nailing the perfect steak sear or understanding why your potatoes never crisp up quite right, Kenji's got the answers — backed by tons of testing and some good humor. Packed with recipes and clever tips, this is the perfect read for anyone who wants to cook smarter, not harder, and make food that will impress any dinner party guest.



Jane Schumacher

North Woods

Daniel Mason

This is a poetic fever dream of a book for when you'd really like to go for a wander in the woods but you're stuck in a tunnel on public transit instead — or lucky enough to be sprawled in a hammock on a summer day somewhere green.

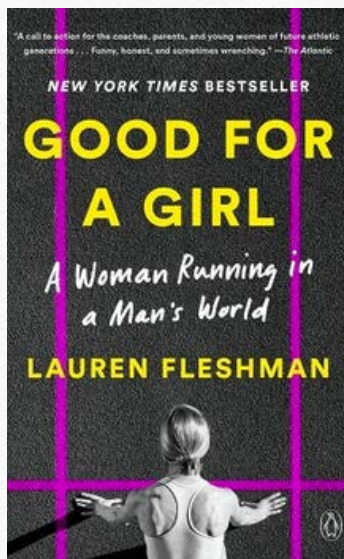


Emma Stutts

Der Klang der Familie: Berlin, Techno, and the Fall of the Wall

Felix Denk and Sven von Thülen

This is an oral history of Berlin's iconic techno scene, born after the fall of the Wall (and recently designated an intangible piece of German culture by UNESCO). East and West Berliners reunited in grimy abandoned bunkers, brought together by their passion for a weird new genre of music. Despite its origins and counterculture predecessor, punk, Berlin techno wasn't anti-anything. It was about universal love, acceptance, and fun. Through firsthand accounts, the book covers the start of Berlin's famous clubs, collaborations with Detroit DJs, feuds over the many sub-genres, and much more. By the new millennium, techno music and culture helped turn around international perceptions of Germany — showcasing it as a hub of creativity and unity rather than a lingering symbol of conflict. Recommended listening: "DJ Charts" in the Appendix.

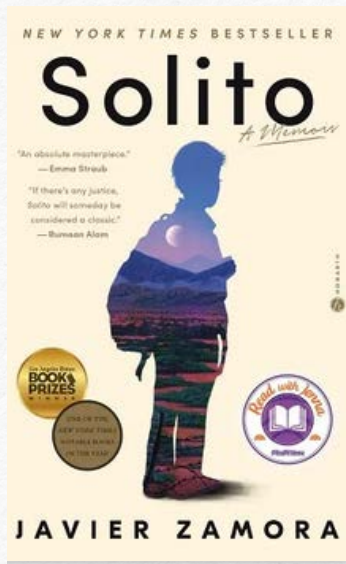


Ben Tiede

Good for a Girl

Lauren Fleshman

This is a fascinating yet frustrating memoir that highlights the ways competitive running and youth sports more broadly are failing female athletes.



Parm Thind

Solito: A Memoir

Javier Zamora

This was recommended by my friend who works in immigration law, and I am so glad she did. It's an intimate, raw look at childhood resilience and the courage it takes to seek a better life. Zamora's writing makes you feel every emotion he experienced, from the terror of being alone to the warmth of unexpected kindness along his journey. The book shows that even in the darkest times, there's hope, connection, and the strength to keep going. It left me with a deeper empathy for those facing such journeys and a renewed appreciation for human resilience.