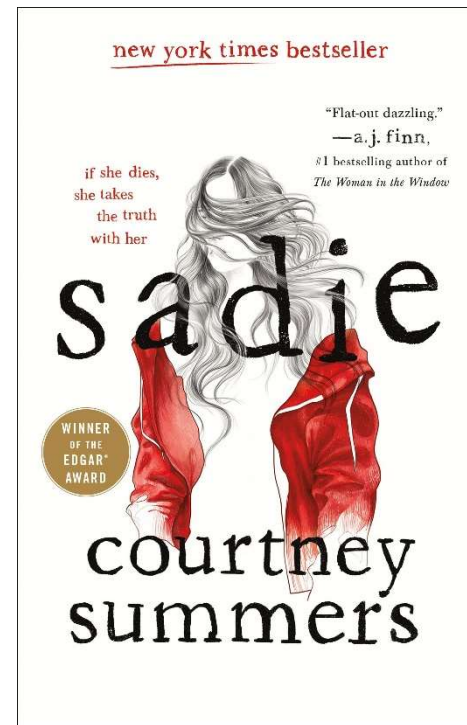


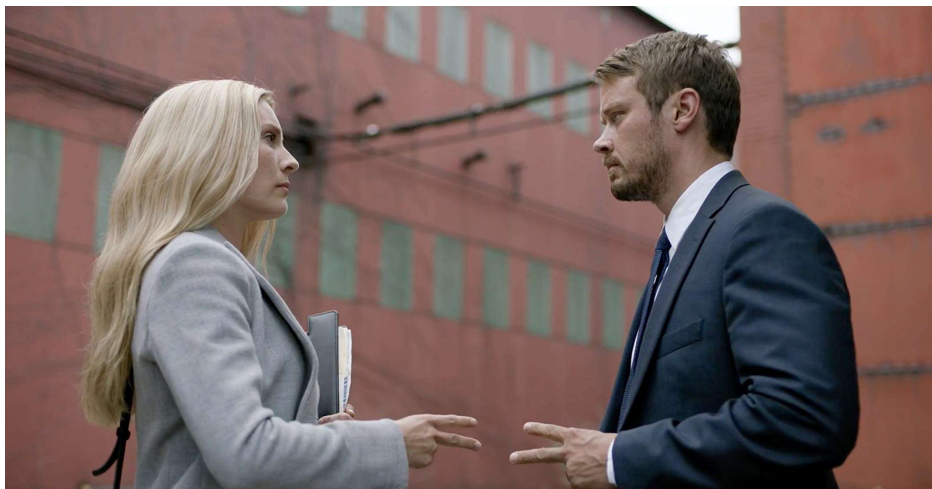


Hit Man ▪ Fun true (ish) story about a fake hit man. Kinda a light romp of a noir, if there is such a thing? It feels like this is the year Glen Powell

became a movie star. I like Ann Helen Petersen's observation that part of it is that he likes women: "It's different than knowing you can get women, or wanting to control women, or even *loving* women. He *likes* them. He *appreciates* them. He *enjoys their company*."



✪ **Sadie** ▪ Our eponymous hero goes on the road searching for the man who murdered her sister **Mattie**. It's so good on the surface level, as a page-turner tale of vengeance, but it's also steeped in trauma and sadness. You never forget that the tragedy has already happened, and the tension comes from seeing if the tragedy will just be compounded. Seeing the world react (often harshly) to Sadie on her own, her disability (a stutter), her trauma, and her single-mindedness, is so well done and just adds to the mood and tension. Not a light read, but a really good one.



✪ **Patriot** ▪ This is a hard show to recommend because it's one of my absolute favs but I made Vicky and Amelia watch ep1 on my birthday and they were meh. Story of a spy who processes his trauma by singing about his missions in WAY too much detail in coffeehouses. To say it's offbeat is an understatement but I adore it. It's like nothing else. *Caveat: at times it is circa-2015-era problematic.*



Shōgun ▪ I'd write more but look at those gorgeous costumes! Such attention to detail, Game of Thronesy in its plotting and intrigues, Huhu's biggest hit, and 99% on Rotten Tomatoes. Well earned.



Something is Killing the Children ▀

Welcome to the world of Erica Slaughter, rogue monster-killer, and on the run from the people who trained her. Love her badassery, the world-building, and much-darker-than-thou Stranger Things vibe. Very bad things happen. The title is not a euphemism. Warning: gory, but comic-book gory. Second warning: probably nowhere close to complete.



Godzilla Minus One ▀ Easily the best Godzilla movie. I mean, the classics are the classics, but unless you're a film buff they are OLD. And the new US ones don't really have much heart. Set in post-WWII Japan so comes with all the thematic depth you'd expect given that setting. At the same time as being a plain ol' good monster movie.



✧ **Shrinking** ▀ I frickin' love this show, I'm gonna plug it for a 2nd year. This is the show Bill Lawrence left Ted Lasso prematurely to go create. Still grounded in warmth and kindness, but with a very different vibe and everybody is so flawed and/or damaged that they are constantly fucking up and making you cringe, but don't we all? Plus it's so funny.



Helluva Boss ▀ My first YouTube rec! Indie animation about a demon hit squad and their various capers. I fully expect this to **not** be everyone's cup of tea—and I'm kinda surprised it's mine!—but the relationships develop in touching directions, and action is so well done, and the musical numbers (!) are killer.



Conclave ▪ I couldn't care less about the papacy or what goes into choosing a pope so this was a tough sell but it was riveting, with all the tension and stakes of a courtroom drama. And just *look* at Ralph Fiennes! You couldn't make someone more suited to the role in a lab.

MUSIC & SPOKEN



The Dragon Prince ▪ Created by a head writer for Avatar: The Last Airbender, who gave us Toph as a girl instead of a love-triangle inducing boy, and Iroh. Janky animation in season one, and there was definitely a mid-series dip, but then came roaring back and overall is a very good fantasy epic. **Caveat:** final season is out but I haven't watched it yet.



♣ **Slow Horses** ▪ I'm sorry but I'm just gonna cut-and-paste from last year since we're now four seasons in and it's still one of the best shows going, and I bet you dig it even if you don't care about spy shows: "Gary Oldman oversees Slough House, the shabby branch of MI5 for disgraced agents. The plots are gripping, and Oldman turns in the best performance of an acerbic genius since Hugh Laurie played Dr. House."



Two Spotify playlists!
The 90 minute sampler:



... and the full 14 hour
firehose:



Apple Music available
on request



Challengers ▪ I don't really know what to say about this one except that it's the polyamory sports movie I didn't know I needed.



Solar Opposites ▪ Aliens crash land on earth with the intention of terraforming it, but have to live among us in the meantime. Not usually my thing, ymmv, but somehow so funny. Also when it was revealed the creator was terrible he was swiftly replaced in perfect fashion, and not just because they brought in Dan Stevens (😬) to voice his character.



Better Call Saul ▪ I maybe don't get to recommend this because I mostly listened to the first four seasons off and on from the other room but it just kept drawing me in and it really is a perfect prequel and a great show in its own right. Our two leads are incredible, and I just love their complex relationship. It is perhaps one of the slowest boils of all time, very different from the meth show, but so rewarding if you stick with it.

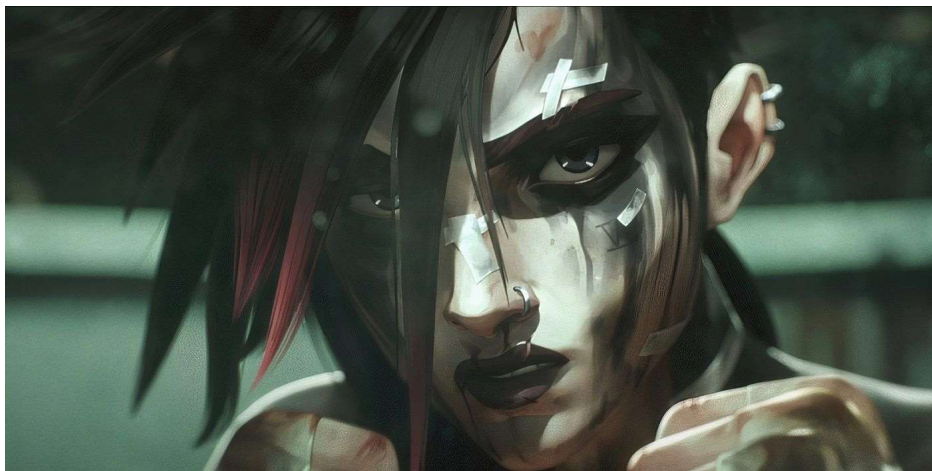


❖ **Anatomy of a Fall** ▪ Everything about this is great: the mystery and ambiguity surrounding the crime, the lead performance, not knowing who to believe, the courtroom drama and tension, even that steel-drum cover of PIMP wormed its way into my head and wouldn't get out (it's in this year's mix!).



“Lark doesn't really have many friends. She would laugh at you if you suggested that Landlord was her friend. Landlord is her dog. He's not even HER dog; he's A dog, he lives in the hut, she lives in the hut.” —Midst, S1E1

I never listen to fiction podcasts but I *adored* this. Took its time weaving the threads together, but what a tapestry by the end! I cribbed somebody else's “what's it about?” answer and I'm putting it here →



❖ **Arcane** ▪ Two seasons of greatness, and some of the most beautiful animation ever. True season two was rushed and that's pretty heartbreaking but even rushed I loved it and wouldn't hesitate to recommend. So many totally kick-ass women! Don't you want to watch her punch things? And the bonds between characters are so palpable and complicated. “Is there anything so undoing as a daughter?” *chills*



❖ **This is Going to Hurt** ▪ A BBC miniseries about a group of **deeply** overworked junior doctors working in the obstetrics and gynecology ward in an NHS hospital. Based on the memoir of the same name. Equal parts funny, dark, stressful, and tragic. Oftentimes the most riveting of trainwrecks, there is no looking away.

- **Midst** is space fantasy New Weird about three people whose lives are disrupted when The Trust, a society based around quantifying the value of good and bad deeds, takes interest in the planet-like islet of Midst.
- **Midst** is about how the moon will explode and the government will spend more time talking about how bad this is for the economy than organizing disaster relief.
- **Midst** is about what happens if The Good Place point system was an economic policy.
- **Midst** is about a cult expanding its sphere of influence and its attempts to maintain hold on a cast of new converts, increasingly disillusioned devotees, and escaped apostates.
- **Midst** is about the mechanics of blame, guilt, fault, accountability, and culpability and how emphasizing sole individual responsibility (for good and bad) deflects from the role of institutions, structures, environments, cycles, and ideologies in perpetuating harm.
- **Midst** is about trying to balance the metaphorical books by making them very much not-metaphorical and how understanding that you can never (figuratively) zero out in reality shapes the way different people face or run from what they've done, hope for redemption and absolution (or not), and relate to themselves and others.
- **Midst** is about taking the phrase capitalism as religion literally.
- **Midst** is about a murder case in a frontier town that swiftly escalates into a major public scandal that reaches into the highest ranks of the federal capital and threatens to destabilize its most prominent institutions.
- I promise none of these are exaggerations in the slightest.



American Fiction ▪ I'm having a hard time putting my finger on why I liked this so much. Jeffrey Wright turns in a pitch-perfect performance, of course. But I think it's more that the satire lands right in the sweet spot for me. It's somehow over-the-top and subtle/nuanced at the same time? I don't know, that's dumb, that shouldn't be possible, but that's how it felt. I never felt like I was being spoon-fed the message because even when it was overt it always seemed like there was more going on. But what do I know? I liked it is all.

BOOKS

TV



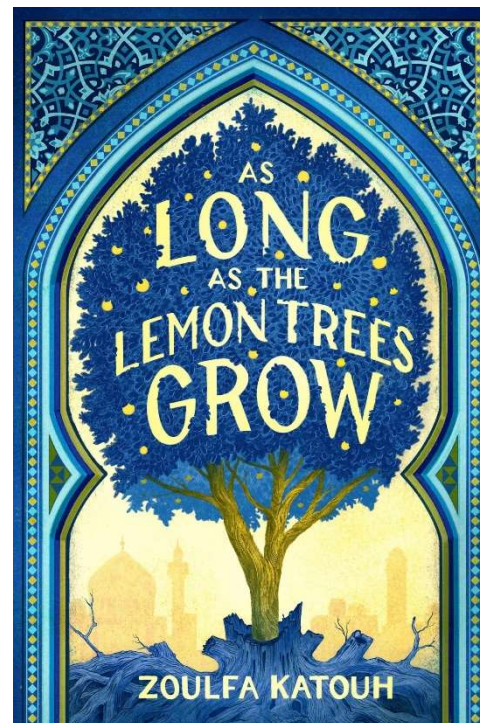
❖ **All of Us Strangers** ▪ I mean, just look at these two, need I say more? Beautiful. Devastating. I jotted this down but I can't remember where, "a movie about loss and the way grief can never happen in a straight line."

DEATH?

Like I was going through picking out some of my favorite online reads for the year and when I was done I looked over the list and the theme was glaring?? I swear I'm fine!



The Substance ▪ Dysmorphia, self-loathing, misogyny, fame-seeking, clinging to the past all metaphorized into one of the great body horror movies. I shy away from body horror but this one transcends the genre. Demi Moore is incredible. The over-the-top cartoonishly gory ending didn't really work for me but still so good.



❖ **As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow** ▪ SSRIs have really helped me—10/10 would recommend—but my one side effect that is minor but still a bummer is that I almost never cry at anything fictional anymore and I miss it. But this got me. Love amidst the horrors of the Syrian Revolution. Everything Amelia gives me to read is great and this is no exception. Jumped to the top of my to-read pile when Assad was finally ousted and that added poignancy for sure.

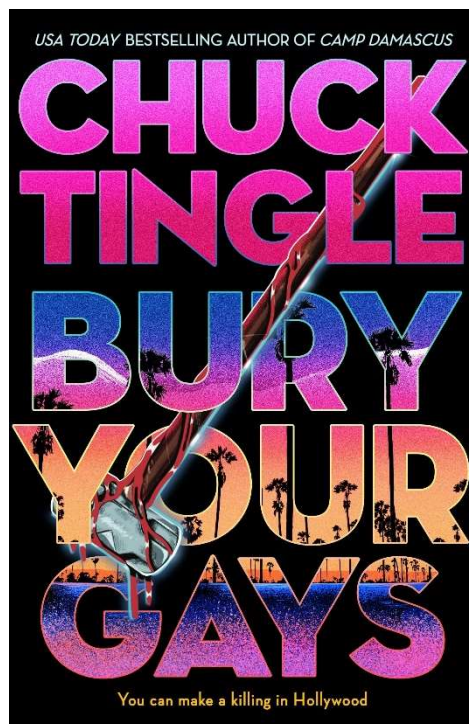
And so, for a long time, I did not love him. The rest of the family needed zero seconds to love Walnut completely. They wondered what was wrong with me.



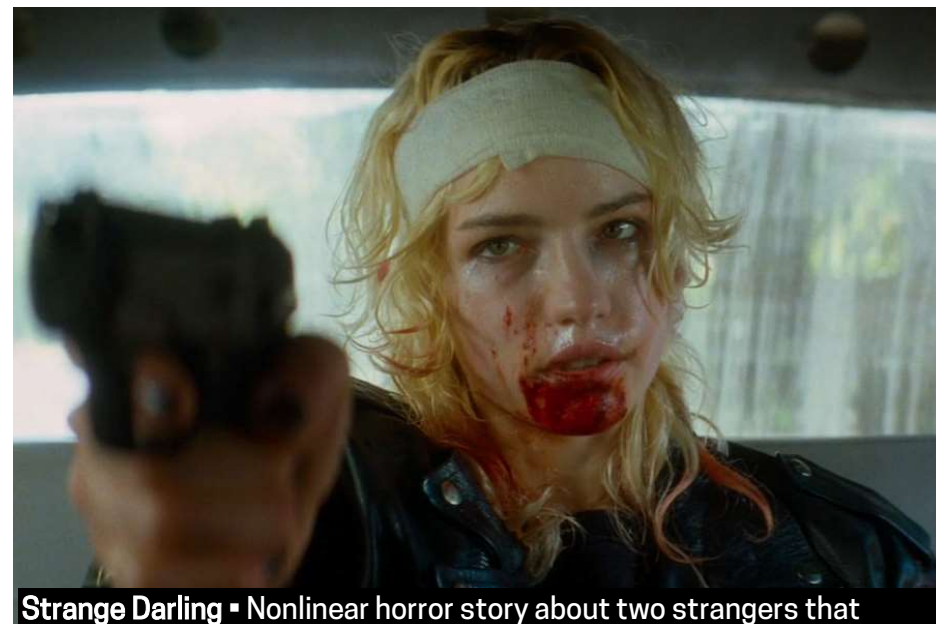
🌀 **What My Dog Taught Me About Mortality** ▪ So beautiful, and it's a scrolling animated thing so it's also a quick read. It's a NY Times thing but this code is for a gift link so hopefully it'll work. Reach out if not and I'll send it to you!



Alien: Romulus ▪ The only good Alien movie since the first two in 1979 and 1986 (omg I'm old). It's in a way a kind of remake as it hits all the same notes as the classics but it also feels fresh in ways good remakes should. At times it feels like it's moving through the obligatory franchise set pieces but it's still so fun. More Aliens (action) than Alien (horror)



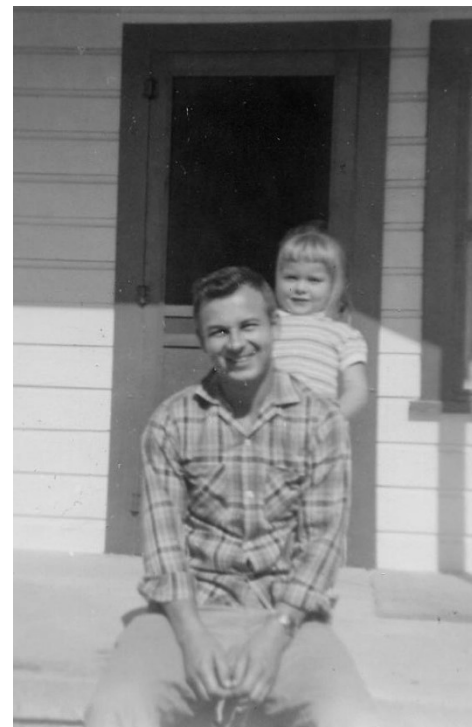
🌀 **Bury Your Gays** ▪ One of my two favorite reads of the year! Blazed through it, couldn't put it down, the tension starts ratcheting early and never lets up. A perfectly crafted thriller about queer representation in media? Yes please. I'm not going to say more because you should go into it blind. Do. Not Miss!



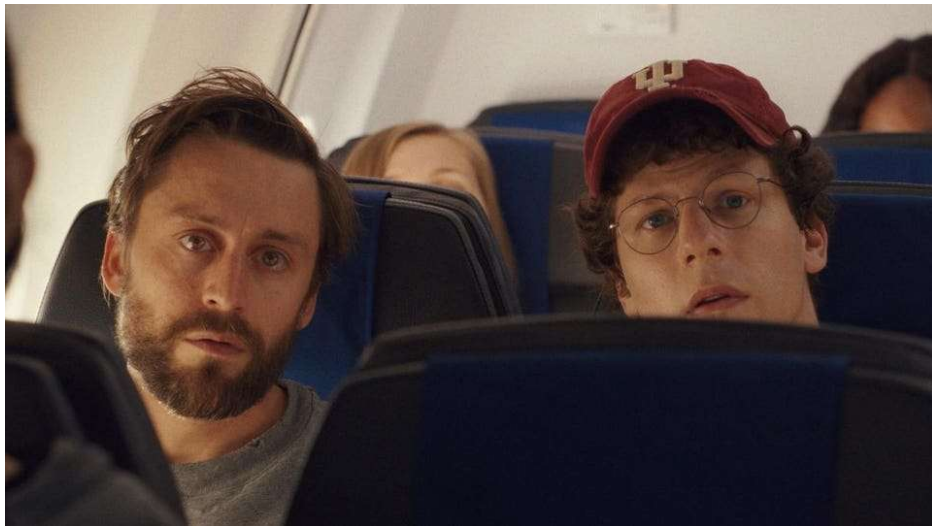
Strange Darling ▪ Nonlinear horror story about two strangers that hookup, seems almost sweet, then gets dark fast (which you know will happen because nonlinear). Go in cold, avoid spoilers!



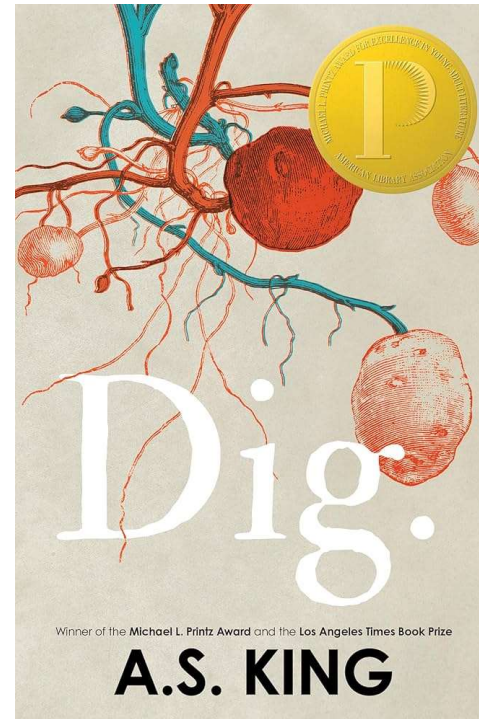
★ **Aftersun** ▪ Nothing really happens in this, so if that's not your thing (and it's usually not my thing) maybe steer clear. The movie plays out as a woman's memories of a vacation with her dad from 20 years ago, and it's just so beautiful: the cinematography, the father & daughter's relationship, the haze of memory, depression, parental anxiety. Love.



Obituary For a Quiet Life ▪ "I filled in the expected details and sent the obituary to the newspaper, but I knew it wasn't right. It captured nothing of the life he lived. What I returned to in the days after he passed, as the ladies from church covered the table in casseroles and Grandma slept in a bed alone for the first time since she was 19, was the sheer audacity of a quiet life."



A Real Pain ▪ Two very different cousins are reunited after one of their grandmothers dies and they go on a historical Holocaust tour in Poland in her honor. It's just a treat to watch these two navigate each other, the history, the tour. Relationships are complicated, the way they love, appreciate, and undermine each other.



Dig ▪ From my notes after reading: "The thing I really like is that so many chapters feel like they could be the first page of a really good book that wants to hook you in."

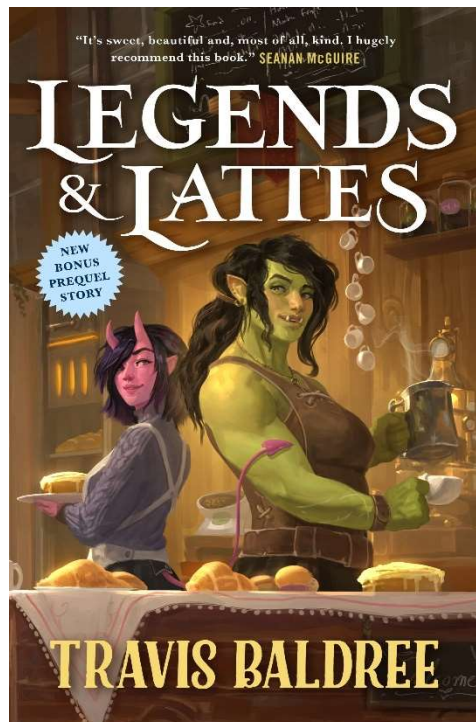
And from King: "This book is supposed to be uncomfortable. I'd apologize, but I'm not sorry."

I'm not sure how to describe it in what little space I have left here. The multi-generational impact of bad, racist parenting told in fragmented multi-perspective style yet still so readable.

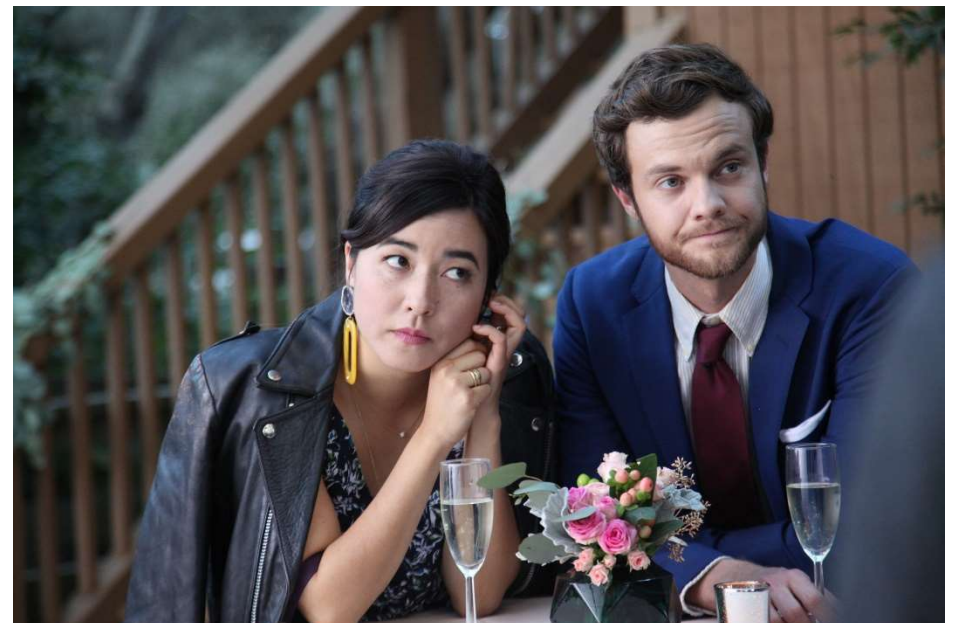
I Nearly Died Drowning. Here's What it's Like to Survive ▪ "The river at this time would have been around 40 degrees, frigid with snowmelt and choked with trees and other obstacles lodged in the current. These lodged obstacles, called "strainers," make normally moderate sections extremely dangerous, allowing water through but not a boat. Getting pinned underwater against a wall of debris is just one of the ways you can die on a river. It didn't occur to me to be scared."



✧ **Abigail** ▪ I don't really want to ruin the twist even though the trailer gives it away, so I'll just say this story of some kidnappers who end up in wayyy over their heads is a ROMP. Plus I'll watch anything with the great Dan Stevens in it. It's more actiony horror than horror horror but probably still not for the squeamish.



✧ **Legends & Lattes** ▪ My other favorite read of the year! I'm always happy when I can find something that I can add to my vaguely defined pantheon of great kindness-themed or make-me-want-to-be-a-better-person-themed works. It doesn't matter if you like fantasy or not, while this obviously takes place in a fantasy world it's much more about building things: self, community, trust, love, and, of course, a coffee shop. But there's also plenty of plot and stakes for it to be a page-turner at the same time. The prequel, **Bookshops & Bonedust**, is also delightful.



Plus One ▪ I don't have much room down here but also I don't have much more to say than this is such a charming romantic comedy!

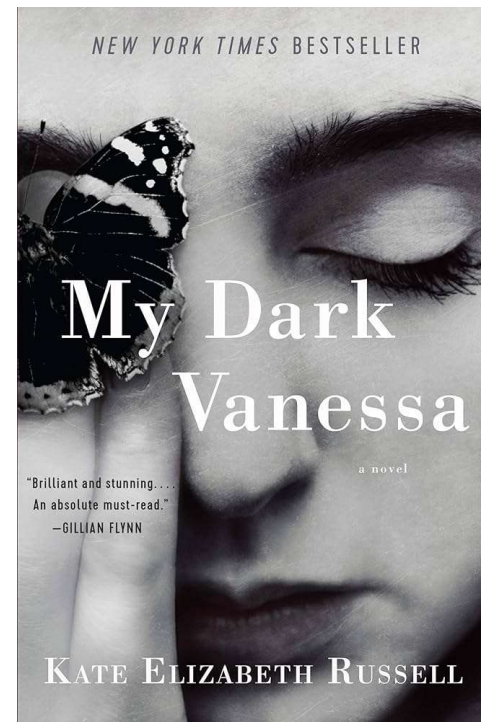
MOVIES



⚡ **Oddity** ▪ My favorite horror movie of the year! Sometimes I feel like people that don't watch horror are missing out, and this is one of those times. Weird and intriguing, while also offering mounting dread and some solid jump scares. I will definitely watch it again.

"i hope death is like being carried to your bedroom when you were a child & fell asleep on the couch during a family party. i hope you can hear the laughter from the next room" —Unknown

"No one is finally dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away, until the clock wound up winds down, until the wine she made has finished its ferment, until the crop they planted is harvested. The span of someone's life is only the core of their actual existence."
—Terry Pratchett, *Reaper Man*

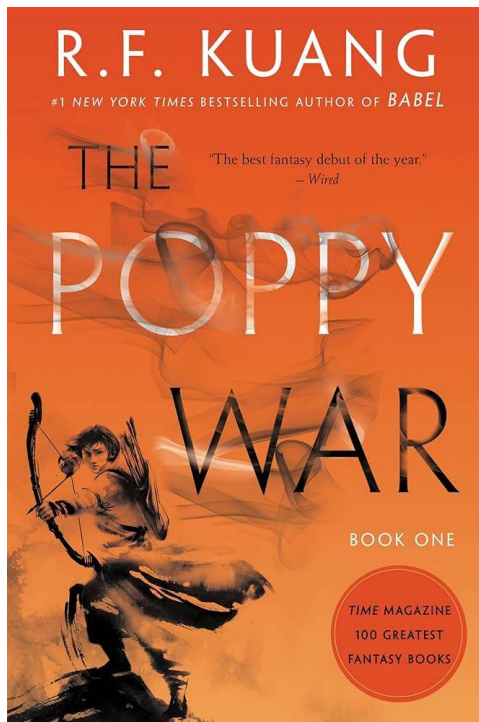


My Dark Vanessa ▪ Not gonna lie, this is tough to read. It's the story of a high school student who is seduced by her teacher and has a lengthy relationship with him into college and beyond and it just makes you squirm, not least of all because of her feelings that it's consensual even though it Really Very Much Is Not. And since it's from her perspective... oof. Incredible portrayal of grooming. This also hit extra hard because it was just uncovered that the same thing happened at the school we used to live at and it is INSANE how much the plot of this book mirrors what happened there.

Out of 65 movies, 28 shows, 32 books, a bunch of articles, and a ton of songs these were my favorite things of 2024! This kinda feels like a bit of an off year so maybe an odd time to experiment with sending it out on paper, like an animal, but hopefully you'll find something you love anyway :)

If I steered you right or wrong or any which way I've love to hear about it <3

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The Poppy War ▪ This is the first book of a LONG trilogy, which also includes **The Dragon Republic** and **The Burning God**. It's a big part of the reason I didn't read quite as many books this year. But it's terrific and very dark fantasy, overtly inspired by the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Rape of Nanking so consider yourselves warned. Our hero is such a deeply flawed force of nature, you can't help but love her despite her doing some truly appalling things, it's such an interesting tension to hold.



Look Back ▪ A lovely (and short, under an hour) anime about art and friendship and is really for anyone who's ever felt a passion about making anything. There's also relationship tensions and grief, so be prepared for some poignancy. I just got so invested in our two mains. Not sure this is for everyone but I found it so touching.