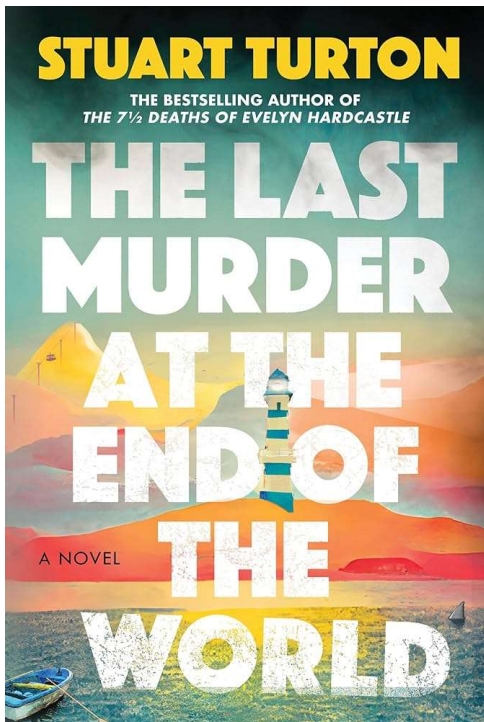




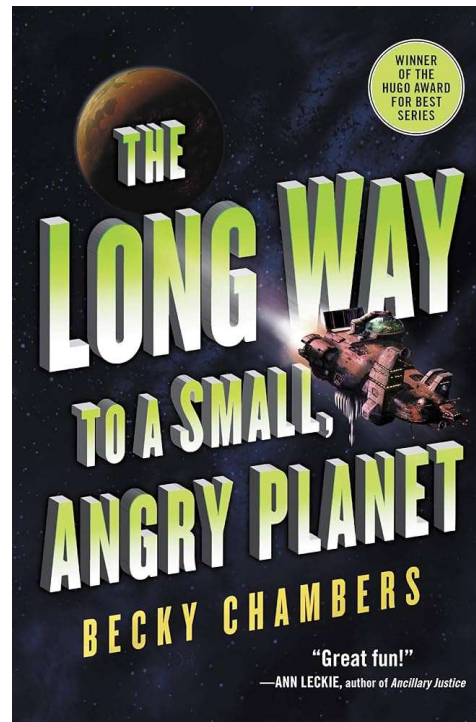
🌟 **Predator: Killer of Killers** ▪ After decades of flops who knew we'd get a Predator renaissance? First *Prey* and now this? They're spoiling us. Gorgeously animated anthology, bringing the hunt to various times and places, then tying the stories together in tantalizing ways.



🌟 **Somebody Somewhere** ▪ Adored. 10/10. Stole from a review somewhere, which is true even if I can't abide the *Schitt's Creek* slander: "These themes will seem familiar to fans of shows like *Schitt's Creek*: acceptance, self-love, the peculiarities of a small town, feeling seen, finding community. In fact, SS reads like a less formulaic, less sentimental, more grounded, and much sadder version of *Schitt's Creek*; you can pitch it to your friends and family as 'Schitt's Creek for people who could not stand *Schitt's Creek*.'"



The Last Murder at the End of the World ▪ First of two high-concept fantastical murder mysteries with maladjusted Sherlocks this year! This one takes place in a post-apocalyptic future where a deadly fog has wiped out all life except on one secure island. The murder triggers a lowering of the defenses and the fog is encroaching, so the stakes couldn't be much higher. There's a lot of fun to be had peeling back the onion layers of the characters, the mystery, and the world itself. Oh, and nobody remembers the night of the murder, so a little bit *The Mist*, a little bit *Memento*.



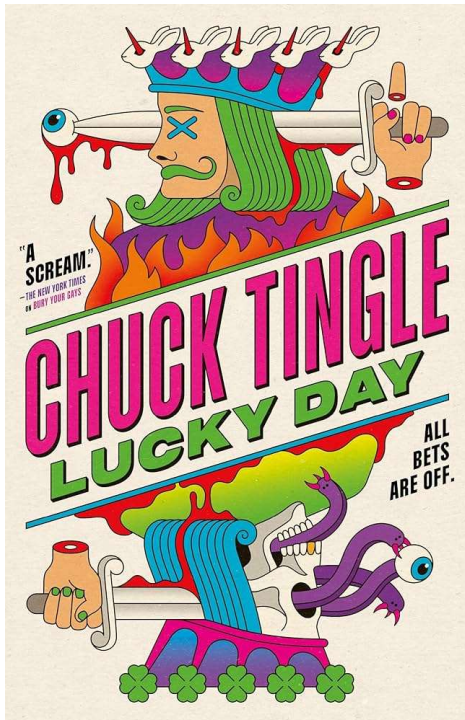
The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet ▪ Big *Firefly* vibes (which you should totally watch if you haven't). Somehow when I read this the first time I merely liked it, and then Vicky read it and was surprised since it seemed like my thing—likable characters, crew as found family fun story—so I went in for the rare reread and as usual she was right. Librarians ftw! 😊



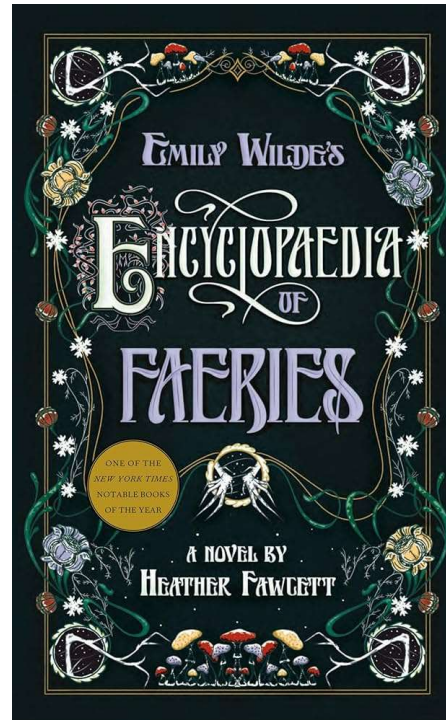
You ▪ Okay, yes, this show centers a stalker who does terrible things, but this is still some top-notch trashy fun. He gets a bit more antihero than villain after season one, so hang in there, maybe? I always loved listening to Amelia and Ella watch this from the next room, no show has ever produced more screaming at the characters than this one.



My Old Ass ▪ This is such a thoughtful, charming, funny, lower-key *Freaky Friday* or *13 Going on 30*. The two leads are perfect and play off each other so well that even though they are so different you have no problem believing they are the same person. Plus these leaving-home stories always get me.



🌀 **Lucky Day** ▪ The blurb on a Slate review states “the self-published author of *Space Raptor Butt Invasion* is now one of our best mainstream horror novelists” and they’re not wrong. As someone who thinks the power of luck in our lives is criminally underrated it’s like Chuck Tingle wrote this one for me, which takes place four years after the “Low-Probability Event” (LPE), in which eight million people died in a single day of VERY improbable (and gory) events. Questions fate and existence and is a ripping page-turner to boot.



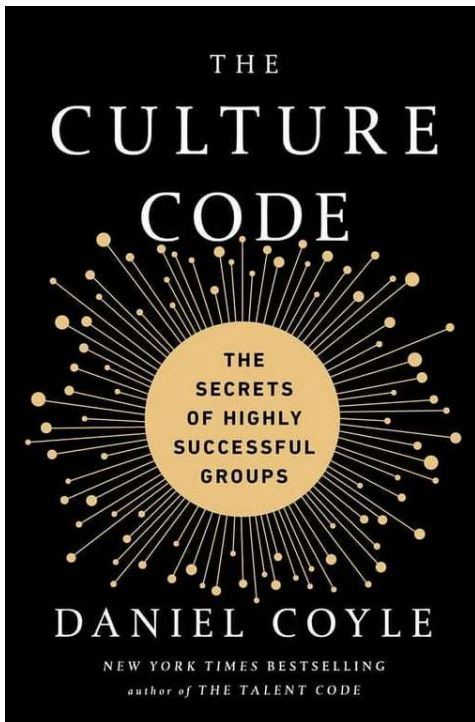
🌀 **Emily Wilde's Encyclopaedia of Faeries** ▪ Between this and *The Tainted Cup* it was good year for odd-couple pairings. The group-project vibes are strong in this one, as our hero is an all-substance-no-charm academic studying the elusive (and dangerous) faerie folk, while her layabout sidekick has charm to burn as he (so very charmingly) piggybacks on her hard work. And of course, perfectly, the whole of their partnership is greater than the sum of its parts. Plus, after a bit of a slow start it’s a captivating entry in the cozy fantasy genre.



Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning ▪ This is far from the best MI movie (that’s probably *Ghost Protocol* or *Fallout*), but it’s still very good and closes the books on The Greatest Action Franchise of All Time. And probably all-time **forever** because it’s hard to imagine a future with this big a star doing stunts this incredible (google MI stunts!). I mean, mayyybe? Forever is a long time, but this feels like the end of an era.



Quick hits: **Slow Horses** is now five seasons in and each one’s a gem. **The Bear** returned to top form in s4 after a holding pattern in s3. **Severance** s2 just as good as s1 (Amelia disagrees, ymmv). And **Plur1bus** had a KILLER pilot and concept and then settled into a slow burn so we’ll see. Vince Gillian reliably turns the screws though, so high hopes!



The Culture Code ▪ How can I not love a book on positive team culture that at times feels like it was written for me? I mean, come on, one of the patterns he notes in highly successful groups is “close physical proximity, often in circles.” Everyone I’ve coached has heard me say “closer, circlier.” Then again, another pattern is “lots of short, energetic exchanges (no long speeches)” so I guess that’s his way of keeping me humble. Anyway, it’s great, and very readable in that pop-science kind of way that’s everywhere. The house that Malcolm Gladwell built, for better or worse.

Meditations for Mortals

Four Weeks to Embrace Your Limitations and Make Time for What Counts

Oliver Burkeman

Author of *Four Thousand Weeks*



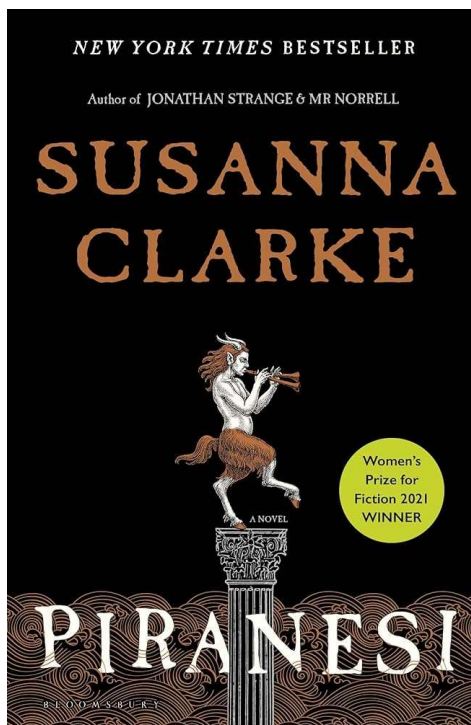
🌀 **Meditations for Mortals** ▪ Oliver Burkeman is my favorite self-help author and he’s really more of an anti-self-help author. The least charitable view of his work is that he just repackages Buddhism, Stocism, etc. for today’s audience—and that’s a fair critique—but he does it so well and so relatably and so engageably. I’ve read other highly acclaimed books that do similar and they are all tonally too clearly geared towards business people, or “optimizers”, or just feel self-important in a way I never find Burkeman to be.

M&Ms

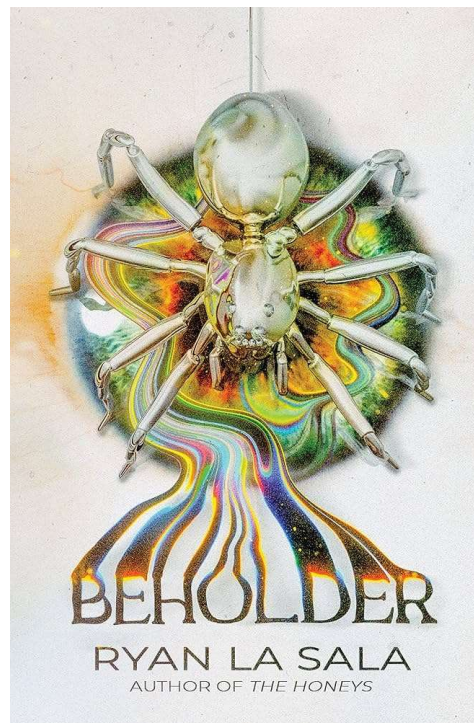
(MUSIC & MISC)



✦ **KPop Demon Hunters** ▪ I love what it says about the state of pop culture that a KPop demon hunting musical action comedy can be Netflix's most watched movie ever. Add this to the Sony Animation Studios list of gems, alongside the *Spider-Verse* movies, *Mitchells vs. the Machines*, and *Arthur Christmas*.



✦ **Piranesi** ▪ A lovely and intriguing fantasy/mystery from the author of *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*. Our narrator is such a sweetheart, and his perspective of the labyrinth he inhabits so unique. The contrast between him and The Other is so stark that we can't help but worry for our guy, and hope the reveals, as they arrive, go his way. Beautifully done all around.



✦ **Beholder** ▪ You know how horror movies have pretty much gotten the “something creepy lurking in the mirror” thing down to a science? La Sala somehow manages to pull off the same feel in text. Pretty dark stuff for YA horror, but such a page turner, and I was very invested in our queer love story. I really wanted them to come through this okay.

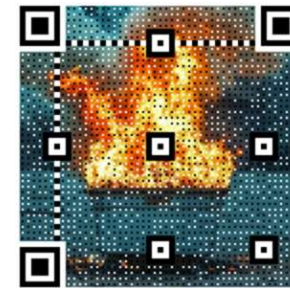


Heretic ▪ Hooked me from the jump, and does such a good job depicting our young Mormon missionaries being polite in a dodgy situation just a liiiittle too long, such a well-depicted damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't conundrum that women face all too often. Good thriller and the cast really delivers. Great undercurrents around religion, power, and control.

2025 MIXTAPE



SAMPLER (11)

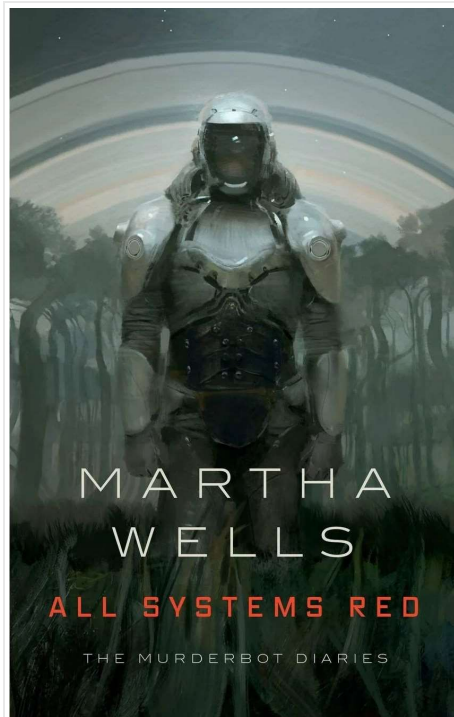


BUFFET (95)

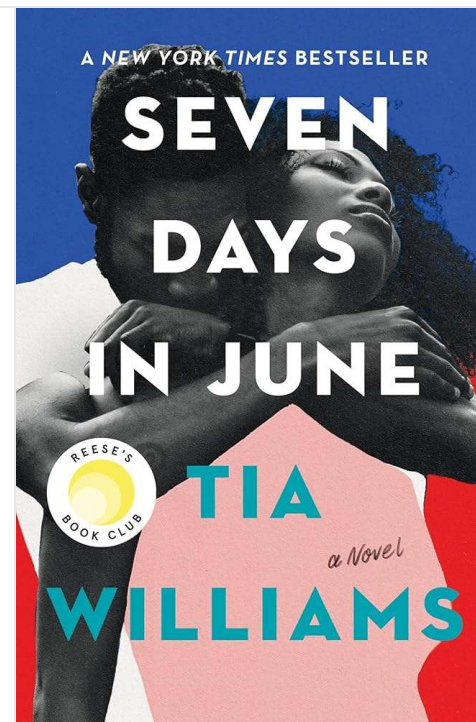


FIREHOSE (261)

These are all Spotify playlist links, Apple Music available on request :)



All Systems Red ▪ A familiar premise, a robot suddenly finds itself freed of its “obey humans / don’t hurt humans” guardrails and has to navigate this new reality. All the usual fun abounds but what really makes this shine is our hero’s deeply sardonic voice, plus how he relatably just wants to watch TV instead of doing his job. The show is fun too, but the book is better. I’d say watch the *Murderbot* trailer for a taste, but then read the books. (I also read book #2, *Artificial Condition*, also very fun, looking forward to the rest).



Seven Days in June ▪ Amelia sets big chunks of my to-read list and looking back at my texts the note on this one was “the crème de la crème of romance novels” and now, since I enjoyed this so thoroughly, I’m like well hell, does this mean I’m done with the genre? Because this was a pretty perfect mix of playful and serious with a couple I was really invested in. Amelia’s other comment was that her only quibble was that the ending felt rushed, but I thought it worked.

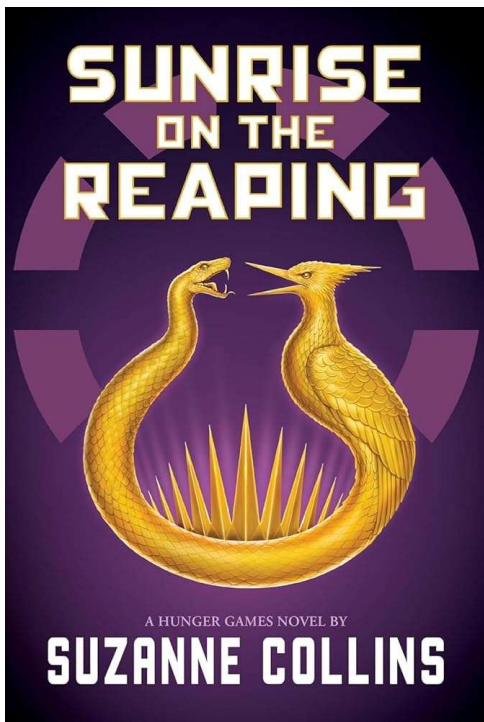
TWO PODCASTS



I didn't discover either of these this year but whatever, I love them both so much. *Anthropocene Reviewed* is brief (under 30m) essay-episodes over a wide range of topics from lovely human John Green (also a book, also wonderful, thanks Makayla!). As for *Heavyweight*, the official blurb nails it: "Maybe you've laid awake and imagined how it could have been, how it might yet be, but the moment to act was never right. Well, the moment is here and the podcast making it happen is Heavyweight. Join Jonathan Goldstein for road trips, thorny reunions, and difficult conversations as he backpedals his way into the past like a therapist with a time machine."



The Game ▪ I don't put a lot of classics in here, but this early one from David Fincher (made a couple years before *Fight Club*) is one of his undersung best, and it holds up so well. I don't remember why Amelia watched this but she did and liked it so much that she sat through it again a few days later with me. The less you know the better.



Sunrise on the Reaping ▪ The Haymitch Abernathy games 🥲 You know how when somebody makes something iconic and they keep going back to the well but it never tastes as sweet (and, if you're JKR, you also reveal yourself to be a horrible bigot)? Somehow Suzanne Collins has gone back to Panem twice and both times made something worthy of the original *Hunger Games* trilogy. (I also read *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* this year, also so good and was shocked how much I could get into a Prez Snow story, but this one is the better of the two)

BOOKS

212 The Extra Degree ▪ The 7 1/2 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle ▪ **All Systems Red (Murderbot #1)** ▪ An Absolutely Remarkable Thing ▪ **Artificial Condition (Murderbot #2)** ▪ The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes ▪ A Beautifully Foolish Endeavor ▪ **Beholder** ▪ Billy Summers ▪ Bunny ▪ Burn ▪ **The Culture Code** ▪ Do Hard Things ▪ Don't Let the Forest In ▪ **A Drop of Corruption** ▪ **Emily Wilde's Encyclopedia of Fairies** ▪ Everything Is Tuberculosis ▪ The Eyes Are the Best Part ▪ Hammer Head ▪ High Conflict ▪ Horror Movie ▪ How We Learn to Move ▪ I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki ▪ **The Last Murder at the End of the World** ▪ **The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet** ▪ **Lucky Day** ▪ **Meditations for Mortals** ▪ The Motern Method ▪ No One is Talking About This ▪ The Originalism Trap ▪ The Other Significant Others ▪ Paper Girls ▪ **Piranesi** ▪ The Right Call ▪ **Seven Days in June** ▪ Something is Killing the Children v4-7 ▪ ~~Stillness is the Key~~ ▪ **Sunrise on the Reaping** ▪ **The Tainted Cup** ▪ Treat Your Own Neck ▪ We Used to Live Here ▪ ~~Will There Ever Be Another You~~ ▪ The Work Of Art



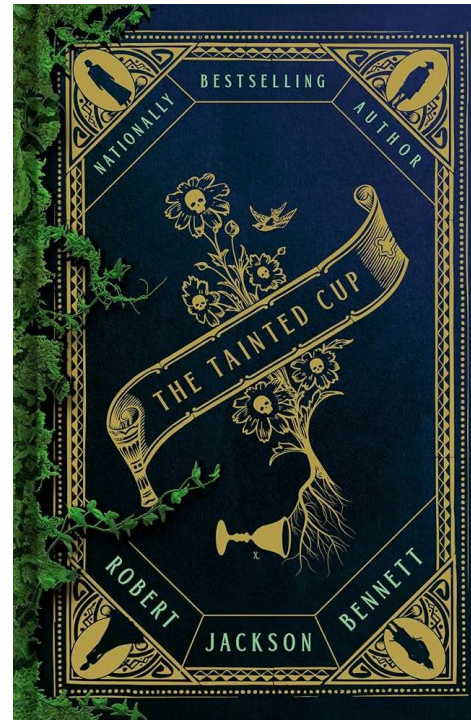
Flow ▪ This movie is such a beautiful wordless, plotless (consider that a warning if that's not your thing) adventure that follows some animals as they navigate a seeming post-apocalyptic world of rising waters. And on the meta-side of things, I love that it cost \$3.5m to make using free open-source software and it took the Oscar from \$200m big studio productions. Respect.



Fuck Willpower by Cate Hall ▪ *“Here is what I think: Willpower is an incoherent concept invented by smug people who think they have it in order to denigrate people who they think don’t. People tacitly act as though it’s synonymous with effort or grindy determination. But in most cases where willpower is invoked, the person who is trying and failing to adhere to some commitment is exerting orders of magnitude more effort than the person who is succeeding.”*



Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl ▪ The best villain in all of claymation makes his glorious return! If you happen to be new to Wallace & Gromit watch *The Wrong Trousers* first (although this stands alone just fine).



📖 **The Tainted Cup** ▪ Second of two high-concept fantastical murder mysteries with maladjusted Sherlocks this year! I love the backdrop of this one, a world behind walls where humanity is always on the brink of being overrun during leviathan season. A perfect mashup of mystery and fantasy, *A Drop of Corruption* (book two) was also great and I’m excited to read the rest.



Eel-ovation by Frank Chimero ▪ *“Let’s dive right in: we don’t really know where eels come from. Which is strange, because they’re everywhere—rivers, lakes, oceans. We only have the faintest sense of where they spawn or how. Their lives remain partly hidden, and that blank space has always invited stories.”* The Freud anecdote is wild.



Dangerous Animals ▪ So straight off this is a horror/thriller about a serial killer who kidnaps women and feeds them to sharks, but before you turn the page we are not into passive victims around here and our hero in this one refuses to go quietly. But she’s also no superhero so the tension is edge-of-your-seat throughout.



Abbott Elementary ▪
 Adolescence ▪ Ash vs Evil Dead ▪
 The Bear ▪ The Dragon Prince ▪
 Girls5eva ▪ Grace & Frankie ▪
 House MD ▪ Interview with a
 Vampire ▪ Invasion ▪ Laid ▪ The
 Last of Us ▪ The Leftovers ▪ Love
 Death & Robots ▪ A Man On the

Inside ▪ Misfits ▪ Mr. Inbetween ▪ The Morning Show ▪ A
 Murder at the End of the World ▪ Murderbot ▪ The Other
 Two ▪ The Penguin ▪ Plur1bus ▪ Poker Face ▪ Reacher ▪
 The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City ▪ Rich & Hungry ▪
 Severance ▪ Slow Horses ▪ Solar Opposites ▪ Somebody
 Somewhere ▪ The Studio ▪ Supacell ▪ The Witcher ▪
 White Lotus ▪ You



📌 **Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery** ▪ I love all the *Knives Out* movies, and I love that each is unique in story and theme. After you watch it, google “Entirely Too Many Thoughts About *Wake Up Dead Man*” by Leah Schnelbach. I already dug the movie, but her piece really deepened my appreciation of it.



🌀 **Bring Her Back** ▪ The saddest fucking horror movie I've ever seen. Makes the Phillippou's previous grim affair, *Talk To Me* (featured in the 2024 roundup!), seem positively Disneyesque. Okay that's enough thinking about that. Ugh I should unwatch it. I should rewatch it. So good.



Together ▪ Alison Brie and Dave Franco (married in real life!) find themselves growing uncomfortably close. Equal parts squirmy and funny. Okay, not equal at all but surprisingly funny. Somebody described this as "beginner body horror" and that's pretty apt.



🌀 **George Saunders 2013 Commencement Address at Syracuse University** ▪ "So: What do I regret? Being poor from time to time? Not really. Working terrible jobs, like "knuckle-puller in a slaughterhouse?" (And don't even ASK what that entails.) No. I don't regret that. Skinny-dipping in a river in Sumatra, a little buzzed, and looking up and seeing like 300 monkeys sitting on a pipeline, pooping down into the river, the river in which I was swimming, with my mouth open, naked? And

getting deathly ill afterwards, and staying sick for the next seven months? Not so much. Do I regret the occasional humiliation? Like once, playing hockey in front of a big crowd, including this girl I really liked, I somehow managed, while falling and emitting this weird whooping noise, to score on my own goalie, while also sending my stick flying into the crowd, nearly hitting that girl? No. I don't even regret that.

But here's something I do regret..."



🌀 **Adolescence** ▪ A four-episode miniseries about a kid maybe murdering another kid. Harrowing and incredible. I learned this was Owen Cooper's first acting job, and episode three was the first of the series to be filmed (and holy shit, what an ep). He had one week of rehearsal before that, and is now the youngest-ever male Emmy winner. Kid's a prodigy.



Can my dead uncle's phone break the cycle of addiction? by Kiki Dy ▪ *"If fate fell as a cinderblock from the sky, killing you without want or warning, what would your crude data—your texts, Reddit searches, Club Penguin chat history—say about you? About your peculiarities? Your*

perversions? Your humor? Your heart? Your hatred? About what led you to such a cruel demise?

Would you rather have a fully nude, open casket funeral—nipple hairs, scars, taint, and imperfections up for examination by all those who alleged to have loved you and all those who didn't? Or an open information corpse funeral, your unlocked phone and laptop propped up against white satin; your exposed nerves, Ambien-addled internet searches, secret affairs, and preoccupations there like a wall outlet for any curious, grief-blurred brain to poke with a metal fork."



✪ **Anora** ▪ Perhaps my favorite movie of the year. Somehow they took the *Pretty Woman* formula and made it feel more realistic without sacrificing the heart or humor. Through the whole thing I was kinda uneasy by how seemingly gratuitous and objectifying the many sex scenes are but by the time the credits roll you realize it was all setup so they could give us the final scene.



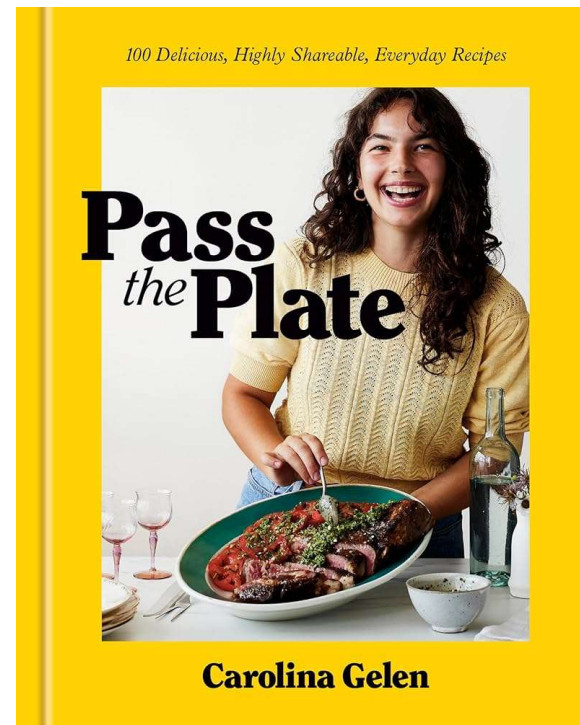
Girls5eva ▪ I don't know how I went so long without even *hearing* of this but then Ana pulled me out from under my rock by telling me it was her comfort show and it's so frickin' funny. At least one literal lol every episode, and usually more. The Wickie "I never lied" montage 😂



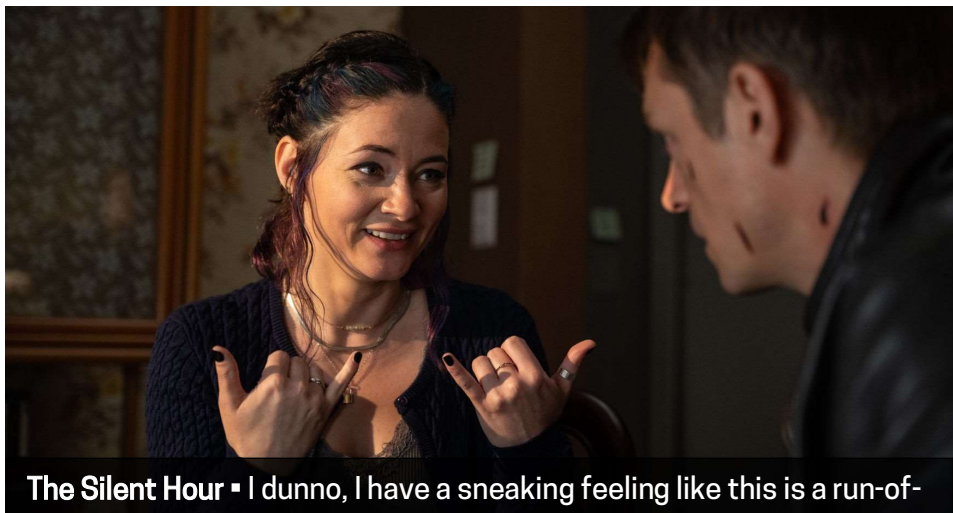
✪ **Sinners** ▪ Patrick Boey's review* title sent me to the dictionary—"A Diegetic Vampire Musical Rooted in Blues & Irish Jigs"—and also put me in awe of the clout Ryan Coogler must wield, that he was able to get that particular elevator pitch greenlit. Then again, all he makes are hits so who dares bet against him at this point? Such a treat for the eyes and ears. *go find his review, it's great

MOVIES

28 Years Later ▪ The Accountant 2 ▪ **Anora** ▪ Atlas ▪ Badland Hunters ▪ Ballerina ▪ Barbarian ▪ The Beekeeper ▪ **Birth/Rebirth** ▪ Blink Twice ▪ **Bring Her Back** ▪ Brokeback Mountain ▪ Carry-On ▪ Caught Stealing ▪ Cleaner ▪ **Dangerous Animals** ▪ Deadpool & Wolverine ▪ Drop ▪ The Family Plan ▪ ~~The Family Plan 2~~ ▪ Final Destination 5 ▪ Flamin' Hot ▪ **Flow** ▪ **The Game** ▪ Game Night ▪ Get Away ▪ Gladiator II ▪ Havoc ▪ Heads of State ▪ **Heretic** ▪ Holland, Michigan ▪ Jackpot! ▪ **KPop Demon Hunters** ▪ Lake George ▪ Locked ▪ The Long Walk ▪ Lost Highway ▪ Malignant ▪ **Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning** ▪ **My Old Ass** ▪ The Monkey ▪ No Hard Feelings ▪ Nobody 2 ▪ Novocaine ▪ ~~The Old Guard 2~~ ▪ One Battle After Another ▪ One Cut of the Dead ▪ **Predator: Killer of Killers** ▪ Presence ▪ A Quiet Place: Day One ▪ **She Rides Shotgun** ▪ **The Silent Hour** ▪ **Sinners** ▪ Snack Shack ▪ Superman ▪ Thunderbolts* ▪ ~~The Thursday Murder Club~~ ▪ **Together** ▪ Totally Killer ▪ **Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery** ▪ **Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl** ▪ ~~Weapons~~ ▪ Woman of the Hour ▪ ~~A Working Man~~



This cookbook is *incredible*, I've made a bunch of stuff from it, all so good, including that banana bread I've been making for everyone for the past year or so. I put the recipe in a PDF here but definitely buy her book, you won't regret it:



The Silent Hour ▪ I dunno, I have a sneaking feeling like this is a run-of-the-mill thriller that I just happen to love, but love it I do. A deaf witness and recently-deafened detective find themselves hunted; straightforward but gripping stuff. I loved reading about how much care Sandra Mae Frank took in making sure her (and her character's) ability to lip read is used appropriately and not treated like a superpower.



The Leftovers ▪ This is not at all a knock against *Lost*, or *Lost-lovers* (of which I am one), but this kinda feels like *Lost* for grownups? Definitely deals more directly and painfully around themes of faith, loss, and grief, and whereas *Lost* sometimes felt like it wrote checks it couldn't cash, this feels like it writes checks it never intends to cash. So while you don't get paid either way, you feel more respected. Also it's such a screen-turner.

Out of 64 movies, 37 shows, 44 books, a ton of songs, and a raft of other flotsam these were my favorite things of 2025! I hope you find something you love :)

P.S. A quick little key: 🌟 entries are particular favorites. On the interstitial pages bold entries are in the roundup, unstyled entries I'm some kind of happy to have under my belt, and crossed out entries are ones I could have missed (some more vehemently than others).

P.P.S. If any of the QR codes give you trouble, especially those pretty ones I tried for the playlists, lmk!

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

23 Marshall St. Leicester MA 01524
jim@biancolo.com



🌟 **Mr. Inbetween** ▫ This show has literally nothing to do with *Breaking Bad* but if you ever wanted a whole show about Mike, but he's Australian and smiles a lot more, this might be the show you've been waiting for. Ah the dilemma: how to have a violent job while raising a tween daughter, caring for your brother with motor neuron disease, and generally navigating mundanity as we all must? A perfect execution of a classic blueprint.



She Rides Shotgun ▫ Between Owen Cooper in *Adolescence* and Ana Sophia Heger here this has been a helluva year for kids turning in dynamite debuts. And Taron Egerton crushes it, as usual. A gritty, touching story of a father and daughter on the run, and a kid who has to grow up too fast. This and *Anora* win the title this year for hitting you hardest in the final scene.