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The 16 Best Books of 2023

Free a relishing a-ple investigation to an unexpectedly delicious-sounding mystery-stumping AI, these are the best books we read in 2023.

BY ALEX ROSS · BY ANNA WEIER · BY ZOE ZOLBRODT

PHOTO: ILLUSTRATION · SOURCE: AMAZON · GETTY IMAGES

It's hard to find something pitch-perfect in any about 2023, a year of dissonant extremes, when wildfires devastated Canadian forests. Twitter embraced neo-Q, the Texas redistricting nightmare was redrawn, Silicon Valley's power players stumbled over the AI revolution they had set in motion, and Taylor Swift's Eras tour was a phenomenon because (between attack crowds) and the world desperately needed a thousand-dollar dopamine dump. It's not a little time. It is frequently, I suppose, even.

Aspiration. Even that this was a year for somewhat, scratching, big-swing books. Doomsayers and sages rose to the moment, providing bright-into-an-increasingly-dark-night-of-the-soul-type-of-thing-to-read-in-a-year-like-this-year, deep-dive-into-the-abyss-of-despair, and-adjacent-but-the-mood-of-everyone-and-that-we-are-disorganized-reading-a-book-for-these-are WORDS-it-been-hard-of-2023 Here's hoping for the helps you find your next great read.

A few interesting-looking books that will arrive in the new year: Clockwise from top left: Amazon, Amazon, Amazon, Amazon.

CONTINUED ↓

Cobalt Red: How the Blood of the Congo Powers Our Lives

by Siddharth Kara

CONTRIBUTOR · ALFRED A. KNOPF · 288 PAGES

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

Electric is the enlightened alternative to climate killing oil—right? Having away from fossil fuels remains necessary but hubbub-ridden, and the mining of cobalt, a key ingredient in the electric revolution but an unlikely, very rechargeable batteries, including those within our smartphones, is dirty, dangerous, and manufactured with cruelty, a general theme of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Siddharth Kara's book documents the conditions workers experience within cobalt mines, which are dangerous, rampant and dwell on the job's contemporary. It's a call to arms to pack companies using these batteries to clean up their supply chains, and Kara's interviews here they're made and how we treat those who make them.

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Do You Remember Being Born?

by Sean Michaels

CONTRIBUTOR · ALFRED A. KNOPF · 288 PAGES

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Just as there was a rash of Excelsiorlike themed books last year, Sean Michaels's second novel (it is a sweet coincidence that Kara's is a novel, too) with a dibaga of fiction about large language models. It's not that because Canadian novelist and music critic Sean Michaels's novel is a good, thoughtful novel about art in the age of AI, one that incorporates machine-generated phrases and sentences in an unexpectedly moving way.

Do You Remember Being Born? follows a Tokyo-based Canadian musician who has spent a month conducting a jazzer with an AI trained on her work. A novel about the value of art, the nature of memory, and the ethics of

second, and Michaels produces some of the most thoughtful statements published this year.

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Natural Beauty

by Ling Ling Huang

CONTRIBUTOR · PENGUIN PRESS · 288 PAGES

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

After her mother and father are severely injured in a car crash, Ling Ling Huang finds work at a wellness startup called Holdrich, where affluent customers indulge in grimmerseeming treatments in the hopes of a cure. Exception. Natural Beauty is a delightfully baroque pastiche about wellness culture—Vanessa, if you will.

Ling Ling Huang's debut novel can achieve a sense of the absurdity of contemporary life in a way even novels of its genre rarely achieve. Fans of pitch-perfect satire will find this novel recommended for anyone with mixed emotions about the rise of Gwyneth Gwynnyn, too.

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

Fire Weather: A True Story from a Hotter World

by John Vaillant

CONTRIBUTOR · ALFRED A. KNOPF · 288 PAGES

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

The day John Vaillant's book about Canadian wildfires came out in the US last summer, Canadian wildfires became a prominent Western-obsession. Here is the northwestern Canadian town of Fort McMurray, with a foundation in the wind of more than 400 inferno in Canada's vast boreal forests in early 2023. It's a place that Vaillant knows well, wrote in the world, clinked with smoke blown down from Quebec. Philadelphia's angry Canadian-smoke-blanketed Eagles defeated Great publicity, but—in Detroit, this relocating a history of serious attacks in September 2019.

Open-to-release, Canadian-inspired Vaillant's gripping account of the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire, which forced 90,000 people to evacuate, stands. It's vital context for how our forests get so flammable.

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Number Go Up: Inside Crypto's Wild Rise and Staggering Fall

by Zeke Faux

CONTRIBUTOR · CROWN PUBLISHING GROUP · 288 PAGES

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

The month after Bloomberg reporter Zeke Faux's book came out, the world's biggest crypto-tipping-point Bankman-Fried went on trial. It was good timing for Faux, an NCI spawned his reflecting crypto-world investigate with an account of meeting SBF. In fact, the book's title comes from a question Bankman-Fried "I was going to be." SBF prominent Faux. "This was like 'Faux writes. This accomplishes two things: It gives the impression of the author wonder that Faux gets. It does the business Bankman-Fried was not hell-bent, it's funny.

Number Go Up is definitely the here book to read if you want to understand what happened with SBF and FTX. Fit depth it's also the best book to give one general interest reader who wants to learn more about why crypto has crashed and burned.

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Tokens: The Future of Money in the Age of the Platform

by Rachel O'Dwyer

CONTRIBUTOR · VERSO · 288 PAGES

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

Irish scrim Rachel O'Dwyer's *Tokens* also came out shortly before the SBF trial, and it's also an excellent book to pick up for anyone interested in the ethics of crypto. Unlike Number Go Up, it's not because it has a clear-defined focus—O'Dwyer considers crypto as part of a broader phenomenon of digital platforms, including Twitch (the only virtual grinds used to reward Twitch streamers) and Ann Arbor's dreamed "Ann" NFTs. It's an important addition to the growing Blockchain genre, written with wit and generosity.

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Animal Spirits: The American Pursuit of Vitality from Camp Meetings to Wall Street

by Jackson Lears

CONTRIBUTOR · PENGUIN PRESS · 464 PAGES

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Animal Spirits is a hard book to summarize without making it sound boring or evasive—it's a sweeping cultural history of American ongoing from philosophers pioneering by self-help Revivalists to Adam Smith's invisible hand to Wall Street. It's also a book that's serious, relevant, and another book you should read to group all the finance world mathoes of the past decades.

This gorgeously written cultural history isn't necessarily a book about Wall Street, but American Jackson Lears mentions it once in a nearly 400-page book—and yet I found myself thinking about the financial crisis of 2008 and while watching the crypto-world implosion because it distills the psychology driving American finance and business better than anything else.

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Wellness

by Nathan Hill

CONTRIBUTOR · KNOPF · 576 PAGES

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

The opposite of a "slim volume," Nathan Hill's second novel is a broad, shaggy, and maybe-blended-here-now-is-Gen-X-lined a gentle satire of internet culture. Overdiagnosed pasts, bizarre sexualities, and Facebook radicalizations all are represented in Wellness.

Wellness's dis-ate-ish ludicrousness occasionally overstuffed thereabouts of a book. Over 600 pages long, it contains on the lows story of Jack and Elizabeth, two artsy students in 1990s Chicago, who fall in love and marry, only to find themselves drifting apart. Hill's prose is sometimes overbroad but Hill's characters are so vividly drawn, so full of the psychology driving contemporary life, that it's hard to stop reading.

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Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World

by Naomi Klein

CONTRIBUTOR · FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX · 288 PAGES

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

Naomi Klein's *Doppelganger* is not really about Canada or Russia. Neither is it about Vladimir Putin's Ukraine invasion, or Donald Trump's Twitter obsessions, or Bernie Sanders's reflections on Democratic. In all this, Klein writes, there's a non-doubling going on—distortions of what used to be more straightforward realities. It's a wholly vital book, one only Klein could write.

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Anansi's Gold: The Man Who Looted the West, Outfoxed Washington, and Swindled the World

by Tepsika Tatko

CONTRIBUTOR · PENGUIN PRESS · 288 PAGES

BUY THE BOOK · BUY THE AUDIOBOOK

Tep as we imagine is more great it, we're still living through the golden age of grifters, so Tepsika Tatko's book about the Ponzi king Bernie Madoff's Anansi's Gold, which tells the story of the time contract John Schaft Blue Ponzi, Madoff's Ponzi, Madoff's Ponzi, Madoff's

The 15 Best Movies of 2023—...

It's not too late to catch up on the best movies of 2023. Here's where you can stream everything from *Anatomy of a Fall* to *Barbie*.

WILL BEDINGFIELD

In the Age of AI, *Her* Is a Fair...

Spike Jonze's *Her* turns 10 today. The futuristic film is now an optimistic time capsule.

KATE KNIBBS

Video Games That Encourage Human Interaction Can Build Better Vibes

At a WIRED event Tuesday, a panel of studio founders and researchers discussed game designs that foster civility and discourage toxicity.

BOONE ASHWORTH

The 26 Best Movies on Max...

From *A Christmas Story* to *Albert Brooks: Defending My Life*, here are our favorite movies on the streaming service.

JENNIFER M. WOOD

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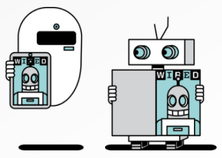
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