



Best books of 2011

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SALISBURY — What terrific book did you read in 2011? Or are you like so many of us — what terrific book did you buy/download this year, fully intending to read?

As the T-shirt says, “So many books, so little time.”

Still, we love lists and best books lists intrigue us in many ways — books we’d like to try; books we’ve already read and like seeing on a list; books we thought, “Really?” and put down.

Here we present lists from sources including NPR and the New York Times.

For NPR, Maureen Corrigan listed the 10 best novels of 2011, including “Swamplandia!” by Karen Russell, a debut novel set at a gator theme park in Florida; “Open City,” by Teju Cole, about a despondent Nigerian doctor walking around Manhattan and delving into the history of New York; another debut novel, Amy Waldman’s “The Submission,” is a political novel of 9/11, praised for its approach to the tragedy; “The Art of Fielding,” a favorite of Deal Safrit of Literary Bookpost, a sturdy bestseller, and as Deal says, so much more than a baseball story, by Chad Harbach; “The Illumination,” by Kevin Brockmeier, described as “an unnerving spiritual fantasy” about how we would respond if we could see each other’s physical and emotional wounds; “The Leftovers,” by Tom Perrotta, another spiritual fantasy about the people left behind after a Rapture-like event; “The Marriage Plot,” by Jeffrey Eugenides, another long-term bestseller, a satire for lovers of literary theory and 19th century novelists; Ann Patchett’s “State of Wonder,” reviewed here by Elizabeth Cook on July 24; “Train Dreams,” a novella by Denis Johnson, first published in 2002, about the men who built the railroads of the West. The final book on her fiction list is “The Pale King,” an unfinished novel by the late David Foster Wallace. It’s about an IRS agent and his officemates — about the dullness and demands of work, with, Corrigan says, genuine sentences that make other fiction seem artificial.

Also from NPR, Michael Schaub’s five brilliant biographies: “James Madison” by Richard Brookhiser; “Van Gogh: The Life,” by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith; “Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie: A tale of Love & Fallout,” by Lauren Redniss; “And So it Goes: Kurt Vonnegut: A Life,” by Charles J. Shields; and “Steve Jobs: A Biography,” by Walter Isaacson.

Marissa Meyer recommends the top five young adult novels: “Anna Dressed in Blood,” by Kendare Blake; “Divergent,” by Veronica Roth; “So Silver Bright,” by Lisa Mantchev; “The Scorpio Races,” by Maggie Stiefvater; “Ashfall,” by Mike Mullin.

BarnesandNoblereview.com has editor’s picks of the best reading. They, too, liked “Open City” and “The Pale King.” Among their other suggestions: “Montecore,” by Jonas Hassen Khemiri, a Swedish novelist, whose book is called “an exuberantly comic masterpiece”; and “Daniel Stein, Interpreter,” by Russian novelist Ludmilla Ulitskaya, the story of a Holocaust survivor turned monk.

Their non-fiction list includes Joan Didion’s latest memoir, “Blue Nights,” about her daughter’s death; and biographies on Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X and the bestseller “Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman,” by Robert K. Massie.

The New York Times agrees on “The Art of Fielding” and “Swamplandia” and adds Stephen King’s “11/22/63,” which they say is his 53rd novel. Two others on the list: a debut by Eleanor Henderson, “Ten Thousand States,” a trip through the 1980s; and “The Tiger’s Wife,” by Téa Obreht, another long term bestseller, as a young doctor reflects on the wars in the Balkans.

The Times puts Christopher Hitchens’ essays, “Arguably” on their non-fiction list, his last book before his death on Dec. 15. Also on the list are Ian Brown’s memoir of life with his disabled son, “The Boy in the Moon: A Father’s Journey to Understand his Extraordinary Son”; “Malcolm X,” by Manning Marable; “Thinking, Fast and Slow,” by Daniel Kahneman, about our memory and thoughts; and “A World on Fire,” by Amanda Foreman, about Britain’s role in the American Civil War.

Happy 2012 reading.