

MANILA BULLETIN

Published on *The Manila Bulletin Newspaper Online* (<http://www.mb.com.ph>)

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The best books of 2011

MANILA, Philippines — The New York Times' 100 Notable Books of the Year were narrowed down to this final list, which contains a contingent of four first novels, Stephen King's 52nd novel, and nonfiction books that are models of their various forms — biography, memoir, history, argument and scientific analysis.

FICTION THE ART OF FIELDING, Chad Harbach.

At a small college on the Wisconsin side of Lake Michigan, the baseball team sees its fortunes rise and then rise some more with the arrival of a supremely gifted shortstop. Harbach's expansive, allusive first novel combines the pleasures of an old-fashioned baseball story with a stately, self-reflective meditation on talent and the limits of ambition, played out on a field where every hesitation is amplified and every error judged by an exacting, bloodthirsty audience.

11/22/63, Stephen King

Throughout his career, King has explored fresh ways to blend the ordinary and the supernatural. His new novel imagines a time portal in a Maine diner that lets an English teacher go back to 1958 in an effort to stop Lee Harvey Oswald and — rewardingly for readers — also allows King to reflect on questions of memory, fate and free will as he richly evokes midcentury America.

SWAMPLANDIA!, Karen Russell.

An alligator theme park, a ghost lover, a Styx-like journey through an Everglades mangrove jungle: Russell's first novel, about a girl's bold effort to preserve her grieving family's way of life, is suffused with humor and gothic whimsy.

TEN THOUSAND SAINTS, Eleanor Henderson

Henderson's fierce, elegiac novel, her first, follows a group of friends, lovers, parents and children through the straight-edge music scene and the early days of the AIDS epidemic. By delving deeply into the lives of her characters, tracing their long relationships not only to one another but also to various substances, Henderson catches something of the dark, apocalyptic quality of the '80s.

THE TIGER'S WIFE, Téa Obreht

As war returns to the Balkans, a young doctor inflects her grandfather's folk tales with stories of her own coming of age, creating a vibrant collage of historical testimony that has

neither date nor dateline. Obrecht, who was born in Belgrade in 1985 but left at the age of 7, has recreated, with startling immediacy and presence, a conflict she herself did not experience.

NONFICTION ARGUABLY. Essays by Christopher Hitchens.

Our intellectual omnivore's latest collection is his last (he's dead of esophageal cancer). The book is almost 800 pages, contains more than 100 essays and addresses a ridiculously wide range of topics, including Afghanistan, Harry Potter, Thomas Jefferson, waterboarding, Henry VIII, Saul Bellow and the Ten Commandments, which Hitchens helpfully revises.

THE BOY IN THE MOON By Ian Brown

A Father's Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son. By Ian Brown

A feature writer at The Globe and Mail in Toronto, Brown combines a reporter's curiosity with a novelist's instinctive feel for the unknowable in this exquisite book, an account — at once tender, pained and unexpectedly funny — of his son, Walker, who was born with a rare genetic mutation that has deprived him of even the most rudimentary capacities.

MALCOLM X A Life of Reinvention. By Manning Marable

From petty criminal to drug user to prisoner to minister to separatist to humanist to martyr. Marable, who worked for more than a decade on the book and died earlier this year, offers a more complete and unvarnished portrait of Malcolm X than the one found in his autobiography. The story remains inspiring.

THINKING, FAST AND SLOW By Daniel Kahneman

We overestimate the importance of whatever it is we're thinking about. We misremember the past and misjudge what will make us happy. In this comprehensive presentation of a life's work, the world's most influential psychologist demonstrates that irrationality is in our bones, and we are not necessarily the worse for it.

A WORLD ON FIRE Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War. By Amanda Foreman

Which side would Great Britain support during the Civil War? Foreman gives us an enormous cast of characters and a wealth of vivid description in her lavish examination of a second battle between North and South, the trans-Atlantic one waged for British hearts and minds.

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