



50 BEST BOOKS OF 2022

Over the next 13 pages, we count down our pick of the bunch

50

THREE TIMES A COUNTESS
by *Tina Gaudoin*



A delicious biography of Princess Diana's stepmother, Raine, rendering this comic grotesque three-dimensional, even mildly appealing.

49

WHICH WAY TO ANYWHERE
by *Cressida Cowell*



The *How to Train Your Dragon* author begins a new fantasy series, this time set in the present day, where we find "a Very Modern Magic... hiding in plain sight".

48

ENDLESS FORMS
by *Seirian Sumner*



The wasp has got a bad rep – until now. Not only are they cleverer than we assume (and particularly ingenious in torturing their prey), but wasps are also ecologically essential.

47

THE CHIEF
by *Andrew Roberts*



The *Daily Mail* founder Alfred Harmsworth had a genius for knowing what people actually wanted – and giving it to them. "Health and sex and money are always news," he said.

46

FAITH, HOPE AND CARNAGE
by *Nick Cave and Seán O'Hagan*



The death in 2015 of Cave's son changed the trajectory of his life and work – for the better, he thinks. As wise a music book as you'll ever read.

45

MOTHER'S BOY
by *Howard Jacobson*



A wisecracking memoir of growing up in Jewish working-class

Manchester, his conjuror father, his pessimistic mother, and why it took him so long to become a novelist.

44

TRESPASSES
by *Louise Kennedy*



This finely detailed tale of an affair between a married Protestant lawyer and a young Catholic woman in 1970s Belfast was one of the most eye-catching debut novels of 2022.

43

READY FOR ABSOLUTELY NOTHING
by *Susannah Constantine*



Princess Margaret cutting up a human turd with a cake slice is the star cameo in this wildly fun memoir.

42

A SEASON IN EXILE
by *Oliver Harris*



Anti-hero Nick Belsey, a policeman so maverick as to make Rebus look like a jobsworth, has burnt his bridges and fled to Mexico in Harris's latest marvellous thriller.

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ROOTED
by Sarah Langford



A barrister-turned-farmer discovers that the bag of diverse (often rather weird) practices we call “traditional farming” are a real alternative to intensive modern methods.

plummeting birth rate in the 1960s hastened the end of the Cold War. Now, Morland shows us the future of humanity in 10 startling statistics.

37

MOUSE'S WOOD
by Alice Melvin



Beautifully observed, the year's best picture book shows a woodland mouse going about his chores, month by month, culminating in a suitably Christmassy feast with his friends.

40

VLADIMIR
by Julia May Jonas



A reverse riff on *Lolita*, this debut novel about a female literature professor in her 50s obsessed with a younger male novelist beautifully skewers the #MeToo pieties.

36

DIAGHILEV'S
EMPIRE
by Rupert Christiansen



A sparkling account of how the impresario Diaghilev set out “to ravish the world” with his Ballets Russes, despite being, as he put it, “a great charlatan”.

39

WITHOUT WARNING
& ONLY
SOMETIMES
by Kit de Waal



The novelist's addictive memoir of her chilly, hungry childhood in 1970s Birmingham, her Irish mother in thrall to Jehovah's Witnesses.

35

GOOD POP, BAD POP
by Jarvis Cocker



Autobiography meets attic clearance: the Pulp frontman sorts through a lifetime's collection of tat, from ancient chewing-gum packets to carrier bags, telling stories as he goes.

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TOMORROW'S
PEOPLE
by Paul Morland



The Soviet Union's

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YOUNG MUNGO
by Douglas Stuart

Protestant Mungo and Catholic James fall in love in sectarian 1980s Glasgow. Essentially the same story as Stuart's Booker-winning *Shuggie Bain*, but equally excellent.

31



ACT OF OBLIVION
by Robert Harris

Harris finds a neat parallel for 2022's ideological intractability in this rollicking tale of two of Charles I's executioners on the run through religiously absolutist America.

33



METAPHYSICAL ANIMALS
by Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman

A firecracker account of how four female dons in postwar Oxford – Iris Murdoch among them – rescued moral philosophy from its rut.

30



PLAYING UNDER THE PIANO
by Hugh Bonneville

The *Downton* star proves himself to be a polished raconteur, discovering that his mother's job – just “a little filing”, she said – was in fact at MI6.

32



BLUE LABOUR
by Maurice Glasman

Labour has lost touch with its communal roots and become a middle-class party, argues the political theorist in a book everyone from Starmer down should read.

29



1945: VICTORY IN THE WEST
by Peter Caddick-Adams

An immersive study of the last 100 days of the Western Front, when the Allies met ferocious resistance from Nazi fanatics who preferred death to surrender.

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THE PREMONITIONS
BUREAU
by Sam Knight

After two people predicted Aberfan, a psychiatrist set up a bureau to monitor dreams. This real-life paranormal tale will spook even sceptics.

27



LADY JOKER
by Kaoru Takamura

Based on an unsolved real-life case, five Japanese men plot to kidnap a leading businessman as a revenge on capitalism, in this idiosyncratic, slow-burn thriller.

26



BEFORE THE
BIG BANG
*by Laura
Mersini-Houghton*

The age-old cosmological question of how and why the Big Bang happened has never been tackled with such aplomb.

25



SURRENDER
by Bono

The U2 frontman Bono structures his life story around 40 songs, in a raw dissection of the impulses that have driven him from embattled outsider to loudmouth superstar.

24



THE SEVEN MOONS
OF MAALI ALMEIDA
*by Shehan
Karunatilaka*

The 2022 Booker Prize was won by this sprawling, joke-filled supernatural farce, steeped in the legacy of Sri Lanka's civil war.

23



CONSPIRACY ON
CATO STREET
by Vic Gattrell

A riveting study of the “greatest plot against the British state since Guy Fawkes”, which failed to topple the government of Lord Liverpool in 1820.

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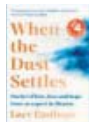
22



WHO ARE WE NOW?
by Jason Cowley

In a beautifully written Orwellian jaunt, the *New Statesman* editor returns to his Essex hometown, then tours England, inspecting racism, austerity and Black Lives Matter.

19



WHEN THE DUST SETTLES
by Lucy Easthope

The “disaster expert” reveals how she has helped governments deal with 9/11, 7/7, the Boxing Day tsunami, Grenfell, and everything in between.

16



QUEEN OF OUR TIMES
by Robert Hardman

This biography corrects some calumnies of *The Crown* – emphasising that the late Queen actually enjoyed her job – without descending into hagiography.

21



THE LEDGER
by David Kilcullen
and Greg Mills

An authoritative account of the melt-down in Afghanistan by two former coalition advisers, who argue that the mission was “absolutely achievable”.

18



MAKING HISTORY
by Richard Cohen

These colourful pen portraits of historians are a stirring reminder of why it all matters: uncritical acceptance of bogus history leads to political disaster (see: Putin).



AGAINST THE TIDE
by Roger Scruton

“True conservatism is less a philosophy than a temperament,” a desire to preserve the things that make life worth living, the late polymath argues in this collection of his finest columns.

20



THE PHILOSOPHY OF MODERN SONG
by Bob Dylan

The Nobel Laureate's essays on the songs that have enraptured him in his 81 years – from an 1849 ditty to rock'n'roll – are wildly eccentric and deeply humane.

17



THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOSEF MENGELE
by Olivier Guez

Journeying into the Nazi monster's mind, this novel is an unqualified masterclass in blending known fact with imagined truth.

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BITCH
by Lucy Cooke

Male animals fight for breeding rights, while females stay home with the young, right? Wrong! Fizzing with facts, this revelatory book will rewire how you see nature.

11



REALITY+
by David J Chalmers

What will it be like to be trapped in Zuckerberg's Metaverse? This is a mind-bending yet lucid discussion of how we might still lead meaningful lives, even in a simulated world.

8



LET'S DO IT
by Bob Stanley

Bursting with forgotten characters, this history of pop goes all the way back to the 19th century, and proves our appetite for earworms, singalongs and dance crazes is nothing new.

13



MAGNIFICENT REBELS
by Andrea Wulf

A superb resurrection of the 18th-century "Jena Set" – Goethe, Schiller, the Schlegels, Novalis – who invented our obsession with "self".

10



THE NORMANS
by Judith H Green

The Normans untangles the mystery of how they seized territory right across Europe, from Byzantium to Sicily to England. Was their society uniquely well-suited to war?

7



QUEEN HIGH
by C.J. Carey

In this ingenious alternative-history thriller, Britain is under the Nazi thumb and a plot is under way to restore Elizabeth II to the throne in place of widowed Queen Wallis.

12



THE EXHIBITIONIST
by Charlotte Mendelson

In this excoriating spin on the bourgeois Hampstead novel, a portrait of an artistic marriage in free fall doubles as a savagely funny take-down of male entitlement.

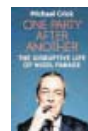
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THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF AN ORDINARY MAN
by Paul Newman

The Hollywood pin-up's posthumous memoir is astonishingly raw, analysing his deepest feelings.

6



ONE PARTY AFTER ANOTHER
by Michael Crick

The veteran journalist's biography of Nigel Farage is the year's best (and most rollicking) political book: a sharp portrait of a man who really changed Britain.

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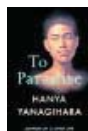
5



OTHERLANDS
by Thomas Halliday

Each chapter of this literary time machine takes us further back in prehistory, telling vivid stories about ancient creatures and their alien ecologies, ending 550 million years ago.

2



TO PARADISE
by Hanya Yanagihara

Wildly ambitious, this is the novel of 2022 that stays with you longest: a history of New York ending in a chilly vision of America's idealism betrayed by dystopian pandemic controls.

4



CONFESSIONS
by AN Wilson

With winning honesty, the novelist and critic turns the messiness of his early life into a tight, funny yarn – and the year's best memoir, filled with eye-popping scenes and wise asides.

1



OVERREACH
by Owen Mattheus

Not just the first book on the war in Ukraine, but likely to be the best. All-seeing, it takes us from Moscow politics to Mariupol trenches, spooling back to show the roots of the conflict.

3

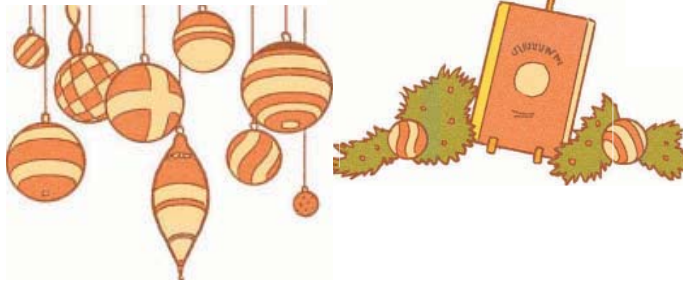


WATERLOO SUNRISE
by John Davis

A beautifully written history of London from the 1960s to Mrs Thatcher, as the arrival of trattorias, Carnaby Street cool, tower blocks and gentrification transformed it.

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