



2019 Best and Worst Book List

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Each year I keep track of the books I've read and make a list of the top ten best and bottom five worst books. I started the list after numerous family, friends, and followers asked me for my book recommendations a few years back. In 2019, I read thirty-five books totaling 13,458 pages. Here is this year's list:

Five Worst Books

5. Beren and Luthien by J.R.R. Tolkien
4. Finn and Hengest by J.R.R. Tolkien
3. The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun by J.R.R. Tolkien
2. The Monsters and the Critics by J.R.R. Tolkien
1. Try Common Sense: Replacing Failed Ideologies of Right and Left by Philip Howard

In fairness to J.R.R. Tolkien, these books represented the last of his thirty-eight books and mostly contained repetitive notes about the stories as he developed each one. As a huge fan of Tolkien, I wanted to read every book he wrote so soldiered through these books. Most people stop reading Tolkien after The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings trilogy, which is a mistake as he has written many other good works. I would, however, not recommend wading through the Middle Earth background work unless you are a massive fan like me.

Ten Best Books

10. Once Upon a River by Diane Setterfield
9. For the Love of the Game by Michael Shaara
8. The Caine Mutiny by Herman Wouk (World War II)
7. The Pioneers: The Heroic Story of the Settlers Who Brought the American Ideal West by David McCullough
6. The Frozen Hours by Jeff Shaara (Korean War)
5. Gone for Soldiers by Jeff Shaara (Mexican-American War)
4. A Column of Fire by Ken Follett (Book 3 in the Kingsbridge series)
3. Rise to Rebellion by Jeff Shaara (Revolutionary War, Part I)
2. The Glorious Cause by Jeff Shaara (Revolutionary War, Part II)
1. The Great Revolt: Inside the Populist Coalition Reshaping American Politics by Salena Zito and Brad Todd

As you can see, I am a fan of the father-son duo of Michael and Jeff Shaara. Their historical fiction books largely covering America's various wars are captivating and full of history. I

enjoyed reading more about many of the historical characters in Gone for Soldiers who show up again in the more famous and award-winning Shaara books covering the Civil War: The Killer Angels, Gods and Generals, and Last Full Measure. I highly recommend all of their books.

With his death in 2019 at the age of 103, I wanted to read more of Herman Wouk's historical work so read two of his books in 2019. The Caine Mutiny made my top ten, as did his other books in past years: The Winds of War, War and Remembrance, The Hope, and The Glory. Many of you probably have seen the movie, but I'd suggest you add the book to your reading list, as it provides much greater detail and character development than the movie can do.

As an Ohioan, I loved The Pioneers about the settlement of Ohio and the struggles of those first families to carve out an existence in such rough terrain. Having spent time in Marietta, you can truly feel the history when reading the book. McCullough has made my top ten list before with his work The Wright Brothers.

Follett's third book in the Kingsbridge series covers the fight between Catholics and Protestants matched his two previous efforts covering the lives of key characters in Kingsbridge, England. While this book, along with The Pillars of the Earth and World Without End, are all around 1,000 pages, Follett's storytelling skills are so good you never feel like the books are that long.

Finally, I found The Great Revolt to be highly insightful and relevant with the 2020 presidential election rapidly approaching, as many of the areas and voting groups discussed from the 2016 election will be targeted again. If you want to truly understand the Trump voter and how he won Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin in 2016, read this book.