

OPPORTUNITY *Ohio*

Best and Worst Books of 2022 January 1, 2023

Happy new year!! It is that time again when I quickly review the best and worst books read in the past year. Though I only managed to read 39 books last year, I did set a new record for pages read by 1,500 pages, coming in just shy of 22,000 pages. As always, I'll start with the worst five books.

5, 4 & 3: *The Century Trilogy: Fall of Giants, Winter of the World, and The Edge of Eternity* by Ken Follett: I've previously lauded Follett for his excellent and highly entertaining "Kingsbridge" series (*The Pillars of the Earth, World Without End, A Column of Fire, and The Evening and the Morning*, which is a prequel written last), so jumped into this series with high expectations. Given all of Follett's books run around 1,000-pages or more, commitment is key. The Century Trilogy tried my commitment enormously. The series runs from before World War I through the Cold War following the lives of several families. My issues with the series were (1) way too many gratuitous sex scenes riddled the book, (2) the plot lines of several of the families just didn't pass muster, and (3) it felt way too Forrest Gumpish to me.

2 & 1: *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life and The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* by Charles Darwin: I read both of Darwin's books given my increasing interest in understanding science topics I failed to learn in high school;-) I thought the first sections of each book were pretty interesting, but found myself bored by how much time Darwin spent on flowers and other animals. Perhaps I misunderstood what the books were about based on years of hearing about them, but expected a focused discussion on natural selection and the evolution of humanity. Instead, it was a more generic discussion that just didn't keep my interest. Darwin's estate should have someone heavily edit the books for a modern version that only uses the sections on humanity.

Now, my top ten books for 2022. I provide hyperlinks to each book on Amazon should you wish to grab a copy after reading my short review

10. [Redcoats and Rebels: The War for America, 1770-1781](#) by Christopher Hibbert: Hibbert's book focuses on America's war for independence from the British perspective. This approach provided interesting insights on the war that I hadn't known before. For example, it detailed some of the bad decisions made by the British generals that allowed the Continentals led by General George Washington to escape defeat and eventually win. If you like American history, this book should be added to your list.

9. [*The Dying Citizen: How Progressive Elites, Tribalism, and Globalization Are Destroying the Ideas of America*](#) by Victor David Hanson: Hanson is one of my absolute favorite American thinkers and writers. I've read several of his books and most of his weekly columns over the years. This book is a book I started to write two years ago I tentatively titled, *Killing Sovereignty: Why the Left's Goal to Kill Sovereignty Will Fail*. Hanson, of course, wrote a far better book than I would have written, so I'm glad mine never got beyond a Table of Contents and a nine-page introduction. He is more pessimistic about American sovereignty than I am, but I take his arguments seriously. If you are concerned with the direction of our country and curious as to what might be happening, Hanson's book is a good start.

8. **Inspector John Rebus (Book One: [*Knots and Crosses*](#)) Novels by Ian Rankin:** when looking for a good fiction series that had enough books in it to keep me busy, I came across the Inspector John Rebus series, which has twenty-four books going from 1987 to 2022. Set in Scotland (mostly), I love how Rankin details the nitty gritty of Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as other locales around Scotland, as Inspector Rebus works and eventually solves murder cases. The reader feels like he is in Scotland. I also like the various supporting characters Rankin has weaved into the stories. Given the sheer length of the character's life, it is interesting to see how Rankin adapts the character and stories as modernity intrudes each passing year (i.e., no cell phones existed in 1987). The series has inspired me to go to Scotland in the Spring of this year for vacation.

7. [*Mind of the Raven: Investigations and Adventures with Wolf-Birds*](#) by Bernd Heinrich: This review is the one in which my kids roll their eyes. I've developed an interest in crows over the last few years as a murder of crows regularly visits my backyard. They come when I'm sitting out back and will let me know of their presence when I'm inside so I can throw out a few pieces of stale bread. Over the years, I've watched them do things that demonstrated intelligence (i.e., dipping stale bread in water to soften it). At any rate, on a flight home I had finished the book I brought with me so went in search of a book at the airport. *The Mind of the Raven* caught my eye given the genetic relationship between ravens and crows. This book left me even more impressed and interested in crows given what I learned about ravens. If you have any interest in animals/nature (or learning why ravens used to be called "wolf-birds"—it is worth it), I suggest picking this book up. Now you know why my kids rolled their eyes...

6. [*The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict*](#) by Elbridge Colby: Colby's book is a critical voice in today's debate on America's defense posture. He makes a very compelling case that we are expending far too many resources on Russia and not enough on preparing for conflict with China. Colby and I have debated on what America should do vis-à-vis Taiwan, but his fundamental thrust is spot-on: China is the preeminent threat to America and the West that isn't getting the resource allocations needed to contain it within the South China Sea. America cannot fight two wars at once, so every dollar or bomb sent to Ukraine to defeat Russia is one we won't have to defeat China when war comes, which it inevitably will. Colby makes the case to leave Russia to Europe so we can focus on China.

5. **[Everett Ruess: A Vagabond for Beauty](#) by W.L. Rusho:** Before Christopher McCandless disappeared and died in Alaska as made famous by John Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, there was the case of 18-year-old Everett Ruess roughly 100-years ago who disappeared in the American Southwest. I read Rusho's book after Krakauer referred to Ruess in *Into the Wild*. The book is mostly made up of letters Ruess sent to family and friends from his adventures around California and the Southwest over the course of three years. Unlike McCandless who left little behind and who clearly had mental health issues, Ruess was just a young man in search of interesting places to paint and people to meet. His letters express an innocence and sophistication few college kids today could match. Ruess survived some pretty hairy situations that would have stopped most people from continuing. The other thing I loved about this book and Ruess's life is how he met and become friends with some of the world's most famous artists just by walking up and introducing himself. Most of Ruess's art was done on block prints, which you can still buy reproductions of today. I bought one to remind me to always seek adventure and never lose that sense of awe Ruess lived with each sunrise.

4. **[The World Crisis: 1911-1918](#) by Winston Churchill:** Everyone knows Churchill was a great war leader and Prime Minister during World War II. Too few realize he also was an amazing author (and painter). *The World Crisis* is Churchill's own account of how the world ended up at war from his perch in government and the admiralty. You can see shades of Churchill's brilliance through this book. Given most of my knowledge about global history comes from American writers, it was interesting to read about World War I from the British perspective. I believe there are worrisome parallels between how the world ended up at war a hundred years ago with what is happening between Ukraine and Russia today. As they say, to understand the future, look to the past. Churchill's book is a great resource for today's strategists.

3. **[Laptop from Hell: Hunter Biden, Big Tech, and the Dirty Secrets the President Tried to Hide](#) by Miranda Devine:** for an extensive review of Devine's excellent book, see my earlier review of it here: <https://mattamayer.substack.com/p/book-review-miranda-devines-laptop>. A must read for anyone curious about the Biden Family swindle and how it imperils American security.

2. **[Old Soldiers Never Die: The Life of Douglas MacArthur](#) by Geoffrey Perret:** When I started this book, I knew only the popular aspects of General MacArthur's life from the Philippines in World War II and the Korean War (i.e., "I shall return!"). I simply had no idea how great MacArthur was going back to his early days in World War I. He simply always stood out among his peers as a man destined for greatness, which many of those peers knew at the time. His exploits in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War are simply fascinating. It makes sense that the Republican Party debated whether it should be MacArthur instead of General Dwight Eisenhower as the presidential candidate in 1952. Maybe great times do make great men, but one has to wonder where are the MacArthurs today.

1. **[Patton: A Genius for War](#) by Carlo D'Este:** As with the MacArthur biography, I was blown away by D'Este's biography of General Patton. Like many, my knowledge of Patton came from the famous George C. Scott movie, *Patton*. Of all the books I read in 2022, this one came out on top. From the details about Patton from birth to his tragic death to the events that surrounded

his tumultuous rise, Patton left a bright light. Patton believed he was destined for greatness so spent years terrified events wouldn't occur to allow him to become great. This internal psychological drama occurring within world events, along with his intersection and clashes with so many famous people, makes Patton becoming Patton all the more interesting. The guy simply possessed a superior strategic mind and did things at war most people wouldn't have the guts to do. He largely succeeded every time. D'Este's book isn't only worth reading for the history, it also is highly entertaining due to Patton's flare for the dramatic and tendency to fight with other big names. One has to wonder what the world would look like today had General Eisenhower and President Harry Truman listened to Patton when he said we needed to push the Red Army back into Russia when we had the chance after the collapse of Germany. They didn't and millions were forced to live behind the Iron Curtain, we spent sixty years fighting the Cold War, and even today are dealing with Russian aggression.