

Suggested Reading “*Historical Novels*”

To indicate increasing level of challenge, one, two, or three stars follow each book title.

ε *The Agony and the Ecstasy: A Biographical Novel of Michelangelo* by Irving Stone ***

In the tempestuous, powerful pages of this passionate biographical novel, Michelangelo Buonarroti, creator of David, painter of the Sistine ceiling, architect of the dome of St. Peter's, lives once more. His time: the turbulent Renaissance, the years of poisoning princes, warring Popes, the all-powerful de'Medici family, the fanatic monk Savonarola. His loves: the frail and lovely daughter of Lorenzo de'Medici; the ardent mistress of Marco Aldovrandi; and his last love—his greatest love—the beautiful, unhappy Vittoria Colonna. His genius: a God-driven fury from which he wrested the greatest art the world has ever known.

ε *The Alienist* by Caleb Carr **

Fast-paced and gripping, infused with a historian's exactitude, *The Alienist* conjures up the Gilded Age and its untarnished underside: verminous tenements and opulent mansions, corrupt cops and flamboyant gangsters, shining opera houses and seamy gin mills. Here is a New York during an age when questioning society's belief that all killers are born, not made, could have unexpected and mortal consequences.

ε *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* by Mark Bowden **

This is military writing at its breathless best. Bowden has used his journalistic skills to find and interview key participants on both sides of the October 1993 raid into the heart of Mogadishu, Somalia, a raid that quickly became the most intensive close combat Americans have engaged in since the Vietnam War. But Bowden's gripping narrative of the fighting is only a framework for an examination of the internal dynamics of America's elite forces and a critique of the philosophy of sending such high-tech units into combat with minimal support. He sees the Mogadishu engagement as a portent of a disturbing future *-Publishers Weekly*

ε *A Danger to the State: A Historical Novel* by Philip Trower **

With sound historical research, masterful character development, intrigue, and mystery, Trower's book is a fictional depiction of the historical events surrounding the suppression of the Jesuit Order in 1773. When Pope Clement XIV issued the brief decommissioning the Society of Jesus, he wiped out a religious order founded in 1540 by St. Ignatius of Loyola. The novel is focused around a Spanish noble family, both of whose sons are Jesuits, one a novice in Spain, the other a priest in Paraguay.

ε *Faded Coat of Blue* by Owen Parry **

A recent immigrant to this land—where American has taken up arms against American—Abel Jones finds himself mysteriously chosen as confidential agent to General George McClellan, the "savior of the Union." No stranger to the cruel paradoxes of war, Jones is asked to investigate the death of Anthony Fowler, a young volunteer captain shot through the heart outside an encampment of raw recruits. Fowler was one of the North's "golden youth," envied and idolized, an impassioned abolitionist and sole son of a powerful merchant dynasty. Instantly, his murder is blamed on the Confederates—but whispers haunt the death of this fallen martyr, leading Abel Jones from the blood of the battlefield through the intrigues of Washington, D.C., and into a web of secrets and sinister relationships where evil and good intertwine...and where heroes fall prey to those who cherished them the most.

ε *The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat *

It is 1937, and Amabelle, orphaned at the age of eight when her parents drowned, is a faithful maidservant of many years to the young Dominican wife of an army colonel. Amabelle's lover, Sebastian Onius, is a field hand, an itinerant sugarcane cutter. They are Haitians, useful to the Dominicans but haunted by the knowledge that they are not entirely welcome. Rumors say that in other towns, Haitians are being persecuted, even killed. But there are always rumors. Amabelle and Sebastian decide they will marry and return to Haiti at the end of this cane season. But what should be the hope-filled dawn of their new lives together quickly becomes a sudden fall of darkness in the terror and madness of an ordained "ethnic cleansing" ordered by Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo.

-The Barnes and Noble Review

ε ***Here Be Dragons* by Sharon Kay Penman ****

Thirteenth-century Wales is a divided country, ever at the mercy of England's ruthless, power-hungry King John. Then Llewelyn, Prince of North Wales, secures an uneasy truce with England by marrying the English king's beloved, illegitimate daughter, Joanna. Reluctant to wed her father's bitter enemy, Joanna slowly grows to love her charismatic and courageous husband who dreams of uniting Wales. But as John's attentions turn again and again to subduing Wales—and Llewelyn—Joanna must decide to which of these powerful men she owes her loyalty and love. A sweeping novel of power and passion, loyalty and lives, this is the book that began the trilogy that includes *Falls The Shadow* and *The Reckoning*.

ε ***The Hornet's Nest: A Novel of the Revolutionary War* by Jimmy Carter ***

Carter continues to have one of the most productive and varied post-political careers of any former U.S. president. A prodigious writer with 16 works of nonfiction to his credit, he turns to fiction with this account of the Revolutionary War as fought in the Deep South. At the heart of the story is Ethan Pratt, who in 1766 moves with his wife, Epsey, from Philadelphia to North Carolina and then to Georgia in 1771, in the company of Quakers. On their homesteads in Georgia, Ethan and his wife form a friendship with neighbors Kindred Morris and his wife, Mavis. Through Kindred and his young Indian friend Newota, Ethan learns about the frontier and the Native American tribes who are being continually pressed farther inland by settlers. As the eight-year war develops, Ethan and Kindred find themselves in life-and-death combat with opposing forces.

ε ***The House of Spirits* by Isabel Allende *****

In this political, historic, romantic blend Allende, niece of Salvador Allende, the socialist president democratically elected that was removed from power and killed by Pinochet, chronicles the life of a family as the patriarch grows from a child to an elder. Through the lenses of the Trueba family, the portion of Chilean history that eventually leads to the 1973 coup is illustrated. The book is based on clashes: old versus young, communists versus conservatives, landlords versus tenants. From the polarization of positions emerges a military dictatorship that no one wanted, but that was a product of the system setup by polarization. In the end, the distinctions that originally separated young from old, conservatives from communists, are removed, as both sides realize the futility of their disputes in the face of an authoritarian regime.

ε ***In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* by Nathaniel Philbrick ****

In 1819, the Essex, a Nantucket whaleship carrying a crew of 20, began what all thought would be a normal, two-year voyage. Instead, after a year and a half of near-disasters, the ship was rammed by a sperm whale and sank in the Pacific. All hands got off in three whaleboats and were at sea for three unbearable months of short rations and little fresh water, leading to the death by starvation of some and the killing of others to provide food. One boat disappeared and the two remaining eventually became separated. When rescued off the coast of Chile, only five men were still alive, including the captain and first mate, as well as three

rescued later from an island. Phillbrick brings the era to life, giving readers a rounded picture of the whaling industry and its society.

ε ***The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara ***

The late Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel (1974) concerns the battle of Gettysburg and was the basis for the 1993 film *Gettysburg*. This account of the three most important days of the Civil War features deft characterizations of all of the main actors, including Lee, Longstreet, Pickett, Buford, and Hancock. The most inspiring figure in the book, however, is Col. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, whose 20th Maine regiment of volunteers held the Union's left flank on the second day of the battle. This unit's bravery at Little Round Top helped turned the tide of the war against the rebels.

ε ***Killing Pablo: the Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw* by Mark Bowden ****

The author of the bestseller *Black Hawk Down*, hits another home run with his chronicle of the manhunt for Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar. He traces the prevalence of violence in Colombian history as background, then launches into the tale of the dramatic rise and fall of "Don Pablo," as he was known. Packed with detail, the book shows how Escobar, a pudgy, uneducated man who smoked marijuana daily, ruthlessly built the infamous Medellin cartel, a drug machine that eventually controlled much of Colombian life.

ε ***The King Must Die: A Novel* by Mary Renault ***

Bringing Greek mythology to life, this book and its sequel *The Bull from the Sea* tell of the amazing adventures of Theseus, famous for slaying the Minotaur, defeating the Amazons, and rescuing Persephone from the underworld.

ε ***Left for Dead: A Young Man's Search for Justice for the USS Indianapolis* by Peter Nelson ***

Two history lessons run concurrently through this exciting, life-affirming book about war heroics and justice. While watching the classic bragging scene in the movie *Jaws*, 11-year-old Hunter Scott grew curious about one character's reference to the U.S.S. *Indianapolis*. Discovering that history usually glossed over or omitted the story, Scott began a six-year crusade, gathering information from the survivors and, eventually, ensuring that their mission and their unjustly maligned captain were appropriately honored. Narrative combines with interviews between Scott and the soldiers to give individualized synopses of the 1945 sinking and rescue, ensuing court-martial, crusade, and exoneration.

-Booklist

ε ***The Legend of Bagger Vance: A Novel of Golf and the Game of Life* by Steven Pressfield ***

The time: 1931. The place: the golf links at Krewe Island off Savannah's windswept Atlantic shore. The event: a mesmerizing thirty-six-hole match in which Bobby Jones and Walter Hagen, legends of golf in their own time, are joined by an unsung opponent, the troubled war hero Rannulph Junah. The key to the outcome lies not with these titans of the game but with Bagger Vance, a caddie who carries the secret of the Authentic Swing. An inspiration for golfers and nongolfers alike, this is a story in which the search for the Authentic Swing becomes a metaphor for the search for the Authentic Self.

ε ***The Octopus: A Story of California* by Frank Norris ****

This is a turn-of-the-century epic of California wheat farmers struggling against the rapacity of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, which will stop at nothing to extend its domination. The company controls the local paper, the land, the legislature and, when the farmers organize to protect themselves, even manages to

control their representative on the state rate-fixing commission. An unremitting tale of greed and betrayal, originally intended as one-third of Norris' never-completed "Epic of the Wheat" trilogy.

ε *Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow *

Published in 1975, *Ragtime* changed our very concept of what a novel could be. An extraordinary tapestry, it captures the spirit of America in the era between the turn of the century and the First World War. The story opens in 1906 in New Rochelle, New York, at the home of an affluent American family. One lazy Sunday afternoon, the famous escape artist Harry Houdini swerves his car into a telephone pole outside their house, and, almost magically, the line between fantasy and historical fact, between real and imaginary characters, disappears. Henry Ford, Emma Goldman, J. P. Morgan, Evelyn Nesbit, Sigmund Freud, and Emiliano Zapata slip in and out of the tale, crossing paths with Doctorow's imagined family and other fictional characters, including an immigrant peddler and a ragtime musician from Harlem whose insistence on a point of justice drives him to revolutionary violence.

ε *Under the Eagle: A Tale of Military Adventure and Reckless Heroism with the Roman Legions* by Simon Scarrow **

This enthralling historical drama is distinguished by its meticulously detailed portrayal of life in the mighty Roman army. It is the year 42 AD, and Centurion Macro, battle-scarred and fearless, is in the heart of Germany with the Second Legion, the toughest in the Roman army. Cato, a new recruit and the newly appointed second-in-command to Macro, will have more to prove than most. In a bloody skirmish with local tribes, Cato gets his first chance to prove that he's more than a callow, privileged youth. As their next campaign takes them to a land of unparalleled barbarity—Britain—a special mission unfolds, thrusting Cato and Macro headlong into a conspiracy that threatens to topple the Emperor himself.

ε *Underworld* by Don DeLillo ***

This novel opens with a breathlessly graceful prologue set during the final game of the Giants-Dodgers pennant race in 1951. Written in what DeLillo calls "super-omniscience" the sentences sweep from young Cotter Martin as he jumps the gate to the press box, soars over the radio waves, runs out to the diamond, slides in on a fast ball, pops into the stands where J. Edgar Hoover is sitting with a drunken Jackie Gleason and a splenetic Frank Sinatra, and learns of the Soviet Union's second detonation of a nuclear bomb. It's an absolutely thrilling literary moment. When Bobby Thomson hits Branca's pitch into the outstretched hand of Cotter—the "shot heard around the world"—and Jackie Gleason pukes on Sinatra's shoes, the events of the next few decades are set in motion, all threaded together by the baseball as it passes from hand to hand. Through fragments and interlaced stories—including those of highway killers, artists, celebrities, conspiracists, gangsters, nuns, and sundry others—DeLillo creates a fragile web of connected experience, a communal Zeitgeist that encompasses the messy whole of five decades of American life, wonderfully distilled.

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