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Giants in the Earth by O.E. Rølvaag

First Published 1925, fiction, 531 pages.

Giants in the Earth (Norwegian: *Verdens Grøde*) is a novel by Norwegian-American author Ole Edvart Rølvaag. First published in Norway as two books in 1924 and 1925, the author collaborated with Minnesotan Lincoln Colcord on the English translation.

The novel follows a Norwegian family's struggles as they try to make a new life as pioneers in the Dakota territory in the 1870s. Rølvaag is interested in psychology and the human cost of empire building, at a time when other writers focused on the glamor and romance of the West. The book reflects his personal experiences as a settler as well as the immigrant homesteader experience of his wife's family. Both the grim realities of pioneering and the gloomy fatalism of the Norse mind are captured in depictions of snow storms, locusts, poverty, hunger, loneliness, homesickness, the difficulty of fitting into a new culture, and the estrangement of immigrant children who grow up in a new land. It is a novel at once palpably European and distinctly American.

About O. E. Rølvaag:

An uncle who had emigrated to America sent Rølvaag a ticket in the summer of 1896, and so he traveled from Norway to Union County, South Dakota to work as a farmhand. He settled in Elk Point, South Dakota, working as a farmhand until 1898. With the help of his pastor, Rølvaag enrolled in Augustana Academy in Canton, South Dakota where he graduated in 1901. He earned a bachelor's degree from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota in 1905, and a master's degree from the same institution in 1910. He also had studied for some time at the University of Oslo

Ask Me Why I Hurt by Randy Christensen

2011, non-fiction, 288 pages

Ask Me Why I Hurt is the touching and revealing first-person account of the remarkable work of Dr. Randy Christensen. Trained as a pediatrician, he works not in a typical hospital setting but, rather, in a 38-foot Winnebago that has been refitted as a doctor's office on wheels. His patients are the city's homeless adolescents and children.

In the shadow of an affluent American city, Dr. Christensen has dedicated his life to caring for society's throwaway kids—the often-abused, unloved children who live on the streets without access to proper health care, all the while fending off constant threats from thugs, gangs, pimps, and other predators. With the Winnebago as his moveable medical center, Christensen and his team travel around the outskirts of Phoenix, attending to the children and teens who need him most.

A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold

First Published 1949, non-fiction, 240 pages.

Few books have had a greater impact than *A Sand County Almanac*, which many credit with launching a revolution in land management. Written as a series of sketches based principally upon the flora and fauna in a rural part of Wisconsin, the book gathers informal pieces written by Leopold over a forty-year period as he traveled through the woodlands of Wisconsin, Iowa, Arizona, Sonora, Oregon, Manitoba, and elsewhere; a final section addresses the philosophical issues involved in wildlife conservation. Beloved for its description and evocation of the natural world, Leopold's book, which has sold well over 2 million copies, remains a foundational text in environmental science and a national treasure.

A Place in Time: Twenty Stories of the Port William Membership by Wendell Berry

2013, fiction, 256 pages.

The story of the community of Port William is one of the great works in American literature. This collection, the tenth volume in the series, is the perfect occasion to celebrate Berry's huge achievement. It feels as if the entire membership—all the Catletts, Burley Coulter, Elton Penn, the Rowanberrys, Laura Milby, the preacher's wife, Kate Helen Branch, Andy's dog, Mike—nearly everyone returns with a story

or two, to fill in the gaps in this long tale. Those just now joining the Membership will be charmed. Those who've attended before will be enriched.

For more than fifty years, Wendell Berry has been telling us stories about Port William, a mythical town on the banks of the Kentucky River, populated over the years by a cast of unforgettable characters living in a single place over a long time. In *A Place in Time*, the stories dates range from 1864, when Rebecca Dawe finds herself in her own reflection at the end of the Civil War, to one from 1991 when Grover Gibbs' widow, Beulah, attends the auction as her home place is offered for sale.

"And so it's all gone. A new time has come. Various ones of the old time keep faith and stop by to see me, Coulter and Wilma and a few others. But the one I wait to see is Althie. Seems like my whole life now is lived under the feeling of her hand touching me that day of the sale, and every day still. I lie awake in the night, and I can see it all in my mind, the old place, the house, all the things I took care of so long. I thought I might miss it, but I don't. The time has gone when I could do more than worry about it, and I declare it's a load off my mind. But the thoughts, still, are a kind of company."

— Beulah Gibbs

Citizenship Papers by Wendell Berry

2014, essays, 190 pages

"[Berry's] refusal to abandon the local for the global, to sacrifice neighborliness, community integrity, and economic diversity for access to Walmart, has never seemed more appealing, nor his questions of personal accountability more powerful."—Kirkus Reviews

There are those in America today who seem to feel we must audition for our citizenship, with "patriot" offered as the badge for those found narrowly worthy. Let this book stand as Wendell Berry's application, for he is one of those faithful, devoted critics envisioned by the Founding Fathers to be the life's blood and very future of the nation they imagined.

Citizenship Papers collects nineteen new essays, from celebrations of exemplary lives to critiques of American life, including "A Citizen's Response [to the new National Security Strategy]"—a ringing call of caution to a nation standing on the brink of global catastrophe.

Indigenous Continent, the Epic Contest for North America by Pekka Hämäläinen,

2022, non-fiction, 586 Pages, Hardcover \$36- \$40 Paperback \$22, Kindle \$20

There is an old, deeply rooted story about America that goes like this: Columbus "discovers" a strange continent and brings back tales of untold riches. The European empires rush over, eager to stake out as much of this astonishing "New World" as possible. Though Indigenous peoples fight back, they cannot stop the onslaught. White imperialists are destined to rule the continent, and history is an irreversible march toward Indigenous destruction.

Yet as with other long-accepted origin stories, this one, too, turns out to be based in myth and distortion. In *Indigenous Continent*, acclaimed historian Pekka Hämäläinen presents a sweeping counternarrative that shatters the most basic assumptions about American history. Shifting our perspective away from Jamestown, Plymouth Rock, the Revolution, and other well-trodden episodes on the conventional timeline, he depicts a sovereign world of Native nations whose members, far from

helpless victims of colonial violence, dominated the continent for centuries after the first European arrivals. From the Iroquois in the Northeast to the Comanches on the Plains, and from the Pueblos in the Southwest to the Cherokees in the Southeast, Native nations frequently decimated white newcomers in battle. Even as the white population exploded and colonists' land greed grew more extravagant, Indigenous peoples flourished due to sophisticated diplomacy and leadership structures.

By 1776, various colonial powers claimed nearly all of the continent, but Indigenous peoples still controlled it—as Hämäläinen points out, the maps in modern textbooks that paint much of North America in neat, color-coded blocks confuse outlandish imperial boasts for actual holdings. In fact, Native power peaked in the late nineteenth century, with the Lakota victory in 1876 at Little Big Horn, which was not an American blunder, but an all-too-expected outcome.

Hämäläinen ultimately contends that the very notion of “colonial America” is misleading, and that we should speak instead of an “Indigenous America” that was only slowly and unevenly becoming colonial. The evidence of Indigenous defiance is apparent today in the hundreds of Native nations that still dot the United States and Canada. Necessary reading for anyone who cares about America's past, present, and future, Indigenous Continent restores Native peoples to their rightful place at the very fulcrum of American history.

The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times by Michelle Obama,

2022, non-fiction, 318 pages, Paperback \$31.50 Kindle 16.99

There may be no tidy solutions or pithy answers to life's big challenges, but Michelle Obama believes that we can all locate and lean on a set of tools to help us better navigate change and remain steady within flux. In *The Light We Carry*, she opens a frank and honest dialogue with readers, considering the questions many of us wrestle with: How do we build enduring and honest relationships? How can we discover strength and community inside our differences? What tools do we use to address feelings of self-doubt or helplessness? What do we do when it all starts to feel like too much?

Michelle Obama offers readers a series of fresh stories and insightful reflections on change, challenge, and power, including her belief that when we light up for others, we can illuminate the richness and potential of the world around us, discovering deeper truths and new pathways for progress. Drawing from her experiences as a mother, daughter, spouse, friend, and First Lady, she shares the habits and principles she has developed to successfully adapt to change and overcome various obstacles—the earned wisdom that helps her continue to “become.” She details her most valuable practices, like “starting kind,” “going high,” and assembling a “kitchen table” of trusted friends and mentors. With trademark humor, candor, and compassion, she also explores issues connected to race, gender, and visibility, encouraging readers to work through fear, find strength in community, and live with boldness.

“When we are able to recognize our own light, we become empowered to use it,” writes Michelle Obama. A rewarding blend of powerful stories and profound advice that will ignite conversation, *The Light We Carry* inspires readers to examine their own lives, identify their sources of gladness, and connect meaningfully in a turbulent world.

The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead,

2016. Fiction, 300 pages Paperback \$10, Kindle \$12. , winner of Pulitzer Prize.

Follow Cora, an escaped slave, as she time travels a literal "underground railroad" to different periods in the U.S. history of slavery--all while being chased by Ridgeway, a relentless slave catcher. "I haven't been as simultaneously moved and entertained by a book for many years. This is a luminous, furious, wildly inventive tale that not only shines a bright light on one of the darkest periods of history, but also opens up thrilling new vistas for the form of the novel itself."

Alex Preston, *The Guardian*

Just Mercy by Brian Stevenson,

2014, Nonfiction, 316 pages. Paperback \$8 Kindle \$13 , NY Times bestseller

An unforgettable true story of the redeeming potential of mercy in the U.S. justice system. The author is the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending the poor, wrongly condemned, and those trapped in the U.S. criminal justice system. This book loosely follows one of his first cases, that of Walter McMillian, a young man sentenced to die for a murder he didn't commit. This book will challenge you to think deeper about how justice is defined and give you chilling insights into our penal system.

Bel Canto by Ann Patchett,

2009, Fiction, 318 pages, Paperback \$12, Kindle \$14, NY Times bestseller, winner of numerous prizes

Somewhere in South America, at the home of the country's VP, a lavish birthday party is being held in honor of a powerful Japanese businessman. Roxanne Coss, a revered operatic soprano, has just dazzled the guests with her singing. It is a perfect evening--until a band of gun-wielding terrorists takes everyone hostage. During months of negotiations, chaos slowly evolves into something quite different--moments of great beauty as terrorists and hostages forge unexpected bonds. Friendship, compassion, and the chance for great love lead the characters to forget the real danger closing in on them from outside the compound walls.

Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder by Caroline Fraser,

2017, Nonfiction, 426 pages (you can easily skim the last 100 pages), Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

Think you know all about Laura Ingalls Wilder? Think again. Spanning nearly a century of epochal change, from the Indian Wars to the Dust Bowl, Wilder's dramatic life provides a unique perspective on American history and our national mythology of self-reliance. With fresh insights and new discoveries, *Prairie Fires* reveals the complex woman whose classic stories grip us to this day. (You can easily skim the last 100 pages of Part III which delves into the tumultuous relationship between Laura and her daughter, Rose.)

A brilliant satire of mass culture and the numbing effects of technology, *White Noise* tells the story of Jack Gladney, a teacher of Hitler studies at a liberal arts college in Middle America. Jack and his fourth wife, Babette, bound by their love, fear of death, and four ultramodern offspring, navigate the rocky passages of family life to the background babble of brand-name consumerism. Then a lethal black chemical cloud, unleashed by an industrial accident, floats over their lives, an "airborne toxic event" that is a more urgent and visible version of the white noise engulfing the Gladneys—the radio transmissions, sirens, microwaves, and TV murmurings that constitute the music of American magic and dread.

White Noise by Don DeLillo

1999, Fiction/satire, 326 pages, The National Book Award

A brilliant satire of mass culture and the numbing effects of technology, *White Noise* tells the story of Jack Gladney, a teacher of Hitler studies at a liberal arts college in Middle America. Jack and his fourth wife, Babette, bound by their love, fear of death, and four ultramodern offspring, navigate the rocky passages of family life to the background babble of brand-name consumerism. Then a lethal black chemical cloud, unleashed by an industrial accident, floats over their lives, an "airborne toxic event" that is a more urgent and visible version of the white noise engulfing the Gladneys—the radio transmissions, sirens, microwaves, and TV murmurings that constitute the music of American magic and dread.

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida by Shehan Karunatilaka

2022, fiction/satire, 400 pages, Booker Prize

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida is a searing satire set amid the mayhem of the Sri Lankan civil war. Colombo, 1990. Maali Almeida—war photographer, gambler, and closet queen—has woken up dead in what seems like a celestial visa office. His dismembered body is sinking in the serene Beira Lake and he has no idea who killed him. In a country where scores are settled by death squads, suicide bombers, and hired goons, the list of suspects is depressingly long, as the ghouls and ghosts with grudges who cluster round can attest. But even in the afterlife, time is running out for Maali. He has seven moons to contact the man and woman he loves most and lead them to the photos that will rock Sri Lanka.

Listen, World!: How the Intrepid Elsie Robinson Became America's Most-Read Woman by Julia Scheeres and Allison Gilbert

2022, biography, 352 pages.

At thirty-five, Elsie Robinson feared she'd lost it all. Reeling from a scandalous divorce in 1917, she had no means to support herself and her chronically ill son. She dreamed of becoming a writer and was willing to sacrifice everything for this goal, even swinging a pickaxe in a gold mine to pay the bills.

When the mine shut down, she moved to the Bay Area. Armed with moxie and samples of her work, she barged into the offices of the *Oakland Tribune* and was hired on the spot. She went on to become a nationally syndicated columnist and household name whose column ran for over thirty years and garnered more than twenty million readers.

Told in cinematic detail by bestselling author Julia Scheeres and award-winning journalist Allison Gilbert, *Listen, World!* is the inspiring story of a timeless maverick, capturing what it means to take a gamble on self-fulfillment and find freedom along the way.

The Oppermanns by Lion Feuchtwanger

1933, nonfiction, 416 pages

Written in real time, as the Nazis consolidated their power over the winter of 1933, *The Oppermanns* captures the fall of Weimar Germany through the eyes of one bourgeois Jewish family, shocked and paralyzed by an ideology they cannot comprehend.

In the foment of Weimar-era Berlin, the Oppermann brothers represent tradition and stability. One brother oversees the furniture chain founded by their grandfather, one is an eminent surgeon, one a respected critic. They are rich, cultured, liberal, and public spirited, proud inheritors of the German enlightenment. They don't see Hitler as a threat. Then, to their horror, the Nazis come to power, and the Oppermanns and their children are faced with the terrible decision of whether to adapt—if they can—flee, or try to fight.

Written in 1933, nearly in real time, *The Oppermanns* captures the day-to-day vertigo of watching a liberal democracy fall apart. As Joshua Cohen writes in his introduction to this new edition, it is “one of the last masterpieces of German-Jewish culture.” Prescient and chilling, it has lost none of its power today.

Project Hail Mary: A Novel by Andy Weir

2021, Science Fiction, 482 pages, #1 NYT Bestseller

Ryland Grace is the sole survivor on a desperate, last-chance mission—and if he fails, humanity and the earth itself will perish.

Except that right now, he doesn't know that. He can't even remember his own name, let alone the nature of his assignment or how to complete it. All he knows is that he's been asleep for a very, very long time. And he's just been awakened to find himself millions of miles from home, with nothing but two corpses for company.

His crewmates dead, his memories fuzzily returning, Ryland realizes that an impossible task now confronts him. Hurtling through space on this tiny ship, it's up to him to puzzle out an impossible scientific mystery—and conquer an extinction-level threat to our species.

And with the clock ticking down and the nearest human being light-years away, he's got to do it all alone. Or does he?

An irresistible interstellar adventure as only Andy Weir could deliver, *Project Hail Mary* is a tale of discovery, speculation, and survival to rival *The Martian*—while taking us to places it never dreamed of going.

I also want to remind you that we stopped reading books on the 2020 list when we stopped meeting in person. These books we might want to reconsider, so I'll put them on our January list as well.

The Only Woman in the Room by Marie Benedict

American Spy by Lauren Wilkinson

Kochland by Christopher Leonard

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Sold on a Monday by Christina McMorris

Beneath a Scarlet Sky by Mark Sullivan