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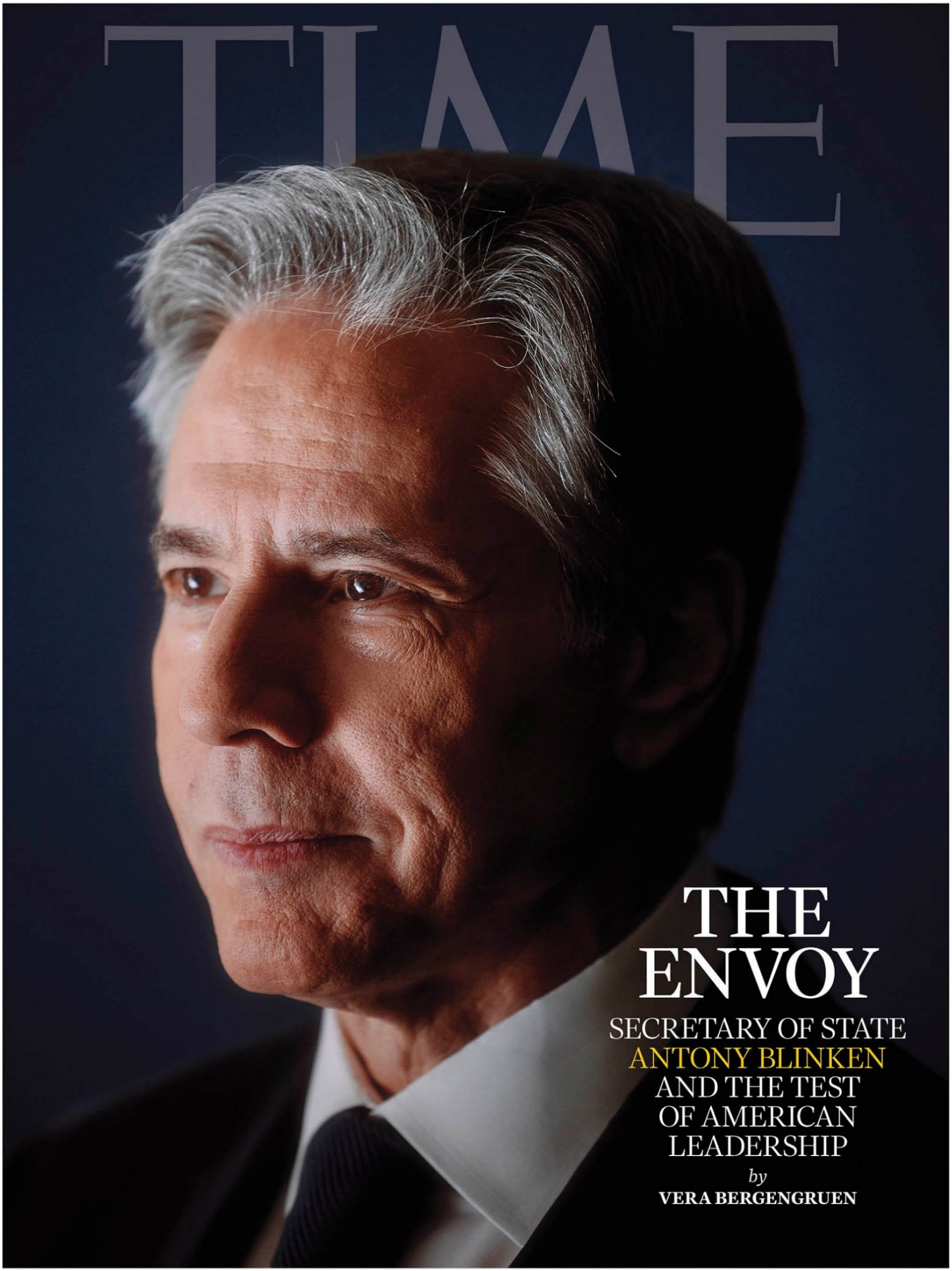

THE ENVOY

SECRETARY OF STATE ANTONY BLINKEN AND THE TEST OF AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

by
VERA BERGENGRUEN

TIME Magazine

[Jan 22, 2024]

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The Top 10 Global Risks for 2024

Ian Bremmer is a foreign affairs columnist and editor-at-large at TIME. He is the president of Eurasia Group, a political-risk consultancy, and GZERO Media, a company dedicated to providing intelligent and engaging coverage of international affairs. He teaches applied geopolitics at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, and his most recent book is The Power of Crisis.

In 2023, the big stories centered on two wars in Europe (Russia vs Ukraine) and the Middle East (Israel vs Hamas). Those conflicts will expand in 2024, but it's a third "war"—the United States versus itself—that poses the greatest global risk. And, as always, there will be new stories that deserve more attention than they're getting.

Read more about the Ideas of the Year—and TIME's complete coverage of the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland

1. The United State vs itself

While America’s military and economy remain exceptionally strong, the U.S. political system is more dysfunctional than any other advanced industrial democracy. In 2024, the problem will get much worse. The presidential election will deepen the country’s political division, testing American democracy to a degree the nation hasn’t experienced in 150 years and undermining U.S. credibility internationally. With the outcome of the vote close to a coin toss (at least for now), the only certainty is damage to America’s social fabric, political institutions, and international standing. In a world beset by crises, the prospect of a Trump victory will weaken America’s position on the global stage as Republican lawmakers take up his foreign policy positions and U.S. allies and adversaries hedge against his likely policies.

2. Middle East on the brink

The fighting in Gaza will expand in 2024, with several pathways for escalation into a broader regional war. Some could draw the U.S. and Iran more directly into the fighting. The conflict will pose risks to the global economy, widen geopolitical and political divisions, and stoke global extremism. The straightest path to escalation would be a decision by either Israel or Hezbollah to attack the other. Top Israeli leaders have pledged to “remove” the threat from Hezbollah. If Israel were to attack preemptively, the U.S. military would provide support, and Iran would assist Hezbollah, its most important regional proxy. Houthi militants are also pursuing an escalatory path, and Shia militias operating in Iraq and Syria have increased attacks on U.S. bases with Tehran’s blessing. No country involved in the Gaza conflict wants a regional conflict to erupt. But the powder is dry, and the number of players carrying matches makes the risk of escalation high.

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3. Partitioned Ukraine

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine remains an historic failure. NATO is strengthened by new members Finland and Sweden. The EU has opened a membership process for Ukraine, Russia has faced 11 rounds of sanctions, with more on the way, and half of its sovereign assets have been frozen—money increasingly likely to be used for Ukrainian reconstruction. Europe no longer buys Russian energy. But Ukraine will be de facto partitioned this year, and Russia now has the battlefield initiative and a material advantage. 2024 is an inflection point in the war: and if Ukraine doesn’t solve its manpower problems, increase weapons production, and set a realistic military strategy soon, its territorial losses could prove permanent and may well expand. Kyiv has taken a body blow from ebbing political and material support from the United States, and the outlook for European assistance is only slightly better. Ukraine is desperate for more troops. For all these reasons, Kyiv will take bigger military risks this year, including strikes on more targets inside Russia that provoke unprecedented Russian responses and could pull NATO into the conflict.

4. Ungoverned AI

Technology will outstrip AI governance in 2024 as regulatory efforts falter, tech companies remain largely unconstrained, and far more powerful AI models and tools spread beyond the control of governments.

5. Axis of rogues (and America’s dangerous friends)

In 2024, Russia, North Korea, and Iran will boost one another’s capabilities and act in increasingly coordinated and disruptive ways on the global stage. Meanwhile, even Washington’s friends—the

leaders of Ukraine, Israel and (potentially) Taiwan—will pull the U.S. into confrontations it wants to avoid.

6. No China Recovery

Absent an unlikely loosening of President Xi Jinping's grip on power or a radical pivot toward large-scale consumer stimulus and structural reform, China's economy will underperform throughout 2024. Beijing's failure to reform the country's sputtering economic growth model, the country's financial fragilities, and a crisis of public confidence will expose gaps in the Chinese Communist Party's leadership capabilities and increase the risk of social instability.

7. The fight for critical minerals

Critical minerals will be a crucial component in virtually every sector that will drive growth, innovation, and national security in the 21st century, from clean energy to advanced computing, biotechnology, transportation, and defense. In 2024, governments around the world will intensify their use of industrial policies and trade restrictions that disrupt the flow of the critical minerals.

8. No room for error

The global inflation shock that began in 2021 will continue to exert an economic and political drag in 2024. High interest rates caused by stubborn inflation will slow growth around the world, and governments will have little scope to stimulate growth or respond to shocks, heightening risk of financial stress, social unrest, and political instability.

9. El Nino is back

After a four-year absence, a powerful El Nino climate pattern will peak in the first half of this year, bringing extreme weather events that trigger food insecurity, increase water stress, disrupt logistics, spread disease, and foment migration and political instability, particularly in countries already weakened by the pandemic and the energy and food prices shocks created by the Ukraine war.

10. Risky business

Customers, employees, and investors—mostly on the progressive side—have brought the U.S. culture wars to corporate offices, and now courts, state legislatures, governors, and activist groups—mostly conservative ones—will hit back. Companies caught in the political and legal crossfire will face higher uncertainty and costs.

Red herrings

U.S.-China crisis

This will be another turbulent year for U.S.-China relations, particularly over Taiwan and tech competition, but domestic preoccupations have persuaded Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping that better-managed relations serve both sides.

Populist takeover of European politics

Europe’s populists will continue to strike fear in the European political establishment, but limited setbacks for mainstream parties at European Parliament, national, and local elections will neither upend the European political order nor derail EU ambitions rejuvenated by the Covid-19 pandemic and Ukraine war.

BRICS vs. G7

Even after this year’s expansion, the BRICS will not emerge as a China-led rival to the G7.

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Teachers Wrestle With How to Discuss January 6 With Students

Olivia B. Waxman is a staff writer at TIME. She covers history and education.

Tom Richey, a teacher in Anderson, South Carolina, is hesitant to call the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol an insurrection when he's in his classroom.

"If a teacher were to come into a mostly Republican community talking about the January 6 insurrection, that's a politically charged term," Richey says, despite the fact that the 2023 report by the bipartisan House Select Committee charged with investigating the violence refers to it as such. "I don't approve of anything that happened on January 6, but I think for a teacher to use a term like insurrection in a classroom setting would be unnecessarily partisan and inappropriate."

Richey is far from the only teacher wrestling with how to discuss Jan. 6 with students as the country approaches the third anniversary of the attack. Because there is no standardized history curriculum

in the United States, there is no nationally required curriculum on Jan. 6. Teachers have to figure out how to link it to what they're already teaching, whether as part of planned lessons on how the Electoral College works, different forms of protest, or post-Civil War era violence, or devote a class period to talking about it.

There's been increased scrutiny of how history is taught in the aftermath of the 2020 murder of George Floyd. Some conservatives argue there has been an increased focus on identity, sexual orientation, and race in the classroom that vilifies white people and sours young people on America. Some liberals, on the other hand, have pushed for more intersectionality in lesson plans and a deeper reckoning with the painful parts of U.S. history. At a time when there have been efforts to ban AP African American Studies in Florida, states are enacting laws designed to restrict how teachers talk about LGBTQ+ topics, and book bans are on the rise, many of the educators TIME spoke to say Jan. 6th falls into the category of topics that can be a political minefield.

Marlon Williams-Clark, a teacher in the Tallahassee, Florida, area, does not bring up Jan. 6 anymore in his classes after a parent complained about him in 2021 because he sent students a link to information about what an insurrection is. He ended up in the school's human resources office, he says, and had to send an apology letter to families. He has no plans to try to bring it up again due to "pressure that is coming from the state." Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is running for President in 2024, has made part of his platform cracking down on teaching that can be framed as "woke" or "indoctrination." (Many of the most popular curriculum websites also explicitly call the attacks an insurrection, including Facing History & Ourselves, which offers a lesson stating, "Insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to prevent the certification of the 2020 presidential election results.")

Many of those who do still bring up Jan. 6 in the classroom say they try to relate it to other moments in history. One fertile area of

inquiry: the early days of the United States. Richey has brought up Jan. 6 when he's discussing the Whiskey rebellion (1791-1794) and Shays' Rebellion (1786-1787). The common theme, as he sees it, is "people who feel that they have been overlooked by the government, feel that there is some kind of process that is worked against them" and "feel that they want to be heard in some way, even if it's not the most constructive way to be heard." He hopes his students will consider how that kind of sentiment is handled in a democratic republic.

Bob Fenster, a teacher in Hillsborough, New Jersey, also focuses on this time period. He assigns his students to read a 1787 letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Adams' son-in-law, arguing that rebellion occurs from time to time and that people should protest if they feel like their rights are being violated. The letter famously states, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure."

Fenster says students usually bring up Jan. 6 when he asks them to list rebellions in American history where people felt they had to rise up against the government. "We don't even have to discuss, in that context, whether they're right or wrong," Fenster says. He asks students to consider, "What do you do about people who are misinformed, but genuinely believe in what they're doing?"

Students and teachers draw parallels to more recent history, too. In the Boston area, while Jenny Staysniak was discussing social contract theory—the idea that citizens can challenge their government if they don't think it's fulfilling its duty to serve the people—students brought up as examples Martin Luther King, Jr. and the 1963 March on Washington participants, and the Jan. 6 insurrectionists. "In the case of the insurrection, there were laws and protocols that were broken, that were violated in a way that was unacceptable not just to the rule of law, but also to social norm," Staysniak says she told her class. "Yes, we can challenge the government, and we can say our social contract has been

broken, but there are still avenues through which civil disobedience is acceptable and it's not."

Matthew Bunch, a teacher in Miami Dade County, tells his students that Jan. 6 is different from other forms of nonviolent protest because it threatened constitutional processes. "You have a method by which you express your satisfaction, dissatisfaction with government, and it's voting," he says. "To use your protest to violently threaten the process of voting is not tenable in a democratic society." In Asheville, North Carolina, Tracey Barrett has students read parts of the House Select Committee's final report on Jan. 6 so they can see an example of Congress' oversight powers. They discuss Congress' role in certifying the Electoral College and how those who stormed the Capitol were trying to stop that process.

By the time many U.S. history teachers are back from Christmas break, they're already onto the post-Civil War era of Reconstruction in their curriculum, and they say there are natural ways to tie that time period to the events of Jan. 6th. Several teachers told TIME that they show the photo of Delaware man Kevin Seefried carrying a Confederate flag through the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 (he was later sentenced to three years in prison). Abigail Henry, a teacher in Philadelphia, sees showing that image as a way of preparing students for life after college: "My Black students are sometimes very unprepared for the racism they're going to experience when they leave Philadelphia," she says. Earlier this year, when Rabiya Kassam-Clay showed the photo to her Los Angeles U.S. history class, a debate ensued between a student who argued that the flag was a symbol of "Southern heritage" and another who said it was a symbol of "white supremacy."

Zinn Education Project, a website with downloadable lessons and articles about history topics, calls Jan. 6 "an attack on the United States Capitol by an armed white supremacist mob, determined to

block the democratic process" and suggests teachers note examples of white mob violence against Black Americans in the Reconstruction era. Among the suggestions is a link to a lesson that guides students on how to design their own reparations bill "to help them reflect on what a path toward justice might look like today."

Shari Conditt, a government teacher in Woodland, Washington, expects to discuss parallels to Jan. 6 when she's reviewing the definitions of rebellion, insurrection, and protest and ask students whether there are modern movements that could be associated with these definitions. Sari Beth Rosenberg, a teacher in New York City, has linked Jan. 6 to the Memphis riots of 1866, when white residents attacked the local Black community, burning down their homes and schools.

In Asheville, N.C., Barrett singles out the 1898 Wilmington Massacre, a coup in Wilmington, N.C. in which white supremacist soldiers and police helped kill at least 60 Black men in response to the election of a Reconstruction-era multiracial government. She explains to students that the Wilmington coup wasn't widely talked about for years because it was dangerous to acknowledge that the people in power had taken over the government by force. She tells students that it's important to talk about the events of Jan. 6 because "not talking about fascism can make it easier for it to occur and to recur."

Similarly, Rosenberg emphasizes to students that they don't have to be an elected official to make a difference in this country. She mentions "the regular people that stood up to protect our democracy," from Capitol Police to whistleblowers who testified during the House investigation of the attacks. She says she wants her students to remember: "It takes all of us to keep this democracy."

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The New RSV Drug Keeps Babies Out of the Hospital

Alice Park is a senior health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, new drug developments in cancer and Alzheimer's disease, mental health, HIV, CRISPR, and advances in gene therapy, among other issues in health and science. She also covers the Olympics, and co-chaired TIME's inaugural TIME 100 Health Summit in 2019. Her work has won awards from the New York Press Club, and recognition from the Deadline Club. In addition, she is the author of *The Stem Cell Hope: How Stem Cell Medicine Can Change Our Lives*.

Doctors and parents celebrated the major advances that came in 2023 to treat respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which sends up to 80,000 children under age five to the hospital each year in the U.S. This year, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved two critical ways to reduce the risk of RSV in young kids: a vaccine for pregnant mothers that can protect newborns, and a drug treatment for babies under one year.

In a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers report encouraging real-world data that show how effective the drug treatment, nirsevimab (brand name: Beyfortus), can be. The study, which was funded by the drug's makers Sanofi and AstraZeneca, included more than 8,000 infants in France, Germany, and the U.K. who were one year old or younger and entering their first RSV season, which runs from fall to spring. Nivrsevimab is a monoclonal antibody that acts almost like a vaccine, training a child's immune system to recognize RSV and defend against it. Half of the babies in the study were randomly assigned to receive nirsevimab, and half received no treatment. The drug was 83% effective in preventing hospitalization among those getting it, and 75% effective in reducing severe RSV. These results were similar regardless of the baby's age, gestational age, or sex.

"From a scientific point of view, it's fantastic that were able to prevent more than 80% of children who received the drug from going to the hospital," says Dr. Saul Faust, pediatrician at University Hospital Southampton and co-leader of the study.

The findings support recommendations by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that any baby under 8 months old receive a single injection of nirsevimab before their first RSV season if the mother has not already been vaccinated against RSV. But since the drug was approved in July, its makers, AstraZeneca and Sanofi, have not been able to keep up with the surge in demand. "The demand for Beyfortus has far surpassed any previous standard," an AstraZeneca spokesperson said in response to questions about ongoing issues with supply.

In October, the CDC alerted doctors about ways to restrict supply of nirsevimab to babies at highest risk of RSV complications, such as younger and lower weight babies, and those born with underlying health conditions. The agency also recommended that some of these high-risk babies, including those born prematurely and who have heart and lung conditions, continue to receive an

older, existing RSV treatment called palivizumab (brand name: Synagis). That can keep supplies of nirsevimab available for babies who don't qualify for palivizumab. While paliviziumab is safe and effective, it requires monthly injections throughout RSV season, so doctors and parents were hoping to start taking advantage of nirsevimab's single-injection.

For families with babies who aren't at especially high risk of RSV complications, Dr. Rick Malley, a pediatrician at Harvard Medical School and Boston Children's Hospital, says there are ways to protect infants even if they can't get the shot. Especially during the holidays, Malley says parents can ask visitors to avoid exposing themselves to the baby if they have any symptoms of respiratory infections, such as a fever, cough, or runny nose. If visitors insist on getting close to the baby, touching the infant's feet rather than face can also reduce the risk of passing on any infections.

The other reassuring news is that in general, RSV infections tend to peak earlier in the season, so it's possible the highest risk is over for this year. Still, nirsevimab's manufacturer anticipates that supplies will gradually continue to increase in coming months. "Approximately 230,000 additional doses will be made available in mid-January for this RSV season," says the AstraZeneca spokesperson. "This follows the announcement in November that 77,000 additional doses were being made available."

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Harvard President Claudine Gay Resigns

Simmone Shah is a reporter at TIME. She covers international and tech news.

Harvard's president Claudine Gay has resigned from her post on Tuesday following backlash over her comments during a congressional hearing about antisemitism on campus and allegations of plagiarism in her academic work. Alan Garber, a physician and economist currently serving as the university's provost, will step in as interim president.

In a letter to the Harvard community, Gay called the decision "difficult beyond words," writing that after consultation with the Harvard Corporation, the university's governing board, "it has become clear that it is in the best interests of Harvard for me to resign so that our community can navigate this moment of extraordinary challenge with a focus on the institution rather than any individual."

Gay is the second Ivy League president to resign following a congressional testimony in December regarding antisemitism on

campus. Last month, Gay, alongside former University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill and Massachusetts Institute of Technology President Sally Kornbluth, testified before a U.S. House of Representatives committee about the rise of antisemitism on college campuses following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. The three leaders did not directly answer a question from Republican Rep. Elise Stefanik on whether calling for the genocide of Jews would violate their schools' codes of conduct.

Magill resigned from her post days after the hearing following backlash for her comments.

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Gay's tenure, the shortest in the university's history, began in July 2023. A professor of government and of African and African American studies, she was Harvard's first Black president and second female president in the university's 387-year history.

Gay also recently began facing allegations of plagiarism in published academic papers and her doctoral dissertation. In a statement published on Dec. 9, the Harvard Corporation stood by Gay, noting that though her work appeared to contain "a few instances of inadequate citation", there was "no violation of Harvard's standards for research misconduct." According to the university, Gay has requested four corrections on two academic papers and is updating her dissertation in three spots.

Gay's resignation comes just weeks after the university's governing board issued a statement of support for the president. "In this tumultuous and difficult time, we unanimously stand in support of President Gay," the Harvard Corporation said on Dec. 12.

On Tuesday, the board said they accepted Gay's resignation "with sorrow."

"While President Gay has acknowledged missteps and has taken responsibility for them, it is also true that she has shown remarkable resilience in the face of deeply personal and sustained attacks," the statement read. "While some of this has played out in the public domain, much of it has taken the form of repugnant and in some cases racist vitriol directed at her through disgraceful emails and phone calls. We condemn such attacks in the strongest possible terms."

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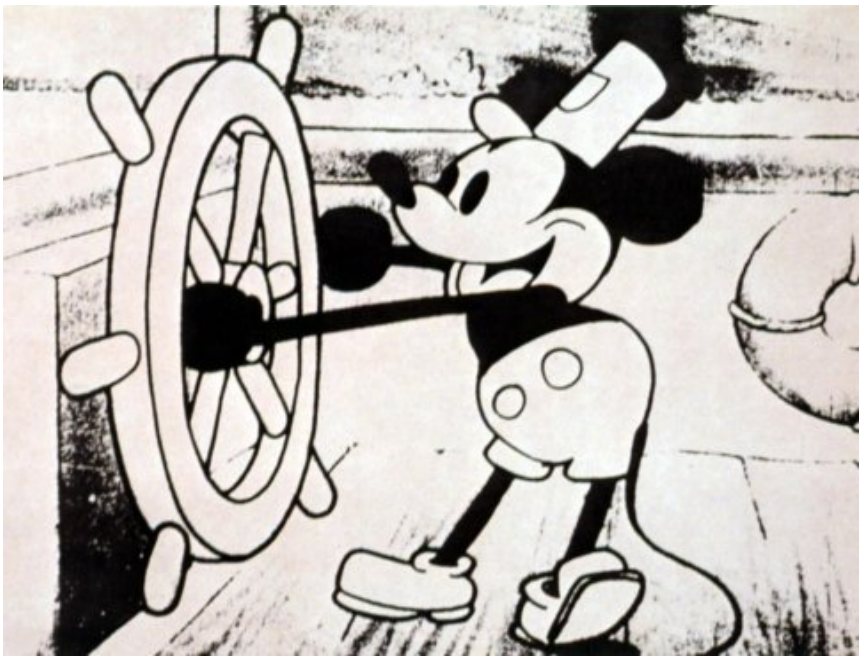
Mickey Mouse Is Now in the Public Domain After 95 Years of Disney Copyright



When Walt Disney first released the cartoon short film *Steamboat Willie* in November 1928, it was groundbreaking. It was one of the cartoons to use synchronized sound, and would go on to become one of the most critically acclaimed and popular cartoon films in the world.

But perhaps most famously, the cartoon introduced the world to the characters of Mickey and Minnie Mouse. Mickey Mouse in particular quickly became one of the most iconic characters of the Disney brand. Today, he is featured in virtually every aspect of Disney's branding. Hidden Mickeys–designs that show the outline of Mickey Mouse's head–are placed all across Disney's theme parks. Mickey Mouse is also the basis of multiple Disney television shows and movies, including *The Mickey Mouse Club*, which introduced audiences to popular celebrities like Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake, and Ryan Gosling for the first time.

Disney has fought to keep its copyright of the famous cartoon character as long as possible, lobbying the U.S. government to extend copyright protection before it was originally set to expire in 1984. Many lawmakers agreed, and in 1976 the law was changed to allow owners to retain copyright protections for the duration of the life of the author plus an additional 50 years. In 1998, Disney once again successfully lobbied along with other entertainment companies to extend copyright protections to life of the author plus 70 years for a maximum of 95 years.

But in January 2024, the copyright on *Steamboat Willie* officially expired, and Mickey Mouse is now officially in the public domain. This means that now anyone in the U.S. can use the Steamboat Willie version of the Mickey Mouse character without fear of copyright infringement. Copyright laws vary by country, so in some places Mickey remains protected.

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Since the start of the year, a trailer for a Mickey Mouse horror film has been released while other digital creators have edited the footage from *Steamboat Willie* to make it sound as if Mickey is using profanity.

Nevertheless, Disney still retains some protections of the Mickey Mouse character. Versions of Mickey Mouse that were released after *Steamboat Willie* that feature his quintessential red shorts and big eyes remain protected.

“We will, of course, continue to protect our rights in the more modern versions of Mickey Mouse and other works that remain subject to copyright,” Disney said in a statement, according to the Associated Press.

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A Make-or-Break Year for Democracy Worldwide

Astha Rajvanshi is a staff writer at TIME based in the London bureau. She covers international news and affairs with an eye on India and neighboring countries. She received the Matthew Power Literary Reporting Award and a Fellowship from the Institute of Current World Affairs.

Yasmeen Serhan is a staff writer at TIME, based in the London Bureau. She covers foreign affairs with an emphasis on the future of democracies and rising authoritarianism around the world.

Elections are no guarantee of democracy. That much we know from who holds them. Even full-blown tyrants crave the legitimacy that, in the modern era, can be provided only by the ballot box—margins of victory doubling as one more tool of intimidation.

But it’s also true that democracy does not exist without elections, which is why the year ahead carries such significance. In 2024, more than half the world’s population will go to polls—4.2 billion citizens across approximately 65 countries in what, from a distance, at least appears to be a stirring spectacle of self-government. At

closer range, however, the picture is cloudier, and warning lights flash red from the murk.

“2024 may be the make-or-break year for democracy in the world,” says Staffan Lindberg, the director of the Varieties of Democracy, or V-Dem, Institute, a Swedish think tank that analyzes the “complexity of the concept of democracy.”

Lindberg says that more than the sheer number of elections, or the fact that many of the countries holding them have global influence, the worry is that “so many have now empowered leaders or parties with antidemocratic leanings.”

Read More: *All the Elections Around the World in 2024*

Around the world, including in some of the biggest and most influential countries, experts have observed that the space for political competition and civil society is shrinking. At the same time, elected but illiberal leaders are cracking down on opponents and critics, eroding democratic institutions like the judiciary and the media that serve as a check on their power, and, finally, consolidating that power through changes in the constitution. When the leader next stands for office, it’s in an election that may ostensibly be free but is no longer fair.

The process is already well along in much of the world. Of the 43 countries expected to hold free and fair elections this electoral megacycle, 28 do not actually meet the essential conditions for a democratic vote, according to the Democracy Index from the Economist's Intelligence Unit. And eight of the 10 most populous countries in the world, including India, Mexico, and the U.S.—all of which head to the polls this year—are grappling with the challenge of ensuring voter participation, free speech, and electoral independence while authoritarianism is on the rise.

"What does it mean to have a free and fair election? Is it possible to have a free but unfair election? And how unfair does it have to be to no longer be democratic?" asks Yana Gorokhovskaia, a research director at Freedom House who oversees the pro-democracy think tank's annual "Freedom in the World" report, the latest edition of which recorded a 17th consecutive year of global decline.

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The American presidential contest looms largest, and not only because the U.S. is the world's longest-standing democracy. The challenger leading in early Republican polling, Donald Trump, hopes to once again secure the office that he refused to vacate after losing to Joe Biden four years earlier—precipitating a physical insurrection on the day Congress was validating the result. Trump is campaigning while under indictment on charges related to Jan. 6, among other allegations.

In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is running for a third term in the world's largest democracy. During his second term, Freedom House downgraded the country's democracy rating from "free" to "partly free," as the government targeted critics and news media, and continued a campaign against the Muslim minority.

Bangladesh is widely expected to re-elect 76-year-old Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina—the country's longest-serving leader and world's longest-serving female head of government—who has cracked down on her political opponents. And in November, Tunisia's presidential contest could see incumbent President Kais Saied further tighten his grip on power as he pulls the country once regarded as the best hope for democratization in the Middle East back to authoritarianism.

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In Russia, which has led the way on mis- and disinformation, and where Vladimir Putin is all but certain to secure a fifth term in office, electoral contests have largely become pro forma, with all meaningful opposition thrown behind bars. "Even autocrats acknowledge that legitimacy comes through elections," notes Gorokhovskaia.

Attacks on free and fair elections bring forth the reminder that even in the most advanced democracy, necessary work must be done to shore up institutions such as electoral bodies, the judiciary, and even the media.

“All these elections that are taking place in 2024 are going to be confronting some version of attacks against democracy, attacks against electoral integrity,” says Tony Banbury, the president and chief executive of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, which provides technical assistance for elections in more than 145 countries. “Without that kind of proactive work to defend democracy, there is going to be backsliding.”

Populist leaders pose particular challenges to democratic norms, as do hyperpolarization and growing distrust abetted by mis- and disinformation, which is now being proliferated at a faster rate than ever before because of generative artificial intelligence. In Mexico, for example, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been seen amplifying false and misleading information against his opponent Xóchitl Gálvez ahead of the country’s June elections.

“We’ve seen how much authoritarians have capitalized on using some of these tools to push out their propaganda,” says Katie Harbath, the founder and CEO of Anchor Change, a firm that advises politicians and governments on the intersection of tech and policy.

Some companies like Facebook and Google have instituted mechanisms to help protect the integrity of elections online, but Harbath says any platforms that haven’t are bound to be exploited by bad-faith actors. “They’re moving to the ones that either don’t have the resources or aren’t willing to put in the time and effort,” she warns. The E.U.’s Digital Safety Act and the U.K.’s Online Safety Bill, which were both enacted in 2023, now outline the obligations of platforms to combat hate speech and misinformation.

But that doesn't necessarily cover the emerging threat of AI—the impact of which is already being felt. In the U.S., Trump shared a manipulated video using AI voice-cloning of CNN host Anderson Cooper last May. During elections in Slovakia last September, pro-Kremlin social media accounts shared AI-generated audio recordings, known as deepfakes, of journalists and politicians allegedly discussing how to rig the election.

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Not every election this year will amount to a meaningful change in government or policy, nor will they necessarily lead to the fall of democracy outright. But collectively, their results will help shape an increasingly precarious world— particularly amid heightened bloc rivalry between the West and China, a rise in right-wing nationalism across Europe, and ongoing armed conflicts between Israel and Hamas and Russia and Ukraine.

"These elections can change the world," says Lindberg, of the V-Dem Institute. No matter their results, he says, it's likely that after 2024 the world is going to be "a very different place."

Correction, Jan. 10

The original version of this story misstated Narendra Modi's title in India. He is the prime minister, not president.

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How TIME and Statista Determined the Best Colleges and Companies for Future Leaders

This year, TIME launched its inaugural list of the Best Colleges for Future Leaders and the Best Companies for Future Leaders, in partnership with Statista, a leading international provider of market and consumer data and rankings. The result of this study: 100 colleges and 150 companies forging the path into the future. Here's how the winners were selected.

Methodology

The "Best Companies and Colleges for Future Leaders" project aims to identify organizations in the U.S. that excel in nurturing highly influential leaders. This project explores questions like: "Where are top leaders typically educated?" and "Which companies often act as key stepping-stones and development platforms for leaders advancing to high-ranking positions?" The rankings offer insights into the organizations significantly contributing to the career trajectories of these leaders.

The methodology involves analyzing a diverse sample of 2,000 of the most influential leaders from various areas in U.S. society. These leaders span a broad range of industries and fields, bringing diverse experiences and expertise to their roles.

The CVs of all of the leaders were meticulously compiled, documenting all publicly available information about their educational and professional experiences. Research sources included personal websites, CV / Resume documents, corporate bios, social media pages, and news media articles.

The selection criteria for leaders in the sample focused on their current roles, emphasizing the paths they took to reach these highly influential positions. For this reason, current positions were removed from consideration, meaning that the data focused exclusively on the roles that brought leaders to their current positions.

Only companies with a significant presence in the U.S. were considered, in alignment with the project's geographic scope. This U.S. presence criteria was only applied at the position level, so that leaders who were born, educated, or had work experience outside of the U.S. still played a role in the evaluation, but only in those experiences that had a U.S. presence.

Board and advisory roles, as well as honorary degrees and positions, were excluded from consideration, as these often recognize existing success rather than contribute to career development.

Approximately 14,000 individual career milestones (CV stations) were collected for the sample. Sources included corporate biographies, personal websites, official CVs, and social media profiles. These data covered details like organization names, positions, start and end dates. Organizations were grouped under their current parent brands, accounting for acquisitions, spin-offs,

rebrands, etc. For instance, acquired entities still operating under a parent company were included under the latter's brand. After compiling and cleaning the data, company headcounts and university enrollment figures were gathered. These enrollment and headcount numbers were factored into a leadership index, balancing the influence of organization size, to ensure that organizations of all sizes could be recognized for excelling in leadership development. CV stations were categorized into 'educational' and 'professional,' encompassing degrees and professional roles, respectively.

The final rankings include two lists: "Top 100 Colleges for Future Leaders" and "Top 150 Companies for Future Leaders," which were derived from the leadership index. These rankings showcase organizations excelling in nurturing future leaders, based on a comprehensive and methodical analysis.

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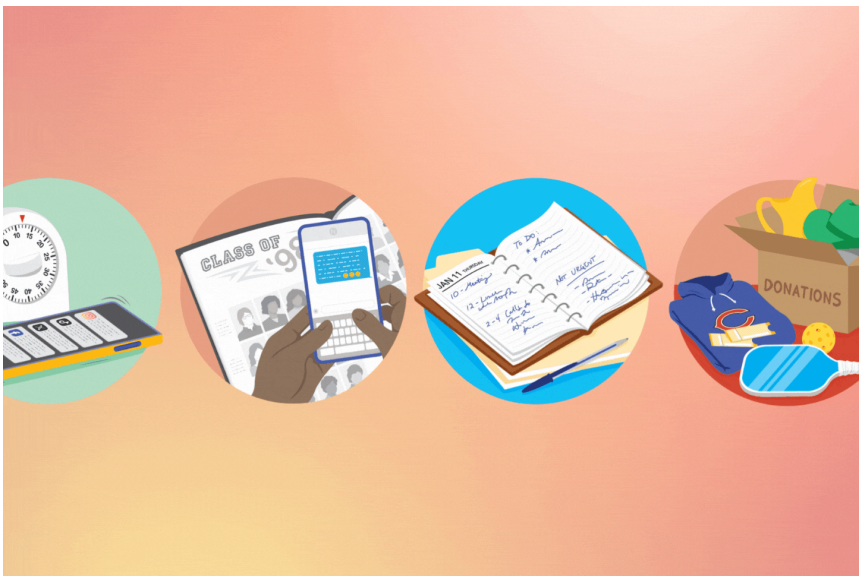
9 Mental-Health Resolutions for 2024, According to Therapists

Angela Haupt is a health and wellness editor at TIME. She covers happiness and actionable ways to live well.



Whether you feel reborn—or even just a little bit reset—at the start of a new year, consider making your mental health a priority in 2024. Why? “Because that’s the gateway to everything else,” says Guy Winch, a clinical psychologist, author of *Emotional First Aid*, and co-host of the *Dear Therapists* podcast. “It’s the linchpin that allows you to succeed or to fail.”

With that in mind, we asked Winch and other experts to share the New Year’s resolutions they wish people would make in the name of mental health.

1. Rethink your social-media use

Spend some time reflecting on whether you’d like to continue with the same online habits in 2024, says Nedra Glover Tawwab, a therapist and author of *Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to*

Reclaiming Yourself. (If it's hard to stop scrolling long enough to have an earnest conversation with yourself, take it as a sign that you need a change.) "Do you want to set some boundaries for yourself? Are there people you need to unfollow?" asks Tawwab. For example, you might limit yourself to 15 minutes on social media per day—or delete the most time-sucking apps from your phone during the work week. You could also challenge yourself not to check social media when you're feeling glum, which is like throwing fuel on an already simmering fire. "The top of the year is a great time to consider how you want to do the rest of the year," Tawwab says.

2. Reconnect with a long lost friend

That old adage—"Make new friends, but keep the old"—is one to live by, especially considering that loneliness affects physical and mental health, while strong social bonds are a salve. In 2024, Winch suggests resolving to reach out to "one person you lost touch with who used to be dear to you." If you're not sure how to open the conversation, he recommends sending a text message like this: "I was thinking about you. It's been so long. How are you?" End the note with a smiley face, he adds. "That's important because when you say, 'It's been so long,' it can sound accusatory." A smiley face, Winch says, can ensure the real meaning— "I miss you"—comes across.

Americans have an empathy deficit, says Calvin Fitch, a clinical health psychologist with Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. He believes fostering empathy is the antidote to the divisiveness ripping society apart. "The fortunate thing about empathy is that it can be trained," he says. "It can grow."

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3. Develop empathy for someone different from you

In 2024, connect with someone from a group you have a moderate level of difficulty understanding, Fitch suggests. You could follow someone from a different political, religious, or ethnic background on social media, spend time in their community, or even read about a fictional character from that group. “Aim to understand their perspective and read their emotions,” he says. “Try to be able to thoughtfully answer these questions: What makes this person happy? What makes them worried? What are their dreams? What experiences and emotions have shaped their world view? And how are their thought patterns similar to mine?” As Fitch points out, people with high levels of empathy tend to function better in society than those with low levels—with more robust social networks and closer relationships.

4. Stop ruminating about work

This can be the year you stop spending evenings replaying upsetting thoughts about the workday, or engaging in fantasy duels with your rude boss. The simplest way to counteract these unproductive thoughts—which might trigger a visceral stress response, like chest tightness—is to convert whatever you’re ruminating about into a problem-solving question, Winch says. Say you’re spiraling over how much work you have to do and how you’ll never get it done. “That’s the ruminative thought,” Winch says. “The problem-solving version is a scheduling question. When do I have time to deal with the thing that’s bothering me? What can I move or reprioritize? Do I need to look at my schedule to reassure myself I do have time?” Figuring that out, he says, allows you to “ease the stress and distress and continue on with your evening.”

5. Slate four activities each week

One way to buffer ourselves against life's stressors is to engage in a wide variety of activities, Fitch advises. First, seek out something that's pleasurable, like going to a football game or belting out your favorite Taylor Swift album. This sort of fun activity "decreases your reactivity to stress by helping you accumulate more positive events than negative ones," he says. Then check off a "mastery activity," like cleaning your house or running errands you've been delaying. You might not want to do them, but you'll almost certainly feel better once they're done. Also key are being social—a sense of belonging facilitates better health—and doing physical activities that get your heart rate going.

6. Do one small thing to alleviate climate anxiety

If you're distressed about the state of the planet—and more of us are—festering in your thoughts will likely exacerbate the situation. Instead, take a cue from Winch's family: Each year, they pledge to do one thing to ease their climate anxiety, like eliminating plastic bags, composting food scraps, or walking 15 minutes to nearby destinations in lieu of driving. "It's overwhelming—I feel like I can't get my arms around it," he says. "But doing one small thing is a way of feeling like you're upping your game."

7. Write a thank you letter

Being grateful is linked with an array of benefits, including improved mental health—but that hinges on practicing it in a way that feels natural to you. Once a year or so, Winch likes to write a thank you letter to someone who did a small thing that they might not have realized had a big impact on him. "I tell them the context, and I tell them why I'm reminding them of something they have no recollection of," he says. Once, he reached out to someone he had shared a summer house rental with years prior. The two are now

close friends, but at the time, they didn't know each other—yet the then-stranger had picked up a set of toiletries for him, since there weren't any there. "It was so lovely and considerate and warm," he says, and helped him feel immediately at ease. Now, thanks to Winch's letter, his friend knows exactly how he feels—a boon for both of them.

8. Write 'you time' into your schedule every day

It could be just 10 minutes twice a day. The key is embracing designated time that's all about you—and making it a standing meeting on your calendar. That way, "it's seen as just as productive as any other business appointment you have," says Kelsey Latimer, a clinical psychologist based in Florida. You might go on a quick walk outside, do some stretches, or close your eyes and embark on a guided meditation, she suggests. Silence your phone and close your office door (or Slack app) to let the people around you know you're briefly unavailable. You'll be much happier, and feel more energized, the rest of the day.

9. Check in with a professional

You could set all the mental-health resolutions in the world and still benefit from talking with a therapist or other licensed professional—someone who's trained to help you optimize your well-being. If you've been to therapy in the past, the start of the year is a terrific time to schedule a catch-up session, Tawwab says; if it's a new idea, check a directory like those run by Psychology Today or Good Therapy to find someone who's available and affordable near you. "Do a mental health check-in just to make sure those bigger things are addressed, and to get their opinion on things that are coming up," she notes. A therapist will be able to arm you with the tools you need to thrive in 2024—and beyond.

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What Pigs and Squirrels Can Teach Us About Managing Pain

Agus, MD, is the Founding Director and CEO of the Ellison Institute of Technology and a professor of medicine and engineering at the University of Southern California. His latest book is THE BOOK OF ANIMAL SECRETS: Nature's Lessons for a Long and Happy Life

Over the past several decades, there have been many supporting studies of the health-promoting effects of an optimistic personality. Much research has been done on the connection between a high level of optimism and good health, described well in clinical psychologists Burel R. Goodin and Hailey W. Bulls' 2014 research paper, appropriately titled, "Optimism and the Experience of Pain: Benefits of Seeing the Glass as Half Full." The authors state that optimism "is linked to both enhanced physiological recovery and psychosocial adjustment to coronary artery bypass surgery, bone marrow transplant, postpartum depression, traumatic brain injury, Alzheimer's disease, lung cancer, breast cancer, and failed in vitro fertilization."

Newer research demonstrates that high levels of hope have been found to be related to lower levels of pain, psychological distress, and functional disability in patients with chronic illnesses. I notice these associations daily when I see patients, and so my clinical style is to be an optimist. I don't want to give false hope, but I think a major role of a physician is to educate patients about the possibilities for treating their diseases, both those that are available now and those that may be available in the near future. I know it is demoralizing as a patient to feel out of control, but by ensuring patients understand what is going on, I hope I can at least reduce some stress—and perhaps even enable them to have a better outcome through their new optimism.

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This is not to say there's no value in grief and feeling glum. Forced optimism can backfire when too much inauthentic positivity leads to denialism and hiding dark emotions that demand we process them. Your mood and general outlook on life are not mutually exclusive. But the two do interact to help determine your overall personality and approach to life in response to positive or negative events. Unsurprisingly, this is also true for other members of the animal kingdom, particularly for pigs and squirrels.

In fact, the domestic pig is an interesting animal to study and compare with humans in terms of the way they process happiness and pain. Pigs are among a growing list of research subjects in the relatively young scientific field of animal personality. Pigs share a number of cognitive capacities with humans, such as self-awareness, experiencing emotions, and playfulness. Studies on the domestic pig tell us that mood and personality interact to influence thinking, how our biases come into play within our environment, and decision-making. And therein lies a key word: environment. It turns out that our environments can make or break our moods (and those of pigs).

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In pigs, personality is frequently measured by watching how the animals cope under different circumstances. Pigs that are deemed proactive, characterized by more active and consistent behavior, are not the same as reactive pigs that behave more passively and erratically. In studies on humans, proactivity and reactivity have been linked to extraversion and neuroticism, respectively, with extroverts more optimistic and those with neurotic tendencies more pessimistic. In one particularly illuminating 2016 study done by a group of researchers in the United Kingdom who specialize in animal behavior and welfare, a litter of pigs that included both proactive and reactive swine was placed in one of two environments known to influence their moods. One environment, designed to be more feel-goody, was more comfortable, playful, and roomy than the other. It had a couple of more square feet per pig and the addition of straw, which pigs love to play with and use as their bedding. Research has long shown that the addition of straw to a pigpen can enhance pigs' welfare.

To conduct the experiment, the pigs were trained to associate two separate feeding bowls with different outcomes. One bowl contained sugary treats, which represented a positive outcome, and the other, filled with coffee beans, promoted the negative outcome.

Then the researchers introduced a third bowl that would act as the litmus test for identifying how optimistic or pessimistic each pig was. The researchers watched to see whether the pig approached this bowl expecting more sweets (and thus another positive outcome) and were optimists. As it turned out, the proactive pigs were more likely to respond optimistically regardless, but the optimism of the reactive pigs hinged on their moods. Reactive pigs living in the roomier feel-good environment were much more likely

to be optimistic about the feeding bowl with an unknown inside. The pigs living in a smaller, more barren environment acted pessimistically. The experiment also revealed what the researchers assumed was true from the start: humans are not unique in combining longer-term personality traits, such as a penchant to have a gloomy or conversely sunny outlook, with shorter-term mood biases when making judgments.

Our personalities color our decisions, and our moods can be influenced heavily by our environments, which means we do have some control in protecting our preferred moods. If you want to tip the scales in favor of being hopeful and reap the health rewards, you need to be mindful of your living quarters, what (and most definitely, whom) you surround yourself with, and where you spend your leisure time (watching TV alone in your living room or taking a walk with a friend). This advice may sound obvious or trite, but not until recently has science really drilled down on the significance of the personality-mood-outlook-outcome phenomenon.

Read More: *What If Animals Have Nightmares Too?*

Other scientists have recorded findings in squirrels that point out once again that personality matters. A three-year study published in 2021 that was done by a team of researchers from the University of California, Davis and the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory in Colorado is the first to document personality in golden-mantled ground squirrels, which are common across the western United States and parts of Canada. The researchers recorded four main traits: boldness, aggressiveness, activity level, and sociability. They noted that bolder, more social squirrels earn an advantage over their shyer counterparts; the gregarious ones move more quickly, command the use of more space and places to perch themselves, and gain more access to resources. These effects ultimately favor the social squirrels' survival. It pays to be convivial, and maybe a little brash.

Although pain and pain management within the context of personality was not part of this study, we can draw some conclusions nevertheless. There is a lot that each of us has control over, and many things, such as health, where we have only partial control, so we have to use the power we have to tip the scales in our favor. This means taking a good look at our lifestyles, because work on the things that we can affect—our moods, our environments, whom we associate with, where we choose to spend our time—and the other aspects like pain and how we feel will improve. Maybe it will not alleviate all of our symptoms, but it will have a major influence.

New research into people with personality disorders, such as narcissism and borderline personality disorder, finds they report higher levels of pain and may even be at a higher risk for cognitive decline (and dementias, including Alzheimer's). This newer research too highlights the power of personality. In particular, the research shows that people who are organized, responsible, goal directed, and gregarious and have high levels of self-discipline ("conscientiousness") may be less likely to develop cognitive decline and impairments than those who are moody or emotionally unstable ("neurotic"). My hunch is the research on pain and personality and cognition and personality will increasingly overlap. After all, our patterns of thinking and behaving—our personality traits—all go hand in hand with how we perceive pain and how our brains function.

Adapted from THE BOOK OF ANIMAL SECRETS: Nature's Lessons for a Long and Happy Life by David B. Agus, MD.
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The Stories Food Can Tell

Twitty is a James Beard and National Jewish Book Award winning author and also a 2022 member of the Time 100 Next list

Not long ago, I stopped referring to one of my most cherished *Koshersoul* recipes of black-eyed pea dip as “hummus.” In Arab cultures, hummus is seen not just as a legume or chickpea dip—but as a sacred offering from one of the world’s most ancient regions, the Fertile Crescent. In the shadow of the darkness that is “chocolate hummus,” listening to Arab and other Middle Eastern voices from the Levant forced me to confront my lazy acceptance of a generalized eponym useful for Western gloss. The thought swirled in my mind beside one of my other pet peeves: when people deem “okra” as a nonspecifically “African word.” This not only reduces the diversity and richness of African languages and cultures, but also makes the deep connections between Africa and the subsequent diaspora in the Americas more murky. These maladaptions allow us to miss the point of our uniqueness and necessarily multicultural world.

In times of national pain, and even international pain, there is constant appeal to a generic “human” lens through tired cliches and platitudes meant to be panaceas—the worst of which is that “food brings people together.” We say this hoping that by setting the table, we’ve done the work. But we still need to actually go out there and do it. While food, indeed, has an incredible capacity to serve as a bridge to dialogue, it’s important to remember that it doesn’t do anything that our meaning won’t allow it to do. Intention is key to food; for food is a story—if we choose to tell it.

Food is not only personal. It is communal. Whatever work it does starts with helping us understand our location and purpose. Food reminds us of the boundaries, taboos, and lessons learned across historical truths and traumas; for how pastrami got put together with white bread and mayonnaise, or what beef curry symbolizes when it is served to members of the Hindu Brahmin caste, or why raisins are now a staple of a soul food-style potato salad all need context. They all have differing degrees of rule-breaking, but they all come with the understanding that ingredients can float in and out of many cultures.

Read More: *9 Food Trends to Ditch in 2024*

Social media skirmishes over who owns what recipes or cuisines rarely take into consideration that food has navigated and stood the test of many different iterations of power: from the aromas we salivate over to the colors we splash on our plates, these are ancient choices that showcase just how dysfunctional and ever-growing we as humans have become. The closer we are as kin, the more likely it seems we are to spar over whether it is sumac, or mint, or perhaps dill that is from the Mediterranean, or Northern Africa, or Southwest Asia—or whatever region your favorite version of salad might be from.

Particularly in American food, communities outside the usual salt and pepper binary all have something valuable to say about how we

eat, even if we fail to appreciate them. The voices of others, including women, take a backseat in a food world that is still white, male, overwhelmingly straight, and most importantly, designed for profit, from field to restaurant kitchen, on the backs of marginalized peoples.

Want to learn more about how we eat and drink now? Get guidance from experts:

- *9 Food Trends to Ditch in 2024*
- *How to Reduce Food Waste and Save Money*
- *The Food Trends to Get Excited About in 2024*
- *How to Be a Healthier Drinker*
- *How Food Can Improve Your Mood*

We must make space for people with multiple societal roles and identities to navigate their personhood and relationships to food, and in turn, their culture. As a descendant of enslaved Africans living in the Americas, I've always said that "our food is our flag"—and just as flags have a tapestry of narratives that tell us about a people's aspirations, struggles, and pride, so too do our plates. When I look at the food on my Shabbat table as a Black, gay, Jewish man of Southern heritage, even if I didn't say a word, it would still have the potential to tell stories about joy, hope, survival, contradictions, unresolved traumas, and migrations. The food I make also has scintillating possibilities for variation and upgrade—and maybe even conversation that leads to understanding. Food can be the tool to bridge the chasms of -isms. Because we need it to be.

Read More: *Michael W. Twitty on 2022 TIME100 Next*

Some might read this as a call to a particular type of gastronomic "wokeness." Most people who freely use that word can rarely define it quickly, so with purposeful critique, I'd like to, instead, offer a call for all of us to strive towards a more tangible, delicious

goal: To understand the dimensions of our food on its many levels and intersections, because that makes our food taste better. The mental and spiritual satisfaction that comes from knowing what good food is and how food can be good for our minds and hearts is irreplaceable. Liking a taste for mere gustatory savor and liking food because it gives us access to human stories and community do not have to be mutually exclusive—they can share space in our lives.

If our food already does the extra work of giving us greater connection, food also has the possibility to both heal ancient divisions and move us towards one another. With this unique opportunity, we may just be back to the original purpose of our meals: not only to relieve hunger, but to nourish civilization.

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9 Food Trends to Ditch in 2024

Haley Weiss is a reporter at TIME. She covers wellness, death and dying, reproductive health, and more.

The start of the 2020s—marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath—changed how we eat. Early lockdowns made home kitchens, gardens, and pantries the new centers of culinary culture, and the rise of TikTok democratized recipe creation, turning home cooks into trendsetters.

But not every change was welcome. Some trends should stay right where they are in 2023. In 2024, it’s time to let these nine trendy dishes, gadgets, and conversations go so that others can shine.

Overpriced tinned fish

If Girl Dinner was the meal of the year, tinned fish was the centerpiece. Rising food prices turned diners toward budget staples, and suddenly tinned sardines, salmon, mackerel, and other salty swimmers became unlikely superfoods on TikTok. “It’s a great weeknight dinner protein option for people who may not want to go

to the grocery store, or people in small kitchens who are weary of smells and spatters," says Molly Baz, a recipe developer, video host, and cookbook author.

Now, some high-end companies are capitalizing on the trend with ever-fancier products (like a can of sardines, packed with gold leaf, selling for $44 a pop). But quality doesn't always increase alongside price, Baz says. "There's a lot of really nicely branded tinned fish that actually isn't prepared and packaged properly." Resist the urge to grab the prettiest tin off the shelf; she suggests stopping by a small grocer to ask for recommendations.

The Ninja Creami

Most people probably don't need a $200 machine with only one function. But that didn't stop the Ninja Creami—a specialized blender with descending blades capable of turning a frozen brick of anything into a rich slush—from becoming one of the more popular appliance trends of the year. It was sold out at many retailers nearly all summer as the hashtag #ninjacreami racked up more than 800 million views on TikTok. In the Creami, its proponents promised, nearly *anything* could become soft-serve—you just have to remember to freeze your ingredients in the proprietary cup 24 hours beforehand, eat it all in one sitting so it doesn't reharden in the freezer, give up a sizeable chunk of prime kitchen-counter real estate, clean a bunch of pieces, and listen to what sounds like a low-flying jet engine run for up to 10 minutes.

The Creami represents a trend of highly specialized (and expensive) kitchen gadgets that lend themselves to easy impulse purchasing—probably because they looked cool on TikTok. Many are now collecting dust. "If you don't want to eat ice cream and you want frozen fruit, make a smoothie," says Meredith Hayden, the chef and recipe developer behind the popular food blog and TikTok page Wishbone Kitchen.

Water bottle collections

First, it was Hydroflask. Then Yeti. Then Stanley. Now, the water bottle brand du jour is Owalla. This year, thanks in part to the rise of flavored #watertok on TikTok, we got a glimpse into the lives of people who collect water bottles like they're building sets of trading cards. Some influencers boast shelves lined with every color a brand offers—sometimes upwards of 100 bottles.

Stockpiling the very item that most symbolizes reduced consumption is more than a little ironic. Just remember: A New Year's resolution to drink more water is just as achievable with a bottle you already own.

ChatGPT recipes

ChatGPT can do a lot of things, but it can't cook. All it takes is five minutes with the AI service to realize that its creative capacity is limited when it comes to the culinary arts. When presented with a theme or a list of ingredients, ChatGPT tends to go for the lowest common denominator: simple recipes and menus that aren't going to knock anyone's socks off. (Usually a stir fry.)

Successful recipe creation requires serious trial and error. "I have to make something a bunch of times before the recipe is worked out," says Jeanine Donofrio, a recipe developer, author, and creator of the vegetarian haven Love and Lemons**.** In contrast, a machine-generated recipe will almost always be lacking.

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Olive-oil coffee

Olive-oil coffee made its 2023 debut when Starbucks released the "Oleato" first in Italy, then in the U.S. The line of drinks—which include coffee infused with a spoonful of olive oil—soon hit meme status, with content creators tasting them on video. "It was not for me," says Baz, who tried the drink and calls it "greasy."

One issue for some drinkers: Olive oil has a laxative effect, and coffee isn't much better in that arena. We'll let you guess what happened to some of the people who tried it.

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- *How Food Can Improve Your Mood*
- *Are GMOs Safe? Breaking Down the Science of Science-ified Foods*

Cottage cheese desserts

If there's one trend that best capped off food media's great transformation into a video-first medium, it was cottage cheese cookie dough. The idea of making treats with lower-calorie and higher-protein ingredients is nothing new, but for years, these types of recipes have been designed to mimic taste above all else, and can sometimes come out looking less than appealing.

With cottage cheese, TikTok creators flipped the script. The desserts it starred in—like cheesecake, ice cream, cake, pudding, and the famous edible cookie dough—looked really good. "It was so exciting, because the mixture itself looked so convincing," says Donofrio. "It was so smooth and creamy. And then I dipped my spoon in, and it was so disappointing."

Hayden, who enjoys cottage cheese in savory dishes, says she thinks constantly about new ways recipe developers can convey taste through video. “It’s so easy to make food look like it tastes good, and the viewer is never going to know,” she says. Ultimately, she suspects the answer to disappointments like cottage cheese desserts is that demonstrating consistency and reliability will be more necessary than ever for recipe developers in 2024.

Nonstick cookware

We’re calling it now: For 2024, nonstick is out, and steel is in. To cook like the pros, there’s no better option. “2023 was almost like the peak of millennial-coded aesthetic cookware,” says Hayden, referencing the Instagram-advertising brands peddling pots and pans that prioritized design over function. “I feel like [nonstick] is a crutch, and it’s preventing people from learning how to cook.”

Though solid evidence has yet to confirm concerns that the coatings on these products—which use substances like Teflon and silica to remain slick—could cause health issues as they chip or secrete PFAS into food, there are other reasons to ditch them for stainless. One is versatility. With the right heat control, stainless steel can slide and sauté like the best of them, or sear and fry with a crispness that rivals the work of an established cast iron. “There’s a fear of heat in the kitchen,” Baz says. “I notice a lot of times that cooks are afraid to turn their burners up.” While nonstick pans don’t get quite as hot, you can crank it up for max flavor with stainless steel, and skillets made from it are built to last in a way other cookware just isn’t.

Caviar everything

Caviar used to be a luxury experience. Now, it’s a casual snack, at least according to lifestyle creators across Instagram and TikTok. Caviar “has woven its way into more mainstream foods and out of

fine dining, I think because people are spending so much more time in their home kitchens as a result of having had to for several years," Baz says. Now, the trendy way to eat it is as part of a "high-low" pairing: Think caviar with Doritos, potato chips, fried chicken, or scrambled eggs.

On TikTok, this type of caviar consumption is more about the aesthetics than the actual gustatory experience. But since sturgeon are severely overfished and their eggs are often sold on the black market, caviar should remain a rare treat.

Scooped bagels

The so-called "scooped bagel" went viral this year when a man chronicled his search for a bagel shop willing to hollow out New York's iconic breakfast food. Scooped bagels may have their origins in anti-carb diets, but if you're trying to be healthier, disemboweling a food you actually enjoy—or asking a busy worker to do it for you—isn't the way to start the new year.

The scooped bagel, even more so than other viral bagel "crimes" like 2019's horizontally sliced "St. Louis bagel," ignores the fact that an already-pristine baked good with a less doughy center already exists: the bialy, a dense, chewy, and flatter-than-a-bagel roll of similar origins and technique. Like your bagels with less center? In 2024, let the quest for your dream breakfast lead you to a boiled-and-baked good that needs no tweaks.

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The Food Trends to Get Excited About in 2024, According to Experts

Angela Haupt is a health and wellness editor at TIME. She covers happiness and actionable ways to live well.

A longing for authenticity. An urge to protect the planet and embrace nature. An itch to spice things up. These are the modern sentiments shaping what will show up on our plates and in our glasses in 2024, according to experts who forecast food trends.

We asked nearly a dozen industry insiders—from chefs to a food futurologist—what to expect in the year ahead for food and drink. Here’s what they said.

An emphasis on global flavors

Even if you don’t venture farther than a nearby restaurant in 2024, exciting new flavors from around the world will be at the other end

of your fork. One of the defining trends of the year is expected to be third-culture cuisine, or dishes from a chef's diverse background. Think: *wafu* Italian restaurants, which bridge Japanese and Italian cultures, and Filipino-British bakeries. "It's very much derived from social changes and globalization and the meaning of identity today," says Claire Lancaster, head of food and drink at the trend-forecasting company WGSN. In the past, she notes, someone might have "slapped something random on a pizza" and called it fusion, but more care goes into it now. "This new generation of chefs is creating products that reflect their unique, multi-layered cultural identities."

More Asian ingredients

Expect Asian flavors and ingredients to have a moment. Black sesame, ube, and milk tea will follow the path of matcha and become more prevalent, predicts Denise Purcell, vice president of resource development with the Specialty Food Association, a trade group that hosts the Fancy Food Show. "We're seeing milk tea-filled donuts and ube hot chocolate," she says. "I was just someplace where they had black sesame cookies." The flavors are also popping up in salty snacks, like black milk tea popcorn, Purcell notes.

Andrea Xu, co-founder and CEO of Umamicart, an online grocer that specializes in Asian groceries, anticipates more people will embrace Asian fruits, such as rambutan, pink guava, longan, mangosteen, and various types of dragon fruit. "If you go for the golden variety, it will be much sweeter and softer," Xu says of dragon fruit. "The white and purple varieties are a little tangier. They make for really good smoothies."

In Denver, Ni and Anna Nguyen—the married chefs behind popular Vietnamese restaurant Sap Sua—are excited about the emergence of first-generation Asian chefs diversifying what dining

looks like. “A lot of people are starting to recognize that there’s a difference between the cuisines,” Ni says. “What makes Filipino cuisine special, and what makes Vietnamese cuisine special? It’s not just lumped into one category.”

Steps toward sustainability

One of the undercurrents driving food and drink trends is our collective desire to take care of the planet. More companies will prioritize sustainability in the coming months in surprising ways. Expect, for instance, the rise of alternative chocolates. As Lancaster points out, the demand for cocoa has led to deforestation worldwide; plus, access to it is becoming more difficult and expensive. Alternative chocolate is “made without cocoa,” but it still tastes remarkably similar to your standard bar, she says. “There’s a group of innovators who are creating alternatives that have the same taste, smell, and melt of original chocolate.” One U.S.-based company, Voyage Foods, uses ingredients like grape seeds, sunflower protein flour, and sunflower lecithin to make their alternative chocolate. In the U.K., WNWN Food Labs replaces cocoa beans with ingredients like cereals and legumes.

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Other companies are responding to water scarcity, extreme heat, and droughts by creating products that minimize their water footprint. For example: waterless plant milks come in powder form, so you can mix in water at home. “The industry is realizing that we’re paying to ship water—that’s 90% of the product,” Lancaster says. “It’s a huge CO2 emitter, and it adds to the cost of the product.” Other companies are utilizing drought-friendly crops like prickly pear cactus to make snacks like popcorn, trail mix, and candy.

Meanwhile, as we learn more about the climate impact of marine ingredients, expect innovators to start showcasing lesser-known ones, Lancaster says. That includes urchins and fish roe—all of which “create a really lovely, savory, umami depth of flavor, and they’re bringing it to a wider range of dishes.”

Fun with fungi

Todd Anderson, a chef and founder of the Turnip Vegan Recipe Club, gets mushy when talking about mushrooms. In 2024, more of us will embrace fungi, he predicts—and mushrooms will shine as a meat replacement. Anderson recently made mushroom meatballs and roasted lion’s mane, a mushroom that grows on woody tree trunks. He also enjoys dishes like shiitake bacon, mushroom roast beef, and maple sausage made out of mushrooms. Many mushrooms are easy to grow at home, he says, even for people in urban environments—and he’s looking forward to seeing more people grow and experiment with them in 2024.

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A celebration of vegetables

Matty Matheson, a chef and restaurateur who starred in FX’s restaurant dramedy *The Bear*, doesn’t consider himself a big trends guy—but he’s excited about veggies. We’re about to see a surge in “vegetable-forward restaurants,” he says. “I think people are now

understanding how to cook vegetables in a way that's more profound and more exhilarating for their customers and for themselves." Take broccoli, for instance. You might see it grilled or pureed; a chef might stew its leaves with collard greens. Another increasingly popular technique: cooking Brussels sprouts' "beautiful, very robust" leaves as though they were collard greens, which Matheson describes as especially flavorful. "Having more vegetables on the forefront is going to be a big thing."

Dinner in a drink

Lauren Paylor O'Brien, a mixologist who's the winner of *Drink Masters* season 1 on Netflix, likes to use food as inspiration for the drinks she creates. In 2024, she predicts we'll see more culinary integration with booze. During a recent event, she paired a scoop of honey ice cream with three drops of olive oil and a fizzy whiskey cocktail. It's a "sensory experience," she says. "There's the visual appearance of ice cream in a glass, the carbonation from the drink as you're pouring it, the aromatics from both the ice cream and the canned cocktail, the additional flavor profile of adding olive oil, and then also the aromatics that you're getting from the olive oil."

Mixologists worldwide are embracing meal profiles for drink flavors, Lancaster notes. She points to Double Chicken Please, a New York City bar, where patrons can order cocktails like the Cold Pizza (Don Fulano Blanco, parmigiano Reggiano, burnt toast, tomato, basil, honey, and egg white) or Mango Sticky Rice (Bacardi Reserva Ocho, mango, sticky rice pu'er tea, wakame, cold brew, coconut). At the Savory Project bar in Hong Kong, patrons can sip on drinks that utilize ingredients like beef, charred corn husks, leeks, and shiitake mushrooms. "Really unexpected flavor profiles" are going to be big, Lancaster says.

More mindful drinking

For years, Derek Brown was best known in Washington, D.C., for owning high-profile bars. But the longtime bartender's attitude about alcohol has shifted, and he's now an advocate for non-alcoholic cocktails (he wrote the *Mindful Mixology* recipe book in 2022).

In 2024, Brown expects we'll see the continued rise of mindful drinking, vs. an either/or approach. "We still see a lot of polarization in discussions about alcohol," he says. "They tend to revert to: drink or don't drink." Instead, we'll start to hear more about what he calls "substituters," or people who switch between "non-alcoholic and alcoholic adult sophisticated-beverages based on the occasion." That allows us to keep the best parts of drinking—being social and trying delicious drinks, Brown says—while leaving heavy consumption behind.

Another trend bubbling toward the surface is non-alcoholic wine, Brown predicts. Attention has largely centered on non-alcoholic beer until now, but companies like Leitz in Germany and Giesen in New Zealand are starting to offer dealcoholized wines. Many add teas and extracts to compensate for the body and flavor lost during the dealcoholization process—and Brown describes their taste as "amazing."

Funky flavors, ingredients, and colors

During a conversation on a recent afternoon, Xu snacked on Lay's "numb & spicy hot pot" flavored potato chips. "We're starting to see people really going outside the typical snacks they'd been having," she says. Enter: unique offerings like roasted cumin lamb skewer Lay's, Sichuan Peppercorn Doritos, and Lay's Stax potato chips flavored like jamon (Spanish ham).

On the higher brow end of things, chef Michele Mazza of Il Mulino New York is looking forward to cooking with unique pasta flavors, like squid ink pasta—which "has a very salty flavor with some

hints of the ocean”—and truffle-infused pasta, which “gives off a more earthy taste.” We’ll also likely see wider use of whimsical pasta shapes, he believes, such as orecchiette, farfalle, fusilli, and Cavatappi.

Color-wise, blue will rule, predicts Morgaine Gaye, a food futurologist based in London. That’s a reflection of a broader trend: In 2024, we’ll continue to seek out nature—part of our ongoing quest to find solace in a divided, stressful world. Inspired by ocean and sky hues, more of our snacks and meals will incorporate blue: “We’ll see muffins, we’ll see cupcakes, we’ll see drinks” colored with butterfly pea protein—a powder made from the butterfly pea plant, a vine native to Thailand—or blue-green algae, Gaye says.

Gaye also foresees florals. Rose, lavender, and violet flavors will pop up in drinks, baked goods, ice cream, snacks, and more to delight us. In 2024, “we’re going to need comfort, kindness, and nature,” she says. “All of that stuff is key to mental well-being, as we try to hold ourselves, and hold one another, together.”

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Are GMOs Safe? Breaking Down the Science of Science-ified Foods

Jamie Ducharme is a health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, Long COVID, mental health, vaping, psychedelics, and more. Her work for TIME has won awards from the Deadline Club, the New York Press Club, and the Newswomen's Club of New York. Additionally, she is the author of *Big Vape: The Incendiary Rise of Juul*, which was adapted for a forthcoming Netflix docuseries.

Thirty years after tomatoes became the first genetically modified produce sold in the U.S., lots of people remain skeptical of science-

ified foods. In a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, just 27% of Americans said they felt genetically modified foods are safe to eat, while 38% said they're unsafe and 33% weren't sure.

That's not only a U.S. phenomenon. In the Philippines, for example, activists have been protesting the production of Golden Rice, a type of genetically modified rice harvested at scale for the first time last year. Unlike regular rice, Golden Rice is engineered to contain beta carotene, an addition meant to counter vitamin A deficiency and resulting vision loss. But opponents argue the rice has not been through adequate testing and that there are safer and healthier ways for people to consume vitamin A. "Golden Rice is simply not the solution to the wide, gaping wound of hunger and poverty," a representative from MASIPAG, a Philippines-based, farmer-led group that opposes Golden Rice, told TIME in a statement.

Golden Rice is only the latest example in a long history of anti-genetically modified organism (GMO) sentiment. Over the years, protesters have torn up fields where genetically modified crops were planted and marched in the streets to criticize companies that produce GMOs. Much of the public's concern seems to stem from fears that gene editing could introduce new toxicity into old foods; make foods more allergenic; or lead to disease-causing genetic mutations in the humans who eat these altered plants or animals. Since-debunked animal research from the 1990s also caused some people to believe that eating genetically modified food leads to organ damage.

Even though the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency—which work together to regulate GMOs and make sure they meet food-safety standards—say they are safe, many people remain wary of these science-enhanced foods. "Technophobia is a very common problem," says Trey Malone, an agricultural economist at the University of Arkansas. "It's this rosy

retrospection that assumes that things used to be better back when. That leads to this belief system that creates pushback against gene-edited and GMO foods."

What many people don't realize, Malone says, is that humans have tinkered with their food for a very long time. Even thousands of years ago, farmers would save the best seeds from their harvests and use them to optimize future yields, sometimes breeding them with other plants to create even more desirable crops in years to come. Modern corn wouldn't exist without this kind of selective breeding; nor would bananas, apples, and broccoli as we know them today. Many of the produce varieties currently available in grocery stores, like pluots and broccolini, are also a result of cross-breeding two species to create a new one.

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Genetic modification is a related but more scientifically advanced process that involves making targeted tweaks to a plant or animal's DNA to change or create specific traits. This process can be used to alter a food's flavor, nutritional content, appearance, or defenses against pests like crop-killing insects, and has given rise to foods including Fresh Del Monte's pink pineapples and non-browning Arctic apples. But while these flashy products grab lots of headlines, the truth is they make up only a fraction of the GMOs sold in the U.S.

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Fred Gould, a professor of agriculture at North Carolina State University who chaired a 2016 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report on genetically engineered crops, often leads educational sessions on GMOs. He likes to show a photograph of a supermarket produce section and ask how many of the vegetables in the picture are genetically modified. He gets lots of guesses as high as 90%—but the right answer is zero.

There are a handful of genetically modified fruits and veggies on the market, including summer squash, papayas, and the aforementioned pineapples and apples. And within the past decade, the FDA has approved genetically modified salmon (which grows faster than regular fish) and pork free of a specific allergen. But in the U.S., GMOs are much more likely to show up in processed foods like cooking oils, soy products, sweeteners, and snack foods. Almost all of the soybeans, corn, sugar beets, and canola planted in the U.S. are genetically modified, mainly for resistance against insects or pesticides. These crops are then used to make many of the packaged foods most Americans eat every day.

By eating these foods, the average American has for decades been part of a "natural experiment," Gould says. People in the U.S. and Canada have been eating GMOs for decades, whereas they're consumed less frequently overseas. If GMOs were linked to serious health problems, researchers would expect to see them reflected in comparisons of the health of North Americans relative to Europeans. But "when we look at the data," Gould says, "we don't see any signs." Indeed, researchers have found no evidence of GMO-related increases in cancer, obesity, kidney disease, gastrointestinal issues, autism, or food allergies in the U.S. and Canada versus Europe. Research in animals has also shown no evidence that consuming GMOs causes genetic mutations, organ damage, or fertility problems.

“We’re very careful about saying there are no effects. We haven’t *found* any effects,” Gould says. There’s always a chance new risks could come to light with time, he says, but he feels that’s unlikely based on what the science has shown so far.

Malone agrees that, based on the available research, there’s no clear reason to fear genetically modified foods and plenty of reasons to embrace them. Gene-editing can not only make foods more nutritious, but also streamline their production processes to improve sustainability, he says. Planting genetically modified crops, research suggests, may increase yields and allow farmers to produce more food on less land, while simultaneously cutting down on chemical pesticide use. Meanwhile, fast-growing genetically modified salmon theoretically requires fewer resources to raise compared to conventional fish.

As Malone sees it, innovations like these are the strongest reason for people to embrace GMOs, particularly as it becomes clear that the status quo isn’t serving the planet or its people. “Production systems across the planet are realizing that we are going to have to confront climate change. We are going to have to adapt,” Malone says. “Agriculture can be part of the solution.”

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How to Be a Healthier Drinker

Angela Haupt is a health and wellness editor at TIME. She covers happiness and actionable ways to live well.

The science is clear: from a health perspective, the less you drink, the better. But alcohol is a cornerstone of nearly every personal and professional gathering, so you may not always want to abstain.

Nor do you always have to. Most people can make drinking in moderation part of a healthy lifestyle in a variety of ways, experts say.

Here’s how to do it.

Take inventory of your habits.

Becoming a healthier drinker starts with getting real with yourself. Have you had a problem with alcohol in the past, or do you now? “Reflecting earnestly and honestly is an important first step,” says Dr. Aakash Shah, chief of addiction medicine at Hackensack Meridian Health in New Jersey. Those with alcohol addiction

issues are usually advised to abstain from drinking. Not sure if that's you? Consider whether you're increasingly snapping at or arguing with your loved ones about how much you're drinking, showing up late or not performing well at work, or unable to think of anything but your next drink. If that sounds familiar, talk to your primary care doctor or search online for an addiction medicine specialist. "Not only is this a disease, but it's a disease for which we have medications that work well," Shah says.

Even those who haven't struggled with alcohol use disorder can benefit from this type of reflection, Shah adds. Do you tend to drink more during celebrations? When you're sad or in the middle of an argument? Taking stock of your triggers can help you better prepare for the times when you tend to overdo it.

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Stick to the recommendations.

Experts agree it's essential to follow federal guidelines to limit intake to two drinks per day for men, and one a day for women. A standard drink means 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits. Binge drinking—defined as having five or more drinks per occasion for men or four or more drinks for women—is especially dangerous, because it's associated with serious injuries and diseases, as well as a higher risk of alcohol use disorder. "Spread out your alcohol over the week," advises Eric Rimm, a professor of epidemiology and nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "Don't have it all Friday or Saturday night."

Make a plan before going out.

If you tend to overindulge, decide in advance how much you're going to drink, and enlist a friend to help you stick to your goals—maybe reminding you that you only wanted to have two drinks before switching to water or soda. "Tell so-and-so that if they see you behaving in a certain way, they should let you know, and you'll head out early and call it a night," Shah says.

It can also be helpful, he notes, to figure out how you'll say no if your friends start pushing you to have another. You could even rehearse potential scenarios with someone you trust. "Practicing is so important," Shah says. "If you leave it up to yourself to find the words in the minute, especially if you've already been drinking, it'll be much more difficult."

Don't drink on an empty stomach.

You'll typically order a drink first at a restaurant, then figure out what you want to eat. But that can amplify the negative effects of alcohol. "It would be much better to get your appetizers first, and after they're delivered, get a drink," Rimm says. That way, you won't spend 20 minutes or so drinking on an empty stomach. Food slows down the rate of intoxication, research suggests, by interfering with how quickly alcohol is absorbed into the small intestine. Meals high in fat, carbs, or protein are particularly effective.

Choose your drinks wisely.

Know the concentration of alcohol in your drink—and if possible, dilute it, Rimm advises. That's not necessary with wine, which is about 14% alcohol by volume (ABV), or beer, which is usually about 5-7%. "But spirits have a huge range that can be as low as 30% or as high as 70% alcohol," Rimm says. One shot could deliver as much or more alcohol than a large glass of something

else, so cutting it with water or another mixer—and reading labels carefully—is a good idea.

Make an effort to cut back.

The healthiest thing most people can do is figure out a way to drink less, says Dr. Timothy Naimi, director of the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research. “Less is better when it comes to health,” he says, noting that heavy drinkers will get the most out of reducing their intake, even if they’re not yet able to drop below recommended daily limits. “If you’re somebody who drinks five or six drinks a day, and you can cut down to three a day, you’re going to get a tremendous benefit.”

To stick with it, first name your motivation, Naimi suggests. Do you want to drink less so you don’t have trouble waking up in the morning before work, or because your relationships are suffering? Then, set a goal, like the number of drinks you’ll stick to each week. Consider enlisting support from your close friends and family members, or tapping into online or in-person communities. It’s also key to arrange alternative activities so your social life and free time don’t revolve around alcohol. “Maybe going for a walk instead of going to the bar, or hanging out with people who tend not to drink much,” Naimi says.

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Take a break.

You've probably heard of Sober October or Dry January—month-long endeavors to give up alcohol. Research suggests that people who quit drinking for even short periods experience long-lasting benefits. In one study, moderate-to-heavy drinkers who gave up alcohol for a month lost about 4.5 pounds and improved their insulin resistance and blood pressure, while also experiencing a reduction in cancer-related growth factors. Other research has found that people who participate in Dry January still drink considerably less than they used to by the time August rolls around.

You can start this sort of challenge at any time of the year, says Dr. George F. Koob, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). If a month feels too long, embark on a shorter trial run. "I always tell people, if you stop drinking for a week or two and feel better, and you're starting to sleep better and your interactions with your family are better, then listen to your body," he says. "It's trying to tell you something."

Practice mindful drinking.

Tapping into meditation-inspired strategies can help you become more aware of how much you're drinking, and why—potentially making it easier to cut back. "When you take a sip, don't think

about other stuff that's going on," Rimm advises. Instead, savor the flavor. When your glass is empty, spend a few moments reflecting on whether you truly want another. Slowing down—instead of mindlessly chugging—can help ensure that you make clearheaded decisions about what and how much you drink, kickstarting a healthier relationship with alcohol.

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Nikki Haley’s Slow Burn Was No Accident

Mini Racker is a staff writer at TIME, where she covers political campaigns and Congress. In 2023, she was selected for the National Press Foundation’s Paul Miller Washington Reporting Fellowship.

After 10 long months of campaigning, it was a 30-second video that suggested Nikki Haley was finally getting somewhere. The December television ad, paid for by Donald Trump’s allies and aired in New Hampshire, accused the Republican presidential candidate of flip-flopping on the gas tax as South Carolina governor. But you could practically hear the champagne corks popping at Haley’s headquarters in Charleston. “Someone’s getting nervous,” she posted on social media.

Haley’s emergence as perhaps the top threat to another Trump nomination isn’t what many Republicans expected when she launched her underdog campaign last February. But as the first votes in the 2024 GOP presidential primaries neared, she climbed to second place in many national and early state surveys, eclipsing Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and even narrowing the gap with

Trump to single digits in the Granite State. Her slow-burn rise has been fueled by standout debate performances, which convinced many Republicans—including plenty of Wall Street donors—that Haley is the party's best hope to beat both the GOP front runner and President Joe Biden. (One recent poll of a hypothetical matchup with Biden found her leading by 17 points.) Her momentum has opened a spigot of cash and spurred a series of key endorsements, from New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu to Americans for Prosperity Action, the Koch-backed grassroots powerhouse that has committed upwards of $30 million on her behalf.

More than any of Trump's rivals, Haley has managed to make the case for her candidacy without turning off the pool of Republicans in the former President's corner. "I believe Donald Trump was the right President at the right time; I agree with a lot of his policies," Haley says at a recent Iowa town hall in a small ballroom at the Sioux City Convention Center, where a staffer has carted in extra chair after extra chair to accommodate a crowd that has gathered nearly six weeks ahead of the Jan. 15 Iowa caucuses. "The truth is, rightly or wrongly, chaos follows him," she pivots. "We can't have a country in disarray in a world on fire, and be dealing with four years of chaos. We won't survive it." Haley repeats lines like these in hay-filled barns and quaint eateries across Iowa and New Hampshire, targeting conservatives exhausted by Trump—a disjointed coalition that spans those who revile the former President and those convinced he can't win. Her ability to draw these contrasts while eschewing direct confrontation have persuaded many non-Trump Republicans that she is their best bet to take him down.

Haley’s path to the nomination remains steep and narrow. Trump maintains a huge lead in most national polls and early-state surveys, lapping the field by as much as 50 points in some cases. Haley’s allies argue that will change as rivals drop out and the non-Trump vote consolidates around her. One of her donors, Eric Levine, likens her strategy to the old joke about two hikers who stumble upon a hungry bear: neither has to outrun the bear, as long as one outruns the other. “Donald Trump wins when there’s a lot of people in the race,” says Levine. “Donald Trump loses if it’s one-on-one. If it’s mano a womano, he’s gonna lose.”

The data doesn’t necessarily agree. Some polls suggest Trump would draw a fair share of his rivals’ supporters if they ended their bids. And much of the primary calendar and delegate process this year appears likely to facilitate a Trump nomination. More than one GOP operative suggests to me that Haley’s best shot would be if the former President needed to step aside for health reasons.

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But other imponderables, mostly in courtrooms, are recasting the meaning of second place. Trump faces criminal trials that could

yield a conviction before November or, with the Supreme Court involved, scramble the election in unexpected ways. “I think he’s probably the starting quarterback,” says Don O’Connor, a bank worker at a Haley town hall in Clear Lake, Iowa, who is leaning toward her. “But starting quarterbacks get hurt, starting quarterbacks get to the point they can’t play anymore, and you better have a strong backup.”

The press conference was Trump’s idea. It was October 2018, and he and Haley had agreed that she would resign her post at the end of the year. When they announced the news in the Oval Office, he sounded like he was promoting her. “Nikki Haley, ambassador to the United Nations, has been very special to me,” Trump effused. “She’s done an incredible job.” Haley smiled bashfully as Trump said she’d have her pick of positions if she worked for him again. She pre-empted inquiries about her future by pledging to campaign for Trump. The moment was the capstone of Haley’s successful tenure in an Administration not known for successful tenures.

Haley grew up in Bamberg, S.C., the daughter of Indian immigrants in a town still largely divided between Black and white. She learned at a young age that her turbaned father and the rest of her Sikh family couldn’t avoid standing out, and learned almost as quickly to steer conversations back to common ground. After

studying accounting at Clemson University and helping run her mother's small retail business, she began eyeing her local state house seat, where the 30-year incumbent was hinting he might retire. He didn't, but Haley ran anyway and won. Six years later, she found herself an underdog once again.

"I remember when she told me she was running for governor," says Nathan Ballentine, a Republican in the South Carolina House who has long been a friend of Haley's. "I didn't say it out loud, but in my mind, I was thinking, 'What the hell is she thinking?'"

She defeated the lieutenant governor, the state attorney general, and a sitting congressman. Taking down a former president? Well, that's just the next logical step.

"This is how Nikki Haley gets elected," says Ted Pitts, her chief of staff when she was governor. "She starts off being kind of seen as a lower-tier candidate, and works her way up the ranks."

To this day, Haley has never lost a race. Still, her current rivals allege she's only vying to be Trump's running mate. They paint her as the candidate of the ruling class—a video from the DeSantis camp includes the slogan "Make the Establishment Great Again!" The portrait amuses those who have followed Haley's career, in which she rode the Tea Party wave to the governor's mansion and is now campaigning on capping federal spending and raising the retirement age for young workers. "Nobody's to the right of Nikki Haley on the economy," says Drew Klein, senior adviser to AFP Action.

Haley is also known for delicately navigating matters of race and identity. Her response to the racist murders at a church in Charleston in 2015 catapulted her to national prominence. Haley attended the funerals of all nine Black churchgoers and led the removal of the Confederate flag from the state Capitol, a move at odds with much of her party's base. She was less resolute late last

month in New Hampshire when she was asked what caused the Civil War and initially failed to mention slavery.

In 2016, Haley delivered the GOP response to President Barack Obama's State of the Union address, using the speech to condemn the "angriest voices" in politics. After Trump beat Hillary Clinton, he met with Haley. He made a dig about her backing Florida Senator Marco Rubio over him in the primaries, Haley recalls in her memoir, but then they talked foreign policy. When his team offered her the U.N. job, she scoffed to a Trump ally, "I don't even know what the United Nations does. All I know is everybody hates it."

But Haley went on to acquit herself in the role. "She's been one of the best ambassadors we've ever had to the U.N., just for the sole reason that she could very clearly express U.S. positions and often declare outrage," Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley says. "Too many people that are at the U.N. tried to be too polite." Many backers cite her foreign policy experience as central to her case for the presidency.

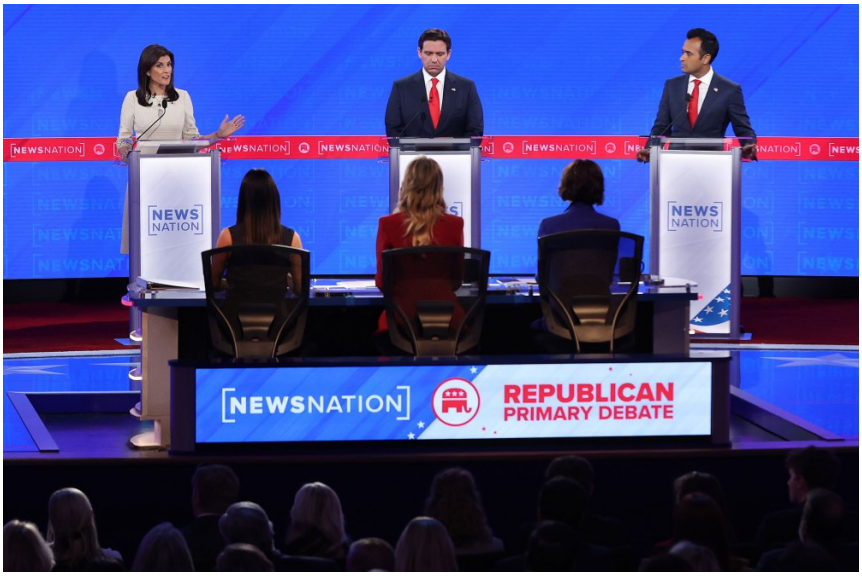
Haley's staunch support for Ukraine—perhaps her sharpest policy difference with Trump—is informed by her past dealings with Russia. And her backing of Israel's war against Hamas is an extension of her efforts at the U.N. to champion the U.S. ally. "There has never been anyone that's been more supportive of the State of Israel than she was when she was at the United Nations," says Fred Zeidman, a Haley donor who helped with Jewish voter outreach for George W. Bush, John McCain, and Mitt Romney.

Haley at times broke with Trump, condemning Russian election meddling and supporting NATO. But in her memoir, she lavishes praise on him and his agenda. Her pattern of threading the needle on Trump continued for years. After the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, she suggested his political career was over, but later said he still had a role to play. She initially said she would not run in

2024 if he did. Once she entered the race, Trump mocked her reversal and took to calling her “Birdbrain.”

But after viewers saw her on the debate stage, her poll numbers began ticking upward, and some fundraisers supporting her home-state Senator, Tim Scott, moved to her after he dropped out. Haley also stepped into the expectant space vacated by DeSantis, who hasn’t worn well. When former Representative Will Hurd of Texas ended his own presidential bid in October, he quickly endorsed Haley. “The difference between Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis,” he says, “is when you meet Nikki Haley, you actually like her.”

On Wednesday night, Haley will have a chance to cement herself as the best Trump alternative when she faces DeSantis one-on-one in a CNN debate in Des Moines. Up to now, her debate performances have continuously bolstered her case. Throughout the face-offs, Republicans have respected how she stays cool under pressure, cracking only in ways that seem relatable, as when she called entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy “scum” for mentioning her daughter.



“The key inflection points for her were the debates, which I always expected she would do very well at,” says Republican strategist Alex Conant, who worked for Rubio when Haley endorsed him.

“She’s somebody who takes prep seriously. … Some candidates just go into it thinking, ‘I’ve got this, I don’t need any help.’ They just wing it. And she was the opposite of that.”

Her supporters in Iowa especially like how she handled a question on abortion at the first debate, when moderator Martha MacCallum asked what she would say to her party after it sustained loss after loss since the fall of *Roe*.

“I am unapologetically pro-life,” Haley said over whistles. “Not because the Republican Party tells me to be, but because my husband was adopted and I had trouble having both of my children, so I’m surrounded by blessings.”

Then, she took a riskier line: “Having said that, we need to stop demonizing this issue. This is talking about the fact that unelected Justices didn’t need to decide something this personal, because it’s personal for every woman and man. Now it’s been put in the hands of the people. That’s great. When it comes to a federal ban, let’s be honest with the American people and say, ‘It will take sixty Senate votes. It will take a majority of the House. So in order to do that, let’s find consensus.’”

That answer comes up often at her Iowa town halls, where everyone is thinking about electability. “Her view on abortion is much more palatable than any of the other candidates,” says James Koopman, who is canvassing for her in Iowa. “I know that’s a huge emotional button for Democrats. In fact, it’s probably the key issue for them. And if we, being Republicans, haven’t learned anything in the last four years, then we have our head in the sand.”

Seeing a path to an upset beginning here, Haley has assiduously sought to keep expectations low.

“The way I look at it, we just need to have a good showing in Iowa,” she tells the crowd in Sioux City. “I don’t think that means

we have to win, necessarily."

"I think you've got three major people that are going to go into Iowa, and I think after Iowa one's going to drop," she continues. "And then I think you're going to have a play with me and Trump in New Hampshire, and then we're gonna go to my home state of South Carolina, and we're gonna take it."

I ask Klein, with the Koch-funded AFP Action, about what I've heard about DeSantis' Iowa ground game being better than Haley's. "I think we're undoubtedly a missing puzzle piece in Nikki's operation," Klein says. "I think the difference is, other candidates parachuted in." Can she win Iowa? "Nothing is impossible. But again we continue to say, this is not simply about what the results are in Iowa. This is about what's the path all the way through those early nominating states and into the convention."

Obstacles remain. DeSantis still leads her in some polls, and he and his supporters are expected to continue the fight past Iowa. And critically, many in the party see Trump's nomination as inevitable.

But there's a less conventional path to victory that has helped Haley fans nurture hope. Trump could lock up enough delegates to secure the nomination as soon as March. Then, he could be

convicted in one of the four trials he faces this year. No one—not ordinary voters, not GOP insiders, not even legal scholars—knows exactly what would happen after that. Trump would still be eligible for the presidency. (He could even run for office from jail.) But some Haley backers want her to stay in the race as long as possible, just in case.

“I’m worried they could figure out a way to prevent him from being on the ballot,” says O’Connor, the voter who’s thinking of Trump like a quarterback. “If we can’t get the nomination in August, who’s our backup plan?”

In the meantime, Haley continues her balancing act. Where some party operatives warn she needs to hit Trump harder, the voters flocking to her disagree. They don’t want more division. “I think he did just about everything right,” says Jim Latham, another Haley supporter in Clear Lake. “I applaud most of his decisions when he was president. I morally do not care for the man.”

I follow up later to ask if he would vote for Trump if he were the nominee. Assuming Democrats put up Biden, he says the race would be a very ugly thing that would fracture America. He would hold his nose and back Trump.

Back in Sioux City, Haley faces one of her toughest questions of the night.

“Everything that I’ve heard from ya, I really like,” begins the man who has been handed the microphone. He confesses that he has trouble trusting politicians these days. “I’ve heard a lot of people say that you’re running just to run as President Trump’s VP,” he says. “If asked, what would you say?”

A tight smile spreads across her face. “I’ve never played for second my entire life,” she says. “I’m not going to start right now.”

As the crowd cheers, Haley scans the room for another question. But the voter presses on: “That’s a no?” She shakes her head and slashes the air twice as if to say, “No chance.” She doesn’t say no.

This story has been updated to reflect the current amount that Americans for Prosperity Action has committed in support of Haley’s candidacy.

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Where Zelensky Comes From

Simon Shuster is a senior correspondent at TIME. He covers international affairs, with a focus on Russia and Ukraine. For his first book, *The Showman*, he reported inside the Ukrainian President's compound in Kyiv as the Russian invasion unfolded.

Volodymyr Zelensky was already a celebrity when his first child was born in 2004. Back then, he and his wife Olena Zelenska often lived apart. He spent his days touring and promoting his comedy troupe in Kyiv, while she often stayed with her parents in their

hometown of Kryvyi Rih, the city that Zelensky would later credit with forging his character. “My big soul, my big heart,” he once called it. “Everything I have I got from there.”

The name of the town translates as “Crooked Horn,” and in conversation Zelensky and his wife tend to refer to it in Russian as Krivoy—“the crooked place,” where both of them were born in the winter of 1978, about two weeks apart.

Few if any places in Ukraine had a worse reputation in those years for violence and urban decay. The main employer in the city was the metallurgical plant, whose gargantuan blast furnaces churned out more hot steel than any other facility in the Soviet Union. During World War II, the plant was leveled by the Luftwaffe as the Nazis began their occupation of Ukraine. It was rebuilt in the 1950s and ’60s, and many thousands of veterans went to work there. So did convicts released from Soviet labor camps.

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Most of them settled into blocks of industrial housing, hives of reinforced concrete that offered almost nothing in the way of leisure, culture, or self-development. There were not nearly enough theaters, gyms, or sports facilities to occupy the local kids. By the late 1980s, when the population peaked at over 750,000, the city devolved into what Zelensky would later describe as a *“banditsky gorod”*—a city of bandits.

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Olena remembers it more fondly than that. “It wasn’t full of bandits in my eyes,” she told me. “Maybe boys and girls run in different circles when they’re growing up. But yes, it’s true. There was a

period in the ’90s when there was a lot of crime, especially among young people. There were gangs.”

The boys who joined these gangs, mostly teenagers, were known as *beguny*—literally, “runners”—because groups of them would run through the streets, beating and stabbing their rivals, flipping over cars, and smashing windows. Some of the gangs were known for using homemade explosives and improvised firearms, which they learned to fashion out of metal pipes stuffed with gunpowder and fishhooks. “Some of them got killed,” Olena said. According to local news reports, the death toll reached into the dozens by the mid-1990s.

Many more runners were maimed, beaten with clubs, or blinded with shrapnel from their homemade bombs. “Every neighborhood was in on it,” the First Lady said. “When kids of a certain age wandered into the wrong neighborhood, they could run up against a question: What part of town you from? And then the problems could start.” It was nearly impossible, she said, for teenage boys to avoid joining one of the gangs. “You could even be walking home in your own part of town, and they’d come up and ask what gang you’re with, what are you doing here. Just being on your own was scary. It wasn’t done.”

The gangs had their heyday in the late 1980s, when there were dozens of them around the city, with thousands of runners in all. Many of those who survived into the 1990s graduated into organized crime, which flourished in Kryvyi Rih during the sudden transition from communism to capitalism. Parts of the city turned into wastelands of racketeers and alcoholics. But Zelensky, thanks in large part to his family, avoided the pull of the streets.

His paternal grandfather, Semyon Zelensky, served as a senior officer in the city’s police force, investigating organized crime or, as his grandson later put it, “catching bad guys.” Stories of his service in the Second World War made a profound impression on

the young Zelensky, as did the traumas of the Holocaust. Both sides of his family are Jewish, and they lost many of their own during the war.

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His mother's side of the family survived in large part because they were evacuated to Central Asia as the German occupation began in 1941. The following year, when he was still a teenager, Semyon Zelensky went to fight in the Red Army and wound up in command of a mortar platoon. All three of his brothers fought in the war, and none of them survived. Neither did their parents, Zelensky's great-grandparents, who were killed during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine, along with over a million other Ukrainian Jews, in what became known as the "Holocaust by Bullets."

Around their kitchen table, Zelensky's relatives often brought up these tragedies and the crimes of the German occupiers. But little was ever said about the torments that Joseph Stalin inflicted on Ukraine. As a child, Zelensky remembers his grandmothers talking in vague terms about the years when Soviet soldiers came to confiscate the food grown in Ukraine, its vast harvests of grain and wheat all carted away at gunpoint. It was part of Stalin's attempt in the early 1930s to remake Soviet society, and it led to a catastrophic famine known as the Holodomor—"murder by hunger"—that killed at least 3 million people in Ukraine.

In Soviet schools, the topic was taboo, including the schools where both of Zelensky's grandmothers worked as teachers; one taught the Ukrainian language, the other taught Russian. When it came to the famine, Zelensky said, "They talked about it very carefully, that there was this period when the state took away everything, all the food."

If they harbored any ill will toward Soviet authorities, Zelensky's family knew better than to voice it in public. But his father Oleksandr, a stocky man of stubborn principles, refused throughout his life to join the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. "He was categorically against it," Zelensky told me, "even though that definitely hurt his career." As a professor of cybernetics, Oleksandr Zelensky worked most of his life in the fields of mining and geology. Zelensky's mother Rymma, an engineer by training, was closer to their only son and gentler toward him, doting on the boy much more often than she punished him.

In 1982, when Zelensky was 4 years old, his father accepted a prestigious job at a mining development in northern Mongolia, and the family moved to the town of Erdenet, which had been founded only eight years earlier to exploit one of the world's largest deposits of copper. (The name of the town in Mongolian means "with treasure.") The job was well paid by Soviet standards, but it forced the family to endure the pollution around the mines and the hardships of life in a frontier town. The food was bland and unfamiliar. Fermented horse milk was a local staple, and the family's diet was heavy on mutton, with the occasional summer watermelon for which Zelensky and his mother had to stand in line for hours.

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Rymma, who was slender and frail, with a long nose and beautiful features, found her health deteriorating in the harsh climate, and she soon decided to move back to Ukraine. Zelensky was a first-grader in a Mongolian school, just beginning to pick up the local language, when they traveled home in 1987. His father stayed behind, and for the next 15 years—virtually all of Zelensky's childhood—he split his time between Erdenet, where he continued to develop his automated system for managing the mines, and Kryvyi Rih, where he taught computer science at a local university.

Zelensky's parents were often separated in those years by five time zones and around 6,000 kilometers. Even at that distance, his father continued to be a dominant presence in Zelensky's life.

"My parents gave me no free time," he later said. "They were always signing me up for something." His father enrolled Zelensky in one of his math courses at the university and began to prime the boy for a career in computer science. His mother sent him to piano lessons, ballroom-dance classes, and gymnastics. To make sure he could hold his own against the local toughs, Zelensky's parents also got him into a class for Greco-Roman wrestling.

None of these activities were really his choice, but he went along with them out of a sense of duty to his parents. "They were always quick with the discipline," he said. The approach his father took to education was particularly severe. Zelensky called it "maximalist." But it was typical of Jewish families in the Soviet Union, who often felt that overachievement was the only way to get a fair shake in a

system rigged against them. “You have to be better than everyone else,” Zelensky said in summarizing his parents’ approach to education. “Then there might be a space for you left among the best.”

Zelensky was the product of an era of change. He was too young to experience the Soviet Union as the stagnant, repressive gerontocracy his parents had known. By the time he returned to Ukraine with his mother, the stage was set for the empire’s collapse. Moscow was broke. Its grand experiment in socialism had failed. Mikhail Gorbachev, the reluctant reformer with the soft southern accent, had already begun his doomed attempts to reform the system without breaking it apart.

Even for someone Zelensky’s age, these changes were hard to miss. He could see them in the empty grocery shelves, the endless lines for basic goods, like sausage and toilet paper. And he saw them, clear as day, on television. Under Gorbachev, the censors on Soviet TV became a lot more permissive, reflecting the wider push to relax the state’s control over the media. One of the most popular TV shows of the era was known as *KVN*, which stands for “The Club of the Funny and Inventive.”

It was a comedy show, but not the kind that most people in the U.S. and Europe would associate with that term. This was not the stand-up of Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy. There was no minimalism here, no lonely cynic at the microphone, breaking taboos. *KVN* was more like a sports league for young comedians. It involved competing troupes of performers, often made up of college students, doing sketch acts and improv in front of a panel of judges, who decided at the end of the show which team was the funniest.

By the mid-1990s, the average university and many high schools in the Russian-speaking world had at least one *KVN* team. Many big cities had a dozen or more, all facing off in local competitions and vying for a place in the championship league. The material was

mostly wooden, with a lot of knee slappers and humdingers. The teams were also expected to sing and dance. Still, in its own hokey way, *KVN* could be fun to watch. For Zelensky and his friends, it was an obsession.

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Most of them went to School No. 95, about a block from the central bazaar in their hometown, and not far from the university where Zelensky's father worked as a professor. Between classes and after school, they rehearsed sketches and comedy routines, riffing off the ones they saw in the professional league on TV. "We loved it all, the *KVN*, the humor, and we just did it for the soul, for the fun of it," said Vadym Pereverzev, who met Zelensky in their seventh-grade English class.

The top *KVN* competitions in Moscow also offered a ticket to stardom that seemed a lot more accessible to them than Hollywood, and a lot more fun than the careers available to kids in a dead-end town like theirs. "It was a rough, working-class place, and you just wanted to escape," Pereverzev told me. "I think that was one of our main motivations."

Their amateur shows in the school auditorium soon got the attention of a local comedy troupe that performed at a theater for college students. One of them, Oleksandr Pikalov, a handsome kid with an infectious, dimply smile, came down to School No. 95 to scout the talent. He happened upon a rehearsal in which Zelensky played a fried egg, with something stuffed under his shirt to represent the yolk. The act impressed Pikalov, and they soon began performing together.

Two years older and already in college, Pikalov introduced Zelensky to a few of the movers and shakers from the local comedy scene, including the Shefir brothers, Boris and Serhiy, who were both around 30 years old at the time. They saw Zelensky's

potential, and they became his lifelong friends, mentors, producers, and, eventually, political advisers.

Around their neighborhood in the 1990s, Zelensky's crew stood out from the start. Instead of the track pants and leather jackets that local hoodlums wore to school, their look was a kind of '50s retro: plaid blazers and polka-dot ties, slacks with suspenders, pressed white shirts, long hair slicked back with too much gel. Zelensky wore a ring in his ear. At a time when Nirvana was on the radio, he and his friends sang Beatles songs and listened to old-timey rock 'n' roll.

To them this felt like a form of rebellion, mostly because it was their own. Nobody acted like that in their city, and it didn't always go over well. Once, in his late teens, Zelensky wanted to try busking in an underpass with his guitar. He had seen people do it in the movies. It looked romantic. But Pikalov warned him that he wouldn't make it past the second song before somebody came over to kick his ass.

"Sure enough, half an hour goes by," Pikalov told me. "Somebody comes over and busts the guitar." But Zelensky was laughing. He had won the bet. "He said he made it through the third song."

Soon his performances caught the attention of his future wife, Olena. The two of them had crossed paths in the hallways of School No. 95 in Kryvyi Rih. But their homeroom classes were rivals—“like the Montagues and the Capulets,” she once told the *Guardian.* It was only after graduation, when Zelensky was on his way to becoming a local celebrity, that they took a liking to each other.

Olena was also involved in the *KVN* scene. To make the connection, Pikalov, their mutual friend, borrowed a videocassette from her, a copy of *Basic Instinct*, and Zelensky used it as an excuse to visit her at home and return the tape. “Then we became more than friends,” she later told me. “We were also creative colleagues.” Their performances began winning competitions around Kryvyi Rih and in other parts of Ukraine. “We were together all the time,” Olena said. “And everything sort of developed in parallel.”

Their big break came at the end of 1997, when they performed at an international *KVN* contest in Moscow. More than 200 teams took part from around the former Soviet Union, and Zelensky’s team, then called Transit, tied for first place with a rival team from Armenia. It was a remarkable debut for Zelensky, but he felt robbed. A video survives of him in that period, a teenage heartthrob with a raspy voice, wiping his palms against his knees as he explains his anger to the camera: the show-runner had cheated, he said, by refusing to let the judges break the tie.

Though he catalogued such gripes with an endearing smile, Zelensky was clearly unwilling to share the crown with anyone. He needed to win. Years later, when he recalled these competitions from his childhood, Zelensky admitted that, for him, “Losing is worse than death.”

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Even if the championship in Moscow did not end in an outright victory for Zelensky, it put him within reach of stardom. One of his team members, Olena Kravets, said they could hardly imagine getting that kind of opportunity. To young comedians from a place like Kryvyi Rih, she said, the major league of *KVN* “was not just the foot of Mount Parnassus”—the home of the muses in Greek mythology—“this was Parnassus itself.”

Its summit stood in the northern part of Moscow, in the studios and greenrooms around the Ostankino television tower, home to the biggest broadcasters in the Russian-speaking world. The major league of *KVN* had its main production headquarters there, and Zelensky soon made it inside. The year after their breakout performance in Moscow, they competed for the first time under the name Kvartal 95—or District 95, a nod to the neighborhood where they grew up.

Along with the Shefir brothers, who served as the team’s lead writers and producers, Zelensky soon rented an apartment in the north of Moscow and devoted himself to -becoming the champion. For all *KVN* teams, that required winning the favor of the league’s perennial master of ceremonies, Alexander Maslyakov. A dapper old man with a Cheshire smile, Maslyakov owned the rights to the *KVN* brand and hosted all the biggest competitions. His nickname among the performers was the Baron, and he and his wife, the Baroness, ran the league like a family business.

“*KVN* was their empire,” Pereverzev told me. “It was their show.” At first, the Baron took a liking to Zelensky and his crew, granting them admission to the biggest stage in Moscow and the touches of fame that it brought. But there were hundreds of other teams vying for his attention, and the competition among them was vicious. “Everyone there lived with this constant emotional tension,” Olena Zelenska told me. “You were always told to know your place. The whole time we were performing in Moscow, they always told us: ‘Remember where you came from. Learn to hold a microphone.

This is Central Television. You should feel lucky.' And that's how all the teams lived, though not so much the lucky ones from Moscow. They were loved."

In the major league of KVN, Zelensky came face-to-face with a brand of Russian chauvinism that would, in far uglier form, manifest itself about two decades later in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As Zelenska put it when we talked about the KVN league, "Those who were not from Moscow were always treated like slaves."

The informal hierarchy, she said, corresponded to Moscow's vision of itself as an imperial capital. "Teams from Ukraine were of course even farther down the ladder than all the Russian cities. They could, for instance, put up with Ryazan"—a city in western Russia—"but a place like Kryvyi Rih was something else. They'd never even seen it on a map. So we always needed to prove ourselves."

The unwritten rules within the league reflected the role *KVN* played in the Russian-speaking world. Amid the ruins of the Soviet Union, it stood out as a rare institution of culture that still bound Moscow to its former vassal states. It gave kids a reason to stay within

Russia's cultural matrix rather than gravitating westward, toward Hollywood. The league had outposts in every corner of the former empire, from Moldova to Tajikistan, and all of them performed in the Russian language.

Even teams from the Baltic states, the first countries to break away from Moscow's rule in 1990 and 1991, took part in the *KVN* league; its biggest annual gathering was held in Latvia, on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Viewed in a generous light, these contests could be seen as a vehicle for Russian soft power in much the same way that American movies defined what good guys and bad guys are supposed to look like for viewers around the world. To be less generous, the league could be construed as a Kremlin-backed program of cultural colonialism.

In either case, the center of gravity for *KVN* was always Moscow, and nostalgia for the Soviet Union was a touchstone for every team that hoped to win. Zelensky's team was no exception, especially since their best shot at victory in the early 2000s coincided with a change of power in the Kremlin. With the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000, the Russian state embraced the symbols and icons of its imperial past, and it encouraged its people to stop being ashamed of the Soviet Union. One of Putin's first acts in office was to change the melody of the Russian national anthem back to the Soviet one.

When it came to *KVN*, Putin was always an ardent supporter. He often attended *KVN* championships, and he liked to take the stage and offer pep talks to the performers. In return, they made him the occasional subject of jokes, though none were ever very pointed. One of the first, when he was still the Prime Minister in 1999, made fun of his soaring poll numbers after the Russian bombing campaign of Chechnya began that summer: "His popularity has already outpaced that of Mickey Mouse," said the performer, "and is approaching that of Beavis and Butt-Head."

Seated in the hall next to his bodyguard, Putin snickered and slumped in his chair. Less than a year later, he made clear that sharper jokes in his direction would not be tolerated. In February 2000, during Putin's first presidential campaign, a satirical TV show called *Kukly*, or Puppets, depicted him as a gnome whose evil spell makes people believe he is a beautiful princess. Several of Putin's campaign surrogates called for the Russian authors of the sketch to be imprisoned. The show soon got canceled, and the network that aired it was taken over by a state-run firm.

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Zelensky, living and working in Moscow at the time, watched the turn toward authoritarianism in Russia with the same concern as all his peers in show business, and, like everyone else, he adapted. To stay on top, his team understood it would not be wise to make fun of Russia's new leader. During one sketch in 2001, Zelensky's character appealed to Putin as the decider "not only of my fate, but that of all Ukraine." A year later, in a performance that brimmed with nostalgia for the Soviet Union, a member of Zelensky's team said Putin "turned out to be a decent guy."

But such direct references to the Russian President were rare in Zelensky's early comedy. More often he joked about the fraught relationship between Ukraine and Russia, as in his most famous sketch from 2001, performed during the Ukrainian *KVN* championships. Titled "Man Born to Dance," it cast Zelensky in the role of a Russian who can't stop dancing as he tells a Ukrainian about his life. The script is bland and the humor juvenile. Zelensky grabs his crotch like Michael Jackson and borrows the mime-in-a-box routine from Bip the Clown.

At the end of the scene, the Russian and the Ukrainian take turns humping each other from behind. "Ukraine is always screwing Russia," says Zelensky. "And Russia always screws Ukraine." The

punch line did not come close to the kind of satire Putin's Russia needed and deserved. But as a piece of physical comedy, the sketch is memorable, even brilliant. Zelensky's movements, much more than his words, seem to infect the audience with a kind of wide-mouthed glee as he shimmies and high-kicks his way through the lines in a pair of skintight leather pants.

The most magnetic thing about the sketch is him, the grin on his face, the obvious pleasure he gets from every second on the stage. The judges loved it, and that night, before a TV audience of millions, Zelensky's team became the undisputed champions of the league in their native Ukraine. But, on the biggest stages in Moscow, victory would continue to elude them, and their troupe did not last long in the major leagues of *KVN*.

After competing and losing in the international championships three years in a row, they gathered up their props and left Moscow in 2003. Members of Zelensky's team agree their departure was far from amicable, though they all seem to remember it a little differently. One of them told me the breaking point with *KVN* was an antisemitic slur. During a rehearsal, a Russian producer stood on the stage and said loudly, in reference to Zelensky, "Where's that little yid?"

In Zelensky's version of the story, the management in Moscow offered him a job as a producer and writer on Russian television. It would require him to disband his troupe and send them back to Ukraine without him. Zelensky refused, and they all went home together. Halfway through their 20s, they were now successful showmen and celebrities across Ukraine. But it was still difficult for Zelensky's parents to accept comedy as his career.

"Without a doubt," his father said years later, "we advised him to do something different, and we thought the interest in *KVN* was temporary, that he would change, that he would choose a profession. After all, he's a lawyer. He finished our institute."

Indeed, Zelensky had completed his studies and earned a law degree while performing in *KVN*. But he had no intention of practicing law. He found it boring.

When he got back home to Ukraine, Zelensky and his friends staged a series of weddings in their hometown of Kryvyi Rih, three Saturdays in a row. Olena Kiyashko married Volodymyr Zelensky on Sept. 6, 2003, and Pikalov and Pereverzev married their respective girlfriends. By the end of the year, when Olena was pregnant with their daughter, Zelensky moved to Kyiv to build up his new production company, Studio Kvartal 95.

Even at this early stage in his career, Zelensky's confidence went beyond the typical swagger of a young man smitten with success. He betrayed no doubts in his team's ability to make it big, and if he felt any fear he hid it from everyone, including his wife. For an expectant father in his mid-20s, the job offered to him in Moscow must have been more tempting than he let on. Apart from the money, it would have placed him among the glitterati, the producers and showrunners in the biggest market in the Russian-speaking world.

Read More: *Inside Zelensky's Plan to Beat Putin's Propaganda in Russian-Occupied Ukrain*e

Instead he took a risk and struck out in a much smaller pond, relying on the team of friends who looked to him for leadership and made him feel at home wherever he went. Upon arriving in Kyiv, Zelensky scored a meeting with one of the country's biggest media executives, Alexander Rodnyansky, the head of the network that produced and broadcast the *KVN* league in Ukraine. The executive knew Zelensky from that circuit as a "bright young Jewish kid," he told me. But he didn't expect the kid to stride into his office with a risky business proposition.

Accompanied by the Shefir brothers, who were a decade older and more experienced in the industry, Zelensky did the talking. He wanted to appear with his troupe on the biggest stage in Kyiv for a nationally televised performance, and he needed Rodnyansky to give him the airtime and bankroll part of the production, marketing, and other costs. “The chutzpah on this guy, that’s what I remember,” the executive told me. “He had this bulletproof belief in himself, with these burning eyes.”

Many years later, Rodnyansky would come to see the danger hidden in that quality. It would lead Zelensky to the false belief that in the role of President, he could outmaneuver Putin and negotiate his way out of a full-scale war. “I think that confidence of his betrayed him in the end,” he said. But at the time, Zelensky’s charm won out in the negotiations with Rodnyansky, who agreed to take a risk on the performance.

It proved to be such a success that, shortly after, the team at Kvartal 95 reached a deal to make a series of variety shows that would air in Russia and Ukraine. Their tone departed from the more wholesome, aw-shucks style of *KVN*. The jokes took on a harder edge, and they became much more overtly political. Pereverzev, who was a writer on the shows, told me their aim was to make a version of *Saturday Night Live* with elements of Monty Python.

It was an untested concept on Ukrainian TV. There was no way to tell whether the audience was ready. “That was Green’s style,” he said, using Zelensky’s nickname. (The word for “green” in Ukrainian and Russian is the same: *zeleny.*) “That was his main quality as a leader. He’d just say, ‘Let’s do it.’ Then we’d all get scared, and he would just tell us to trust him. All our lives it was like that. And at some point we just started to trust him, because when he said it would work out, it did.”

Excerpted from THE SHOWMAN: Inside the Invasion That Shook the World and Made a Leader of Volodymyr Zelensky *by Simon Shuster, to be published January 23 by William Morrow.* *Copyright © 2024 by Simon Shuster. Reprinted courtesy of HarperCollins Publishers.*

Correction, Jan. 5: The original version of this story misstated when Zelensky’s first child was born. It was 2004, not 2003.

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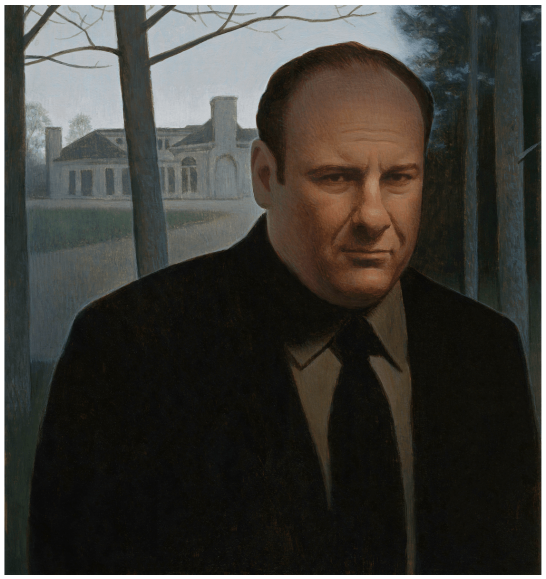
Is TV Too Broken to Ever Make Another Show Like The Sopranos?

Judy Berman is the TV critic at TIME. Along with reviewing current television, she writes about the ways in which entertainment and pop culture intersect with our larger social and political realities. Her TIME essay on *Ted Lasso* and modern masculinity won a New York Press Club award in 2022.



David Chase is feeling thankful. Twenty-five years after the premiere of the series that cemented his legacy, *The Sopranos* creator is filled with gratitude that he got to work with actors like James Gandolfini, Edie Falco, and Lorraine Bracco and a writing staff that included future *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner and Terence Winter (*Boardwalk Empire*). Gratitude for the freedom HBO granted him. And now that the show is a consensus classic, he says, “I have a great deal of gratitude that people still see it. That people seek it out. That people wanna hear about it.”

Yet when I ask Chase, during a wide-ranging video chat in December, whether he thinks it would be possible to make *The Sopranos* today, his reply is firm: “No, I don’t.” For one thing, his

friends who've produced streaming series keep telling him that TV development is now "really all about money," he explains. "All these corporations spent billions of dollars chasing after Netflix. And now they're broke. So everything they produce, they want to do on the cheap."

Chase is not known for his optimism, particularly with respect to TV. And he's careful to note that he's a bit out of the industry loop. But he's not alone in doubting that the necessary conditions for bringing a project of *The Sopranos*' ambition, originality, and cost to fruition exist in streaming-era Hollywood. As John Koblin, who with Felix Gillette co-authored *It's Not TV: The Spectacular Rise, Revolution, and Future of HBO*, puts it: a quarter-century after that show kicked off TV's most recent golden age, "It's extremely possible that the next few years in television aren't going to be quite so golden."

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This is the irony that must be acknowledged as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of a series that recast the small screen in its brilliant, violent, psychologically rich image—and whose prescience about the precarious nature of American life in the 21st century has made it even more relevant than it was when it debuted. It's an indictment of an industry that squandered one of its most fertile creative periods by sacrificing quality for quantity, embracing franchises, genre spectacles, and reality TV. But, as new generations discover *The Sopranos*, it's clear that audiences will always hunger for stories that plumb the darkest depths of human nature and societal dysfunction. The question is: Has TV as an art form become too debased to satisfy that hunger again?

***The Sopranos* arrived** on Jan. 10, 1999, with the force of an explosion. And it made TV new again, annihilating the saccharine tropes of the broadcast writers' rooms where Chase had spent decades on acclaimed shows like *The Rockford Files* and *Northern Exposure*. Everything the networks had ever produced (save, perhaps, *Twin Peaks*) suddenly felt stodgy or artificial by comparison.

Since then, the series has become such an important chapter in TV history that, especially if you haven't revisited it in upwards of a decade, it's easy to take for granted what made it so great. Nominally a gangster show, it certainly featured the guns, *goomars*, and gory deaths native to the genre. But protagonist Tony Soprano, indelibly embodied by Gandolfini, who died in 2013, wasn't just a North Jersey mob boss; he was a husband, father, and the son of a cold, manipulative mother (Nancy Marchand). Haunted by sinister dreams that begged for interpretation, his panic attacks landed him in the offices of Dr. Jennifer Melfi (Bracco), a psychiatrist who would become his ambivalent confessor. "It's good to be in something from the ground floor, but I came too late for that," he tells her in the pilot. "Lately, I'm getting the feeling that I came in at the end."

He is talking, obliquely, about America, a place known to Tony's—and Chase's—Italian immigrant forebears as the land of opportunity. "I think a lot of people knew, in 1999, that something was wrong," Chase recalls. "It probably goes way back to the '60s," when issues of race, class, and the Vietnam War divided society. "So by the time 1999 came around, the joke was that America had become so greedy and so entitled that even a gangster couldn't stand it."

Determined to avoid the didactic tone that was then and is now, again, so common on TV, *The Sopranos* didn't evangelize a set of values. It developed layered, conflicted characters and let them disagree. Tony's wife Carmela, endowed with warmth and grit by Falco, is a Catholic who worries her husband is going to hell—and that by letting his crimes underwrite her lifestyle, she has imperiled her own soul as well. The couple's relatively sheltered teenage children, high-achieving Meadow (Jamie-Lynn Sigler) and brooding A.J. (Robert Iler), can sound hopelessly naive when contrasted with their father's lethal pragmatism. Yet their adolescent obsessions with fairness offer a bracing contrast to his brutality.

Along with thoughtful writing and career-making performances by a huge ensemble of mostly unknown actors, *The Sopranos* characters read as a genuine family (nuclear, extended, crime) because the show made a point of almost exclusively casting Italian Americans from the tri-state area. They "could have been at my house, as a kid, for Christmas," Chase says. For Falco, this familiarity gave her a unique "comfort level" on set. "There are all these people that could have been family members," she recalls. "I'll never have another experience like that."

Chase insisted on shooting on location. It was HBO's support for this expensive and unorthodox plan that convinced him, after a frustrating round of pitching to broadcast networks and an unsuccessful attempt to develop the series at Fox, that it was the

right home for the show. The late ’90s were a good time for HBO, which Koblin says was “sitting on a pile of cash,” to take a big risk. Executives who never absorbed broadcast’s conservative norms gave Chase free reign. Even as budgets ballooned, HBO signed checks without saddling him with endless network notes. “Nobody told us to do anything,” Chase marvels. “We had complete creative freedom. It’s unheard of.”

Liberated from the imperative to supply the feel-good storylines advertisers demanded from broadcast programs, *The Sopranos* got to be dark, enigmatic, pessimistic. It wasn’t just a stylistic choice. Chase’s approach had profound political resonance. The show inhabited a world where, as Peter Biskind, the author of *Pandora’s Box: How Guts, Guile, and Greed Upended TV*, notes, morally complex antiheroes supplanted blandly heroic good guys and “the system was stacked in favor of the powerful against the powerless.”

This sense of peril has only gained currency—between 9/11 and the Iraq War, the rise of Donald Trump, a pandemic, and the growing existential threat posed by climate change. *The Sopranos*’ finale, which closes with the family gathering at Holsten’s diner when a man who may intend to assassinate Tony walks in, was notoriously divisive. In retrospect, though, it was a bridge to a contemporary reality permeated by foreboding. We couldn’t know what would happen once the screen went black for an excruciating eight seconds before the end credits finally rolled, the way we can never be certain what the future will hold. But all signs pointed to doom.

In a better world than *The Sopranos* depicted—maybe the world of Aaron Sorkin's idealistic White House fantasy *The West Wing*, which also premiered in 1999 but now feels ancient—Americans might have banded together to beat back the encroaching darkness. Instead, society fragmented along lines drawn in the cataclysmic '60s. TV responded, in large part, by cranking out safe, apolitical programming designed to soothe, rather than challenge.

Hence the rise of what has come to be known as comfort TV—the *Ted Lasso*s, *Great British Baking Shows*, *Schitt's Creek*s, and *Emily in Parises* that have become some of the most popular shows on TV. Chase is keenly aware of this shift: "I've been told, or it has been implied, that there's a lack of interest," among those who hold the purse strings in Hollywood, "in psychology, ambiguity, spirituality." In other words: all the qualities that made *The Sopranos* what it was.

Because television has always been a business first and an art form second, there is, of course, a financial impetus behind this trend. The streaming wars escalated in the late 2010s, as studios like Disney and HBO's parent company WarnerMedia (now Warner Bros. Discovery) launched proprietary platforms and scrambled to compete with Netflix, which had already spent years and billions to

build an enormous library of originals. “The result of the competition among
the streamers is a stampede to get the biggest audience,” says Biskind. “And the way you get the biggest audience is to be the most bland because you don’t want to offend anybody.”

Now, with most streamers deep in the red and after months of production shutdowns amid a striking Hollywood, this competition for eyeballs has become more desperate than ever. According to Koblin, “There is certainly a threat that TV is about to look like the old days of television, before *The Sopranos*.” Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos recently predicted, he notes, that after subscribers flocked to the generic USA procedural *Suits* when it appeared on the platform last summer, “next year you’ll probably see a bunch of lawyer shows.”

An industry-wide return to network-TV norms wouldn’t just mean fewer, blander, and cheaper series. It could also endanger an auteurist movement in the medium, led by Chase, that has made creators as different as Vince Gilligan, Taylor Sheridan, and Michaela Coel household names. Chase’s “singular vision” guided the making of *The Sopranos*, Falco recalls. “I’ve worked on network stuff since then, and it really is incredible. Everybody wants [to put in] their two cents. And then I thought: ‘Why don’t you guys go in there and make it, then? Or if you’re going to let this person make it, get out of the way.’”

Falco is also skeptical that *The Sopranos* could be made in an atmosphere as concerned with what she calls “appropriateness” as Hollywood is today. She doubts that, for example, the show’s many layered, sometimes purposely disturbing sexual encounters would have felt as authentic had they been overseen by an intimacy coordinator. Choreograph a scene too tightly, and “you’re leaving out the possibility of last-minuteness.”

If it were to premiere amid our current, increasingly inflammatory discourse around identity and representation, *The Sopranos* might well see even more pushback than it faced upon release, when some mouthpieces for the Italian American community protested that it promoted harmful stereotypes and some feminists called its violence against women misogynistic. These arguments were always somewhat flimsy. The show didn't relish women's suffering any more than men's. Despite *Difficult Men* author Brett Martin's insistence that *The Sopranos* and its descendants were "largely *about* manhood," female characters—resilient Carmela, idealistic Meadow, perceptive Melfi—had as much depth as their male counterparts. "If [these critics] watched and thought that women were incidental or second place?" Chase says now. "That's pathetic."

As for the Italian stereotypes, Chase recalls a meeting at the Beverly Hills Hotel, before *The Sopranos* premiered, with "four leading lights of the Italian American anti-defamation movement." They had been sent advance tapes and complained that viewers would infer "that all Italians are criminals." But when Chase tried to talk through individual scenes, they confessed that they'd yet to actually watch the tapes. "At that point I went, to myself: 'F-ck. You.' And that's what I stuck with for the next six or seven years." In this era of Notes app apologies and hair-trigger cancellations, it's hard to imagine controversy-averse TV execs supporting such a combative stance.

Tony Soprano was a terminal nostalgist, always decrying the entitlement of a younger generation of wiseguys. “Whatever happened to Gary Cooper?” became his refrain. Now, *The Sopranos* is itself an object of nostalgia. Yet the show has recently found a new audience, particularly during COVID-19 lockdown—a cohort of viewers who weren’t necessarily alive, and definitely weren’t watching, when it premiered has been experiencing the show in the present tense. The designer Rachel Antonoff sells a trendy $295 jumpsuit depicting vignettes from the show. A clip of costumed 20-somethings at a “Sopranos Party” has more than 50,000 likes on TikTok.

Chase is heartened to see this generation—one known, perhaps unfairly, for over-policing the "appropriateness" of entertainment—embrace the show, though it also surprises him. "I always did wonder, what are they seeing in it?" Could the Y2K-retro costumes and red-sauce family dinners now constitute comfort viewing—like *Friends*, except sometimes the Central Perk crew starts killing each other? But ultimately, Chase suspects that young people, coming of age amid ever-intensifying fears for their future, "get the joke" about how America has become too corrupt even for a Mafia boss. He can imagine that "Gen Z people are looking at [*The Sopranos*] and saying… 'I feel a connection to what's being said here.'" Like Nirvana at the dawn of the '90s shouting down the debauched fantasies of '80s hair metal with wounded punk, the show inspires youthful passion because it dares to be blunt about the ugliest aspects of humanity.

Maybe the fight to make TV premised on discomfort has become an uphill battle, but our appetite for pessimistic realism persists. Two of HBO's best and buzziest dramas of the past five years, *Succession* and *The White Lotus*, have taken dim views of America's pampered capitalist class during a period of extreme economic polarization. And the more acerbic they got, the more audiences obsessed. But unlike *The Sopranos*, *The White Lotus*—an auteur project from writer-director Mike White—came out of HBO's need to make a cheap, single-location series during lockdown. And, as Koblin and Gillette recount, *Succession* was, in part, the product of HBO head Casey Bloys' search for a "vicious HBO spin" on NBC's histrionic *This Is Us*. To the extent that viewers can still opt for challenge over comfort, much credit is due to long-serving creative executives like Bloys and FX's John Landgraf, who Koblin says remain "incredibly important because their track records speak for themselves"—even if Bloys is now also overseeing a fluffier slate for Max, which last year unveiled *What Am I Eating? With Zooey Deschanel*.

Another small sign of hope for television as an art form in the post-Peak TV era? Chase and co-creator Hannah Fidell currently have a series in the works at FX, which aired Fidell's provocative statutory rape drama *A Teacher*. "We've already been told that the audience isn't going to sit still as long as they used to, waiting for something to develop," Chase says. "They've got to see it right away in the pilot." He senses industry angst about "elitism"—a charge you could only level against *The Sopranos* if what you meant was that it required independent thought on the part of its audience.

But so far, the network has been supportive. "No one has dropped an economic hammer on us yet," says Chase. And then, before the conversation can get too upbeat, he adds: "But I fully expect it.

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The 39 Most Anticipated Movies of 2024

Cady Lang is a staff writer at TIME. She covers culture, focusing on identity, celebrity, and fashion.

Summer blockbusters, action-packed thrillers, sweet rom-coms, and much-anticipated sequels are all on the movie slate for 2024. The upcoming year for movies promises to be one for the books, especially with the long-awaited releases of films that were delayed as a result of the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes. From dramatic biopics like *Bob Marley: One Love* and the Amy Winehouse film *Back to Black* to epic sequels like *Dune: Part Two* and *Beetlejuice 2*, here are 38 films to look forward to in the new year.

The Book of Clarence (Jan. 12)

Jeymes Samuel's (*The Harder They Fall*) dark comedy leans on Biblical inspiration for some decidedly irreverent humor. For Clarence (LaKeith Stanfield), staying on the path of righteousness is a challenge, but he's inspired to emulate Jesus Christ, especially after he sees the fame and accolades the latter gets from doing his good deeds. Eyeing an opportunity to capitalize on the star power of Jesus, Clarence begins faking miracles, a lucrative hustle that goes well until the Roman empire comes calling.

Mean Girls: The Musical (Jan. 12)

Mean Girls will be back on the big screen with the film adaptation of the 2018 hit Broadway musical based on Tina Fey's 2004 cult classic movie. Reneé Rapp will return to the role she played on Broadway as Queen Bee Regina George, while Angourie Rice will star as new girl Cady Heron. Fey and fellow *SNL* alum Tim Meadows will reprise their roles from the original movie as math teacher Ms. Norbury and Principal Duvall, respectively.

Lisa Frankenstein (Feb. 9)

A dark romance blossoms between a misunderstood teenage goth named Lisa (Kathryn Newton) and The Creature, a handsome Victorian corpse that she reanimates (Cole Sprouse), in this a horror comedy written by *Juno*'s Diablo Cody. The pair's pursuit of romantic bliss turns into a wild murder spree as they attempt to source missing body parts for The Creature.

Madame Web (Feb. 14)

Dakota Johnson enters the world of Marvel comics as Cassandra Webb, the paramedic heroine grappling with her clairvoyant

abilities in *Madame Web*. As Cassie reckons with dark secrets from her past and her newfound psychic abilities, she assumes responsibility for ensuring that a trio of young girls, who will be profoundly influential in the future, survive a deadly adversary.

Bob Marley: One Love (Feb. 14)

The life and legacy of Jamaican singer and songwriter Bob Marley is the subject of this new biopic starring Kingsley Ben-Adir as the iconic reggae artist. The film, which was produced in partnership with the Marley family, charts his rise to fame, including an attempted 1976 shooting at his home, his longtime time advocacy for peace, and his prolific music career, up until his untimely death in 1981.

Drive-Away Dolls (Feb. 23)

Ethan Coen will make his solo directorial debut outside of his work as part of the Coen Brothers with *Drive-Away Dolls*, the queer roadtrip buddy comedy he co-wrote with his partner and longtime collaborator Tricia Cooke. The film stars Margaret Qualley and Geraldine Viswanathan as friends and roommates whose spontaneous road trip to Tallahassee is undermined by a gang of amateur criminals.

Dune: Part Two (March 1)

Timothée Chalamet returns as the defiant hero Paul Atriedes for the second installation of Denis Villeneuve's adaptation of the classic sci-fi saga. In this new chapter, Paul joins forces with his love interest Chani (Zendaya) and the Fremen, to avenge his family and bring peace to the planet of Arrakis.

Spaceman (March 1)

Adam Sandler stars in this Netflix original about an astronaut on a mission to the outer reaches of the solar system who strikes up an unexpected friendship with a creature (voiced by Paul Dano) who has stowed away on his spaceship, as he worries over his relationship with his wife back home (Carey Mulligan).

Damsel (March 8)

Millie Bobby Brown is no damsel in distress in *Damsel*, Netflix's fantasy flick that subverts the traditional fairy tale princess narrative. In the film, Brown plays Princess Elodie, a young woman betrothed to marry a prince, who discovers that her engagement was actually an elaborate ruse to sacrifice her as part of an ancient debt that claimed the lives of many women before her. Elodie must brave steep cliffs, harsh weather, and a fire-breathing dragon if she wants to escape this fate.

The American Society of Magical Negroes (March 22)

Writer and director Kobi Libii turns the racist trope of the "Magical Negro" on its head with *The American Society of Magical Negroes*. In the satirical film, Justice Smith stars as Aren, a young Black man who is recruited to be a part of a secret society of magical Black

people who derive their power from the act of making white people's lives easier.

Mickey 17 (March 29)

Bong Joon-ho's much-anticipated film adaptation of Edward Ashton's science fiction thriller, *Mickey 17* stars Robert Pattinson as the titular Mickey 17, an "expendable" space traveler sent on a deadly mission to colonize Niflheim. When Mickey dies, his body is cloned with most of his memories intact, setting off a cycle that parallels immortality.

Challengers (April 26)

A tense love triangle ups the stakes for a trio of elite tennis players in Luca Guadagnino's *Challengers*. Zendaya stars as Tashi Duncan, a former tennis prodigy who now coaches her husband, Art (Mike Faist). Sparks fly when she signs him up for a Challenger match, where he'll face off with Patrick (Josh O'Connor), his former best friend—and Tashi's ex-boyfriend.

Civil War (April 26)

Alex Garland's dystopian thriller, his first since 2018's *Annihilation*, imagines a deeply divided America in the not-so-distant future, ravaged by a violent second civil war. Starring Kirsten Dunst, Cailee Spaeny, and Jesse Plemons, the film probes just how far people will go to defend their beliefs.

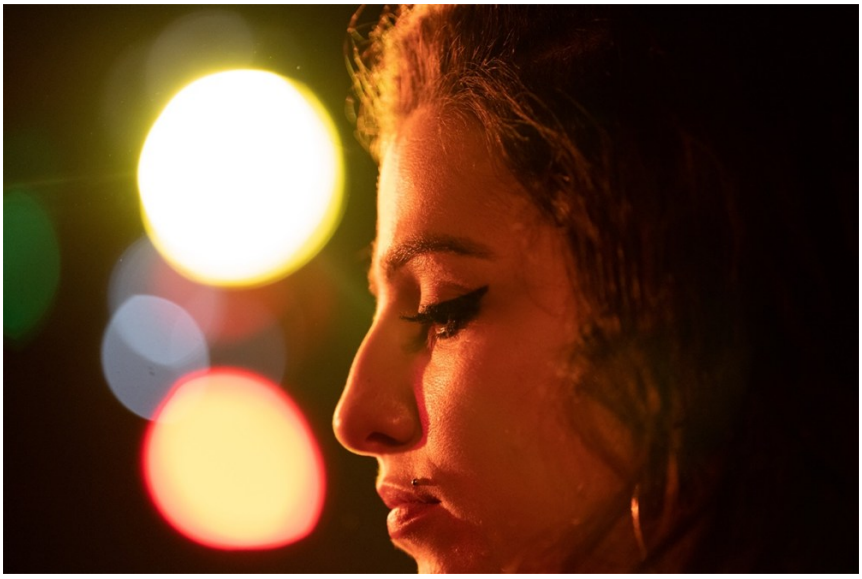
Shirley

Regina King plays Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman to run for president, in this Netflix biopic from John Ridley.

The Fall Guy (May 3)

In this big-screen adaptation of the 1980s TV series of the same name, Ryan Gosling brings the action as Colt Seavers, a past-his-prime stuntman who is reunited with Jody (Emily Blunt), an ex-flame, after he's hired for a job on a movie she's directing. After the star of Jody's film goes missing, Seavers must find the missing actor to finish the film, but the discovery of a criminal plot threatens to upend not only his mission, but his job and his plan to win back the love of his life.

Back to Black (May 10)



In the Amy Winehouse biopic *Back to Black*, director Sam Taylor-Johnson revisits the late musician's rise to fame and the release of her acclaimed album of the same name. Starring Marisa Abela (*Industry*) as Winehouse, the film is told from the singer's perspective, giving an intimate look at the complex woman behind the music and the relationship that inspired her final legendary album.

IF (May 17)

A young girl's (Cailey Fleming) extraordinary power to see forgotten imaginary friends sends her on a journey to save them from being lost forever in this heartwarming film written, directed by, and co-starring John Krasinski. Featuring a star-studded cast led by Ryan Reynolds, it's a fantastical romp that's entirely family friendly.

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga (May 24)

In George Miller's epic *Mad Max* prequel, Anya Taylor-Joy stars as a young Furiosa, before she became a formidable imperator. After Furiosa is kidnapped by the warlord Dementus (Chris Hemsworth) and forced to leave the Green Place of Many Mothers, she must

fight for her life and her freedom across the barren wasteland as she tries to make her way back home.

Garfield (May 24)

Everyone's favorite, perpetually hungry orange cat embarks on a wild adventure in *The Garfield Movie*. After Garfield (voiced by Chris Pratt) reunites with his long-lost father Vic (Samuel L. Jackson), a slick street cat, he and his hapless dog friend Odie (Harvey Guillén) get roped into helping Vic with a high-stakes scheme that challenges their comfortable suburban existence.

Inside Out 2 (June 14)

Adolescence provides ripe fodder for the sequel to Pixar's 2015 film about the emotions that run the mind of Riley, a young girl. Emotions from the first film Joy (Amy Poehler), Sadness (Phyllis Smith), and Anger (Lewis Black) find their world turned upside down as Riley enters her teenage years and new emotions, like Anxiety (Maya Hawke), enter the scene.

Horizon: An American Saga: Film 1 (June 28)

Kevin Costner brings his all to the American West with *Horizon: An American Saga*: *Film 1*, the first of two installments for his epic film about post-Civil War expansion in the States. The movie, which takes place over the course of 15 years, is a veritable passion project for Costner, who has devoted the last 30 years to it and wrote, directed and stars in it.

A Quiet Place: Day One (June 28)

This spin-off prequel is the third installment in the *A Quiet Place* franchise. Starring Lupita Nyong'o and Joseph Quinn, the film,

which shows the beginning of the invasion of aliens with super hearing, is written and directed by Michael Sarnoski.

Despicable Me 4 (July 3)

The latest installment of the *Despicable Me* franchise sees Steve Carrell reprising his role as reformed supervillain Gru and will feature a script written by *White Lotus* creator Mike White.

Twisters (July 19)

Minari director Lee Isaac Chung will helm *Twisters*, the sequel to 1996's *Twister*. While the film is not a continuation of the original film, it promises to deliver the same thrills and disasters that made the original a box-office hit. According to screenwriter Mark L. Smith, the film will focus on how climate change affects the fearsome storms.

Deadpool 3 (July 26)

Ryan Reynolds revives his foul-mouthed superhero once more for *Deadpool 3*, the long-awaited third sequel for the "Merc with a Mouth." The film, which also stars Hugh Jackman reprising his role as Wolverine, finds the two superheroes teaming up to defeat a common enemy.

Horizon: An American Saga: Film 2 (Aug. 16)

The second installment of Kevin Costner's epic about the American West returns two months after its first release. Costner leads a star-studded cast that includes Sienna Miller, Sam Worthington, Jena Malone, and Luke Wilson.

Beetlejuice 2 (Sept. 6)

Winona Ryder and Michael Keaton will reprise their iconic roles as Lydia Deetz and Betelgeuse in *Beetlejuice 2*, Tim Burton's sequel to his 1988 hit horror comedy. The film also stars scream queen of the moment, Jenna Ortega, as Lydia's daughter Astrid, as well as Willem Dafoe and Monica Belluci in supporting roles.

Joker: Folie à Deux (Oct. 4)

In the much-anticipated sequel to Todd Phillips' 2019 film *Joker*, Joaquin Phoenix reprises his Oscar-winning role as dastardly villain Arthur Fleck, while Lady Gaga stars as Dr. Harleen Quinzel, a psychologist at Arkham Asylum, whose attempts to treat the Joker lead to her own descent into madness and the adoption of a new persona, Harley Quinn. Zazie Beetz will return as Fleck's neighbor, Sophie Dumond.

Gladiator 2 (Nov. 22)

Ridley Scott revisits the Roman Empire with *Gladiator 2.* For this epic sequel, Paul Mescal stars as a now-grown Lucius Verus (Commodus' a.k.a. Joaquin Phoenix's nephew who was saved by Maximus a.k.a. Russell Crowe in the original *Gladiator*) as he seeks answers about his biological father.

Wicked (Nov. 27)

The origin story of one of the world's most misunderstood witches hits the big screen on Thanksgiving 2024 with the first of two installments of Jon Chu's adaptation of the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical. Bringing to life the origin story of *The Wizard of Oz's* Wicked Witch of the West, from her perspective, the movie stars Cynthia Ervio as Elphaba and Ariana Grande as Glinda.

Mufasa: The Lion King (Dec. 20)

The origin story of Mufasa, Simba's late father, will come to life in *Mufasa*: *The Lion King*, the live-action prequel to be helmed by Oscar-winning director Barry Jenkins. Starring Aaron Pierre as the voice of Mufasa, the film will address the backstory of the lion leader and his relationship with his younger brother, Scar.

Nosferatu (Dec. 25)

The Witch director Robert Eggers will helm a new adaptation of F.W. Murnau's iconic 1922 silent film *Nosferatu*, reinterpreting its tale of a bloodthirsty, bubonic plague-spreading vampire and the tortured young woman he's obsessed with. Eggers' remake will star Bill Skarsgard as the infamous vampire and Lily-Rose Depp as the object of his infatuation.

Dates TBA

Babes

Better Things creator Pamela Adlon makes her directorial feature debut with *Babes*, a comedy about Eden, an aggressively single woman (Ilana Glazer), who gets pregnant from a one-night stand. After deciding to keep the baby, Eden relies heavily on her best friend Dawn (Michelle Buteau), a married mother of two, to guide her through her pregnancy and beyond.

Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F

Eddie Murphy returns to the role he originated nearly four decades ago, teaming up with a new
partner (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) for a case that hits close to home in this Netflix sequel.

Hit Man

Glen Powell stars in Richard Linklater's action comedy based on the real story of an undercover fake hit man. The film was acquired by Netflix after impressing audiences on the fall festival circuit.

The Idea of You

In this big-screen adaptation of Robinne Lee's novel of the same name, Anne Hathaway stars as a 40-year-old mother who gets swept off her feet in a whirlwind romance with a 24-year-old boy band member (Nicholas Galitzine from *Bottoms* and *Red, White & Royal Blue*) after meeting him while chaperoning her 16-year-old daughter at Coachella.

Problemista

Los Espookys creator Julio Torres delivers a triple threat as the director, writer and star of *Problemista*, a surrealist tale about Alejandro (played by Torres himself), an artist and aspiring toy designer from El Salvador, who needs his eccentric boss (Tilda Swinton) to co-sign his visa so he can stay in the U.S.

Rez Ball

Co-written by *Reservation Dogs* co-creator Sterlin Harjo, alongside director Sydney Freeland, this Netflix underdog sports film follows a Native American high school basketball team in New Mexico.

Unfrosted: The Pop Tart Story

Jerry Seinfeld directs and stars in this ‘60s-set Netflix origin story for the iconic toaster pastry. He’s joined by Melissa McCarthy, Jim Gaffigan, and Hugh Grant, among others.

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The 25 Most Anticipated Books of 2024

Megan McCluskey is a staff writer at TIME. She covers culture, focusing on horror, fantasy, and science fiction.

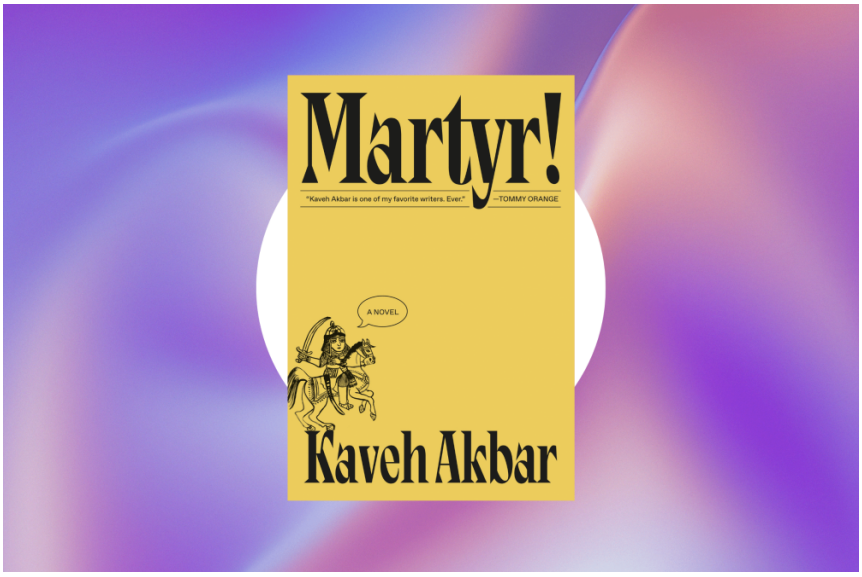
Olivia B. Waxman is a staff writer at TIME. She covers history and education.

From *Drag Race* host RuPaul's memoir to a posthumous novel from Nobel Prize–winning author Gabriel García Márquez, the 2024 books lineup offers something for every reader.

In *Funny Story*, romance novelist and #BookTok darling Emily Henry serves up a feel-good pairing of polar opposites. In *The Demon of Unrest*, best-selling historical nonfiction writer Erik Larson chronicles the turbulent months leading up to the start of the American Civil War. Also on the way: buzzy releases from established fiction favorites including Tana French, Kristin Hannah, and Kevin Kwan.

Here, the 25 most anticipated books of 2024.

Martyr!, Kaveh Akbar (Jan. 23)



In poet Kaveh Akbar's debut novel, a newly sober Iranian immigrant befriends a terminally ill painter living in a museum. The former shares some traits with the author—Akbar was born in Tehran and is also in recovery. *Martyr!* captures the bond between the unlikely duo, punctuated by Akbar's lyrical prose.

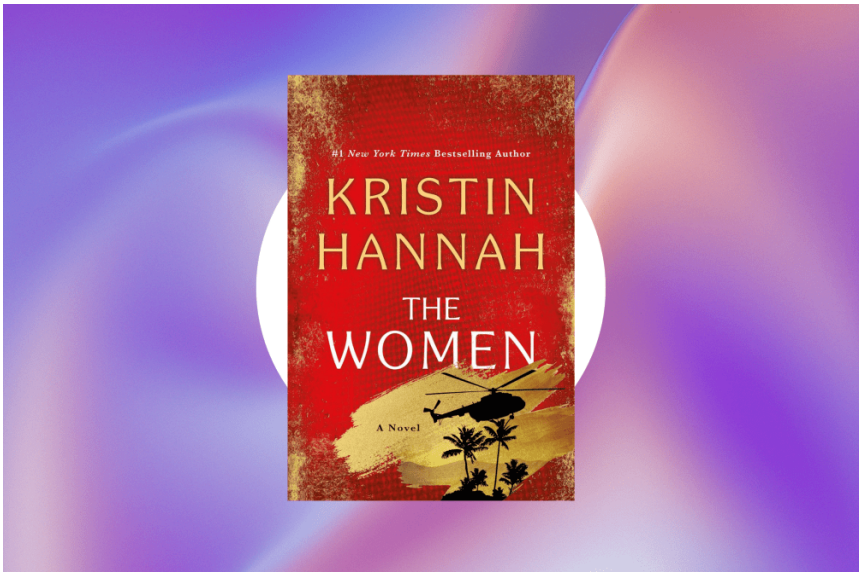
Buy Now: *Martyr!* on Bookshop | Amazon

Come and Get It, Kiley Reid (Jan. 30)

Kiley Reid's 2019 debut novel *Such a Fun Age*, which was longlisted for a Booker Prize, centered on the relationship between a babysitter and her wealthy employer. In her follow-up, Reid draws on similar themes, again focusing on a young woman struggling to make ends meet who comes to rely on an older woman with more resources. This time, it's a resident assistant carrying out questionable tasks for a visiting professor at the University of Arkansas. As their relationship grows more complicated, Reid unveils another twisty narrative full of observations about class and power.

Buy Now: *Come and Get It* on Bookshop | Amazon

The Women, Kristin Hannah (Feb. 6)

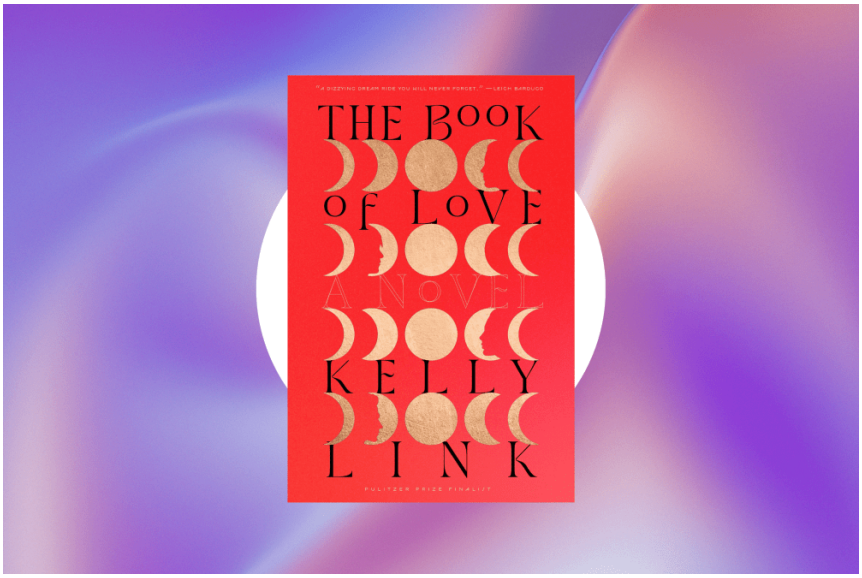


In 2015, Kristin Hannah's best-selling novel *The Nightingale* explored the myriad ways that French women both played a role in and were deeply impacted by World War II. In *The Women*, she delves into how the lives of young American women who volunteered to serve in Vietnam were shaped by the conflict. The historical fiction epic centers on Frances "Frankie" McGrath, a 20-year-old nursing student who enlists in the Army Nursing Corps in 1965 right before her older brother Finley is killed overseas.

Hannah’s latest is both a coming-of-age story and an examination of a turbulent and divisive era.

Buy Now: *The Women* on Bookshop | Amazon

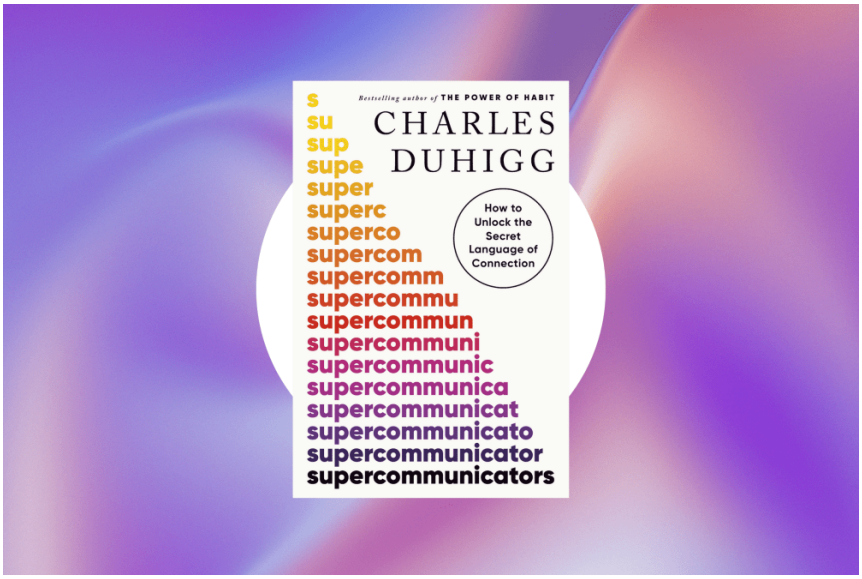
The Book of Love, Kelly Link (Feb. 13)



In her highly anticipated debut novel, Pulitzer Prize finalist Kelly Link takes readers on a surreal journey to a fictional coastal town in Massachusetts. It's been nearly a year since teenagers Laura, Daniel, and Mo disappeared and were later presumed dead—leaving Laura's sister Susannah grieving and alone. But then the impossible happens: the trio, alongside another older spirit, are resurrected by a mystical being the kids previously knew as their high-school music teacher. The four formerly deceased characters are forced to compete in a series of high-stakes magical challenges. The winners get to stay alive—and the losers will be sent back to the realm of the dead. Link weaves together elements of horror, fantasy, and magical realism in a twisting, turning, and often whimsical tale.

Buy Now: *The Book of Love* on Bookshop | Amazon

Supercommunicators, Charles Duhigg (Feb. 20)



Through deep reporting and scientific research, Charles Duhigg, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Power of Habit*, breaks down his tools for becoming someone with the ability to effectively communicate in any scenario, otherwise known as a "supercommunicator." Duhigg argues there are three types of conversations—practical, emotional, and social—and supercommunicators can recognize which they are having and understand how to adapt accordingly. Drawing on exchanges ranging from a jury deliberation to a surgeon advising a patient, Duhigg provides a framework for having more empathetic and productive interactions.

Buy Now: *Supercommunicators* on Bookshop | Amazon

Splinters, Leslie Jamison (Feb. 20)

In a memoir that centers the trials and triumphs of motherhood, Leslie Jamison, the best-selling author of *The Recovering* and *The Empathy Exams*, recounts the disintegration of her marriage in the months after her daughter was born. Through piercing prose, Jamison delivers an intimate account of her relationships with men, her parents, her child, and herself as she investigates, in her own words, the "difference between the story of love and the texture of living it."

Buy Now: *Splinters* on Bookshop | Amazon

Grief Is for People, Sloane Crosley (Feb. 27)

From the author of the 2022 novel *Cult Classic* and the 2008 best-selling essay collection *I Was Told There'd Be Cake* comes a memoir about friendship, love, and death. Shortly after Sloane Crosley's New York apartment was burglarized, one of her closest friends, book publicist Russell Perreault, died by suicide. Crosley unpacks that distressing time, which took place over the span of just one month in 2019, to craft a poignant remembrance of her late mentor—an influential yet flawed figure in the high-pressure publishing industry. She elegantly processes her grief over two seemingly unconnected traumas in her life.

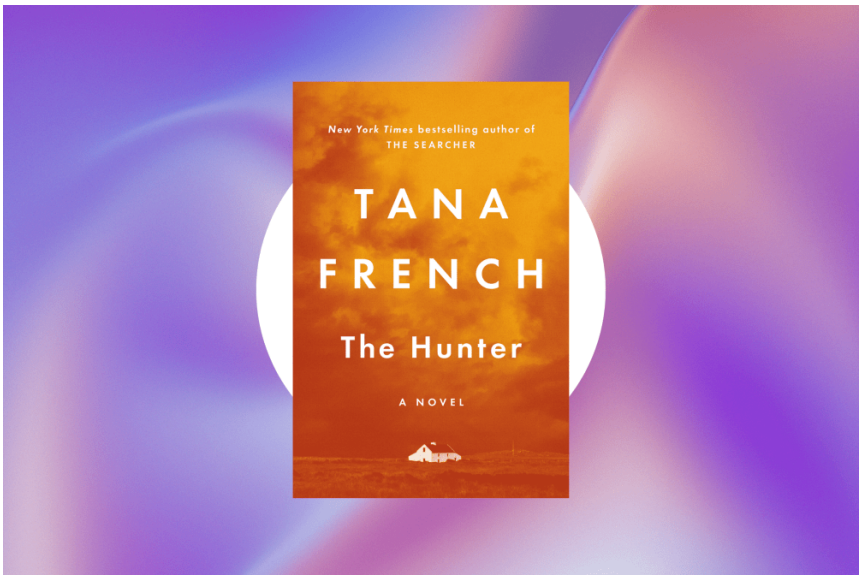
Buy Now: *Grief Is for People* on Bookshop | Amazon

Wandering Stars, Tommy Orange (Feb. 27)

Pulitzer Prize finalist Tommy Orange's new historical fiction novel imagines how three generations of a family are affected by the real-life Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, in which more than 230 Cheyenne and Arapaho people were killed by the U.S. Army in Colorado. Orange follows the son of a survivor of the attack, a boy who is sent to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School and taught a curriculum designed to erase Native American history. *Wandering Stars* flips forward to 2018, in the aftermath of a shooting, and reveals how the past is tied to the present.

Buy Now: *Wandering Stars* on Bookshop | Amazon

The Hunter, Tana French (March 5)



Contemporary mystery master Tana French returns to the fictional West Irish village of Ardnakelty for a sequel to her Western-inspired 2020 novel *The Searcher*. In that book, retired Chicago police detective Cal Hooper moved to the sleepy rural enclave to rebuild his life, and was drawn into a missing-persons case by local teenager Trey Reddy. *The Hunter* picks up two years later with Cal and his girlfriend acting as parental figures to Trey, whose long-absent father returns to Ardnakelty with a scheme to find gold in the remote town. But Trey's not happy to see him—and wants revenge. Hailed as the queen of Irish crime fiction, French spins a taut tale of retribution, sacrifice, and family.

Buy Now: *The Hunter* on Bookshop | Amazon

Anita de Monte Laughs Last, Xochitl Gonzalez (March 5)

In Xochitl Gonzalez's new novel, a first-generation Ivy League art history major named Raquel discovers the work of Anita de Monte, a popular 1980s artist who was mysteriously found dead in New York City. As Raquel researches de Monte's life, she starts dating another student, who is older and has many connections in the art world. Raquel begins to see parallels between her life and de Monte's, leading her to question her relationship and her place on campus. Just like her 2022 best seller *Olga Dies Dreaming*, Gonzalez's latest is a dissection of social status and privilege.

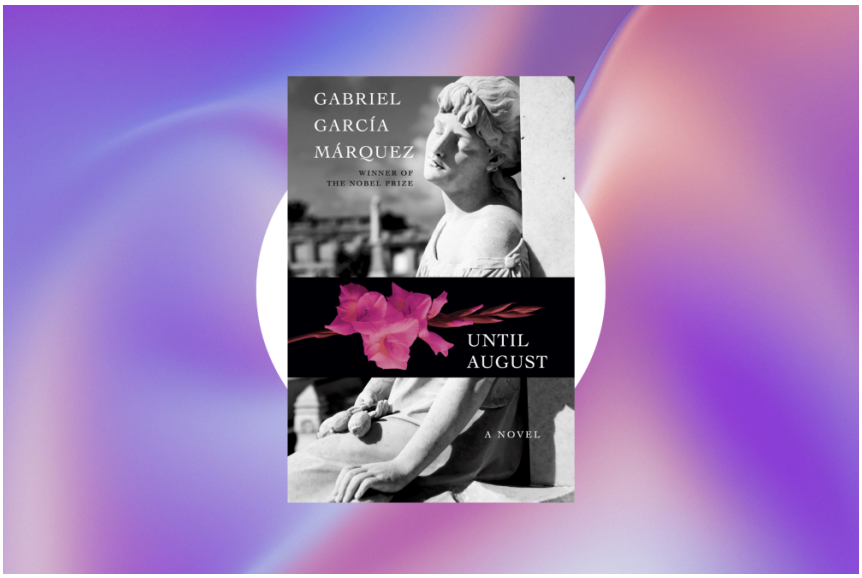
Buy Now: *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* on Bookshop | Amazon

The House of Hidden Meanings, RuPaul (March 5)

RuPaul, star of the hit reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, has written three autobiographical books, but his fourth might be his most personal. In the upcoming memoir, RuPaul details the challenges of growing up Black and queer with a father who was out of the picture, and how he found love and family with his husband George LeBar. As he said in a video statement, "This world today feels so hostile and it's such a scary place to be vulnerable in, but I did it. So get ready."

Buy Now: *The House of Hidden Meanings* on Bookshop | Amazon

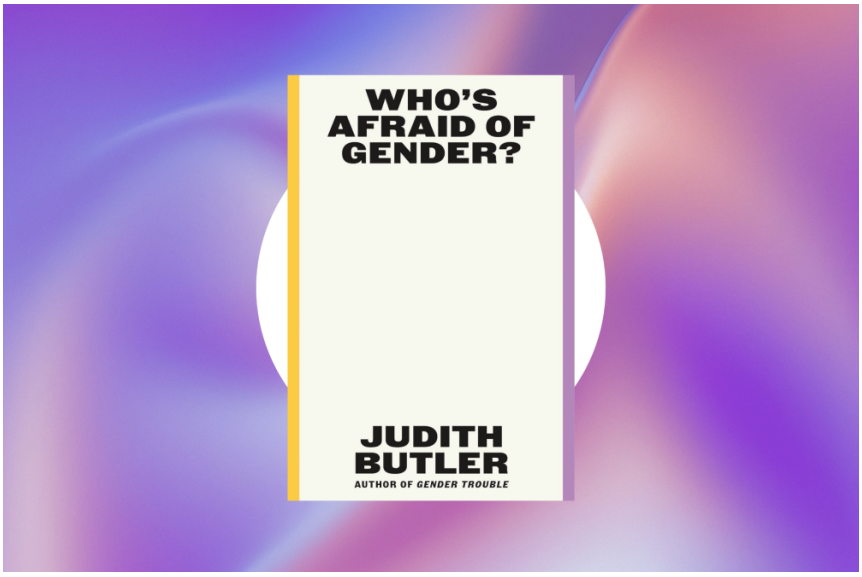
Until August, Gabriel García Márquez (March 12)



Arriving almost a decade after Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez's death is a recently rediscovered novel, translated by Anne McLean from the original Spanish. *Until August* is set in the Caribbean, where a woman married for 27 years takes a new lover every time she comes to visit her mother's grave. As she gives into her desires, a powerful narrative about love and freedom emerges. The novel promises to be full of the absurd circumstances the Colombian magical realism master is known for.

Buy Now: *Until August* on Bookshop | Amazon

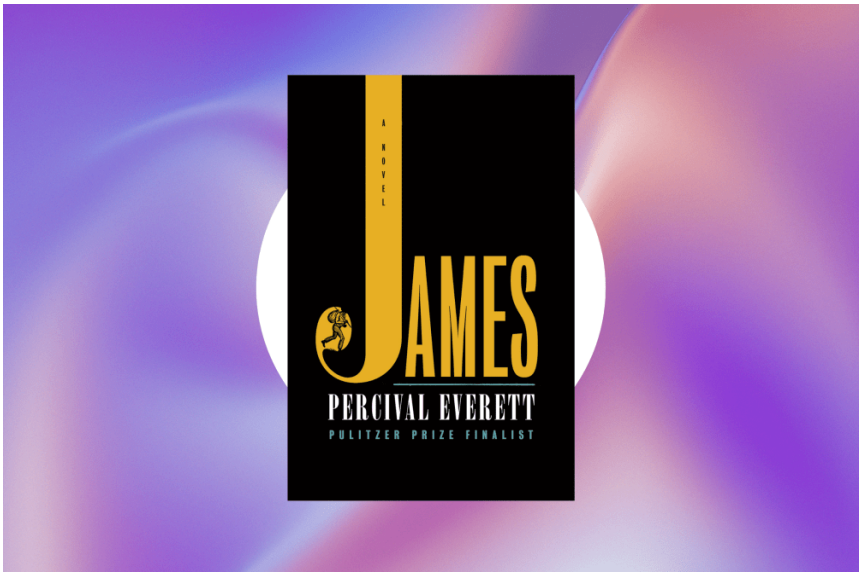
Who's Afraid of Gender?, Judith Butler (March 19)



Preeminent gender studies scholar Judith Butler unpacks how authoritarian regimes and fascist movements use anti-gender ideology as a fear-mongering tool to distract from globally destructive forces like war and climate change. At a time when anti-LGBTQ and anti-trans rhetoric is being weaponized by right-wing extremists around the world, Butler argues that opposing these conservative and incendiary concepts requires solidarity among all those fighting for equality.

Buy Now: *Who's Afraid of Gender?* on Bookshop | Amazon

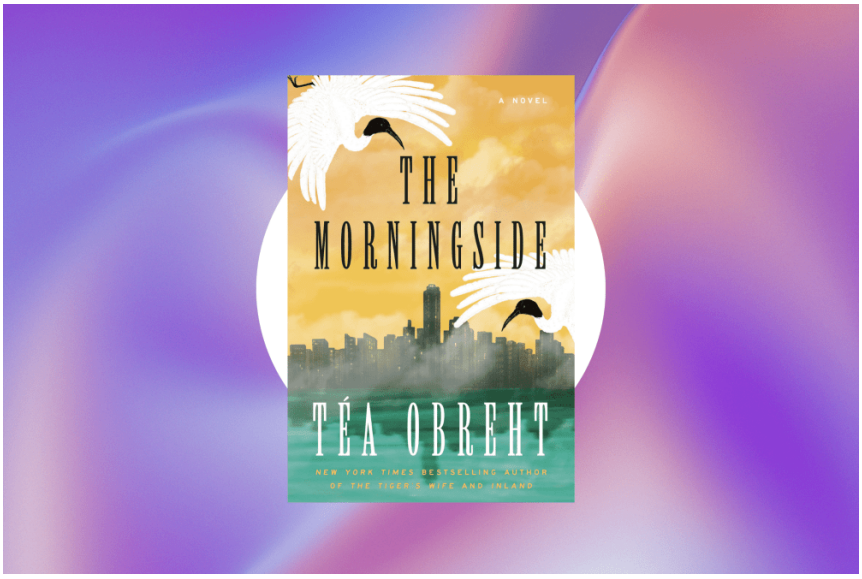
James, Percival Everett (March 19)



Pulitzer Pulitzer finalist Percival Everett reimagines *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from the point of view of Finn's enslaved friend Jim in his new novel *James*. In this gripping thriller, Huck Finn has embarked on a journey down the Mississippi River after faking his own death to escape his abusive father, and Jim goes into hiding on an island when he finds out he's going to be sold into slavery and separated from his family.

Buy Now: *James* on Bookshop | Amazon

The Morningside, Téa Obreht (March 19)



In *The Morningside*, Téa Obreht introduces us to the half-underwater ruins of Island City (an apparent fictional facsimile of Manhattan), where preteen Silvia and her unnamed mother have just moved into a decaying luxury high-rise. Adapted from Obreht's 2020 short story of the same name, the dreamlike novel draws on elements of folklore and fairy tales for a narrative set eerily close to present day that explores environmental collapse and human resilience.

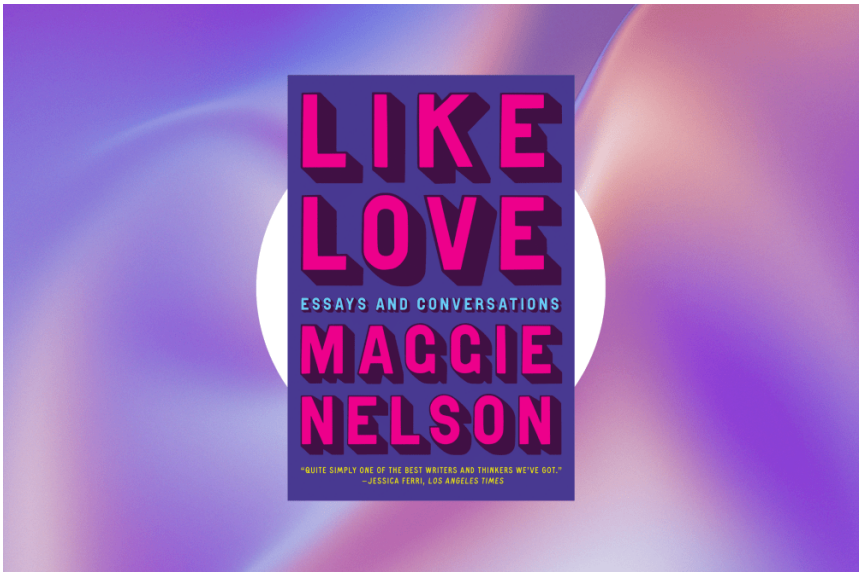
Buy Now: *The Morningside* on Bookshop | Amazon

There's Always This Year, Hanif Abdurraqib (March 26)

Cultural critic Hanif Abdurraqib looks at basketball as a lens to try and understand why some people make it big in America and others don't. He weaves together threads from his own relationship to the sport alongside history and contemplates the meaning of home. Like he did in his 2021 book *A Little Devil in America*, which was a finalist for a National Book Award, Abdurraqib distills a huge aspect of American culture to consider its societal implications.

Buy Now: *There's Always This Year* on Bookshop | Amazon

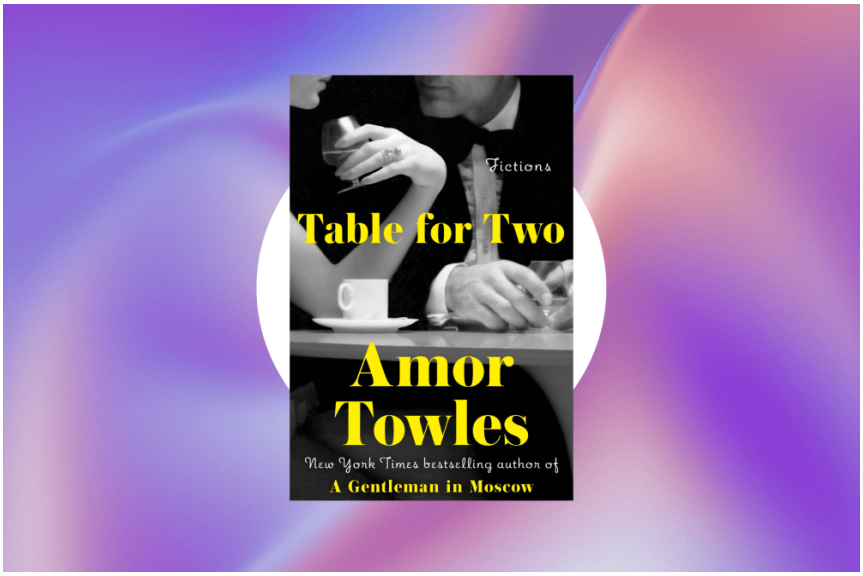
Like Love, Maggie Nelson (April 2)



A collection of essays drawn from nearly 20 years of genre-defying author Maggie Nelson's work, *Like Love* offers incisive commentary on topics ranging from music and literature to feminism and queerness to motherhood and love. Featuring cultural criticism, conversations with friends, and tributes to beloved artists like Björk and Prince, the chronological anthology examines the purpose of art and how Nelson's relationship to her own writing has changed over time.

Buy Now: *Like Love* on Bookshop | Amazon

Table for Two, Amor Towles (April 2)

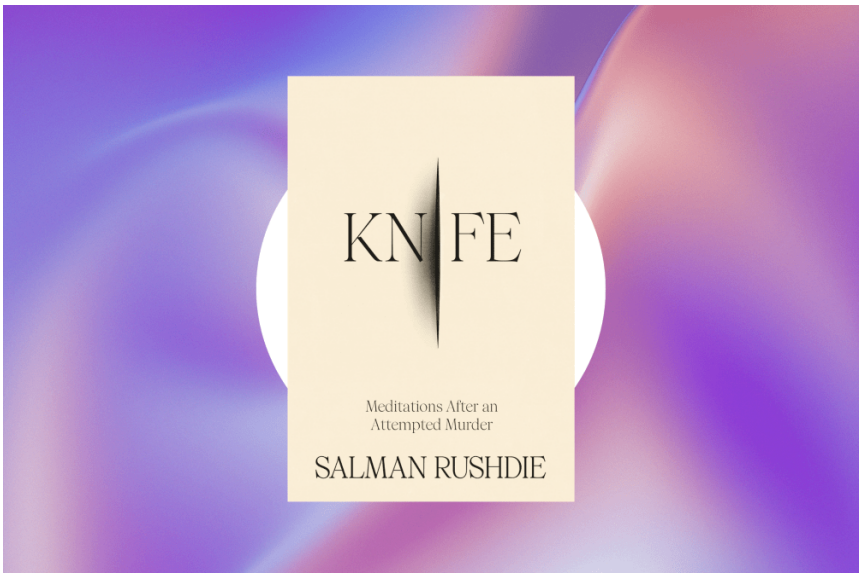


Amor Towles' latest is an immersive collection of short works of fiction set in turn-of-the-millennium New York and Golden Age Hollywood. The book features six short stories and a novella that centers on Evelyn Ross, a character from Towles' debut novel *The Rules of Civility*. The author, whose previous three novels have collectively sold more than six million copies worldwide, told *Today* that the majority of the narratives in *Table for Two* deal with fateful encounters between strangers or family members. "When I finished the collection," he said, "it occurred to me that in many of the stories, a critical moment in the tale involved two of the

characters facing each other across a kitchen table to confront some new reality in their lives.”

Buy Now: *Table for Two* on Bookshop | Amazon

Knife, Salman Rushdie (April 16)



On Aug. 12, 2022, Booker Prize winner Salman Rushdie survived a stabbing in which he lost sight in one eye and the use of one of his hands (the latter is coming back). While he’s best known for his magical realism, Rushdie draws on his own experience recovering from the traumatic attack in his latest book. In an interview with TIME earlier this year, the novelist described writing the book as part of his healing process—“a way of kind of taking charge of it”—and not letting the incident control him.

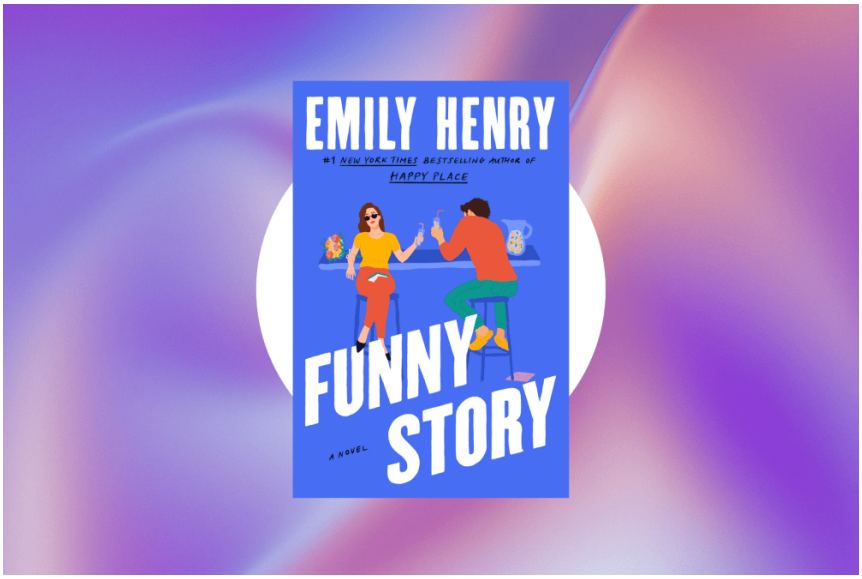
Buy Now: *Knife* on Bookshop | Amazon

Real Americans, Rachel Khong (April 30)

In her second novel, Rachel Khong serves up a story about race and power in America. Like her 2017 debut *Goodbye, Vitamin*, *Real Americans* is set on the West Coast, this time on a small island off the coast of Washington state. It's 2021, and Lily Chen is a single mom raising a 15-year-old boy who decides to search for his birth father. But the journey is complex—and uncovering answers about the boy's father only leads to more questions. By following three generations of the family, Khong explores the forces that shape a person's sense of self and probes the connection between identity and fate.

Buy Now: *Real Americans* on Bookshop | Amazon

Funny Story, Emily Henry (April 23)



A rising–star writer of literary romance, Emily Henry has garnered a devout readership by consistently delivering dreamy modern love stories. Building on a run of best-sellers—from *Beach Read* (2020) to *Happy Place* (2023)—in which Henry found innovative ways to subvert tropes of the genre, *Funny Story* puts the author's signature spin on the idea that opposites attract. The novel centers on Daphne, a down-on-her-luck librarian whose fiancé Peter recently dumped her for his childhood best friend Petra. Finding herself at a crossroads, Daphne decides to move in with Petra's ex-boyfriend Miles. Hijinks, heartache, and a healthy dose of temptation ensue.

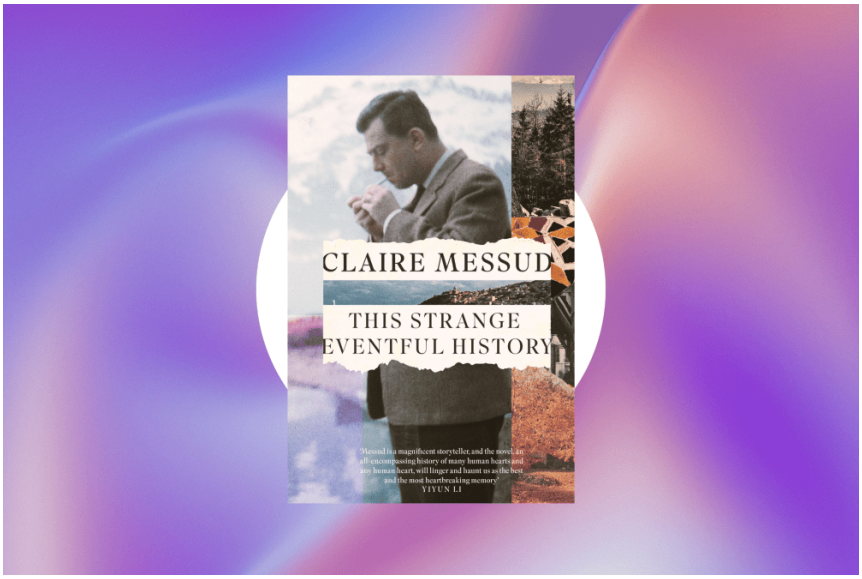
Buy Now: *Funny Story* on Bookshop | Amazon

The Demon of Unrest, Erik Larson (April 30)

Best-selling author Erik Larson has spent his writing career meticulously reconstructing critical junctures in history, from the 1893 Chicago World's Fair in *The Devil in the White City* to the rise of the Third Reich in *In the Garden of Beasts* to the sinking of the Lusitania in *Dead Wake*. Larson's nonfiction accounts of these fateful events feel like novels, making his books as readable as they are informative. In *The Demon of Unrest*, Larson digs into the months between Abraham Lincoln's election as the 16th president of the United States and Confederate forces firing the first shots of the Civil War at Fort Sumter. As Larson told the *Associated Press*, he was particularly interested in exploring "the human element—the hubris, the personalities, the ambitions, the egos"—that led to America's fracturing.

Buy Now: *The Demon of Unrest* on Bookshop | Amazon

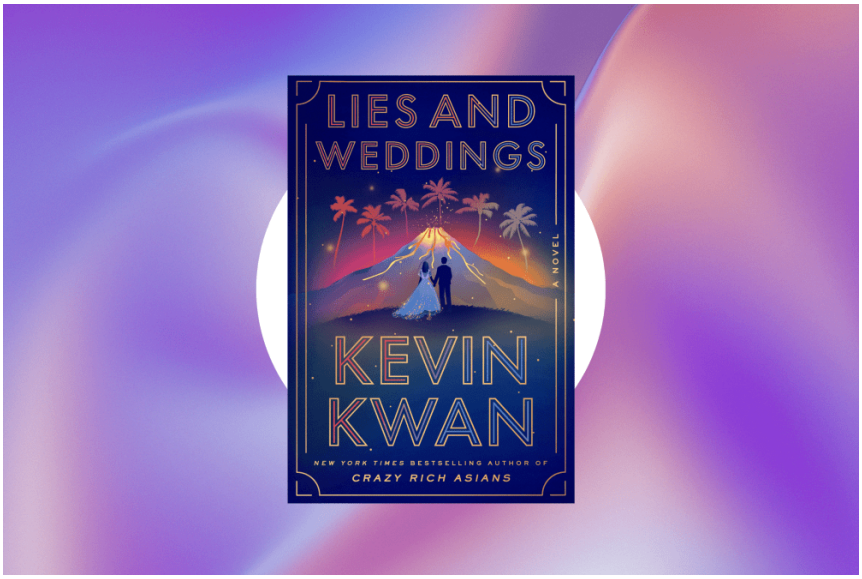
This Strange Eventful History, Claire Messud (May 14)



Inspired by acclaimed author Claire Messud's own ancestry, *This Strange Eventful History* chronicles seven decades in the lives of a fictional family of Algerian-born French citizens. Opening with the patriarch, naval attaché Gaston, while he is stationed in Greece as Paris falls to the Nazis, the novel unfolds as war, distance, politics, and faith test the family's ties. Messud follows the Cassars from 1940 to 2010, weaving a complex, multi-generational saga against the backdrop of World War II, the Algerian Revolution, and beyond.

Buy Now: *This Strange Eventful History* on Bookshop | Amazon

Lies and Weddings, Kevin Kwan (May 21)



Much like his blockbuster *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy, Kevin Kwan's latest novel satirizes super-rich Asian jetsetters—only this time he's sending up the English upper classes. In the follow-up to 2020's *Sex and Vanity*, a former Hong Kong supermodel is pressuring her son, the future Earl of Greshambury, to pursue a wealthy woman at his sister's glamorous Hawaii wedding because the family is secretly bogged down by debt. But when a volcano erupts and ruins the nuptials, it also knocks all of the schemer's plans off course. What ensues is a hilarious, richly detailed family affair that takes place around the world, from Hawaii to Venice to Los Angeles to the English countryside.

Buy Now: *Lies and Weddings* on Bookshop | Amazon

Tehrangeles, Porochista Khakpour (June 11)

The tragicomic novel from Porochista Khakpour follows the Milani family, Iranian American multimillionaires and wannabe reality TV show stars in the City of Angels. They are finally close to landing their own series, but before the cameras even start rolling, family secrets start leaking out. The Milanis begin to realize the price of fame—and it might just be their downfall.

Buy Now: *Tehrangeles* on Bookshop | Amazon

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The Most Anticipated Albums of 2024

Moises Mendez II is a reporter at TIME. He covers internet culture, music, movies, TV, books, and podcasts.

A treasure trove of music is slated to be released in 2024. New albums from Jennifer Lopez, who released her first album since 2014, *This Is Me… Now*, in February, and Usher, who hadn't put out an album in five years, have kicked off the year—and there's still so much more to come.

Beyoncé and Taylor Swift, whose new releases *Act II* and *The Tortured Poets Department* arrive in March and April, respectively, will soundtrack the spring. Since announcing the album at the 2024 Grammy Awards, Swift has revealed more information about the

song titles, various album covers, and bonus tracks in the leadup to its release.

Just after teasing *Act II* at the Super Bowl in February, Beyoncé dropped two singles from the upcoming album, “Texas Hold ‘Em” and “16 Carriages.” “Texas Hold ‘Em” topped charts in the U.S., and made history when Beyoncé became the first Black female artist to have a No. 1 country song.

In 2024, we can also expect new music from Shakira, Kacey Musgraves, Dua Lipa, and Sheryl Crow. Music releases are a delicate balance. Artists are known to pull or postpone projects—for example, Nick Minaj’s highly anticipated new album, her first since 2018, was supposed to come out Nov. 17 but didn’t actually release until Dec. 8. Ahead of the new year, Cardi B has released a string of features and two singles, but has not spoken at length about when fans can expect a new album. And pop phenom Dua Lipa released the lead single, “Houdini,” for her upcoming album, out in May.

While the world waits for more details on the status of albums from their favorite artists, here are some of the most anticipated albums of 2024.

Orquideas, Kali Uchis (Jan. 12)

Kali Uchis’ *Red Moon in Venus*, a lush soundscape that fully encapsulates listeners with soft, feathery vocals, was our pick for the best album of 2022. The Colombian singer is gearing up for her second all-Spanish-language project, *Orquideas*, which is due out at the top of 2024. The lead single, “Muñekita,” was a dembow-forward slamming banger featuring El Alfa, one of the frontmen leading dembow’s crossover to American audiences, and JT from the rap duo City Grils. She’s also released the bolero-inspired song, “Te Mata” and the KAROL G-assisted track, “Labios Mordidos.”

Savior, Green Day (Jan. 19)

Green Day is starting out the year with their 14th album and first in three years, *Savior*. The beloved punk-rock band began the album rollout with the lead single, “The American Dream is Killing Me,” and has since released two more tracks ahead of the album’s Jan. 19 release—”Look Ma, No Brains!” and “Dilemma.” A stadium tour is set to be making stops across North America with supporting acts like The Smashing Pumpkins, The Linda Lindas and Rancid.

What Now, Brittany Howard (Feb. 2)

Brittany Howard is a powerhouse vocalist who served as the frontwoman of the Alabama Shakes and has since become the star of her own solo career. Her last album, *Jaime*, was met with critical acclaim and the single, “Stay High” earned Howard a Grammy for Best Rock Song—making it her fifth award. In 2024, she is making a comeback with her second studio album, *What Now*, releasing a single of the same name ahead of its release.

Coming Home, Usher (Feb. 11)

Usher has a lot to look forward to in 2024. Not only is he going to be taking the stage at the Super Bowl Halftime Show, but on the same day, he is releasing his ninth studio album, *Coming Home*. His recent single, “Good Good” featuring R&B and rap heavyweights, Summer Walker and 21 Savage, garnered praise in 2023, but Usher got real Internet attention this year after he got KeKe Palmer to star in the music video for his song, “Boyfriend.” It was a strategic move after Palmer’s ex-boyfriend publicized his discomfort with her being serenaded by Usher at his Las Vegas residency, which is a routine part of his act. The mononymous singer has ruled the R&B game for so long, so we’re definitely looking forward to seeing what his new album will bring.

This Is Me… Now, Jennifer Lopez (Feb. 16)

The last time Jennifer Lopez released an album was in 2014 and a lot has happened since then. She was engaged to baseball player Alex Rodriguez before the couple broke up in 2021. In 2022, she got back together with Ben Affleck, who served as the main inspiration for her 2002 album, *This is Me… Then*. Now that the two are back together, she's releasing a sequel to the album titled, *This Is Me… Now*. The new music will be accompanied by a film of the same name on Prime Video.

Eternal Sunshine, Ariana Grande (Mar. 8)

The seventh studio album from Ariana Grande will arrive in March. Titled *eternal sunshine* in reference to the 2004 film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, the album's first single, "yes, and?", released in early January, set the stage for what to expect. The video for the song included a card featuring coordinates to Montauk, New York, the setting of the movie which was a favorite of Grande's late boyfriend Mac Miller. The two shared a love of the actor Jim Carrey, who starred in the film. In 2013, Miller told *Complex*, "I love Jim Carrey when he's being serious. He killed this role. Whenever I'm talking to a girl, I always tell them to watch *Eternal Sunshine*. It cuts deep."

Bleachers, Bleachers (Mar. 8)

When Jack Antonoff is not busy producing albums with Taylor Swift, Lorde, or Lana Del Rey, he works on music with the band Bleachers, which released its debut album in 2014. Following two more albums, Bleachers will release a fourth self-titled album in 2024.

Deeper Well, Kacey Musgraves (Mar. 15)

Kacey Musgraves' Album of the Year win at the 2019 Grammy Awards catapulted the country-pop singer to stardom. *Golden Hour* became a favorite to those who were new to Musgraves, and her 2021 follow-up, *star-crossed*, kept her fans hooked. Almost three years later, she is returning with a new album called *Deeper Well*. Musgraves released the somber title track in early February On her fifth album, she worked with her long-time producers and collaborators, Ian Fitchuk and Daniel Tashian.

World Wide Whack, Tierra Whack (Mar. 15)

Tierra Whack is one of the most zany characters in the rap game, but don't let her vibrant personality distract you from her serious talent. Following her feature onLil Yachty's "T.D.," her first album, *Whack World*, which consists of 15 one-minute tracks, and a few EPs, Whack will release a full LP, *World Wide Whack*—which she has called her official debut album.

Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran, Shakira (Mar. 22)

Over the course of her decades-long career, superstar Shakira holds the record for best-selling female Latin artist in history. The singer has announced that she will be releasing her first album in seven years, *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran*. The title seems to come from one of the most notable lines in her juggernaut hit "Shakira: Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53" with the Argentinian producer and viral hitmaker Bizarrap, where she sings, "las mujeres ya no lloran, las mujeres facturan," translating to, "women no longer cry, they make money." According to the newly released tracklist, she has a new song with Bizarrap on the way. The two made magic together last year after he gave Shakira space to sing about her highly-publicized split from her husband Gerard Piqué; she has since been on a journey of reclaiming the narrative, not as a woman scorned, but as an empowered mother who rises above it all. Last year saw multiple hits from Shakira's collaborations with Colombian

superstar Karol G's "TQG" and her singles "Copa Vacía" with Manuel Turizo and "El Jefe" with Fuerza Regida, all of which are going to be on the album. Also on the tracklist, she has new collaborations with Rauw Alejandro, Cardi B, and Grupo Frontera. The album boasts 16 tracks—eight of which are new—and a Tiësto remix of her viral Bizarrap song.

Tyla, Tyla (Mar. 22)

Tyla had a huge year with the success of her single, "Water," which inspired a viral dance craze online. The hashtag #TylaWater has over 1.2 billion views on TikTok, helping Tyla catapult into stardom and earning her her first Grammy nomination in the Best African Music category—which is also a first for the category. After releasing

For Your Consideration, Empress Of (Mar. 22)

Rising artist Empress Of will release a new album called *For Your Consideration* in late March. The LA-based singer whose real name is Lorely Rodriguez, has already released three singles off the album. "Femenine," "Kiss Me," featuring British pop-rock darling Rina Sawayama, and "Kiss Me," a collaboration with the band MUNA. On the album, she sings in both English and Spanish. The title of the album comes from a previous relationship she had with a director who was announcing his "For Your Consideration" campaign for the Oscars. "He took me up on a hill and said he was emotionally unavailable and he kind of broke my heart," she tells *Pitchfork*. "That was the gateway for the album and it gave me the opportunity to explore broader themes."

Act II, Beyoncé (Mar. 29)

Beyoncé's *Renaissance*, referred to as Act I, has prompted speculation about what Acts II and III could be since its release in

July 2022. During the Super Bowl, Beyoncé gave a look at Act II when she starred in a Verizon commercial. At the end of the ad, she says, “Okay, they’re ready. Drop the new music.” Soon after, Beyoncé dropped a teaser video that on her Instagram that announced a new album, *Act II*, would be released on Mar. 29. She also released two new country songs, “16 Carriages” and “Texas Hold ‘Em.”

Evolution, Sheryl Crow (Mar. 29)

The music legend doesn’t quit. In 2018, Sheryl Crow said she wouldn’t be releasing any more music after her album that year. In a press release announcing the album, Crow said that she started writing and the songs “just kept flowing out of me and it was pretty obvious this was going to be an album.” The new LP is set to be nine tracks long, and she recently released the lead single, “Alarm Clock.”

Found Heaven, Conan Gray (April 5)

Conan Gray’s third album, *Found Heaven*, will drop in April. Based on the four singles he’s released so far—”Killing Me,” “Never Ending Song,” “Winner,” and the most recent single, “Lonely Dancers”—Gray is fully leaning into a retro-80s aesthetic for the new record. The newest single heavily samples the 1982 smash hit “Safety Dance” by Men Without Hats and was produced by pop’s biggest hitmaker Max Martin along with ILYA, and Oscar Holter.

Don’t Forget Me, Maggie Rogers (April 12)

Maggie Rogers has been releasing consistently great music since her debut single “Alaska,” left superstar producer Pharrell Williams speechless when he first heard it in 2016. Since then, she’s released two albums—her debut *Heard It In a Past Life*, and 2022’s

Surrender. For that project, Rogers attended a songwriting camp hosted by none other than prolific singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell and had other famous attendees, including Brandi Carlisle and Harry Styles. With this new album, Rogers wrote in a newsletter posted to her Instagram last week that she worked a majority of the songs with Ian Fitchuk—eight out of the 10 songs—and the last two she "uncovered on [her] own and were the product of [her] long friendship with Lee Foster. She also wrote that in many ways this album feels like a return to form for, inspiring the feelings she felt while making art at 16 years old, saying, "I wanted to make an album that felt like a Sunday afternoon."

I'm Doing It Again Baby!, Girl in Red (April 12)

Norwegian singer-songwriter girl in red has become a critical darling of the indie pop world, with her debut 2021 album *if i could make it go quiet* getting generally positive reviews. After the success of her debut album and serving as an opener for some dates on Taylor Swift's massively popular Eras Tour, she is releasing a new album titled *I'm Doing It Again Baby* in April.

The Tortured Poets Department, Taylor Swift (April. 19)

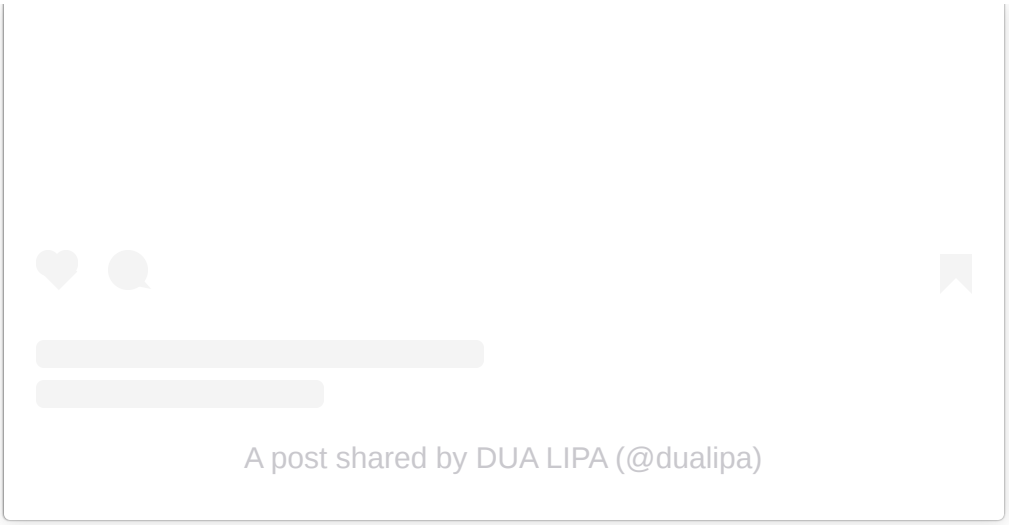
View this post on Instagram

A post shared by Taylor Swift (@taylorswift)

While accepting her 13th Grammy Award this year, Taylor Swift zigged when we all thought she'd zag. Everyone was convinced that Taylor Swift would announce that she was releasing her fifth re-recorded album, *Reputation (Taylor's Version)*; instead she announced she was releasing a brand new album: *The Tortured Poets Department* will come out on April 19. Immediately after getting off-stage, she released the cover art for the album and later released the tracklist, revealing she collaborated with Post Malone and Florence and the Machine.

Radical Optimism, Dua Lipa (May 3)

View this post on Instagram



Dua Lipa has found a sound that works for her. The pop superstar had a massive hit with the glittery-disco *Barbie* movie soundtrack single, “Dance The Night.” Now she’s focused on her own music and released “Houdini,” the lead single to her forthcoming third studio album. This will follow the runaway success of her LP, *Future Nostalgia*, which soundtracked the early days of the pandemic.

What a devastating turn of events, Rachel Chinouriri (May 3)

Rachel Chinouriri is taking the internet by storm with her infectious, earworm-y single, “Never Need Me,” a pop rock-leaning banger about letting go of a persistent ex who is no good for you. The song became a hit on social media, even making its way to Adele, who spoke about Chinouriri at one of her shows and said she’ll be going to her concert in March. The album will be Chinouriri’s debut, and based on the first two singles, listeners are in for a treat.

Fine Ho, Stay, Flo Milli (TBA)

Flo Milli’s swagger comes through in every single one of her songs, making her one of the emerging rappers in recent years to

keep an eye on. It's impossible not to feel like a bad bitch listening to her music. In 2019, the Alabama rapper found viral fame with her song, "Beef FloMix" and that built the perfect foundation for her first mixtape, 2020's *Ho, why is you here?* The 23-year-old burgeoning star released her second project, *You Still Here, Ho?* in 2022 and in 2024, fans can expect her third album, *Fine Ho, Stay*. While her fans wait for an official release date, they can listen to a number of her viral hits like "In The Party" or her most recent single, "Never Lose Me," which is currently gaining traction online.

TBA, Cardi B (TBA)

The Bronx rapper came out swinging in 2018 with her debut studio album, *Invasion of Privacy*, earning her a Grammy award for Best Rap album. She made history as the first solo female artist to win in the category (Ms. Lauryn Hill was the first female to get a Grammy in this category for her work with the Fugees). Ever since her rise to rap superstardom, the world has been awaiting a new Cardi B record. After taking some time off to focus on her two young kids, Kulture and Wave, the rapper is making her comeback and is set to release her first album in five years following the release of her lead single, the Megan Thee Stallion-assisted "Bongos."

TBA, Tems (TBA)

The Nigerian singer Tems is on the rise. She was included on TIME 100 Next this year, racking up award nominations—earlier this year she won a Grammy for her feature on Future's "Wait For U" and another nom for her work on Beyoncé's *Renaissance*. Next year she'll be in the running for the Best Song Written for Visual Media category as she wrote on Rihanna's "Lift Me Up" for the *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* soundtrack. 2024 is gearing up to be Tems' year as she rounds out 2023 with two solo singles, "Me &

U," and the recently released, "NOT AN ANGEL." No word on a new album title or release date yet.

Viscera, Miguel (TBA)

Miguel had a big year in 2023 with his 2010 hit "Sure Thing" as it found a second life on TikTok and took it back to the top of the charts. The 13-year-old song peaked at No. 11 on the Billboard Hot 100 earlier this year. Following the success of his old song, the R&B singer is gearing up to release his fifth studio album, *Viscera*, sometime in 2024. His fans were given a taste of the album's new sound with the release of the first song, "Give It To Me."

TBA, J Balvin (TBA)

Fans of J Balvin were expecting a new album from the Colombian singer this fall, as reported by *Billboard*, but the album has been pushed to next year. He released the first single from the new album, "Amigos," along with the Lil Jon and Usher sampling track, "Dientes," which also features DJ Khaled. He has yet to announce the title of the album—but stay tuned. Balvin told *Billboard* in an interview that he is working with a variety of different names from producers like Tainy, Mambo Kingz, and Mura Masa, as well as collaborations with Anuel AA and Stormzy.

Lasso, Lana Del Rey (September)

The world knows Lana Del Rey as a sumptuous balladeer who usually stays within the realms of alternative pop music. But come March, audiences will be getting to know a different side of Lana. The singer announced earlier this year that her 10th studio album will be a country album titled *Lasso*, due in September. It'll be the follow-up to her album, *Did You Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd*, which was nominated for Album of the Year this year's Grammy Awards.

Dopamine, Normani (TBA)

In July 2018, four months after Fifth Harmony went on an "indefinite hiatus," Normani uploaded a tweet that said, "I have an album title, y'all." Every year since then, a user on X with the username @dizzydorahoe would reply to Normani's original tweet reminding her the fans are waiting for an album announcement. "One year… ur sick," the tweet in 2019 read. In 2020, they tweeted, "two years… ur sick." So on and so forth with the last one being added to the thread in June 2023.

> THE CYCLE HAS ENDED pic.twitter.com/mLRyHgiBAr
>
> — 𝔠𝔥𝔲𝔫𝔩𝔦 (@callmechunli__) February 21, 2024

On Feb. 21, Normani announced the name of her album, which is called *Dopamine*, in a tweet and shared the album cover art—however, there is no release date yet.

brat, Charli XCX (Summer)

Charli XCX revealed on a red carpet back in December that she finished an album. On Feb. 28, the British singer said the name of her new project is *brat*, and that it will come out this summer. Charli's last album came was 2022's *CRASH*, and in 2023, she provided a song to the *Barbie* soundtrack and remixed Caroline Polachek's "Welcome To My Island" with her fiancé The 1975's George Daniel.

Lana, SZA (TBA)

SZA's second album, *SOS*, kicked off another big year for the artist; at this year's Grammy Awards, she was the most nominated artist of the night with nine nods. In her Oct. 2023 cover story with *Rolling Stone*, she announced that a deluxe version of SOS called

Lana, consisting of 10 new songs, will arrive at a still undetermined time. So far, SZA's released one song from the forthcoming work: "Saturn."

Correction, Dec. 21: *The original version of this story mischaracterized the movie that will be released with Jennifer Lopez's forthcoming album. It will be a film, but not a documentary.*

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The 31 Most Anticipated TV Shows of 2024

Laura Zornosa is a reporter at TIME. She covers TV, film, books, music, and pop culture. She was awarded a reporting fellowship grant from the Pulitzer Center.

Following a predictable trend, more than half of the shows on this list are based on pre-existing intellectual property, or IP: novels old and new, like *Monsieur Spade* (*The Maltese Falcon* by Samuel Dashiell Hammett) and *Expats* (*The Expatriates* by Janice Y. K. Lee); nonfiction books, like *Masters of the Air* (*Masters of the Air* by Donald L. Miller) and *Franklin* (*A Great Improvisation* by Stacy Schiff); movies, like *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (2005's *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*); TV shows, like *Parish* (2014's *The Driver*) and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*; video game franchises, like *Fallout*; and comic books, like *The Penguin* (characters created for DC).

And then there are the shows inspired by existing history, textbook or onscreen: *Griselda*, *Genius: MLK/X*, *The New Look*. With so much TV based on IP, there is less room for original ideas brainstormed by creative screenwriters. But 2024 will see a few original series break through, including *The Brothers Sun*, *Death*

and Other Details, and *The Regime*. As the delightfully inventive *Curb Your Enthusiasm* draws to a close after 12 beloved seasons, one must wonder: Is it setting a precedent?

Here are the TV shows we're most looking forward to in 2024.

New Releases

The Brothers Sun

Jan. 4 on Netflix

Bruce (Sam Song Li) is just a normal guy in California—or at least he wants to be. That hope is thwarted, though, with the abrupt arrival of his brother, Charles (Justin Chien), from Taipei. Charles brings with him the shocking revelations that their father is a Taiwanese triad kingpin, and their mother, Eileen (Michelle Yeoh), had moved to the U.S. to escape that life, but now ruthless gangsters have followed Charles and are coming for the Sun family.

Echo

Jan. 10 on Disney+ and Hulu

Maya Lopez, or Echo (Alaqua Cox), entered the Marvel Cinematic Universe in the 2021 miniseries *Hawkeye*. Then, she was the head of the criminal gang Tracksuit Mafia, working under the crime lord Wilson Fisk, or Kingpin (Vincent D'Onofrio). Now, Echo, who is deaf, has returned to her Oklahoma hometown. She's reckoning with her past—which heavily involves Kingpin, her adoptive uncle, who is responsible for her father's death—and reconnecting with her Native American roots.

Monsieur Spade

Jan. 14 on AMC

Based on the 1930 novel *The Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett—*Monsieur Spade* picks up where *The Maltese Falcon* left off. The private investigator Sam Spade (Clive Owen) is dragged out of tranquil retirement in the south of France to look into the brutal murders of a half a dozen nuns at the local convent. Their deaths, it seems, are mysteriously linked to a child that everyone is chasing, who is believed to have great powers.

Death and Other Details

Jan. 16 on Hulu

Caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, and suddenly Imogene Scott (Violett Beane) is the primary suspect in a locked-room murder. The room in question is on a sumptuous, restored Mediterranean ocean liner. But to prove her innocence and solve the crime, Imogene has to team up with Rufus Coteworth (Mandy Patinkin), the world's greatest detective, who she just so happens to hate.

Griselda

Jan. 25 on Netflix

This crime drama, "from the creative minds that brought you *Narcos*," dramatizes the life story of Colombian drug lord Griselda Blanco (Sofía Vergara.) She is framed as a jack-of-all-trades "queenpin, innovator, mother, and killer," although the real-life Griselda was ruthlessly violent. *Griselda* follows its titular character from Medellín, where she shot and killed her husband, to Miami, where she established a massive, bloody cocaine empire.

Masters of the Air

Jan. 26 on Apple TV+

Based on Donald L. Miller's 2007 book *Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany*, this war drama traces the history of the 100th Bomb Group of the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II. Austin Butler stars as Major Gale Cleven, with Callum Turner as Major John Egan, Barry Keoghan as Lt. Curtis Biddick, and Ncuti Gatwa as 2nd Lt. Robert Daniels. The companion miniseries to *Band of Brothers* tells another WWII story from producers Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg.

Expats

Jan. 26 on Prime Video

Based on Janice Y. K. Lee's 2016 novel *The Expatriates*, this drama, created by Lulu Wang, follows the intricate, interconnected lives of those living abroad in Hong Kong. The American architect Margaret (Nicole Kidman), the Korean American college grad Mercy (Ji-young Yoo), and the British expat Hilary, who desperately wants a baby (Sarayu Blue), are knit together by friendships both strong and necessarily temporary through the bumps of adult life: marriage, parenting, careers, and loss.

Genius: MLK/X

Feb. 1 on National Geographic/Feb. 2 on Disney+ and Hulu

So far, the National Geographic biographical anthology franchise *Genius* has covered Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, and Aretha Franklin. Now, its fourth season, *MLK/X* is the first to compare and contrast two historical figures: Martin Luther King Jr. (Kelvin Harrison Jr.) and Malcolm X (Aaron Pierre). The work of these two giants was constantly in conversation, and their legacies are inextricable.

Mr. & Mrs. Smith

Feb. 2 on Prime Video

This iteration of *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* is based on the titular characters from the 2005 action-comedy film by the name (starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie). But in this version, Donald Glover plays the Mr. in question and Maya Erskine plays the Mrs. Their marriage is a cover story, staged by the mysterious spy agency that both individuals work for. But can they keep up the pretense under the pressure of weekly high-risk missions? And what happens if false feelings turn real?

The New Look

Feb. 14 on Apple TV+

In the wake of the World War II Nazi occupation of Paris, the fashion designer Christian Dior (Ben Mendelsohn) is poised to launch his new fashion collection, the “New Look.” But as Dior’s star rises, Coco Chanel’s (Juliette Binoche) is at risk of waning. A star-studded ensemble—Maisie Williams as Catherine Dior, John Malkovich as Lucien Lelong, Emily Mortimer as Eva Colozzi,

Claes Bang as Hans Von Dincklage—rounds out a historical drama about the launch of modern fashion.

Avatar: The Last Airbender

Feb. 22 on Netflix

The beloved animated series gets a live-action remake—and hopefully it's a fresh take on the movie version. The premise remains the same: Siblings Katara (Kiawentiio) and Sokka (Ian Ousley) of the Southern Water Tribe discover Ang (Gordon Cormier), a 12-year-old airbender, frozen in ice, where he has been for the last hundred years. They revive him, and the three of them (and Ang's beloved sky bison, Appa) embark on a quest to help Ang become the Avatar, the master of all four elements.

Shōgun

Feb. 27 on FX/Hulu

Based on the 1975 novel by the same name by James Clavell, *Shōgun* is a period drama set in feudal Japan. Lord Toranaga (Hiroyuki Sanada) is a daimyo, a feudal lord, who is cunning and powerful but surrounded by enemies. He is juxtaposed against John Blackthorne (Cosmo Jarvis), a British sailor who winds up shipwrecked in Japan, facing a culture completely foreign to his own. And Lady Mariko (Anna Sawai) joins the fray as a mysterious female samurai with plenty to prove.

Apples Never Fall

March on Peacock

Based on the 2021 novel by Liane Moriarty, who also wrote *Big Little Lies* and *Nine Perfect Strangers*, *Apples Never Fall* is a twisty mystery about the Delany family. Joy (Annette Bening) and Stan (Sam Neill) and their four grown children—Amy (Alison Bri), Troy (Jake Lacy), Logan (Conor Merrigan-Turner), and Brooke (Essie Randles)—are hoping to spend time together after the parents sold their tennis academy. But when an injured young woman shows up at their door, the golden family's secrets start to surface.

Palm Royale

March 20 on Apple TV+

This show's ingredients are scrumptious: It's a 1969 period drama and a comedy; it stars Kristen Wiig, Laura Dern, and Ricky Martin;

and it's set in Palm Springs, billed as the most "exclusive, fashionable, and treacherous" ledge of America's high society. Based on Juliet McDaniel's 2018 novel *Mr. & Mrs. American Pie*, in *Palm Royale*, one ambitious woman, Maxime Simmons (Wiig), is more of a have-not than a have, but she's scrambling toward the towering top.

3 Body Problem

March 21 on Netflix

In physics, a three-body problem takes the positions and velocities of three point masses and solves for their subsequent motion. In this story, the three bodies in question are three sun-like stars, which means, you guessed it, alien civilization. Based on Liu Cixin's 2008 sci-fi novel by the same name, in *3 Body Problem*, the astrophysicist Ye Wenjie (Rosalind Chao) makes a decision in the '60s that will cause massive ripple effects for scientists in the present day.

Fallout

April 12 on Prime Video

Based on the role-playing video game franchise by the same name, and starring Ella Purnell as a young Vault Dweller named Lucy, *Fallout* is set in an alternate history. In this world, after World War II, nuclear technology continued to evolve until a massive nuclear war created the Wasteland, or anything outside of the Vaults. Now, 200 years later, Lucy sets out from these secure underground bunkers, where survivors of the war have proliferated, into the bizarre, brutal, retrofuturistic realities outside.

The Regime

Spring on HBO

Kate Winslet is back with another singular accent. This time, the subtle drawl belongs to a fictional Central European autocracy, where she is the chancellor in charge. This sharp political satire spans a year inside the palace of this contemporary European regime, as cracks show and it begins to crumble. Guillaume Gallienne plays the chancellor's husband, Andrea Riseborough is her palace manager, Martha Plimpton is the U.S. Secretary of State, and Hugh Grant is the leader of the opposition.

Franklin

TBD on Apple TV+

Based on the 2005 book *A Great Improvisation: Franklin, France, and the Birth of America* by Stacy Schiff, *Franklin* recounts the founding father's 8-year-long mission to France. During the Revolutionary War, while pushing 70, Franklin helped craft the 1778 Franco-American alliance. Then, in 1783, he did again in the final Treaty of Paris with England. All the while, he was navigating, dodging, and out-maneuvering French informants, British spies, and his own colleagues.

Parish

TBD on AMC

Based on the BBC One series *The Driver*, *Parish* stars Giancarlo Esposito as Garcián "Gray" Parish, a taxi driver whose life takes a sharp turn after he picks up an unusual passenger. Gray has a dark past, and thinks it is all far behind him—until now. The sudden, brutal murder of his son sends him on a spiraling quest that reawakens old habits.

The Boroughs

TBD on Netflix

The Duffer brothers, who brought us *Stranger Things*, are the executive producers behind a different supernatural series. This one is on the opposite end of the age spectrum, set in a retirement community in New Mexico. And the shadowy villain this time around is an extraterrestrial being who craves their most valuable resource: time.

A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms: The Hedge Knight

TBD on Max

This show is based on George R. R. Martin's 2015 *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms*, which compiles the first three prequel novellas to *A Song of Ice and Fire*: "The Hedge Knight," "The Sworn Sword," and "The Mystery Knight." A hedge knight is a wandering knight without a master, and the knight in question is Ser Duncan the Tall, or Dunk for short. 80 years after *House of the Dragon* and 90 years before *Game of Thrones*, Dunk and his squire, Egg, wander through Westeros.

The Sympathizer

TBD on HBO

Based on the 2015 novel of the same name by Viet Thanh Nguyen, which won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, *The Sympathizer*, a black A24 comedy, tells the tale of the Captain (Hoa Xuande), a North Vietnamese plant in the South Vietnamese army during the Vietnam War. When the war ends, the Captain must flee to the U.S. There, he keeps spying on South Vietnamese refugees and reporting back to the Viet Cong. But how long can he keep up the charade?

Ripley

TBD on Netflix

Tom Ripley has had a few other iterations before this: While this specific story is based on Patricia Highsmith's 1955 crime novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, that book also inspired 1960's *Purple Noon*, starring Alain Delon, and 1999's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, starring Matt Damon. Now, Ripley is played to unnerving perfection by Andrew Scott, opposite Johnny Flynn as Dickie Greenleaf and Dakota Fanning as Marge Sherwood. He's a grifter, hired by a wealthy man to convince his son, Johnny, to come back from '60s Italy.

The Penguin

TBD on Max

Based on characters created for DC by Bob Kane with Bill Finger, *The Penguin* revisits a classic villain. Colin Farell reprises his role as Oswald "Oz" Cobblepot, a.k.a. The Penguin, after 2022's *The Batman*. The Penguin is a disfigured crime lord who had served as

chief lieutenant to Carmine Falcone, who was killed by The Riddler. Now, The Penguin is vying with Falcone's daughter Sofia (Cristin Milioti) for power over Gotham City's criminal underbelly.

Returning Shows

True Detective: Night Country (Season 4)

Jan. 14 on Max

Jodie Foster the investigator is back. After starring as FBI trainee Clarice Starling in 1991's *The Silence of the Lambs*, now she's playing detective Liz Danvers in the fourth season of the anthology crime drama *True Detective*. "*Night Country*" refers to the fictional town of Ennis, Alaska during the winter, when darkness lasts for 24 hours. She begrudgingly reunites with her former partner, Evangeline Navarro (Kali Reis), to solve a string of disappearances that end with a pile of bodies on ice—literally.

Feud: Capote vs. The Swans (Season 2)

Jan. 31 on FX/Feb. 1 on Hulu

Based on Laurence Leamer's 2021 book *Capote's Women: A True Story of Love, Betrayal, and a Swan Song for an Era*, *Capote vs. The Swans* marks the second installment of *Feud*, a docudrama series created by Ryan Murphy. Tom Hollander plays the writer Truman Capote, who ingratiates himself with a flock of swans, beautiful women from '70s New York high society—until he shatters their trust by publishing their secrets. (The swans include Barbara "Babe" Paley (Naomi Watts), Slim Keith (Diane Lane), C.Z. Guest (Chloë Sevigny), and Lee Radziwill (Calista Flockhart.))

Bridgerton: Season 3

May 16 (Part 1) and June 13 (Part 2) on Netflix

Based on the fourth novel in Julia Quinn's Bridgerton series, *Romancing Mister Bridgerton*, the third season of this smash hit will focus on the burgeoning friends-to-lover romance between Penelope Featherington (Nicola Coughlan) and Colin Bridgerton (Luke Newton). And there is, of course, the tantalizing subplot of Lady Whistledown, the mystery author of a wildly popular scandal sheet that circulates Regency-era London. At the tail end of Season 2, remember, Eloise Bridgerton (Claudia Jessie), Penelope's best friend and Colin's sister, realized Penelope was Whistledown the whole time.

House of the Dragon: Season 2

Summer on HBO

Rhaenyra Targaryen (Emma D'Arcy) and Alicent Hightower (Olivia Cooke) are at war. In this prequel series set roughly 200 years before *Game of Thrones*, and based on George R. R. Martin's book *Fire & Blood*, House Targaryen has splintered. King Viserys Targaryen (Paddy Considine) has died, and his daughter Rhaenyra is supposed to succeed him. But on his deathbed, he muttered part of a prophet that Alicent, his wife, mistook to believe that their son Aegon (Tom Glynn-Carney) should be his heir.

The Jinx – Part 2

TBD on HBO

Eight years after *The Jinx*, and in the wake of Robert Durst's 2022 death, we're getting six more docuseries episodes about the convicted murderer and New York real estate heir. *The Jinx* digs deep into three murders: Durst's wife Kathie in 1982, the writer Susan Berman in 2000, and Durst's neighbor Morris Black in 2001. (Durst was suspected of involvement in the first two incidents and confessed to killing Black—though he was acquitted at trial.) And the day before the Season 1 finale, Durst was arrested on first-degree murder charges for the death of Berman.

The Bear: Season 3

TBD on FX/Hulu

Season 3 of this frenetic, chaotic, beautiful show has been confirmed, and filming will resume this winter. In Season 2, Carmy (Jeremy Allen White) and Sydney (Ayo Edebiri)—alongside a dedicated crew of family and friends—raced against the clock to create and open their new restaurant, The Bear. In the finale, Carmy may have accidentally locked himself in the walk-in refrigerator, but opening night ultimately went well, thanks to Richie (Ebon Moss-Bachrach), Natalie (Abby Elliott), and Marcus (Lionel Boyce).

Final Seasons

Curb Your Enthusiasm: Season 12

Feb. 4 on Max

All good things must come to an end. Since 2000, this beloved sitcom, starring Larry David as a fictionalized version of himself, has followed his life as a semi-retired TV writer and producer in L.A. Regulars Cheryl Hines, J.B. Smoove, Jeff Garlin, and Susie Essman return, and we would bet on many satisfying guest appearances, if history is any indication.

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Jodie Foster on Returning to Her Killer-Hunting Roots in True Detective: Night Country

Megan McCluskey is a staff writer at TIME. She covers culture, focusing on horror, fantasy, and science fiction.

Nearly 35 years after her Oscar-winning turn as FBI trainee Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs*, Jodie Foster is back to her crime-solving ways in *True Detective: Night Country*.

Premiering Jan. 14, the long-awaited fourth season of HBO's acclaimed anthology series opens in Ennis, Alaska, as the remote fictional town is plunged into polar night, a period of prolonged winter darkness that occurs annually north of the Arctic Circle. As Ennis police chief Liz Danvers, Foster stars opposite Kali Reis' state trooper Evangeline Navarro—a duo with a complicated history who come together to investigate the mysterious disappearance of eight scientists working at the nearby Tsalal Arctic Research Station. Naturally, a web of dark secrets soon begins to unravel.

Following a near-universally beloved first season starring Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson as a seemingly mismatched pair of homicide detectives in pursuit of a serial killer responsible for a string of sadistic, ritualistic murders in the Louisiana bayou, the show's second and third entries failed to reach the heights of their predecessor. But ahead of its debut, *True Detective* Season 4, which Foster also produced, has been drawing high praise from critics.

"[Showrunner Issa] López's gorgeously realized story grounds its hardboiled mystery in multidimensional characters, believably immerses viewers in a unique community, and makes a strong case for the continuation of the franchise," wrote TIME TV critic Judy Berman. "In contrast to the gold-hued desert heat and white machismo that defined *True Detective*'s iconic first season, *Night Country* is cold, blue, female, attuned to the perspectives of Native women. Where *True Detective* could be heady to the point of pretension, *Night Country* is humanistic."

Foster is also fresh off a scene-stealing performance in *Nyad*, a 2023 biopic about history-making long-distance swimmer Diana Nyad (Annette Bening) in which Foster plays Nyad's coach and best friend Bonnie Stoll.

TIME spoke with Foster about her relationship to true crime, the satisfaction of a supporting role, and the hard-won rise of female directors.

TIME: Your performance as Clarice Starling in *Silence of the Lambs* paved the way for a new generation of on-screen female detectives. How has that role evolved in pop culture?

Foster: I didn't realize I was doing anything special at the time. I just wanted to go on the hero's journey. And the classic hero's journey was reserved for men. *Silence of the Lambs* was revolutionary in that it posited that the hero's journey could be a

female journey. It's been wonderful over the last 30 years to see different voices come into the picture—women protagonists and antiheroes that are complex and complicated and messy.

How did it feel to once again take up the mantle of lead detective in a crime drama 30+ years after *Silence of the Lambs* became a defining film in your career?

It feels great to be back in this horror, eerie, crime puzzle-solving genre. [*Silence*] was truly a wonderful movie. It's like the great-grandmother to *True Detective* Season 4 in some ways. *Silence* inspired *Seven* which inspired *True Detective* Season 1 which inspired *True Detective* Season 4. So it's a little chain of events. And I feel like I have a direct emotional connection to telling that kind of story.

***True Detective* has traditionally been a show with a lot of masculine energy and characters. This season flips that dynamic. How does that switch add new dimensions to the series?**

These are more complicated humans and we need more complicated humans for our culture to grow and evolve. The first season [of *True Detective*] was extraordinary. But when you look back on it, you're like, "Wow, that's a lot of masculinity." It was a lot of questions about masculine identity and masculine suffering. That's a valuable story to tell. But we were interested in telling a story about the feminine world. So it's a different path. We look at misogyny through different eyes, instead of through the eyes of the misogynist.

***True Detective: Night Country* was shot in Iceland to double for Alaska. What was it like filming in those extreme winter weather conditions?**

There is an inherent survival instinct and a smallness in the face of nature when you live somewhere that could just snap you like a twig. And that really is true of living above the Arctic Circle. At any moment, you could go. So there's an appreciation of and a humility about living. One of our characters talks about Alaska as the end of the world. It's a place where the seams are splitting open and the old world is revealing itself. When you live in an extreme place, the damage human beings have done to the earth is starting to show itself.

Showrunner Issa López has said she's fascinated with true-crime mysteries, including the stories that inspired this season. Are you a true crime person?

I'm much more interested in cinema than the weird, awful things people do to each other in real life. So I love when we as an audience are drawn through the darkest of psyches. There's something healing about watching the good guy swim through this horrible darkness and emerge in the light. That's very transformative, and it's as old as the hills in terms of narrative structure.

There's a good amount of pretty graphic imagery in the show. As someone who's starred in things like *Silence of the Lambs*, do scenes like that ever still get to you?

It's funny because when you're acting and you interact with the special effects, it doesn't affect you because you can see the spaghetti behind the curtain. But it's wonderful seeing the magic once it gets on screen and still feeling the chill and still not seeing the denouement coming. If you go back to *Silence of the Lambs*, it's a particularly bloodless movie. There really isn't a lot of violence in it. It's actually the insinuation that's worse. That's what makes that movie so creepy. I think that's true with this, too. It's really more the allusion to angst and anxieties that we already have that's scary.

Your *True Detective* partner this season is Kali Reis, a relatively untested actor. As someone who has been acting since they were very young, what was that experience like?

Kali is an extraordinary actress. She's a world champion boxer, so she brings that fierceness and completely disciplined presence. You just can't stop watching her. But she is also so sensitive and spiritual and instinctual, and all of that comes through too. It's nice to see a combination of those things. Her character of Navarro is really special. She is the central journey of *True Detective: Night Country.* My job was to support that journey and to allow that central Indigenous voice to shape the show.

In both *True Detective* and *Nyad*, you play one half of two very different partners in crime. How does that compare to the more singular leads you've done?

When I was younger, I was more interested in a singular journey. I didn't trust that I would still be able to find my center in partnership. Now I'm in my 60s and finally realize how satisfying it is to be part of a team. I didn't know how content it would make me to play the role of supporting the person whose journey is central.

***Nyad* is about the unbreakable friendship between swimmer Diana Nyad and her friend and coach Bonnie Stoll. What attracted you to that story?**

There are two reasons I wanted to do *Nyad*. One was Bonnie and Diana, who I know and who are extraordinary. Diana's feat of swimming 110 miles at 64 in shark- and jellyfish-infested Gulf Stream currents is amazing. And then, of course, the great Annette Bening. I've loved every minute of working with her. It's a real treat to work with somebody you respect so much.

The film does a great job depicting how women, particularly older women, are more than capable of breaking out of the boxes they're too often placed in. What about *Nyad* made it such an effective vehicle to convey that message?

People really connect to feeling like, "Wait, I'm not done just because I'm a certain age." If you have a mission in life but people keep telling you that opportunity is over—who says? And for women of a certain generation who sometimes had to choose between having a full life and being partnered and having children, there's also this story of deciding to link arms and say, "You're my best friend, you're my family, and we will be together till the day we die." It's really hard to explain how deep that kind of friendship is.

In a 1991 TIME cover story, you said directing isn't a business that's kind to women, and you hoped someday there could be an "old-girl network" in Hollywood. How do you look back on those sentiments today?

Sometimes I read things I said in my 20s and I'm like, really? But that's a pretty good one. When I was young, there were really no American women directors, maybe a few. I didn't think I was allowed to be a director. And that's not true anymore. I couldn't be prouder to have watched Greta Gerwig this year with *Barbie*. Not

only was this wonderful director recognized, but it was because there were people behind her saying, “You’re not a risk.” I never thought that was going to happen. So there’s just a big smile on my face.

What have you learned as an actor that you could only have learned after doing this for decades?

You don’t have to worry so much and try so hard. It’s all about relaxing. So much of being excellent is just not getting in your own way. So that just means you can take naps and drink coffee and show up.

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