

PERSON OF THE YEAR

TIME

DONALD
TRUMP



TIME Magazine

[December 30th, 2024]

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Donald Trump

Sam Jacobs is Editor in Chief at TIME where he leads TIME's global newsroom and its journalism across all platforms. Since joining TIME in 2013, Jacobs has held a variety of senior editorial leadership positions. Previously, he was national political correspondent at Reuters, associate editor at Newsweek and staff reporter for The Daily Beast. His writing has appeared in the Boston Globe and New York Observer.



Three days before Thanksgiving, the former and future [President of the United States](#) is sitting in the sun-filled dining room of his Florida home and private club. In the lavish reception area, more than a dozen people have been waiting for nearly two hours for Donald Trump to emerge. His picks

for National Security Adviser, special envoy to the Middle East, Vice President, and chief of staff huddle nearby. All afternoon, Trump pipes music throughout the 1927 oceanfront estate from a 2,000-song playlist he curates: Sinéad O'Connor's "Nothing Compares 2 U," ABBA's "The Winner Takes It All," James Brown's "It's a Man's Man's Man's World."

For 97 years, the editors of TIME have been picking the [Person of the Year](#): the individual who, for better or for worse, did the most to shape the world and the headlines over the past 12 months. In many years, that choice is a difficult one. In 2024, it was not.

Since he began running for President in 2015, perhaps no single individual has played a larger role in changing the course of politics and history than Trump. He shocked many by [winning the White House in 2016](#), then led the U.S. through a chaotic term that included the first year of a pandemic as well as a period of nationwide protest, and that ended with his losing the election by 7 million votes and provoking the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. The smart money wagered that we had witnessed the end of Trump.

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If that moment marked Trump's nadir, today we are witnessing his apotheosis. On the cusp of his [second presidency](#), all of us—from his most fanatical supporters to his most fervent critics—are living in the Age of Trump. He dispatched his Republican rivals in near record time. For weeks, he campaigned largely from the New York courtroom where he would be [convicted](#) on 34 felony counts. His [sole debate](#) with President Joe Biden in June led to his opponent's [eventual exit](#) from the race. Sixteen days later, he survived an [assassination attempt](#) at a campaign rally. In the sprint that followed, he [outlasted Vice President Kamala Harris](#), sweeping all seven swing states and emerging from the election at the height of his popularity. “Look what happened,” Trump told his supporters in his election-night victory speech. “Isn’t this crazy?” He almost couldn’t believe it himself.

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Trump has remade American politics in the process. He won by enlarging his base, seizing the frustration over rising prices and benefiting from a global turn against incumbents. With those tailwinds, exit polls suggest that he won the largest percentage of Black Americans for a Republican since Gerald Ford and the most Latino voters of any GOP nominee since George W. Bush. Suburban women, whose anger over restrictions to reproductive rights was thought to be a bulwark for the Democrats, moved not away but toward him. He became the first Republican in 20 years to win more votes than the Democrat, with 9 of 10 American counties increasing their support for Trump from 2020.

Now we watch as members of Congress, international institutions, and global leaders once again align themselves with his whims. The carousel of Trumpworld characters spins anew. This time, we think we know what to expect. Supporters cheer even his promises to take revenge on his enemies and dismantle the government. In a matter of weeks, Trump will be returning to the Oval Office with his intentions clear: tariff imports, deport millions, and threaten the press. Put [RFK Jr.](#) in charge of [vaccines](#). Chance war with Iran. “Anything can happen,” he told us.

[Sitting with TIME](#) three weeks after the election, Trump was more subdued than when we visited him at Mar-a-Lago in March. He is happiest to be in a fight, and now that he has won, he sounded almost wistful, recognizing that

he had run for office for the final time. “It’s sad in a way. It will never happen again,” Trump told us. And while he is thinking about how that chapter has ended, for Americans and for the world, it is also the beginning of a new one. Trump is once again at the center of the world, and in as strong a position as he has ever been.

Over time, we’ve seen the Person of the Year franchise shift: from Man of the Year to its current designation; from the period between the world wars, defined by leaders like Mohandas Gandhi and Wallis Simpson, to the first quarter of the 21st century, an era marked by the tremendous changes ushered in by a technological revolution. Although the American presidency has evolved across these eras, its influence has not diminished. Today, we are witnessing a resurgence of populism, a widening mistrust in the institutions that defined the last century, and an eroding faith that liberal values will lead to better lives for most people. Trump is both agent and beneficiary of it all.

For marshaling a comeback of historic proportions, for driving a once-in-a-generation political realignment, for reshaping the American presidency and altering America’s role in the world, [Donald Trump is TIME’s 2024 Person of the Year](#).

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Lisa Su

Billy Perrigo is a correspondent at TIME based in the London bureau. He covers the tech industry, focusing on the companies reshaping our world in strange and unexpected ways. His investigation ‘Inside Facebook’s African Sweatshop’ was shortlisted for the 2022 Orwell Prize.



Lisa Su apologizes if she seems tired. It's the day after the U.S. presidential election, and like much of the nation she was awake until the early hours, transfixed as the results came in, only tearing herself away once it became clear that Donald Trump had won. "I wanted to know," Su explains as she takes her place at the head of a conference table in the Santa Clara, Calif.,

headquarters of Advanced Micro Devices (AMD). “It’s relevant information.”

The identity of the next President is pertinent news to most of America’s CEOs, but few more so than the leader of a top semiconductor company. Semiconductors, or chips, are the engines of our computers, phones, cars, internet services, and—increasingly—our [artificial intelligence](#) (AI) programs. The relentless rise of the chip over the past seven decades has grown economies, transformed lives, and helped cement the U.S., where most chips get their start, as the globe’s postwar hegemon. [AMD](#) is one of the world’s leading designers of the CPU chips that power both personal computers and data centers, the vast warehouses of servers that make possible the likes of [Google](#), [Meta](#), [Amazon](#), and [Microsoft](#). It’s also a top designer of graphics processing units, or GPUs, the specialized chips used to create and run AI programs like [ChatGPT](#). When you send an email, stream a movie, buy something online, or chat with an AI assistant, chances are an AMD chip is providing some of the computing power needed to make that happen. In November, a supercomputer that runs on AMD chips displaced another AMD-based machine to become the world’s most powerful.

Which is thanks in large part to Su’s leadership. When she became CEO a decade ago, AMD stock was languishing around \$3, its share of the data-center chip market had fallen so far that executives rounded it down to zero, and the question on everybody’s lips was how long the company had left. An engineer by training, Su spearheaded a bottom-up redesign of AMD’s products, repaired relationships with customers, and rode the AI boom to new heights. In 2022 the company’s overall value surpassed its historical rival Intel’s for the first time. AMD stock now trades at around \$140, a nearly 50-fold increase since Su took over. This fall, Harvard Business School began teaching Su’s stewardship of AMD as a case study. “It really is one of the great turnaround stories of modern American business history,” says Chris Miller, a historian of the semiconductor industry and the author of *Chip War*.

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TIME CEO OF THE YEAR

AMD leader
Lisa Su



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For all its progress, AMD remains the semiconductor industry's distant No. 2. As Su's team was speeding past Intel, both companies were lapped by [Nvidia](#), run by Su's cousin [Jensen Huang](#), which in two years has risen from industry also-ran to become the most valuable company in the world. Nvidia got a jump on its rivals by realizing that its chips, initially made for rendering graphics, happened to be perfectly suited for training neural networks, the programs that underpin modern AI. Of the \$32 billion worth of AI data-center GPUs sold in the third quarter of 2024, Nvidia's accounted for some 95%. In November, AMD announced that it would lay off 4% of its global workforce in what it framed as a restructuring to focus on the opportunities from AI. Meanwhile, big tech customers, like Microsoft, Meta, and Amazon, are now designing their own specialized chips for AI workloads, which could reduce their reliance on AMD products. And AMD's continued growth relies on a host of factors outside its control: continued progress in AI; the security of Taiwan, where the vast majority of its top chips are manufactured; and the actions of a notoriously unpredictable U.S. President. [Trump's return to the White House](#) will bring new turbulence to an industry that has barely caught its breath from a half-decade of geopolitical showdowns, shortages, and an AI-fueled market boom.

A lot rides on Su's ability to steer the company through these obstacles. People who know her describe Su as a shrewd strategist who invests in talented people and jettisons those who aren't pulling their weight. "I don't believe leaders are born. I believe leaders are trained," she tells TIME, ahead of a strategy meeting where she delivers blunt feedback to her executives and urges them to move faster and delegate more. Su, 55, holds meetings on weekends and is known among her executives for wanting to talk on morning calls about the finer points of long documents that were circulated after midnight. When prototype chips get delivered from the factory, she often personally goes down to the lab to help scrutinize them. It's a hard-charging style that isn't for everyone and makes it difficult for people who don't meet their commitments to survive at the company, according to Patrick Moorhead, a tech-industry analyst and a former AMD executive who left before she joined.

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The potential for [artificial intelligence to transform](#) science, health care, and the world of work hinges on access to a diverse supply of chips. In the brewing cold war between the U.S. and China, semiconductors are among the most vital battlegrounds. And America's economic success—as measured by its stock market, at least—depends now more than ever on the continued growth of companies that design, produce, and utilize chips. Allies say Su is up to the task. "We couldn't have a person better qualified for this job," says Jerry Sanders, the company's 88-year-old founder and its first CEO. Does she have what it takes to beat Nvidia one day? "Not a question in my mind," he says.

In October 2014, Forrest Norrod was sitting in his car at a McDonald's drive-through when he got a phone call from Su. Norrod had just quit his job as an executive at Dell, intending to take some time off. Su wanted to pitch him on joining AMD, where she had just been appointed CEO. While Norrod waited for his Quarter Pounder with cheese, he listened to her vision for the struggling company. By the next day, he was at AMD's Austin headquarters, weighing the opportunity to lead its server business. Norrod had seen how the pace of innovation in the cloud-chip industry had dropped off once AMD had allowed Intel to dominate the market, and believed that customers were paying the price. He got a sense that Su was a leader with a rare combination of traits: a technical background, business acumen, and people skills. He accepted the job.

Su was born in Taiwan and moved to the U.S. at age 3, when the family immigrated so her father could attend graduate school. She grew up in New York City and discovered a love of STEM subjects at an early age, growing fascinated by the ability to write rudimentary programs on her Commodore 64 computer. She fondly recalls creating, at the science-focused high school she attended in the Bronx, a project in which she simulated a hurricane inside a box, complete with boiling water and windows through which to watch the maelstrom. She chose to major in electrical engineering at MIT after determining that it was the most difficult option—and eventually earned her Ph.D. in the subject.

It was at MIT that Su first experienced a semiconductor lab, where she was taken by the idea that such a tiny piece of hardware could carry so much mathematical firepower. She spent the first years of her career at Texas Instruments and IBM, two first-wave tech titans, which taught her about how to run a business and manage teams. “I was really lucky early in my career,” she says. “Every two years, I did a different thing.” She accepted a VP job at AMD in 2012, and by 2014 had ascended to CEO. “I felt like I was in training for the opportunity to do something meaningful in the semiconductor industry,” she says. “And AMD was my shot.”



Su took over an indebted firm that had fired 25% of its staff, sold and leased back its Austin office, and spun off its expensive chip factories. It was a moment of change for the tech industry writ large. Smartphones and tablets were ascendant. Consumer PCs, AMD's main market, were in decline. “It didn't look at the time that Lisa was really set up for success,” says Stacy Rasgon, a chip-industry analyst. “She was handed a tough situation.” Su's turnaround plan had three steps: build great products, focus on customer relationships, and simplify the business. Some AMD board members wanted

to pivot toward making low-power processors for phones. Su rejected that approach. “We needed to bet on what we were good at,” she says.

What AMD was good at was building powerful processors. Su set a goal for her engineers: to build a new CPU chip that was 40% faster than the previous generation’s. And she started a team on an even more ambitious project: to explore how to develop a chip for the world’s first exascale supercomputer, a machine capable of carrying out 1 quintillion operations per second. The decisions revealed a core tenet of Su’s leadership philosophy. “People are really motivated by ambitious goals,” she says. “The previous strategy of, hey, let’s just do a little bit better here and there—that’s actually less motivational.”

The problem was that Su’s plans would take years to come to fruition. In the meantime, AMD was still on the ropes. “My job as a CEO was to give the engineers time to do the work,” Su says. She inked deals with console manufacturers that won AMD the revenue it needed to keep afloat. In 2016, she signed another with a consortium of Chinese companies, licensing some of AMD’s designs so they could make processors for the Chinese market. That deal brought in \$293 million, though it would later come back to haunt AMD.

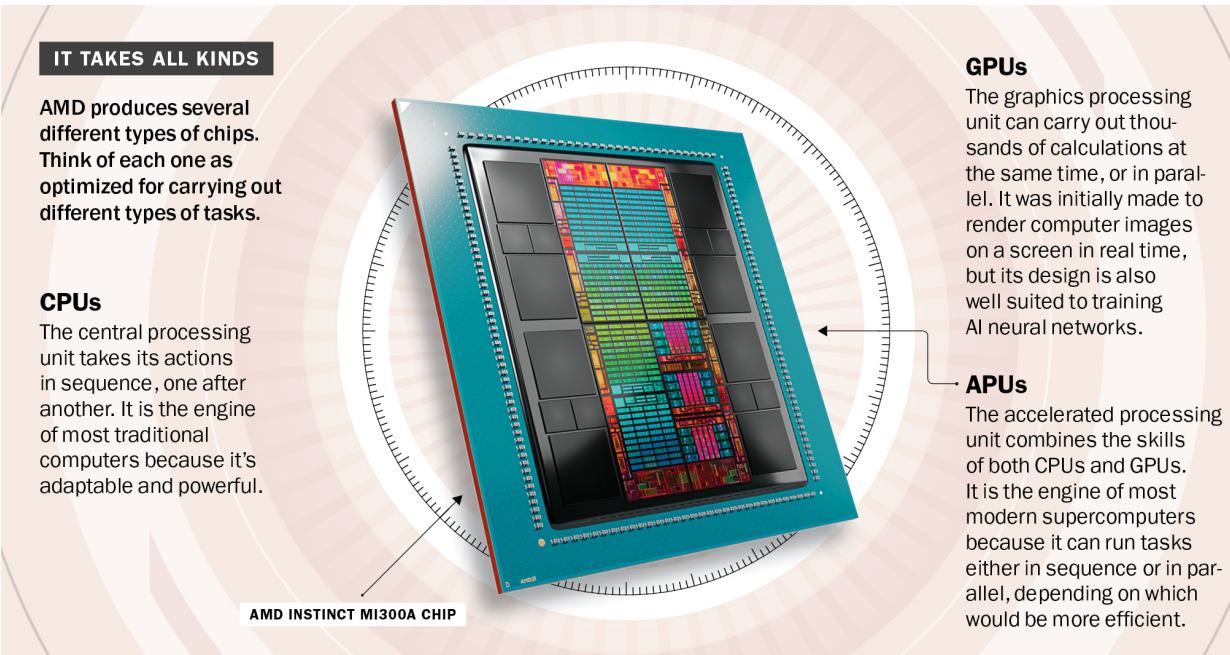
By 2017, the company was on stronger financial footing and the new flagship chip was finally ready. Engineers had redesigned the CPU from the ground up, making use of a new architecture, which the company called “chiplets.” Until then, the chip industry had mainly etched the different parts of a processor onto one piece of silicon. AMD’s innovation was to put different circuits onto individual pieces of silicon and then fuse them all together, which made manufacturing more reliable and scalable. Engineers suggested to Su that they call the new chip “Zen,” because it was designed with a balance in mind between energy efficiency and high performance. The name stuck.

Meanwhile, Intel, AMD’s main competitor, was beginning to flounder. Its new cloud processors were beset by delays. When AMD’s chips hit the market, they were the best on the block. With each new generation of Zen, AMD’s share of the cloud-CPU market grew. Today, its share of that market is 34%. When AMD’s overall valuation surpassed Intel’s in 2022, “it felt

fantastic,” Norrod says. “It’s something that I don’t think anybody in the industry would have believed was possible just a few years ago.”

One recent afternoon at AMD’s Santa Clara headquarters, Su was sitting with several senior executives in the CEO’s favorite corner conference room, where the offices of both Nvidia and Intel are visible through the glass. In the meeting, Su pressed her colleagues to meet engineering milestones for the specialized chips that AMD sells for use in AI data centers. “We cannot miss a beat,” Su told them. “We have negative slack. Whatever we do organizationally, we cannot slow down.”

AMD is grappling with geopolitical challenges that could reshape the semiconductor industry. Today’s chips have billions of transistors, tiny gates for managing electric current. To manufacture them requires colossal machines with hundreds of thousands of specialized parts, which fire lasers at tiny droplets of molten tin to create extreme ultraviolet light that bounces through a series of multilayered mirrors and, ultimately, etches designs onto thin wafers of silicon with atomic-level accuracy. A stray particle in the machine, a half-degree fluctuation in temperature, or a nanometer-scale vibration could each threaten a batch of chips worth millions of dollars. The process is so complex, fragile, and expensive that only one company is currently able to manufacture at scale the most cutting-edge chips designed by the likes of AMD and Nvidia: [Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co.](#) The industry’s most advanced chips may be conceived in Silicon Valley, but their fabrication is almost entirely outsourced to just a handful of factories on the west coast of Taiwan.



Some 80 miles across the Taiwan Strait lies China, which claims the self-governing island as its territory. Chinese President Xi Jinping has instructed his military to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027, according to U.S. intelligence assessments made public last year. And Xi has set China on a path to reduce its technological dependence on the U.S. by producing powerful chips of its own. Without Taiwanese manufacturing, the semiconductor industry would be upended and the world's supply of advanced chips would plummet. And if Beijing's effort to become a world-leading semiconductor producer is successful, it would set up China's military and AI industry to match or outpace America's, which many in Washington view as a national-security threat.

In this light, Su's 2016 decision to go into business with Chinese state-backed companies looks like a misstep. Pentagon officials tried and failed to block the deal at the time, according to a report in the Wall Street Journal, which cited worries that AMD had transferred crucial know-how that could aid China's military and domestic semiconductor ambitions. AMD denied suggestions that it had sought to evade regulatory scrutiny on the deal, saying that it had correctly briefed the Pentagon and other agencies and had received no objections, and that the Journal's story contained "several factual errors and omissions." At the time, there were few laws against technology transfer to China, and deeper economic integration between the

two powers was viewed by many as natural. “It was a very different era,” Su says. But the music would quickly change. In 2019, the Trump Administration placed AMD’s Chinese joint venture on the “entity list” that restricts exports of critical technologies to foreign adversaries because of perceived security risks. In 2022, the Biden Administration [passed broader export controls](#) that made it illegal for companies like AMD and Nvidia to sell their most advanced chips to Chinese companies.

Demand for specialized AI chips is so high, and their supply so constrained, that these export controls have so far had little effect on chipmakers’ bottom lines. But Trump is expected to further expand [tariffs and sanctions on China](#), which could quickly become painful for chip companies. Some 15% of AMD’s revenue in 2023—\$3.4 billion—came from the legal sale of less powerful chips to China and Hong Kong. AMD warned investors in October that its business could be adversely affected by tariffs, as well as any retaliatory measures imposed by foreign governments. If it’s any consolation for AMD’s market position, its rivals are even more exposed: in 2023, China and Hong Kong accounted for 17% of Nvidia’s revenue, and China represented 27% of Intel’s. “We want to service the entire world with our chips,” Su says. “[But] I’m certainly a believer in: we want to be the most advanced semiconductor country.”

Still, AMD is incentivized to lobby against the widening of chip export controls, even if officials determine that more sanctions would be in the interests of national security. The Semiconductor Industry Association, a trade group of U.S. chip companies including AMD, argues against export controls, and has spent more than \$4.5 million since 2022 lobbying lawmakers in Washington, according to the watchdog OpenSecrets. “You have to run faster,” Su says of her view of the U.S.’s competition with China. She says her main goal with any lobbying is to help lawmakers make sure “that any desired policy has the desired effect,” adding, “We certainly want to be a good corporate citizen.”

Inside a high-security laboratory beyond the dry hills at Silicon Valley’s eastern edge, a team of government scientists celebrated a major milestone in November. The machine under their care, housed in a room longer than a football field, had just achieved the official title of most powerful

supercomputer in the world. If every single person on earth were to make one calculation per second, it would take them over 480 years to calculate what this supercomputer could in one minute. The machine is called El Capitan, after the massive granite rock formation in Yosemite National Park. At its heart are more than 44,000 AMD chips called accelerated processing units (APUs), which combine elements of CPUs and GPUs in the same chip. When Su heard the news that El Capitan had officially become the most powerful supercomputer in the world, she was ecstatic. “These are the days I live for,” she says. The achievement meant that the two most powerful supercomputers in the world are now powered by AMD chips.



For Su, the win was about more than just bragging rights. “I personally visited the labs several times,” she says. Fulfilling her pledge to create best-in-class technology became almost an obsession, just as delivering Zen chips on time to waiting customers had been years earlier. “She’s so, so customer-centric,” says Vamsi Boppana, AMD’s senior vice president for AI. “She absolutely wants to delight, and that has served the company so well.”

Su views supercomputing as the wellspring from which further AI profits will flow. The chips in El Capitan are “without a doubt, the most complex thing we’ve ever built,” she says. But they were not a single-purpose investment. The designs that AMD engineers used for El Capitan are already

trickling down into the specialized AI chips supplied to clients like Meta and Microsoft. The most advanced AMD chip currently on sale in the AI market, called the Instinct MI300X, is the “first cousin” of the chips inside El Capitan, says Mark Papermaster, AMD’s chief technology officer. That’s thanks to their chiplet-based designs, which make it relatively simple to switch in and out different components. “There is so much synergy between traditional high-performance supercomputing and AI,” Su says.

AMD always had a business in building GPUs for gaming, but after the release of ChatGPT in 2022, the company quickly spun up a more powerful line aimed at the data-center market. And in the past year, AMD’s projected revenue from specialized AI chip sales has leaped from essentially \$0 to \$5 billion, which would account for roughly 5% of that market. (Nvidia maintains a hammerlock on most of the rest.) This line of chips is now a popular choice for what’s known in the industry as AI “inference,” or the running of an already-formed AI system.

For years, the easiest way to increase AI performance was by simply training bigger models on more GPU chips. But as some computer scientists report diminishing returns from that practice, companies are now turning to a different strategy: increasing the time AIs spend running instead—in the inference phase, rather than the training phase. That could be good news for AMD, whose inference chips are approaching parity with Nvidia’s in terms of not only speed but also energy efficiency, which matters even more when you’re running an AI over a longer period. “We do see inference as a growing piece of the market,” says Boppana.

AMD is still struggling to break into the training phase of the market. That’s largely because Nvidia controls the world’s leading software for optimizing GPUs for that purpose—and it only works with Nvidia chips. The huge number of developers who already use it gives Nvidia an ongoing advantage. AMD is building its own competing software, but it is “absolutely behind Nvidia’s,” says Moorhead, the former AMD executive. Su says AMD is catching up. That’s partly thanks to an informal alliance with tech companies, including Meta, that want to avoid handing Nvidia an outright monopoly. Meta is buying AMD chips, contributing to AMD’s code base, and using its software in its data centers. “It’s a very good symbiotic relationship,” says Moorhead. “Without AMD, Nvidia can double their

prices.” Says Su: “Nobody wants to be locked into a proprietary ecosystem. Really our strategy is: let’s invest in an open ecosystem. And then may the best chip win.”



Yet in their bid to reduce their reliance on Nvidia, major AI companies have also begun to design some of their own chips in-house. That could threaten AMD in the long term. But Su doesn’t see it that way. “I actually see it as an opportunity,” she says. No company wants to replicate the \$6 billion AMD pours into R&D annually, she argues. She sees instead a future where big tech companies continue to spend on AMD’s chips, while also relying on their own chips for certain workloads. “There’s no one-size-fits-all in computing,” she says. “The broader the ecosystem, the bigger the party.”

If Su is right, the size of the party is going to keep on growing. She predicts the specialized AI chip market alone will grow to be worth \$500 billion by 2028—more than the size of the entire semiconductor industry a decade ago.

To be the No. 2 company in that market would still make AMD a behemoth. Sure, AMD won't be overtaking Nvidia anytime soon. But Su measures her plans in decades. "When you invest in a new area, it is a five- to 10-year arc to really build out all of the various pieces," she says. "The thing about our business is, everything takes time."

—With reporting by *Leslie Dickstein and Simmone Shah*

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Caitlin Clark

Sean Gregory is a senior sports correspondent at TIME. His work has been cited in the annual Best American Sports Writing anthology nine times. His stories have won awards from the U.S. Basketball Writers Association, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, and his work was named a finalist for Deadline Club and Mirror awards for excellence in magazine writing and reporting on media, respectively.



Few jobs require less physical exertion than rebounding for [Caitlin Clark](#). On an early-November morning in downtown Indianapolis, Clark, the two-time college national player of the year for the University of Iowa, reigning WNBA Rookie of the Year from the [Indiana Fever](#), and emergent American sports icon, sprints to different spots along the three-point line at the Fever

practice gym, trying to bang as many shots as possible over a six-minute span. A Fever coach has tasked me with standing under the basket to retrieve her misses. But as Clark runs all over the court to launch long-range bombs, I barely have to move. *Swish, swish, swish.* She hits 14 shots in a row. A dozen in a row. Eleven in a row. *Swish, swish, swish.* Nine in a row. Another nine.

Sure, she's putting on this display in practice. But her ability is still mesmerizing. Clark, 22, takes shots with a degree of difficulty never before witnessed in the women's game; her signature 30-ft. launches, from near half-court on team logos across America, are akin to home-run balls, hanging high in the air. Can she actually make that flabbergasting attempt? *Yes!* it turns out. Over and over again.

After her workout I fill Clark in on the statistics from her shooting session: 93 three-pointers in six minutes, good for an 85% success rate.

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TIME ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Basketball star
**CAITLIN
CLARK**



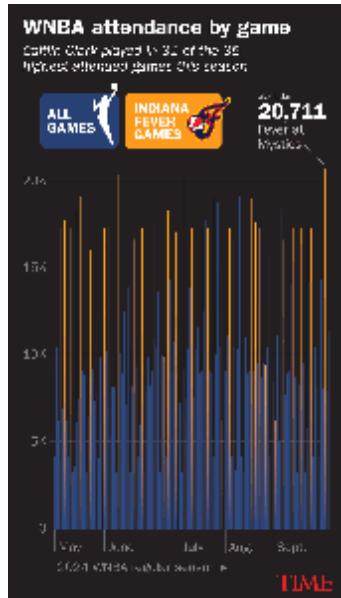
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“Wow,” she responds from the driver’s seat of her gray Lexus GX. “That’s pretty good.”

Nice to know that after wowing so many around the world throughout her record-breaking year, Clark can still impress herself. In February, she set the new NCAA Division 1 women’s basketball scoring record. A few weeks later, she broke Hall of Famer Pete Maravich’s mark, making her the top scorer overall. Her college championship game between Iowa and South Carolina averaged 18.9 million viewers, becoming the second most watched women’s sporting event, outside the Olympic Games, in the history of U.S. television, with American viewership outdrawing that of each game of the 2024 NBA Finals and World Series. And for the first time ever, more people tuned in for the women’s NCAA championship than the men’s. As a pro, she set a rookie record for most three-pointers made in a season, while also setting new all-time WNBA marks for most assists in a season and most assists in a single game. She signed a reported \$28 million endorsement deal with Nike, the largest ever for a women’s basketball player. Clark’s Fever appeared in the most watched WNBA games ever on ABC, CBS, ESPN, and ESPN2. The WNBA attracted an all-time record of more than 54 million unique viewers across all its national broadcasting platforms during the regular season, and the league’s overall attendance jumped 48% year over year to its highest level in more than two decades. The Fever broke the WNBA record for home attendance by a single franchise, and Fever games were moved to NBA and NHL arenas in Las Vegas, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., to accommodate the hordes of fans, many donning Clark’s No. 22 jersey. The Washington Mystics-Fever regular-season finale set a new WNBA single-game attendance record of 20,711.



When asked to define her year in one word, Clark chooses *historic*. Clark, it quickly becomes clear, is polite and down-to-earth but also has not an ounce of false humility. “I’ve been able to captivate so many people that have never watched women’s sports, let alone women’s basketball, and turn them into fans,” she says. Good luck naming another player who altered the trajectory of their entire team sport within five months on the job. [Lionel Messi](#) had a monumental influence on Major League Soccer when he arrived in [Miami](#) last year, but he was in year 20 of his pro career. Michael Jordan energized the NBA in the mid-1980s, but Larry Bird and Magic Johnson had already put the league on solid footing. While other female athletes have pushed the limits of human achievement and created their own cultures—[Serena Williams](#), [Simone Biles](#), and the stars of the [U.S. women’s national soccer team](#) all come to mind—the Clark phenomenon is still unprecedented. It’s one thing to rally around athletes during global spectacles like tennis majors or an Olympics or a World Cup. It’s quite another to turn routine regular-season games in the WNBA, a league neglected for far too long over its 27-year history, into appointment viewing.

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To be clear, Clark had plenty of help. The WNBA was already enjoying positive momentum going into the 2024 season, thanks to MVPs like [A’ja Wilson](#) and [Breanna Stewart](#), and some of Clark’s fellow rookies, like [Angel Reese](#) and Cameron Brink, brought their own followings. But Clark took the

league—and the sport—to a new level. Even during a period when investment across women’s sports is surging, team valuations are on the rise, and fan interest and engagement are at all-time highs, her arrival was transformative.

Clark’s skyrocketing fame has upended her life at a dizzying rate. She now has an advance security squad. A fan asked her to sign a sonogram. “There’s just so much weird stuff,” she says. The Golf Channel covered her appearance at an LPGA pro-am event as if she were [Tiger Woods](#) in his prime, moving up its studio show by 90 minutes to provide live look-ins at her swings. “She’s box office,” says Atlanta Dream co-owner [Renee Montgomery](#), a former WNBA player.

At times, the plot proved unpleasant. All year, Clark found herself party to raging debates, even though she rarely, if ever, did anything to perpetrate them. “I tell people I feel like the most controversial person,” says Clark. “But I am not. It’s just because of all the storylines that surround me. I literally try to live and treat everybody in the same exact respectful, kind way. It just confuses me at times.” That her gender played a role in the level of scrutiny is hard to deny. Clark’s introductory press conference with the Fever was a harbinger of things to come: a male reporter appeared to make a cringeworthy attempt at flirtation with Clark; he was suspended and prohibited from covering the Fever. As the season progressed, more flashpoints emerged—whether concerning the marketing advantage granted by her race, fouls that players committed against her, or her exclusion from the U.S. Olympic team—that spurred her so-called defenders to push racist, misogynistic, anti-LGBTQ narratives, or even threaten WNBA players directly. She calls this toxicity “upsetting” and “gross,” but during the season she addressed the discourse mostly when asked about it in courtside interviews or at press conferences rather than proactively engaging with it. “It’s not something I can control … and to be honest, I don’t see a lot of it,” [she told](#) the Athletic’s Jim Trotter in June. Her extended interview with TIME is the first time she’s talked at length about her year.



“All of this is really speaking to something much larger than Caitlin Clark,” says Theresa Runstedtler, a scholar of African American history at American University. “It’s speaking to our unresolved issues about race, gender, and sexuality in American society, at this particularly fraught moment in our political landscape.”

Still, in the face of all this heaviness, *joy* remains the resonant vibe of Clark’s 2024. Her talent brought together communities—in SRO arenas, in sports bars and living rooms, on social media—to celebrate her fire, unselfish play, and ability to score in inconceivable ways when she needed to. Clark certainly fed off this electricity. “You feel powerful,” Clark says. “Instantly, everybody goes crazy. People are invested in the game, they love the game, and that’s what makes it so fun for me. These people aren’t supporting women’s sports to check a box. It’s going to be the new normal.”

The weekend before our interview, Clark attended back-to-back [Taylor Swift](#) shows at Lucas Oil Stadium. She met Swift’s mother and boyfriend, Kansas

City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. When fans noticed her sitting in a suite, they turned around to take pictures or toss her friendship bracelets. “People are just going crazy that I’m there,” she says. “I thought people would be so in their own world, ready to see Taylor. And it was just completely the opposite.”

Swift gave Clark four bags of Eras Tour merchandise with a note saying Clark was inspiring to watch from afar. She said “Trav and I” were excited to get to a Fever game now that the tour was winding down and invited Clark to attend a Chiefs game with her.

Clark has always seemed destined for greatness, if not friendship with the biggest pop star in the world. Her path to this women’s-sports paradigm shift started in West Des Moines, Iowa, where Clark played multiple sports as a kid before focusing on her best one. She’s the second of three children (Clark has two brothers); her father Brent Clark is executive vice president at a company that sells and distributes agricultural and industrial parts, and her mother Anne Nizzi-Clark is a retired marketing executive. Jan Jensen, an Iowa assistant coach at the time, first watched Clark play when she was in middle school: she hit a step-back three-pointer and threw a long pass her teammate couldn’t catch. But the ball was on the money. “You could see her swag,” says Jensen. “The way she walked. In a peewee game, when everybody’s like, ‘Your shot hit the rim, let’s go get ice cream,’ she’s like, ‘I don’t want any freaking ice cream. I want to win.’ That’s when the Caitlin Clark mission began.”

Her Catholic family wanted her to pick Notre Dame for college, but Clark shunned the Fighting Irish to play for her home-state school. She put up big numbers at Iowa immediately but had trouble hiding her frustrations. She’d shake her head when someone screwed up. Or take it out on a towel. Or a chair. “If somebody couldn’t catch a pass, she’d throw her hands up and do a pirouette,” says Lisa Bluder, the Iowa head coach during Clark’s years at the school (Bluder retired after last season, and Jensen now runs the program). The coaching staff worked with Clark to improve her body language, showing her video of her outbursts, and she reined it in for the most part. By her junior year, Iowa was knocking off undefeated South Carolina in the national semis to reach the finals against LSU.

That championship game was Clark's inauguration into the 24-hour sports-news cycle. In the final moments, when it was clear LSU would win, Tigers forward Angel Reese approached Clark and pointed at her ring finger, a bit of [trash-talking](#) that sparked needlessly cruel backlash; Reese was labeled "classless" and worse. Clark and Reese were pitted against each other as rivals, a narrative that has carried over to the WNBA. "I don't get that at all," says Clark. "We're not best friends, by any means, but we're very respectful of one another. Yes, we have had tremendous battles. But when have I ever guarded her? And when has she guarded me?" She downplays Reese's gesture. "I didn't think it was taunting," says Clark. "It really didn't bother me. It's just like, 'Why don't you talk about them winning? Or the incredible run that we went on that nobody would have thought we would have ever gone on?' The only thing people cared about was this controversy that was really fabricated and made up, and then that has continued to be the case ever since."



Going into her senior year, Clark was in a much different position than women's basketball players who have come before her. Iowa played summer

exhibition games in Italy and Croatia, and with the help of name, image, and likeness (NIL) sponsorship money from brands like Nike, Buick, and the midwestern grocery chain Hy-Vee, Clark treated her teammates to a yacht outing in the Adriatic. “I wouldn’t say it was boozy,” says former Iowa manager Will McIntyre, now director of scouting and technology for the Rutgers women’s team. “I would say bougie.”

Clark loved college life, and even considered returning for a fifth year instead of entering the 2024 WNBA draft. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, NCAA players were granted an extra year of eligibility. Around January, however, Clark knew it was time to move on. It helped that the [Fever had won the draft lottery](#), assuring that Clark, unquestionably the No. 1 pick, would begin her career in the Midwest. She announced her intention to enter the draft at the end of February. Lin Dunn, then the Fever general manager—now a senior adviser—saw the news on X. “I would have done a back handspring if I wasn’t 77 years old,” says Dunn.

About a month later, on the eve of this year’s NCAA tournament, West Virginia’s coach told his players “let’s send Caitlin Clark packing.” So after Iowa dispatched the Mountaineers in the second round, Clark took a microphone before practice, stood on the scorer’s table, and sang “Country Roads” at the top of her lungs. “I kind of just troll,” Clark says. She has a big, loud personality with people she’s comfortable with. When former Iowa teammate Kate Martin visited Clark’s Indy apartment as a member of the Las Vegas Aces in September, Clark serenaded her with [Luke Combs](#) songs on her karaoke machine. “She’s not a good singer at all,” says Martin. (For the record, Temi Fagbenle, who was Clark’s Fever teammate this season and will join Martin on the expansion team the Golden State Valkyries in 2025, disagrees. As a rookie, Clark was tasked with singing happy birthday to the team’s vets. “She wouldn’t just sing a regular happy birthday,” says Fagbenle, who gives Clark’s voice a 7.5 on a 10-point scale and believes her sense of humor and charisma are part of her appeal. “It would be a grandiose performance. She loves her moments.”)

After a much hyped [Clark-Reese rematch in the Elite Eight](#) that drew the second largest ESPN audience to any basketball game, college or pro, in a dozen years, the Hawkeyes fell short in the [championship game](#) for the second straight year, this time to once again undefeated South Carolina.

During the podium celebration Dawn Staley, the venerated Gamecocks coach, clutched the mic and said, “I want to personally thank Caitlin Clark for lifting up our sport.”



Clark had little time to reflect on her accomplishments. Two days before the WNBA draft, she flew to New York City after staying up late in Los Angeles while receiving the Wooden Award as national player of the year, went straight to the *Saturday Night Live* set, and collapsed on a couch there from fatigue. She got big laughs during her “Weekend Update” segment needling co-host Michael Che for past jokes about women’s sports. Her favorite: after Che told Clark that he’d pass along a signed apron she gave him to his girlfriend, Clark quipped, “You don’t have a girlfriend, Michael.” The crowd howled. Clark says [Jason Sudeikis](#), who had cheered her on at Iowa games, had suggested that add-on.

Clark’s segment did include a more serious moment, as she thanked a quintet of Black women—Lisa Leslie, Sheryl Swoopes, Cynthia Cooper, Staley, and [Maya Moore](#), Clark’s basketball hero growing up—for paving the way for

her success. These stars, despite their athletic prowess, were never rewarded with the same level of attention that Clark is now receiving. “America was founded on segregation and to this day is very much about Black and White,” Fagbenle, who loved playing with Clark, writes in a text message. “In a sport dominated by Black/African-American players, White America has rallied around Caitlin Clark. The support looks mostly amazing, sometimes fanatical and territorial, sometimes racist. It seems that the Great White Hope syndrome is at play again.” Going into the WNBA season, Wilson, a two-time league champion and now three-time WNBA MVP, told the Associated Press she thought Clark’s race was a “huge” contributor to her popularity. “It doesn’t matter what we all do as Black women, we’re still going to be swept underneath the rug,” Wilson said. “That’s why it boils my blood when people say it’s not about race because it is.”

Clark is cognizant of the racial underpinnings of her stardom. “I want to say I’ve earned every single thing, but as a white person, there is privilege,” says Clark. “A lot of those players in the league that have been really good have been Black players. This league has kind of been built on them. The more we can appreciate that, highlight that, talk about that, and then continue to have brands and companies invest in those players that have made this league incredible, I think it’s very important. I have to continue to try to change that. The more we can elevate Black women, that’s going to be a beautiful thing.”

When Clark and her fellow soon-to-be rookies arrived at the WNBA draft on April 15, it was clear that women’s basketball had entered a new era. Clark, whom fans had seen mostly in her jersey, gym shorts, and ponytail, became the first athlete, in the WNBA or NBA, to be dressed for the draft head-to-toe in Prada, right down to the tinted sunglasses she wore on the “orange carpet.” The event broke another viewership record, as ESPN’s audience more than quadrupled over the previous year.

Clark’s Fever teammates received a taste of their new reality on a preseason trip to Dallas to play the Wings. For one of only two times this year, Indiana flew commercial—the WNBA instituted charter flights for the regular season—and autograph hounds greeted the team at the gate. “People were literally running after us-slash-Caitlin in the airport,” says Fever guard Lexie

Hull. Cameras flashed as they went to baggage claim. The Fever needed to load the bus, so Clark didn't have time to stop for pictures. One guy chastised her: "Caitlin, you're not that big-time!"

"I'm not big-time," Clark says now. "But you just chased me through the terminal."

Christie Sides, the Fever coach this past season, recalls the throng of people gathered to watch Clark walk to the bus before her regular-season debut against the Connecticut Sun. "It was people my age," says Sides, 47. "It was people my parents' age. It was people between my and my parents' age. I saw people crying. I saw people shaking. It made me think of the Beatles. Or Elvis."

Despite all the hype, however, the Fever's season threatened to implode before it ever really got started. Clark committed 10 turnovers in that debut game, a new record for a career opener. The schedule offered no favors to the young team, which also included the reigning WNBA Rookie of the Year, Aliyah Boston, the No. 1 overall pick in 2023. The Fever faced the Sun, a league semifinalist this season, and the New York Liberty, the 2024 champs, in its first four contests, before heading west for a three-game swing that included a matchup against the 2023 champs, the Aces. "Clearly, there was zero flow within the team," says Clark. "It was just so choppy, and no one really knew what the other person was doing. Our defense was really bad."



Clark was also adjusting to the rigors of the WNBA. “Professional players and professional coaches—this is no disrespect to college women’s basketball—are a lot smarter,” she says. “I love women’s college basketball. But if you go back and watch the way people guarded me in college, it’s almost, like, concerning. They didn’t double me, they didn’t trap me, they weren’t physical. And it’s hard. It’s college. A lot of those women will never go on to play another basketball game in their life. They don’t have the IQ of understanding how the game works. So I completely understand it. And it’s no disrespect at all. They don’t have the IQ. You have to simplify it for girls at that age.”

There were glimmers of hope during Indiana’s 1-8 start. Clark had a few big scoring games and was second in the league in assists. She was named league Rookie of the Month for May. She wasn’t having trouble getting her shot off. She just wasn’t making enough of them. She was spotting open teammates. She just needed to clean up some of the passes. “I never really got down because I knew everything was so controllable,” says Clark. “I would come home at night and would be like, ‘This is so annoying.’ Because

I know I'm literally, like, right there, of being one of the best players in the league." She holds her forefinger a milinch from her thumb. "I knew I was so close to doing so many amazing things."

When the Fever hosted the Chicago Sky, and Reese, in the first pro meeting between the two college superstars on June 1, Indiana gutted out a 71-70 victory. Clark had skipped a [Noah Kahan](#) concert—"No. 1 on my bucket list"—the night before knowing it would be a bad look to be seen out given the team's terrible record. But that contest won't be remembered for the basketball. In the third quarter, Chicago's Chennedy Carter hip-checked Clark to the floor. Carter was called for a foul, which the next day was upgraded to a flagrant-1 violation. But while the WNBA could revise the ruling, it could not stem the ensuing furor. That Reese jumped off the bench and appeared to cheer Carter only added fuel to another Clark-adjacent fire. Some pundits cited Carter's foul as evidence that jealous players, particularly Black players, were targeting Clark. The *Chicago Tribune* weighed in with an editorial, imploring that Clark "must not be allowed to become a target for rule breakers." The *Tribune* wrote that Carter's foul would have been "seen as an assault" outside the sports arena. The intense commentary came with consequences. Security had to intervene at the Sky's hotel a few days later when a man approached Carter with a camera. "I've been called every racial slur imaginable lately and my teammates have had it even worse," Sky forward Brianna Turner wrote on X.

Clark casts aside any notion that envious opponents were coming after her. "I never thought I was being targeted," says Clark. "Obviously, that shouldn't ever happen within a game. But basketball is physical. Your emotions can get the best of you. My emotions have gotten the best of me many times." She says she did not see Reese cheering from the bench. "I don't even know if she really knew what happened," says Clark. "Honestly, I don't think she was cheering because somebody hit me. I really don't think that would be the case. I hope not." Reese's representatives did not make her available for this article.

"A lot of people that wanted to have opinions on what was happening probably didn't even watch half the games that they were trying to have a take on and hadn't supported the W for a really long time," says Clark.

The day after the incident, in a matchup against the Liberty, Clark ran into a Jonquel Jones screen and ruptured her eardrum. “It was vibrating,” Clark says. “My hearing was really messed up.” She shot 1-10 from the field in a 36-point drubbing. A five-day reprieve in the schedule came at the perfect moment.

During these off days, Clark shot extremely well during drills. “That gave me a lot of confidence,” says Clark. “It just reiterates, ‘You are one of the best shooters.’” In Indiana’s first game back, Clark hit seven three-pointers en route to a 30-point game and a Fever victory. On the bus, Clark texted her agent that she hoped that performance helped her case to make the Olympic team for Paris. Clark’s agent responded immediately: I have to call you.

“And I’m like, ‘Sh-t,’” says Clark.

The news, predictably, was unpleasant: the Olympic roster was about to leak, and Clark wasn’t on it. USA basketball officials hopped on a call with Clark. “They were like, ‘Yeah, we haven’t selected you. Obviously, we think the world of how you play and blah, blah, blah.’” She wasn’t really listening. She knew she was good enough to be on the team. And she had heard rumblings that she would be.

At the same time, she understood the decision. The 12 players selected included many future Hall of Famers and Olympic veterans. “A point everybody was making was like, ‘Who are you taking off the team?’” Clark says. “And that was a tremendous point.” Clark also admits that during her early stretch for the 3-9 Fever, “I gave them a lot of reasons to keep me off the team with my play.”

Many people, however, rushed to her defense. The gist of the pro-Clark case: women’s basketball missed a golden marketing opportunity to grow the sport, given Clark’s popularity. It’s an argument that Clark wholly rejects. “I don’t want to be there because I’m somebody that can bring attention,” says Clark. “I love that for the game of women’s basketball. But at the same time, I want to be there because they think I’m good enough. I don’t want to be some little person that is kind of dragged around for people to cheer about and only watch because I’m sitting on the bench. That whole narrative kind

of upset me. Because that is not fair. It's disrespectful to the people that were on the team, that had earned it and were really good. And it's also disrespectful to myself. ”

For the second time in about a week, Clark was leading the sports-news cycle. No matter that the NBA Finals had just tipped off. Everyone had a hot take on Clark, except, it seemed, for Clark. “I have a great skill of just blocking it out,” says Clark. “I don’t care what people say about me.”

Clark told Sides the snub “woke a monster.” Making the 2028 team “is a huge, huge goal,” she says, and she believes being left off the Paris roster “will definitely motivate me my entire career.” She calls her exclusion a “blessing.” Not only did it fuel her to prove that she belonged on the team, it also granted her a much needed break: there’d be a one-month pause in the WNBA schedule to accommodate players competing at the Olympics.



The monster arose almost immediately, as the Fever began to turn their season around. Indiana went on a four-game winning streak in June. Clark recorded the first-ever rookie triple-double (at least 10 points, assists, and

rebounds) during a home victory against the Liberty. Right before the WNBA All-Star Game, Clark had 19 assists, a new WNBA single-game record, against the Wings. She started in the All-Star Game—against the [U.S. Olympic team](#)—and her 10 assists helped her side to a 117-110 victory. Most importantly, her All-Star experience further dispelled the notion that her pro colleagues were out to put her in her place. Her fellow All-Stars, Clark says, “are all looking to me to call the plays. It just showed the sign of respect they really do have for me.”

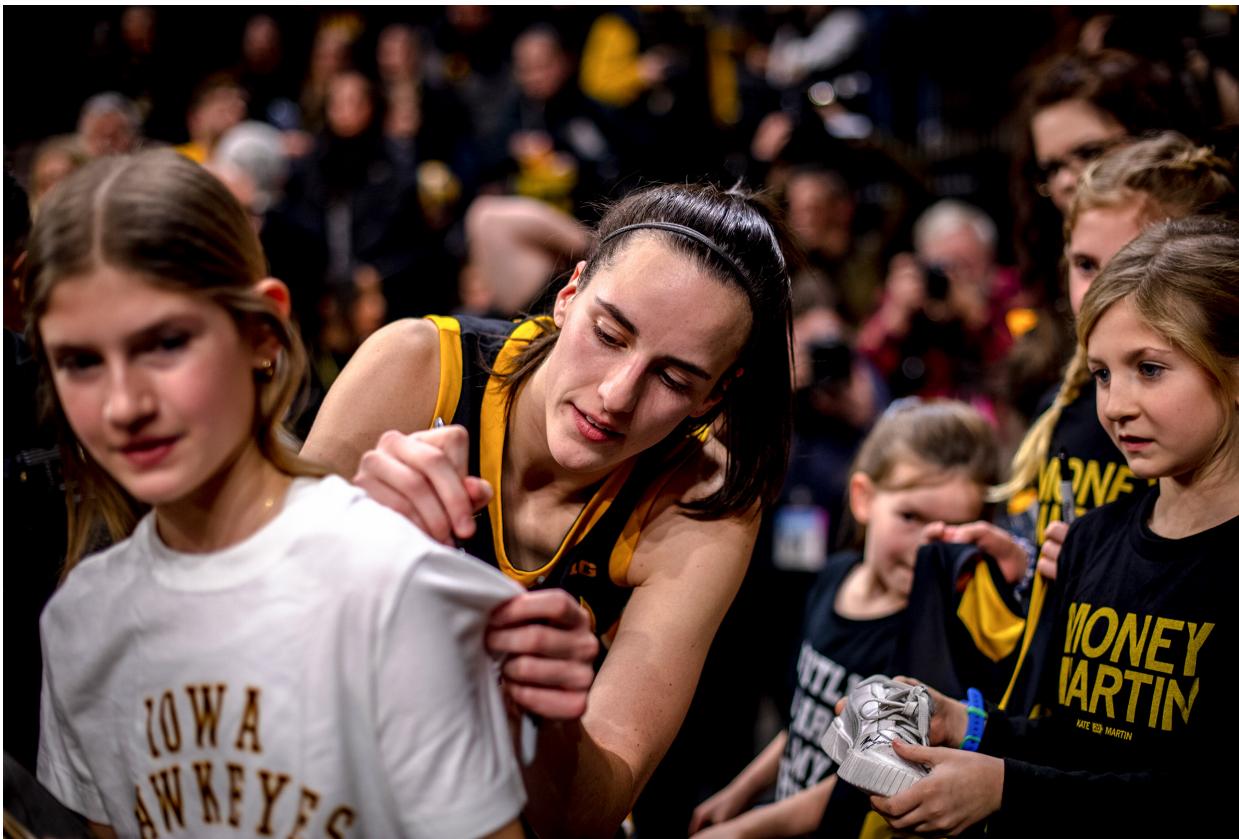
During the first week of the Olympic break, she escaped to Cabo San Lucas with her boyfriend, former Iowa basketball player Connor McCaffery, who spent the past season as a basketball-development staffer with the Pacers and is now an assistant coach at Butler University. She drank “a million” Shirley Temples, with Sprite; devoured French brioche; and read [Emily Henry’s Happy Place](#). Refreshed, she returned to Indianapolis, where the Fever practiced over the break, participating in bonding activities like a wiffle-ball home-run derby. Clark once again displayed her troll side. “Nobody else was able to hit,” she says. “I was smashing bombs, and it was pissing everybody off. It was so good. Because I was talking crap, and then I backed it up.”

When the Fever returned to the court for games, they won seven of their first eight. Clark led the team to the playoffs for the first time since 2016 and raised her play to All-WNBA First Team level. During the dog days of August, when sports radio is usually obsessing over the upcoming NFL season, hosts debated the Rookie of the Year race between Reese and Clark, who set a new WNBA record for double-doubles (at least 10 points and rebounds) in a season.

By this point, Clark had gone global. The owner of a Chinese restaurant in West Des Moines recently told Clark’s mother that she overheard two kids talking about her daughter on a Taiwanese subway. Clark watch parties were held in Iceland. Fever president Allison Barber, who has since left the franchise to launch a youth sports complex for girls, was driving through northwest Indiana this summer when she stopped for soup. The owner of the joint saw the Fever logo on her shirt and asked if she had a connection to the team; as Barber was walking to her car, the owner chased her, holding his phone. He asked if she could say hello to her elderly dad, a Clark diehard in Greece.

Charles Whitehead, a logistics worker from Orange, N.J., drove three hours to the Mohegan Sun Arena to watch Indiana take on Connecticut in the first round of the playoffs. Whitehead paid some \$500 for his seat near the front row. “Caitlin got me here,” says Whitehead, 35, who’s wearing a red Clark Fever jersey. He points across the court, where Clark is signing autographs less than an hour before tipoff. “Rock star,” he says. I wonder if, before Clark’s emergence, Whitehead ever pictured himself wearing a women’s basketball jersey and paying good money for WNBA playoff tickets. “Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope,” he says. “Never, never, never, never.”

Clark thought Indiana could make it to the championship. “People would probably laugh if they read that in this article,” she says. “But I was being dead serious.” In the end, however, the Sun swept the Fever—but not before Clark found herself at the center of one last controversy: in Game 1, Connecticut’s DiJonai Carrington poked Clark in the eye while trying to deflect a pass. The contact became more fodder for social media and elsewhere. After *USA Today*’s Christine Brennan asked Carrington if she intended to hit Clark in the eye—“Obviously, it’s never intentional,” Carrington said—the WNBA players union publicly called for Brennan’s credentials to be revoked, saying the interview was “a blatant attempt to bait a professional athlete into participating in a narrative that is false and designed to fuel racist, homophobic, and misogynistic vitriol on social media.” After the Sun eliminated the Fever, Connecticut’s Alyssa Thomas said, “I think that in my 11-year career I never experienced the racial comments [like] from the Indiana Fever fan base.”



This whole contretemps still annoys Clark. “Never once did that cross my mind, that it was on purpose,” she says. “I’ve been poked in the eye many times playing basketball. It happens.” Clark feels debate about intent reveals a gender double standard. “If that would have happened in the NBA, do you think people would have showed up the next day and been like, ‘Hey, Tyrese Haliburton, did you poke [Steph Curry](#) in the eye on purpose?’” she says. While Clark says she wasn’t aware that the union was going to reprimand Brennan, she supported its decision. “That whole line of questioning that [Carrington] got was not appropriate, and I did not like that,” she says.

Many observers seem inclined to reserve judgment on Clark and her approach to confronting off-court issues given that she was a rookie adjusting to life as an athletic icon. “She should be afforded some grace,” Fagbenle texts. “Understanding the racial tensions in this country, could she have been more proactive about condemning her racist fans’ words and distancing herself from them? Sure—if she’s comfortable standing up for others and challenging her racist fans, unsolicited—but not everyone is built like that.” When asked if Clark did enough to combat the racist threats

against other players, Montgomery, the Atlanta Dream co-owner and former player, declined to comment. Dream forward Cheyenne Parker-Tyus, meanwhile, says she thinks Clark handled it all well. “I’m not concerned about her and how she stands with racial comments or hateful comments,” she says. “She feels the way we all feel. She’s made that clear.”

“I know people want her to say more and do more, and I’m like, at 22 years old, how many of us have the skill set, have the ability to be able to communicate?” says former Fever star and Hall of Famer Tamika Catchings, whose franchise rookie scoring record Clark broke this year. “She’s a game changer on the court, but having to be a game changer off the court and get into the politics part of it, I don’t know if that’s her responsibility.”

While Terri Jackson, executive director of WNBA players association, hopes Clark leans into her voice more down the road, “let’s be clear,” she says. “The responsibility for setting the tone and sending a message was absolutely at the league and team, but particularly at the league, level.” (During her WNBA Finals press conference, commissioner Cathy Engelbert promised to “attack” racism against its players “multidimensionally.” She hinted at potential online controls to help clean up the discourse. “There are some technology solutions out there that we could deploy and employ,” Engelbert said.)



“What comes with being a professional athlete is speaking on important issues,” says four-time WNBA champion and five-time Olympic gold medalist [Sue Bird](#). “And so I imagine she’s going to continue to educate and get better at that as well. In today’s world, people will use you if you don’t speak about your own feelings and thoughts. So by getting more comfortable and confident in your voice, you can eliminate that.”

Clark says she really does stay off social media during the season and wasn’t aware that talk about the eye poke, for example, was percolating until she was asked about it. “It’s something I’m trying to navigate,” she says. “I’m trying to find a balance while being a rookie.” But she hears the calls imploring her to step up for her colleagues, particularly in a league known for its outspokenness on social-justice issues. “I’m probably the most popular player in the league at the moment, and somebody a lot of people turn to to have a voice on this type of stuff,” says Clark. “I hope we can do a better job as a league of protecting our players and putting better resources around them to make it a safer environment. And obviously, there’s only so much you can police on social media, because we don’t have full control over social media. But there is real responsibility. I understand that, and I acknowledge that.” So what’s her message to bad-faith actors harassing others in her name? “Just stop,” says Clark. “Because that’s not who I am.”

To get to lunch after her workout, I trail Clark down a rainy back alleyway that smells like garbage, past the “Ray’s Trash Service” bins, through the kitchen, down a narrow flight of stairs to a private room of a restaurant scouted by her security team. (She says her team gave her a 30-page pdf with instructions on how to navigate movements at the Swift concert.) I tell Clark and Hull, who has joined us, that the walk reminded me of the famous scene from *Goodfellas* where the mafioso played by Ray Liotta enters the Copacabana through the kitchen. They haven’t seen the film but appreciate the comparison. “We’re mobsters,” says Clark.

Over carnitas and fish tacos, we talk about their new head coach, Stephanie White, who had been hired three days earlier. Indiana had dismissed Sides in October; management wanted a coach with more playoff experience. White, a former Fever player, coached the Sun the past two seasons and led Indiana to the WNBA Finals as head coach in 2015. Clark insists she had nothing to

do with the change. “I’m actually not the general manager of the team,” she says. “Believe it or not!” adds Hull.

Clark’s eyes are glued to the TV, where the USC women are playing Ole Miss on the opening day of college basketball. “I feel like if I was out there, I would literally have 50,” says Clark. “The college game is so much easier than professional.”



But Clark knows she can get better. She expresses admiration for White's game plans against the Fever. "We didn't usually have the best game plan back," Clark said when White stopped by the gym during her workout. "Like, here's a ball screen, Caitlin. Figure it out."

At one point talk turned to Clark's high school soccer career. "I would get so many yellow cards," Clark said.

"You still do," said White. "What are you talking about?"

Indeed, Clark finished her season with six technical fouls, tied for second most in the WNBA. "I only probably deserved, like—two."

"Haaaaa!" White yelled. "She's a comedian, too."

Controlling Clark's fire has always been a challenge for her coaches. It makes her special, but techs can come back to bite you. Same with her mistakes: Clark shattered the WNBA's all-time season record for turnovers, but you want her throwing some high-risk passes. As for other areas of improvement, Clark's working on her midrange shooting. "I used to have a middie bag," she says. "I just never had to use it." And she wants to get stronger. "Teams' No. 1 tactic of stopping me is, 'be physical with her,'" Clark says. "Because they know either I don't like it or it can throw me off."

Speculation was swirling about whether Clark would play in Unrivaled, the new 3-on-3 league founded by Stewart and Napheesa Collier that begins in January. The startup has attracted attention as a way for WNBA players to make more money without having to play overseas. Still, Clark—who made \$75,535 in salary her first year on the Fever but thanks to her many endorsements is doing just fine financially—is taking a pass. "I didn't rule out doing it in the future, but this year is just not the best for me," she says. She thinks spending the winter lifting weights and working solo in the gym will elevate her game. "It's going to be good for me to do my own thing and have my own space," she says. "I kind of want to just stay out of the spotlight."

She'll be back there soon enough. "Personally, I'm just scratching the surface of what I can do and hopefully how I can change the world and

impact people,” she says. “There’s also been so many people that are not involved in women’s sports, that are just in the workforce, or whatever they do, and they’re just like, ‘Thank you for what you do for women.’ I’ve heard that a million times.” With lunch wrapped, Clark drives to White’s press conference, where she sits front row with Boston and Hull. Her day concludes at historic Hinkle Fieldhouse where she watches McCaffery’s Butler team win its season opener.

Fifth grader Ellie Dillon and a friend—both wearing Clark shirts—wait more than a half hour after the game to catch Clark, who as she’s leaving the gym with McCaffery stops to give them autographs. “It almost doesn’t feel real,” says Dillon moments after meeting Clark. “That that’s actually her, standing right in front of you.”

[video id=yiQ9aa0i autostart="viewable" no_rec vertical]

Styled by Adri Zgirdea; hair and make-up by Erin Lee smith; production by The Wall Productions

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Elton John

Belinda Luscombe is an editor at large at TIME, where she has covered a wide swath of topics, but specializes in interviews, profiles, and essays. In 2010, she won the Council on Contemporary Families Media Award for her stories on the ways marriage is changing. She is also author of [*Marriageology: the Art and Science of Staying Together*](#).



[Elton John](#) has no address. Visitors to his home are given three names: the name of a house, the name of a hill, and the name of a town, which is near Windsor, as in Windsor Castle, where King Charles III lives.

Admission is granted via a big iron gate that swings silently open to a crunchy driveway, a small turreted gatehouse, a pond with geese, hedgerows, wordless men with wheelbarrows and Wellingtons and, after a little walking, a three-story red-brick Georgian compound. From the outside it has the stately but understated air commonly associated with English gentry. One of the property's chief treasures is a really old oak tree.

This is not the [Elton John most people know](#). That guy is loud. The glasses, the outfits, the sexuality, the concerts, the retail expenditure, the platform heels, the temper, the parties, and most of all the piano—all set permanently at fortissimo. John has been in showbiz for 60 years, and for 50 of those he has been a front man, inordinately and excessively famous. His triumphs, mistakes, strengths, weaknesses, wigs, and duck costumes have been in full and permanent plumage. The wealth and passions he became known for have not been those associated with aristocracy: they leaned more toward shopping than Chopin.

DEC. 30, 2024



TIME ICON OF THE YEAR

Music legend
ELTON JOHN



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But these days the comparison to an English noble feels weirdly apt. John's married with two heirs. His philanthropic work is much admired. Some of his possessions—a selection from his [impressive photograph collection](#)—are currently on display at one of London's most highly regarded art institutions, the Victoria and Albert Museum. His library is full of trophies that attest to his prowess, an Emmy and multiple other awards crowded together on a small table with some ancient sculpture fragments. He has literally been knighted. From his garden, the current King's grandmother once remarked, you get a good view of the British monarchy's ancestral home.

John has owned Woodside, as the house is known, for nearly 50 years, but until the pandemic he did not spend much time in it. Most of his life was spent in hotel rooms, while he toured. Like many nobles, he found laundry an unfamiliar task. "It was the most embarrassing thing in my life when I went into [drug] treatment that I couldn't work a washing machine," says John during our first interview, conducted in a New York City hotel room in November, while his husband David Furnish lies on the bed and two publicists wait in the bathroom. "I thought, 'F-ck. Here you are at 43 years of age, and you can't work a washing machine. That shows you how you're f-cked up.'"

[video id=WsW5nHEB autostart="viewable"]

More than three decades later, at 77, he is doing much more than still standing in front of the top loader. Right now, he's dealing with damage to his right eye, which was previously the good one, that has rendered him almost blind, but you wouldn't know it to meet him. The candle that is Elton John has been inextinguishable, no matter how strong the wind. His 57 U.S. Top 40 hits were mostly [released during his wild-child youth](#), but he found a second act in [writing songs for animated Disney movies](#), for which he won two Oscars, and a third in writing songs for Broadway musicals, for which he won a Tony. There's a whiff of fourth act about him as he moves into the mash-up phase of his career, lending his melodies—and some vocals—to a new generation of performers. It has been a mere 16 months since he had his

last hit single, a [collaboration with Britney Spears](#), who hadn't recorded music for five years.

This kind of longevity requires not just prodigious musical dexterity, and phenomenal luck, but stamina. Few can keep up with fame's sugar-daddy demands for long enough to get to the settling-down phase with their sanity, health, and friends and family intact. "When you're famous, there's like a court around you," says John. "People are vying for position, and the nearer you are to me, the more people will get jealous."



He has bested or evaded the four horsemen that cut down his generation's boldest names: drug addiction, AIDS, irrelevance, and suicide. Apart from Paul McCartney, who had a Top 10 single with a resurrected Beatles song in 2023, very few of John's contemporaries are still alive, let alone releasing new hits. The Rolling Stones still tour, but their last No. 1 was 40 years ago. John has also survived deep family dysfunction, tabloid fabrication, early hair loss, bulimia, and in the '80s, a brief marriage to a woman. And here's the key part: he has remained prolific.

Having performed 4,500-something concerts over half a century, he retired from touring at the end of 2023, but not from cultural output. [Elton John: Never Too Late](#), the most recent documentary on his life, which compares his [meteoric first five years of touring the U.S.](#) with the final tour that ended in July last year, hits Disney+ on Dec. 13. He has written the music for and co-produced two new musicals: *Tammy Faye* and *The Devil Wears Prada*. An auction of some of his many belongings in February brought in more than \$20 million, [twice the presale estimate](#). He has a podcast/radio show, [Rocket Hour](#), which promotes young musicians. This year the 52-year-old song “Rocket Man” hit a billion streams on Spotify, while “Cold Heart,” a 2021 track with Dua Lipa, drew a million listeners a day. “When Elton and David called me about the collaboration, for me, it was because of our friendship,” says Lipa. “And of course, singing alongside one of my musical heroes was a no-brainer. His music has been able to soundtrack my life from the very beginning.”

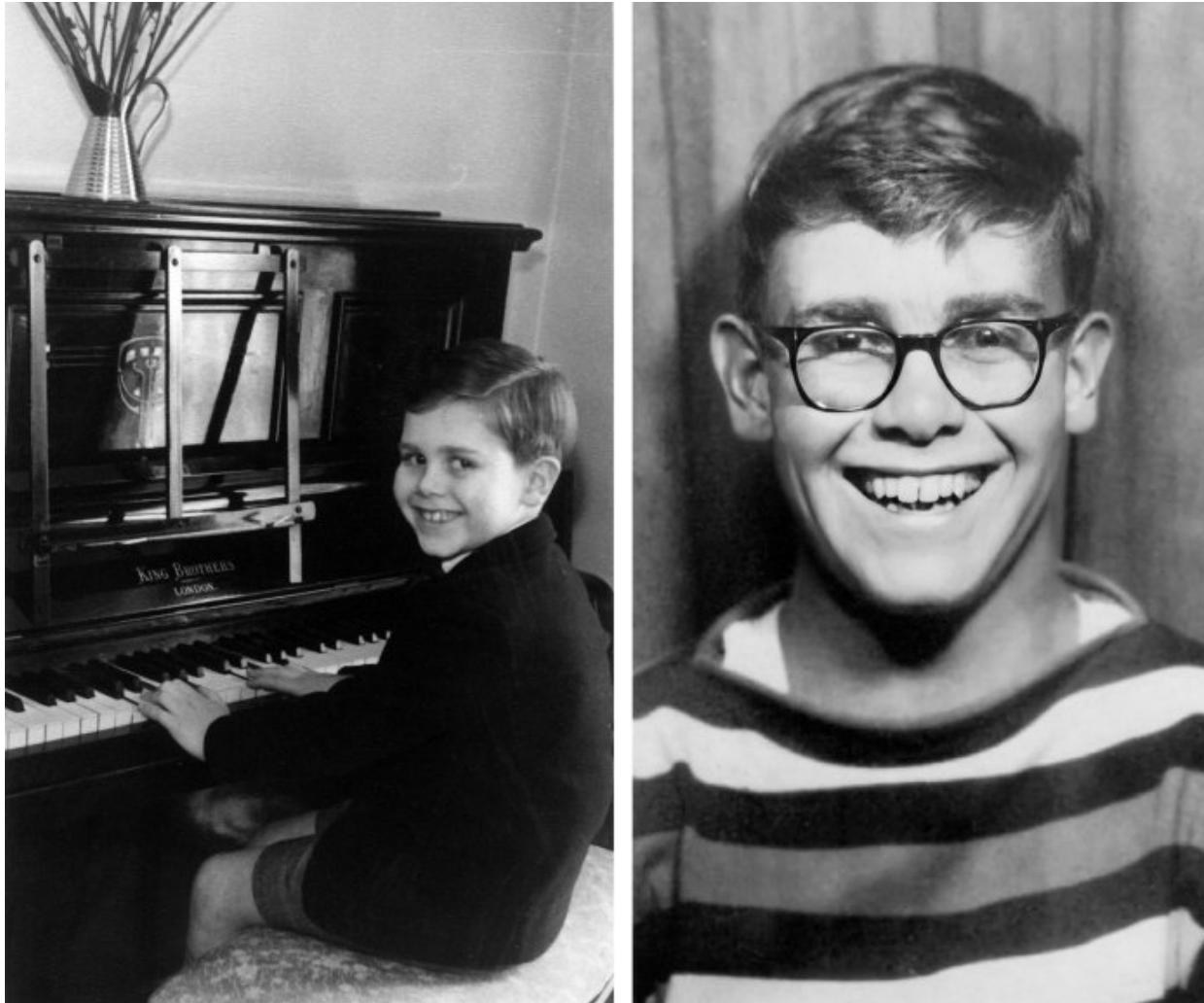
John’s outrageous string of hits is now a list of global standards. “Do you know how many requests I get a day for the use of our songs on things like *America’s Got Talent*, *The Voice*, or the silly show where they dress up as poodles?” says [Bernie Taupin, John’s longtime writing partner](#), who has provided the lyrics to most of his hits. “I don’t think Bob Dylan gets a lot of requests for *The Masked Singer*.”



In person the glam-rock superstar is gentle, a little shy, and eager to please, and especially eager to make people laugh. While some frailties are apparent, he still has plenty of bounce. He favors comfy designer tracksuits and sneakers. He doesn't hear too well or walk with confidence. Corrective surgery a few years back made the glasses a mostly cosmetic choice, but a recent eye infection damaged the optic nerve in his right eye and it's taking a while to heal. His husband is determined to be optimistic about it. "I just think it's just gonna take time, right?" Furnish says.

It's the evening after opening night of *Tammy Faye*, the \$22 million Broadway musical about the televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker, who came to embrace and be embraced by the gay community. John wrote the music. The reviews are out, and they are dismal. It will be just one day before the [show's impending closure is announced](#). John is mostly philosophical. "It's a shame for everyone who put so much work in it," he says. "But that's what happens when you take a chance." He and Furnish chalk the failure up to the mood after the election of Donald Trump. "It's a fairly political piece of work," he says. "And with that you have to press somebody's buttons. The buttons we pressed last night with the critics weren't the right ones."

If John seems sanguine, it's perhaps because he's long been more interested in exploring what's next than stewing about his failures. His [best-selling 2019 memoir *Me*](#) and Furnish's 1995 documentary about him, [*Tantrums & Tiaras*](#), reveal a willingness to let people see the less fabulous side of Elton John. "It was a bit like video therapy in a way," says Furnish. "It gave me a chance to go in with a camera, like a shield, and kind of confront and shine a light on things in his life that I thought were odd."



The documentary (which George Michael advised him to bury) captures him in full meltdown mode, insisting on one occasion that he will never make another music video because someone left a bag in a car, and on another instructing his private plane to leave the South of France as soon as possible and never return because a woman waved at him during a tennis lesson. (They stay.)

John still struggles with patience. "David can tell you that my fuse is very short, and the worst thing about my temper is that David is very rational about things and he'll explain," says John. "And I'll get even madder about it." When John met Furnish in 1993, at a dinner party a friend had organized at Woodside at John's request, Furnish was impressed with the star's warmth and lack of ego. But as they grew closer, he realized John, who had endured childhood under a distant and eventually absent father and an ill-tempered

mother, was a people pleaser with self-esteem issues. “He was very, very shut down in terms of accepting love,” says Furnish. “No one had ever asked him to do personal things like go for a walk together, those kind of joyful things.”

John was one of the earliest celebrities to come out, in 1976, initially saying he was bisexual, when such an admission was deeply hazardous career-wise. After 31 years together, John and Furnish, who formerly worked in advertising, take their gay-icon status very seriously. They formed a civil partnership in December 2005, within weeks of its becoming legal to do so, and were [married on the same day nine years later](#) after the U.K.’s same-sex-marriage laws were passed.

Unlike many [celebrity parents](#), they are sending their [two boys](#), Zachary, 13, and Elijah, 11, to school locally, although Zachary just started boarding school. “We deliberately didn’t homeschool our children because we want them to be their own people and to define life as they want to be defined,” says Furnish, who is husband, helpmeet, and manager. He’s the CEO of Rocket Entertainment, is listed as executive producer on the musicals, and is the co-director of the new documentary, which he brought to R.J. Cutler, who has also helmed docs about [Martha Stewart](#) and Billie Eilish.

Fatherhood, marriage, and sobriety have mellowed the superstar. As has self-knowledge. “I will flare up if I’m tired, if I’m exhausted, if I’m overwhelmed,” says John. “I don’t like having that temperament, but it’s all usually done and dusted within five or 10 minutes.” But impatience is also part of his gift, it seems. He likes to write fast—if he can’t get a tune for the lyrics he’s given in an hour or so, he moves on to new ones. “I know people think, ‘Oh, God, he doesn’t work that hard,’” says John. “But it’s really effortless. If I get a lyric and I look at it, the song comes straight out.”



Taupin wrote “Your Song,” the duo’s most commercially successful tune, over breakfast when he was 19 and living with John’s family, sleeping in bunk beds in John’s room. He guesses it took his roommate half an hour to create music for it. “We have a telepathy between the two of us,” says John of Taupin. “He seems to know what I want, and I seem to know what he wants. It’s really unusual and it’s very spooky.” In the new documentary there’s old footage where John explains how he scored a song Taupin wrote. “As soon as you see the word *ballerina*, you know it’s not going to be fast, it’s got to be gentle,” the young star says, like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. The song is “Tiny Dancer.”

In some of rock ’n’ roll’s most formative years, 1970 to 1975, John released 13 albums, seven of which went platinum. He was the first artist ever to have an album debut at No. 1 on the American charts and is the only one ever to have had a Top 10 single in each of the past six decades. Even today, John’s songs are inescapable—they’re at every party, in every restaurant, in every

airport, on every hold for an agent, at every karaoke night. [Spears cited him as her favorite artist](#) even before their duet gave her an unexpected hit song. “Elton’s songs are perfectly, masterfully written songs, and that’s what connects them to millions, billions of people,” says [Chappell Roan](#), whom John raves about and whose rapid rise to fame is reminiscent of John’s early days.



Roan says he also helped her learn to trust her instincts. “The advice he gave me was that the songs will come,” says Roan. He told her that after his first album blew up, he had no songs lined up. “He thought that he wouldn’t have the ideas, but they were absolutely there. He just had to let them come to him. So that’s a good reminder.” As well as being a guru for young performers, John has restored the careers of older musicians who had lost faith in themselves. His [work with John Lennon](#) gave the Beatles legend a No. 1 hit. And he rescued one of his idols, [Leon Russell](#), from obscurity with an album they made together in 2011.

Rocket Hour is mostly just him playing music and telling the young artists how much he adores them. The people he interviews look bewildered to be so feted, like they got a FaceTime about their science project from Albert Einstein. “Elton’s impact cannot be overstated, and even now, his continued effort to make a better future for young LGBTQ+ artists is so felt,” wrote Allison Ponthier, one of the artists he has featured, on social media.

For Taupin, John’s enduring relevance is a validation. “What people didn’t realize in the ’70s and ’80s and ’90s, but I think they realize now, is that he’s one of the best f-cking piano players on the planet,” he says. “There are a lot of people that have great catalogs and great songs, but I don’t think anybody of our peers has songs that are so varied.” Cutler, the documentary’s other co-director, calls him “Mozartian in his prodigious gifts.” In his youth, Cutler forged multiple record vouchers to win a ticket to John’s 1974 concert at Madison Square Garden. “It comes out of him,” says Cutler, trying to describe John’s artistry. “It emanates from him, like it’s a gift from the heavens.”



Music was always the easiest part of John's life. Words—and relationships—not so much. A fledgling music producer at Liberty Records was so unimpressed with young Reginald Dwight's songs during an audition that he sent him packing, handing him an envelope of lyrics mailed in by a 17-year-old chicken farmer from Lincolnshire as he left. It's one of the [greatest origin stories in rock history](#). The unlikely duo of John and Taupin churned out hits in much the same way chickens make eggs, often and without fuss. Except these eggs frequently turned platinum.

While the songs were appealing, it was John's performance style that captivated American critics on his first tour in the States in 1970. He had developed an approach to the piano that combined the merriness of Winifred Atwell with the force of Jerry Lee Lewis and the showmanship of Little Richard, all to a rock beat. The costumes and keyboard antics were brazen, but the stories the songs told and harmonies they used were mostly tender. "I think there's always a new generation that cling on to the things they say," says Taupin.

Somewhere around 1974, at the peak of his productivity, John was introduced to cocaine by his ex-lover and then manager John Reid. He took to it with the [avidity he applies to most of his pursuits](#). At first he found it freed him of his crippling shyness, but eventually it took over. “You make terrible decisions on drugs,” he says. “I wanted love so badly, I’d just take hostages. I’d see someone I liked and spend three or four months together, and then they would resent me because they had nothing in their life apart from me. It really upsets me, thinking back on how many people I probably hurt.”

As John became increasingly dependent on drugs, the music got worse. “I was terrified for him. It was absolutely horrible,” says Taupin. He had some hits—“I’m Still Standing,” interestingly, came out of this period—but they were rarer. “A lot of the work that we did in the times when he was at his worst wasn’t the best of both of us,” says Taupin, who says watching John’s decline made him reform his own heavy drug use. “I wasn’t able to creatively invest any time in writing material that related to him until he actually found himself, and then it was easier for me to reflect upon it.”

John now divides his life into pre- and post-sober periods. He has helped many people kick drugs and has offered to help many more. He is [Eminem’s sponsor](#). He orchestrated English pop star [Robbie Williams’ first stint in rehab](#). He tried, without success, to [help George Michael](#). “It’s tough to tell someone that they’re being an a-hole, and it’s tough to hear,” he says. “Eventually I made the choice to admit that I’m being an a-hole.” Those struggles have made him doubt the wisdom of legal weed. “I maintain that it’s addictive. It leads to other drugs. And when you’re stoned—and I’ve been stoned—you don’t think normally,” he says. “Legalizing marijuana in America and Canada is one of the greatest mistakes of all time.”



Asked if he feels the same way about alcohol, he pauses, exhales, and asks Furnish for help. His husband, who is also sober and has already prevented the star from oversharing once during the interview, sits up on the bed and offers a balanced answer, suggesting that while alcohol is part of the fabric of society, there are studies that find it's much less healthy than people believe it to be.

Survival, as the poet Christian Wiman has said, is a style. You have to be around long enough to really make a dent on the culture. John, who has taken a half-hearted bid at ending his life three times, thinks there were three things that saved him from the fates that took so many of his peers: Watford FC, a soccer club local to where he grew up that he bought and took to the Premier League; Alcoholics Anonymous; and a [hemophiliac teenager from Indiana named Ryan White](#). At the club he met people who cared more about soccer than his fame, AA's methods helped him deal with his multiple

addictions, and White, who contracted HIV from a tainted blood transfusion in the early days of the AIDS crisis and was shunned by his school and neighbors, showed him how selfishly he was living.

John heard about White when the teen was invited to an AIDS benefit and said on a TV news program that the person he was most looking forward to meeting was the rock star. John saw the interview and called the family. White, who was given six months to live when he got his diagnosis, survived five years and spent much of it trying to educate people about AIDS. John kept in touch and helped the family out when they needed it. Eventually he flew them to a concert in California. “Elton wasn’t afraid to be around us and just brought so much joy,” says Jeanne White Ginder, Ryan’s mother. “It took us off all the negativity we were facing at home.”

White died on April 8, 1990, at 18. John was at the hospital with him. “It all came to a climax, really, at the Ryan White funeral in Indianapolis—a really sad and emotional week—and I came back to the hotel thinking I’m just so out of line,” John says. “It was a shock to see how far down the scale of humanity I’d fallen.” Six months later he went into rehab. Two years later [he started the Elton John AIDS Foundation \(EJAF\)](#), of which Furnish is now the chairman. “We could end AIDS tomorrow if every person knew their HIV status and had access to treatment,” says Furnish.



In 2022, President Joe Biden surprised John with the National Humanities Medal, calling him “an enduring icon and advocate with absolute courage, who found purpose to challenge convention, shatter stigma, and advance the simple truth that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.” John and Furnish are particularly proud of the [EJAF-funded program that allows people to take HIV tests at Walmart](#), without going to a doctor. They believe that the U.N.’s [goal of ending new AIDS cases by 2030](#) is achievable, even with an incoming U.S. Administration whose proposed health czar has suggested, contrary to evidence, that [AIDS is not caused by a virus.](#)

Looking back on that news program that first brought John into their lives, White Ginder recalls how horrified she was that her son had not talked up the event’s sponsor Elizabeth Taylor. “I said, ‘Ryan, why did you mention Elton John?’” she says. “And he said, ‘Because he’s not afraid to be different.’”

As Furnish and John sit on floral couches next to a gas fireplace in Woodside and talk about the demands and benefits of being Elton John, it is clear that the rock star gave up touring reluctantly. (“Elton used to say, ‘I want to die onstage,’” says Furnish. “It never made me particularly happy.”) But what he has now is what he has always wanted: a home. Yes, it’s one where a stunning young man serves hot beverages and where artworks by [Damien Hirst](#) and Andy Warhol share space with a mannequin covered in what look like jelly beans. But the bougie-candle-scented living room is also strewn with family photos. As with so many who resisted the pulls of fatherhood until late in life, John’s chosen style of parenting is gushy. “On my gravestone,” he tells me in our New York City interview, “all I want it to say is ‘He was a great dad.’”



There were casualties to creating this new life, the biggest of which was his relationship with his mother, to whom he had been very close. “She meant a lot to me, but my success changed her,” he says. He continued to support her financially, but she disapproved of Furnish. “She was probably one of the biggest liars I’ve ever met,” says John. “But that’s because she was a

sociopath, and I got to understand it.” The two fought publicly; she hired an Elton John impersonator for her 90th birthday. Her son and his spouse were not invited, but reporters were. “I rang her up the next day to wish her a happy birthday. I said, ‘How did it go?’” John recalls. “And she said, ‘It was great. He’s as good as you are.’”

Perhaps it’s age or his relationship with Furnish (or distance from his mother, who died in 2017), but he has grown slightly more comfortable with himself. Slightly. His distaste for being on video, for instance, persists.

“Music videos should be made by good-looking people like Harry Styles,” says John. “I’m not very good at looking at myself. I don’t think you ever lose that body consciousness. I just think it stays with you forever. But I am much better.” He especially dislikes TV and has turned down invitations to be a judge on the TV talent shows that request his music so often. “Being on TV all the time kills your career, kills your vibe, kills your charisma totally,” he says.



He would prefer to spend his time discovering. “I’ve never lost the excitement of buying a new record, a new book, a new photograph,” he says, noting that if he had to choose between never playing music again and never listening to it again, he’d opt to keep listening. “I just think that’s kept me going,” he says. But he is beginning to think a bit about what lies beyond. “I don’t really believe in the biblical God too much, but I have faith,” says John. “My higher power has been looking after me all my life; he’s got me through drugs, he’s got me through depression, he’s got me through loneliness, and he got me sober. He’s been there all the time, I think. I just didn’t acknowledge him.”

Like many megastars, John feels that he was somehow chosen to be as famous as he is, because he could withstand the burdens it brings. Asked if he’d wish his talent on his sons, if it also came with the drawbacks of stardom, he offers an emphatic no. “I’ve lived an incredible life, but it’s been a hell of a life, and it’s been a slog,” he says. “I wouldn’t want that amount of pressure on them.” Icon status is great, but as he learned over his many decades in the spotlight, there’s more to life than rock ’n’ roll. “If people remember that we tried to change the world a little bit, we were kind, we tried to help people,” that would be enough of a legacy for him, says John. “And then, apart from that, there was the music.”

—With reporting by Leslie Dickstein

Set design by Trish Stephenson; styled by Jo Hambro; grooming by Jamie Madison; production by 2b Management

Correction: The original version of the story misstated the name of John’s latest documentary and its release date on Disney+. It is called *Elton John: Never Too Late* and will be released on Dec. 13.

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Behind the Scenes of TIME's 2024 Person of the Year Issue

Sam Jacobs is Editor in Chief at TIME where he leads TIME's global newsroom and its journalism across all platforms. Since joining TIME in 2013, Jacobs has held a variety of senior editorial leadership positions. Previously, he was national political correspondent at Reuters, associate editor at Newsweek and staff reporter for The Daily Beast. His writing has appeared in the Boston Globe and New York Observer.



We are nearing a century of [Person of the Year](#), the franchise TIME's editors launched as a make-good at the end of 1927, after realizing they had [failed to mark Charles Lindbergh's history-making transatlantic flight on the cover](#). It is our privilege to work on a project that has, across those years, become a milestone and, yes, a lightning rod. Like much of what we do at TIME, this issue is an opportunity to be in conversation with history while embracing the future with arms wide open.

It takes hundreds of people to make Person of the Year possible, from those of us in the newsroom to our colleagues across TIME's business, including our CEO Jessica Sibley. For the second year in a row, Person of the Year was led by Kelly Conniff, who is entering her 13th year at TIME. Kelly guides the staff through months of debate and assignments until we reach our final destination. She was assisted by many including Lori Fradkin, Lily Rothman, Annabel Gutterman, and D.W. Pine.

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PERSON OF THE YEAR

TIME

DONALD
TRUMP



time.com

The story on Donald Trump was written and reported by [Eric Cortellessa](#), who covers the Republican Party and its leaders for TIME. Massimo Calabresi, Alex Altman, and I joined Eric for the interview with Trump on Nov. 25. Trump has sat with TIME journalists for [extensive interviews](#) over the past nine years; the results of those interviews have provided valuable insight for our readers. We publish in TIME today a story on Trump's year along with a [transcript](#) and [analysis of Trump's remarks](#).

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TIME CEO OF THE YEAR

AMD leader
Lisa Su



time.com

The [profile of CEO of the Year Lisa Su](#) was written by Billy Perrigo, reporting from Santa Clara, Calif., on Nov. 6; last year, Billy co-wrote the [CEO of the Year profile on OpenAI's Sam Altman](#). Sean Gregory's streak of writing or co-writing all of TIME's Athlete of the Year profiles remains unbroken. He [interviewed Caitlin Clark](#) in Indianapolis on Nov. 4. Belinda Luscombe, who joined TIME's original parent company in 1992, [interviewed Icon of the Year Elton John](#) in New York City and at Woodside, his home in Old Windsor, England, in November.

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TIME ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Basketball star
**CAITLIN
CLARK**



time.com

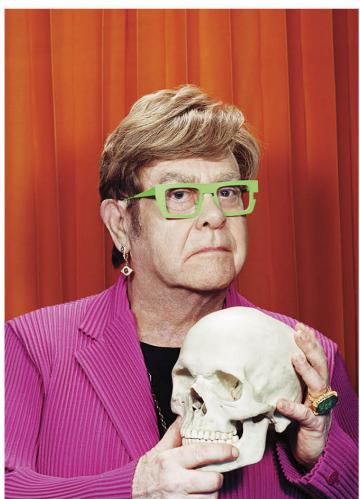
We are fortunate to work with the best photographers in the world. Donald Trump was [photographed by Platon](#), who has taken more than 20 covers—and last created the [cover image for Person of the Year in 2007](#). Clark was photographed by Cass Bird, a giant of contemporary fashion and art photography. Elton John was photographed by Miles Aldridge, whose father, artist Alan Aldridge, created the cover for John's 1975 album [*Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy*](#). Su was photographed by Guerin Blask. Their work was photo edited by Katherine Pomerantz, Dilys Ng, and Kara Milstein. Design for this issue was overseen by Rich Morgan and video by Justine Simons.

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TIME ICON OF THE YEAR

Music legend
ELTON JOHN



time.com

As TIME has evolved, so too have the many forms in which we present this issue. The night before we closed this magazine, we gathered for our annual “A Year in TIME” event in New York City. Led by Dan Macsai, Cate Matthews, and Jeff Smith, the event featured onstage conversations with Clark and Su and a performance by John. There, we also celebrated the first decade of our Next Generation Leaders program, created in partnership with Rolex.

[video id=qCJFJJYI autostart="viewable"]

Finally, a note on the future: this year we are debuting [TIME AI](#), a new initiative led by TIME COO Mark Howard in partnership with Scale AI, with our Person of the Year coverage. We’ve been covering the rise of generative AI across industries in our reporting, and now we are helping TIME’s readers experience our journalism with it. Visit our website to experience TIME’s Person of the Year reporting translated into seven languages, as well as via audio and a new conversation-based interface.

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A Look Back at Taylor Swift's Record-Breaking Eras Tour

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



More than 630 days after [Taylor Swift's Eras Tour](#) kicked off on March 17 2023, in Glendale, Ariz., the [global concert phenomenon](#) came to an end following three final shows in Vancouver, British Columbia, this weekend.

By the end of its 66-show run in 2023, Swift's painstakingly crafted musical extravaganza had earned over \$1 billion to become the highest-grossing concert tour of all time. Since then, she has performed an additional 83 shows, propelling that number into the stratosphere—and helping turn Swift into the [first musician to become a billionaire](#) solely from songwriting and performing.

In the nearly two years since Eras began, Swift's accomplishments have been numerous, from [dropping three albums](#) to being named [TIME's 2023 Person of the Year](#) to releasing the [most successful concert film of all time](#) to [breaking untold records](#). And her popularity shows no signs of waning any time soon.

Still, it's an emotional time for both fans and Swift herself, who [told the audience at her final Toronto show](#) on Nov. 23 that she was "having a bit of a moment" after tearing up onstage. "My band, my crew, all of my fellow performers, we have put so much of our lives into this," she said. "And you've put so much of your lives into being with us tonight and to giving us that moment that we will never forget."

It seems safe to say that there's never been a concert tour quite like Eras. So in honor of the final three shows, we're taking a numerical look back at the biggest two years of Swift's career to date.

Number of Eras shows and cities

In total, Swift will have played 149 shows across five continents and 51 cities worldwide as of Dec. 8. Of those shows, 62 took place in the U.S. in 23 different cities stateside. The remaining 90 were part of the Latin America, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Canada legs of the tour.

Distance traveled by Eras attendees

Fans traveled an average distance of 338 miles for the Eras Tour, according to data from ticket exchange and resale company Vivid Seats. That's a 125% increase on the average of 150 miles they traveled for her Reputation Stadium Tour in 2018 and a 248% increase on the average of 97 miles they traveled for her first-ever headlining tour, the Fearless Tour, which opened in 2009 and ran through 2010.

Number of surprise songs

In addition to her 44-plus-song set list, Swift has played at least two acoustic “surprise songs” per Eras show. In 2023, she performed 125 different songs (counting mashups of repeat songs as unique entries) as her 133 surprise offerings. During that run of shows, [she told fans](#) she wouldn’t repeat a surprise song unless she messed it up the first time or it was from her 2022 album *Midnights*, which she described as “the most accurate picture of [her] life to date.” However, at her last show of 2023, in São Paulo, Brazil, she announced that all of her tracks would be “fair game” to repeat when the tour picked back up in the new year. In 2024, with the slate wiped clean, she has performed 160 different surprise songs, many of which have been unique mashups of multiple tracks. She is set to reveal at least six more surprise songs at the final three shows of the tour in Vancouver for a grand total of 299.

Read more: [All the Song Mashups Taylor Swift Has Played During the Eras Tour](#)

Number of special guests

From [Sabrina Carpenter](#) to [Paramore](#) to Gracie Abrams, Swift’s Eras stops have featured 19 different opening acts. She has also brought out 10 other special guests, from frequent collaborator [Jack Antonoff](#) to her boyfriend, NFL star [Travis Kelce](#), to join her on stage at various shows.

Number of Eras tickets sold

Following the final Vancouver show on Dec. 8, Swift’s team reported that the singer had sold 10,168,008 tickets across her 149 sold-out performances for an average of 68,241 tickets per show. (Those totals would have been higher if Swift hadn’t had to cancel three shows in Vienna in August due to safety concerns over terrorist threats.)

- [The 10 Best Songs of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Movies of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Albums of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best TV Shows of 2024](#)

- [The 10 Best Video Games of 2024](#)

Total Eras Tour gross

Eras sold an astronomical total of over \$2.078 billion in tickets, according to Swift's production company, making it the first tour to not only cross the \$1 billion mark but more than double that benchmark. That's more than the forecasted 2024 GDP of 18 small countries. For comparison, the second-highest grossing tour of all time, Elton John's nearly five-year Farewell Yellow Brick Road Tour, sold six million tickets across 328 shows to earn \$939 million.

Read more: [How Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce Inspired Two New Christmas Movies](#)

Total Eras merch revenue

According to reports from different venues, [Pollstar](#) estimates Eras attendees were spending an average of \$40 per person on merch at the first 60 Eras shows. That puts Swift's tour merch revenue at an estimated \$440.8 million—not including non-concert day purchases—following her final run of 2024 Eras dates.

The TTPD effect

After debuting two re-recorded albums, *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)* and *1989 (Taylor's Version)*, and one single, “You’re Losing Me (From the Vault),” during the 2023 run of the Eras Tour, Swift dropped a brand new 31-song double album, *The Tortured Poets Department (TTPD)*, in April 2024. In its first week of sales, *TTPD*, which became the first album to claim every slot in the top 14 spots of the Billboard Hot 100 simultaneously, sold 2.61 million equivalent album units and tallied 891.37 million official streams (the largest streaming week for an album ever), [according to industry data provider Luminate](#). It also became her 14th No. 1 album on the Billboard 200, tying Jay-Z’s record for most No. 1 albums by a solo artist. Only the Beatles, with 19, have more. Following the album’s

release, Swift began incorporating a new block of seven *TTPD* songs that she described as “Female Rage: The Musical” into her Eras set list.

Read more: [*Taylor Swift Is Halfway Through Her Rerecording Project. It's Paid Off Big Time*](#)

The Eras Tour Book sales

Leading up to the final weekend of Eras, Swift released a 256-page coffee table book containing over 500 photos and anecdotes from the record-breaking tour. Despite only being available for purchase through one retailer, Target, the \$40 *Eras Tour Book* sold 814,000 copies in its first two days on sale, according to industry data provider Circana BookScan. That's the second-highest number of books sold in a single reporting week since BookScan began tracking sales in 2001, surpassed only in the nonfiction category by Barack Obama's *A Promised Land*, which sold 816,000 copies when it first went on sale in 2020.

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Why 2024 Was the Year of the Viral Animal

Chad de Guzman is a reporter for TIME based in Singapore. He covers the Asia-Pacific region and global overnight news.



Moo Deng. It's a name millions around the world have come to know. She's the most obsessed-over, least controversial celebrity. Her dewy skin, her enviable lifestyle of frolicking and feasting, her eminently meme-able face have all made her an icon of the internet. She's also ... a hippopotamus.

Cute creatures going viral is nothing new. Seven years ago, the Cincinnati Zoo wanted TIME to name [Fiona the hippo](#) Person—er, Animal?—of the Year.

But 2024 seems to be on a different level of feral fascination.

The plump pygmy hippo from Thailand—who was born in July and whose name translates approximately to “bouncy pork”—[rose to fame](#) perhaps when she was needed most. “Observing animals, whether online or in person, can be therapeutic in many ways,” University of Washington psychology professor emeritus David Barash tells TIME. They can provide a comforting distraction, he says, “when so many people are depressed by the state of the world.”

And distract Moo Deng did.

What started as simply a new subject of photos and videos posted on Khao Kheow Open Zoo’s social media platforms quickly snowballed into the world’s latest It girl. Social media users obsessed over every new documentation of her teething and tumbling and infantile antics, and the followers of the zoo’s [TikTok](#), [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [Instagram](#) accounts skyrocketed.

Moo Deng inspired fan art, merchandise, even makeup trends. Foot traffic to the zoo hit record highs, prompting new measures to protect Moo Deng’s safety and limitations on visiting hours. (A [24/7 livestream](#) was set up for her most dedicated fans to get round-the-clock access.)

Jin Lee, a media sociologist at Curtin University in Australia, thinks Moo Deng initially resonated so widely because her relationship with her [caretaker](#) seemed genuine rather than staged or manufactured for clicks. “He spent a lot of time with her, and then he just started to post things about her,” says Lee, and people crave such authenticity.

Moo Deng’s reach has since extended far and wide: She made her way into photoshops of [movie scenes](#), became the U.S. Labor Department’s poster girl for [staying hydrated](#), and in September was even parodied on [Saturday Night Live](#). In November, GMM, one of Thailand’s largest music companies, produced an upbeat theme song for Moo Deng in four different languages—[Thai](#), [Chinese](#), [Japanese](#), and [English](#)—that have collectively racked up hundreds of thousands of streams on YouTube.

Tony Sampson, a digital-media researcher at the University of Essex, tells TIME he defines digital virality as “affective contagion.” In other words,

posts that make you *feel* something tend to spread better than purely informational posts. “Negative emotions like anger and frustration spread well too,” he adds. “But maybe people need to escape that sometimes.”

“I think this year might be slightly different given that there’s been a lot of depressing news,” Sampson says. “Certainly, on my networks, where there’s been an understandable increase in downbeat posts related to the depressing political situation and the wars, my most popular post was of a small bird peeping through my window.”

It’s no wonder, then, that Moo Deng was not alone this year in attracting the world’s attention. A cohort of adorable animals have joined her in the online spotlight—from [Pesto the very large penguin](#) to [Nibi the “diva” beaver](#) to [Biscuits the seal](#), [Hua Hua the giant panda](#), and even [Haggis](#), a fellow baby pygmy hippo who was born in Scotland in October. The list goes on, but one thing these social media sensations appear to have in common is that people seem to like to ascribe humanlike traits and emotions to them.

Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz coined the concept of *Kindchenschema*, or baby schema, to describe humans’ affinity to facial and bodily features that make a creature appear cute—big eyes, protruding cheeks, an awkward gait—and that trigger a desire to care for and protect them. The most popular Moo Deng posts often center around likening her to a toddler, from [finding her footing](#) to [calling for her mom](#) to [throwing tantrums](#). One post even made out that she carried a leaf around on her snout for [emotional support](#).

Anthropomorphism can sometimes misread what animals are actually going through, Barash warns. But the fact that much of Moo Deng’s appeal seems to stem from her perceived relatability isn’t necessarily a bad thing, he suggests—and it isn’t always off base. “Fortunately,” he says, “animal behaviorists are increasingly comfortable recognizing the obvious: that many animals share a wide range of mental states with human beings.”

Maybe we could all do with our own emotional-support leaf. Or maybe Moo Deng is already just that.

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How the Benefits—and Harms—of AI Grew in 2024

Andrew R. Chow is a technology correspondent at TIME. His covers crypto, AI, tech regulation, and culture.



In 2024, both cutting-edge technology and the companies controlling it grew increasingly powerful, provoking euphoric wonderment and existential dread. Companies like Nvidia and Alphabet soared in value, fueled by expectations that artificial intelligence (AI) will become a cornerstone of modern life. While those grand visions are still far into the future, tech undeniably shaped markets, warfare, elections, climate, and daily life this year.

Perhaps technology's biggest impact this year was on the global economy. The so-called Magnificent Seven—the stocks of Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and Tesla—thrived in large part because of the AI boom, propelling the S&P 500 to new highs. [Nvidia](#), which designs the computer chips powering many AI systems, led the way, with its stock nearly tripling in price. These profits spurred an [arms race](#) in AI infrastructure, with companies constructing enormous factories and [data centers](#)—which in turn drew [criticism](#) from environmentalists about their energy consumption. Some market watchers also expressed concern about the increasing dependence of the global economy on a handful of companies, and the potential impacts if they prove unable to fulfill their massive promises. But as of early December, the value of these companies showed no sign of letting up.

Though not with the explosive novelty of ChatGPT's 2023 breakthrough, generative AI systems advanced over the past 12 months: Google's DeepMind achieved silver-medal results at a prestigious math competition; Google's NotebookLM impressed users with its ability to turn written notes into succinct podcasts; ChatGPT passed a Stanford-administered Turing test; Apple integrated new artificial intelligence tools into its newest iPhone. Beyond personal devices, AI played a pivotal role in [forecasting hurricanes](#) and powering growing fleets of driverless cars across China and San Francisco.

A more dangerous side of AI, however, also came into view. AI tools, created by companies like Palantir and Clearview, proved central to the wars in [Ukraine](#) and [Gaza](#) in their ability to identify foreign troops and targets to bomb. AI was integrated into drones, surveillance systems, and cybersecurity. Generative AI also infiltrated [2024's many elections](#). South Asian candidates flooded social media with AI-generated content. Russian state actors used deepfaked text, images, audio, and video to spread disinformation in the U.S. and amplify fears around immigration. After President-elect Donald Trump reposted an AI-generated image of Taylor Swift endorsing him on the campaign trail, the pop star responded with an Instagram post about her “fears around AI” and an [endorsement](#) of Vice President Kamala Harris instead.

Read More: [*How Tech Giants Turned Ukraine Into an AI War Lab*](#)

Swift's fears were shared by many of her young fans, who are coming of age in a generation that seems to be bearing the brunt of technology's harms. This year, hand-wringing about the impact of social media on mental health came to a head with Jonathan Haidt's best seller [*The Anxious Generation*](#), which drew a direct link between smartphones and a rise in teen depression. (Some scientists have disputed this correlation.) Social media platforms scrambled to address the issue with their own fixes: Instagram, for instance, set new guardrails for teen users.

But many parents, lawmakers, and regulators argued that these platforms weren't doing enough on their own to protect children, and took action. New Mexico's attorney general sued Snap Inc., accusing Snapchat of facilitating child sexual exploitation through its algorithm. Dozens of states moved forward with a lawsuit against Meta, accusing it of inducing young children and teenagers into addictive social media use. In July, the U.S. Senate passed the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA), which puts the onus on social media companies to prevent harm. Most tech companies are fighting the bill, which has yet to pass the House.

The potential harms around generative AI and children are mostly still unknown. But in February, a teenager died by suicide after becoming obsessed with a Character.AI chatbot modeled after *Game of Thrones* character Daenerys Targaryen. (The company called the situation "tragic" and told the [*New York Times*](#) that it was adding safety features.) Regulators were also wary of the centralization that comes with tech, arguing that its concentration can lead to health crises, rampant misinformation, and vulnerable points of global failure. They point to the Crowdstrike outage—which grounded airplanes and shut down banks across the world—and the Ticketmaster breach, in which the data of over 500 million users was compromised.

President Joe Biden signed a bill requiring its Chinese owner to sell TikTok or be banned in the U.S. French authorities arrested Telegram CEO Pavel Durov, accusing him of refusing to cooperate in their efforts to stop the spread of child porn, drugs, and money laundering on the platform. Antitrust actions also increased worldwide. In the U.S., Biden officials

embarked on several aggressive lawsuits to break up Google's and Apple's empires. A U.K. watchdog accused Google of wielding anticompetitive practices to dominate the online ad market. India also proposed an antitrust law, drawing fierce rebukes from tech lobbyists.

But the tech industry may face less pressure next year, thanks in part to the effort of the world's richest man: [Elon Musk](#), whose net worth ballooned by more than \$100 billion over the past year. Musk weathered many battles on many frontiers. Tesla failed to deliver its long-awaited self-driving cars, agitating investors. X was briefly banned in Brazil after a judge accused the platform of allowing disinformation to flourish. In the U.S., watchdogs accused Musk of facilitating hate speech and disinformation on X, and of blatantly using a major public platform to put his finger on the scale for his preferred candidate, Donald Trump. Musk's companies face at least 20 investigations, from all corners of government.

Read More: [*How Elon Musk Became a Kingmaker*](#)

But Musk scored victories by launching and catching a SpaceX rocket and implanting the first Neuralink chip into a paralyzed patient's brain. And in the November election, his alliance with Trump paid off. Musk is now a prominent figure in Trump's transition team, and tipped to head up a new government agency that aims to slash government spending by \$2 trillion. And while the owner of Tesla must navigate Trump's stated opposition to EVs, he is positioned to use his new perch to influence the future of AI. While Musk warns the public about AI's existential risk, he is also racing to build a more powerful chatbot than ChatGPT, which was built by his rival Sam Altman. Altman's OpenAI [endured many criticisms](#) over safety this year but nevertheless raised a massive \$6.6 billion in October.

Is the growing power of tech titans like Musk and Altman good for the world? In 2024, they spent much of their time furiously building while criticizing regulators for standing in their way. Their creations, as well as those of other tech gurus, provided plenty of evidence both of the good that can arise from their projects, and the overwhelming risks and harms.

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2024 was a Complicated Year for Climate Action

Justin Worland is a senior correspondent at TIME in the Washington, D.C. bureau. He received Covering Climate Now's inaugural Climate Journalist of the Year award in 2022, among other awards. He is the Outrider Foundation fellow at TIME.



By early November, it was virtually certain that 2024 would be the hottest year on record. The evidence was being felt around the world—from flooding that killed hundreds in Spain to drought in 48 of America’s 50 states. Insurance-giants dropped coverage in danger zones and warned about the growing challenge posed by climate change. Amid all that, a casual observer might have expected negotiators gathered at U.N. climate talks in Baku, Azerbaijan, to double down on the most critical efforts to cut global emissions and prevent the problem from getting worse.

Instead, the talks, known this year as [COP29](#), devolved into a chaotic conflict across decades-old battle lines. The deal that emerged—an agreement for developed countries to lead in providing \$300 billion annually in climate finance to Global South nations—was enough to keep hope alive but far from sufficient to tackle the scale of the problem. Chandni Raina, a negotiator for at-risk India, summed up the prevailing sentiment after the finance agreement was gavelled in: “We are extremely hurt.”

The talks were a fitting end to a complicated year of climate action. As the problem grows worse, leaders constrained by political considerations keep eking out piecemeal solutions. The solutions could be worse, but they could also be a lot better. In 2024, few politicians are denying the urgent science of climate change. Yet most are struggling to act on the scale necessary to help the world avoid the worst effects of warming.

But that doesn’t mean all is lost. This year brought some glimmers of progress. The economics of clean energy have improved. Policies enacted years ago are paying dividends. And innovators—technological, financial, and policy—continue to forge ahead. In time, those developments will make a more sustainable future inevitable. The question is what the path looks like to get there.

Any assessment of the year in climate requires a clear-eyed look at the science. In November, the World Meteorological Organization warned not only that 2024 is on track to be the hottest on record, but also that global temperature rise may bob above the 1.5°C threshold laid out in the Paris Agreement. To avoid that, a U.N. Environment Program report said countries would need to cut emissions 42% by 2030 and 57% by 2035. It noted that hitting these numbers remains “technically” possible. But it would require muscular government programs to promote clean energy, stop carbon-releasing deforestation, and push high-polluting industries to decarbonize.

The current political context is not exactly friendly to such sweeping government programs. In the E.U., a long-standing climate leader, populist backlash this year gave right-wing, anti-climate policymakers a record presence in the European Parliament. European Commission President

Ursula von der Leyen, head of the E.U.’s executive branch, remains in office, but her new cabinet will be playing defense. Top officials say they will focus on streamlining existing climate policies to make the bloc more competitive rather than issuing new ones. “There is a clear conviction that we will continue to lead on this,” Wopke Hoekstra, the bloc’s top climate official, told me in April. But the E.U. needs to “bridge that better, marry that better with competitiveness for our companies and a just transition for our people.”

Nowhere, however, is the reality of challenging politics more stark than in the U.S., where [Donald Trump](#) won a nonconsecutive second term as President. He will enter the White House promising to end what he has called “the Green New Scam,” as he describes the Biden Administration’s clean-energy tax breaks and subsidies. Trump may not be able to repeal in its entirety the Inflation Reduction Act, President Joe Biden’s landmark climate law, given the jobs the law has created in conservative places where voters support Trump. But his return nonetheless casts a pall on global climate efforts. Investors dumped green stocks in response to Trump’s ascent. Leaders in the Global South have already felt less diplomatic pressure to decarbonize. And some companies have doubled down on their strategy of keeping quiet on climate efforts. “It’s clear that the next Administration will try to take a U-turn and erase much of this progress,” John Podesta, Biden’s climate envoy, said on the first day of COP29. “I’m keenly aware of the disappointment that the United States has at times caused.”

Combine the stark science with the stark political realities and you get a pretty grim picture: the uphill climate battle got a lot more difficult this year. Still, a careful observer can identify meaningful green shoots.

No matter the political complications, countries continued to deploy clean energy at a rapid clip this year driven by economics (renewables are often cheaper than fossil fuels) and energy-security concerns (producing clean electricity at home means less reliance on polluting imports). Globally, investment in green technologies has reached nearly \$2 trillion annually, twice the level of investment in new fossil-fuel supply, according to the International Energy Agency. Many climate advocates have celebrated the

resurgence of nuclear power. Long considered taboo, and too expensive, investing in nuclear offers a zero-carbon solution to companies building energy-intensive AI data centers.

And there are the nascent initiatives launched in 2024 that will pay dividends in the months and years to come. Financial innovators have pursued new ways of investing in climate projects. That includes efforts on the global stage to use government money to “derisk” private-sector climate investments in the Global South. Thus far, these efforts have been relatively small, but their impact will grow as the programs scale. Policy innovators, too, are thinking through ways to continue progress in the new political atmosphere. Linking emissions reduction with trade, for example, offers a potential opportunity, even under Trump.

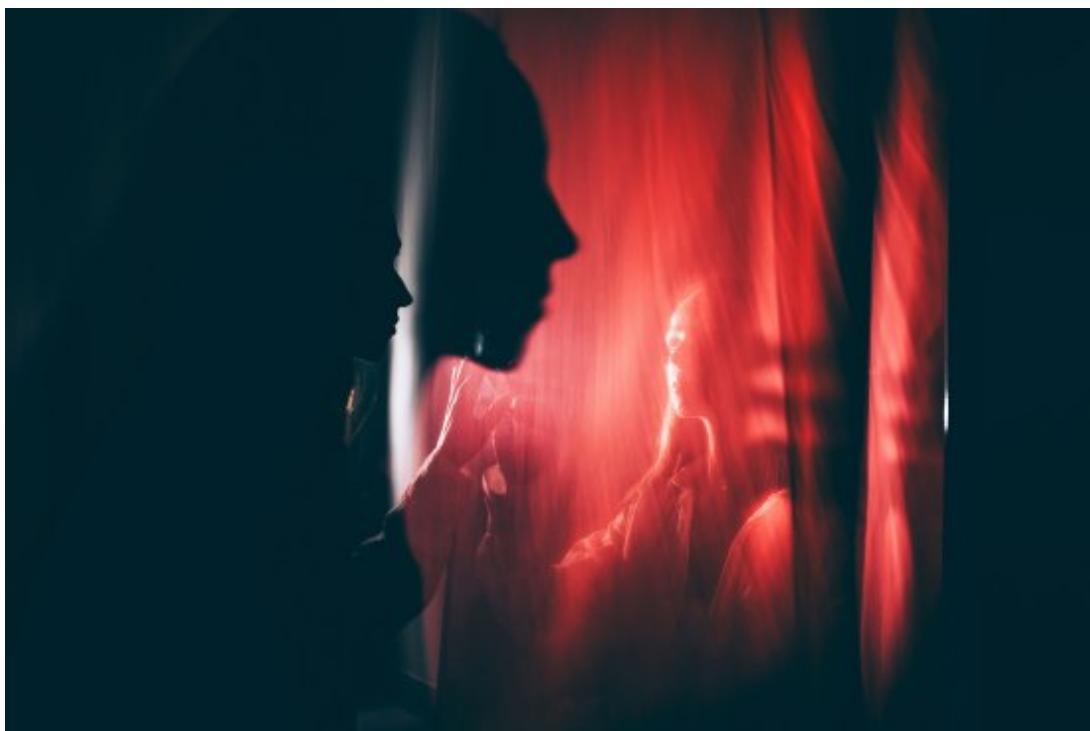
In climate conversations it has become almost cliché to say the energy transition is inevitable. And yet that’s the truth.

Will it happen fast enough? Right now, things don’t look good, but that doesn’t mean we should give up. Every bit of warming we can avoid matters. In November, I spoke with [World Bank President Ajay Banga](#) about his agenda to remake the bank with climate in mind. More than any policy guidance, what struck me was his approach to making change by carefully tweaking the organization’s structures. It’s a lesson worth remembering as we head into 2025: in time, small changes add up to something much bigger. “Forecasts are not destiny,” he says. “You can change destiny, but you have to work at it.”

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Mental Health Leveled Up in 2024

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*](#). Follow her on Instagram at [@aliceparktime](#).



Progress in addressing mental health is notoriously slow and mostly incremental. Breakthrough treatments tend to be rare, and trained professionals too few to meet the demand for services, which is increasing. But 2024 was a pivotal year—thanks to the culmination of decades of research and post-pandemic attention to mental-health issues.

In March, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Rejoyn, the [first digital therapeutic to treat major depressive disorder](#). The app opens the door to a new class of therapies that could dramatically increase access to treatment. Six months later, the FDA approved the [first new drug for schizophrenia](#) in 30 years, Cobenfy. It targets a different brain chemical system than previous treatments. And psychedelics notched a first when the FDA reviewed a request to [approve MDMA for the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder](#). Though this bid ultimately failed—the agency wanted to see more research—the FDA remains open to this group of drugs as a promising new way to treat certain mental-health conditions.

These advances come at a time when the need for mental-health services has never been more urgent. About a fifth of teens in the U.S. report symptoms of anxiety or depression, according to the most recently analyzed federal survey [data](#) from 2021–22, but 20% say they can't afford therapy to address their symptoms. The national lifeline for mental-health crises, 988, fielded around 5.3 million calls, texts or chats this year. And the U.S. surgeon general raised the alarm about two major mental-health issues: first [calling for warning labels](#) about the dangers of social media for young people, and then [highlighting](#) the extraordinary stress and anxiety parents experience in raising families today.

Read More: [*Is Intermittent Fasting Good or Bad for You?*](#)

Clearly, more help is needed. “The problem is that there are so few trained personnel,” says Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the school of public health at Brown University and former White House COVID-19 response coordinator. But innovations like those introduced this year can help to ease the load on mental-health professionals. The schizophrenia drug Cobenfy solves a number of problems that plague current treatments, which aren’t very effective and come with such severe side effects that up to half of patients stop taking them—it targets a circuit in the brain that patients seem to tolerate better, and has been shown to reduce symptoms like hallucinations, paranoia, and delusions. That could help more people to get the treatment they need.

Rejoyn, which was approved as a supplement to existing treatments, lets people take their mental health into their own hands through a smartphone

app. It prompts users to remember emotions depicted on people's faces, which requires them to use both the emotional and cognitive processing centers of their brain. In studies, people who used Rejoyn for six weeks showed more balanced activity in these brain centers and had fewer depression symptoms. That "rewiring" may make people more responsive to traditional treatments like cognitive behavior therapy or antidepressants.



These advances may have reached patients in 2024, but they didn't develop in a year, or even a few. Each took decades of basic scientific research, trial and error, and careful testing in people. That's true not just of mental-health innovations, but with advances in all areas of medicine: 2024 also saw the first genetically edited [pig-to-human kidney transplant](#), the first patients receiving CRISPR-edited gene therapy for [sickle cell disease](#), the rise of the [most powerful medications yet to treat obesity](#), and unprecedented remissions for the most challenging cancers. "I've been following life sciences for decades, and I have never seen acceleration at this level, and spread across so many different areas," says Dr. Eric Topol, founder and director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute.

As the incoming Trump Administration threatens to reduce federal research budgets while shrinking health agencies in the name of efficiency, health experts fear such momentum could slow, ultimately narrowing the treatment pipeline for a number of diseases. The impact might not be felt immediately, but could result in fewer innovations in coming years. “The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is an agency that invests in long-term scientific progress,” says Jha. “What I worry about is that if we are going to make a bunch of cuts to NIH, we might not see any negative health effects this year, but it will hurt the next generation more than it will hurt people today. Today’s miracles come from fundamental investments that happened a decade or two decades ago.”

Philanthropists and the private sector could step in to help fill the funding gap. But that may mean the investments won’t be as broad and diverse as government-driven funding, and might prioritize specific conditions, widening the already significant gaps in access to essential health services such as those for mental health.

Read More: [*When Should I Go to the Doctor With Cold Symptoms?*](#)

Even more disturbing than the immediate risk of potential cuts to research budgets is a deeper mistrust in science and scientists that is part of a larger “culture of hostility to expertise,” says Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, vice provost for global initiatives at the University of Pennsylvania, who has served in both the Office of Management and Budget and the NIH. “Someone being an expert in an area used to get them a lot of authority, reverence, and respect. Now it’s more than likely to get them real hostility, name-calling, and denigrating attacks. It’s very distressing, because this is occurring simultaneously as we revel in all the fruits that science is producing.”

Restoring trust in science is necessary to keep up the medical progress that improves lives this and every year. Such advances are critical in mental health, as rates of illness and demand for treatment continues to rise. Innovative developments, including novel treatments and new ways of thinking about how to incorporate digital technologies, are important first steps to increasing access and addressing unmet needs.

Those investments must continue, since in the U.S., “even though we have a lot of health problems, things are starting to get better,” Jha says. “And the reason things are getting better is because of long-term investments into the NIH and the work of public health and biomedical scientists.”

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The 10 Best TV Shows of 2024

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.



One of the greatest pleasures of the [Peak TV era](#) was that an excellent series could come from almost anywhere. Lifetime could greenlight the smart, satirical thriller [You](#) (which would become a hit for Netflix after failing to attract an audience on cable). The lyrical coming-of-age saga [David Makes Man](#) could find a home on OWN. TNT could serve up madcap Floridian crime soap [Claws](#) while BBC America made [Killing Eve](#) an obsession on this side of the Atlantic.

A few years into the [industry's contraction](#), and in the wake of [writers'](#) and [actors' strikes](#) in 2023, the television landscape looks a lot different. Many of the above cable networks have turned away from expensive scripted originals. While second-generation streaming platforms like Peacock and Paramount+ have theoretically emerged to take their place, those services are mostly spewing out reality-TV filler, uninspired revivals of IP owned by the legacy studios that own their copyrights, and imported titles of varying quality. Starz, Showtime, and just about every other premium cable channel that isn't HBO have gotten lost amid so many bigger brands vying for subscription dollars. Apple TV+ stands as a well-funded haven for ambitious ideas, yet its executives seem [too dazzled by celebrity-led projects](#) to do much quality control.

And so, in taking stock of 2024's best television, we're left with the usual suspects—the vanguard of the TV renaissance that began at the turn of the 21st century: HBO, FX, and, to a lesser extent, [the embattled AMC](#). (Netflix releases so much content that its presence on this list, albeit with a British sleeper hit and a low-budget indie show that it licensed, was inevitable.) I'm conscious of the dearth of platform diversity in this list, and I don't think it's a coincidence.

Maybe it's this climate of scarcity that has drawn me to some of the year's most lavish spectacles. Three of them, *Pachinko*, *The Sympathizer*, and *Shōgun*, have a lot in common, from historical settings and literary source material to multilingual scripts and almost entirely Asian casts, but each also has a voice all its own. *Interview with the Vampire* isn't just grand; it's maximalist, in an emotional as well as an aesthetic sense. *Industry* and *Say Nothing*, two very different shows, immerse us in the chaos of (respectively) global finance and revolutionary politics. With the inclusion of these titles along with a handful of the much smaller, stranger, more personal series that I usually gravitate towards—*Baby Reindeer*, *Somebody Somewhere*, *Penelope*, *Fantasmas*—this list is intended as both a celebration of television's potential for excellence on any scale and a rejection of the "[mid TV](#)" mediocrity we too often see instead.

10. *Pachinko* (Apple TV+)

Creator Soo Hugh made one choice, in the [first season](#) of *Pachinko*, that I found baffling. Instead of preserving the chronological structure of Min Jin Lee's sweeping novel about a 20th century Korean family, she paired the opening chapters—which take heroine Sunja (played as a young woman by Minha Kim and later by [Yoon Yuh Jung](#)) from her childhood in a fishing village to her early adulthood as an immigrant in Japan—with an expanded story following Sunja's finance-guy grandson, Solomon (Jin Ha), in the '80s. In alternating between two bookends, the series left a void at the heart of the story. Season 2 fills in the book's powerful middle chapters, which trace Sunja's conflicted relationship with her secret lover turned guardian angel, Mr. Koh (Lee Min-ho), during World War II. Hugh weaves together the family's struggles with a fresh perspective on a conflict that made Korean immigrants suffer for their occupier's aggression, while also deepening the first season's depiction of Solomon wrestling with his identity, history, ambition, and future. A tale that pits survival against self-sacrifice and legacy against self-determination, this season of *Pachinko* doesn't just do justice to the contemporary classic on which it's based; it forges new connections and finds new revelations across generations.

9. *Baby Reindeer* (Netflix)

No one was placing bets on a trauma-driven dramedy adapted from an unknown Scottish creator's [semi-autobiographical](#) Edinburgh Fringe Festival show to become Netflix's big 2024 breakout. In fact, the platform barely promoted *Baby Reindeer* in the U.S. But such is the magic of Netflix, which through some unique combination of algorithmic wizardry and word-of-mouth virality has the power to spawn global hits nobody saw coming. Now the show's mastermind and star, [Richard Gadd](#), is a household name with an armload of awards and an HBO series in the works. It couldn't have happened to a more compelling voice. Nominally a crime drama that fictionalizes his ordeal with a female stalker (Jessica Gunning), his *sui generis* series is really a [journey into a wounded psyche](#), dissecting everything from Gadd's self-involvement to his history with a sexually abusive mentor to his inability to commit to a trans woman ([Nava Mau](#)) who is probably too good for him. All three major performances are breakthroughs. Also: It's funny.

8. *The Sympathizer* (HBO)

Yes, it casts one of the biggest movie stars in the world, [Robert Downey, Jr.](#), in a quadruple role that collectively represents white supremacy. And yes, he's great, chomping scenery as he spoofs '70s icons like [Francis Ford Coppola](#) and [Hunter S. Thompson](#). But what's really remarkable about [Park Chan-wook](#)'s wild, epic, visually stunning, manically referential, simultaneously hilarious and gutting adaptation of the [Pulitzer-winning novel](#) by [Viet Thanh Nguyen](#) is its insight into the Vietnam War, a cataclysm that has shaped identities both Vietnamese and American. Grounded in the chronically ambivalent perspective of the Captain (a note-perfect Hoa Xuande), *The Sympathizer* spans continents as it reckons with what it means to commit to a cause and how a society survives colonialism, war, and internal schism. Not enough people tuned in to the series when it aired, this past spring. Maybe it sounded like a slog. Actually, it's electrifying—and there's no better time to engage with it than during our nation's anxious holiday interregnum.

7. *Interview With the Vampire* (AMC)

Genre shows are everywhere—they're practically the only originals we get from platforms like Disney+ and Prime Video—yet few do justice to the IP on which they're usually based. *Interview With the Vampire*, the flagship title in [AMC's Anne Rice franchise](#), is the rare reboot that has something new to offer. What began as the warped saga of conflicted vampire Louis (Jacob Anderson) and his abusive but devoted maker, Lestat (Sam Reid) evolved, in this year's second season, into TV's most bizarre love triangle, as we got to know Louis' mysteriously powerful current beau, Armand (Assad Zaman). A [capital-R Romantic spirit](#) suffuses creator Rolin Jones' production, which feels emotionally immersive in ways that so much recent entertainment for adults is not. From its evocative postwar-Paris flashbacks to the diabolical twists that kept fans screaming with each new episode, *Interview* might be 2024's most purely pleasurable show.

6. *Somebody Somewhere* (HBO)

For a few years, at the very peak of Peak TV, you couldn't browse a streaming-service menu without stumbling upon a witty, wise, alternately warm and wry slice-of-life show whose modest scale belied its universal insight. [Better Things](#). [Work in Progress](#). [Betty](#). [Vida](#). [Back to Life](#). [Please Like Me](#). [Sort Of](#). One of the last such series left standing—until its Dec. 8 finale—is *Somebody Somewhere*, which casts New York alt-cabaret doyenne [Bridget Everett](#) as a single, unmoored, middle-aged woman in small-town Kansas. A celebration of friendships that become chosen families and intrafamilial feuds that resolve into friendships, it's a show that illustrates how finding community can, slowly but indelibly, change a person's life. Its third and final season, which finds Everett's Sam flirting with romance as her pals Joel (Jeff Hiller) and Fred (Murray Hill) settle down with partners of their own, poignantly captures the familiar fear that everyone in your life is moving forward while you stay stuck in the same stunted place.

5. *Fantasmas* (HBO)

When reality feels like a fever dream, surreal stories can hit harder than realism. Hence the haunting humor of *Fantasmas*, an unconventional sketch comedy about art and survival from the infinite imagination of [Julio Torres](#) ([Los Espookys](#), [Problemista](#)). The show's fantastical vignettes feature what is easily the year's most delightful guest star lineup: [Tilda Swinton](#), [Steve Buscemi](#), [Bowen Yang](#), executive producer [Emma Stone](#), and more. But what has stuck with me is the frame narrative starring Torres as Julio, a creative wunderkind living in a violet-hued, alternate-universe New York, whose nebulous career includes gigs like pitching new crayon shades. When a health scare and landlord trouble throw his life into precarity, Julio's situation is exacerbated by his refusal to obtain an invasive new form of ID called Proof of Existence. His only other option is to earn enough money, through selling dumb TV-show ideas about his gay and Latino identities, to live on his own terms. His predicament may be absurd, but as a metaphor for the artist's endless battle against bureaucracy, mediocrity, and poverty—not to mention a sharp commentary on the current TV landscape—it makes perfect sense.

4. *Penelope* (Netflix)

It says nothing good about the state of television that filmmaker and actor [Mark Duplass](#), who created [*Penelope*](#) with Mel Eslyn, pitched the series around but wound up producing it independently (an unusual model for TV) when no platform would bite. Thankfully, Netflix did license the final product—a dreamlike half-hour drama that follows a teenage girl (a magnetic Megan Stott) who abruptly abandons her life of high school and social media to rough it in Cascade National Forest. While it is, in part, a survival story, Penelope’s journey, rendered in vibrant shades of green and generous with moments of silence, is best understood as a spiritual pilgrimage. Like Thoreau, she goes to the woods to live deliberately; what she experiences there recalls both [*Cheryl Strayed’s Wild*](#) and Christ’s sojourn through the desert. The result is a show that, in immersing us in its heroine’s search for meaning, invites our introspection as well.

3. *Say Nothing* (FX)

What happened to Jean McConville, the widowed mother of 10 who disappeared, in 1972, after being dragged by a masked mob from her Belfast home? This is the question that ostensibly drives FX’s adaptation of the acclaimed [nonfiction](#) book by [Patrick Radden Keefe](#). But Keefe’s story is no simple potboiler, and [*Say Nothing*](#) bears little resemblance to the typical true-crime drama. Morally astute, rich in layered characters and insightful performances, and perceptive about how a person’s moral calculus can change over the course of a lifetime, the series filters four decades’ worth of the Troubles through the experience of Dolours Price (Lola Petticrew), an IRA agitator who spent her later life (in which she’s played by Maxine Peake) haunted by the extreme actions she participated in as a young woman. The show’s true question is more like: Who benefits from political violence, and who becomes its collateral damage? And the answers it suggests are anything but easy.

2. *Industry* (HBO)

Industry has always been better than its reputation as that show where arrogant young finance employees in London snort coke, sleep around, and take reckless risks with staggering sums of money. (To be fair, that description is not technically incorrect.) But with *this year's third season*, amid HBO's conspicuous efforts to position it as a successor to *Succession*, *Mickey Down and Konrad Kay*'s propulsive drama leveled up to become one of TV's shrewdest commentaries on the times in which we're living. Opening with the calamitous IPO of a green-energy startup managed by the series' fictional banking giant, Pierpoint & Co., the season took a scalpel to the hypocrisy-prone phenomenon of socially conscious capitalism. At the same time, it zoomed in on some of its most compelling characters: haunted heiress Yasmin (*Marisa Abela*), cutthroat company man Eric (Ken Leung), toxic striver Rishi (Sagar Radia). Taken together, the individual storylines and the overarching plot demonstrate how, in an environment like Pierpoint, when self-interest conflicts with loyalty, decency, or any other virtue, selfishness always wins.

1. *Shōgun* (FX)

[video id=SZZmx0dt]

An *artistic triumph*. A *record-breaking* 18 Emmy wins. An *all-time viewership high for FX*. Two more seasons in development for a title that was planned as a limited series. By just about every conceivable measure, *Shōgun* is the TV success story of 2024. Yet it wasn't a foregone conclusion that the network's *\$200 million* bet—on a largely Japanese-language production that was also the second high-profile adaptation of *James Clavell's 1975 best seller* about a 17th century English sailor (Cosmo Jarvis) who washes up in Japan and finds himself at the mercy of a politically isolated feudal lord (Hiroyuki Sanada)—was going to pay off.

But, at a time when American audiences are assumed to have fragmented along demographic and partisan lines, creators Justin Marks and Rachel Kondo scored a megahit the old-fashioned way: by offering something precious to every kind of viewer. For the *Game of Thrones* crowd, there was vividly rendered combat and, more importantly, intricate political intrigue. For prestige-TV types, heady themes of faith, honor, self-sacrifice, and

culture shock. For [history buffs](#), a deep dive into a pivotal period of Japanese history and the uneasy relationship between East and West. Unlike its predecessor, this *Shōgun* gives us a fully realized female character in [Anna Sawai](#)'s canny, conflicted noblewoman, Toda Mariko. There's even a slow-burning love story. And you'd be hard-pressed to find another show that so stunningly combines lush visuals, masterly performances, and an expressive original score (from Atticus and Leopold Ross). As streamers increasingly turn away from ambitious projects, in their desperation to get out of the red, I hope *Shōgun* will resonate across the industry as a reminder that fortune favors the bold.

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The 10 Best Movies of 2024

Stephanie Zacharek is the film critic at TIME. She is the recipient of a Newswomen's Club of New York award, and was a 2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist.



This has been a difficult year. You may have been buffeted by anger you didn't want to feel, and didn't know how to productively process. Breeding grounds for [misinformation](#)—and its even more treacherous sibling, [disinformation](#)—have proliferated. [AI is coming](#), supposedly to make our lives easier, but in reality it may just be [taking our jobs](#). Sometimes it has seemed that soullessness has become the order of the day—as if having a soul were simply too much bother.

But as of right now, at least, most movies are made by human beings, and they are still one of the [most extraordinary ways](#) for humans to talk to one another. The conversation may seem one-sided. After all, a filmmaker

makes the movie, and then you buy the ticket or pay to stream it. But if you care about movies at all, then surely there have been times you've gone so deep into a film that you've almost taken up residence within it—or, rather, it has taken up residence within *you*. This is why filmmakers do what they do. Some are deeply invested in capturing the texture of life that surrounds them, so that viewers in California or Iowa or New York will have some sense, say, of what it's like to be a woman making her way alone in a densely populated, noisy, complicated city like Mumbai. For a filmmaker, even just asking the question, "What do women want?" can yield rich, pleasurable rewards. Asking what women need is even more dangerous. Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof has risked his life to do so; you can't put more faith in the art form than that.

Making a film is more of a crapshoot than ever, especially if you're hoping your work will be watched in theaters, on the big screen, rather than at home on the small one. But sometimes watching movies small is a necessity: unless you live within driving distance of a good art-house theater, some of the best movies of 2024 might not have come to a cinema near you. The 10 titles I share with you here are movies that have helped me through this fraught and sometimes confounding year. I hope you'll find your way to at least some of them—and perhaps one or two or more of them will find a home in *you*.

10. *DogMan*

French filmmaker Luc Besson has long specialized in fantastic flights of fantasy and shockeroo violence. But he's never made a film as tender as *DogMan*. [Caleb Landry Jones'](#) Douglas is a wounded human being, a survivor of childhood abuse, who finds solace in living with his community of dogs. *DogMan* is about the families we choose, sometimes more sustaining than the ones we're born into. It's also the perfect movie for those days you're convinced that dogs are better than people—even if that's every day.

9. *Flow*

This wordless animated wonder from Latvia, directed by Gints Zilbalodis, follows a nameless cat as he travels across a flooded world, in a boat shared by a clumsy-friendly dog, an opportunistic lemur, and a stately, long-legged secretary bird. Elegant and spare, this is an environmental parable that doesn't hammer away at its message. Instead, it gently reminds us that the beauty of this world is worth preserving.

8. *Emilia Pérez*

In Jacques Audiard's extravagantly emotional opera [*Emilia Pérez*, Zoe Saldaña](#) plays Rita, a disillusioned lawyer working in Mexico, who's asked to undertake a strange task: a ruthless drug lord, Manitas, wants to transition to living as a woman and needs Rita to arrange both his surgery and subsequent disappearance. She pulls it off, and thinks she's through with the job. But the woman Manitas has become, now named Emilia Pérez (both roles are played by the fantastic Spanish actress [*Karla Sofía Gascón*](#)), re-emerges, asking Rita's help in righting some of her past wrongs. *Emilia Pérez* is great fun. But it's also about personal transformation as a beginning, not an end, an exhortation to leave the world in better shape than you found it. It's a film with an open heart, arriving at a time when so many human hearts seem to have shut down.

7. *Green Border*

A serious-minded film about the plight of refugees trying to cross into Europe from the Middle East and Africa is a tough sell. But Agnieszka Holland's film, though at times hard to watch, is so beautifully made, and so attuned to all the things we respond to as humans who care about art's entwinement with real life, that it's ultimately more joyful than dispiriting. Sometimes movies about difficult subjects end up being such brutal experiences you almost wish you hadn't seen them. [*Green Border*](#) is the opposite: it's likely to leave you feeling emboldened and galvanized, if also a little sadder and wiser.

6. *Hard Truths*

[Mike Leigh](#) is the closest we've got to a modern [Dickens](#), a filmmaker whose portrayals of complex, difficult, and often unlikable people come to feel like family portraits: they may make us cringe, but we can always see bits of ourselves there too. [Marianne Jean-Baptiste](#), so extraordinary in Leigh's 1996 *Secrets & Lies*, plays Pansy, a woman who appears to be held together by her anger. She bristles with bitterness every minute; no one, including her husband (David Webber) and son (Tuwaine Barrett) can stand to be around her for long. Jean-Baptiste softens nothing about her; this is a performance as raw as a bundle of thorns, fierce and uncompromising. We never find out what makes Pansy the way she is, and there's no comforting redemption arc. Still, somehow, we reach out to her in her unnamable pain. Leigh doesn't give up on her, and neither can we.

5. A Complete Unknown

[James Mangold's](#) scrappy patchwork portrait of Bob Dylan's early years in New York isn't a biopic. It's a Dylan cover, an interpretation of real events filtered through memory, myth, and pure fabrication. But can you, should you, fact-check a ballad? [Timothée Chalamet](#) slouches through the movie with inquisitive, appraising eyes. Yet this film really belongs to the women, Monica Barbaro as superfamous folk singer [Joan Baez](#) and [Elle Fanning](#) as Sylvie Russo, based on Suze Rotolo, an early Dylan muse but also a shrewd chronicler of the scene. These are women living in the real world. Meanwhile, the man himself sits on a rumpled bed, writing one of the world's greatest protest songs in his underpants. As the title suggests, you'll know less about the real [Bob Dylan](#) coming out of *A Complete Unknown* than you did going in. But do you think the actual Bob considers knowing everything about everything a worthy goal? There's a song that goes, "He not busy being born..." You probably know the rest.

4. *Anora*

Sean Baker's story of an effervescent young sex worker, Ani (Mikey Madison), who meets and falls for the rambunctious son of a Russian oligarch, spoiled rich kid Ivan ([Mark Eydelshteyn](#)), is part romantic comedy, part [fractured fairytale](#)—one that focuses on what happens after

the golden coach turns back into a pumpkin. That's the magic of writer-director Baker, a workaday humanist whose quiet generosity sneaks up on you. And Madison's performance, both ebullient and piercing, is one of the year's finest.

3. The Seed of the Sacred Fig

What happens when a country becomes desperate to control women, believing it has every right to do so? Iranian filmmaker [Mohammad Rasoulof's](#) shattering film offers one possible answer. A loyal government servant, Missagh Zareh's Iman, has just been promoted to the position of investigating judge, a huge move up for him, his wife Najmeh (Soheila Golestani), and their two teenage daughters, Rezvan (Mahsa Rostami) and Sana (Setareh Maleki). This is what you'd call a close, loving family. But Rezvan and Sana come to see the insidiousness of the comfortable lives their father's job has accorded them; their awareness ignites a kind of explosion. Rasoulof fled Iran last spring—just before this film was to make its premiere at Cannes—after the Islamic Republic, displeased with the content of his films, handed him an eight-year prison sentence. This film, made in the aftermath of [Mahsa Amini's 2022 death in police custody](#) after she was arrested for her refusal to wear a hijab, is a thriller, a family drama, and a horror story. But mostly, it's an invocation to fight back.

2. All We Imagine as Light

Everywhere you look, there are women living on their own, making their lives work in spite of long hours at their jobs, thwarted love, loneliness. In [Payal Kapadia's gorgeous study of friendship](#) and the tensions that sometimes come with it, three women in modern Mumbai chart their own bumpy roads: Prabha (Kani Kusruti), a nurse, is married, but she hasn't heard from her absentee husband in years. Fellow nurse Anu (Divya Prahba) is secretly involved with a Muslim man, which she must hide from her Hindu family—and just about everybody—at all costs. And Parvaty (Chhaya Kadam) is an older hospital worker who loses her home because the property's paperwork is in her late husband's name. All of these women have come from small villages to work, to make money, to do things their

own way. Kapadia captures the texture of their lives, as well as the glittery, gritty poetry of the city around them.

1. *Babygirl*

[video id=u1JgsYOb]

If you read only the synopsis of *Babygirl* before seeing it, you might imagine it's an erotic age-gap thriller about the workplace power dynamic between men and women. That's part of it, sure. But Halina Reijn's exuberant third feature goes deeper than that, exploring the ways in which human beings—especially women—often want things they don't know how to ask for. [Nicole Kidman](#) gives a livewire performance as Romy, a buttoned-up executive who falls under the spell of a seductive intern ([Harris Dickinson](#), a bedroom murmur in human form). There's so much we don't know about desire, particularly in perimenopausal and menopausal women, and almost nobody wants to talk about it—except Reijn. The movie's centerpiece, built around George Michael's "Father Figure," is one of the most rapturous sequences put to film this year, a celebration of what it means to finally, or at least temporarily, know yourself.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: [The Room Next Door](#), [A Real Pain](#), [It's Not Me](#), [The Brutalist](#), [Robot Dreams](#), [The Fall Guy](#), [How to Come Alive with Norman Mailer](#), [The Fire Inside](#), [Between the Temples](#), [Kidnapped: The Abduction of Edgardo Mortara](#), [Conclave](#), [Here](#), [Vermiglio](#), [Megalopolis](#).

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The 10 Best Fiction Books of 2024

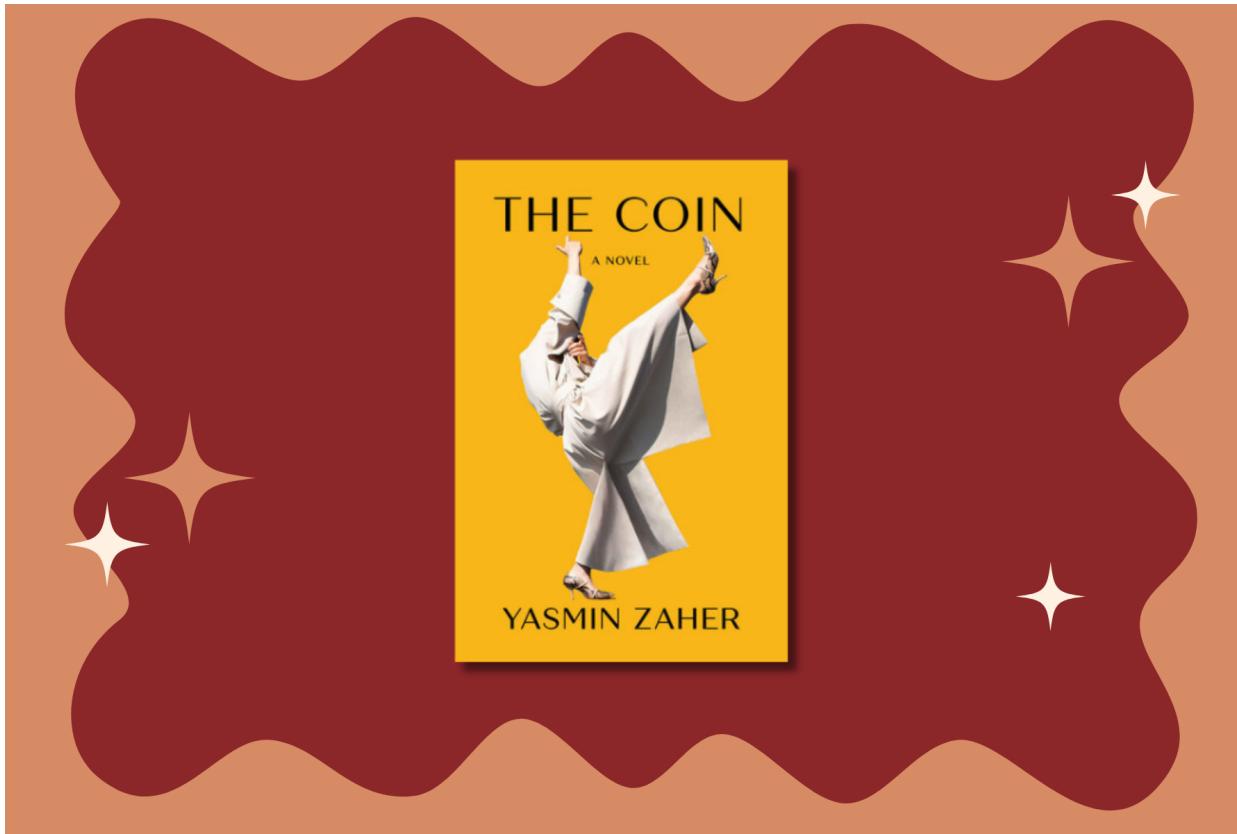
Annabel Guterman is a senior editor at TIME.



The best of this year's fiction features characters who, like so many, feel like they don't belong anywhere, even when they're with the people they love. Some are foreigners in their cities, others feel like foreigners in their own bodies. Three recently came back from the dead. One is even a clandestine alien living in Philadelphia, observing life as it unfolds around her. As these lonely characters navigate worlds brought to life by authors like [Kelly Link](#), [Kaveh Akbar](#), and [Percival Everett](#), their stories push us to consider our relationships to the places we hold dear and the communities we surround ourselves with. Taken together, these books offer a reminder: even outsiders are never truly alone.

Here, the best fiction books of 2024.

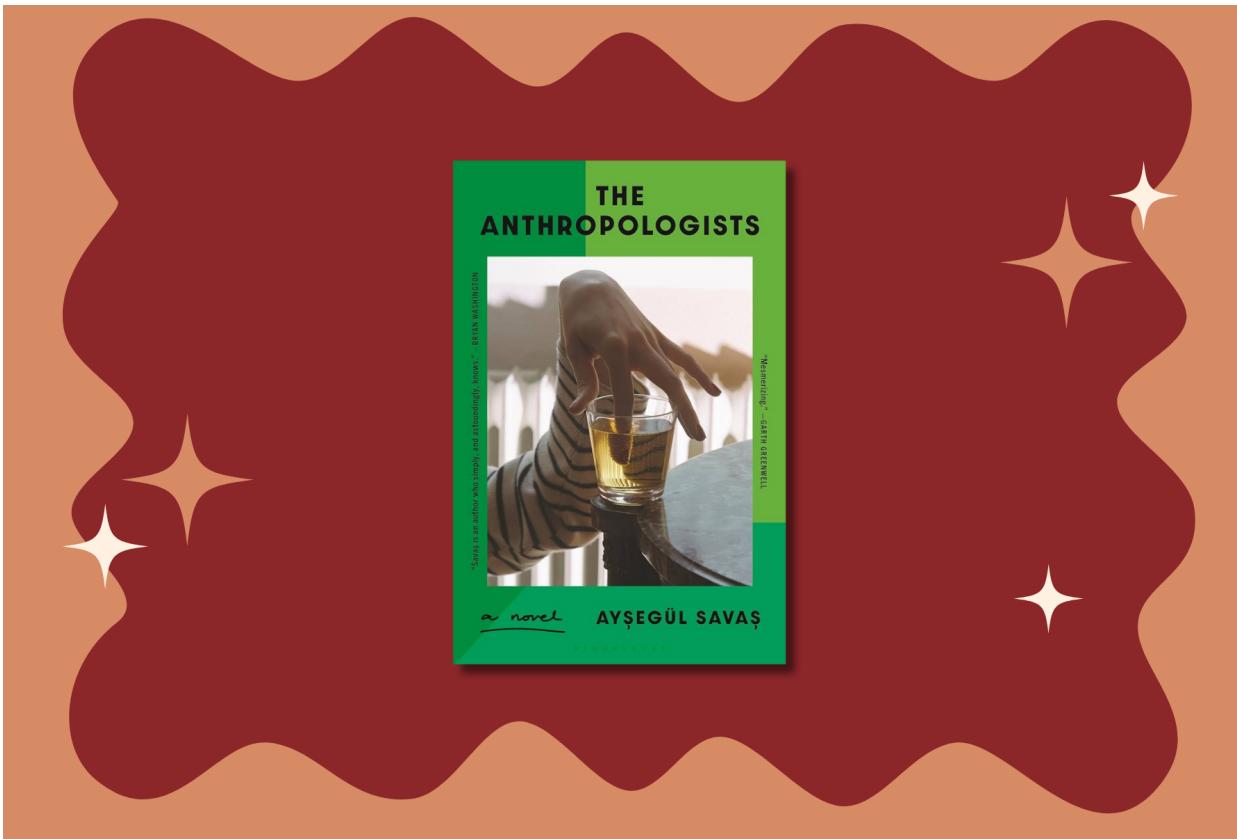
10. *The Coin*, Yasmin Zaher



In *The Coin*, a stylish Palestinian schoolteacher navigates a cramped New York City, where she's obsessing over the large inheritance she can't access due to her brother's controlling hands. As chaos swirls around her, she vies for control, attempting to cleanse herself of the many ways American culture is taking a toll on her. This presents itself in varied forms, including bathing in boiling water and even breaking down to her students. Soon, Yasmin Zaher's anxious protagonist becomes addicted to purging herself of filth as she detaches from reality. With biting humor and incisive prose, Zaher presents a dizzying portrait of a woman on the edge.

Buy Now: *The Coin* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes& Noble](#)

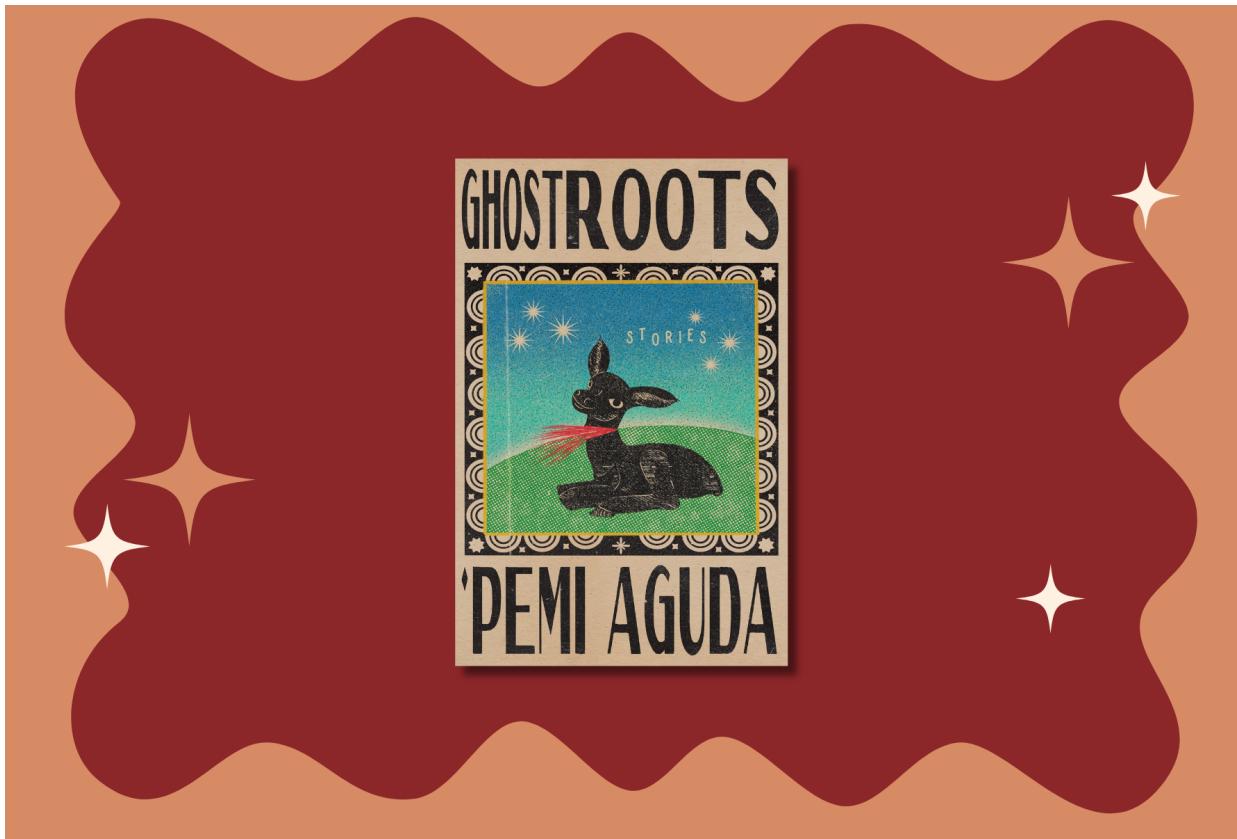
9. *The Anthropologists*, Ayşegül Savas



Is there a plot in Aysegül Savas' *The Anthropologists*? Technically, yes, but it's not really the point. Asya, a documentarian, and her husband Manu are looking for a new home in an unnamed city. Meanwhile, Asya has decided that a local park will be the focus of her next film. These projects move the book forward, but what makes this slim novel sing are the intricately drawn ways the couple spends their time with the people around them, whether neighbors, friends, or family members. As Asya and Manu view apartments and imagine different futures for themselves, Savas crafts a remarkable narrative about the ordinary moments that fill our lives.

Buy Now: *The Anthropologists* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

8. *Ghostroots*, 'Pemi Aguda



Across the 12 short stories in her debut collection, 'Pemi Aguda asks how we can move forward while being reminded of the past. These stories, all set in the author's native Lagos, explore the collision between myth, memory, and reality. Characters are combatting ghosts of all shapes and sizes, which keep popping up in the most unexpected places. In "Manifest," a woman is horrified when she finds her daughter's face is being overtaken by that of her deceased, abusive mother. In "The Hollow," an architect is tasked with remodeling a home that keeps changing due to the spirits trapped within its walls. *Ghostroots* brims with an unsettling energy as Aguda twists her narratives in amusing and unpredictable directions.

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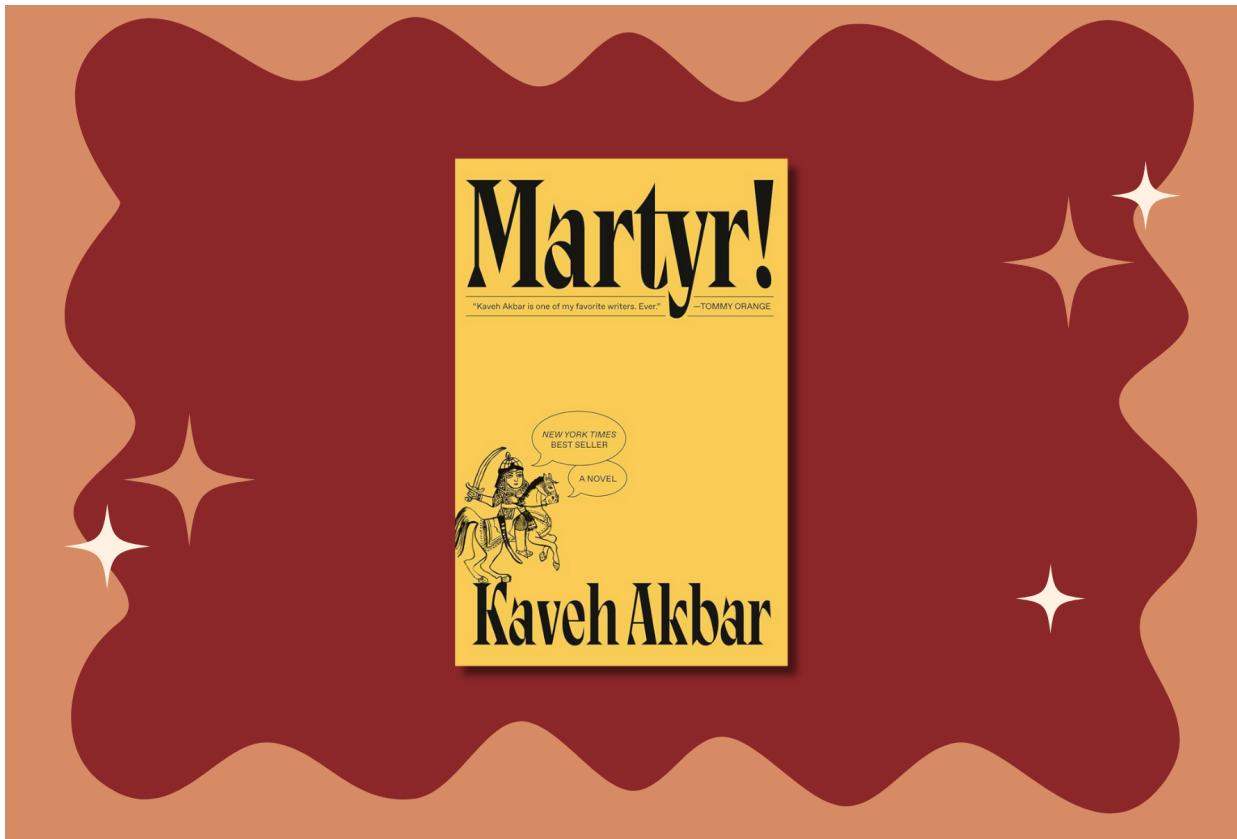
7. *The Book of Love*, Kelly Link



In Kelly Link's debut novel, three teenagers are resurrected from the dead and given the chance to return to their lives—but they can't all stay for good. The trio is tasked with completing magical tasks in order to earn a place back in their sleepy Massachusetts town. In surreal, joyful, and at times devastating turns, they reckon with old wounds and come to better appreciate the people they've left behind. *The Book of Love* is funny and whimsical as its characters harness fantastical powers, yet it's also grounded in one of life's ultimate truths: everyone eventually runs out of time, even if we can escape the inevitable for a little while.

Buy Now: *The Book of Love* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

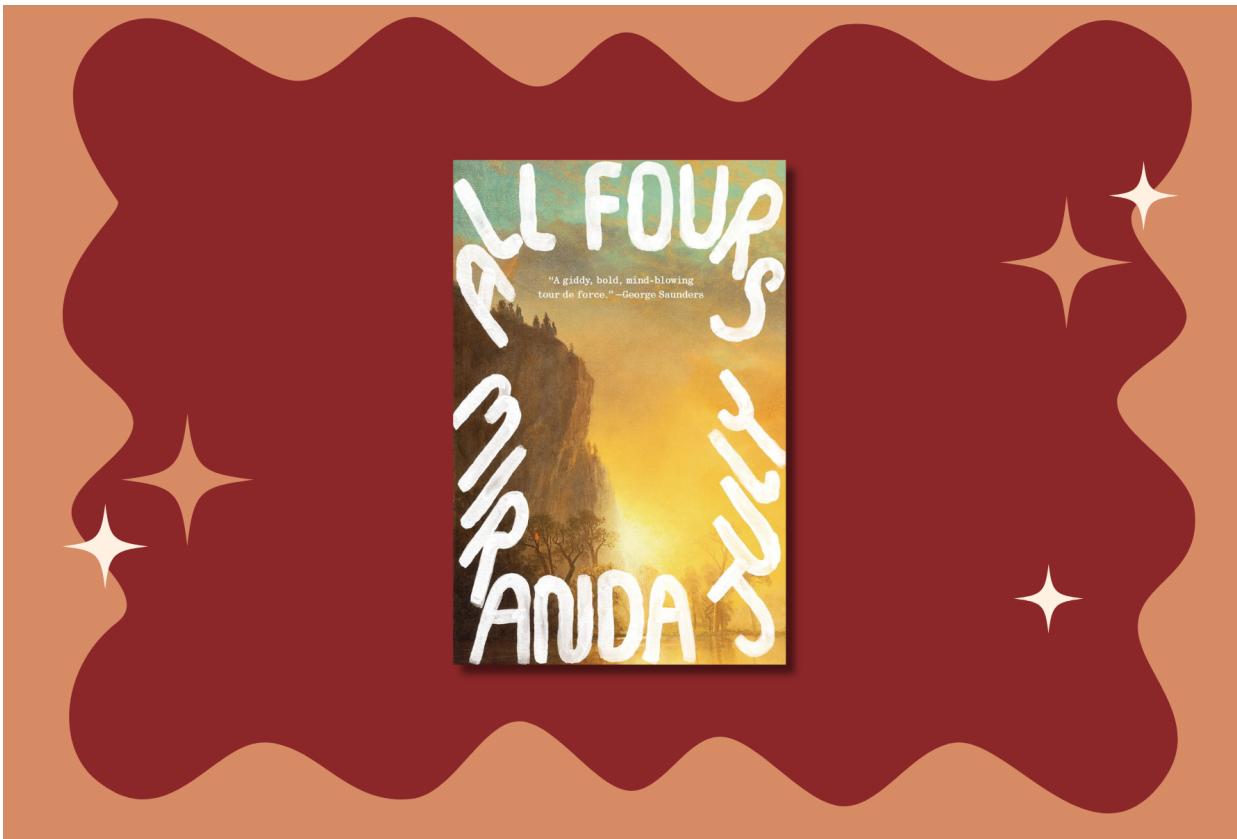
6. *Martyr!*, Kaveh Akbar



Stumbling through his days as a hospital actor, Cyrus Shams travels to the Brooklyn Museum, where a terminally ill artist has put herself on display for her final exhibit. Cyrus, recently sober and obsessed with death, has lived a life punctuated by loss, beginning as a baby when his mother perished in a plane crash. Now, he finds himself drawn to the cancer-ridden painter and her morbid exhibit. Kaveh Akbar pulls these seemingly disparate characters closer together in a wrenching narrative that is both a multi-generational family saga and a portrait of a young man attempting to make sense of life.

Buy Now: *Martyr!* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

5. *All Fours*, Miranda July



Filmmaker and writer Miranda July's second novel explores the reawakening of a 45-year-old artist caught between her desires and the realities of aging. *All Fours* begins as the unnamed woman leaves her child and husband in Los Angeles and hits the road on a planned cross-country drive to New York City. But less than an hour outside of town, she pulls off the freeway and into a motel, where an unexpected love affair with a younger man steers her thrillingly off course. Their steamy time together propels the protagonist down a path that forces her to reconsider her relationships with intimacy, sexuality, and the rules of marriage. July writes with a ferocious electricity as the woman becomes obsessed with her new love and upends her life, all while inhabiting a body that is changing in ways she's only just beginning to understand.

Buy Now: *All Fours* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

- [The 10 Best Songs of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Movies of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Albums of 2024](#)

- [The 10 Best TV Shows of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Video Games of 2024](#)

4. *Fire Exit*, Morgan Talty



For years, Charles Lamosway has kept a watchful eye over his daughter, who lives on the nearby Penobscot Reservation and has no idea her father is a white man. She's being raised by her mother and stepfather, the latter of whom Elizabeth believes is her biological parent. Charles catches glimpses of Elizabeth's life from his porch across the river and yearns to know her. But then she stops showing up. After weeks go by with no sightings of his daughter, Charles decides to take matters into his own hands, embarking on a quest that forces him to confront his complicated past as well as the life he never got to live. Told in exacting prose, Morgan Talty's *Fire Exit* is a haunting book about heritage and the meaning of family.

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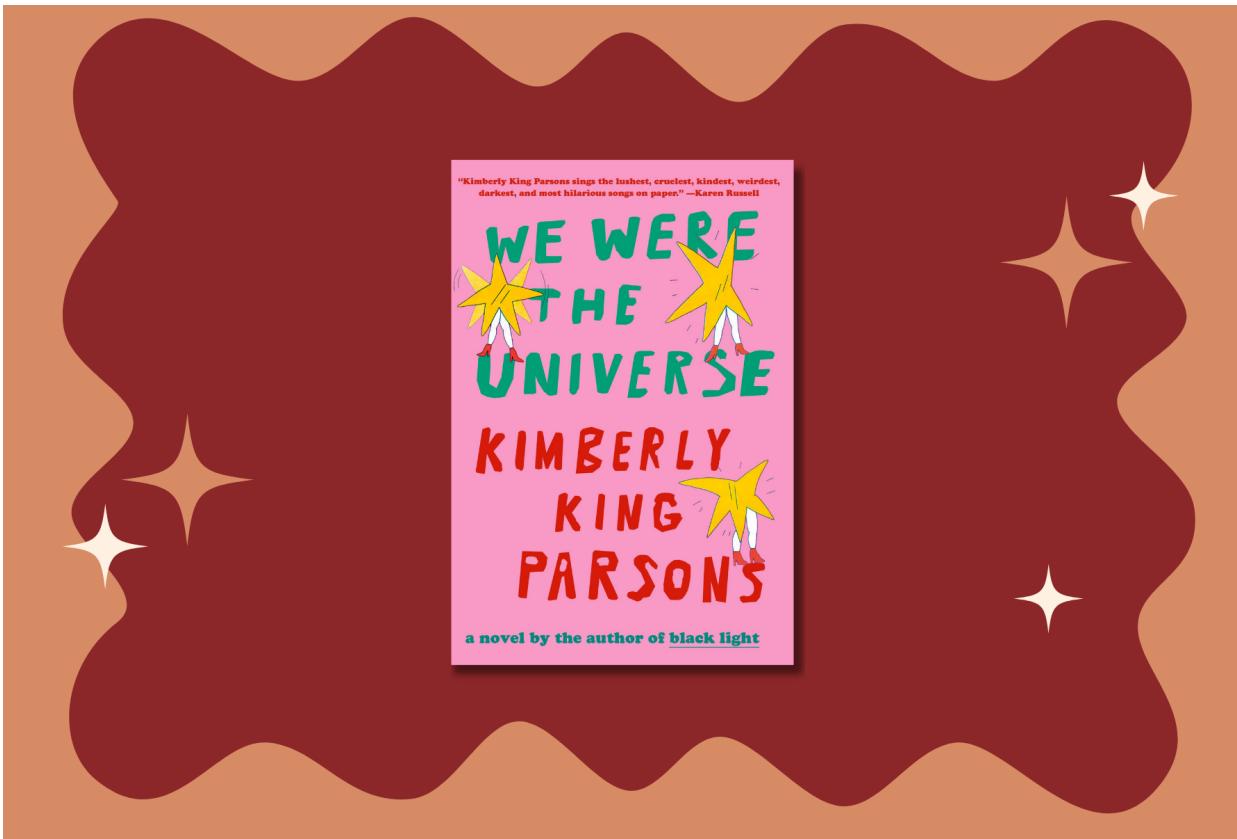
3. *Beautyland*, Marie-Helene Bertino



Marie-Helene Bertino's inventive novel begins when an unusually small and jaundiced baby named Adina Giorno is born in Philadelphia. Raised by a single mother, her childhood is marked by the usual things (going to school, making friends) as well as an uncanny ability to communicate with extraterrestrial life via a fax machine (though she keeps that part of herself secret). As Adina grows, she reports on the human life she observes with a clarity that is often hilarious: "Upon encountering real problems, human beings compare their lives to riding a roller coaster, even though they invented roller coasters to be fun things to do on their days off." Through Adina's watchful eyes and intense desire to understand the world, Bertino unveils a sweet and strange exploration of what it means to be human.

Buy Now: *Beautyland* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

2. *We Were the Universe*, Kimberly King Parsons



Leaving her young daughter and husband in Texas, 20-something Kit goes on a retreat with her best friend in Montana. The getaway is fun, at first, until a drunken night goes awry. Kimberly King Parsons' overwhelmed protagonist is suddenly reminded of the loss that formed the gaping hole inside her chest, the one she's always stepping around to just survive each day: the death of her beloved sister Julie. When she returns, Kit feels Julie's presence everywhere, and her reality begins to warp as old memories of a shared adolescence marked by acid trips and band practice begin to feel real again. In this novel about the shape-shifting nature of love, Parsons captures Kit's grief in aching and honest terms.

Buy Now: *We Were the Universe* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

1. *James, Percival Everett*



Percival Everett's reimagining of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is one of the most acclaimed—and widely read—books of the year, and for good reason. *James*, which won a National Book Award and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, is a sweeping story centering on Jim, the enslaved sidekick in Mark Twain's classic adventure tale. Everett sends both Huck Finn and his friend, reintroduced as James, down the Mississippi River as he pokes holes in the 1884 novel and paints the original protagonist's companion as a perceptive observer of danger, humanity, and language. As he journeys toward an unknowable future, James wrestles with a gnawing loneliness that only grows in his increasingly fraught world. In giving a beloved character the agency he so deserves, Everett presents his most propulsive novel to date.

Buy Now: *James* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

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The 10 Best Nonfiction Books of 2024

Annabel Guterman is a senior editor at TIME.



The best nonfiction books of the year tackle undeniably difficult topics. Many are personal stories about surviving the unthinkable. Salman Rushdie describes the violent attack that nearly killed him. Zara Chowdhary captures the fear of living amid sectarian violence in India. And Alexandra Fuller reflects on the sudden passing of her 21-year-old son. Through the honesty of these authors and more, heartbreak and loss are broken down to their essential, universal parts. In sharing these histories, they remind us that there is no grief without love.

Here, the top 10 nonfiction books of 2024.

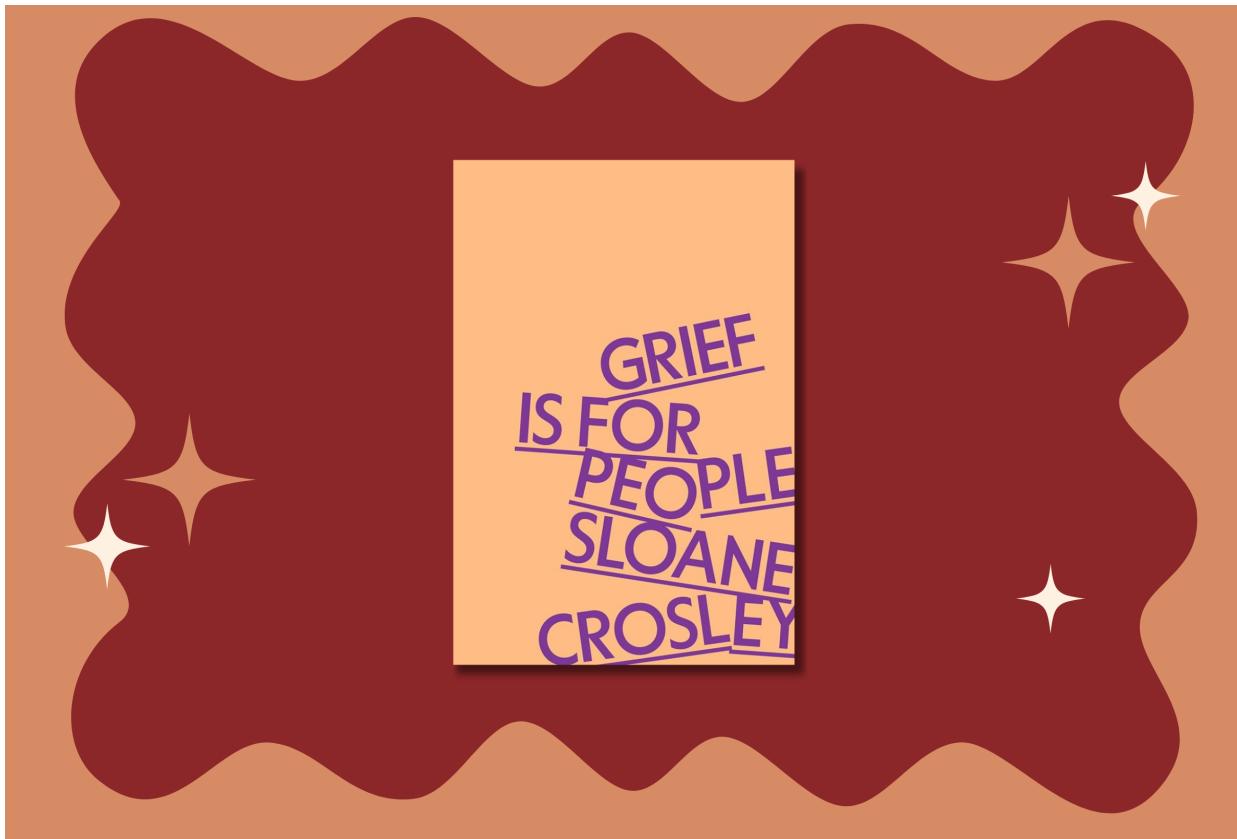
10. *The Friday Afternoon Club*, Griffin Dunne



In his memoir, actor and producer Griffin Dunne offers an inside look at his privileged life in a world where he was friends with Carrie Fisher, worked with Martin Scorsese, and hung out with his aunt Joan Didion. But for all the glamour that fills *The Friday Afternoon Club*, there's a tragedy that anchors it: in 1982, the author's sister Dominique was strangled. Dunne unspools a compassionate portrait of his fractured family.

Buy Now: *The Friday Afternoon Club* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

9. *Grief is for People*, Sloane Crosley



In 2019, twin crises hit Sloane Crosley back-to-back. First, her apartment was burglarized, and many of her prized possessions stolen. Then, just a month later, her mentor and close friend died by suicide. These losses lie at the center of *Grief Is for People*, the author's unsparing memoir that dissects this period and its aftermath. As the title suggests, the book is most concerned with grief and how it manifests as Crosley attempts to make sense of enormous new holes in her life. On her path to understanding, a windy road that she captures in detail, she looks to philosophy and art to provide her with a language to explore it all.

Buy Now: *Grief is for People* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

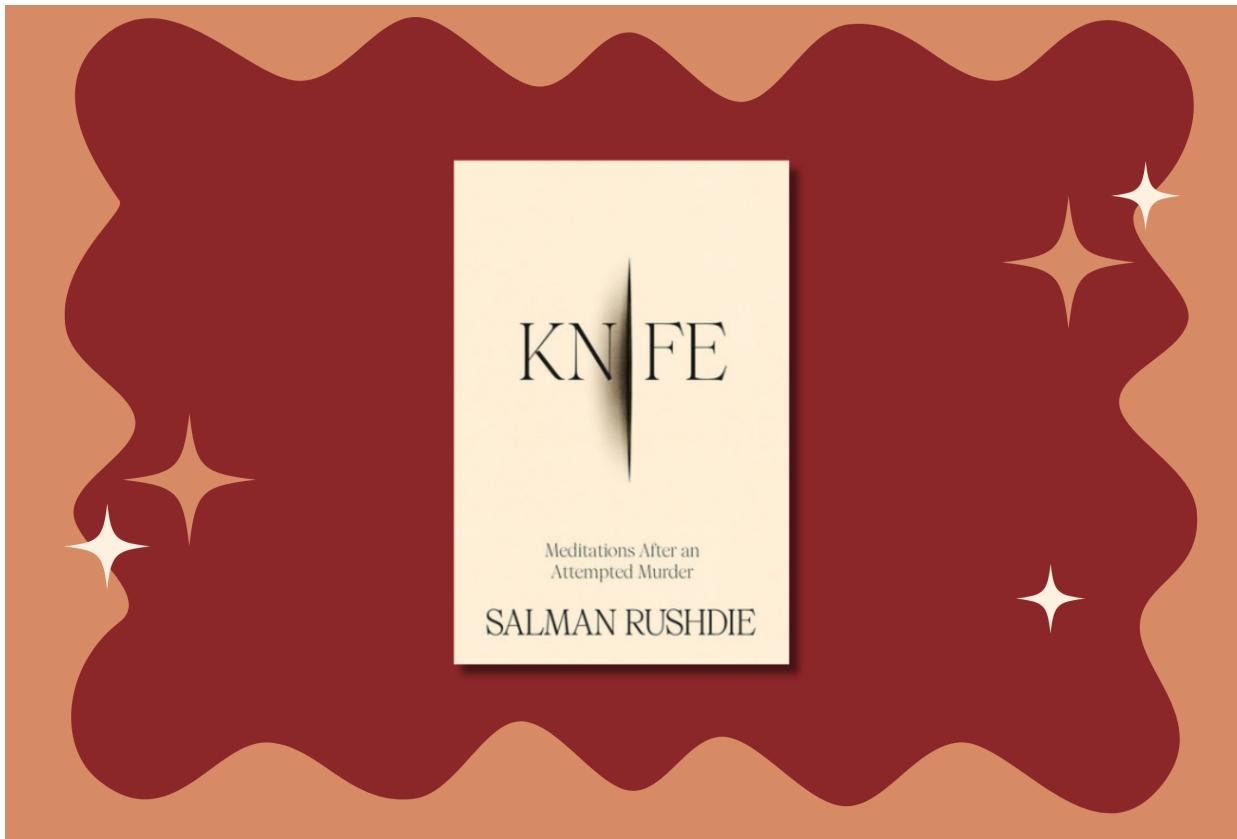
8. *There's Always This Year*, Hanif Abdurraqib



Structured like quarters in a basketball game, Hanif Abdurraqib's *There's Always This Year* centers on his love for the sport and what it means to go home after achieving success. He describes growing up in 1990s Columbus, just as fellow Ohioan LeBron James was coming up. In lyrical prose, he circles in on James' performance on the court, questioning why some Black men are deemed exceptional, and what happens to those who aren't. *There's Always This Year* shows off Abdurraqib's skills as a critic as he narrows in on a specific subject to illuminate its broader connections to American culture. In this case, he offers a book about basketball that is also one about grief, family, and hope.

Buy Now: *There's Always This Year* [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

7. *Knife*, Salman Rushdie

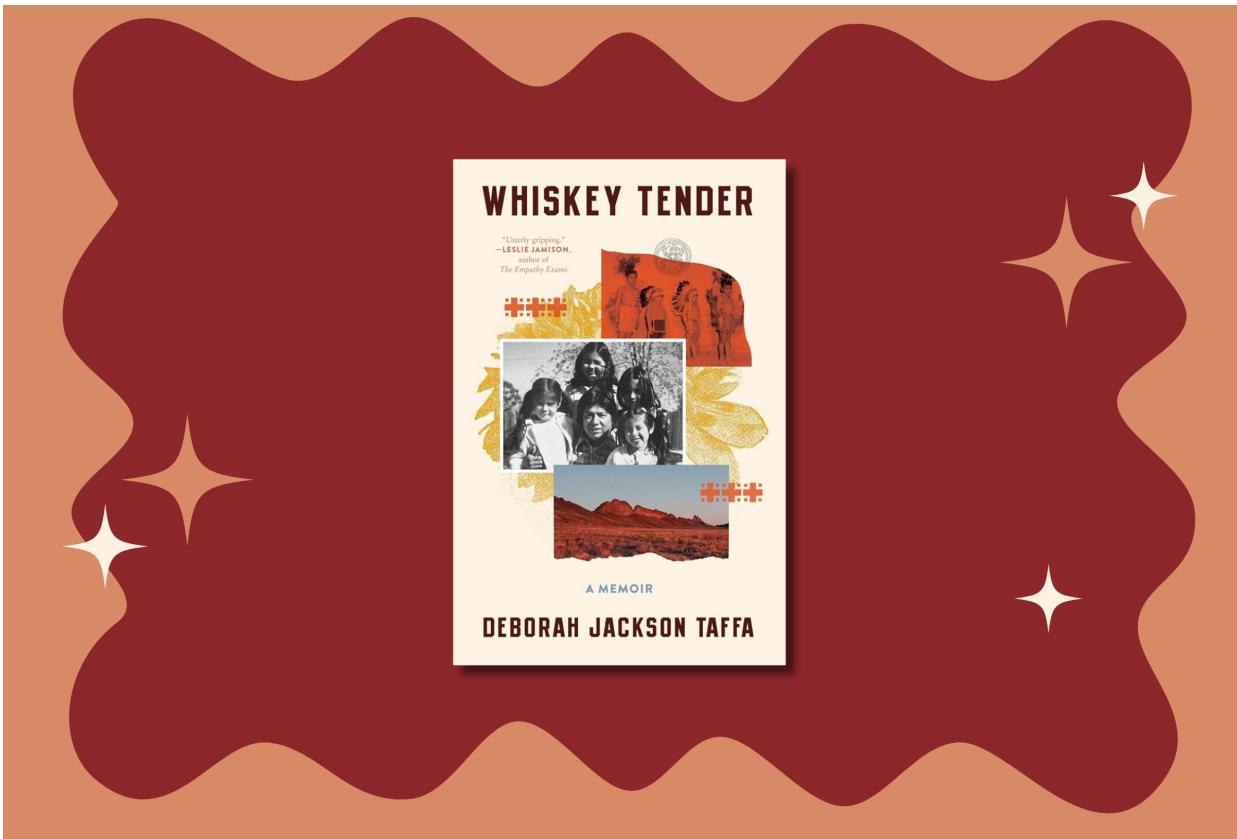


When Salman Rushdie was attacked onstage in Chautauqua, N.Y., in 2022 by a man with a knife, he felt the inevitability of a moment he had long feared, thanks to a fatwa issued by Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini over his 1988 book *The Satanic Verses*. With great honesty and in gripping detail, Rushdie recounts that terrifying day and his journey to recovery. His near-death experience gives him a renewed sense of clarity, coalescing into a stunning memoir full of observations on art, love, and freedom.

Buy Now: *Knife* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

- [The 10 Best Songs of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Movies of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Albums of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best TV Shows of 2024](#)
- [The 10 Best Video Games of 2024](#)

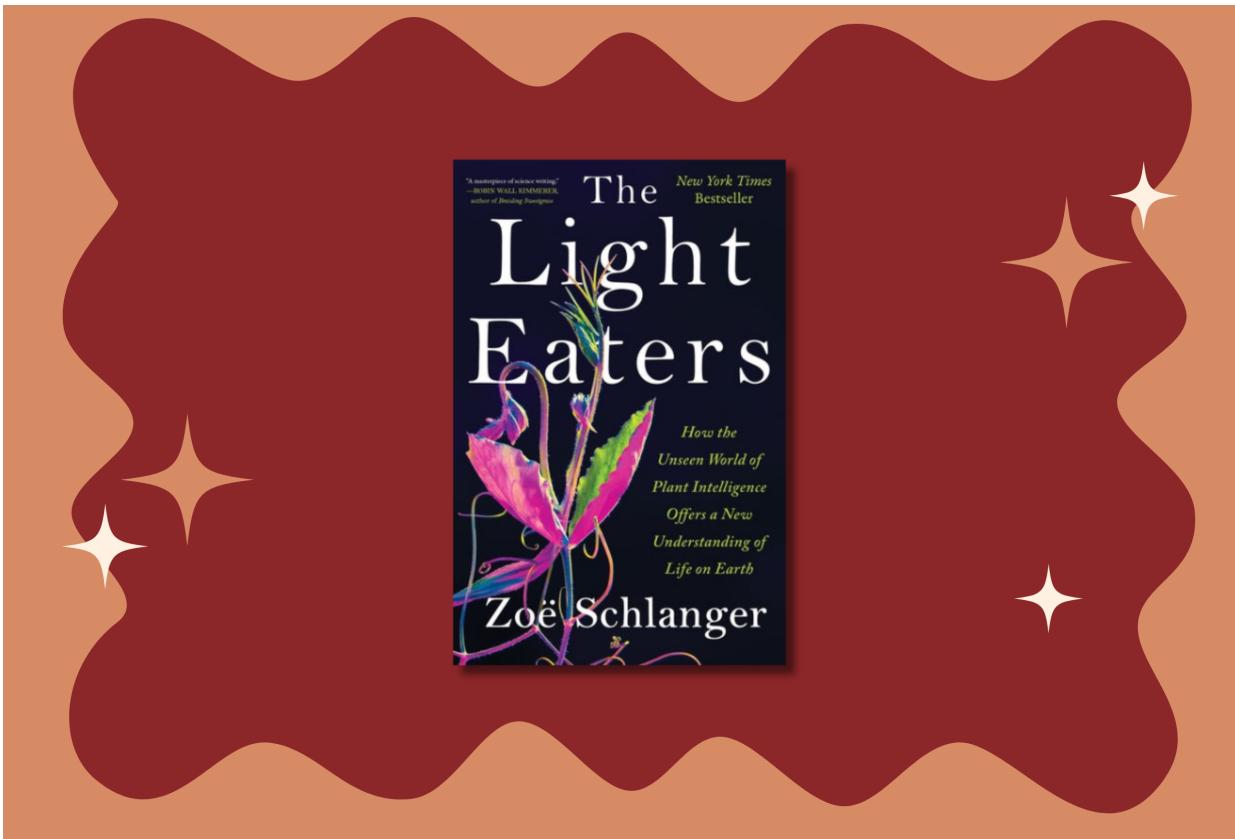
6. *Whiskey Tender*, Deborah Jackson Taffa



What does it mean to really belong? It's the question at the center of Deborah Jackson Taffa's stirring memoir, which explores the author's relationship with her mixed-tribe Native identity. She tells stories of survival, from how her grandparents endured Indian boarding schools to her own tumultuous coming of age, living on and off a reservation. *Whiskey Tender* mines these intimate, personal experiences alongside a thorough analysis of Native history, exploring the often devastating consequences of inherited trauma. In following these threads, Taffa also makes an urgent call for intergenerational storytelling as a means of preserving both Native culture and power.

Buy Now: *Whiskey Tender* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

5. *The Light Eaters*, Zoë Schlanger



Journalist Zoë Schlangner reminds us of a common truth that we tend to take for granted: plants are remarkable. Behind each stage of development in their lives is a complex system, one that she describes in awe-inspiring detail. Combining research with her own personal stories, the author illuminates why plants are so vital to our ecosystem and asks pressing questions about the relationship between humans and natural life. The result is a surprising and tender book of science writing that urges us all to reconsider how we think about the greenery that lives both in our homes and outside of them.

Buy Now: *The Light Eaters* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

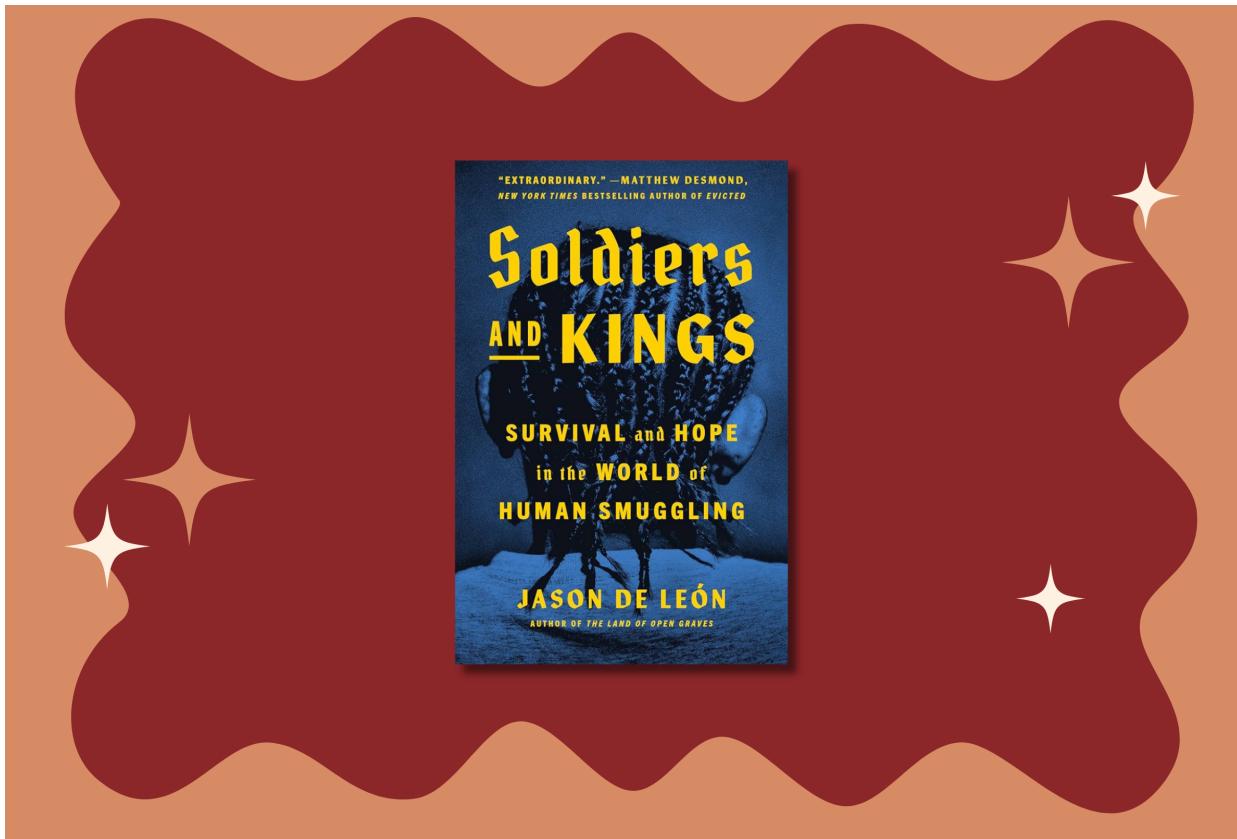
4. *The Lucky Ones*, Zara Chowdhary



As a teenager in 2002, Zara Chowdhary was living in India when a train fire in Godhra killed dozens of Hindu pilgrims. For the three months that followed, the 16-year-old and her family, along with thousands of other Muslims, lived in fear as sectarian violence broke out and transformed the country. *The Lucky Ones* recounts this time in all of its atrocities, underlining how the promise of democracy fails to account for those who need it most.

Buy Now: *The Lucky Ones* [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

3. *Soldiers and Kings*, Jason De León



A riveting work of narrative nonfiction, Jason De León's book provides a window into the world of smugglers, known as coyotes, who guide Central American migrants across the border to the U.S. For seven years, De León followed smugglers and migrants as they journeyed through Mexico. With an unwavering hand, the author describes their plight and their humanity. The power of *Soldiers and Kings*, which won a National Book Award, lies in the trust that De León builds and maintains with his subjects as he delicately delves into the many dimensions of their lives.

Buy Now: *Soldiers and Kings* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

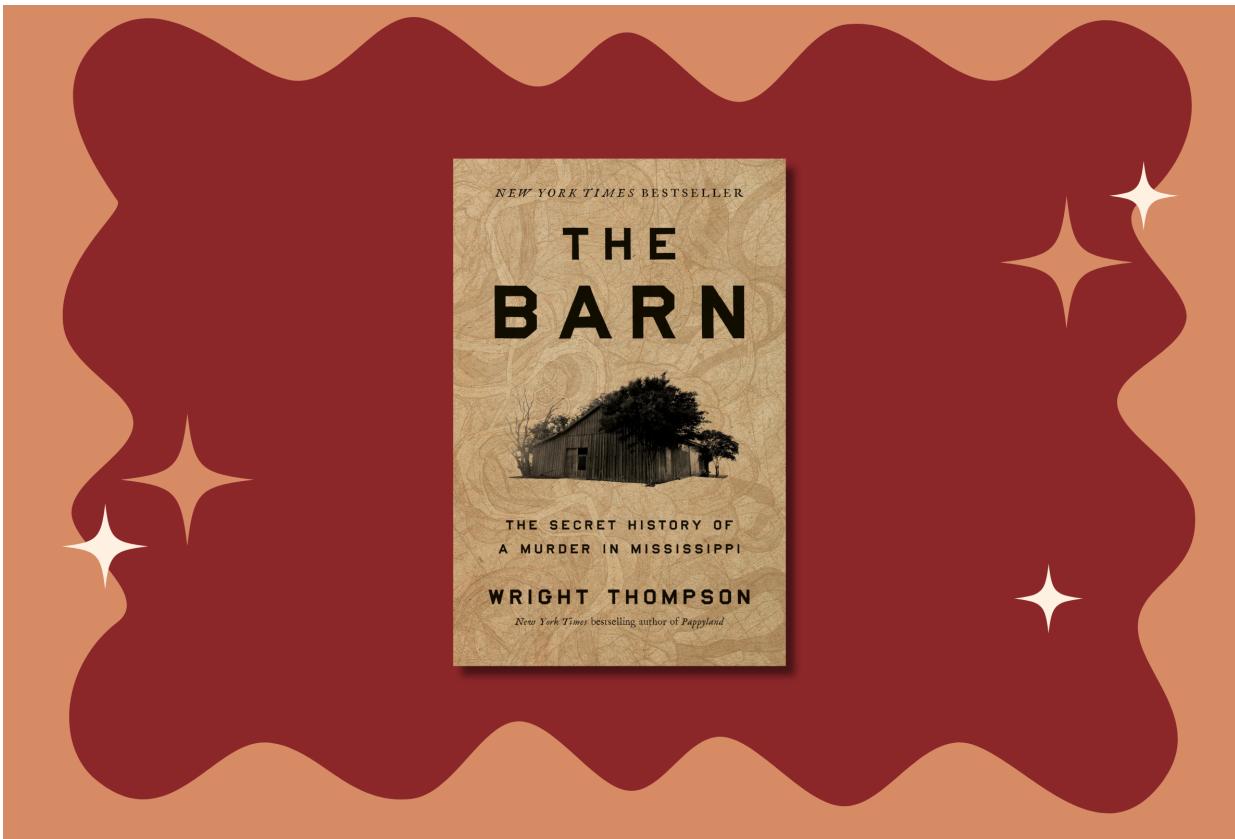
2. *Fi*, Alexandra Fuller



The summer before her 50th birthday, Alexandra Fuller suffered the unimaginable: her 21-year-old son, Fi, died in his sleep. The seemingly random nature of this tragedy—Fi was young and mostly healthy—rocked Fuller to her core. But in her memoir, named after her beloved son, the author reflects on how she moved forward and showed up for her surviving daughters. In lush prose, Fuller takes readers from a grief sanctuary in New Mexico to a retreat in Canada as she reckons with living in a world that begs more questions about life and death than it ever answers.

Buy Now: *Fi* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

1. *The Barn, Wright Thompson*



In 1955, two white men were charged with the murder of [14-year-old Emmett Till](#), a Black boy in Mississippi. Nearly seven decades later, there's still so much that's unknown about the horrific act of violence that has been taught in history books from a limited point of view. In his revelatory book, Wright Thompson digs through the details of a whitewashed history, homing in on the barn where the murder took place. A layered and deeply reported history, *The Barn* combines Thompson's years of research with his own personal connection to the American South to unpack the far-reaching implications of Till's lynching and the systems that covered it up.

Buy Now: *The Barn* on [Bookshop](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#)

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The 10 Best Albums of 2024



[Streaming](#) has mutated the album as a format over the past decade, lengthening tracklists, shifting where likely hits get placed, and chipping away at song runtimes. But this year, artists seemed less beholden to the bean counters at record labels and [tech companies](#), releasing albums tailored to their own stories and musical interests.

These 10 records, spanning death metal, Americana, dance, rap, and more, don't just feature some of the most striking and virtuosic [songwriting](#) of the year. These artists skillfully use the enclosure of the album—its convincing air of a bespoke space *in here, at this time, under these conditions*—to burrow deeply into a given sound or concept. Even as these albums explore the anxieties and joys of our own world, they feel thrillingly alien, governed by sovereign laws of physics and shaped by singular experiences.

In January, I thought music would be the treehouse I climbed to escape the absurdities and miseries of an [election year](#). But thanks to these records, it more often served as my reflecting pool, the place where I learned to sharpen my senses—to look and listen deeper.

Programming note: these albums were selected with our list of the 10 Best Songs of 2024 in mind, so to showcase a greater range of music, no artists appear on both.

10. *Malegría*, Reyna Tropical

One of the founding members of this Los Angeles-based [Latin act](#) didn't live to see the release of its debut album: Nectali "Sumo" Diaz, who formed the duo with guitarist and surviving member Fabiola Reyna in 2016, died in an accident in 2022. The music nonetheless feels warm and triumphant. Reyna, backed by a few producers, leads a humid romp through the dance cultures of the Latin diaspora, melding bouncy polyrhythms, syrupy melodies, and field recordings of birds and moving water. The album title is a Spanish word for "bad happiness," a reference to both the sad circumstances of the album's creation and the broader coexistence of joy and pain. This is music for dancing away the grief and lingering inside it.

9. *Night Reign*, Arooj Aftab

Night ripples with possibility and wonder on composer and singer [Arooj Aftab's](#) fourth solo album. A technician of texture and negative space, Aftab crafts gorgeous arrangements where soft tones and harmonies sound intense despite the calm of the music. Influenced by a childhood spent between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, a formal musical education at Berklee College of Music, and a young adulthood in New York, she pulls from many traditions. The songwriting spans classical Hindustani and Western music, with lyrics from Aftab as well as an 18th century poem and a jazz standard. Aftab's not exactly a classicist though. Her eclectic compositions—one of which features a very modern dose of Auto-Tune—evoke film noir, trip-hop, and *Lovers Deluxe*-era Sade. For Aftab, night is a melting pot.

8. Please Don't Cry, Rapsody

Rapsody is one of rap's premier lyricists, but on her fourth album, she flexes new muscles. Inspired by her idol [Lauryn Hill](#), the North Carolina rapper emphasizes expression over wit, reflecting on her life and career over rich blends of R&B, soul, and reggae. She's an accomplished storyteller, and spends much of the album, which is framed as a poignant therapy session, unspooling experiences as mundane as vacationing and as charged as watching a beloved relative lose their memory. It's her best music yet, and her pen remains potent. While her snappy lyrics structure these songs of reflection and self-care, her deep arsenal of flows, intonations, and melodies bring them to life.

7. Absolute Elsewhere, Blood Incantation

Blood Incantation's third album is technically two songs divided into three tracks each, but good luck holding any number in your head as these arrangements blast you through spacetime. The Denver death metal quartet rip through drone, prog rock, and ambient across the dense, riveting album, which is perpetually in transition. Technically, the music is about the obliteration of human consciousness upon coming into contact with an alien text, and that zany premise is the appeal. Moments of stillness build into lysergic riffs, which beget gnarlier riffs before simmering into a synth-driven calm that gathers energy for the next detonation. For Blood Incantation, the metal mandate to seek extremity is joyously open-ended, freeing them to explore quietude as often as ruckus. Into the Stargate!

6. My Method Actor, Nilüfer Yanya

If Nilüfer Yanya decided to put down her guitar and pursue a career as a vocalist, most of her fans probably wouldn't protest. She's got a voice of velvet: rich, full, colorful. But the British singer songwriter is also an accomplished strummer, and she spends her third album proving how essential the instrument is to her angsty songs of young love and adulthood. Co-written entirely with electronic producer Will Archer, who has worked with [Jessie Ware](#) and Sudan Archives, *My Method Actor* does more with

less, finding strength in restrained melodies and subdued vocals that heighten the tension of her songwriting.

5. *BRAT*, Charli XCX

What if a pop record were constructed like a MySpace page? That's the simple but genius premise of [Charli XCX's BRAT](#), a kaleidoscopic dance album that revels in the freedoms of living messily. The British singer doesn't have a golden voice, killer choreography, or a Grammy, but she's indelibly cool. And her coolness isn't just a pose; it's true taste—a hankering for the very specific melodies, phrases, and beats that rouse her. In brattiness, Charli unlocks her inner paranoiac, mean girl, and so much more, a palette that further enlivens the restless [electronic music](#) she's long championed. The richness of the brat persona and the immediacy of the songwriting turned the album into a [zeitgeist event](#), but that massive success is secondary to the record's idiosyncratic purview. *BRAT* offers a 360 view of the scenes and sounds Charli holds dear. So stylish.

4. *What Now*, Brittany Howard

There's no question mark in the title of [Brittany Howard's](#) second solo album since going on hiatus from the [Alabama Shakes](#) in 2018. The multi-instrumentalist and singer sets out to make a statement with this swinging set of funk, pop, soul, and rock tracks. Leaving behind the intimate storytelling of her debut, she lets the music take charge, showcasing her skill as an arranger with richly layered rhythms and melodies. The music never feels overstuffed though, its profusion in service of the searching writing, which often examines the fragility of love. Don't dare ask her what next.

3. *I Lay Down My Life For You*, JPEGMAFIA

Producer and rapper JPEGMAFIA makes hyperactive songs that jitter and rumble like an overloaded washing machine. Beat switches are common, samples get sourced from anywhere, and the rapping is variously smooth,

abrasive, and stoned. He slows down a bit on his fifth album, which finds him processing the recoil of working with his [controversial](#) idol, Ye (f.k.a [Kanye West](#)), on the album *Vultures 1*. The songs are muscular and syncretic as ever, but the normally peevish rapper doesn't maintain his trolling energy for the full record, settling into a questioning and pensive pace. This in turn opens up the music, changing it from a bludgeon to a balm. JPEG doesn't reconcile these two modes, but with repeat listens they feel less polar, facets of a single mind.

2. *Tigers Blood*, Waxahatchee

After four albums of gauzy indie rock, Alabama-born singer Katie Crutchfield turned to folk and country for *Saint Cloud*, her fifth record. The change of pace, rooted in both a sense of homecoming and her recent embrace of sobriety, recalibrated her songwriting and widened her audience. She further refines those heartland sounds on *Tigers Blood*, a stunning set of easygoing downhome tunes cataloging the travails and charms of mid-30s living. The rhythm section, helmed by multi-instrumentalist Brad Cook works wonders, flickering and flaring in tandem with Crutchfield's mighty but nimble voice. "Oh, when that siren blows, rings out all over town," she sings on the title track. Indeed.

1. *Lives Outgrown*, Beth Gibbons

Singer Beth Gibbons hasn't released much music in the 30 years since her iconic band Portishead stormed out the gate with seminal trip-hop record *Dummy*. Nor has she spoken to the press much, gaining a reputation for intense privacy. But she's not necessarily the hermit these habits suggest. Her second solo album, a collection of baroque chamber folk, explores mortality with striking verve. It's a deeply interior record, abuzz with images and thoughts that feel borne of rumination and experience. The bustling arrangements—which frequently feature layers of strings, percussion, and woodwinds—surge and swell as Gibbons sings of her aging body and home life. Where the languid rhythms of trip-hop soundtrack the feeling of eternal night, that blissful post-club chill, this record inhabits the charged peace of knowing that all nights, and days, must end.

Correction, Dec. 11

The art that accompanied the original version of this story included an incorrect image. It has been updated to show Arooj Aftab the singer, not the actor of the same name.

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The 10 Best Podcasts of 2024

Eliana Dockterman is a correspondent at TIME. She covers culture, society, and gender, including topics from blockbuster movies to the #MeToo movement to how the pandemic pushed moms out of the workplace.



In 2024, podcasts eclipsed traditional media outlets in their [influence over the U.S. election](#) as certain shows with massive audiences managed to score interviews with sought-after subjects trying to widen their reach.

Just look at Vice President Kamala Harris' decision to talk to [Alexander Cooper on *Call Her Daddy*](#), a popular podcast known mostly for raunchy sex jokes that crucially attracts young women. Or President-elect Donald Trump's bro-cast tour on shows like [The Joe Rogan Experience](#) that are wildly popular among young men.

Read More: [Call Her Daddy's Alexandra Cooper Made Her Name Talking About Sex. Now She's Pushing Beyond That](#)

Sorry, but you won't find any of those shows on this best-of list. While some are enjoyable listens, those hosts by definition are not asking our world leaders the hardest questions: That's why many powerful people prefer to do interviews on those platforms rather than with traditional news outlets.

Still, you will find some of podcasting's most famous faces—voices?—on this roundup. Call me nostalgic but I found myself seeking out old favorites this fall. Shows I had not listened to for years, like *99% Invisible* and *Modern Love*, experimented with new topics and formats that drew me back into the fold. I eagerly tuned in to new shows from beloved podcasting veterans like *Reply All*'s Alex Goldman, *Missing Richard Simmons*' Dan Taberski, or *Still Processing*'s Wesley Morris. And the Lonely Island guys did the impossible: Recording a television recap podcast that's actually funny and worth your time.

Here are the best podcasts of the year.

10. *Finally! A Show About Women That Isn't Just a Thinly Veiled Aspirational Nightmare*

As the name might suggest, this audio diary show isn't about becoming a girl boss or perfecting the high wire act of motherhood. In each episode, a different woman in a particularly fascinating circumstance records a day in her normal life. Some of the more enthralling stories include a recording from an 80-something pinup girl about her time shopping for vibrators and a telehealth abortion provider who works for the intentionally provocative Satanic Temple.

The host-less format is a risk—the episodes don't have a particular unifying theme or message about womanhood. But we are safe in the hands of two podcasting veterans who know a little something about being a lady: Jane Marie investigated multilevel marketing schemes that target women in *The Dream*, and Joanna Solotaroff helped produce one of the first breakout

comedy podcasts, *2 Dope Queens*. The resulting show celebrates women—whatever their specific experiences may be.

Start Here: [*Finally! A Show About an 83 Year Old Calendar Girl*](#)

9. *Things Fell Apart*

Jon Ronson's podcast on the culture wars is back for a second season that is even better than the first. Ronson, who wrote *Men Who Stare at Goats* and *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* among other works, has spent much of the last couple decades chronicling the erosion of our shared notion of truth. *Things Fell Apart* tries to understand how this fracture occurred by exploring the unlikely origins of major cultural shifts.

Each episode asks a question: How does a serial killer targeting Black sex workers in the 1980s connect to the killing of George Floyd in 2020? How does a bestselling book on trauma fuel campus protests? The stories themselves are engrossing. They take twists and turns that you won't expect. But the overall effect is chilling.

Start Here: [S2. Ep1: The Most Mysterious Deaths](#)

8. *My So-Called Midlife*

Midlife is often marked by crises, boredom, and restlessness. Reshma Saujani, the founder of [Girls Who Code](#) and all-around [high-achieving woman](#), feels ready to blow up her monotonous existence as she stares down 50. On this show, she invites on accomplished women to offer guidance on finding happiness at a challenging time when kids are leaving the home, careers stall, and the body begins to shift.

Saujani takes a few cues from fellow Lemonada podcaster [Julia Louis-Dreyfus](#), who attempts to extract wisdom on aging from women in their 70s and beyond in [Wiser Than Me](#). This show is aimed at a younger demographic and Saujani brings an almost pleading vulnerability to the conversations: She seems to genuinely need guidance on how to endure. Her impressive array of early guests includes Louis-Dreyfus herself, famous economist and parenting guru [Emily Oster](#), and none other than Supreme Court Justice [Ketanji Brown Jackson](#). They offer an array of useful life tips: always find a new way to challenge yourself at work,

schedule sex with your partner, and take a 20-minute nap when you're overwhelmed—in the Safeway parking lot, if you have to.

Start Here: [*It Could Be F*cking Great With Julia Louis-Dreyfus*](#)

7. 99% Invisible: The Power Broker

The preeminent podcast on design—from architecture to clothing to the staging of this year's Olympics—deserves recognition nearly every year. This year, they decided to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Pulitzer Prize-winning Robert Moses biography, [*The Power Broker*](#), with a book club of sorts. Show host Roman Mars and *Daily Show* writer Elliott Kalan examine Robert Caro's deep dive into the man who had a greater impact on forming New York City than arguably anybody else in history, inviting guests like *New York Times* columnist Jamelle Bouie and Rep. [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) to talk about Moses' legacy.

Under Moses' supervision, the city built 35 highways, 13 bridges, parks, playgrounds, housing projects, Lincoln Center, Shea Stadium, and the 1964 World's Fair. But the urban planner also bulldozed through entire neighborhoods to build his ideal city—and doomed New Yorkers to terrible traffic by refusing to expand certain roadways beyond a few lanes. The podcast provides the perfect excuse to finally dip into the 1,200-page tome.

Start Here: [*The Power Broker #1: Robert Caro*](#)

6. Modern Love

The Modern Love Podcast, an adaptation of the beloved *New York Times* column, has cycled through many formats over the years. Authors have read their essays on love, and so have celebrities. Hosts have conducted conversations with the writers and with readers. In honor of the 20th anniversary of the column, the podcast is yet again trying something new. In a series of recent episodes, host Anna Martin has asked celebrities ranging from [Penn Badgley](#) to [Samin Nosrat](#) to read essays and then spoken with them about the essays' amorous themes.

The format works well. It's rare to hear guarded people open up, but something about reading heart-wrenching piece of writing preps these celebrities for honesty. Several come ready to spill—no one more so than [Andrew Garfield](#), a heart-on-his-sleeve actor whose viral episode brought many to tears. The following episode with Chicken Shop Date host [Amelia Dimoldenberg](#) is not quite as vulnerable but equally as intriguing (especially given [Garfield and Dimoldenberg's recent flirtations](#)). You could say I've rekindled my relationship with *Modern Love*.

Start Here: [Andrew Garfield Wants to Crack Open Your Heart](#)

5. *Empire City: The Untold Story of the NYPD*

Chenjerai Kumanyika of [Uncivil](#) is back with a show that delves into the history and mythology of the NYPD. That story, inevitably, ties to the evolution of policing in America as a whole. The podcast begins with a disturbing video shot by the NYPD surveilling Kumanyika's father, a civil right activist. Rewatching the footage inspired Kumanyika to take on this project.

Kumanyika demonstrates how the very foundation of the institution is [built on uneven ground](#): During the Civil War, New York police officers earned payments by kidnapping free Black men and women in the city and shipping them South to be enslaved. He then follows the evolution of the NYPD and the many problematic structural decisions that eroded trust between the police and the people they are sworn to protect. Throughout eight episodes, Kumanyika interweaves personal narrative with rigorous research on the NYPD's history to make the compelling argument that New Yorkers' safety isn't actually the prime objective of the nation's largest police force.

Start Here: [They Keep People Safe | 1](#)

4. *Hyperfixed*

Reply All was one of the longest-running and most beloved podcasts in the tech space [until it imploded in 2022](#). Since, the two former co-hosts have struck out on their own and, after some experimentation, landed on podcast concepts that are, frankly, extremely similar to *Reply All*. That's not a criticism—many people dearly miss the original show.

PJ Vogt's excellent *Search Engine*, which answers a wide range of questions about everything from animals in zoos to fentanyl in drugs, has only gotten better [since it made my Top 10 list last year](#). Now comes Alex Goldman's *Hyperfixed*, a help desk podcast that riffs on *Reply All*'s "Super Tech Support" segment. Goldman bills himself as an "overconfident idiot" all too eager to help with random problems that unfold in unexpected ways. An episode on a New Yorker who needs Goldman's help getting her driver's license expands into an investigation into why driving in New York is awful. An entry on perfecting a baking recipe diverts into the confounding history of the U.S. refusing to implement the metric system and an interview with award-winning chef Nancy Silverton. Though Goldman has only produced two episodes so far, the series proved immediately addictive and charming. I'm betting I'll become a regular listener.

Start Here: [Eva Needs to Measure](#)

3. *The Wonder of Stevie*

As a dedicated listener to both *Do You Like Prince Movies?* from Grantland and *Still Processing* from the New York Times, I would tune in to just about anything Pulitzer Prize-winning cultural critic Wesley Morris creates. Morris formerly co-hosted those shows with other writers. *The Wonder of Stevie* is a different endeavor, an overview and deep analysis of the career of an [iconic musician](#) that Morris tackles solo, though he occasionally gets a helping hand from none other than former President [Barack Obama](#). Morris interviews the likes of Questlove, Janelle Monae and [Michelle Obama](#) about Stevie Wonder's career. (The Obamas' Higher Ground helped produce the podcast.)

The show begins in 1972 and traces the next half decade in the musician's career, during which he won 12 Grammys. Even if you don't care about

Wonder, you should care about what Morris cares about: He is always able to succinctly divine meaning from great art. And this podcast in particular is a joyful celebration. He also heroically moderates a conversation in the final episode between Barack Obama and Stevie Wonder himself.

Start Here: [Music of My Mind | 1972](#)

2. *The Lonely Island & Seth Meyers Podcast*

Typically, podcasts that involve celebrities recapping their own shows tend to be self-indulgent, un-analytical, and not particularly revealing. But I fell hard for *The Lonely Island & Seth Meyers Podcast*. Each episodes focuses on a different Lonely Island [Saturday Night Live](#) sketch. Andy Samberg, Jorma Taccone, and Akiva Schaffer offer insight into the stressful yet hilarious process of writing joke songs about d—cks in boxes with Justin Timberlake and coming up with swear words for Natalie Portman to rap.

It's a cliche to praise podcasts for effortless chemistry, but it should be no surprise that a trio that has worked together for decades on songs like "I'm on a Boat" and movies like [Pop Star](#) have it. (So does [Meyers](#), who apparently is in a daily text exchange with Samberg about their Spelling Bee scores.) The podcast serves up unabashedly nostalgic content for those of us who came of age in the late 2000s, but it also lands at an existential moment for *SNL* on the eve of its 50th anniversary. Some 20 years ago, Lonely Island dragged *SNL* into the YouTube era and set trends that persist on TikTok today. Perhaps there are lessons to be gleaned from this throwback show for the future of comedy.

Start Here: [Lazy Sunday](#)

1. *Hysterical*

The most engrossing podcast Dan Taberski has produced since *Missing Richard Simmons*, *Hysterical* investigates a [mysterious illness](#) that spread among high school girls randomly exhibiting Tourette's-like symptoms about a decade ago in Le Roy, New York. The incident is believed to be the

largest case of mass hysteria since the Salem Witch Trials. The show explores the origins of hysteria, other modern examples, and what patients do when confronted with the frustrating diagnosis that their symptoms are “all in their head.”

While the history of hysteria is intriguing, *Hysterical* is at its strongest when Taberski is speaking with the women who were once afflicted by what they argue was a mysterious—but very real—illness. The scandal occurred near Taberski’s hometown in upstate New York, and he’s able to bring a local charm to his color commentary and interviews. He manages to make what might feel like a dour show on a serious topic feel light and brisk.

Start Here: [Outbreak | 1](#)

Correction, December 2

The original version of this story misstated how many Grammy Awards Stevie Wonder won in the five years after 1972. It was 8, not 6.

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