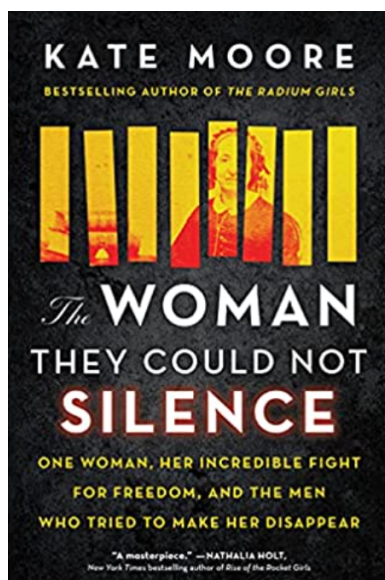




From left: Dan, Sheri, Harry, Daryl, Sarah, Laurie, Colleen, Megan, Audrey, Christine, Susan, Mary Ellen, Amy

Our group met at the Nakia Lodge, island of Taveuni, in Fiji to discuss books. (And to do a little diving.) Here's our list of favored books...

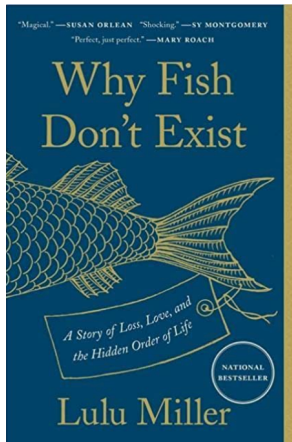
Laurie: [*The Woman They Could Not Silence: One Woman, Her Incredible Fight for Freedom, and the Men Who Tried to Make Her Disappear*...](#) by Kate Moore.



During the Civil War, Elizabeth Packard is being institutionalized by her husband of twenty-one years. He feels threatened—by Elizabeth's intellect, independence, and unwillingness to stifle her own thoughts.

The horrific conditions inside the Illinois State Hospital are overseen by Dr. Andrew McFarland, a man who will prove to be even more dangerous to Elizabeth than her husband. But more disturbing is that Elizabeth is not the only sane woman confined to the institution. There are many rational women on her ward who tell the same story: they've been committed not because they need medical treatment, but to keep them in line—conveniently labeled "crazy" so their voices are ignored.

Sarah: [*Why Fish Don't Exist: A Story of Loss, Love, and the Hidden Order of Life*](#) by Lulu Miller. (2021) David Starr Jordan was a taxonomist, credited with discovering nearly a fifth of the fish known to humans in his day. But the more of the hidden blueprint of life he uncovered, the



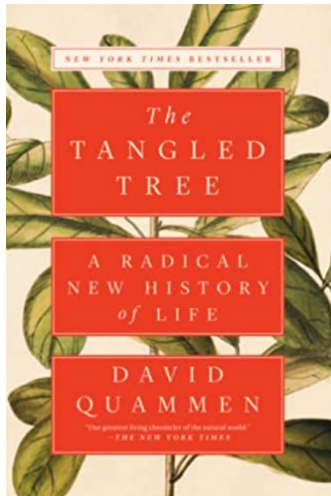
harder the universe seemed to try to thwart him. His specimen collections were demolished by lightning, by fire, and eventually by the 1906 San Francisco earthquake—which sent more than a thousand of his discoveries, housed in fragile glass jars, plummeting to the floor. In an instant, his life's work was shattered.

Many might have given up, given in to despair. But Jordan? He surveyed the wreckage at his feet, found the first fish that he recognized, and confidently began to rebuild his collection. And this time, he introduced one clever innovation that he believed would at last protect his work against the chaos of the world.

When NPR reporter Lulu Miller first heard this anecdote in passing, she took Jordan for a fool—a cautionary tale in hubris, or denial. But as her own life slowly unraveled, she began to wonder about him. Perhaps instead he was a model for how to go on when all seemed lost. What she would unearth about his life would transform her understanding of history, morality, and the world beneath her feet.

(Sarah points out that this book is especially good as an audio book.)

Dan: [A Tangled Web: A Radical New History of Life](#) by David Quammen. (2019)



In the mid-1970s, scientists began using DNA sequences to reexamine the history of all life. Perhaps the most startling discovery to come out of this new field is horizontal gene transfer (HGT), or the movement of genes across species lines. It turns out that HGT has been widespread and important; we now know that roughly eight percent of the human genome arrived sideways by viral infection—a type of HGT.

(Dan points out that he *listened to this book*, but it was pretty complex and required a physical re-read. It's truly dense, but it will change the way you think about heredity and the definition of species.)

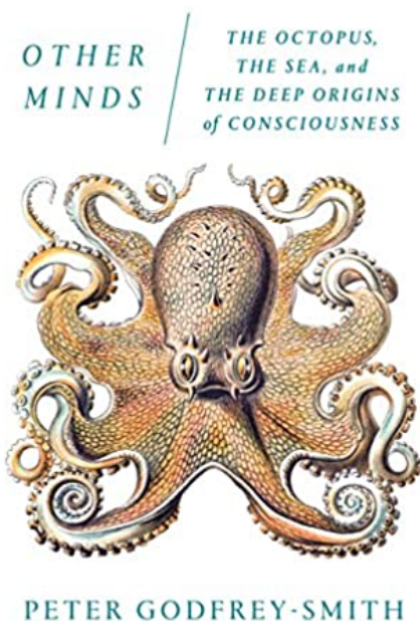
Harry: [The Hidden Spring. Neurobiologist: A Journey to the Source of Consciousness](#) by Mark Solms (2021)



Scientists consider consciousness the "hard problem" because it seems an impossible task to solve: how can we understand why we feel a subjective sense of self and how it arises in the brain? Venturing into the elementary physics

of life, Solms has now arrived at an astonishing answer. In *The Hidden Spring*, he brings forward his discovery in accessible language and graspable analogies. He goes beyond other neuroscientists by paying close attention to the subjective experiences of hundreds of neurological patients, many of whom he treated, whose uncanny conversations expose much about the brain's obscure reaches.

Harry: Other Minds: [The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness](#) by Peter Godfrey-Smith (2017)



Although mammals and birds are widely regarded as the smartest creatures on earth, it has lately become clear that a very distant branch of the tree of life has also sprouted higher intelligence: the cephalopods, consisting of the squid, the cuttlefish, and above all the octopus. In captivity, octopuses have been known to identify individual human keepers, raid neighboring tanks for food, turn off lightbulbs by spouting jets of water, plug drains, and make daring escapes. How is it that a creature with such gifts evolved through an evolutionary lineage so radically distant from our own? What does it mean that evolution built minds not once but at least twice? The octopus is the closest we will come to meeting an intelligent alien. What can we learn from the encounter?

In *Other Minds*, Peter Godfrey-Smith, tells a story of how subjective experience crept into being—how nature became aware of itself. It is a story that largely occurs in the ocean, where animals first appeared. The first nervous systems evolved, probably in ancient relatives of jellyfish; later on, the cephalopods, which began as inconspicuous mollusks, abandoned their shells and rose above the ocean floor, searching for prey and acquiring the greater intelligence needed to do so. Taking an independent route, mammals and birds later began their own evolutionary journeys.

Christine: [These Violent Delights](#) (Book 1 of 2). Chloe Gong.

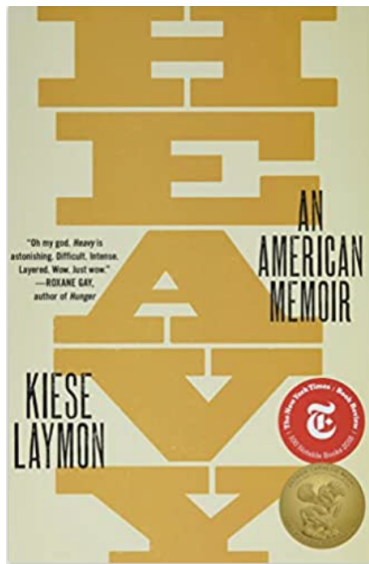
A blood feud between two gangs in 1926 Shanghai runs the streets red, leaving the city helpless in the grip of chaos. At the heart of it all is eighteen-year-old Juliette Cai, a former flapper who has returned to assume her role as the proud heir of the Scarlet Gang—a network of criminals far above the law. Their only rivals in power are the White Flowers, who have fought the Scarlets for generations. And behind



every move is their heir, Roma Montagov, Juliette's first love...and first betrayal.

But when gangsters on both sides show signs of instability culminating in clawing their own throats out, the people start to whisper. Of a contagion, a madness. Of a monster in the shadows. As the deaths stack up, Juliette and Roma must set their guns—and grudges—aside and work together, for if they can't stop this mayhem, then there will be no city left for either to rule.

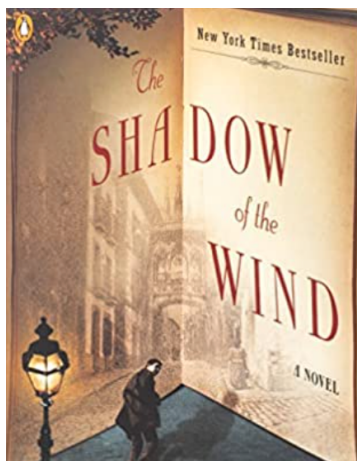
Amy: [Heavy: An American Memoir](#). Kiese Laymon.



In *Heavy*, Laymon writes eloquently and honestly about growing up a hard-headed black son to a complicated and brilliant black mother in Jackson, Mississippi. From his early experiences of sexual violence, to his suspension from college, to time in New York as a college professor, Laymon charts his complex relationship with his mother, grandmother, anorexia, obesity, sex, writing, and ultimately gambling. *Heavy* is a “gorgeous, gutting...generous” (The New York Times) memoir that combines personal stories with piercing intellect to reflect both on the strife of American society and on Laymon’s experiences with abuse. By attempting to name secrets and lies he and his mother spent a lifetime avoiding, he asks us to confront the terrifying possibility that few in this nation actually know how to responsibly love, and even fewer want to live under the weight of actually becoming free.

“A book for people who appreciated Roxane Gay’s memoir *Hunger*” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel), *Heavy* is defiant yet vulnerable, an insightful, often comical exploration of weight, identity, art, friendship, and family through years of haunting implosions and long reverberations. “You won’t be able to put [this memoir] down...It is packed with reminders of how black dreams get skewed and deferred, yet are also pregnant with the possibility that a kind of redemption may lie in intimate grappling with black realities” (The Atlantic).

Sheri: *The Shadow of the Wind*. Carlos Zafón. (first of a quadrilogy)

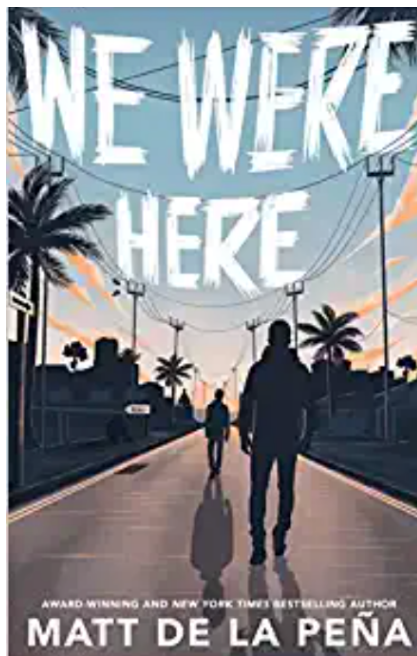


Barcelona, 1945: A city slowly heals in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, and Daniel, an antiquarian book dealer’s son who mourns the loss of his mother, finds solace in a mysterious book entitled *The Shadow of the Wind*, by one Julián Carax. But when he sets out to find the author’s other works, he makes a shocking discovery: someone has been systematically destroying

every copy of every book Carax has written. In fact, Daniel may have the last of Carax's books in existence. Soon Daniel's seemingly innocent quest opens a door into one of Barcelona's darkest secrets--an epic story of murder, madness, and doomed love.

(Dan's comment: This IS a wonderful book—it's also a big book, one that should be read fairly quickly. Don't try to read it over the entire summer—try to do it in a weekend, or you won't remember all of the characters!)

Audrey: [We were here](#) Matt de la Peña.



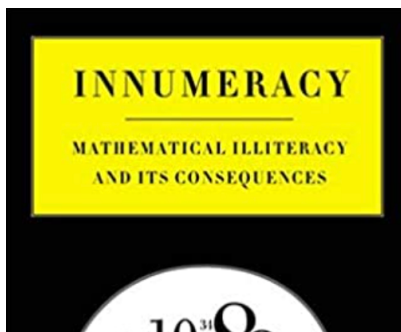
When it happened, Miguel was sent to Juvi. The judge gave him a year in a group home—said he had to write in a journal so some counselor could try to figure out how he thinks. The judge had no idea that he actually did Miguel a favor. Ever since it happened, his mom can't even look at him in the face. Any home besides his would be a better place to live.

But Miguel didn't bet on meeting Rondell or Mong or on any of what happened after they broke out. He only thought about Mexico and getting to the border to where he could start over. Forget his mom. Forget his brother. Forget himself.

Life usually doesn't work out how you think it will, though. And most of the time, running away is the quickest path right back to what you're running from.

From the streets of Stockton to the beaches of Venice, all the way to the Mexican border, *We Were Here* follows a journey of self-discovery by a boy who is trying to forgive himself in an unforgiving world.

Daryl: [Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy and Its Consequences](#). John Allen Paulos
Why do even well-educated people understand so little about mathematics? And what are the costs of our innumeracy? John Allen Paulos, in his celebrated bestseller first published in 1988, argues that our inability to deal rationally with very large numbers and the probabilities associated with them results in misinformed governmental policies, confused personal decisions, and an increased susceptibility to pseudoscience of all kinds. Innumeracy lets us know what we're missing, and how we can do something about it.



Sprinkling his discussion of numbers and probabilities with quirky stories and anecdotes, Paulos ranges freely over many aspects of modern life, from contested elections to sports stats, from stock scams and newspaper psychics to diet and medical claims, sex discrimination, insurance, lotteries, and drug testing. Readers of *Innumeracy* will be rewarded with scores of astonishing facts, a fistful of powerful ideas, and, most important, a clearer, more quantitative way of looking at their world.

Special Round: What's your favorite podcast?

Amy: [Ear Hustle](#)

Ear Hustle launched in 2017 as the first podcast created and produced in prison, featuring stories of the daily realities of life inside California's San Quentin State Prison, shared by those living it.

[Stay Tuned with Preet](#)

U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara as he breaks down legal topics in the news and engages thought leaders in a podcast about power, policy, and justice. From CAFE and the Vox Media Podcast Network.

Megan: [What Roman Mars can learn about con law](#)

Professor Elizabeth Joh helps an anxious Roman Mars make sense of the maelstrom of news by teaching us all Constitutional Law

Sarah: [The Iditapod](#)

The Iditapod follows the Last Great Race. This daily podcast from Alaska Public Media and KNOM Radio takes you out on the trail — into checkpoints, down along the sea ice, and across the finish line in Nome. Hear interviews with mushers, behind the scenes news, and in-depth race analysis you won't find anywhere else.

Harry: [Opposing Bases](#)

The Opposing Bases podcast takes you deep into the world of flying, planes, and especially air traffic control. If you are a worrisome flier, this isn't for you. But for the bold and curious, learning about "shiny aluminum showers" is fascinating.

[You're Wrong About](#)

Mike and Sarah are journalists obsessed with the past. Every week they reconsider an event, person or phenomenon that's been miscast in the public imagination.

Dan: [Cautionary Tales](#)

We tell our children unsettling fairy tales to teach them valuable life lessons, but these cautionary tales are for the education of the grown-ups — and they are all true. Tim Harford (Financial Times, BBC, author of *Messy* and *The Undercover Economist*) brings you stories of awful human error, tragic catastrophes, daring heists and hilarious fiascos. They'll delight you and scare you, but also make you wiser.

Audrey: [Gastropod](#)

Gastropod looks at food through the lens of science and history. Each episode, we look at the hidden history and surprising science behind a different food and/or farming-related topic, from aquaculture to ancient feasts, from cutlery to chile peppers, and from microbes to Malbec. We interview experts, visit labs, fields, and archaeological digs, and generally have lots of fun while discovering new ways to understand the world through food.