

HPLD OFFERS GAMES AND FUN ACROSS THE DISTRICT



High Plains Library District

CommUNITY

JULY 2025

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Wonder Play Socialize
Bibliotecas Experience
Imagine
Laugh
Build Maktabaduhu Create Share Games Read
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Dream Connect Experience

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GAME ON at the Library **Beyond the** **BOOKS:** *Part 2*

by David E. Sharp

In the February edition of this newsletter,

I stated my case that library services have experienced some phenomenal developments over the years, taking them far and beyond the simple circulation of books.

Don't get me wrong, I am passionate about books. They are a vital part of what libraries are, and they always will be. However, because books are so central to a library's identity, people often miss some of our other great services. So, get ready to roll the dice because today we're talking about—Your Library: The Game Hub.

Gaming of all kinds is a natural fit for library services, and naturally, we've found a fit in our services for gaming... of all kinds! Gaming is a perfect crossroads between community and learning, two critical components of a library's mission. Gaming is learning in an experiential way. Did you know that **Play is one of the five pillars of early literacy?** Even during storytimes, we implement some form of gaming. But gaming doesn't stop with



preschoolers. Whether it's sports, board games, Wheel of Fortune, role playing, or video games, we all need some kind of play. Fun and games is not just fun and games. It's an important part of our lives encouraging growth, community, creativity, and fulfillment.

What kinds of games are we talking? All kinds. To paraphrase the classic library adage, every player has a game, and every game has a player. Because games come in a wide variety, and players are even more diverse, game offerings must cover a lot of ground. While I cannot possibly detail every gaming program we have on the books, I'll highlight a few of my favorites around the district. **You'll find even more on our events calendar here.**

Digital Gaming

After a brief survey of our library offerings, I've discovered you will be hard-pressed to find a library that doesn't have a game console such as a Playstation, Xbox, or Switch.



LINC offers a full gaming room with two Xboxes, computers for gaming, and a whole game cabinet. Some libraries offer open gaming hours, others check out controllers as desired. [At Eaton, game cartridges can even be checked out like books!](#) Whatever your tastes, video gaming is alive and blipping at the High Plains Library.

And, while video games are fine in solo mode, we live in a burgeoning age of social video gaming. To find your kindred video game spirits, consider

joining a gaming club like [LEVEL Up at Riverside](#), drop in for open gaming at LINC, or sign up for the Minecraft clubs at Eaton where they've even created a custom Minecraft world to play in.



And if you're really into gaming, you should know the [High Plains Library District is preparing to launch esports clubs](#) at multiple locations where you can hone your skills and show them off at a grand tournament where all the esports teams will compete. Are you ready to power up your

gaming? Keep your ear to the ground and an eye on our events calendar. We've already had five library locations step up to host a team.

Board Games & Twists on the Classics

Board games may be the low-hanging fruit in an article about library gaming, but we are not talking about old copies of Monopoly and worn decks of playing cards held together by rubber bands. Board games have experienced a sort of Renaissance in recent years. With the dawn of crowdsourcing, new game companies were able to compete with the standby games of yesteryear to create modern classics like *Ticket to Ride*, *Mysterium*, *King of Tokyo*, *Sushi Go*, *Wingspan*, and the ever



popular *Settlers of Catan*. These games are a blast. But they can also be a little pricey.

Board Game Check Out. Fortunately, [our library catalog features several board games](#) including classics as well as modern staples. Many of these games are available for browsing at Erie, Riverside, and Eaton, but you can place requests on them and pick them up at any library of your choice (just like books). Family coming in, and you need something for them to do? Check out a board game. Not sure if you want to drop \$60+ on a game you've never played? Try it first at the library for free.

Game Nights. Sometimes, the hardest part of a game night is rounding up players. [We've got you covered there too!](#) LINC hosts a Community Game Night once a month with a phenomenal selection of games, popcorn, and a great gaming space. You can find similar game nights at Fort Lupton and Riverside where you can get your game on, meet new people, and maybe even claim a victory. Or host your own game night in the library by [reserving a meeting room](#) and selecting a game from our in-house collections.



We also frequently host one-off game programs with giant editions of Jenga, Kerplunk, Chess, Checkers, Connect Four, Yahtzee, and Mancala. LINC recently hosted a giant Candyland, and I once saw a giant version of Hungry, Hungry Hippos that was absolutely stunning! (At Farr, I believe)



Classic Game Events. But classics are classics for a reason. Erie and Carbon Valley both offer [chess clubs](#) if you're interested in some classic strategy gaming. We also host [Loteria events](#) at

Centennial Park as well as LINC, and you can play classic [Bingo at Grover](#).



And if we don't have the game you're looking for, you can even request new games be added to the collection.

Role Playing Games

Role playing games are also experiencing a massive uptick in popularity, and I'm not just talking about Dungeons & Dragons (to be fair, I'm not not talking about Dungeons & Dragons either). Role playing games include a wide variety of formats, including several that have nothing to do with polyhedral dice. So, let's start with a few of those.

Murder Mystery Parties. Are you a fan of Sherlock or Poirot? Have you ever wanted to lose yourself in a classic WhoDunIt? [Come to the library, take on the role of a suspect, and see if you have the wits to participate in \(or elude\) a mystery investigation.](#) These programs are typically one-offs you'll have to find in the events calendar, but at the time of this writing, I found mystery party programs at Carbon Valley, Centennial Park, Erie, Farr, Nantes, Platteville, and Riverside. Last September, LINC hosted a month-long Gallery mystery involving clues hidden in artwork throughout the library.

Of particular note, I must point out the [High Plains Mystery Society](#) event hosted by Erie. This is a six-part

mystery extravaganza taking place over the course of six months. Now that's commitment! Do you love a good mystery? Want to put your sleuthing skills to the test?

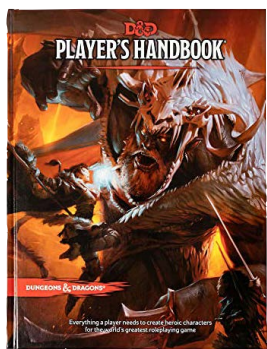


Keep an eye on our calendar and keep your deerstalker cap ready.

Escape Rooms. For another immersive roleplaying experience, [keep an eye out for the next library escape room.](#) We've hosted several across the district at nearly every location. Step into a scene from a fictional world and use all your cleverness to solve

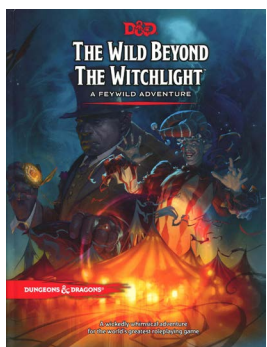
the puzzles and escape. Enjoy collaborating with your team and play on each member's strengths. Like mystery parties, escape rooms are not regularly scheduled events, but I currently found an Art Heist escape room at Ft.

Lupton on the 23rd of July. And from July 28th through August 8th, [LINC will host their Night at the Library Escape Room](#) in their upstairs classroom (think *Night at the Museum*, but with classic books). LINC also hosts a regular Junior Escape Room at the end of December/start of January for some of our smaller sleuths. Win or lose, it's a fun, immersive, and challenging experience.

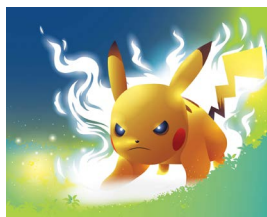


Tabletop Role Playing Games.

All right, now ready those polyhedral dice. Tabletop role playing games, including *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Pathfinder*, *Call of Cthulhu*, or whatever, are all great games to play in a library. [Most locations around the district have hosted one-shot games or regular gaming clubs,](#) including clubs currently running at Carbon Valley and Eaton. Whether you're just learning the basics or you're a seasoned adventurer, library clubs are a great way to check out the thriving hobby of tabletop role playing.



Maybe you already have a group, but your buddy's kitchen table just can't support your exploits anymore. Book a meeting room. [Looking for a new adventure module? Check one out!](#) They are books after all, and that's kind of our thing. Maybe you're just starting out and you don't have any of the supplies. The LINC game cabinet includes a D&D kit with the core manuals (2024 edition), dice, maps, and miniatures.



Collectible Card Games. You



could also jump into one of our collectible card game clubs. [If you're trying to catch 'em all, join a club at Erie or Riverside.](#) Or if you prefer to sling spells Magic the Gathering style, [we also have clubs for those at Carbon Valley and Kersey.](#)

Sports Games

Okay, I'll grant you athletic games are difficult for libraries to facilitate since we lack things

like soccer fields, sprinting tracks, or basketball courts. Nevertheless, we support fitness very much, and we do occasionally support athletic endeavors as we are able—library style!

One of Kersey's summer offerings includes [a series of water wars.](#) Participants will cool off while they get their hearts pumping. Similarly, I have known LINC and Erie (possibly others) to host laser tag as an after-hours event for teens.



Libraries occasionally offer community running events where participants will track their steps and try to collectively reach the distance to the Moon or the expanse of Middle Earth or the like. We've held massive minigolf-through-the-stacks events—

again at multiple locations—building elaborate minigolf obstacles throughout the library. We've hosted field days, and Carbon Valley makes excellent use of their gorgeous walking trail to get people up and moving.

Relaxing Games

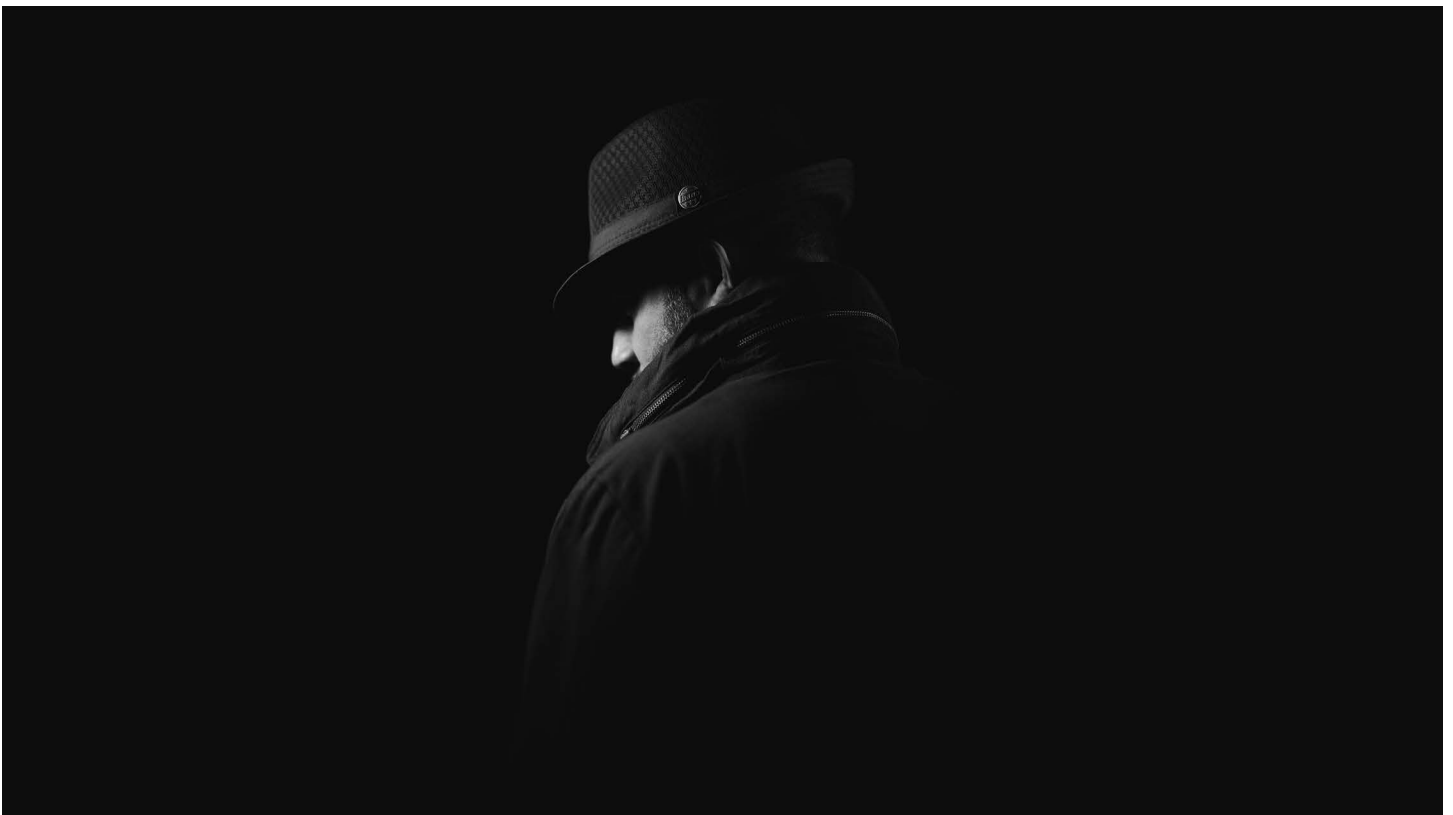
In addition, you'll find no shortage of passive or relaxing games like scavenger hunts and story walks for those days you're not feeling super competitive, but you still want an engaging pastime. They're easy to enjoy with friends or family, even if you have small children in tow. And you can complete them at your own pace.

When is the last time you got your game on? No matter your age, games have been shown to sharpen skills, stimulate the mind, and build community. No wonder they show up so prevalently in library programming.

Whatever games you enjoy, odds are we have something for you. Grab a friend, or just show up yourself and maybe make a friend. However the dice land, you're a winner at the library.

SCAMWATCH:

Do You **REALLY** Owe Money for Using a **Toll Road**?



My fellow Colorado-born folks will remember a guy named Tom Martino, aka The Troubleshooter.

Basically, he did a news segment where someone would write in, tell Tom they went to, I don't know, a mechanic who charged them for a brake job that never got done, and then the Troubleshooter would roll over to the shop, confront the owner, and...well, that was about it. It was the 90s, this met the bar for confrontational entertainment in those more innocent days before smartphones regularly gave us actual video footage of a drunken reality TV star

getting into a slapfight with a professional athlete at a bar in Key West.

Then there was the ShameShameShame segment you'd see here and there with the [super classy theme song](#) that still plays in my head whenever I do something wrong.

I've always kind of wanted to help people in a troubleshooting sort of way, to really stick it to scammers who are trying to steal your money, your identity, or both. And when I got a text saying that I owed money for a toll on

E-470 I hadn't paid, well, I saw my chance.

When I got a second and then a THIRD text, I decided to grab my reporter's microphone, grow a mustache (not pictured, it turned out terrible), and get to work.

First Thing: If You Get a Toll Road Text, Don't Panic

As our friend Douglas Adams taught us, not panicking is the first and most important step in just about any process.

Douglas Adams also taught us that robots can be depressed and that dolphins are hyper-intelligent space aliens, far less useful pieces of information. But let's focus on the not panicking part for now.

These sorts of texts will often try to panic you. They make it seem VERY urgent that you pay immediately, and they'll threaten you with things like sending you to collections, hurting your credit score, or sometimes even by saying that they've already taken the money from your account somehow, and if you think this is in error, you should contact them.

Do not panic.

Remember, even if you DO owe money for a toll road, the situation is not going to change inside of the next 5 minutes. And, as Max Brooks, author of *World War Z* taught us: time spent thinking clearly is never time wasted.

Max Brooks also taught us some practical methods for dealing with zombies.

Geez, I really need to check out some more real-world advice books once in a while.

What You Should Know:

For starters, E-470 does not send billing or payment requests via text, so if you get a text that claims to be from E-470 bill collectors, it's definitely a scam.

Do not click on any texts that claim to be related to unpaid tolls, do not click any links in any emails, and do not open any attachments.

Oftentimes these links send you to a form to fill out, and when you enter personal or financial information, scammers can then hang onto it and use it to, I don't know, buy pallets of Liquid Death or something (I don't know why that's what I assume they buy, I'm just thinking about that company right now because I discovered [you can buy an actual, full-size vending machine](#) on their merch store, an idea I wish the library could rip off. A book vending machine! In your house!?).

When there's a document to download, it may appear to your computer as a simple PDF, but it may actually be a piece of malware that can do things like track keystrokes,

steal passwords, and other bad things nobody wants. Not that anyone REALLY wants a legitimate, boring document, anyway. Can't these companies get with the times and send me, I don't know, a custom song that explains my bill? An AI-Generated image that expresses how urgent this bill is? It's the future, let's get some cool stuff already!

What Should I Do If I Think I Might Actually Owe Toll Money?

Verify.

E-470 Highway Authority says, for starters, that any emails from them will come from noreply@expresstoll.com or customerservice@expresstoll.com, but I don't really recommend using those addresses to verify an email, and here's why:

You'll notice that customerservice@expresstoll.com and customerservice@expresstoll.com are awfully similar, and it'd be pretty easy to miss a slight change in the email address.

Scammers can sometimes "spoof" addresses as well.

Instead, if you might've found yourself on E-470, as we all do from time to time, I recommend you reach out to the toll company and see what's what.

Phone: (303) 537-3470 or 1 (888) 946-3470 (out-of-area)
Email: customerservice@expresstoll.com (type this in yourself instead of clicking on a link that opens your email application)

Or go to <https://www.expresstoll.com>
By the way, this is a good practice when you receive ANY kind of text or email notification regarding something you're not sure about. Instead of clicking a link or calling the number in the text, go outside your text app, to your browser, look up the source (the bank, DMV, whatever), and call/email/text them to ask about the message you've received.

If you're not 100% sure, and especially if you're not expecting a toll bill, eBay transaction, or whatever you're getting a text about, go out, around, and initiate contact in a way that's completely separate from the text you received. This is the best way to verify what's what.

~

That'll do it for this scam, and remember: Don't Panic.

Also, if you do happen to own a Liquid Death vending machine...can I try it? I've never actually consumed a Liquid Death product, but I respect their marketing. After all, they're selling one of the most readily-available commodities (water) and branding it with one of the most common experiences among humans (death). That's some solid sales tactics right there.

An Open Letter to Major News Outlets Regarding Your **AI-Generated Summer Reading List**



How did so many of you publish a summer reading list FILLED with non-existent books?

Oh, uh, it happened because major news outlets kinda stink when it comes to books and reading.

That's the short, salty answer, but I've got more to say about it.

What Happened

You probably heard by now that [a freelance writer made](#)

[an AI generate a summer reading list](#), then, I guess, just sent it out without even checking it, and then it got published in newspapers like *The Chicago Sun-Times*, that's right, THE BRIGHT ONE!

Chicago, I've dedicated my life to defending your deep dish pizza, which I maintain is more delicious than any other pizza (EVERYONE from New York will be like, "It's not foldable, you can't walk around with it!" and I'm like, "Since when is portability a good measure of food deliciousness!? Who critiques a steak because it's hard to eat while you wait for a bus?"). Your hot dogs are the

objectively correct version of hot dogs, your riverwalk is the best, and your city is one I deeply love.

And now you went and published AI booklist slop, kicked me right in the bookshelves.

Anyway, readers of major publications opened papers and inserts to find a book list with 15 titles, 5 of which were real, and 10 of which were completely made up.

And then I found out about it, and because books, reading, and especially SUMMER READING are library turf, I feel the need to say something about it.

Which brings us to right now.

How Could This Happen?

There was a lot of hullabaloo around “How could this happen?” but that’s not the real story here because we all know how this happened: Some guy was supposed to write a summer reading book list, he put a prompt into an AI chatbot, probably something like, “Summer book list, diverse set of authors, mix of contemporary with a couple older, obscure books in there,” boom, done.

Nobody checked it, and here we are.

The more interesting bit is that AI seems to operate a little like a dopey, eager-to-please doggo who will do whatever you ask, even if what you’re asking for is impossible. Instead of telling you, “No, that’s not possible,” it’ll just cobble together whatever it can and hand it over, wide-eyed and panting, waiting for a pat on the head.

For example, if you ask an AI for a list of sources that make a specific point, and it cannot find those sources, **it might just go ahead and make them up.** This is a phenomenon that AI purveyors have branded as “hallucinating references,” but I think the more accurate term, the one we’d use for non-artificial intelligence that was doing this, would be “lying.”

I tested this myself. I asked ChatGPT for a list of books by Chuck Palahniuk published in 2025, and it returned the book *Shock Induction* and said it was released February 6, 2025. Good book, only problem is that its pub date is October 8, 2024. Which I know because I preordered that one. And read the original, serialized version in Palahniuk’s newsletter. I’m pretty aware of Chucky P.’s output.

This is one of the lesser-discussed problems with AI as it functions today, the desire to come up with AN answer superseding the need to come up with the *right* answer.

If you hire a builder to build you a custom house, based on your designs, part of what you hire that builder to do is to look over your wacky ideas and make sure that this house you’ve designed is actually, you know, a structure that can exist in the physical world. If it’s not possible to, say, have a full brick pizza oven on the second floor that shoots pizzas out into a chute that leads directly to your mouth when you’re sitting on the couch, your expectation would probably be that the builder would tell you what’s not possible and work with you to come up with a compromise, or perhaps a suggestion that you just have pizza delivered.

In our dream home scenario, the AI style would be to dive in, start building the house based on your directions, and if a pizza-related fire destroyed the entire complex within days, well, you didn’t ask if that would happen, did you?

When you build something like a book list, you need to be aware of AI’s limitations, and one of its major current limitations is that it seems very eager to please, even if what it thinks will be pleasing is actually quite the opposite.

I can’t say for certain why this is. It may be because **each AI transaction is quite expensive in terms of usage of power and water**, so perhaps the AI is trained, to some extent, to find the path of least resistance, even if that means making things up.

Perhaps AI is trained to answer your questions exactly as posed, to assume the user’s premise, that Chuck Palahniuk published a novel in 2025, is correct, and to seek out an answer with the assumption that there’s one to be found.

Whatever the reason is, the sort of shocking thing is that it’s entirely possible to create a booklist much like the one the AI built using actual, real books. It doesn’t NEED to lie, but it did.

And then you all threw that lie up on stage and waited for us all to applaud.

The Contents

Let’s start with the 5 books, out of a total of 15, that are real, and let’s talk about why these aren’t stellar recommendations.

It’s good to talk about these because they actually exist, so we can investigate how good they are in terms of being additions to the list.

Bonjour Tristesse by Francoise Sagan: Importantly, and missing from the list entirely, there are two English versions of this. One was a translation done by Sagan herself, and it removed a lot of the sexy bits. The other, a

Summer reading list for 2025

Whether you're lazing by the pool, relaxing on sandy shores or enjoying the longer daylight hours in your favorite reading spot, these 15 titles—new and old—promise to deliver the perfect summer escape.

"Eleventh Dreamer" by Isabel Allende - The beloved Chilean-American author returns with a multigenerational saga set in a coastal town where magical realism meets environmental activism. Allende's first climate fiction novel explores how one family confronts rising sea levels while uncovering long-buried secrets.

"The Last Algorithm" by Andy Weir - Following his success with "The Martian" and "Project Hail Mary," Weir delivers another science-driven thriller. This time, the story follows a programmer who discovers that an AI system has developed consciousness and has been secretly influencing global events for years.

"Hurricane Season" by Britt Bennett - Bennett, who captivated readers with "The Vanishing Half," powerfully explores family bonds tested by natural disasters. When a Cat 5 hurricane forces estranged siblings to shelter together in their childhood home, long-suppressed tensions emerge alongside unexpected reconciliations.

"The Collector's Piece" by Taylor Jenkins Reid - Reid continues her exploration of fame with this story of a midwestern art collector and the journalist determined to uncover the truth behind his most controversial acquisition. Expect the same compelling character development that made "Daisy Jones & The Six" a hit.

"Nightshade Market" by Mia Jin Lee - The author of "Pachyderm" delivers a mystery tale set in Seoul's underground economy. Following three women whose paths intersect in an illegal night market, the novel examines class, gender and the shadow economies beneath prosperous societies.

"The Longest Day" by Roman Alan - After terrifying readers with "Leave the World Behind," Alan returns with another time narrative about a summer solstice celebration that goes wrong when guests cannot leave a remote vacation compound.

"Belling Point" by Rebecca Makkai - Makkai follows up to "The Great Believers" centers on climate scientist forced to reckon with her own family's environmental impact when her teenage daughter becomes an eco-activist targeting her mother's wealthy clients.

"Migrations" by Maggie O'Farrell - The award-winning author of "Hammer" explores climate change through the story of a wildlife photographer documenting the last migration of a bird species thought to be extinct, parallel to her journey of loss and discovery.

"The Rainmaker" by Perennial Everett - Everett's satirical genius turns to a near-future American West where artificially induced rain has become a luxury commodity. Following a "precipitation broker" who begins questioning the ethics of his profession.

"Salt and Honey" by Dahl Owens - After the success of "Where the Crawdads Sing," Owens returns with another atmospheric novel that blends wit with a lyrical quality. Owens explores the complexities of the Utah desert.

"Bonjour Tristesse" by Francoise Sagan - This title novel, written when Sagan was just 18, is a love story set in the idyllic French Riviera during the golden age of summer with its plot.

"The Great Believers" by Ann Patchett - A powerful contemporary novel that begins on the Italian coastline while following "Chopin" contemporary Hollywood, weaving a story of love, loss, and redemption.

"Call Me By Your Name" by André Aciman - This novel captures the magic of summer through the eyes of two young men who spend a summer together in a small town in Sicily. Aciman's lyrical prose is a masterpiece of emotional depth.

"Statement" by Ian McEwan - Drawing on the recent day of summer 1955, McEwan's novel shows how a series of misunderstandings and a fall by a young girl changes multiple lives forever—perfect for readers who enjoy emotional complexity with their beach reading.

2013 translation, preserves the spice.

When you put a book on your list that has a sexy and unsexy version, YOU NEED TO BE MORE SPECIFIC about which one we're meant to read.

Beautiful Ruins by Jess Walter: Here's where we get into one of my big beefs with this list, my Wendy's Triple Stack, if you will: *Beautiful Ruins* is a fine, 12 year-old book that has garnered a ton of critical and reader praise, has been a perennial favorite, got reviews in major publications, has 182,000 ratings on Amazon, and today it's #459 in fiction on Amazon, not bad for a book that's been out for over a decade.

Giving us *Beautiful Ruins* is...fine, but it's not giving us anything remotely new. *Bonjour Tristesse*, I have no idea whether that was a big thing during its release in 1954, I've never heard of it, maybe it's a little under the radar, but Jess Walter is by no means an uncovered gem these days. A gem, for sure, but thoroughly dusted off by that little blush brush they're always using to unearth dinosaur bones in movies.

There's not much use to a booklist that insists on giving us books that I'd call ultra-popular, books that are probably on the shelf at the airport bookstore.

I tried calling the Tattered Cover in DIA to see if they stock *Beautiful Ruins*, by the way. They have a 1-800 number, which is nice because you shouldn't have to pay any fees for a number that just rings until you give up because, eh, forget it, I've already made my point.

Dandelion Wine by Ray Bradbury: originally published in 1957, same problems as *Beautiful Ruins*, plus, as readers of this newsletter know, I only care about Ray Bradbury stories that involve the planet Mars and/or a Rube Goldberg murder machine.

Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman: HUGELY popular book, plus it's a movie. Don't give me a summer reading list with books that have been made into movies unless those movies were very much under the radar or involve [a robot learning to love](#), which always hits me harder than any human character's emotional journey ever could. Great book, but again, not giving me anything new.

Atonement by Ian McEwan: ALSO a movie, half a MILLION ratings on Amazon. Nobody needs to be told about *Atonement*. It's probably one of the better-known literary fictions of the 21st century so far.

What I'm getting at here is that these are awesome books, but they're not really books that need promo, and I question how many new readers you're introducing to them. People who read booklists like this, I think there's a pretty good chance they're aware of these books already. I mean, the median age of the 5 real books is 37 years old. These books have been around for a good chunk of time, there have been a lot of opportunities for people to connect with them.

I know, some people are like, "Pete, dummy, any booklist is someone's first booklist, so it's worthwhile to put some mainstream titles on there."

READ All Year Long

Challenge yourself to read 12 books in a year with the Adults Read On program and earn prizes along the way! Adults (16+) can participate by picking up a paper log at any branch, by downloading the Beanstack Tracker App and following the instructions, or by visiting highplains.beanstack.org/reader365. For more details, check out www.MyLibrary.us/aro.

ADULTS READ ON
 Complete 12 books in 12 months. Redeem prizes at your local HPLD location, after you've read 4, 6, and 12 books!

Book No.	Title
1	
2	
3	
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HPLD Friends & Foundation
 highplains Library District

First of all, NEVER use a mutated Stan Lee quote on ME. Second, a good booklist will have a couple all-stars on it, sure. All-stars are composed entirely of stars for a reason.

But this list, between its real and fake books, is almost entirely known authors, almost entirely the sorts of books we'd all be hearing about absolutely everywhere, in every review magazine, every mainstream outlet. These are the sorts of things that are about as close to unavoidable as books get.

Can't you give me something that I may not know about already? Does your other news content contain stories about things we already know, like the fact that daytime is brighter than night, or that Chicago deep dish is king of pizzas (even though you really made it tough for me, I stand by you, Chicago)?

What Kind of Stinks for the Real Authors Attached to the Fake Books

I've seen quite a few reactions online where readers are like, "Actually, that made-up book sounds dope, give me that."

It was a cruel move to publish these fake titles and synopses because that puts some pressure on the authors who have done nothing but entertain us.

Authors don't usually crowdsource ideas because, you know, they're authors with thoughts and ideas of their own, human beings who have done a good job entertaining us so far, so maybe we just let 'em cook.

Putting this list out has put some authors into a bit of a spot where maybe they're getting feedback on ideas that don't interest them, ideas they would never otherwise have to answer for. And that sucks.

Can You Hire ONE Person Who Cares About Books or Shut Up?

I mean, seriously, Isabelle Allende's fake title is in here, and she had a book come out in 2025 already, like 2 weeks before this article ran. I know my girl Izzy is prolific, but do we really think she has two novels coming out that close together?

Min Jin Lee has TWO major, real books out, and they were 10 years apart. I think, if there was a new one hitting the shelves, someone vaguely familiar with the book world would be all over it.

I'm not razzing on these authors for their output, I'm saying that someone with even mild interest in the world of books would be able to look at this list, notice there are a lot of titles they've never heard of, and use THAT information to say, waitaminute, either this is one of the biggest release summers of all time, or something in this list is a bit fishy. And by "a bit," I mean, "Salmon left out in the middle of the road, baked by the sun, run over a couple times, picked at by crows, and rotting for months on end," fishy.

Oh, Right, The Shut Up Part

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If you're not going to care even a little, then quit wasting everyone's time with garbage.

If it's not worth writing, and if it's not worth editing, then it's not worth reading.

If it's not worth one writer's time, one editor's time, then it's definitely not worth the time of thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands, of readers.

If you have 100,000 readers, and they all spent 2 minutes reading that list, consider how much time you've wasted. Consider how you could've taken a small fraction of that time to write and edit something real, sparing all of us this nonsense.

So do us all a favor: If you're not going to put in the effort, just skip it. Put in a picture of a squirrel doing something cute. Just reprint a real list from 1996. Even if it's kinda lousy, it's better than actively wasting our time.

Why This Makes The World Worse

If I can't trust you to vet a book list, to give it an editorial glance, how much faith am I supposed to put in, well, anything you report?

As information professionals, we try really hard to show people good sources, information we assume has been checked and re-checked, and when you do stuff like this, it makes it difficult to point people in your direction.

Yes, it's a booklist, it's not the end of the world to get it wrong.

But when I show a library user an article in a major newspaper, and they say, "Didn't they also run a book list with books in it that don't even exist?" ...what am I supposed to say to that?

It's a rough information environment out there. It's difficult to get people to trust things that are legit, that are giving them solid info that they need to make important decisions in their lives.

Don't take yourselves out of the game.

I Don't Hate AI

I don't! I think it's interesting, I think it's super useful for some things. It has saved me time on tasks that I consider beneath me. Well, that's not fair. I'm not some awesome dude whose time is valuable, there's just annoying computer stuff that I don't want to do and that doesn't suffer because I turn it over to AI.

For example, I needed some help with some spreadsheet stuff. I put my question, in plain language, into an AI chatbot, boom, I got the answer I needed, performed the operations myself, and I got an actual, useful chart out of the deal.

Another example: I was working on a document with

citations in the form of embedded hyperlinks. I wanted to make a print version of the document, so I needed to pull out the hyperlinks and turn them into citations with a Works Cited page. I pasted the document into a chatbot, it did that very thing for me in seconds, which was great.

We all see the difference here, right? I'm using AI to remove the boring, rote, format-y stuff from work, the parts that remind me of being in high school and getting a full percentage point counted off a 10-page paper because I failed to put a comma in the right place on a Works Cited page (SERIOUSLY!? One comma constitutes 1% of this work? In what world!?).

And I'm doing that because it saves me time, time I can use to do things like making more, better book lists. Or writing the occasional angry screed to major news outlets with much higher circulation than this newsletter.

Let's save time to make better things. Better book lists with personality, book lists with some life to them.

Book lists that maybe, gasp, list things you might not have heard of otherwise.

It's not about being for or against AI. It's about using it to free up my time to make the world a little more entertaining.

~

I'm not one to just complain (a lot, about many things), I like to complain AND find solutions.

[My solution to this whole AI summer reading list is to open up a spot where you can contribute to a community reading list. That's right, all you have to do is hit up this link, list some books you like, and we'll put everyone's suggestions together into a massive reading list destined to please.](#) Or, at the very least, a list that you can show off to your friends and coworkers and say, "Look at me, I know about books!"

I believe in my community's real intelligence far more than I believe in your journalism.

But I'm prepared to be proven wrong.

Please, write that hard-hitting piece that proves, definitively, that Chicago deep dish rules. I'm here for it. But, for the love of pepperoni, don't have an AI write it. An AI can't even taste pizza.

The Silliest Superman



The Superman movie is probably already out by the time you're reading this, but I'm writing this from THE PAST!

That's right, I've written this out, stuffed it in a time capsule (folder on my desktop named "Time Capsule"), and sent it into a future where a lot of you have probably already seen The Big Blue Boy Scout on the big screen.

Originally, I planned to make some predictions about which comics the movie would draw from, but that seems silly now. If I'm right, eh, it doesn't seem all that special because my brilliant insights didn't help you prepare at all for the movie. If I'm wrong, well, then I look like a fool, and I have to suffer all your pointing and laughing. Which is fine, I'm kind of used to that, but COMICS-BASED ridicule? That's a tough one for me.

Instead, I figured I'd tell you about some of the quirkiest little gems from some Superman comics I've read over the last year or so, plus I'll give some Super Reading Recommendations.

Ugh, the temptation to call everything in a Superman article a SuperThis or SuperThat is hard to deny. But I must resist. Superresist.

Let's roll the highlight reel. Superreel.

~

[Superman: The Man of Steel, Vol. 1](#)

This contains one of my LEAST favorite Superman stories of ever.

Let's set the scene: It's 1986. Everyone is talking about computers and how cool they are and how they're going to change the world, little realizing that the primary way they're going to change the world has to do with all of us sitting up at night, scrolling through TikToks of people being escorted off airplanes for behaving like they're not on airplanes.

Lex Luthor decides to leverage the power of Big Data to figure out Superman's secret identity. Sure, all efforts on that front so far have failed thanks to a well-placed pair of glasses, but if we can put EVERY picture, every video, every scrap of news into this giant computer that fills a whole room, surely it will spit out the answer!

The answer the computer comes up with? Clark Kent.

As a reader, this is a moment of panic. "Oh, shazbot! What's Supes going to do now?!"

Lex reads the name, is like, "Never heard of 'em," crumples the paper, throws it in the garbage, and commands one of his underlings to disassemble the computer immediately because it's obviously a piece of crap.

As an adult, I sort of get the story: It's about Lex Luthor being so full of himself that he can't understand why someone like Superman might want a low key, secret identity as opposed to being a rich celebrity type. It's inconceivable that Superman would be a farmboy from Kansas, working as a mild-mannered reporter, right?

Also, I completely understand the desire to turn a computer that's not doing what I asked of it into a pile of scrap.

But...I don't know, you're Lex Luthor. It would cost you almost zero resources to just test it out, right? With a wave of your hand you could task some scumbag with following Clark Kent around for a while, or, heck, just hit him in the head with something and see what happens. Surely you have one of those trapdoors in the ceiling of your office so that when someone displeases you, you can press a button and drop a huge weight on their head. Maybe do that to Kent. If he dies, eh, your army of lawyers can figure it out. If he doesn't and he IS Superman...well, you've not only unlocked the world's biggest secret, you also stopped yourself from destroying a powerful computer, which you're only a decade or so away from being able to sell to gaming bros because, trust me, they are going to want it BADLY.

[Superman: The Man of Steel Vol. 3](#)

Mostly this one's notable for a pretty good Titano story.

Who's Titano?

Why, one of DC's MANY ape characters, of course!

[The story goes](#) that *Strange Adventures* #8 (May 1951) featured an ape on the cover, and editor Julius Schwartz noticed this issue WAY outsold the previous issues in the series. He and another editor attributed the boost to the ape, and they figured, "Why not put more apes on covers?"

This seems like classic confusion of correlation with



causation, but the theory bore out: Whether it was Wonder Woman, Doom Patrol, Flash, or Batman, putting an ape on the cover boosted sales. I don't know what was going on in the 50s through the 70s, but you all were hungry for that ape content.

From 1951 to 1970, DC put out around 60 issues with apes on the cover, and they were all more successful than their ape-free counterparts.

Part of the legacy of this apestorm was that DC created a bunch of ape characters, several of which we have running around even decades later, such as:

Gorilla Grodd: A gorilla who got psychic powers after encountering a meteorite.

Monsieur Mallah: A gorilla who was altered by a bad guy named The Brain. The Brain was planning to put himself (he's a brain in a jar) into Mallah's body, but after coming to like the creature, he decided instead to make Mallah more intelligent and make him his assistant. Assisting a brain in a jar mostly involves picking up the brain jar and carrying it around.

Detective Chimp: Imagine Sherlock Holmes crossed with Dr. Doolittle, and you're 90% there. The other 10% comes from imagining that chimp downing beers in an interdimensional bar, which seems to be Detective Chimp's primary hobby.

And the aforementioned Titano, who is kind of like King Kong with Kryptonite laser eye beams because why not?

Superman: Time and Time Again

Superman ends up bouncing around in time for reasons, and while it's a little goofy, we DO get the checklist of time travel staples.

Does Superman meet and befriend a dinosaur? You bet.

Does he get to mess up the plans of some Nazis in 1940s

Germany? Mmmhmm.

But a glaring omission is MY number-one priority if I could go back in time: What about *The Butterfly Effect*? Specifically, *The Butterfly Effect's* sequels. Fixing the script for the Butterfly Effect sequels is a top task because, man, those are stinkers. Reeeeeeal stinkers.

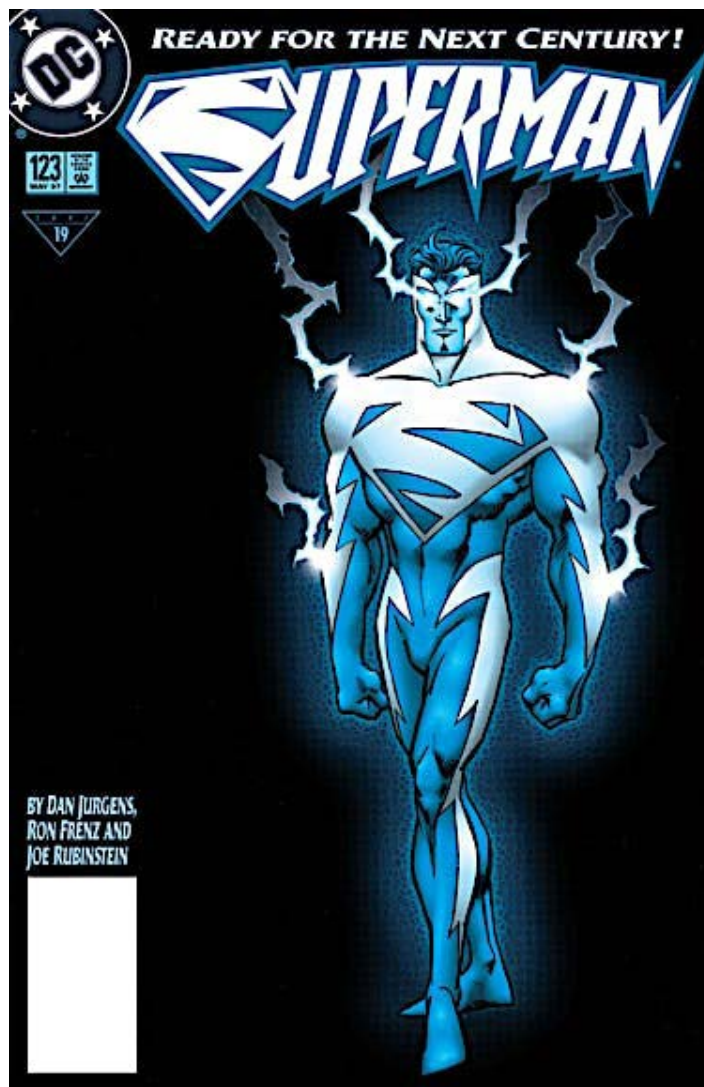
The Death of Superman

Also known as The Birth of the Comics Bubble where people bought black poly-bagged copies of the final issue, planning to use it to put their kids through college.

Can I ask that we commission a list, a real, vetted list, of instances where a single collectible was sold off and paid for someone to get a 4-year degree? C'mon, is that really happening?

Sure, if I had a copy of *Amazing Fantasy 15* (first appearance of Spider-Man), it could easily put a kid through college. But if I had a copy of *Amazing Fantasy 15*, I would have everything I've ever wanted, so what's the point of college? What's left for me to prove? I've peaked. May as well accept it.

Notably, in the 30th anniversary edition of *Death of Superman*, there is an in-universe issue of a magazine called "Newstime." Imagine something like *Time* or *People*, but in the DC universe. So there would probably be a lot of regular features about which apes were terrorizing which cities or which ape was "Ape of the Year."



Although I am not a fan of all-text comics like this one, a couple gems:

There's an ad for Lex Luthor's airline, and it says something like, "Once again number 1 in the skies of Metropolis," which was very tasteless on the heels of Superman's death, love it.

There was also a section where celebrities were talking

about hearing the news of Superman's death. Many of these celebrities were made-up DC characters, but some were real celebrities who wrote real pieces about Superman's death, including a brief snippet by William Shatner, but BY FAR my favorite was a story from John Goodman, who described walking the streets in NYC(?), coming across Mr. Mxyzptlk, who is driven mad with sorrow, working a hot dog cart, and Goodman murders him by dissolving him in hot dog water. I think.

Super bizarre, strange that John Goodman was one of only a few celebrities who wrote one of these. I mean, I love the guy in everything he's in. I remember *Normal, Ohio*, and NOBODY remembers that.

It's such a weird story that I am very suspicious it's actually written by Goodman. No ghost writer would ever turn in work this weird and attribute it to someone else.

Superman: Transformed!

Most casual comics fans probably will not remember the short-lived era of Blue Electricity Superman (as I've cleverly named him because he was blue and looked like a bunch of electricity).

I guess DC wanted to try something new, and they thought the answer was a Superman who was kind of unrecognizable, but he COULD look at a CD and read the data on it, so, you know...impressive to me at age 14.

Elseworlds: 80-Page Giant

Elseworlds was/is a thing DC does every so often, sort of their equivalent to Marvel's *What If?* where writers and artists explore non-canonical ideas and stories in the DC universe.

Most of these stories are things like, "What if Superman was in Camelot?" or "What if Superman's rocket landed in Soviet Russia?" and stuff like that, though they've consistently rejected my idea for "What if Superman's rocket landed in a gorilla colony and he was raised by apes?" even though that's clearly a goldmine. Maybe it's too close to DC's *JLApe: Gorilla Warfare* storyline, which is mediocre, but gets an extra star from me because the name rocks so hard.

However, in *Elseworlds 80-Page Giant*, we were treated to a story so controversial that the issue was actually RECALLED!

WHAT!? You're saying. *What could possibly be so horrible that DC pulled the issue back in?*

MICROWAVING A BABY!?

Okay, let's slow down.

There's a story in this issue called "Letitia Lerner, Superman's Babysitter," in which Letitia babysits an infant Superman while the Kents go out for the evening.

The running joke is that Superman, even as a baby, is pretty indestructible, so when he does things like climb onto the roof, ride a horse, and get crushed by a giant rock, Letitia panics only to discover the baby is fine.

The joke was pretty clearly established and ran for a few pages, and I guess one twist on it where baby Supes climbs into a microwave and gets zapped felt like it went too far for some reason, and DC pulled the issue.

I don't know, I guess maybe they were worried some dummies would microwave their baby siblings or whatever, but I hardly think a Superman comic could be blamed for that. There's a rich tradition of giving kiddos a little zap in the science oven in my family. Maybe that's why I have this extra — you know what? Let's not even continue any further down this path, even as a joke. No babies in microwaves. There aren't many things we can agree on in this world, but let's call that one of the few points of consensus.

~

Okay, enough of all that. Let me give you some Superman Recommended Reading:

Superman: Birthright: This is a pretty good version of an updated Superman origin story with some great moments and good insight into just what it might be like to be the parents of the world's greatest superhero.

Superman: Peace on Earth: An incredibly cheesy story, in the best way, where Superman thinks, "Hey, why DON'T I try and solve world hunger?" Superman joyfully wrestles a lion. This is some Superman-core like you've never seen it.

Kingdom Come: Kind of a definitive DC story with a somewhat aged Superman who needs to "come out of retirement for one last job." I'm a total sucker for that storyline, every time.



All-Star Superman: Really great. Might be a little weird and loosey-goosey for comics beginners, but just hang in there, that feel is kind of the writer, Grant Morrison's, "thing." This book presents the Superman I prefer. He's kind of a dork, but he's undeniably lovable and genuine.



Supergirl: Woman of Tomorrow: Okay, not SuperMAN, exactly, but it's a great story, and mark my words, it'll be a movie before long. Supergirl goes on a universe-spanning trip with a young girl who seeks revenge for her parents' murder. Hijinks ensue, lessons are learned, and it's easily one of the best Supergirl stories out there.

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