

12 Books to Read: The Best Reviews of May

The long life of the Declaration of Independence, wartime survival in Ukraine, the joy of soccer fandom, early human societies and more.

By WSJ Books Staff
May 30, 2026 6:00 am ET

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Don't miss our list of May's best fiction. Read the article

Arachnomania: Spiders and the Cultural Work They Do for Us

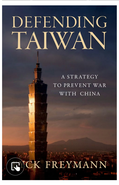


By Maria Tatar | *Princeton*

In many cultures, the spider's ability to weave threads is understood as a symbol of divine, elemental power. *Review by Brandy Schillace*

Read the review

Defending Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War with China

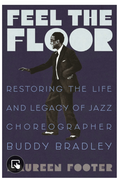


By Eyck Freymann | *Oxford*

Supporting Taiwan's security in the face of Chinese threats of invasion is vital both for the island and the rest of the world. *Review by Kate B. Odell*

Read the review

Feel the Floor: Restoring the Life and Legacy of Jazz Choreographer Buddy Bradley

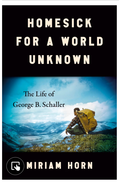


By Maureen Footer | *Beacon Press*

The dancer and choreographer was a virtuoso performer in his own right—and a valued mentor to others. *Review by John Check*

Read the review

Homesick for a World Unknown: The Life of George B. Schaller

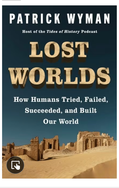


By Miriam Horn | *Penguin Press*

The zoologist George Schaller traveled the globe to get up close and personal with tigers, gorillas and other animals. *Review by Sara Wheeler*

Read the review

Lost Worlds: How Humans Tried, Failed, Succeeded, and Built Our World



By Patrick Wyman | *Harper*

Between the end of the Ice Age and the recorded history of the ancient world, numerous human communities rose and fell. Most have left little trace behind. *Review by Kyle Harper*

Read the review

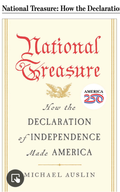
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National Treasure: How the Declaration of Independence Made America

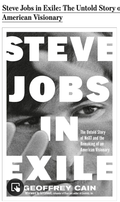


By Michael Auslin | *Avid Reader*

How the Founders' redefinition of what it meant to be a free citizen echoed down the decades. *Review by William Anthony Hay*

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Steve Jobs in Exile: The Untold Story of NeXT and the Remaking of an American Visionary

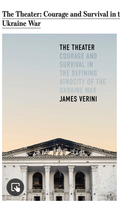


By Geoffrey Cain | *Portfolio*

Steve Jobs had a reputation for arrogance when he was forced out of Apple in 1985. His struggles at NeXT humbled him. *Review by Frank Rose*

Read the review

The Theater: Courage and Survival in the Defining Atrocity of the Ukraine War

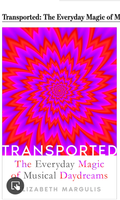


By James Verini | *Simon & Schuster*

Before it was destroyed, Mariupol's theater served as a bomb-shelter whose denizens cut across social, economic and cultural classes. *Review by Matt Gallagher*

Read the review

Transported: The Everyday Magic of Musical Daydreams



By Elizabeth Margulis | *Liveright*

We store memories as a jumble of sensory fragments. Music can snap the pieces together and conjure up old feelings. *Review by Sarah L. Kaufman*

Read the review

The Village on the Edge of the World: Writing and Surviving in Ceaușescu's Romania



By Herta Müller | *Pegasus*

Herta Müller's account of growing up in Ceaușescu's

Most Popular News

Why Are So Many Adults Cutting Off Their Parents?

The Mystery Man Shadowing Kimberly Guilfoyle as She Pushes Deals Across Europe

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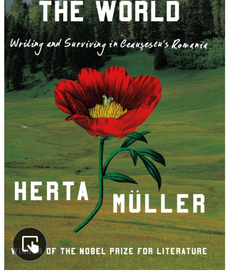
How to Put Time Back on the Clock in Iran

The Save America From California Act

Further Reading

OPINION Russia Burns Books and Sacks Libraries in Ukraine

'Hinterlands' Review: Marginal Disturbances



Romania documents how the state insinuated oppression into every corner of life. *Review by Robert D. Kaplan*

Read the review

We Are the World (Cup): A Personal History of the World's Greatest Sporting Event

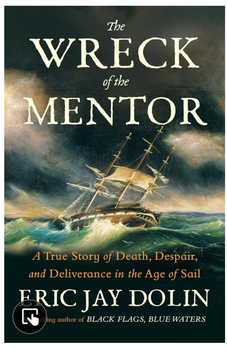


By Roger Bennett | *Dey Street*

Soccer fans all around the globe have used the experience of the quadrennial World Cup as a way to mark the stages of life. *Review by Tunku Varadarajan*

Read the review

The Wreck of the Mentor: A True Story of Death, Despair, and Deliverance in the Age of Sail



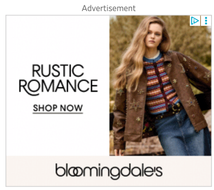
By Eric Jay Dolin | *Liveright*

The crew of the Mentor traveled halfway around the world before pausing to take on supplies. The ship set a course for Guam in the Pacific but never arrived. *Review by Michael O'Donnell*

Read the review

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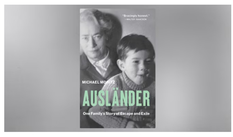
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BOOKSHELF

'Ausländer' Review: The Lives of Outsiders

8 hours ago



By fleeing Germany before World War II, Michael Moritz's parents evaded death. They insisted they were escapees, not survivors.

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ARTS CALENDAR

Arts Calendar: Happenings for the Week of September 27

17 hours ago



Tom Cruise plays an oil tycoon in 'Digger'; 'East of Eden' gets a seven-part Netflix adaptation from Zoe Kazan; Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock are the focus of a major show at the Met; and more.

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ART

The Six-Year Quest to Find the Mystery Woman in an 18th-Century Painting

September 26, 2026



Adam Harris Levine followed many twists and turns to figure out his unknown portrait sitter's story.

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ART REVIEW

The Bayeux Tapestry Makes Landfall at the British Museum

September 26, 2026



The 224-foot stunner makes its first return to England since its creation a millennium ago, still vibrantly alive with scenes from that nation's 11th-century rebirth.

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ART REVIEW

The Best Art at Independent 20th Century

September 25, 2026



Now located in Marcel Breuer's iconic New York building, the art fair continues to champion the underappreciated and overlooked.

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