Book Review 2019

I didn’t get to read as many books as I’d hoped to in 2019. After reading 62 books in 2018, I made it only to 40 in 2019. However, I also read three books for authors that are not yet published: a fantasy, a science fiction, and a YA contemporary, and all three I hope will be published soon!

Here’s my eclectic book review for 2019.

1. *The Dreaming Stars* by Tim Pratt

Science Fiction

The second in the series (I have the third ready to read in 2020), we continue to follow the crew of the White Raven, her incredible captain and loyal crew, as they seek to discover what has happened to the Axiom, the ancient aliens set out to destroy the world that the other alien Liars have, well, lied about since they came into contact with humans.

1. *Our Year of Maybe* by Rachel Lynn Solomon

YA Contemporary

Sophie would do anything for her best friend Peter, including giving him her kidney when he needs a kidney transplant. However, after the transplant, Sophie hoped it would bring them closer together, whereas Peter has a new lease on life. I couldn’t put this down. It’s a gut-wrenching story of unrequited love, loss, and finding one’s self again.

1. *Star Wars Last Shot: A Han and Lando Novel* by Daniel José Older

Science Fiction

A fun adventure that takes place a few years after *Return of the Jedi*, but with an alternate timeline back to a time after *Solo* but before *A New Hope*, with Han and Chewbacca, and another timeline before *Solo*, on Lando’s adventures with his droid sidekick L3-37. It’s great backstory on Han in his struggles to be a father to baby Ben. Sometimes I found it hard to follow through the different timelines, but the writing is enjoyable and it’s definitely a *Star Wars* story.

1. *Zeroboxer* by Fonda Lee

YA Science Fiction

Fonda Lee’s debut novel of boxing in space. It’s awesome. Luka is a prize-fighter zero-g boxer, but as he works his way up and is offered everything, he finds he has much more to lose. Luka finds himself caught in a criminal web that incriminates him, and if he risks exposing it, he could lose everything.

1. *Within and Without* by Deborah Maroulis

YA Contemporary

Advance Reader Copy

I had the honor and privilege of reading Deborah’s debut before it was released, and it is one of my favorite books. I read it all in one day. Wren struggles after her parent’s divorce with finding her place and being accepted for who she is. When Jay, her longtime crush, starts paying attention to her, she begins to try to change to fit his desires. Content warning for sexual assault and eating disorders. A very raw coming-of-age story.

1. *The Collapsing Empire* by John Scalzi

Science Fiction

An amazing story of a universe in which people can travel through wormholes called The Flow, from planet to planet—but it’s becoming unstable. What happens when the powers fighting for control in this vast empire are faced with the truth that it’s all about to collapse. Will they hide it to try to keep their control, or will they share what’s really happening—that everything is about to change.

1. *The Light Brigade* by Kameron Hurley

Science Fiction

One of my favorite books this year. I love Hurley’s writing, it’s raw and feminine, even though the main character’s gender is never truly revealed (sort of at the end, but even then, you’re not completely sure). In the future, militaries travel via light speed by becoming light themselves, but as you probably know, space has to do with time and relativity, and what happens when that becomes tangled and messed up? What I loved about this book is every time I as the reader had the light bulb click on as to what was going on, so did the main character. I loved being right in sync with the reveals.

1. *Kintsugi—Powerful Stories of Healing Trauma*, edited by Sienna Saint-Cyr and Leyna Alexander

Nonfiction/essays and poems on trauma and healing

Content warning for sexual assault, abuse, and violence

A collection of narratives and poems where people found healing from past abuse and trauma. Each story is unique. I know some of the authors in this collection and found stories of hope rising from the scars of the past.

1. *The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer’s Guide to Character Expression (Writers Helping Writers Series #1)* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi

Nonfiction/writing craft

I didn’t intend to have this listed in my books ready for 2019, but I kept removing it from Goodreads and it kept putting it back every time I went to look up something. This is a very handy guide and reference for writers. I highly recommend all writers have this on their shelf.

1. *Tiamat’s Wrath (The Expanse #8)* by James S.A. Corey

Science Fiction

The first four words will stop you in your tracks. I don’t want to spoil it for those who haven’t read the series, but The Expanse series is by far one of my favorites (and I love the show, too, but the books are amazing). This one ties back together the stories of the original characters in their quest to survive and to make a difference in the universe. And there are tragic stories of loss. I read Expanse books cover to cover and this was no exception. Sigh. There’s only one more left.

1. *Start This, Stop That: Do the Things that Grow Your Church* by Jim Cowart and Jennifer Cowart

Nonfiction/Church leadership

Quick read, good tips, but they’re pastors in megachurches in the south, so take what you can get out of it.

1. *Holy Grounds: The Surprising Connection between Coffee and Faith—From Dancing Goats to Satan’s Drink* by Tim Schenck

Nonfiction/Coffee and Religion

I don’t know how else to describe this book, but it’s easily one of my favorite reads from 2019. The author has an amazing dry wit, and I couldn’t put it down. You don’t have to be religious to enjoy this—if coffee is your religion, that’s enough. It’s a great book, learning all about coffee, its origins, and the impact on American society now, along with the process of making coffee, fair trade, single-source beans, and much more. I highly recommend this for the entertainment and educational value.

1. *Hat Trick* by Jacqueline Guest

Middle Grade Fiction—young

I read this as research for a YA hockey book I’m working on. I tried reading it with my son but he was less interested. It’s a fun, simple story about a girl growing up with divorced parents, coming from different cultural backgrounds, and playing hockey as a girl.

1. *Being Sloane Jacobs*

YA Contemporary Fiction

Another read for my research. The story is cute but the plot is completely predictable and unbelievable. Two girls happen to have the same name—Sloane Jacobs—and end up at sports camp in Canada together, both failing their sports—figure skating and hockey respectively. So they switch places. They’re supposed to be training at Olympic level. Yeah. So not real at all. It’s a cute story but just so incredibly implausible it didn’t work for me.

1. *Invasion: Book 1 of the Homefront Trilogy (Transgenic Wars)* by Scott James Magner

Science Fiction

A fascinating story of the consequences of human colonization of the galaxy and how we can “other” so quickly. I was hooked from the end of the first chapter. There are a lot of POV’s to keep track of, but there is an epic space battle that pays off, so stick with it.

1. *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* by Rachel Held Evans

Nonfiction/Religion

I love this book. It sat on my shelf for a long time, and after Rachel’s shocking death last year, I had to pick it up. I’d only met Rachel a couple of times, and it was important to me to hear her voice again. This is her best work to date (my understanding is she did complete another book before she died, so I’m glad it is not her last). This is a good introduction to progressive Christianity, Biblical interpretation using the best scholarship and resources, and how we live into Scripture as people of faith.

1. *The 10% Solution: Self-editing for the Modern Writer* by Ken Rand

Nonfiction/Writing Craft

This is a fantastic tool on tight writing and cutting extraneous words from manuscripts. I feel I should keep the review brief for that purpose.

1. *We Will Feast: Rethinking Dinner, Worship, and the Community of God* by Kendall Vanderslice

Nonfiction/Church development

This is not a how-to book, but rather an overview of the rise and model of faith community surrounding the meal. The book covers the theology, origins, and practice of the dinner church movement.

1. *Hockey: The Math of the Game* by Shane Frederick

Middle Grade Nonfiction

Published by Sports Illustrated, this was also for my research. I read it to know more about scoring, assists, and player statistics, but my assumption is that this helps young athletes understand why they need to learn math and to try to make it fun.

1. *The Next Ones: How McDavid, Matthews, and a Group of Young Guns Took Over the NHL* by Michael Traikos

Nonfiction/Sports/Hockey

Another book I read for my hockey research, but I loved this book. If you’re a fan, this is a must-read. All about how instruction, strategy, and game philosophy have differed in Europe and North America, how focusing on skating technique has quickly become a focal point for young players. The game has definitely changed in recent years, and I think it’s a good thing. And the forward of the book is by Eric Lindross (Flyers #88, back in the day when I first became a fan, he was my favorite player!)

1. *Check, Please! Book 1: #Hockey* by Ngozi Ukazu

Graphic Novel

The moment I told anyone I was writing a YA hockey book, they told me I had to read *Check, Please!* It’s a great comic, and I’m sad it will be coming to an end soon as Bitty finishes his senior year. What I love is that it covers New England hockey culture, a blossoming romance between players, and Bitty’s growth as a boy from the South, who figure skated before hockey and loves to bake pies, falls in love with a New England hockey player.

1. *The Great Faerie Strike* by Spencer Ellsworth

YA Fantasy

The Otherworld in Victorian London has now been infiltrated … by capitalism. Ridley Enterprises has brought new factory jobs in, but when Charles the Gnome begins to suspect corruption and wrongdoing, well, he’s fired. Charles teams up with the half-vampire journalist Jane to expose the horrific working conditions and help the Fae strike against the man—er—werewolves. A fun, sometimes hysterical read that has you cheering for the vampires and underdog gnomes carrying copies of Marx as they demand worker’s rights.

1. *Jade War (The Green Bone Saga #2)* by Fonda Lee

Fantasy

This series has been dubbed as The Godfather meets Kung Fu. It’s more complicated and far more interesting than that. Loyalty to family and love come into conflict with the need to survive. The Kauls, the family the saga follows, face devastating losses, one after another, of betrayal, revenge, and choices from the past that now haunt their current decisions. And just when you think you know where the story is going—the epilogue hints that so much more is about to fall down around them. The first book, Jade City, took me a while to get into, but I could not put down Jade War.

1. *This Is How You Lose The Time War* by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone

Science Fiction

Perhaps the most unique story I’ve ever read. Told in two POV’s, it jumps around time as two rival agents of a war happening across time and distance at first sabotage each other, then save each other. On Goodreads I gave this four stars, but I need to make it five. I have not stopped thinking about this book since I read it in August. It’s now January.

1. *Holy Disunity: How What Separates Us Can Save Us* by Layton E. Williams

Nonfiction/Christian

Advance Reader Copy

I received an ARC in exchange for an honest review. For Christians today, this is a must-read. We often are drawn into a false sense of unity, in which we deny who we are, put aside our most deeply-held believes, for the sake of conformity. Williams rejects this. To have true unity in Christ, we must accept our differences, hold on to who we are, and struggle with being in relationship with one another. [Read here for my full review.](http://rev-o-lution.org/2019/08/26/book-review-holy-disunity-how-what-separates-us-can-save-us-by-layton-e-williams/)

1. *The Dragon Republic (The Poppy War #2)* by R. F. Kuang

Fantasy

The Poppy War was my favorite book of 2018. Rin’s journey of survival continues as she seeks revenge, but more importantly, she finds her chosen family of former classmates and warriors. Learning from her mentor’s mistakes (while sometimes still making them), Rin forges her own path with her friends, to find a way to stop the war and the empire that is coming to defeat them. Still bloody and gory as the first (and content warning for sexual assault), but I love Kuang’s storytelling and how Rin will not give up, even when she wants to die, she can’t give up.

1. *So You Want To Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo

Nonfiction

This is a must read. Practical, down to earth, Ijeoma tells of her own experiences as a black woman. This is a good introduction into the topics of race, privilege, racism, intersectionality, and more. She gives examples from her own experience that I found helpful in understanding the harm of microaggressions. She’s blunt and tells it like it is. Did I already say this is a must-read?

1. *More Than Enough: Living Abundantly in a Culture of Excess* by Lee Hull Moses

Nonfiction/Christian

A short, but good read on the theology and practice of stewardship. The author focuses on breaking the cycle of overconsumption and productivity in the U.S. and how we must break down the system of poverty. I was a bit disappointed in that there wasn’t much in terms of practical advice, which I guess I assumed from the title there would be. Still worth the read.

1. *Neighborhood Church: Transforming Your Congregation into a Powerhouse for Mission* by Krin Van Tatenhove and Rob Mueller

Nonfiction/Christian/Church

I’m somewhat surprised by the lower ratings of this on Goodreads—I found it incredibly helpful, practical, and down-to-earth. There's a lot of good food for thought, sensible ideas, and case studies to help shape how the church can be a resource for the community. What I really appreciated is the helps in shifting the culture of the church. We all know this has to happen, but this is the first book that helped me think through what this might look like in my own context.

1. *The Calculating Stars (Lady Astronaut #1)* by Mary Robinette Kowal

Science Fiction

Oh how I loved this book! I think this is my favorite of the year. This is the story of the space race, set in an alternate timeline in which Truman lost and Dewey won the presidency, and a meteor collision with Earth forces the world to contend with the need to colonize the Moon and Mars. Elma is a calculator—she naturally computes math quick as a flash—and sees the need to push forward with the plan to get to the Moon. This alternate timeline doesn’t mean that sexism and racism are forgotten—rather, they are important factors in who is chosen for missions. Elma, a Jew, struggles against the sexism and prejudice of her day, recognizes her own privilege, and manages to fight for the way to the Moon.

1. *The Fated Sky (Lady Astronaut #2)* by Mary Robinette Kowal

Science Fiction

The sequel to The Calculating Stars, now that humanity has reached the moon, they set their sights on Mars. Of course, men are still in charge and are worried about sending women that far into space, but they can’t do it without Elma and other calculators (who were mostly women in that time period). Still, Elma faces the consequences of privilege and the intersection of race in who is chosen to go. I like the first slightly better, but this was a great sequel.

1. *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams

Science Fiction

I began reading this the day I turned 42—which of course is the answer to life, everything, and the universe. I know this is a favorite book of so many, and I think I’m a victim of having known so much hype about it. Yes, it’s funny in parts, and is the primer for humor in science fiction. It’s also older than I am. But now I can say I’ve read it, and for the most part, enjoyed it, although I found it tedious at times.

1. *When Kids Ask Hard Questions: Faith-Filled Responses to Tough Topics*, edited by Bromleigh McCleneghan and Karen Ware Jackson.

Nonfiction/Parenting

I’m an author in this book! Is it fair for me to review a book I’m in? I’m going to do it anyway. This is a fantastic, helpful resource for parents of elementary-aged children to help navigate the tough questions in life, such as death, divorce, sexuality, gender, and disability. My chapter is about making friends with disabled peers. As the mother of AJ, who has autism and is primarily nonverbal, often it’s the parent’s reaction to the innocent question of their child that is the problem, not the question itself. Most of the authors are Christian pastors, but there are Muslim and Jewish voices as well as others. It’s a good book for any parent to have handy.

1. *Not Your Parent’s Offering Plate: A New Vision for Financial Stewardship* by J. Clif Christopher

Nonfiction/Christian/Church

This is a newer edition to the well-known financial resource. It’s a solid read. Some of the information and resources are outdated, and the author is more familiar with large churches in the south. It has good tools and advice for talking about money and stewardship, so yes, every pastor should probably read this at some point.

1. *Devotions* by Mary Oliver

Poetry

This grand collection of Mary Oliver is a perfect tribute to the poet who passed away last January. It begins with her most recent work and finishes with some of her early poetry from the 1960’s. I used this as my daily devotional read for 2019, finding myself lost in the world she creates from simple words, simple poems that convey an incredible richness of life.

1. *Solus Jesus: A Theology of Resistance* by Emily Swan and Ken Wilson

Nonfiction/Theology

This is a sound, well thought-out and researched proposal for an alternative to Sola Scriptura. A missionary told me years ago we don't worship the Bible, we worship Jesus, and that's the foundation of this work. Building off of Bonhoeffer and the work of René Girard and later James Allison, this theology of resistance is a must read for pastors and theologians.

1. *A Perfect Mistake* by Laura Brown

Romance

I love Laura’s books and the way she weaves in deaf culture. They’re cozy and sweet romances, but they bring fresh insights into how hearing people often treat those who are deaf. This story begins with a one-night stand, but it turns out oops, the characters actually know of each other in real life, and it puts Veronica in a bind because Cam, the deaf man she is falling for, is the grandson of one of her clients. As a social worker, she’s crossed a boundary, and it’s difficult to unravel, even though the grandmother was matchmaking long before the fated night that Veronica and Cam spent together. (Going to put in a plug here for *Signs of Attraction*, my favorite romance ever, also by Laura Brown!)

1. *Noumenon* by Marina J. Lostetter

Science Fiction

A literary agent I once queried recommended I read this book, and they were right, I loved it. A space adventure spanning centuries, what would happen if humans lost contact with Earth and had to return home? How would we evolve, biologically and culturally different? A fascinating exploration of genetics, AI, and what it means to be human.

1. *The #MeToo Reckoning: Facing the Church’s Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct* by Ruth Everhart

Nonfiction/Christian

Advance Reader Copy

I received an ARC in exchange for an honest review. I \*should\* have a longer review published soon (waiting to hear back) but this is a must-read for every church leader, pastor, and especially those in judicatory leadership. The church has failed victims, time and again, by our silence. Hushing up matters of abuse, claiming we don’t want to further harm victims, but often we end up protecting abusers. Ruth is brave and bold. She names names, systems, and structures that have been responsible and have failed to protect the most vulnerable. She does offer a way forward—a way of lament and justice that leads to healing. When I read it, I recognized stories of my own, stories I have known from those abused in the church, and the way that many (often male-only) committees and leaders have covered this s\*it up. I hope Ruth’s work breaks open the conversation to bring healing and hope.

1. *Goodnight Darth Vader* by Jeffrey Brown

Children’s

I included this because my own kiddo was up at 2:30 a.m. on New Year’s Eve and I desperately wanted to finish reading 40 books for Goodreads. So I read this, given to me by my mother for Christmas. It’s cute. Could be a bit better on the rhyme scheme. As it is, I believe it’s my lowest rated book for the year of only 3 stars.