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Favorite Fall Reads of 2023

BY CINDY BURNETT, STAFF WRITER | NOVEMBER 2, 2023

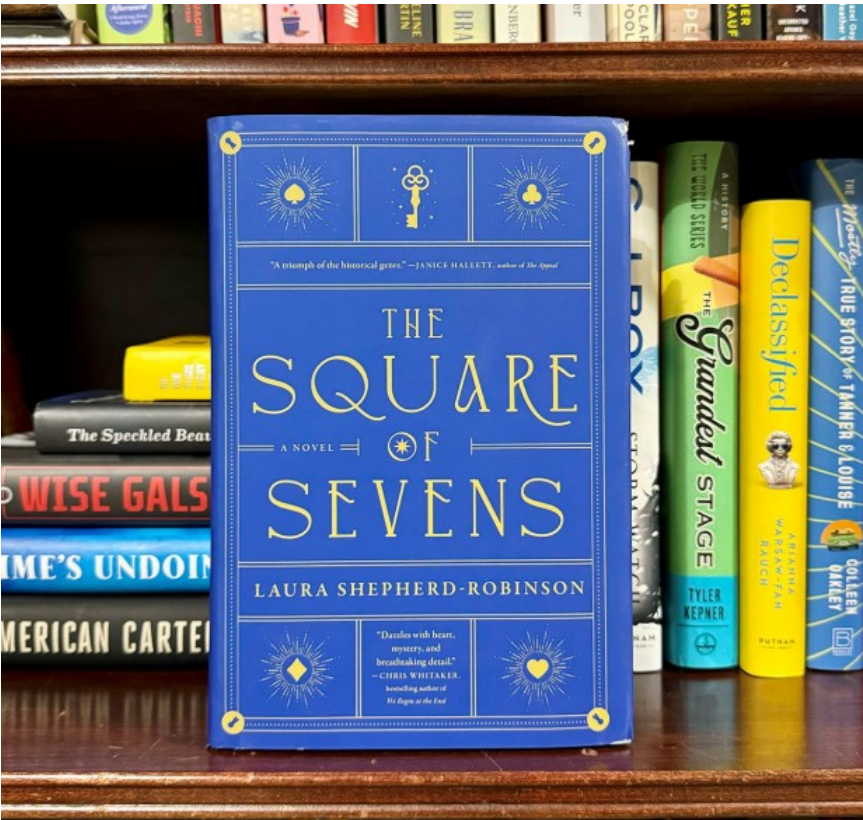


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Cindy Burnett shares some favorite reads of fall 2023.

Fall can be a quieter time in the publishing world, with a focus on big celebrity memoirs and other books that will make great gifts during the holiday season. While I often don't find as many books that resonate with me publishing during this window of time, 2023 is an exception. I am highlighting several that are out or will be out soon that are well worth reading.

Being Henry: The Fonz...and Beyond by Henry Winkler (memoir) – Henry Winkler's first big role in Hollywood, as The Fonz in "Happy Days," defined him for decades after the show went off the air. His incredible story starts earlier with a troubled home life and undiagnosed dyslexia and follows him through his role as The Fonz and into the acting roles he has subsequently played and children's books he has

written. Fans of “Happy Days” will enjoy the details he divulges about the show, including the origin of the term “jumping the shark” and how he was treated significantly better than the rest of the cast and the tension that created. I listened to this one; Winkler and his wife Stacey narrate, and I felt that they were personally telling me their tales. This will make a great gift at the holidays.

***The Berry Pickers* by Amanda Peters (historical fiction)** – A Mi’kmaq family travels every summer from Nova Scotia to Maine to pick blueberries, and one summer their 4-year-old daughter Ruthie goes missing while in Maine, last seen by her 6-year-old brother Joe. Interspersed with their story is Norma’s tale of growing up in a wealthy Maine household, overly protected by her parents with dreams of an earlier life that feel more like memories. The story is not what happened to Ruthie, because we know that she is Norma, instead it is a tale of trauma and how two families cope with the aftermath of Ruthie’s abduction as well as how secrets can destroy families. While *The Berry Pickers* is not a happy story, it is a beautiful and powerful one about grief and tragedy and the lifelong repercussions. I loved learning about blueberry picking in Maine as well as the Mi’kmaq culture, and the sense of place is incredibly strong for both Maine and Nova Scotia. This book will appeal to readers who like character-driven stories, family sagas, and/or tales steeped in other cultures or locales. I highly recommend it.

***The Madstone* by Elizabeth Crook (historical fiction)** – This beautifully crafted story set in 1868 Reconstruction-Era Texas is narrated by 19-year-old Benjamin Shreve to a young child, Tot, that he meets on the Texas frontier, recounting the journey the pair embark on with the child’s mom Nell across the state to a distant port. Nell and Tot are on the run from Nell’s husband, a dangerous man affiliated with a gang that harasses newly freed Black citizens. The trio, joined by a treasure hunter and a Black Seminole who is a veteran of several wars, make the dangerous journey across the Texas plains encountering all manner of hardships and peril. Benjamin’s smart, heartfelt and witty narration makes the story as well as the manner in which Crook brings 1860s Texas vividly to life. Her writing and sense of place are stunning. This will be one of my favorite reads of the year. Have tissues handy when you read it.

***The Square of Sevens* by Laura Shepherd-Robinson (historical fiction)** – This multilayered, gothic historical saga is structured around cartomancy, telling fortunes using the ancient Square of Sevens method. The structure of the book itself is built around the Square of Sevens, with each chapter assigned a significant card with an explanation about the significance of that card. The story opens with 7-year-old Red traveling from place to place with her Cornish father, a “cunning” man who tells fortunes using the ancient Square of Sevens to make a living. Shortly before he dies, her father entrusts her care as well as an ancient Square of Sevens document to a gentleman to raise her. Eventually, Red’s desire to understand her past leads her on a journey across England to solve the mystery of her origins. This lengthy novel (it runs over 500 pages) incorporates history, twists and turns, cartomancy, intrigue, and drama into a well-structured and clever tale with a fabulous ending.

***Starter Villain* by John Scalzi (science fiction)** – John Scalzi’s latest novel is an engaging and witty romp starring Charlie Fitzner, an ex-journalist working as a substitute teacher, who discovers that his estranged uncle has died and left him his supervillain business. Suddenly, Charlie is thrown into the world of comical James-Bond-style villain societies, talking cats, laser death rays, dolphin labor disputes, a volcano island lair, and lots of double and triple twists. The book is chock full of laugh-out-loud dialogue as well as Scalzi’s thoughts on modern-day billionaires and who is actually running the world making this both an enjoyable and intriguing read. This is a short book that will appeal to a wide range of readers; I highly recommend it.

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