



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

We asked our writers at SHOUT what was the best thing they read this year. Here are the top picks, curated for you.

The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue by V.E. Schwab

"Schwab pens an amazing story about life, love and remembering. Addie, doomed by the gods of old to be forgotten, is one of the most unforgettable characters I've ever come across. Hard recommendation for any fans of Neil Gaiman." – Aaqib Hasib

The Parisian by Isabella Hammad

"The Parisian follows the life of a Palestinian youth who travels to France to study medicine during WWII. His experience of adjusting to a new culture and host family, the joys of learning a subject that intrigues him, and the micro aggressions of racism that he faces from locals resonated deeply with me." – Sarah Bari

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong

"The way Vuong captures every moment and memory, with such raw,

captive prose, a reader is bound to feel deeply connected to his story. He treads carefully on issues of race, gender, masculinity, and identity and it is hard to believe it is a work of fiction as it holds such power and truth. It is truly at once brief and gorgeous." – Nafisa Afsara Chowdhury

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga

"This book doesn't try to romanticise India; a lot of authors have done that in the past. It's very raw. But even within his criticism of Indian life, Adiga depicts the story of class struggles through a guy who escaped the life he was born into, even if it was through unconventional ways. It's very *Slumdog Millionaire*-y and I liked that." – Fariha S Khan

Milkman by Anna Burns

"There's an unsettling feeling conveyed through the protagonist's paranoia at being stalked. The tension gradually grows on you as you're eventually left wondering about the consequences of being the centre of attention in a totalitarian community. But you'll probably have to wrap your head around the colourful Irish vocabulary first." – Rasha Jameel

Submarine by Joe Dunthorne

"Submarine is one of the few coming of age stories where you're not meant to relate to the character. Laughing along to his extremely flawed views is almost as amazing as the movie adaptation's soundtrack." – Wasique Hasan

The Ballad of Songbirds and

Snakes by Suzanne Collins

"Narrated from a different perspective than the original *Hunger Games* series, this book is a much required addition to the saga. It answers some old questions and raises a few new ones. It has suspense and mastery of storytelling, and a good plot." – Upoma Aziz

Gun Island by Amitav Ghosh

"It's not only a very engaging read, but also a relevant one for the twenty-first century. On one hand, there's the climate emergency looming over us. On the other, the plight of Bengali migrants in Italy. Linking the two is a mysterious folktale from the Sundarbans." – Adhora Ahmed

The Molecule of More by Daniel Lieberman and Michael Long

"This is a must read for everyone since products are now designed to cater to people's dopamine systems. The book expands on how everyday things become addictive and how dopamine works as motivation. It really helps to understand how our brain can get hijacked with technology and the consumerism of modern times. I can't recommend this book enough." – Rumman R Kalam

Quiet by Susan Cain

"If you're introverted and feel as though it's a negative trait, please read this book. I hope it helps you identify your strengths in what you believe are your faults due to your quiet nature. Reading it feels like looking into a mirror and being at peace with what you see." – Bushra Zaman

A Special New Year's Eve Just for You

ADHORA AHMED

The Cambridge Dictionary definition of the word "party" is as follows: a social event at which a group of people meet to talk, eat, drink, dance, etc., often in order to celebrate a special occasion.

That's so 2019.

This New Year's Eve, redefine parties. Who says you can only have fun in the presence of people? If you're an introvert, you're probably nodding in affirmative. If you're an extrovert, allow me to prove to you that yes, it's possible to throw a party for a single person.

GUEST LIST

Since the host and the guest of the party is the same person, you can cross this one out. Of course, your annoying siblings will try to freeload. Your challenge will be to make sure that this is *your* party, thrown *only* for yourself. One successful tactic is to lock yourself up in your room. People will obviously knock insistently and try to ruin the mood, but they'll get bored soon and give up.

DECOR

The ideal location for your party is your own room or anywhere you like to spend time alone, preferably indoors. The theme and decoration is entirely up to you, but please, do the bare minimum of cleaning the area. If you want to be basic, just blow a leftover balloon from a previous birthday and have it floating around. If you want to go the extra mile, any kind of fancy lighting will come in handy, whether it's a strobe light or fairy lights. While you're at it, add confetti and streamers too.

FOOD AND DRINKS

This quarantine should have given you ample opportunities to experiment with recipes, or at least the chance to develop your culinary skills. If not, now is the time to try! Remember, since you're the host, you're also in charge of the food. Instead of whole three-course meals, prepare some snacks to munch on through the night. These might include popcorn, chicken nuggets or brownies. If you can't go into the kitchen without risking burning down the house, choose any dry snacks of your liking, such as store-bought cookies, puffed rice or *chanachur*. Make sure you have a few options for soft drinks, because what's a party without them?

ENTERTAINMENT

Don't use this as an excuse to set up a group call with all your friends. You can do this the next day. If you have a Bluetooth speaker, turn it up to dance or to curl up in the corner to your favourite tunes, provided it's not "The Final Countdown". No need to play that song, because your neighbours will do it for you when the clock strikes midnight. If you're not in the mood for music, you can always start bingeing that Netflix series you've been putting off for months. Before you know it, you'll start off another year in the sole company of your own self.

Whatever you choose to do, wish others with caution when the time comes because you know where the overly optimistic wishes got us after last December 31st.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

TONIGHT. 11.59 PM.

Nobody:
Me: **plays Final Countdown**

