

Ars To-Be-Read: Five books we're most excited to read in 2020

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As “best of 2019” lists flood in, we’re looking toward the future—the literary future, to be precise. After another solid year of reading in 2019, we’re excited for new releases to come in the early months of 2020. Below are some of our most anticipated reads that you can get your hands on within the first three months of 2020.

Hugo-award-winner N.K. Jemisin will be releasing the first novel in a new series in March, while German author-songwriter Marc-Uwe Kling has a satirical novel about our addiction to convenience coming out in English for the first time. We know setting New Year’s resolutions can be hard, but we think you’ll want to put all five of these upcoming releases at the top of your TBR list.

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The City We Became by N.K. Jemisin

N.K. Jemisin returns with her first new novel after her three-year Hugo-winning streak for her *Broken Earth* trilogy. New York, Jemisin's hometown, is the setting for *The City We Became* (out March 24, 2020), but it's not the New York that we're familiar with. Five New Yorkers are brought together as avatars of the city, destined to fight together to defend their home from a supernatural, ancient evil.

The New Yorkers don't know what lies ahead of them, and nor do they know that the city they call home faces an existential threat that could wipe out everyone and everything in it. However, the severity of the situation becomes apparent when the city begins fighting against them as the evil lurking throughout its streets and back alleys starts taking over.

An extension of a short story in Jemisin's collection *How Long 'til Black Future Month* (which can be read at [Tor.com](https://www.tor.com)), *The City We Became* is the first in a new series in which major

cities become characters themselves, and those who live in them must fight for the soul of their hometowns. While the subject matter is very different from Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy, lovers of fantasy will get lost in Jemisin's signature, lyrical prose, and those who gravitate to stories imbued with the age-old struggle between good and evil will also enjoy *The City We Became*.

***Qualityland* by Marc-Uwe Kling**

QualityLand

Welcome to QualityLand, the best nation on Earth—because it was built for you. In QualityLand, everything is automated to make your life more convenient: digital personal assistants find everything from the best food to the best friends for you, a universal ranking system decides which social class you'll excel in and what career you should pursue, while advanced algorithms from the most successful company on Earth, TheShop, deliver necessities to your door without you needing

to order them. Everything is easy, everything is personal, everything is *quality*.

But one day, a resident of QualityCity in QualityLand named Peter Jobless receives a package from TheShop he definitely knows he does not want. He decides, against his better judgement, to return it—and thereby call into question the foundations of QualityLand as a whole.

Translated from German into English for the first time, *Qualityland* (out January 7, 2020) is full of laugh-inducing absurdities that come dangerously close to a possible, not-too-distant future. Some of the features of QualityLand (like TouchKiss, a “more forge-proof” method of biometric authentication that makes citizens kiss their tablets when they need to pay for food at a restaurant, receive delivered packages, and the like) are both ridiculous and uncanny because they are totally feasible, albeit unlikely, things that could happen in our world today. Kling’s witty, satirical look at technology and our dependence on it is a must-read if you’re intrigued by dystopian futures that hit a little too close to home. HBO will also turn *Qualityland* into a series in the future, so be sure to check out the book before that happens.

***Bagels, Bumf, and Buses* by Simon Horobin**

Oxford University Press

Wordsmiths will relish reading *Bagels, Bumf, and Buses: A Day in the Life of the English Language* (out January 1, 2020) by Simon Horobin. A professor of English and literature at Oxford, Horobin takes readers through a typical day in a typical person's life, examining all of the ubiquitous words that we encounter on the way. Have you ever wondered, while munching on your Wheaties, where the word "cereal" comes from? Has the origin of the word "pants" ever struck you while you got dressed to go to work? Even if these thoughts are foreign to you, Horobin's informative-yet-engaging writing style will make you curious.

Most of us take the English language for granted, but *Bagels, Bumf, and Buses* will give you a new appreciation for the words you likely use many times each day. Horobin fascinatingly takes commonplace words like "office" and "gymnasium," as well as new lingo like "meme" and "hashtag," and traces their origins back to multiple languages and associated words from

the past.

He also explains how words have evolved and changed over time (like how “lunch” used to be a fancier version of “luncheon,” not the other way around) and shows how evolutionary language was and continues to be as we humans use and abuse it. Anyone with a passion for language or a burning desire to learn more trivia should check out *Bagels, Bumf, and Buses*.

***A Witch in Time* by Constance Sayers**

Recently divorced Helen Lambert goes on a first date with a man who’s clearly not her type. But this man, Luke, talks to Helen as if he has known her for years—decades even. Readers of *A Witch in Time* (out February 11, 2020) are then thrown into Helen’s story, which is also the story of Juliet LaCompte, a woman living in late 19th-century France who’s having an affair with a married Parisian painter. The decision by Juliet’s mother, a witch, to curse her daughter’s

lover inadvertently ties Juliet to him through time—dooming her to relive the same love affair over and over for centuries to come.

Juliet lives multiple different lives since her first one in France, all of which have been watched over by Luke, who's actually a demon in charge of maintaining this botched curse. But Luke isn't merely a passive observer as he follows Juliet (and Nora, and Sandra, and Helen, and all the names she takes over the years) through time—he's more attached than she knows. But as Helen starts to remember some of the details of her past lives, she discovers that she might be able to break the curse once and for all.

While *A Witch in Time* has a romanticism akin to that in *Outlander* and *The Time Traveler's Wife*, it's also an intriguing romp through history and an interesting look at one woman's identity as it literally changes as the decades come and go. Sayers balances a lot of elements in this story—it's part historical fiction with a time-travel twist, part romance with a supernatural kick. Readers who enjoy stories chronicling one person's life (however many lives they have) will want to read *A Witch in Time*.

***The Wolf of Oren-Yaro* by K.S. Villoso**

Talyien is a woman devoted to her people and her nation of Oren-Yaro. In order to bring peace to the factions of her nation, Talyien is promised to the son of her father's rival. But the night before she's crowned queen, Talyien commits a startling act, and her husband leaves.

Fast forward a few years and Queen Talyien is struggling to rule on her own when she receives a request to meet her estranged husband in a distant nation. Knowing that the consequences of not going would be worse than anything else, Talyien leaves with only her most trusted guards to meet her husband. But things quickly turn sour when their secret meeting is ambushed and assassins attempt to kill Talyien. Now, stuck in a foreign nation, Talyien must find her way home and rescue her husband without losing her own life.

Fans of Villosso's existing *Agartes Epilogues* series will find similarities between it and *The Wolf of Oren-Yaro* (out February 18, 2020). But the new series is by no means derivative—Villosso is an expert at world-building, and the

pace of the novel forces you to move as quickly as Talyien does from one precarious situation to another. *The Wolf of Oren-Yaro* is a high-fantasy thrill ride that fans of the genre will appreciate, particularly those thirsting for a strong female main character.

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