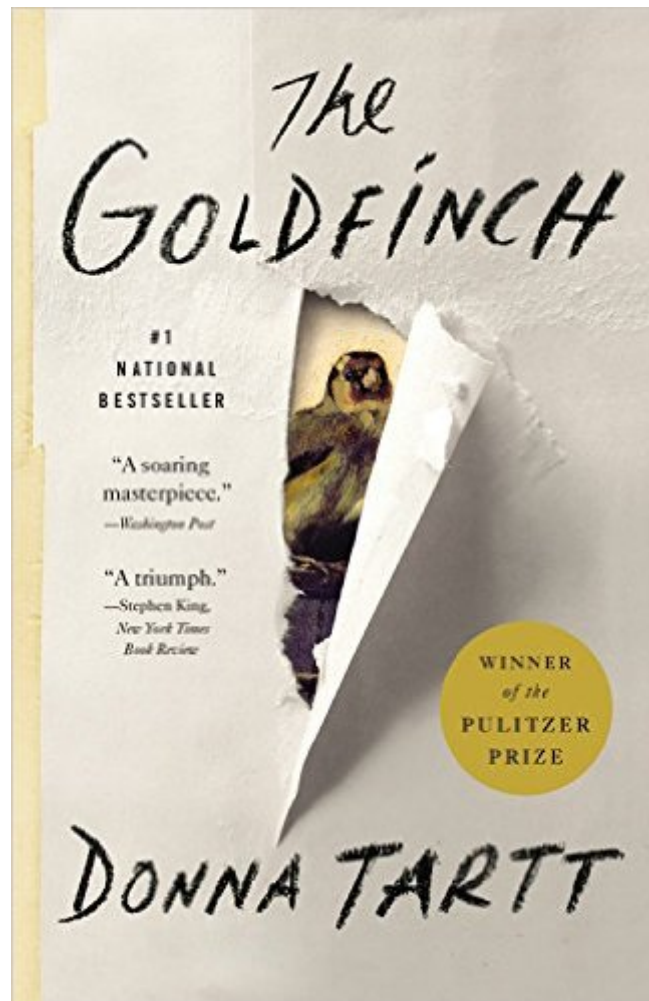


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The Goldfinch: A Novel (Pulitzer Prize For Fiction)



Synopsis

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE "The Goldfinch is a rarity that comes along perhaps half a dozen times per decade, a smartly written literary novel that connects with the heart as well as the mind....Donna Tartt has delivered an extraordinary work of fiction."--Stephen King, The New York Times Book Review

Theo Decker, a 13-year-old New Yorker, miraculously survives an accident that kills his mother. Abandoned by his father, Theo is taken in by the family of a wealthy friend. Bewildered by his strange new home on Park Avenue, disturbed by schoolmates who don't know how to talk to him, and tormented above all by his longing for his mother, he clings to the one thing that reminds him of her: a small, mysteriously captivating painting that ultimately draws Theo into the underworld of art. As an adult, Theo moves silkily between the drawing rooms of the rich and the dusty labyrinth of an antiques store where he works. He is alienated and in love--and at the center of a narrowing, ever more dangerous circle. The Goldfinch is a mesmerizing, stay-up-all-night and tell-all-your-friends triumph, an old-fashioned story of loss and obsession, survival and self-invention, and the ruthless machinations of fate.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I won't go into the plot since everyone will know it. My concern whenever I'm given or purchase a very long book is, "Will it keep me engaged?" and is it worth the weeks it will take me to finish it?" The answer with THE GOLDFINCH is "Yes!" and "Sorta!" To me, the book is divided into sections or novellas--the explosion, living with the wealthy family, moving to Vegas, etc. The brilliant opening section immediately kept me engaged--I think the explosion and Theo's experience and recovery is

some of the best writing I've read in years. The family he moves in with may remind you of THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS or Salinger's Glass family. They are funny, a bit tragic and sort of odd. The father especially--something about his behavior seemed a bit "off" as did his wild dialogue; it didn't seem at all "real" in a novel that's very grounded in reality. (It's revealed later why he behaves this way.) The next--and for me, strongest novella--takes place in Las Vegas where we "live" with Theo's father and girlfriend. The writing is vivid, the characters and plot really move along and it's all terrific. And then, for me, THE GOLDFINCH seems to stall a bit and slightly loses its way. This painting that Theo carries with him seems to be forgotten about and then every 100 pages or so is mentioned again (not that we care.) There's a novella about dealing in art (collection and deception) and our hero takes a downward turn, but I found myself losing interest and by page 600 was growing impatient for it to end...or for the plot to kick in again as it did in the first few sections. The great thing about this book is that you can set it aside for a few days and pick it up again and not be "lost"--the writing and characters are that strong. The "plot" on the other hand seems to grow thinner and less important as you head down the last 200 plus pages as "big issues" are thoughtfully woven in. I'm sure this will receive many 4 and 5 star ratings, but I'm giving it a very good solid 3 since, unfortunately, it seemed to run out of gas toward the end. But those first 600 pages -- great, great stuff!

It's been a long time since I found a book so alternately beautiful and maddening. There are excellent scenes and lines in this novel, and I'm glad I read it, but it doesn't hold together well. In the end it reminded me of the antique shop the character Hobie runs in the book: many amazing, high-quality things half-hidden beneath mounds of less interesting stuff. Tarrt deserves credit for daring greatly in this book. It's hard to center a long novel on a fairly unlikeable character, and even harder when that character is also the narrator. In Theo Decker I felt she was trying to get at the ways a severe psychic injury plays out over a lifetime, and for the first half of the book I was fascinated by Theo even when I didn't like him. And Tarrt does lay the groundwork carefully for his later misdeeds, particularly in Theo's unwanted resemblance to his father. But once Theo becomes an adult (in years if not in maturity), he makes so many stupid decisions, and is so apathetic about his life generally, that it got increasingly difficult for me to care what happened to him. It's also hard to reconcile how Theo can act as he does while having the insights he articulates. I understand that this is part of what Tarrt is trying to explore (why people don't do what they know, at some level, they should do), but I don't think it quite comes off here. Theo's character felt too inconsistent to sustain the whole novel. The high points of the novel for me were Theo's life immediately after the

explosion that kills his mother, when he is taken in by the wealthy family of a school friend, and his relationship with Hobie, the furniture dealer who takes him on as a kind of apprentice. As in "The Secret History," Tartt excels in showing the dark underside of wealth and privilege, and it wasn't a surprise when members of the wealthy family turn up later in Theo's life and play some decisive roles. As for Hobie, I wanted to read a whole novel about him, because the portions that describe his sense for furniture and his love for the past were some of the strongest in the book. Boris, the Russian-born friend Theo makes during his sojourn in Las Vegas with his gambler father, is also a vivid character, and I appreciated that Tartt took his character in directions I didn't expect. It's the ending (and by "ending" I mean about the last 200 pages) that was the real problem for me. The violence and cross-continent chase scenes just didn't ring true. This part of the book, in which more "happens" in plot terms, was actually the hardest to get through. Tartt excels at rendering the inner lives of characters, but the action scenes fall flat. I hate giving this novel a mediocre rating, because I appreciate the ambition it embodies and the parts of it in which Tartt's prose really sings. She's engaging some important questions about the power of art in this book, and the scenes that feature Theo thinking through his relationship with the purloined painting were moving and thought-provoking. The novel as a whole just doesn't measure up to its best components, sadly.

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