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Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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Long-form picks from Tim Ferriss and Andrew Wilkinson lead this brief. Also included: Packy McCormick’s sci-fi and biology reads, Balaji’s take on The Sovereign Individual, and short endorsements of AI-era essays from Garry Tan, Tobi Lütke and Matt Mullenweg.

Top pick: Tim Ferriss’s long-form list (The Random Show)

- **“Personal Renewal,” a speech by John Gardner** given to McKinsey & Company in November 1990. Ferriss calls the transcript “exceptional” and “full of gems,” and says it’s about continual learning throughout life. One example he quotes: Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* in prison at 53 [1]. His advice is to print it out and read it away from notifications. He has “read this one a few times now” and gets something from it every time [1].
- ***The Dark Wizard***, a four-part miniseries about climber Dean Potter. Andrew Huberman first recommended it to Ferriss [1]. Ferriss praises its archival footage and the drawings and notes from Potter’s journals. He started it at 11 p.m. and binged the whole series until 3 a.m. [1].
- ***Hard Times: An Illustrated Oral History of the Great Depression*** by Studs Terkel. Ed Cook, the memory champion who founded the learning app Mindmax, introduced it to him [1]. Ferriss calls it “a page turner” and “one of the better and most unique depictions of history” he has come across [1]. Cook also says Terkel’s *Working* is “incredible” [1].
- **“Please Use AI,” a short article by Sean Smucker**. One of the hosts recommends it as a counterbalance to optimizing everything with LLMs,

calling it a “beautiful piece” about preserving human interaction [1].

Watch

Andrew Wilkinson: *The Goal* and a Shep Gordon documentary

Wilkinson calls *The Goal* an “amazing book” and “a quick read.” He uses its factory lesson about not limiting throughput to explain why he delegates details and keeps his own role to “raw ideas and relationships” [2]. The transcript doesn’t name the author; it is Eliyahu Goldratt.

He also points to Mike Myers’s documentary about Shep Gordon, who wrote *They Call Me Supermensch*. Friends told him he had to watch it. Afterward he called Gordon “the north star” for living normally and treating everyone the same [2]. Watch

Packy McCormick: *The Diamond Age* and a virtual cells explainer (Not Boring)

Packy calls Neal Stephenson’s *The Diamond Age* “one of my all-time favorites.” He brings it up because the book’s “matter compilers” share a name with Atomic Machines’ new Matter Compiler [3]. On virtual cells, he admits his own explanation only goes so far and “highly recommend[s]” Elliot Hershberg’s *What Are Virtual Cells?* in *The Century of Biology* [3].

Balaji Srinivasan: *The Sovereign Individual*, with caveats

At the Network State Conference, Balaji called *The Sovereign Individual* “a good book” but said it “didn’t think about China or AI as much.” He offered three counterarguments or complements: the individual sovereign (a leader like Xi), the sovereign collective, and drone armies [4]. The authors, James Dale Davidson and William Rees-Mogg, aren’t named in the transcript. Watch

Short endorsements of AI-era essays

- **Garry Tan** on Steve Yegge’s “The AI Vampire”: “great read” [5]. Yegge had pointed out that Tan’s idea of hiring AI-enabled workers part-time came from that essay [6].
- **Tobi Lütke** on Geoffrey Huntley’s post: “Good read” [7]. The post argues that “AI use is no longer optional if you wish to be employed.” It advises employees and hiring managers on how to find AI-first candidates [8].
- **Matt Mullenweg**, replying to Patrick Collison’s thread on agents in the economy, argues that a personal agent needs the GNU Four Freedoms “to truly be on your side.” He links his own explainer [9]. Collison’s thread says much of his analysis “hinges on the assumption that personal agents will be on the consumer’s side” [10].

Brian Armstrong: Polytopia

Armstrong calls Polytopia “one of the most underrated strategy games.” He says it parallels business and calls it “being a founder, compressed into 20 minutes.” Coinbase, his company, is sponsoring the game’s World Championship [11]. He reshared the post this period ahead of the championship [12].

Sources

1. The Random Show — AI Super Assistants, Dream Engineering, Wizards, Supplements, and More!
2. Why Success Makes You Lonely (And How Andrew Wilkinson Avoids It)
3. Weekly Dose of Optimism #214
4. 11 - Network State Conference 2026 - Fireside with Mike Maples of Floodgate and Balaji
5. X post by @garrytan
6. X post by @Steve_Yegge
7. X post by @tobi
8. X post by @GeoffreyHuntley
9. X post by @photomatt
10. X post by @patrickc
11. X post by @brian_armstrong
12. X post by @brian_armstrong