

What to read when technology is changing power and judgment

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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A curated set of authentic recommendations connecting American power to AI-era geopolitics, practical ways to push AI beyond default behavior, and unusually personal texts on creativity, decisiveness, and political theology.

The strongest recommendation is Patrick O'Shaughnessy's pairing of Walter Russell Mead's *Special Providence* and *God and Gold*: he calls them "two of the best books on American power," in a conversation framed around whether America can retain its dominance in an era of AI and robotics. [1]

Start with the geopolitical frame

Special Providence and God and Gold — Walter Russell Mead

- **Type / creator:** Books by Walter Russell Mead.
- **Link:** O'Shaughnessy's conversation with Mead
- **Recommended by:** Patrick O'Shaughnessy.
- **Key takeaway:** O'Shaughnessy presents the books as a foundation for understanding American power, alongside a discussion of global dominance, China, technology, foreign-policy traditions, warfare, Taiwan, and the Middle East. [1]
- **Why it matters:** This is the clearest bridge in the set between technological change and national power. It is the best starting point for readers who want a geopolitical frame rather than another book about AI capabilities alone.

Practical ways to work with AI—and with uncertainty

“How to turn your AI into a world-class designer” — Anshu Chimala

- **Type / creator:** Article on Lenny’s blog by Anshu Chimala, who led software-engineering and design teams at Apple for 12 years. [2]
- **Link:** The 5-Bullet Friday edition containing the article
- **Recommended by:** Tim Ferriss, who identified it as the most-clicked link in his latest edition and included it under “What I’m reading.” [2, 3]
- **Key takeaway:** The article’s first technique, “seed strings,” asks the model to generate a long random alphanumeric string, derive the design’s color, layout, and typography from patterns in that string, and use it as inspiration without exposing the string in the final design. [3]
- **Why it matters:** This is an executable method for pushing a model away from its default design patterns—not a generic exhortation to be more creative.

Military history, military strategy, and decisive battles

- **Type / creator:** Study track rather than a single title; no specific work was named.
- **Recommended by:** Tim Ferriss.
- **Key takeaway:** Ferriss says studying these subjects helped him overcome “paralysis by analysis.” His operating rule is to set a deadline for a go/no-go decision despite incomplete information, then reduce the perceived risk of action through small, short-term experiments. [4]
- **Why it matters:** It is a recommendation about decision-making under uncertainty, with a usable framework attached—not just a topical reading list.

Fiction and creative resistance

Cat’s Cradle — Kurt Vonnegut

- **Type / creator:** Novel; the podcast transcript renders the author’s name unclearly as “Kerbonagget,” apparently referring to Kurt Vonnegut.
- **Link:** Lenny’s Podcast interview with Roman Ugarte
- **Recommended by:** Roman Ugarte.
- **Key takeaway:** Ugarte calls it a fun recommendation and says he has bought copies for many friends. [5]
- **Why it matters:** The repeated gift-giving is stronger evidence of a lived recommendation than a passing mention, even though the interview does not extract a particular lesson from the novel.

The War of Art — Steven Pressfield

- **Type / creator:** Book by Steven Pressfield; the transcript spells the surname “Presfield.”

- **Link:** Lenny’s Podcast interview with Roman Ugarte
- **Recommended by:** Roman Ugarte.
- **Key takeaway:** He frequently returns to it, sometimes reading only a page or two, and recommends it to anyone. The discussion describes its subject as the challenge of creating something new and overcoming resistance. [5]
- **Why it matters:** It is the most directly actionable creative-work recommendation in the set: a short text designed for repeated use when resistance, rather than lack of ideas, is the bottleneck.

Lonesome Dove — Larry McMurtry

- **Type / creator:** Novel by Larry McMurtry.
- **Link:** Packy McCormick’s Not Boring essay
- **Recommended by:** Packy McCormick.
- **Key takeaway:** Packy says the book “deserves to be read” and tells readers who have not read it to start immediately. He praises its characters, simple prose, and unvarnished account of nineteenth-century frontier life; he found it after asking Claude for a book he would not be able to put down. [6]
- **Why it matters:** The recommendation includes both a clear verdict and a selection heuristic: choose it for immersion, strong characters, and prose that does not overwork the material.

A political-theology wildcard

A Short Story of the Antichrist — Vladimir Solovyov

- **Type / creator:** A 1900 short story by an Eastern Orthodox writer; the podcast transcript renders the name as “Salavia,” while the work is commonly attributed to Vladimir Solovyov.
- **Link:** The First Things episode with Peter Thiel
- **Recommended by:** Peter Thiel, who explicitly recommends it to listeners and calls it the best work in the genre of Antichrist fiction. [7]
- **Key takeaway:** Thiel introduces it while discussing the theological and political ideas surrounding Alexandre Kojève and the figure of the Antichrist. [7]
- **Why it matters:** It is an unusual primary-text recommendation for readers trying to understand the political-theological vocabulary behind Thiel’s worldview, rather than a conventional technology or business book.

One current frontier pointer

“A huge swarm of agents pushes the frontier of mathematics” — *The Wall Street Journal*

- **Type / creator:** News article; the shared post does not identify a byline.

- **Link:** The Wall Street Journal article
- **Recommended by:** Vinod Khosla, who shared it with the comment, “Amazing how fast math is being solved.” [8]
- **Key takeaway:** The linked post describes a “huge swarm of agents” pushing mathematics forward and producing the equivalent of a million books; Khosla says many benefits will come from the solution. [9, 8]
- **Why it matters:** This belongs at the edge of the list as a current research pointer rather than a fully characterized review: it directs readers to a concrete report about agentic mathematical work, while the recommendation itself supplies little methodological detail.

Sources

1. X post by @patrick_oshag
2. X post by @tferriss
3. 5-Bullet Friday — Creeping Cats, Superhuman Nepalis, Using Mice to Beat Ticks, AI Design, and More
4. X post by @tferriss
5. How we built Grok Bot in a month | Roman Ugarte (SpaceXAI)
6. Everyone is Reading Lonesome Dove
7. Where Is the Antichrist? (ft. Peter Thiel)
8. X post by @vkhosla
9. X post by @scmallaby