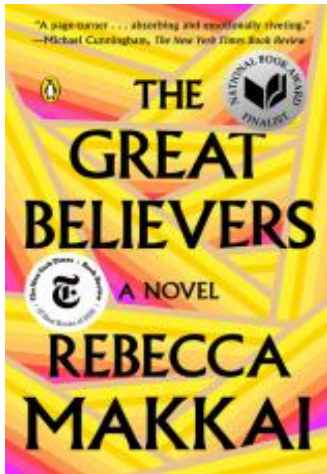


# The Great Believers

by Rebecca Makkai

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## About the Book

FINALIST FOR THE PULITZER PRIZE IN FICTION

WINNER OF THE ANDREW CARNEGIE MEDAL

WINNER OF THE *LOS ANGELES TIMES* BOOK PRIZE FOR FICTION

WINNER OF THE STONEWALL BOOK AWARD

SHORTLISTED FOR THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

**Soon to Be a Major Television Event, optioned by Amy Poehler**

“A page turner... An absorbing and emotionally riveting story about what it’s like to live during times of crisis.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

**A dazzling novel of friendship and redemption in the face of tragedy and loss set in 1980s Chicago and contemporary Paris.**

In 1985, Yale Tishman, the development director for an art gallery in Chicago, is about to pull off an amazing coup, bringing in an extraordinary collection of 1920s paintings as a gift to the gallery. Yet, as his career begins to flourish, the carnage of the AIDS epidemic grows around him. One by one, his friends are dying, and after his friend Nico's funeral, the virus circles closer and closer to Yale himself. Soon the only person he has left is Fiona, Nico's little sister.

Thirty years later, Fiona is in Paris tracking down her estranged daughter who disappeared into a cult. While staying with an old friend, a famous photographer who documented the Chicago crisis, she finds herself finally grappling with the devastating ways AIDS affected her life and her relationship with her daughter. The two intertwining stories take us through the heartbreak of the '80s and the chaos of the modern world, as both Yale and Fiona struggle to find goodness in the midst of disaster.

THE GREAT BELIEVERS has become a critically acclaimed, indelible piece of literature; it was selected as one of the *New York Times* 10 Best Books of the Year, a *Washington Post* Notable Book, a BuzzFeed Book of the Year, a Skimm Reads pick, and a pick for the New York Public Library's Best Books of the year.

## Discussion Guide

1. Yale's group of friends is very close. In a sense, they are his "chosen family." How is this explored in the book? How does each character relate to their family, biological and chosen? Do you have a "chosen family," and if so, what brings you all together?
2. How has the culture changed regarding LGBTQ+ voices and stories since the 1980s?
3. Chicago is such a powerful presence in this novel that it is almost a character in itself. Have you ever been to or lived in a place that exerted a strong influence on you?
4. Nora, the elderly woman donating the 1920s pieces, seems completely removed from the rest of Yale's life, yet her story contains elements that can be compared and contrasted with Yale's. What similarities between his and her life are there? How has her past affected the present?
5. Fiona has suffered many losses in her life. How do you think that affected her as a mother? What are the ways in which trauma and loss are passed down through generations?
6. Do you empathize more with Fiona or Claire?
7. Do you see any parallels between the state of healthcare during the 1980s and now?
8. On page 353, Asher asks Yale, "Does it really ever go anywhere?... Love. Does it vanish?" Yale replies, "I mean, we never want it to. But it does, doesn't it?" What would you say to them?
9. Is the creation of artwork always a collaborative effort? How do you feel about the relationship between artist and muse?
10. What has been your knowledge of --- or experience with, if any --- AIDS or those affected by the disease? Has reading this novel changed any ideas you have previously had about the subject?

## Author Bio

Rebecca Makkai is the Chicago-based author of the novel *THE GREAT BELIEVERS*, one of the *New York Times*' Best 10 Books of the Year for 2018, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, winner of the ALA Carnegie Medal and the Chicago Review of Books Award, and a pick for the New York Public Library's 2018 Best Books. It appeared in a total of 21 Best of the Year lists. She is the author of two other novels, *THE BORROWER* and *THE HUNDRED-YEAR-HOUSE*, and the collection *MUSIC FOR WARTIME* --- four stories from which appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*. The recipient of a 2014 NEA Fellowship, Rebecca has taught at the Tin House Writers' Conference and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and is on the MFA faculties of Sierra Nevada College and Northwestern University. She is Artistic Director of StoryStudio Chicago.

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