



CHRISTMAS MUST-READS

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the year's best books

THE SUNDAY TIMES

The Bed of Procrustes by Nassim Taleb

The author of hugely influential tome *The Black Swan* now graces us with a selection of his aphorisms

Robert Collins

Published: 12 December 2010



Nassim Nicholas Taleb is an author, philosopher and investment strategist (Andreas Rentz)

Having made millions of dollars as a trader on Wall Street, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, the author of the bestselling *The Black Swan* (2007), retired to become a full-time philosopher in 2004. A formidable polymath, he shuns, as far as he can, all internet, television and newspapers. In this quirky,

entertaining collection of aphorisms, covering everything from the web (“like a verbally incontinent person”) to the injuriousness of doing too much work (“My idea of the sabbatical is to work for (part of) a day and rest for six”), you won’t get the best introduction to Taleb’s fascinating theory of “black swans” — how unpredictable events have history-changing consequences. You will, instead, be given a wry, often hilarious glimpse into Taleb’s pet hates.

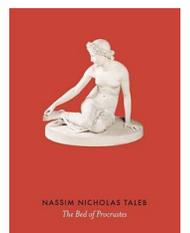
“They will envy you for your success, for your wealth, for your

The essentials

Title
The Bed of Procrustes:
Philosophical and
Practical Aphorisms

Author
Nassim Taleb

Publisher



intelligence, for your looks, for your status — but rarely for your wisdom,” he laments. Enemies are a constant feature of Taleb’s musings. But, as the man who made a fortune betting on Black Monday in 1987, he knows how to turn a crisis into an asset: “A good foe is far more loyal, far more predictable, and, to the clever, far more useful than the most valuable admirer.”

Allen Lane

Length
128 pages

Culture Planner

The likes of Facebook, though, get his epistemological hackles up: “Social networks present information about what people like; more informative if, instead, they described what they don’t like.”

And so that’s precisely what Taleb does: gyms, economists, carbohydrates, journalists — he loathes them all. “I take a ritual bath after any contact, or correspondence (even emails), with consultants, economists, Harvard Business School professors, journalists, and those in similarly deprived pursuits.”

Oh, and don’t forget you: “Newspaper readers exposed to real prose are like deaf persons at a Puccini opera.”

But if there’s one thing that truly gets Taleb’s goat in his arch if uneven meditations, it’s jobs: “Those who do not think that employment is systemic slavery are either blind or employed.” Which brilliantly proves how clever the maddeningly wise Taleb is: he’s cured himself of that problem completely.

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