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Recommended books 2009

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Fiction

Archer, Jeffrey. Paths of Glory
A fictionalized account of the life of teacher George Mallory follows his brilliant education, service in World War I, and his fatal attempt to summit Mount Everest in 1924.

Baker, Tiffany. The Little Giant of Aberdeen County
Truly Plaice was born with acromegaly, a pituitary gland disorder causing her to grow without stopping. Compared to her delicate sister Serena Jane, the heavy-bodied Truly is a monster…a little giant. Isolated from her peers, Truly must learn to make peace with her own body and with those who have alternately loved and shunned her from childhood.

Bazell, Josh. Beat the Reaper
The carefully orchestrated life of Manhattan emergency room doctor and witness-protection program participant Peter Brown unravels in the course of a day that begins with a mugging and a new patient who knows him from his previous existence.

De Robertis, Carolina. The Invisible Mountain
The story of three generation of women of the Firielli family as they search for love and identity during the tumultuous political events of twentieth-century Uruguay.

Dolan, Harry. Bad Things Happen
The man who calls himself David Loogan is leading a quiet, anonymous life in the college town of Ann Arbor, Michigan. He's hoping to escape a violent past he would rather forget. But his solitude is broken when he finds himself drawn into a friendship with Tom Kristoll, publisher of the mystery magazine Gray Streets--and into an affair with Laura, Tom's sleek blond wife. When Tom offers him a job as an editor, Loogan sees no harm in accepting. What he doesn't realize is that the stories in Gray Streets tend to follow a simple formula: Plans go wrong. Bad things happen. People die.

Ferry, Peter. Travel Writing
After witnessing a fatal car accident one night on his way home from work, teacher and part-time writer Pete Ferry is deeply haunted by the events as his strange obsession for the beautiful victim begins to take over his mind, heart, and soul.

Finder, Joseph. Vanished
Lauren Heller and her husband Roger, a brilliant executive at a major corporation, are attacked in a Georgetown parking lot after an evening out. Knocked unconscious by the assailants, Lauren lies in a coma in the hospital while her husband has vanished without a trace. With nowhere else to turn, Lauren's teenage son Gabe reaches out to his uncle, Nick Heller, a

high-powered investigator with a corporate intelligence firm in Washington, D.C.

Goolrick, Robert. A Reliable Wife
Ralph Truitt, a wealthy businessman with a troubled past who lives in a remote nineteenth-century Wisconsin town, has advertised for a reliable wife. His ad is answered by Catherine Land, a woman who makes every effort to hide her own dark secrets and her true motivations for answering the ad.

Grisham, John. The Associate
Three months after leaving Yale, Kyle McAvoy becomes an associate at the largest law firm in the world, where, in addition to practicing law, he is expected to lie, steal, and take part in a scheme that could send him to prison, if not get him killed.

Henriquez, Cristina. The World in Half
Miraflores has never known her father, and until now, she's never thought that he wanted to know her. She's long been aware that her mother had an affair with him while she was stationed with her then husband in Panama, and she's always assumed that her pregnant mother came back to the United States alone with his consent. But when Miraflores returns to the Chicago suburb where she grew up, to care for her mother at a time of illness, she discovers that her mother and father had a greater love than she ever thought possible, and that her father had wanted her more than she could have ever imagined.

Horn, Dara. All Other Nights
Jacob Rappaport, a Jewish soldier in the Union army, struggles with difficult moral questions when he is ordered to murder his own uncle, who has been plotting an assassination attempt against President Lincoln.

Huston, Charlie. The Mystic Arts of Erasing all Signs of Death
Working on a crime-scene clean-up crew, disaffected slacker Web Goodhue is hired by the daughter of a Malibu suicide victim who enlists his help in getting her brother out of trouble, making him the target of some gun-toting L.A. cowboys who are out for blood.

Kadrey, Richard. Sandman Slim
Working as a sideshow gladiator and demonic assassin in Hell after being snatched by demons at the age of nineteen, hard-boiled magician James Stark escapes and returns to Los Angeles, where he plots to destroy the circle of other magicians who stole his life.

Levin, Daniel. The Last Ember
Jonathan Marcus, a young American lawyer and a former doctoral student in classics, has become a sought-after commodity among antiquities dealers, but when he is summoned to Rome to examine a client's fragment of an ancient stone map, he stumbles across a startling secret: a hidden message carved inside the stone itself. The discovery propels him on a perilous journey from the labyrinth beneath the Coliseum to the biblical-era tunnels of Jerusalem in search of a hidden 2,000-year-old artifact sought by empires throughout the ages.

Mieville, China. The City and The City
Twin southern European cities Beszel and Ul Qoma coexist in the same physical location, separated by their citizens' determination to see only one city at a time. Inspector Tyador Borlú of the Extreme Crime Squad roams through the intertwined but separate cultures as he investigates the murder of foreigner Mahalia Geary, who believed that a third city, Orciny, hides in the blind spots between Beszel and Ul Qoma. As Mahalia's friends disappear and revolution brews, Tyador is forced to consider the idea that someone in unseen Orciny is manipulating the other cities.

Moore, Lorrie. A Gate at the Stairs
In the Midwest just after the September 11 attacks, twenty-year-old Tassie Keltjin comes of age amid such challenges as racism, the War on Terror, and cruelty in the name of love, as she leaves her family's farm to attend college and takes a part-

time job as a nanny.

Ogawa, Yoko. The Housekeeper and the Professor
A relationship blossoms between a brilliant math professor suffering from short-term memory problems following a traumatic head injury and the young housekeeper, the mother of a ten-year-old son, hired to care for him.

Philips, Jayne Anne. Lark and Termite
Set against the backdrop of the Korean War in the 1950s, a novel about family, the repercussions of war, and the bonds that sustain personal relationships focuses on a single family--Lark, her brother Termite, their mother Lola, and Termite's soldier father, Robert Leavitt.

Valente, Catherynne. Palimpsest
Between life and death, dreaming and waking, at the train stop beyond the end of the world is the city of Palimpsest. Those fated to make the passage are marked forever by a map of that wondrous city tattooed on their flesh after a single night. To this fantastic kingdom come Oleg, a New York locksmith; a beekeper, November; Ludovico, a binder of rare books; and a Japanese woman named Sei, each of whom has lost something important in their lives.

Wilson, Robert Charles. Julian Comstock: A Story of 22nd Century America
Julian Comstock, the disgraced nephew of the tyrannical American president, grows up in a small town in what was formerly northern Canada. Adam Hazzard, Julian's working-class friend, and Sam Godwin, a bluff old retainer and secret Jew, struggle to keep Julian alive despite his uncle's hatred and Julian's proclivity for annoying the repressive Dominion Church. When Julian is drafted to fight the invading Dutch in Labrador, exaggerated tales of his heroism, written by would-be novelist Adam, catapult the young aristocrat to unwanted fame.

Non-Fiction

Bartlett, Allison Hoover. The Man Who Loved Books Too Much: the true story of a thief, a detective, and a world of literary obsession B G474b
In telling the true story of book thief John Charles Gilkey and the man who was driven to capture him, journalist Allison Hoover Bartlett explores the larger history of book passion, collection, and theft through the ages.

Beaven, Colin. No Impact Man: the adventures of a guilty liberal who attempts to save the planet, and the discoveries he makes about himself and our way of life in the process 333.72 B386
Describes the author's one-year experiment with minimizing his impact on the Earth, an effort for which he eschewed technology, processed foods, and other negative-impact products while evaluating the plausibility and actual value of sustainable living.

Brinkley, Douglas. Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the crusade for America 973.911 R781b
"The movement for the conversation of wild life and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method." So wrote Theodore Roosevelt, known as the "naturalist President" for his efforts in protecting wildlife and wilderness, merging preservation and patriotism into a quintessential American ideal. The Wilderness Warrior, Douglas Brinkley's massively readable new biography, intrepidly explores the wilderness of influences, personal relationships, and frontier adventures that shaped Roosevelt's proto-green views.

Egan, Timothy. The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the fire that saved America 973.911 Eg28
When Theodore Roosevelt vacated the Oval Office, he left a vast legacy of public lands under the stewardship of the newly created Forest Service. Immediately, political enemies of the nascent conservation movement chipped away at the foundations of the untested agency, lobbying for a return of the land to private interests and development. Then, in 1910, several small wildfires in the Pacific Northwest merge into one massive, swift, and unstoppable blaze, and the Forest

Service is pressed into a futile effort to douse the flames. Over 100 firefighters died heroically, galvanizing public opinion in favor of the forests--with unexpected ramifications exposed in today's proliferation of destructive fires.

Eggers, Dave. Zeitoun B Z48e
Through the story of one man's experience after Hurricane Katrina, Eggers draws an indelible picture of Bush-era crisis management. Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a successful Syrian-born painting contractor, decides to stay in New Orleans and protect his property while his family flees. After the levees break, he uses a small canoe to rescue people, before being arrested by an armed squad and swept powerlessly into a vortex of bureaucratic brutality. When a guard accuses him of being a member of Al Qaeda, he sees that race and culture may explain his predicament. Eggers, compiling his account from interviews, sensibly resists rhetorical grandstanding, letting injustices speak for themselves.

Grann, David. The Lost City of Z 918.11 G759
Interweaves the story of British explorer Percy Fawcett, who vanished during a 1925 expedition into the Amazon, with the author's own quest to uncover the mysteries surrounding Fawcett's final journey and the secrets of what lies deep in the Amazon jungle.

Holmes, Richard. The Age of Wonder: how the romantic generation discovered the beauty and terror of science 500 H752
The winner of the Somerset Maugham Award presents the earliest ideas of the explorers of "dynamic science," including William Herschel and his sister, Caroline, who changed the public's ideas about stars, and Humphry Davy, who invented the miners' lamp.

Horner, Jack. How to Build a Dinosaur: extinction doesn't have to be forever 567.9 H816h
A pioneering paleontologist and T. rex expert evaluates the potential for artificially growing a real dinosaur without ancient DNA, discussing the principles of the new science of evolutionary development; the relationships between dinosaurs and birds; and how it may be possible to stimulate latent Tyrannosaurus rex genes in a chicken to create a "chickenosaurus."

Jacobs, A. J. The Guinea Pig Diaries: my life as an experiment 814 J17
The author of The Know-it-all and The Year of Living Biblically gives us a look at all crazy experiments he does in order to write amusing articles for Esquire. In one episode, Jacobs decides to outsource his life by hiring two firms out of India. In another, Jacobs decides he will be absolutely honest for an entire month, but not just by speaking the truth, but also by telling people his thoughts no matter how offensive.

Kamkwamba, William. The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: creating currents of electricity and hope B K156
A true story of tenacity and imagination describes how an African teenager built a windmill from scraps to create electricity for his home and his village, improving life for himself and his neighbors.

Kidder, Tracy. Strength in What Remains: a journey of remembrance and forgiveness. B N736k
Presents the story of Burundi civil war survivor Deo, who endures homelessness before pursuing an education at Columbia and eventually returning to his native land to help people in both countries.

Krakauer, Jon. Where Men Win Glory: the odyssey of Pat Tillman B T577k
Traces the controversial story of NFL player and soldier Pat Tillman, describing the military's efforts to hide the truth about his death by friendly fire, in an account that draws on Tillman's journals and letters as well as interviews with family members and fellow soldiers.

Scotti, R.A. Vanished Smile: the mysterious theft of Mona Lisa 759.5 L58sc
Part love story, part mystery, Vanished Smile reopens the case of the most audacious and perplexing art theft ever committed--the theft of Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" from the Paris Louvre on August 21, 1911.

Small, David. Stitches: a memoir Graphic Novel B Sm63s

The author recounts in graphic novel format his troubled childhood with a radiologist father who subjected him to repeated x-rays and a withholding and tormented mother, an environment he fled at the age of sixteen in the hopes of becoming an artist.

Stanton, Doug. Horse Soldiers: the extraordinary story of a band of US soliders who rode to victory in Afganistan.
958.1047 St79
Describes the secret mission of a small band of U.S. soldiers who battled against Taliban forces on horseback and captured the Afghan city of Maz'ar-i Shar'if, a critical location for further campaigns.

Teachout, Terry. Pops: a life of Louis Armstrong 781.57 Ar73t
Draws on previously unavailable sources, including hundreds of private recordings made throughout the second half of the jazz master's life, to assess his artistic achievements and personal life.

Wolffe, Richard. Renegade: the making of a president 973.932 W858
Presents an insider's view of Barack Obama's run for the presidency, describing his many personal and professional triumphs and obstacles he encountered on the campaign trail and his eventual election as the nation's forty-fourth president.

Wood, Gordon S. Empire of Liberty: a history of the early Republic, 1789-1815 973.4 W875
One of America's most esteemed historians, Gordon S. Wood, offers a brilliant account of the early American Republic, ranging from 1789 and the beginning of the national government to the end of the War of 1812. As Wood reveals, the period was marked by tumultuous change in all aspects of American life--in politics, society, economy, and culture.

Wrangham, Richard W. Catching Fire: how cooking made us human 394.12 W941Harvard biological anthropologist Wrangham dates the breakthrough in human evolution to a moment 1.8 million years ago, when, he conjectures, our forebears tamed fire and began cooking. Starting with Homo erectus, these innovations drove anatomical and physiological changes that make us adapted to eating cooked food the way cows are adapted to eating grass. Wrangham's accessible treatise ranges across nutritional science, paleontology and studies of ape behavior and hunter-gatherer societies; the result is a profound analysis of cooking's role in daily life and evolution.

RA staff
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