

Recommended books 2007

Fiction

Abu-Jaber, Diana. [Origin](#) (Mys)

Lena is a fingerprint analyst with a crime lab in Syracuse, New York. When she discovers a connection between several recent infant deaths, she is sure it's murder and sets out to solve it. At the same time, she's also researching her early childhood before she was placed into the foster home where she grew up. Evocative setting and interesting tandem mysteries make this one a winner.

Brooks, Terry. [The Elves of Cintra](#) (SF)

Second in the Genesis of Shannara trilogy, Brooks keeps his readers on the edge of their seats. In the near future, there are no governments and people either live in fortresses or roam the wilderness. Among the survivors are a select few who have magic powers and whose purpose is to shape the destiny of the world and save it from evil. For fantasy (Tolkien especially) lovers, start this trilogy off with *Armageddon's Children*.

Ferris, Joshua. [Then We Came to the End](#)

In Ferris's humorous debut novel, a Chicago ad agency is in its final agonizing days and layoffs must begin. The anxious employees are each trying to cope with changes, trying to prove their worth, and stressing over the mundane up until the very end. Ferris captures the idiosyncrasies of each employee and brilliantly displays their group dynamic.

Gibson, William. [Spook Country](#)

Gibson is difficult to pin down. He's a writer of thrillers, a writer of science fiction, and this latest has some of each. Hollis is a writer hired by a magazine that does not yet exist. Her task is to write an article on an art form that exists only virtually and that brings her all sorts of trouble as her investigation starts to make others nervous. Interesting characters and an engrossing story will keep you turning the pages.

Hamid, Moshin. [The Reluctant Fundamentalist](#)

A Pakistani man, named Changez, sits at a café in Lahore with an unnamed American. Changez tells the American his life story, including details of his childhood in Pakistan, his days as a student in the U.S., his subsequent prosperity as a businessman, and then of his ultimate

decision to abandon his American ways. This is a powerful novel told skillfully.

Hill, Joe. *Heart Shaped Box*

When a retired rocker with more money than sense buys a ghost from an online auction site, there's bound to be trouble. Hill's debut novel has its terrifying moments including a car chase with a ghost behind the wheel. Not for the faint-hearted, this horror novel by the son of Stephen King will have you hiding under the covers and thinking twice before submitting your next online bid.

Horan, Nancy. *Loving Frank*

In 1903, Mamah Borthwick Cheney and her husband commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design a house for them. During construction, Mamah and Wright became attracted to each other and embarked on a scandalous affair. Nancy Horan has taken the facts and woven them into a beautifully detailed historical novel focusing on the unusual path Mamah chose for her life.

Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Author of *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini's newest novel again focuses on Afghanistan. This time, the story unfolds over decades during the Soviet jihad, the civil war, and during the days of the Taliban focusing on the women of Afghanistan. Mariam and Laila are years apart in age and unlikely to ever become friends, but are bound together by their marriage to the same man. Because of his brutality, they are drawn together as a means of survival. This is a difficult story to read, but a memorable one.

Kyle, Aryn. *The God of Animals*

In this coming-of-age story, Alice Winston has to help her rancher father with everything. Her older sister has run off with a cowboy, her mother is in a deep depression and does not leave her room. There's no money for family needs and not enough hands to run the ranch properly. When her father begins to board "rich women's horses" to help make ends meet, everything changes on the ranch. The horses are not always treated humanely, but neither are the people connected to the ranch. It's a haunting story you won't soon forget.

Kagen, Lesley. *Whistling in the Dark*

Ten year old Sally O'Malley's mother is in the hospital, her stepfather is on a bender, and her older sister is too interested in her boyfriend to watch Sally and her younger sister Troo. This might have worked out in the 1950's working class neighborhood in Milwaukee where everyone knew each other and kept an eye on each other's kids. Unfortunately, there's a child killer on the loose and Sally believes she knows who it is. This is an engaging story featuring a charming protagonist.

Lippman, Laura. *What the Dead Know* (Mys)

Riveting stand-alone mystery from the author of the popular Tess Monaghan series. A woman who fled the scene of a car accident is questioned at the hospital by medical personnel and the police. Carrying no ID, she refuses to tell them her name, instead hinting that she's one of a pair of sisters who have been missing since they were teens. She knows enough details to keep them interested, but not enough to allow them to entirely believe her story. Lippman's plot-driven mystery is a page-turner.

McEwan, Ian. *On Chesil Beach*

A young couple embarks on marriage with differing levels of anxiety and knowledge about what will take place on the wedding night. She suffers from extreme apprehension, having held her husband off throughout the courtship out of dread. He is in turns eager and fretful; leading to an incident that forever colors their relationship. This novella offers a fascinating and sensitive study of a marriage in its infancy

Olmstead, Robert. Coal Black Horse

At age 14, Robey Childs leaves the family farm in search of his father, who is one of the soldiers in the Battle of Gettysburg. Along the way, he borrows a beautiful horse who becomes his companion as he becomes witness then victim to the atrocities of war. In this brief novel (just over 200 pages), Olmstead tells a straightforward story in which is buried a myriad of meaning.

Packer, Anne. Songs Without Words

Packer, author of *The Dive from Clausen's Pier*, returns with a second novel about women's friendships. Sarabeth and Liz grow up as neighbors and become best friends when Sarabeth's mother commits suicide when the girls are sixteen years old. Their friendship remains constant through decades, but when Liz's daughter reaches her teen years, circumstances force the women to take a fresh look at each other and their friendship. Beautiful character development and intriguing story put this one on the list.

Non-Fiction

Atkinson, Rick. The Day of Battle: the war in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944 (940.54215 AT87)

Second volume in a World War II trilogy (Pulitzer prize winning *An Army at Dawn* is volume 1), Atkinson follows American and British forces as they land in Sicily and fight their way north to Rome. Atkinson is painstakingly detailed and thorough in his research while keeping his books readable.

Beah, Ishmael. A Long Way Gone: memoirs of a boy soldier (B B365)

Beah details his life as a child soldier in Sierra Leone. He's taught to handle an AK-47 and given drugs to dull his emotions. Trained to be a ruthless killer, Beah nonetheless manages to survive and recover his humanity. This one is difficult, but important to read.

Bergreen, Laurence. Marco Polo: from Venice to Xanada (915 P76be)

Author of *Over the Edge of the World: Magellan's terrifying circumnavigation of the globe* shifts his focus to an earlier adventurer. Polo was 17 when he first set out on his journey to Asia with his uncle and his father. Later, while imprisoned, he wrote an account of the trip. Bergreen uses the various translations of this account and his own experiences traveling the same route to flesh out this captivating travelogue.

Danticat, Edwidge. Brother I'm Dying (B D193)

Novelist Danticat (*The Dew Breaker*) tells her family's story. At age 2, her father leaves Haiti for the United States. Her mother soon follows, leaving Danticat with her father's brother until she can be reunited with her parent 8 years later in the U.S. Danticat considers her uncle a second father, and is distressed when she must leave him behind to go to people she barely remembers. Along with the story of her early years with her families, Danticat also tells the tragic story of her father's final days.

Gilbert, Elizabeth. Eat, Pray, Love (910.4 G464)

More than a travelogue, Gilbert's book is a spiritual journey born of desperation. After years of severe depression and a failed marriage, Gilbert embarks on a year of travel. Her plan is to spend four months in Italy reveling in the food and culture and doing as she pleases. The next four months she plans to spend in India, and part of this time will be living in an ashram learning to meditate. The final part of her journey will be spent in Bali, where she hopes a medicine man will show her how to balance pleasure and spirituality. There are plenty of surprises along the way and Gilbert captures the right details to let you feel as if you're along on her journey.

Isaacson, Walter. Einstein: his life and universe (B Ei35i)

If you've read his biography of Benjamin Franklin or Henry Kissinger, you know that Isaacson brings his subjects to life, flaws and all. Isaacson studied the previously sealed personal correspondence of Einstein in preparation for this book and paints a portrait of Einstein unlike those by his other biographers. Isaacson's portrayal is generally positive, while acknowledging Einstein's foibles including several mistresses, illegitimate children, and a general and pervasive disregard for his family's feelings. Isaacson might have dwelled more on Einstein's actual work, focusing on the math and theory, but instead focuses on Einstein's humanity keeping this biography interesting and accessible.

Kingsolver, Barbara. Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: a year of food life (641 K55)

Kingsolver takes on the challenge of living for a year on home- or locally-grown food. She discusses the importance of eating what's available to us to save energy, as well as for economic and nutritional reasons. It's an interesting and sometimes humorous look at how we eat and how we might eat better.

Kurson, Robert. Crashing Through: a true story of risk, adventure, and the man who dared to see (B M467k)

Mike May lost his sight in early childhood. This didn't prevent him from doing the things he enjoyed including setting downhill ski speed records. He was a husband, a parent, and a successful businessman when a doctor offered him a chance to see again. This is the story of Kurson's life with and without sight and the tough decisions he faced when an amazing opportunity presented itself. Kurson, author of *Shadow Divers*, presents scientific and medical information about sight that adds an interesting element to this story.

Mortenson, Greg. Three Cups of Tea: one man's mission to fight terrorism and build nations--one school at a time (371.822 M887)

When Mortenson attempted to climb K2 and failed, he was rescued and sheltered by Pakistanis in a remote village. In return for their assistance, Mortenson promised to build a school for them. He kept his promise and within a dozen years, Mortenson's Central Asia Institute built more than 50 schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan despite starting penniless and facing the hostility of warlords and extremists.

Tammet, Daniel. Born on a Blue Day: inside the extraordinary mind of an autistic savant: a memoir (B T158)

Tammet is a genius. His mathematical aptitude and ability to picture complex ideas and equations as symbols have made him a subject of scientific study. But this is more than the story of a whiz kid. This is also the story of a child growing up in a world where he is different from

others and knows he will remain so. Tammet's autobiography offers a rare look into an intriguing mind.

Toobin, Jeffrey. The Nine: inside the secret world of the Supreme Court (347.7326 T668)
Former assistant U.S. attorney in Brooklyn and legal analyst Toobin presents a detailed look at the Supreme Court including profiles of each Justice and stories behind important decisions.

Weiner, Tim. Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA (327.1273 W423)
Weiner is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who has taken on the study of recently declassified documents in an effort to piece together a comprehensive picture of the CIA. What he exposes is an abysmal record and an important history for us not to repeat

Weisman, Alan. The World Without Us (304.2 W428)
Weisman interviews a variety of scientists and puts together a timeline of what would happen to the earth should humans suddenly disappear. He takes an interesting approach, showing us step by step as the forests reclaim the suburbs and the subways collapse. He also shows us what human traces will endure. His entertaining style and fact-filled narrative will keep you turning the pages

RA staff
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