

Nonfiction Too Good to Miss

[Assembling California](#)

by McPhee, John

Drawing on his travels along the fault lines of the earth's shifting plates, the author discusses how a half dozen large pieces of country have drifted from far and near to coalesce as California.

[The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession](#)

by Obmascik, Mark

Three competitors are tracked through their "Big Year," one of the biggest events in birding in which the contestant who spots the most species of birds in one year is the winner.

[The Botany of Desire](#)

by Pollan, Michael

Focusing on the human relationship with plants, the author uses botany to explore four basic human desires - sweetness, beauty, intoxication, and control - through portraits of four plants that embody them: the apple, tulip, marijuana, and potato.

[A Brief History of Time](#)

by Hawking, S. W.

Professor Hawking shares his blazing intellect with nonscientists everywhere, guiding us expertly to confront the supreme questions of the nature of time and the universe. From Galileo and Newton to modern astrophysics, from the breathtakingly vast to the extraordinarily tiny, Professor Hawking leads us on an exhilarating journey to distant galaxies, black holes, alternate dimensions--as close as man has ever ventured to the mind of God.

[Cadillac Desert: The American West and its Disappearing Water](#)

by Reisner, Marc

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The story of the American West is the story of a relentless quest for a precious resource: water. This is the story of the early settlers, lured by promises of paradise. The author documents the rivalry between government giants and other institutions, in the competition to transform the West, and projects on the future problems of limited groundwater reserves, silting up of reservoirs, and contamination of soil.

[In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences](#)

by Capote, Truman

Dramatically reconstructs the investigation and trial that followed the meaningless murder of a Kansas farm family by two ex-convict drifters.

[The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics](#)

by Zukav, Gary

The history and concepts of physics, including quantum mechanics and relativity theory, are viewed within the framework of Eastern thought to unravel the mysteries of the physical universe.

[Democracy in America](#)

by Alexis, de Tocqueville

Tocqueville's monumental book is as relevant today as when it was first published in the mid-nineteenth century, and it remains the most comprehensive, penetrating, and astute picture of American life, politics, and morals ever written - whether by an American or, as in this case, a foreign visitor.

[Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America](#)

by Larson, Erik

A rich narrative of a master builder, a killer, and the 1893 Chicago Worlds Fair that obsessed them both.

[The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition](#)

by Alexander, Caroline

Chronicles the perilous 1914-1915 expedition of Sir Ernest Shackleton in Antarctica, when he and his crew became stranded in the frozen Weddell Sea and faced a twenty-month struggle for survival.

[Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything](#)

by Dubner, Stephen J. and Levitt, Steven D.

An economist and a journalist begin with a mountain of data and a simple question. Some of these questions concern life-and-death issues; others are rather freakish. These questions have the capability of redefining the way we view the modern world.

[Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution and How it Can Renew America](#)

by Friedman, Thomas L.

A fresh outlook to the crises of destabilizing climate change and rising competition for energy. <div class="clear"></div>

[Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster](#)

by Krakauer, Jon

Krakauer's book is at once the story of an ill-fated Everest adventure and an analysis of the factors leading up to its tragic end. Through the story, the triumphs and perils of other Everest trips throughout history are recalled.

[Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History](#)

by Cline, Isaac Monroe and Larson, Erik

Based on the diaries of scientist Isaac Monroe Cline and on contemporary accounts of the 1900 hurricane that struck Galveston, Texas, this is the story of what can happen when human arrogance

meets the great uncontrollable force of nature.

[Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of his Time](#)

by Sobel, Dava

The dramatic human story of an epic scientific quest and of John Harrison's 40-year obsession with building the perfect timekeeper, known today as the chronometer, the clock that enabled sailors to measure longitude, saving lives and fortunes.

[The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11](#)

by Wright, Lawrence

Winner of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction, this is a gripping narrative that spans five decades, explaining in detail the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, the rise of al-Qaeda, and the intelligence failures that culminated in the attacks on the World Trade Center.

[The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals](#)

by Pollan, Michael

Pollan writes about the ecology of the food humans eat and why--what it is, in fact, that we are eating. Discussing industrial farming, organic food, and what it is like to hunt and gather food, this is a surprisingly honest and self-aware account of the evolution of the modern diet.

[The Orchid Thief](#)

by Orlean, Susan

This is a tale of obsessed orchid enthusiasts, explorers, smugglers, big-spenders, and other characters driven by the passion to see or possess rare species.

[The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea](#)

by Junger, Sebastian

A book taut with the fury of the elements which depicts the courage, terror, and awe which the men of the fishing vessel "Andrea Gail" faced as they were caught in the grip of a savage force of nature.

[The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary](#)

by Winchester, Simon

The compilation of the OED, begun in 1857, was one of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken. As definitions were collected, the overseeing committee, led by Professor James Murray, discovered that one man, Dr. W.C. Minor, had submitted more than ten thousand. When the committee insisted on honoring him, a shocking truth came to light: Dr. Minor, an American Civil War veteran, was also an inmate at an asylum for the criminally insane.

[Rabid : a cultural history of the world's most diabolical virus](#)

by Wasik, Bill

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A haunting yet interesting chronicle of the history, science, and mythology of rabies. The authors trace

how rabies, a disease that warps the mind before a certain death, has inspired the myths of monsters, including werewolves, vampires and zombies.

[Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books](#)

by Nafisi, Azar

The author describes growing up in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the group of young women who came together at her home in secret every Thursday to read and discuss great books of Western literature.

[Seabiscuit: An American Legend](#)

by Hillenbrand, Laura

The spellbinding story of the racehorse Seabiscuit in a riveting tale of grit, grace, luck, and an underdog's stubborn determination.

[Shanghai Diary: A Young Girl's Journey from Hitler's Hate to War-Torn China](#)

by Bacon, Ursula

Eleven year old Ursula Bacon and her family travel 8,000 miles to Shanghai from Germany to escape the looming war and Hitler's "Final Solution." In a Shanghai ghetto, Ursula finds both adventure and hardship.

[Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers](#)

by Roach, Mary

A fascinating, sometimes gruesome, and sometimes hilarious look at what happens to human bodies after death.

[There is No Me Without You](#)

by Greene, Melissa Fay

A thorough and entirely readable account of AIDS in Africa, the millions of children who will be orphaned by the disease, and one woman who is changing the fates of these children. Greene tells a heartbreaking and intimate story of orphans in Ethiopia, and the happy endings some of them find.

[Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace One School at a Time](#)

by Mortenson, Greg

In 1993 Greg Mortenson was an American mountain-climbing bum wandering emaciated and lost through Pakistan's Karakoram. After he was taken in and nursed back to health by the people of a Pakistani village, he promised to return one day and build them a school. From that rash, earnest promise grew one of the most incredible humanitarian campaigns of our time.

[Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West](#)

by Ambrose, Stephen E.

A chronicle of the two-and-a-half year journey of Lewis and Clark covers their incredible hardships, first encounters with Native Americans, the contributions of Sacajawea, and Lewis' post-journey

depression.

[Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith](#)

by Krakauer, Jon

This meticulously researched book tells the story of an appalling double murder committed by a pair of Mormon Fundamentalist brothers who insist they received a revelation from God commanding them to kill their blameless victims.

[The World Without Us](#)

by Weisman, Alan

Drawing on the expertise of engineers, atmospheric scientists, art conservators, zoologists, oil refiners, marine biologists, astrophysicists, religious leaders from rabbis to the Dalai Lama, and paleontologists - who describe a prehuman world inhabited by megafauna like giant sloths that stood taller than mammoths - Weisman illustrates what the planet might be like today, if not for us.