

Recommended Books by Theme/Location

E= Easy and/or short

M=Moderate difficulty

D= Difficult and/or long

! NY Times Best Book of 2004

* SF Chronicle Best Book of 2004

War

April Fool's Day by Josip Novakovich 240 p. (M) A harrowing, deeply funny novel set in Balkan wars and prisons. Ivan Dolinar is a man caught in the cross-currents of senseless wars, ridiculous dictators, and the usual and unusual difficulties of just trying to get by in the Balkans.

! War Trash by Ha Jin (M) 368 pp. Jin applies his stripped-bare storytelling to the violence and horrifying political uncertainty of the Korean War in this brave, complex and politically timely work, the story of a reluctant soldier trying to survive a POW camp and reunite with his family.

Flyboys by James Bradley (M) An account of eight American airmen who were shot down and captured by the Japanese in WWII.

When the Elephants Dance by Tess Hulthe (D)

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay by Michael Chabon (D)

Kitchen God's Wife by Amy Tan (M)

Imagining Argentina by Lawrence Thornton (M-D)

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (M)

In Pharaoh's Army by Tobias Wolf (M)

Fallen Angels by Walter Dean Meyers (E)

When the Rainbow Goddess Wept by Cecilia Brainard (M)

Don't Lets Go to the Dogs Tonight and Scribbling the Cat by Alexandra Fuller (M)

Stones From the River by Ursula Hegi (M)

Parvana's Journey & Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis (E)

Rumors of Peace by Ella Leffland (E-M)

In Country by Bobbi Ann Mason (E)

The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of WWII by Iris Chang (M-D)

Hiroshima by John Hersey (M)

From Beirut to Jerusalem by Thomas Friedman (D)

Balkan Ghosts by Robert Kaplan (D)

Adventure

Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded by Simon Winchester 432 p. (D) The story of the volcanic explosion that killed nearly 40,000 people. It caused temperatures to plummet, and its tsunami could be felt in France. The eruption helped trigger a wave of anti-Western violence.

Skeletons on the Zahara: A True Story of Survival by Dean King 353 p. (M) non-fiction; true story of a merchant shipman and crew who are shipwrecked off the coast of Africa & survive slavery and a trek across the Sahara where they meet various desert tribes.

Cook: The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain James Cook by Nicholas Thomas 464 p. (M-D)

Over the Edge of the World: Magellan's Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe by Laurence Bergreen 416 p. (M) NF A superb real-life thriller about the voyagers who sailed west from Spain in 1519 and returned in 1522, having lost Magellan and 200 of 260 crew members.

Flyboys by James Bradley An account of eight American airmen who were shot down and captured by the Japanese in WWII.

* The Last Crossing by Guy Vanderhaeghe 391 p. A tale of British brothers sent to 19th century North America to find their missing sibling--epic, mythical, and humorous.

* Dark Voyage by Alan Furst 256 p. Intelligent thriller includes intrigue, espionage, longing and desperation on a Dutch steamer ship during WW2.

The Snow Fox by Susan Fromberg Schaeffer 438 p. (M) F A tale of a powerful, manipulative woman in feudal Japan.

Memoir

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi 153 p. (E-M) see *Middle East*

Waiting for Snow in Havana by Carlos Eire (M) NF see *Latin America*

Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution by Ji-li Jiang (M)

Don't Lets Go to the Dogs Tonight by Alexandra Fuller (M) see *Africa*

* Around the Bloc: My Life in Moscow, Beijing, and Havana by Stephanie Griest 288 p. An extremely readable memoir about visiting three communist countries that educates as well as entertains.

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (M) see *War*

In Pharaoh's Army by Tobias Wolf (M) see *War*

Revolution

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi 153 p. (E-M) see *Middle East*

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress by Dai Siji 192 p. (E) *F* This novella tracks the lives of two teenage boys, childhood friends and sons of doctors, who have been sent to a small Chinese village for "re-education" during the Cultural Revolution in China.

*! Dancing With Cuba by Alma Guillermoprieto 290 p. (M) Poignant description of everyday life under Castro
Waiting by Ha Jin A Romeo and Juliet style love story set during the Cultural Revolution of China. Winner of the National Book Award.

The Good Earth by Pearl Buck (M) The Pulitzer-Prize winning classic story of the origins of the Chinese Revolution.

Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution by Ji-li Jiang (M)

Wild Swans by Jung Chang (M-D)

Loving Che by Ana Menendez (M) 229 p.

Religion

Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver (D)

The Red Tent by Anita Diamant (M)

Princess, Sultana's Daughters by Jean Sasson (E-M)

Rain of Gold by Victor Villasenor (M-D)

Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling by Ross King (M) 304 p.

Indigenous & Threatened Cultures

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down by Anne Fadiman (M-D)

Savages by Joe Kane (M-D)

Time Among the Maya by Ronald Wright (M-D)

Bury Me Standing by Isabel Fonseca (M-D)

Genocide

Imagining Argentina by Lawrence Thornton (M-D)

We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families by Phillip Gourevitch (D)

The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of WWII by Iris Chang (M-D)

Bury Me Standing by Isabel Fonseca (M-D)

King Leopold's Ghost by Adam Hochschild (M-D)

Stones From the River by Ursula Hegi (M)

First They Killed My Father by Loung Ung (M)

When Broken Glass Floats by Chanrithy Him (M)

Biography & Autobiography

Cook: The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain James Cook by Nicholas Thomas (M-D)
Samurai William: The Englishman Who Opened Japan by Giles Milton (D) Story of the Englishman who inspired James Clavell's *Shogun*
My Traitor's Heart by Rian Malan (M-D)
Falling Leaves by Adeline Yen Mah (M)
Angela's Ashes by Frank McCourt (M)
Kaffir Boy by Mark Mathabane (M)
Princess, Sultana's Daughters both by Jean Sasson (E-M)
First They Killed My Father by Loung Ung (M)

Africa

The Spider's House by Paul Bowles 424 p. (M) F This novel explores the conflict between the French and Arabs in Morocco; the story reads for stretches like a first-class political thriller.
* GraceLand by Chris Abani 321 p. A vivid, original portrayal of life in Lagos, Nigeria. Abani's intensely visual style and sense of humor convert the stuff of hopelessness into the stuff of hope.
Skeletons on the Zahara: A True Story of Survival by Dean King 353 p. (M) non-fiction; true story of a merchant shipman and crew who are shipwrecked off the coast of Africa & survive slavery and a trek across the Sahara where they meet various desert tribes.
Don't Lets Go to the Dogs Tonight by Alexandra Fuller (M)
Black Hawk Down by Mark Bowden (M)
Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver (D)
We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families by Phillip Gourevitch (D)
King Leopold's Ghost by Adam Hochschild (M-D)
Kaffir Boy by Mark Mathabane (M)
My Traitor's Heart by Rian Malan (M-D)
Middle Passage by Charles Johnson (M)
Power of One by Bryce Courtenay (E-M)

Asia

Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini 368 p. Saga of boyhood friends separated by Afghanistan's tragic upheavals, one landing over the border in Pakistan, the other overseas in Fremont.
The Crazed by Ha Jin (M) about the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre
When the Elephants Dance by Tess Hulthe (D)
The Snow Fox by Susan Fromberg Schaeffer 438 p. (M) F see Adventure
When the Rainbow Goddess Wept by Cecilia Brainard (M)
When Broken Glass Floats by Chanrithy Him (M)
A Step From Heaven by An Na (E)
Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden (M)
The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy (D)
First They Killed My Father by Loung Ung (M)
Imperium--Ryszard Kapuscinski (M-D)
Noble House, Shogun, King Rat, Taipan, or Gai-Jin all by James Clavell (M-D)
The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston (M)
Parvana's Journey & Breadwinner both by Deborah Ellis (E)
Falling Leaves by Adeline Yen Mah (M)
The Great Game by Peter Hopkins (D)
China Boy by Gus Lee (E)
Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution by Ji-li Jiang (E)
Sister of My Heart and Mistress of Spices by Chitra Divakaruni (M)
Donald Duk by Frank Chin (M)

Dragonwings by Laurence Yep (E)
No-No Boy by Okada (E)
Black Rain by Masuji Ibuse (M)
Children of the River by Linda Crew (E)
Bride Price by Buchi Emecheta (M)
Picture Bride by Yoshiko Uchida (E)

Latin America

Waiting for Snow in Havana by Carlos Eire (M) NF A memoir of a childhood by a scholar who was 11 years old in 1962 when he was airlifted out of Cuba along with 14,000 other children.
Imagining Argentina by Lawrence Thornton (M-D)
!* Dancing With Cuba by Alma Guillermoprieto 290 p. (M) see Revolution
Loving Che by Ana Menendez (M) 229 p
Krik?Krak! and Breath, Eyes, and Memory both by Edwige Danticat (E-M)
Rain of Gold by Victor Villasenor (M-D)
Dreaming in Cuban by Cristina Garcia (M)
Aztec by Gary Jennings (M)

Europe

* Birth of the Chess Queen: A History by Marilyn Yalom 304p. M NF A history of the most powerful chess piece and how it mirrors the rise of women's status in Medieval European.
The Princess of Ireland by Edward Rutherford 800 p. D History of Dublin
* The Last Crossing by Guy Vanderhaeghe 391 p. A tale of British brothers sent to 19th century North America to find their missing sibling--epic, mythical, and humorous
Galileo's Daughter by Dava Sobel (M)
April Fool's Day see *War*
Pompeii by Robert Harris (M)
Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling by Ross King (M) 304
The Girl with the Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier (E-M)
How Green Was My Valley by Richard Llewellyn (M-D)
Angela's Ashes by Frank McCourt (M)
Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway (M-D)
Stones From the River by Ursula Hegi (M)
Painted Bird by Jerry Kosinski (E)
Birdsong by Sebastian Faulks (M-D)
King Leopold's Ghost by Adam Hochschild (M-D)
Hitler's Willing Executioners by Daniel Goldhagen (M-D)
The Bridge Over the Drina and Bosnian Chronicle, both by Ivo Andric (D)
Balkan Ghosts by Ropert Kaplan (D)

Middle East

* Occidentalism: the West in the Eyes of Its Enemies by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit 160 p. (M) The authors manage to explain who the terrorists are and what they hate about us in under 200 pages.
Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi 153 p. (E-M) A wonderful memoir of the first fourteen years of the author's life growing up during the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Told with comic-strips.
The Spider's House by Paul Bowles 424 p. (M) F see Africa
Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini 368 p. Saga of boyhood friends separated by Afghanistan's tragic upheavals, one landing over the border in Pakistan, the other overseas in Fremont.
Princess, Sultana's Daughters by Jean Sasson (E-M)
The Red Tent by Anita Diamant (M)
From Beirut to Jerusalem by Thomas Friedman (D)

Other

* 1968 by Mark Kurlansky (M)

Guns, Germs, and Steel by Jared Diamond (D)