

### ***The Sea Came In At Midnight***

Steve Erickson is a visionary novelist whose time has come. Considered by many to be the secret heir to Pynchon and DeLillo, he has steadily acquired a passionate following of readers over the course of five previous novels. Now, with *The Sea Came at Midnight*, Erickson delivers a masterwork of intense feeling, scope and power--an intimate epic of late twentieth-century civilization in free fall, an unforgettable young woman's revelation amid the ruins.

In the final seconds of the old millennium, 1,999 women and children march off the edge of a cliff in Northern California, urged on by a cult of silent men in white robes. Kristin was meant to be the two-thousandth to fall. But when at the last moment she flees, she exchanges one dark destiny for a future that will unravel the present.

Answering a cryptic personals ad for a woman "at the end of her rope," Kristin finds temporary haven in the Hollywood Hills with an older, unnamed man as obsessed as he is spiritually ravaged. In a locked room at the bottom of his house, he labors over his life's work: a massive blue calendar the size of a tsunami that measures modern time by the events of chaos and pinpoints the true beginning of the new millennium as not midnight December 31, 1999, but the early hours of one May morning in 1968. This calendar is shot through with the threads of other lives--those searching for a small measure of redemption and an answer to the question, "What's missing from the world?"

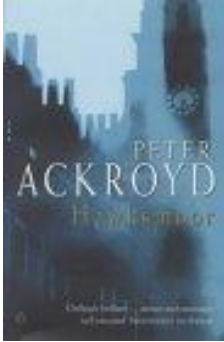
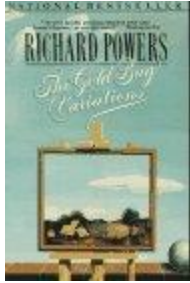

From a ritual sacrifice in the name of salvation to a ritual sacrifice in the name of pleasure, from an ancient haunted Celtic tower in Brittany to the revolving memory hotels of Tokyo, from a cinematic hoax in Manhattan that costs five women their lives to a mysterious bloodstained set of coordinates tacked to the wall of an abandoned San Francisco penthouse, *The Sea Came at Midnight* is a breathtaking literary dance of fate and coincidence. And, unknown even to her, at the center of that dance is the seventeen year-old. (Back cover copy – Harpercollins)



This is a reading path for Greg Stahl, a friend of mine who loved this book. Greg is a

huge fan of postmodern metafiction, which I have chosen as an umbrella path over a subsequent breaking-down of several postmodern elements of this novel in particular. This novel is highly surreal, and plays with time, place, and memory. There is an emphasis on the flexibility of the narrative as it shifts between locations in time and place and there is a dreamlike quality that creates doubt in the reader about the “reality” of certain events. It is highly atmospheric, and conjures up a real feeling of millennial tension, and what it means to be a society on the cusp of this uncertainty. The cult element, although minor, I felt was useful to explore, and although this story takes place in a variety of locations throughout the world, most of the “present-day” action takes place in Los Angeles, and I would argue that the spirit of Los Angeles pervades the narrative and makes for some of the most memorable descriptive passages. There is also an emphasis on alternate but connected worlds in a metaphysical, not science-fictional, sense. There will be some overlap between titles: *Infinite Jest* is both a general postmodern title, and a multi-thread narrative, but I tried to choose the most appropriate book for each element explored.

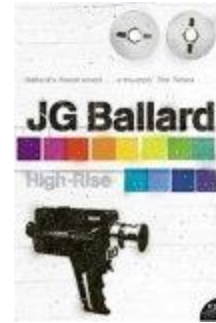
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sprawling postmodern epics</b></p> <p><i>The Royal Family</i> – William Vollmann (2000)</p> <p><i>The Tunnel</i> – William Gass (1995)</p> <p><i>Infinite Jest</i> – David Foster Wallace (1996)</p> <p><i>Gravity's Rainbow</i> – Thomas Pynchon (1973)</p> <p><i>The Diviners</i> – Rick Moody (2005)</p>	 
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Temporal Distortion/Disjunctive Time:</b></p> <p><i>The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle</i> - Haruki Murakami (1992)</p> <p><i>The Lost Scrapbook/Easy Chain</i> – Evan Dara (1995, 2008)</p>	

<p><i>Slaughterhouse Five</i> – Kurt Vonnegut (1969)</p> <p><i>Arcadia</i> – Tom Stoppard (1993)</p> <p><i>Hawksmoor</i> – Peter Ackroyd (1985)</p> <p><i>The Garden of Forking Paths</i> – Jorge Luis Borges (1941)</p>	
<p><b>Multi-Thread Narratives:</b></p> <p><i>From the Teeth of Angels</i> – Jonathan Carroll (1994)</p> <p><i>House of Leaves</i> – Mark Z. Danielewski (2000)</p> <p><i>Gold Bug Variations</i> – Richard Powers (1991)</p> <p><i>Magnetic Fields</i> – Ron Loewinsohn (1983)</p> <p><i>John's Wife</i> – Robert Coover (1996)</p> <p><i>Ghostwritten/Cloud Atlas</i> – David Mitchell (1999, 2004)</p>	 
<p><b>Millennial Tone/Impending Apocalypse:</b></p> <p><i>Rapture</i> – Liz Jensen (2009)</p> <p><i>White Noise</i> – Don DeLillo (1985)</p> <p><i>Cat's Cradle</i> – Kurt Vonnegut (1963)</p> <p><i>Valis</i> – Philip K. Dick (1981)</p> <p><i>High-Rise</i> – J.G. Ballard (1975)</p>	

*Inverted World* – Christopher Priest (1974)

*Messiah* – Andrei Codrescu (1999)

*The Millennium Quartet* – Charles L. Grant  
*Symphony* (1997)  
*In The Mood* (1998)  
*Chariot* (1998)  
*Riders in the Sky* (1999)

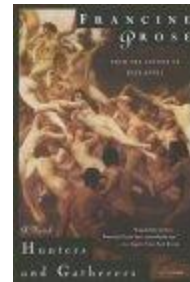


### **Cult Survivors:**

*Survivor* – Chuck Palahniuk (1999)

*Prescription For a Superior Existence* – Josh  
 Emmons (2008)

*Hunters and Gatherers* – Francine Prose (1995)



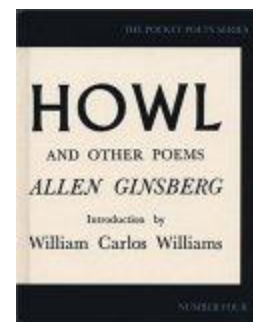
### **American Zeitgeist:**


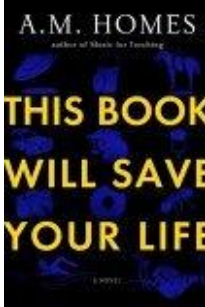
*Howl* – Allen Ginsberg (1956)

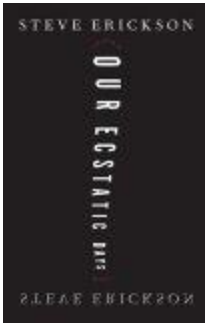
*Leaves of Grass* – Walt Whitman (1854)

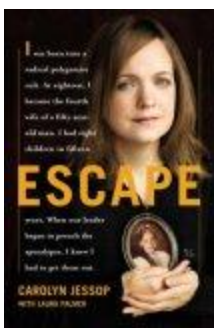
*Underworld* – Don DeLillo (1997)

*The Waste Land* – T.S. Eliot (1922)



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Los Angeles:</b></p> <p><i>The Zoo Where You're Fed To God</i> - Michael Ventura (1994)</p> <p><i>California Gothic</i> – Dennis Etchison (1995)</p> <p><i>This Book Will Save Your Life</i> – A.M. Homes (2006)</p> <p><i>L.A. Confidential</i>– James Ellroy (1990)</p>	 
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<p><b>Sequel and Similar Titles by Steve Erickson:</b></p> <p>Our Ecstatic Days (2005)</p> <p>Amnesiascope (1996)</p> <p>Days Between Stations (1985)</p>	
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Nonfiction:</b></p> <p><i>Escape</i> – Carolyn Jessop (2007)</p>	
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Film:</b></p> <p><i>Julia of the Spirits</i> – Federico Fellini (1965)</p> <p><i>Southland Tales/Donnie Darko</i> – Richard Kelly (2006, 2001)</p>
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*Mulholland Drive/Lost Highway/Inland Empire* – David Lynch (2001, 1997, 2006)

**Resources:**

(2010) Fantastic Fiction. Retrieved April 20, 2010, from <http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk>

(2010) Fiction Connection. Retrieved April 20, 2010, from <http://www.fictionconnection.com>

(2010) Goodreads. Retrieved April 20, 2010, from <http://www.goodreads.com>

(2010) NoveList. Retrieved April 22, 2010, from <http://web.ebscohost.com/novelist/search>