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SEED PICKS

# Seed Picks 2008

by [EDIT STAFF](#) • Posted December 17, 2008 01:25 PM



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## The Numbers Game: The Commonsense Guide to Understanding Numbers in the News, in Politics, and in Life

By Michael Blastland and Andrew Dilnot (Gotham)

Drawing on examples from popular news outlets, Blastland and Dilnot's short, punchy book carefully unravels the ways in which statistics are distorted and misrepresented — often unintentionally — in media coverage of important and controversial issues. The book is a necessary companion for anyone looking to make sense of the percentages, probabilities, averages, and large dollar amounts making headlines on any given day. As the authors explain, "if we are the least bit serious about any of these issues, we should attempt to get the numbers straight."

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## On the Surface of Things: Images of the Extraordinary in Science

By Felice Frankel and George M. Whitesides (Harvard University Press)

In the ten years since Frankel and Whitesides created a stunning new way to envision science, Frankel's images have appeared in over 300 journals. In this reissue, the authors include several new images and fresh digital scans of the old. Yet, they write, the spirit of the original remains. "We chose the subject — surfaces and the light that illuminates them — because they are important in the two great technologies — information and biology — that are now remaking the world." [Buy](#)

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### **Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions**

By Dan Ariely (Harper)

Any economic model based on perfect human rationality is undoubtedly flawed. But that doesn't mean people behave unpredictably. In this exuberant book, behavioral economist Dan Ariely contends that our irrational behavior is wholly consistent, and that we can learn to capitalize on it. Ariely backs up each claim with examples from his own inventive research — subjects include unwitting MIT students and unsuspecting trick-or-treaters — forming an argument as charmingly anecdotal as it is convincing. [Buy](#)

### **Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food**

By Pamela C. Ronald and Raoul W. Adamchak (Oxford University Press)

Genetically-engineered versus organically-grown. It's a choice often framed as being between science and nature, but it's a false one, says this wife-husband team. In a literal marriage of two entrenched camps, Ronald, a plant genomics researcher at UC Davis, and Adamchak, an organic gardener, shed light on the unfounded fears of gene modification and the merits a more-holistic approach to agriculture. Recipes include "Sticky Rice with GE Papaya" and "Isolation of DNA from Organically- Grown Strawberries." [Buy](#)

### **The Stuff of Life: A Graphic Guide to Genetics and DNA**

By Mark Schultz, Illustrated by Zander Cannon and Kevin Cannon (Hill and Wang)

With the graphic novel gaining status as a form of serious storytelling, *The Stuff of Life* makes a case for the graphic-novel textbook. A sentient alien sea sponge professor makes the case for sexual reproduction (and thus genetic diversity) to the leader of its species, and in the process, explains the basics of molecular biology, Mendelian inheritance, and evolution. The illustrations are simultaneously cute and explanatory, and the text's oversimplifications and techno-utopianism are justified for a cartoon treatment of one of most complex stories in science. Check out a Stuff of Life animated lesson [here](#). [Buy](#)

### **The Superorganism: The Beauty, Elegance, and Strangeness of Insect Societies**

By Bert Hölldobler and E.O. Wilson (W.W. Norton)

In this sequel to their 1990 Pulitzer-winning *The Ants*, the authors focus on new research demonstrating that in social insects (bees, termites, wasps, and ants), natural selection works not on individual members but on the colony as a unit. These "superorganisms," according to Hölldobler and Wilson, occupy a distinct — and overlooked — biological niche halfway between an organism and entire species. Sure to rekindle the group-selection debate, this magnum opus on six-legged societies offers a provocative twist to the evolution of complex behavior. [Buy](#)

### **The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature**

By Daniel J. Levitin (Dutton)

Following up on his bestselling *This is Your Brain on Music*, musician and cognitive scientist Levitin argues that we evolved to produce and consume music