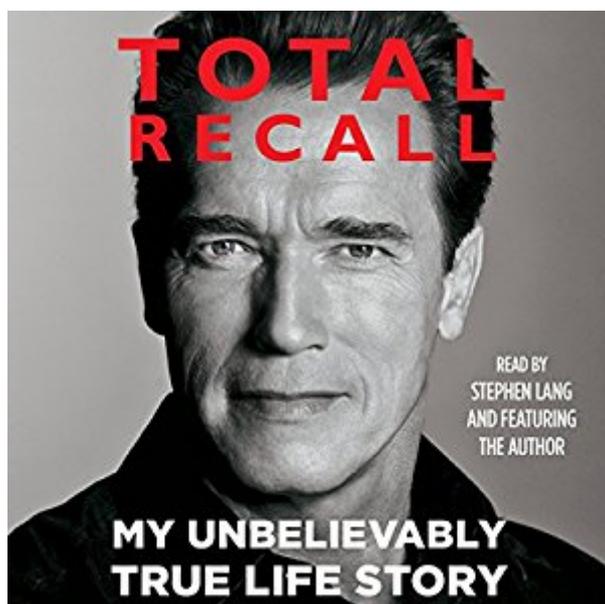


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Total Recall: My Unbelievably True Life Story



Synopsis

One of the most anticipated autobiographies of this generation, Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Total Recall* is the candid story of one of the world's most remarkable actors, businessmen, and world leaders. Born in the small city of Thal, Austria, in 1947, Arnold Schwarzenegger moved to Los Angeles at the age of 21. Within 10 years, he was a millionaire businessman. After 20 years, he was the world's biggest movie star. In 2003, he was elected governor of California and became a household name around the world. Chronicling his embodiment of the American Dream, *Total Recall* covers Schwarzenegger's high-stakes journey to the United States, from creating the international bodybuilding industry out of the sands of Venice Beach, to breathing life into cinema's most iconic characters, and becoming one of the leading political figures of our time. Proud of his accomplishments and honest about his regrets, Schwarzenegger spares nothing in sharing his amazing story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was a big Schwarzenegger fan through my college years, up until the time of the most recent revelations about his relationship with his housekeeper. When I started reading this book last night, I was wondering if Arnold's ego would allow him to own up to his mistakes and, to a large extent, he does and I admire him for it. In many ways, this is the typical immigrant narrative about having a dream and working hard to achieve it. The stories of his early years growing up in post-war Europe stand out on account of what we would consider the abject poverty that he experienced, in a house

with no running water or indoor plumbing. I especially enjoyed his descriptions of his early business efforts, selling ice cream by the lake in the summer and ditching school to panhandle (resulting in a substantial beating when his father found out). Arnold admits the mistakes he made, but he doesn't come across as being terribly repentant. He says he used steroids in his bodybuilding career because people didn't really know their dangers at the time. Later in the book, he details some of his womanizing, but I have the sense that he rationalizes his behavior to a certain extent. He seems sorry to have caused pain to his family but, as with all of his errors, seems almost comfortable in moving on with his life. In some ways, I think this ability to compartmentalize negative experiences and move forward is one of the attributes that makes him so successful. For me, the overriding lesson in this book was that someone with a plan, the ability to analyze experiences and the motivation to work hard can become successful in just about anything he or she seeks to do, in spite of a lack of money or connections. With everyone telling him he'd never make it on account of his accent or his physique, he just powered on. He got his business education and invested his money in distressed real estate, all while working on his training and pursuing a movie career. This book is often funny (see Arnold's brief tank driving career), but always interesting. I'm glad I stayed up all night to read it. I'm not saying Arnie's a great guy, but I understand him better and that's the point of an autobiography from my standpoint.

Schwarzenegger's new book isn't as bad as it could be. This is a decent autobiography, with plenty of memories and anecdotes. Like Arnold himself, the book is warm but so guarded I can't help but wonder what he's leaving out. This is not a racy tell-all. It is a not-bad account of an ambitious (but not remotely self-aware) man who has done a fair amount of interesting things. Arnold's most candid memories come early in the book, with his accounts of childhood in Austria during the early days of the Cold War. He tells of snuggling with his brother and parents in bed during thunderstorms, of their house with no toilet, of being beaten by parents and teachers alike. There is insight into his father's bitterness and the futility of surviving in a country trying to find its footing in the wake of the Third Reich. From a young age, Arnold saw America as a beacon of strength and safety, and bodybuilding as the path to lead him there. He boldly recalls being "absolutely certain" he was special. From a young age, Schwarzenegger was shameless in going after what he wanted: he panhandled money to go to the toy store and movies, went AWOL from the military for a bodybuilding contest, and picked fights for thrills. His concern seems first and foremost about getting caught, and even in hindsight he seems unconcerned as to what this all might say about his character. He unblinkingly describes steroids and women ("one of my girlfriends was a stripper and

the other was a gypsy.") But he's also sure to mention his gratitude for the parental figures who nurtured him along the way. In America, Arnold's cunning and determination bring success at bodybuilding, promotion, and various entrepreneurial endeavors. Some readers will think these parts are funny, like when he learned to lie about his zodiac signs to pick up girls and outwitted a competitor in a bodybuilding competition by working the crowd. When he gets into film and politics, the story becomes more scripted. He's a Republican because he sees this as the embodiment of the American Dream and views Democrats as "too Austrian." He can be genuinely egalitarian -- like openly promoting women in bodybuilding -- but also totally doesn't get it, like his approach to filming a violent scene with a woman. There are lots of conversations with Sargent Shriver and George H.W. Bush (who, he'll have us know, was NOT a "waschlappen" - the Austrian word for "wet dishrag.") He describes mentors including Milton and Rose Friedman, James Earl Jones, Marvin Hier, and Andy Warhol. I'm not a film buff but I was interested in all the moviemaking, especially his work with James Cameron on the Terminator films. He might be at his best with inadvertent observations, like an overheard argument about race between Wilt Chamberlain and Grace Jones. For political fans, the section on his campaign and work as Governor of California are as straightforward as a press release but include a fair amount of detail about the political process. To his credit, he does try to explain why his policies, which can seem inconsistent, align with his goals and ideals. Of course, the object of his affection is Maria Shriver: the savvy, beautiful, energetic woman whose world was "big enough" for him even as she brought him a much-needed dose of common sense. He has only nice things to say about Maria (this also keeps him from being more candid about the Kennedy Family, which is our loss). He compares their marriage to Joe and Rose Kennedy. He recounts all the details of his marriage proposal (at his childhood swimming hole in Austria). His affection gets so heavy-handed it sounds desperate (when their first baby was born, the "nurse showed us how to breastfeed" . . . and: "of course I was in heaven when Eunice or Sarge would come stay with us.") He adores Maria, but he also adores cars, and it's hard not to notice that he describes his first customized Humvee with the same gushing voice he uses for his wife. Although, in fairness, his tenderness toward his young children is undeniable. So we have to assume that this book is intended as some kind of public love letter to beg her forgiveness and try to win her back. When I found myself wondering why Shriver filed for divorce instead of trying to work it out, I realized I couldn't possibly know the whole story - perhaps I had been charmed myself, because he's obviously left out so much. I wouldn't be surprised if even Arnold doesn't understand. I suspect his downfall in marriage had a lot to do with his failure to understand his own carelessness -- what in the Austrian military he called being "catastrophe-prone" -- his ultimate lack of humility, his

concern with getting caught instead of doing the right thing. In the end, the book does have some unwitting insights, although most of them are between the lines. Fans of Schwarzenegger's politics or films will find a lot here to entertain them. For me it was mildly interesting, but in the end this is not a person -- or a book -- I need in my life after I finish the final page.

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