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Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science, by Atul Gawande, Picador, 2003

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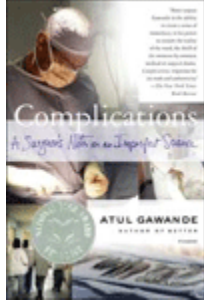
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Recommended Readings



Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science

by Atul Gawande, Picador, 2003

Reviewed by William Johnston

Atul Gawande's *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science* is an extraordinarily interesting non-fiction account. The title says it all-Gawande's thesis promotes the idea that diagnoses and surgical procedures in medical science aren't the clear-cut practices that hospitals and the medical profession often make them out to be. There are three reasons why the book works so well. First, Gawande is a fabulous author- his writing honed by his contributions to the *New Yorker*, he has developed an ability to tell medical stories accurately but with simple beginnings, an increasing sense of drama that increasingly pulls the reader into a full-absorption wonder, and then-bam!-a resolution that leaves you open-mouthed and astounded by the outcome. The stories also come with values-you end up really caring about the people involved, or about the medical procedure, or about whatever issue it is that Gawande sneaks into the mix. Most important, he writes with a refreshing honesty, admitting his own shortcomings. How many Medical Doctors, no matter how accomplished and admirable (and theirs is a venerable profession), do you know who do that? Most people agree that honesty and compassion are two of the most commendable characteristics we humans can uphold. For Gawande, they are part of his very being-his left eye and his right. And they permeate this book throughout. If you want a candid peek into the work of the medical profession and how it can impact your health issues, pick up this Gawande jewel.

- William Johnston is Professor of Mathematics at Butler University.