

The Top Shelf

STAFF PICKS . SEPTEMBER 2008 . ISSUE 5

For Children



Vampire: The Terrifying Lost Journal of Dr. Cornelius Van Helsing

by Cornelius Van Helsing

This is a highly interactive presentation of a fabulously spooky subject. The good doctor is actually a vampire expert and in this nineteenth-century journal he reveals all about his favorite subject. While travelling in Transylvania with his assistant Gustav de Wolff, Dr. Van Helsing created a journal packed with maps, letters, pull-tabs, booklets and samples of vampyre fur for the brave reader to explore. Not for the faint of heart!

Porcupine

by Meg Tilly

The sudden death of her father in Afghanistan puts Jacqueline (or Jack, as she prefers), in charge of her depressed mother and younger sister and brother. Forced to move across the country to live with their great-grandmother on her prairie farm, Jack meets her challenges with courage and intelligence. Tilly brings the characters and their stories to life with such skill that it's hard to put the book down until its conclusion.

Sandy

Read Canadian!

Prepare to read Canadian this fall and winter! A wealth of new Canadian titles are available now or will be soon. Award-winning novelists with new books out this fall include Rawi Hage with *Cockroach*, Miriam Toews with *The flying Troutmans*, Nino Ricci with *The origin of the species*, Austin Clarke with *More* and David Bergen with *The retreat*.

Novels by other acclaimed Canadian authors include *Through black spruce* by Joseph Boyden, *The slow fix* by Ivan E. Coyote, *Coventry* by Helen Humphreys, and *What they wanted* by Donna Morrissey. I'm also looking forward to reading acclaimed poet Patrick Lane's debut novel, *Red dog, red dog*, set in the Okanagan Valley in the 1950s. A rich reading season for Canadian literary fiction lovers awaits!

Canadian authors have been busy writing genre fiction, too. Mysteries by Giles Blunt (*No such creature*), Gail Bowen (*The brutal heart*) and Louise Penny (*The murder stone*), and thrillers by debut author Andrew Davidson (*The gargoyle*) and Andrew Pyper (*The killing circle*) can be found on our shelves or placed on hold. Fantasy fiction readers will welcome *Toll the hounds* by Steven Erikson and *Living with the dead* by Kelley Armstrong. There's something Canadian for everyone, with a new historical novel by Pauline Gedge, (*Seer of Egypt*) and the best of Canadian short fiction in the annual *The Journey Prize stories 20*.

If you wish to interject some international flavour to your reading diet this fall, you'll be pleased to select from an addition to the *44 Scotland Street* series by the prolific Alexander McCall Smith (*The world according to Bertie*), a sequel to — three decades later —

The witches of Eastwick by John

Updike (now *The widows of Eastwick*) and the re-issuing

of the historical novel *The Courilof affair*, written by

Holocaust victim

Irene Nemirovsky

and originally

published in 1933.

Lorraine



Fiction

The Other

by David Guterson

Neil Countryman finds himself the beneficiary of a \$440 million windfall, the bequest of a long-dead teenaged friend. As he contemplates what to do with the money, Neil pieces together the story of his, and his troubled friend's, shared past. The wildness and beauty of the Pacific Northwest figures significantly in the story.

Lorraine

Skeletons at the Feast

by Chris Bohjalian

Alternating between brutality and beauty, this absorbing and lyrical novel is the story of a German family facing danger as they flee the advance of the "Ivans" in 1945. Forced to confront the reality of the Nazi world, their transformations remind us of the price to be paid when good men do nothing.

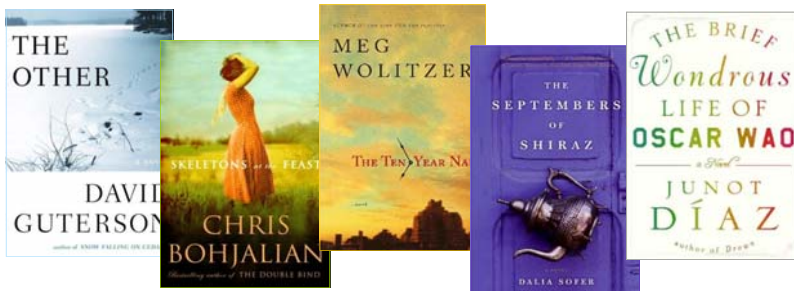
Michael

The Ten-Year Nap

by Meg Wolitzer

Four New York professional mothers are trying to redefine their lives after 10 years of opting out of the workforce. The book is a deft exploration of gender roles, stereotypes, and the choices women make to balance their work and family lives.

Phyllis



The Septembers of Shiraz

by Dalia Sofer

A fascinating story of a wealthy Jewish family who experienced fear, threats, violence, isolation, and imprisonment after the 1979 revolution in Iran. The family's realization that those they have trusted the most have betrayed them, is the core of this compassionate and compelling novel.

Homa

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

by Junot Díaz

Díaz's dark and humorous novel introduces Oscar, a first generation Dominican-American and his crazy, but engaging, extended family. The family's multi-generational curse brings troubles and tragedy to them all but particularly to the loveable, sad, and smart-but-doomed protagonist.

Phyllis



Teen Picks

World War Z

by Max Brooks

Possibly life changing! A you-will-not-put-this-down-till-you-have-finished-every-last-page-and-are-huddled-wide-eyed-under-the-covers kind of read. For older teens.

Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian

by Sherman Alexie

Arnold Spirit moves from the reservation to the rich white kids' school down the road — where the only other Indian is the team mascot.

What I Was

by Meg Rosoff

A story about the friendship between two boys: one a jaded misfit, the other mysterious and independent.

How Not to be Popular

by Jennifer Ziegler

After being uprooted again and again by her hippie parents, Maggie Dempsey sets out to become the social pariah at her new school.

Brisinger

by Christopher Paolini

Starting writing when he was just a teenager, Paolini really delivers in this wonderfully imaginative third installment in the epic *Inheritance* series.

Cara & Chris

The Reading Room

Welcome to the Reading Room, on the second floor of the library, where you'll find resources that celebrate reading and help in choosing good books. Here's a short list of some of the titles:

Book Lust and More Book Lust

by Nancy Pearl

The A-Z of eclectic reading interests and tastes from the guru of readers' advisory.

A History of Reading

by Alberto Manguel

A "bible for bibliophiles," celebrating books and the joy of reading.

How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read

by Pierre Bayard

According to the *Globe & Mail*: "brilliant: a witty and useful piece of literary sociology."

How to Read and Why

by Harold Bloom

A believer in the maxim "so many books, so little time," the author urges us not to waste time reading the mediocre.

The Readers' Advisory Guide to Non-fiction

by Neal Wyatt

For all lovers of literary non-fiction.

Reading Lolita in Tehran

by Azar Nafisi

Part memoir, part literary criticism: a testament to the determination of a small group of women rebelling against censorship in Iran.

Lorraine

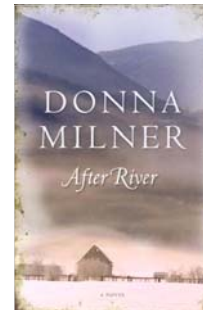


Fiction

After River

by Donna Milner

This first novel by a BC writer has received a surprising amount of buzz. Told through flashbacks, most of the story takes place in a simpler time and place — the Kootenay Valley in 1966. The arrival of a draft dodger, River Jordan, upsets the tranquil farming life of the Ward family. The story keeps you guessing at the painful family secrets that divided them for 35 years.

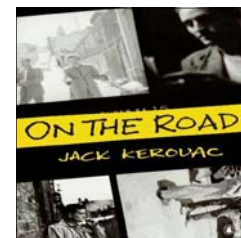


Phyllis

On the Road: 50th Anniversary Audiobook Edition

by Jack Kerouac

Since its initial release in 1957 this work has captured many a heart for those wanting a taste of what it was like to travel the open road at the cusp of the Beat Generation and the 1960s. Wonderfully read by Bill Patton, this audiobook makes for great company during the daily commute.



Chris

The Have-Nots

by Katharina Hacker

A chance encounter between a German children's book illustrator, a drug dealer, and a mentally challenged little girl, in the aftermath of September 11 evolves into humiliation and a power struggle. Hacker's honest portrayal of the dark side of the human psyche was the winner of the 2006 German Book Prize for best novel.

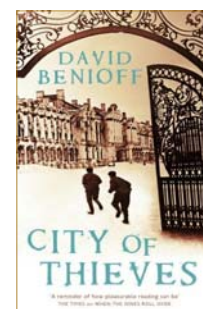


Victor

City of Thieves

by David Benioff

Set during the siege of Leningrad in WWII, the two main characters in this novel are charged with an unusual quest: secure a dozen eggs within one week for a possibly crazy Russian colonel as reparation for their dubious crimes, or be executed. In the frozen and devastated countryside, and behind German lines, the duo must use wit and wile if they are to succeed. A tragic yet comic and thoroughly engaging picaresque.



Lorraine

Non-fiction

Film Club: a True Story of a Father and Son

by David Gilmour

In this witty memoir, Gilmour grapples with his decision to allow his son to leave school in the 10th grade, providing they watch three movies a week together. A poignant account of a dedicated father determined to guide his son through the treacherous waters from adolescence to adulthood.

Phyllis

My Trip Down the Pink Carpet

by Leslie Jordan

Actor and playwright Leslie Jordan parlays his unique take on life into this very entertaining collection of anecdotes. From his upbringing in Chattanooga, Tennessee to life in Hollywood, Jordan entertains with this moving yet playful reflection on recovery and perseverance against the odds.

Chris

Things I've Learned from Women who've Dumped Me

by Ben Karlin, Editor

These humorous essays, collected by writer Ben Karlin (*The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*) look on the bright and sunny side of being dumped. Comedians and writers entertain while candidly detailing their own personal experiences with heartache.

James



"How do we know who we are or what we can become? We tell ourselves stories. The stories we tell are what we know of ourselves — we are a creation, a product of our minds, pastiche of memory, dream, fear, desire . . ."

Madness: a Bipolar Life

When You Are Engulfed in Flames

by David Sedaris

Sedaris's hilarious, self-deprecating humour is at its best in his latest engaging essay collection confronting his mid-life crisis and mortality. His diverse stories range from surviving two embarrassing incidents as an airline passenger to his masochistic determination to stop smoking in Japan, where smoking is permitted everywhere!

Nikki

Madness: a Bipolar Life

by Marya Hornbacher

A courageous, first-hand account of a life shattered by mental illness, and a glimpse into what bipolar disorder can do to its victims, in this case a young talented writer haunted by rapid cycles of manic depression and episodes of clarity and brilliant creativity. An insightful, moving memoir with a strong message of hope.

Fereshteh



Classic TV on DVD

My So-Called Life

Claire Danes navigates through the adolescent dramas and angst of middle-class American high school life.

MASH

Alan Alda leads the cast through 11 seasons of this beloved war comedy with its anti-establishment flavour.

Twin Peaks

The first season was an instant cult classic and although it could not keep its momentum through the second season, it's still worth a look.

McLeod's Daughters

An addictive Australian soap opera saga of sisters running a sheep and cattle ranch in the Outback.

Bob Newhart Show

The first and best Newhart series, co-starring Suzanne Pleshette, with Bob as the mild-mannered psychologist.

Allo Allo

This British series stars Gordon Kaye as a cowardly, corrupt, but irresistibly charming cafe owner in occupied France during World War II.

Phyllis

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