



Our Tragic Universe ~ Scarlett Thomas

Writer Meg Carpenter is unfulfilled in her relationship, her best friend is in distress, she's had a falling out with another friend, and her novel is taking years to write, as she's been busy writing teen fantasy books for the money. Then things start to change...Scarlett Thomas is a masterful storyteller who will make your head spin, but you won't be able to put this book down.



Into that Darkness ~ Steven Price

When an earthquake destroys Victoria an old man, a young boy and the boy's mother try to survive as best they can amid the physical devastation. What they don't expect is the human brutality and savagery that has been let loose in the aftermath of so much destruction. This is a dark and haunting novel that will stay with you long after you put it down.



The Thieves of Manhattan ~ Adam Langer

If Carl Hiaasen's testimonial on the front of this book doesn't make you want to read it there's something wrong with you. Adam Langer has written a funny and clever send-up of the writing, reading and publishing world that will make you laugh...and then despair.



Severance Package ~ Duane Swierczynski

If you've read and enjoyed Josh Bazell and Charlie Huston, this is the next author for you. The plot of this novel is so far-fetched and crazy that it borders on ridiculous. And yet Duane Swierczynski manages to deliver a highly entertaining account of what might happen in a last-minute Saturday office meeting that has actually been called to kill all the employees. Of course, nothing is what it seems and insanity ensues.



Cargo of Orchids ~ Susan Musgrave

This is without a doubt one of the best books I have ever read. Vancouver Island poet Susan Musgrave draws on her own experiences to create the life of her unnamed narrator, who begins telling her story while on Death Row, convicted of killing her own child. There is absolutely nothing predictable in this devastating and haunting novel and some parts of it are extremely unpleasant, but there are also moments of such beauty and hope that you won't be able to turn away.



The Highest Tide ~ Jim Lynch

This beautiful, mystical tale by Pacific Northwest author Jim Lynch grabs onto you from the first chapter and has you in its grasp right up until the very end. When precocious and endearing thirteen year old Miles finds a rare sea creature near his home and becomes a local celebrity his life is forever changed. You'll not only fall in love with this character, you'll be amazed at Lynch's vivid descriptions of the local sea life you likely have no idea exists here.



***You Comma Idiot* ~ Doug Harris**

Sharp, funny and delightfully twisted, this new novel by Doug Harris is just plain good. Lee Goodstone is an ugly, skinny, gawky drug dealer who is hopelessly in love with his handsome best friend's gorgeous girlfriend. Then suddenly they sleep together...then another friend is accused of kidnapping a young woman...then Lee's territory is threatened by a rival dealer. This book is a crazy ride.



***The Sentimentalists* ~ Johanna Skibsrud**

This book is definitely not for everyone, but I completely understand why it won the Giller. Skibsrud's writing is poetic and complicated and while it may seem excessive, she does not waste a single word. She manages to weave together so many stories and ideas: the senseless violence of war, the loss of a childhood home, the aging of parents, the betrayal of lovers and so much more. This is certainly not a cheery book but it is well worth reading.



***Lemon* ~ Cordelia Strube**

I haven't loved a teenage protagonist this much since Miriam Toews wrote the brilliant Nomi Nickel in *A Complicated Kindness*. Lemon is a bright, funny and scared girl who sees through the BS that most adults feed her. She's trying to make sense of the world around her and just get by while dealing with three mothers, an oblivious father, oversexed and cruel high school boys and a young friend dying of cancer. This is one of the best coming-of-age stories I have ever read.



***Everything Was Good-Bye* ~ Gurjinder Basran**

Local author Gurjinder Basran has written an excellent first novel. We meet Meena when she is in high school and follow her through university and her twenties while she struggles with her identity as a Punjabi woman who doesn't want to conform to the standards and rules imposed on her. This is a moving and well-crafted story that will resonate with readers of all ages.



***Player One* ~ Douglas Coupland**

Douglas Coupland has taken on the challenge of writing the 2010 CBC Massey Lecture by making it a five part novel. Set in an airport bar and told from the points of view of four (or is it five?) people trapped in there during what looks like the Apocalypse, this is an exceptional book. This book does have some strange twists and turns, but, hey, what do you expect when it might be the end of the world? If you loved *Generation A* you will also love *Player One*.



***Sarah's Key* ~ Tatiana de Rosnay**

This touching novel brings to light a horrible piece of France's history known as The Vel' d'Hiv Roundup. On July 16th and 17th 1942, French police rounded up over 13,000 Jewish people and incarcerated them in the Velodrome before they were sent to Auschwitz. In this novel, journalist Julia Jarmond is assigned an article on the anniversary of this event of which she is embarrassed to admit she has no knowledge. We jump back and forth between Julia's experience researching The Vel' d'Hiv Roundup and ten-year-old Sarah's experience as one of the prisoners in the Velodrome in Paris in 1942. This is a very moving story and would make an excellent book club selection.



***Caught Stealing* ~ Charlie Huston**

I have read and loved every one of Charlie Huston's books but this one is my absolute favourite. When washed-up former baseball star Hank Thompson agrees to take care of his neighbour's cat for a few days he has no idea what he's getting himself into. In no time, he's being chased by shady Russians and threatened by a corrupt cop...and for what? If he doesn't figure it out quickly the lives of everyone he cares about will be in danger.



***The Wheelman* ~ Duane Swierczynski**

You'll be on the edge of your seat from the first to the last page of this book. Lennon, a mute getaway driver, is double-crossed after a job – the money is taken and he's left for dead. But that's not nearly enough to stop him and soon he's fighting his way through a myriad of criminal masterminds, the Russian and Italian mobs, corrupt cops, and people he used to trust to try to get the money back. This is a fast-paced ride that doesn't pause to let you catch your breath.



***Kitchen Confidential* ~ Anthony Bourdain**

Anthony Bourdain, the bad boy of the culinary world, has written quite a few books, but this, his first, is definitely his best. It is a raunchy, hilarious, no-holds-barred look at Bourdain's life as a lover of food. He takes us on a journey from his childhood epiphany that strange food can be delicious when on vacation in France to toiling in dirty kitchens to becoming the executive chef at Les Halles Brasserie in New York.



***The Incident Report* ~ Martha Baillie**

Don't let the apparently choppy format of this book discourage you – the narrative flows beautifully through these short chapters. From the opening quote by Ray Bradbury, "Without the library, you have no civilization," through each exquisitely heartbreaking incident report and moments in young librarian Miriam's life to the amazing end of this novel, you will be mesmerized.



***Bedtime Story* ~ Robert Wiersema**

When 11-year-old David falls unconscious while reading his father Chris's favourite childhood fantasy novel, Chris knows the medical condition is connected to the book. In his dream world David becomes the main character in the novel and must complete a quest if he has any hope of surviving. This is a beautiful story about the love of a broken family, believing in magic, and holding on to hope. If you loved Wiersema's first novel, *Before I Wake*, you will also love this novel.



***Animal Dreams* ~ Barbara Kingsolver**

Barbara Kingsolver writes so well when she's writing about people and their connection to the land and their families that you know she's drawing heavily from personal experience. This novel is deceptively simple, a woman returns home to care for her ailing father, but it becomes so much more – a love story, an environmental crusade and a family drama.



***The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* ~ David Mitchell**

This is the best book I have ever read. It really is. Based loosely on the true story of a clerk for a Dutch shipping company stationed on a small artificial Island in Japan in 1799, this novel weaves together multiple stories of dozens of characters so deftly that you won't even know where the stories begin and end. I was keenly disappointed when this book ended and am already anticipating Mitchell's next book.



***The Help* ~ Kathryn Stockett**

Reading this novel about domestic help and race relations in Jackson, Mississippi in 1962 will likely make you very angry, as it did to me. This is Kathryn Stockett's first novel and she does a remarkable job of telling the stories of three very different women in three very different voices. When these women come together secretly to work on a book about what it is like to be "The Help" they each face their own very serious repercussions. You will fall in love with each of these characters.



***The Solitude of Prime Numbers* ~ Paolo Giordano**

It's shocking that a 27 year old particle physicist wrote a novel containing such depth of experience and emotion as this. When they meet as teenagers, Mattia and Alice recognize something dark and vulnerable in each other and they cling together as best they can. But circumstances and their own inabilities to express honest feelings threaten to undo their friendship. Told in a stark yet beautiful way, this is a fascinating story.



***One Day* ~ David Nicholls**

This novel completely blew me away, but I can't tell you why because it'll spoil it. You'll just have to take my word for it; read this book. If you like the clever, funny and poignant writing of Nick Hornby, you'll love David Nicholls.



***The Lacuna* ~ Barbara Kingsolver**

This is quite the departure from the rest of Barbara Kingsolver's novels and it's one of her best. Right from the first few lines describing the terrifying cry of howler monkeys in Mexico I was captivated by the life of Harrison Shepherd, plaster-maker for Diego Rivera, secretary to Leon Trotsky, and controversial author, among other things. While the historical events that take place in this novel are completely accurate, Kingsolver has created an amazingly rich and detailed life for her fictional main character. This is a beautiful and compelling novel.



***Everyone in Silico* ~ Jim Munroe**

Ignore the absolutely horrible cover of this book and just open it up and read the first couple of pages. Soon you'll be caught up in life in Vancouver in the not-too-distant future, where everyone belongs to a category (bronze, silver, gold and platinum) that corresponds to their wealth and income, people can teleport, and if you have enough money, you can buy your way out of the gloomy reality into a perfect world. But, where are the people who buy their way out ending up? And why is there a growing resistance to corporate control and the status quo? If you like quirky, intelligent and creative fiction, read this novel.



***The Red Tent* ~ Anita Diamant**

This is one of the best works of historical fiction I have ever read. Diamant gives a voice to the biblical character of Dinah, who is best known for being raped by the prince of Shechem, causing her brothers to avenge the crime by killing all the men in the city. In this novel, however, Dinah's story is different – from her birth, through her childhood as one of Jacob's many children, and right up to the end of her life, Diamant has given her an expressive and lyrical voice, allowing the reader to experience what Dinah's life may actually have been like.



***Falling from Grace* ~ Ann Eriksson**

Faye Pearson is a 3' 10" entomologist who's developed a tough personality over years of dealing with a world made for bigger people. All she wants to do is be up in the trees of Vancouver Island with her assistant looking at bugs. When a research project gets waylaid by a group of logging protestors Faye has to start dealing with the people around her, including a little girl named Rainbow, some militant protestors and her very own mother. As you read this book you can't help but fall in love with Faye and you'll be turning the pages as quickly as you can to read the rest of her story.



***Far to Go* ~ Alison Pick**

I read and loved Alison Pick's first novel *The Sweet Edge* quite a few years ago, so I was thrilled to see this new novel of hers. And she doesn't disappoint. Pick tells this story of an affluent Jewish family and their nanny in Prague during World War II with such sensitivity that it's no surprise to learn that the story is based on her grandparents' experiences. I highly recommend this novel if you want a beautiful, heart-breaking story of love and loss.



***The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* ~ Alan Bradley**

This is not the type of book I would normally read and enjoy, but I could not help being drawn into the charming world of Flavia de Luce. It is 1950 and precocious little Flavia has discovered the body of a man in her family's back garden. Rather than being terrified, she is fascinated and takes it upon herself to find the murderer. This is a well-written, lovely story.



***Already Dead* ~ Charlie Huston**

This book is a sharp, fast and excellent read. Joe Pitt is a rogue private investigator in Manhattan, the guy you go to when you couldn't possibly go to the police or any regular PI. He knows all the questionable characters in town and how to find someone who doesn't want to be found. He doesn't necessarily have the best judgement and regularly gets in over his head, somehow always managing to get out of very dangerous situations using wit, humour and extreme violence. Oh, and he's a Vampire.



***An Opening Act of Unspeakable Evil* ~ Jim Munroe**

If you've read and enjoyed Jim Munroe's first few novels (*Flyboy Action Figure Comes with Gasmask*, *Everyone in Silico* and *Angry Young Spaceman*) you should read this one as well. Walking in on your roommate practicing demonic rituals in her bedroom would probably throw most people off, but Kate starts a blog about it and then turns it into a show and takes it on tour, eventually becoming part of the act. Jim Munroe is the master of the bizarre novel but is sadly under-read and underappreciated. You could help fix that now by reading this book.



***Into Thin Air* ~ Jon Krakauer**

Jon Krakauer was part of the 1996 Mt. Everest expedition that ended with the deaths of half of his team and he writes about his experience with disarming honesty and heart-wrenching emotion. Even though you know right from the beginning of this book what happens to every person, you will still be rushing to get to the end, hoping that more of them survive. Krakauer has taken on an almost impossible task in telling this story and he succeeds brilliantly.



The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society

~ Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Burrows

Shaffer and Burrows have chosen a little-known part of World War II history in which to frame their story – from June 1940 to May 1945 Germany occupied the Channel Islands, including Guernsey. After the end of the war, writer Juliet Ashton starts exchanging letters with a man on Guernsey and then decides to visit there to learn what life had been like during the occupation. What she finds, however, binds her to the Island more than she could have expected. This is a beautiful novel that will make you laugh and cry.



***Year of Wonders* ~ Geraldine Brooks**

When the plague comes to a small isolated English village in 1666 the residents decide to completely cut themselves off from the rest of the country in order to prevent spreading the disease. This novel is based on the true story of a village in Derbyshire that lost two thirds of its population in one year. This is a chilling and heartbreaking story and is some of the best historical fiction you will ever read.



***The Prescription Errors* ~ Charles Demers**

Charles Demers has crafted a moving story about illness and healing and how we care about the ones we love. Don't read this book too quickly or you'll miss the subtle razor-sharp humour that makes it so f***ing great. This is the kind of book that first makes you want to hang out with the author then makes you worry that you probably aren't smart enough to.



***The Plight House* ~ Jason Hrivnak**

With this novel, Jason Hrivnak will reach inside you and pull your heart out. The unnamed narrator takes us on a deeply personal journey after learning of the suicide of his childhood best friend. This doesn't read like a typical novel and therein lies its strength – Hrivnak doesn't follow conventions of style or narrative and this allows him to reach new depths and heights of despair, hope, passion and pain.



***The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death* ~ Charlie Huston**

Charlie Huston has crafted a clever, sharp and darkly humorous novel about an elementary school teacher who becomes a crime scene cleaner after a traumatic experience leaves him psychologically damaged and unable to teach. Do I even need to say that there are some stomach-turning parts in here? If you enjoyed Josh Bazell's *Beat the Reaper*, you'll enjoy this one too.



***Water for Elephants* ~ Sara Gruen**

This novel will captivate you from the first page. When veterinary student Jacob Jankowski accidentally joins the circus after a family tragedy, he finds that his compassion for the oft-mistreated animals won't let him leave. Told in flashbacks as an elderly Jacob watches a circus set up across the street from his nursing home, this beautiful story has it all: love, cruelty, devotion, revenge... and a brilliant elephant named Rosie.



***The Invention of the World* ~ Jack Hodgins**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez meets Ethel Wilson in this novel, one of the best books ever to come out of British Columbia. Jack Hodgins grew up on Vancouver Island and writes about the Island and its characters so well that you will be enchanted. This novel is destined to become a Canadian Classic.



***Brine* ~ Adrienne Jones**

This is by far one of the strangest books I've ever read. Elliott Newton has made his name in the art world by painting lighthouse scenes, but one night after too much to drink and too much stress some childhood memories come to the surface that force him to paint some hideous creatures. Then the creatures come to life. And harass Elliott. And that's not even the most bizarre part of the book, it gets much much weirder before Elliott can figure out what's going on and how to get rid of the creatures. If you want some mind-bending fiction, here it is.



***The Girls* ~ Lori Lansens**

It's hard to explain why I love this novel so much. Rose and Ruby Darlen narrate their own story, their lives as conjoined twins. Their lives are both normal and extraordinary, dull and exciting, but every bit of this novel is beautiful and moving. Lori Lansens manages to write two distinct but connected voices very well.



***Cloud Atlas* ~ David Mitchell**

Mitchell crafts an amazing and moving novel by intricately weaving together a series of seemingly unrelated stories. From the South Pacific of the 19th Century to Korea of the near future and beyond to post-apocalyptic Hawaii, this novel never fails to impress.



***The Art of Racing in the Rain* ~ Garth Stein**

This novel is told from the point of view of Enzo, a very clever dog who knows that when "a dog is finished living his lifetimes as a dog, his next incarnation will be as a man." Enzo feels like he's ready to be human – he has a soul and just needs opposable thumbs. He has a unique insight into humans and how they behave and is a loyal companion to his owner Denny through all of Denny's many difficulties. This book *will* make you cry.



***All Over Creation* ~ Ruth Ozeki**

All Over Creation is very different from Ozeki's first novel, *My Year of Meats*, but if you liked that one, you'll love this one. Reminiscent of Barbara Kingsolver, this novel is about connections – to family and friends, to the land, to the community and to the past.



***Important Artifacts and Personal Property...* ~ Leanne Shapton**

I was a tad trepidatious to read this novel, given its strange format. It's likely safe to say that it is the first novel to be written in the form of an auction catalogue of a couple's belongings. But, I was actually surprised by how easy this book was to read and how much I enjoyed it. I got a very strong and real sense of the characters despite the lack of dialogue and description. This is a clever, original and fun book.



***Beat the Reaper* ~ Josh Bazell**

This book contains a scene that is so graphic, bloody and disgusting that I still get a little nauseous thinking about it, and I read this book over a year ago. If you want to read a fast-paced, thrilling, gory and violent story about a mob hit man turned med student and the craziness that ensues when someone from his past recognizes him, pick up this book.



***I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell* ~ Tucker Max**

There is absolutely nothing redeeming about this book other than the fact that it will make you laugh uncontrollably. Tucker Max is a self-professed asshole who describes what he does as: "get excessively drunk at inappropriate times, disregard social norms, indulge every whim, ignore the consequences of my actions, mock idiots and posers, sleep with more women than is safe or reasonable, and just generally act like a raging dickhead." If you're easily offended don't read this book.



***Generation A* ~ Douglas Coupland**

Douglas Coupland is back! After the somewhat disappointing *The Gum Thief* (feel free to turn around and argue this with me), *Generation A* is Coupland back at his best. After bees are thought to be extinct, five people around the world are stung by bees and the world goes crazy trying to figure out what's happening and what it means. This book takes some wild twists and turns and is one of the best and most clever books I've read in a long time.



***Juliet, Naked* ~ Nick Hornby**

Nick Hornby does it again with *Juliet, Naked*. He fills this novel with flawed but lovable characters who struggle with their lives in ways that are so easy to relate to. When Annie and Duncan end their fifteen year relationship she inadvertently starts an online correspondence with the reclusive American singer who Duncan has worshipped for most of his life. Of course, hilarity ensues. This book is funny, very funny, but also touching and engaging.



***Things the Grandchildren Should Know* ~ Mark Oliver Everett**

I love the Eels, so I was very excited to read this autobiography of lead singer (and often everything else) Mark Oliver Everett. And I was not disappointed. Everett wears his heart on his sleeve and doesn't hold anything back as he writes about the deaths of his sister, mother and father, what drives him to make music, his failed relationships... and everything else that makes him the amazing artist that he is. Even if you're not a fan of the Eels, you'll enjoy this book.



***The Angel's Game* ~ Carlos Ruiz Zafon**

The Angel's Game takes us deep into the mysterious and turbulent Barcelona of the 1920s where young novelist David Martin receives an offer to write a book that will make people believe... but in what? Once you start, you will not be able to put this book down. This is Zafon's second novel to be translated into English and is just as fantastic as his first, *The Shadow of the Wind*.



***Border Songs* ~ Jim Lynch**

This novel tells the story of Brandon Vanderkool, an exceptionally tall and dyslexic US Border Patrol agent and his uncanny ability to find criminals. Of course, already tense relations between the residents of the border cities in Canada and the US become even more tense when the "drug wars" escalate and a potential bomber is caught coming in from Canada. This is a compelling read.



***Go-Go Girls of the Apocalypse* ~ Victor Gischler**

Nine years after the Apocalypse, Mortimer Tate leaves his mountain hideaway to find out what happened to his estranged wife, only to get his butt kicked by the crazy new world. With the help of his new friend "Buffalo Bill" and various other colourful characters, he slowly makes his way across the country, narrowly escaping death a few times. This is one of the most fun books I've read in a long time. If you love Christopher Moore, you'll love Victor Gischler.



***High Fidelity* ~ Nick Hornby**

The book is better than the movie! If you've watched and enjoyed the movie, it's time for you to read the book. Nick Hornby's writing is so clever and funny that you'll find yourself laughing out loud. There's really not much more to say except READ THIS BOOK!



***Scar Tissue* ~ Anthony Kiedis**

If you're a fan of The Red Hot Chili Peppers you should read this book. Anthony Kiedis documents his childhood, rise to fame, drug addiction, relationships and everything in between with remarkable honesty and candour. It's a wild ride and some of it seems too crazy to be true, but the way Kiedis shows us the bad (and sometimes really ugly) along with the good makes it hard to doubt the veracity of his stories. Even if you're not a RHCP fan you will still enjoy this book for the entertaining read that it is.



***The Cellist of Sarajevo* ~ Steven Galloway**

Steven Galloway has created a beautiful and heart-wrenching story of life in Sarajevo during the war of the 1990s. What do you do when the city you love has turned into a battlefield and you risk getting shot every time you step out the door? The characters in this novel struggle to survive and hold onto hope even when their futures seem dismal at best.



***The Shadow of the Wind* ~ Carlos Ruiz Zafon**

Once you start reading this amazing novel, you won't be able to put it down. You'll be drawn into the web of mysteries that our protagonist Daniel is faced with when he tries to learn the truth of the history of his favourite novel. Every time he uncovers a piece of information about the author it leads to more questions. Soon Daniel is deep in a tangle of secrets and lies that may threaten his life and the lives of his family and friends.



***The Retreat* ~ David Bergen**

I was actually surprised by how much I enjoyed this novel. David Bergen's writing is poetic and flows so smoothly that I was finished the book before I knew it. Taking place on in the early 1970s in Western Ontario, this novel tells the story of a young First Nations man and his relationship with the daughter of a family who come to spend time at "The Retreat". It's actually about every kind of relation – between husband and wife, between separated brothers, between the First Nations and the rest of the community (including the police), and so much more.



***Life of Pi* ~ Yann Martel**

Yes, this book is a few years old, but if you haven't read it yet, you should pick it up right now! I never could have imagined that I would find the story of an Indian boy trapped on a life-raft with a Bengal tiger after a shipwreck would hold my interest, but I was captivated. It is fantastical, funny, tragic and hopeful, all at the same time.



***Bloodsucking Fiends* ~ Christopher Moore**

Irreverent is probably the best way to describe this book. Our heroine, Jody, has just been turned into a vampire and has to figure out how to deal with it, and quickly. The problems of her mortal life (dead-end job, idiotic boyfriend, overbearing mother) are nothing compared with not being able to go out during the day, craving blood, and possibly being stalked by the vampire who turned her. She manages remarkably well (despite still having to deal with her mother) with the help of her new minion, Tommy. This book is hilariously politically incorrect. I highly recommend it if you like books that make you cringe and smile at the same time.



***Lullabies for Little Criminals* ~ Heather O'Neill**

This is a remarkable book for being a first novel. Thirteen year old Baby's father is a heroin addict and she has no mother, so she's left to fend for herself in their not-so-nice neighbourhood. Baby has a strong imagination and creates stories for herself to escape from the hell her life is becoming. Heartbreakingly beautiful, this novel captures the voice of a traumatized yet hopeful little girl so well that you can't help but fall in love with her and keep turning the pages to see what happens next.



***The Flying Troutmans* ~ Miriam Toews**

If you read and loved *A Complicated Kindness* and have been anxiously awaiting this new novel by Miriam Toews, you will not be disappointed. Hattie Troutman returns home to Winnipeg to take care of her niece and nephew when her seriously depressed sister has to be admitted to the hospital. Her relationship with the kids seems to be tenuous, but it is honest and full of love. As with Nomi Nickel in *A Complicated Kindness*, Toews writes Hattie Troutman so well that you'd swear she lived this life herself. This is a brilliant novel.



***Snuff* ~ Chuck Palahniuk**

True to form, Chuck Palahniuk delivers a disturbing, disgusting and utterly brilliant story in this his latest novel. Who else can write a book about a porn queen attempting to break the world record of serial fornication on camera, told from the point of view of three of the men waiting their turn, and still make the characters endearing? It's definitely not for everyone, but if you've liked Chuck in the past, you won't be disappointed by this one.



***Divisadero* ~ Michael Ondaatje**

I haven't been thrilled by Michael Ondaatje's last couple of novels, so I approached this one somewhat cautiously. But within a few pages I was completely absorbed and couldn't put this book down. Ondaatje has created a beautiful story of a family torn apart and their subsequent separate lives as they form new relationships, learn to love again and eventually come to terms with the past. The story goes back in time, crosses the world and switches narrators, but I found each new part of the book to be even more engrossing than the last.



***The History of Love* ~ Nicole Krauss**

This is without a doubt one of the best books I have ever read. Just before the Second World War a young man in Poland writes a book for the young woman he loves. After they are separated by the war they both end up in the US, but their lives have changed too much to be together. He doesn't know that his book has survived and is touching the lives of the people who read it. Meanwhile, fourteen year old Alma Singer's mother is translating the book for a mysterious client and Alma decides that this client may be the answer to her mother's loneliness. As she embarks on unravelling the mystery of the client, she starts finding out about the author of the book and the journey the book has taken over the past fifty years.



***Rebel Without a Crew* ~ Robert Rodriguez**

This is the story of the making of *El Mariachi*, Robert Rodriguez's first feature film. It is gritty, funny, smart and probably the most entertaining book you'll read in a while. Rodriguez had one camera, no crew, friends as actors, and spent months in medical testing to raise the money to make this film. If you've seen and appreciated *El Mariachi* (or any Robert Rodriguez films for that matter) read this book, you will love it.



***Perfume* ~ Patrick Süskind**

This novel is mesmerizing – a beautifully written and haunting story that will captivate you. Set in 18th Century Paris, *Perfume* is the story of Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, whose amazingly heightened sense of smell drives him to create the “perfect perfume.” The journey he embarks on to undertake this is strange and disturbing, culminating in a series of events so shocking you won't be able to put this book down.



***The Bean Trees* ~ Barbara Kingsolver**

It's possible that Barbara Kingsolver can do no wrong. After reading almost all of her books, I am amazed that I love each one of them. *The Bean Trees* is no exception to this. We follow independent Taylor Greer as she leaves her poor childhood in Kentucky behind and heads west to a better future. Along the way she unexpectedly picks up a damaged little girl and essentially becomes her mother. The characters are endearing, the journey is remarkable and the story is touching – this is an amazing book.



***Pigs in Heaven* ~ Barbara Kingsolver**

This novel picks up a few years after *The Bean Trees* ends. Taylor Greer and her daughter Turtle are forging a life together when an almost tragic event thrusts them into a media spotlight. The circumstances under which Taylor adopted Turtle are questioned and they risk being separated. This is a beautiful story of what it means to belong, both to a place and with a person.



***My Year of Meats* ~ Ruth Ozeki**

I cannot believe how much I enjoyed this book! I have always thought that the title is awful, the cover is unappealing and the back cover blurb is uninspiring. But, I decided to read it after it was selected as the *One Book One Vancouver* book, and I am very happy that I did. It has nothing to do with Vancouver, but it does have to do with everything else: racial tension, belonging, independence, abuse, love, family, health, freedom and happiness. If you love Barbara Kingsolver, you will also love Ruth Ozeki.



***The Poisonwood Bible* ~ Barbara Kingsolver**

Barbara Kingsolver is one the best writers writing today, in my opinion. This is her most popular book (yes, it was an Oprah pick, but don't let that dissuade you) and one of her best. Told from the point of view of the wife and four daughters of a Baptist missionary as they carry out their mission in the Belgian Congo, this book is full of beauty and love as well as heartache and sorrow. Kingsolver gives such different voices to each of her narrators and keeps them unique throughout the whole novel. This book will make you cry.



***Love in the Time of Cholera* ~ Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

If you loved *One Hundred Years of Solitude* you will also love this book. Almost as epic in its scope, this novel is the story of a lifetime of unrequited love. Florentino Ariza doesn't let the fact that his childhood love married another man ruin his love for her – he waits most of his life to be with her again. When her husband dies, Florentino finally has the chance to declare his love for Fermina Daza again. This is a beautifully written story about a timeless love.



***The Average American Male* ~ Chad Kultgen**

And now for something completely different... There really aren't any words to describe this book, at least not ones that I can post here in a review. The narrator of this book is without a doubt the most politically incorrect, obnoxious, misogynistic character I've ever read. He's also one of the funniest. I felt kind of wrong to be enjoying this book so much, but I really did. If you're easily offended don't read this book.



***Rant* ~ Chuck Palahniuk**

You can't help but wonder what kind of life Chuck Palahniuk lives when you read his novels... what does he do throughout the day that makes him come up with the ideas he writes about? *Rant* is his new novel and it lives up to every expectation you have after reading his previous novels. You are drawn in to the crazy world of Buster Casey as he leaves his small hometown to embark on a wild life of Party Crashing cars and spreading rabies. Of course, as with all Chuck's novels, not everything is as it seems and the ending of this book is mind-bendingly strange.



***No one belongs here more than you* ~ Miranda July**

If you're already a fan of Miranda July you will love this book. These stories are short and seem uncomplicated, but don't let that fool you – her writing is clever and engaging and you will be struck by the beautiful simplicity of her language. This book is accessible to everyone; it's true that no one belongs here more than you.



***Diary* ~ Chuck Palahniuk**

As with his other books, Chuck spends the first three quarters of *Diary* weaving a freakish, disturbing, surreal story that makes the reader wonder how he's going to resolve it all. In the end, he hits you with a superb finale that makes all the disgusting imagery well worth it. If this sounds vague, it's because it doesn't do Chuck justice to try to describe his novels on a recipe card. Just read it.



***The Raw Shark Texts* ~ Steven Hall**

Eric Sanderson wakes up on the floor of his bedroom with no memory of who he is. As he begins to piece his life back together from the fragments around him he begins to realize that nothing is as it seems and no one can be trusted, perhaps not even himself. This book is a surreal wild ride fraught with danger as Eric flees from a conceptual shark. Yes, a conceptual shark. I'm still not entirely sure what happened in this novel, but I know I loved it. Fans of Bret Easton Ellis and Chuck Palahniuk will love this book.



***Eleanor Rigby* ~ Doug Coupland**

As far as we're concerned, lately Doug Coupland can do no wrong. And this book is no exception. Coupland's characters are not idealized and they grapple with deep issues, in this case the crucial importance of human attachments. ~ Maralyn & Mary-Ann



***Exit A* ~ Anthony Swofford**

You may have read the apologetically negative review of this novel by William T. Vollman in *The New York Times*. Vollman expressed his disappointment in Swofford as a writer, even though he acknowledged that his positive regard of Swofford's first book, the war memoir *Jarhead*, had nothing to do with the writing. It makes me wonder what Vollman was expecting here. I appreciated *Jarhead* for what it was and I appreciate *Exit A* for what it is: the overly-dramatic, somewhat gritty fantasies and desires of the author put on paper. Maybe my lower expectations allowed me to enjoy this book, which is fine by me; it's perfect escapist reading.



***Chuck Klosterman IV* ~ Chuck Klosterman**

Chuck Klosterman is funny, clever, irreverent, insightful, poignant and completely honest, all at the same time. His books have gotten progressively better and this most recent one is my favourite. Chuck seems interested in absolutely everything, so whether he's interviewing Britney Spears, having coffee with Steve Nash, or discussing the phenomena of Goth kids at Disneyland, you know that he's totally into his subject. And he intersperses just the right amount of personal anecdotes to make you really connect with him.



***What is the What* ~ Dave Eggers**

This is not your typical Dave Eggers book. If you've read and enjoyed his previous three books (one memoir, one novel and one book of stories), prepare yourself for something completely different and amazing here. Eggers tells the true story of Valentino Achak Deng, one of the Lost Boys of Sudan, from his childhood in Sudan to his trek to Ethiopia and Kenya for refuge to his immigration to America and his hope for a better life. His story is shocking and incredible and you will cry. The proceeds of this book go to the Valentino Achak Deng Foundation.



***Prodigal Summer* ~ Barbara Kingsolver**

Kingsolver is best known for *The Poisonwood Bible* but I think that *Prodigal Summer* is a far superior book. We follow the stories of three people living very different lives in the Appalachias: Deanna is a forest ranger who is more comfortable with nature than people, Lusa is a farmer's wife who just moved from the city, and Garnett is an older man living alone on his farm. As we get further into their stories we start to learn how they are all connected. Kingsolver writes as if she herself has lived each of these lives, with such detail and evocative imagery that the reader feels drawn right into the book.



***JPod* ~ Douglas Coupland**

If you remember *Microserfs* fondly, you will love *JPod*. Set in a fictional video game development company in Burnaby, this new novel focuses on the six co-workers whose names begin with J and the pod in which they work. It's not as emotionally gripping as *Hey Nostradamus!* or as sentimental as *Eleanor Rigby*, but it is the most fun book you will read this year. You will never think of Ronald McDonald, Jeff Probst or Doug Coupland in the same way again.



***Black Swan Green* ~ David Mitchell**

Have you read Mitchell's previous book, *The Cloud Atlas*? If not, go buy it now and read it – it is one of the best books you will ever read. If you have read it, now you must read *Black Swan Green*. Mitchell writes from the point of view of a twelve year old boy living in a small city in England and the voice is so genuine that you would swear the book was written by a twelve year old boy living in a small city in England. It is funny, tragic, moving, distressing, heartbreaking and wonderful, all at the same time.



***When I Was Young and in my Prime* ~ Alayna Munce**

A young woman watches the gradual physical and mental decline of her grandparents while dealing with the possible breakdown of her young marriage in this beautifully arranged and written first novel by Alayna Munce. Her writing is poetic and a pleasure to read.



***The Sweet Edge* ~ Alison Pick**

This is Alison Pick's first novel and it showcases her as a Canadian novelist to watch. We follow a young man and woman as they spend their summer apart after deciding to end their relationship, he on a solo canoe trip into the Arctic and she in Toronto. Pick sensitively writes about love, infidelity, unconditional friendship and so much more.



***Haunted* ~ Chuck Palahniuk**

From the Pacific Northwest's resident writer of some of the most mind-bending, revolting and hilarious fiction comes this novel about a group of individuals who sign up for a three month writer's retreat which turns out to be nothing like they were expecting. What will they do when they realize they are barricaded in an old theatre and their food, heat and power start running out? This book contains a few of the most disgusting stories I've ever read. But if you're a fan of Palahniuk, you'll love it!



***A Long Way Down* ~ Nick Hornby**

There's something incredibly comfortable and familiar about reading Nick Hornby's novels - you feel like he knows you and you know him and his characters. It doesn't matter that you've likely never climbed to the roof of Toppers' House in London with the intention of jumping and then formed a relationship with the other people you met up there. What matters is that Hornby's writing makes his characters so real and so interesting that you're drawn right into their lives.



***English Passengers* ~ Matthew Kneale**

This double-strand narrative parallels the stories of an odd group of strangers who come together to search for the Garden of Eden and the tribes of Aborigines in Australia whose land and lives are being taken over by white settlers. Often a story told from so many different perspectives can become confusing and disjointed, but each character in this novel does his unique part, and they all come together in the end.



***A Gradual Ruin* ~ Robert Hilles**

Alternating between the stories of two sisters who leave their small town home to move to Winnipeg and the subsequent difficult life of one of their daughters, and the experience of a young Canadian soldier in World War II, this book grasps the reader's attention and holds on until the end. Hilles writes his characters, and their emotions and experiences, so well that he doesn't have to rely on gruesome detail to show the horrors of WWII or tearjerker exclamations to express the devastation on a family of the drowning death of a young boy.



***The Pornographer's Poem* ~ Michael Turner**

This is one of the best books I have ever read. Michael Turner's writing is edgy, hard and exciting, but also compassionate and moving. This book challenges the reader to think – about pornography, love, death, personal boundaries and the way we connect with each other.



***You Shall Know Our Velocity* ~ Dave Eggers**

In his memoir, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Eggers freely mixed fact with fiction to come up with an amazing book. Here, he successfully makes the transition to fiction, producing a novel resplendent with humour, intelligence and emotion. Eggers presents the readers with fantastic situations, but his characters are so real that you're drawn into their lives with genuine interest.



***A Star Called Henry* ~ Roddy Doyle**

You can't help but fall in love with Henry Smart as he fights his way out of squalor on the streets to become a soldier in the Irish Citizen's Army. This book has all the excitement and intrigue that Doyle's previous books are lacking.



***A Rhinestone Button* ~ Gail Anderson-Dargatz**

Gail Anderson-Dargatz's writing draws you right into the book. Even if you've never been to a small town in Alberta, have no interest in farming, know nothing about religion and don't understand synesthesia, this book is still incredibly engrossing. She creates such vivid imagery that you feel as if you're there with the characters.



***Hey Nostradamus!* ~ Douglas Coupland**

I think this is Doug Coupland's best book. Progressing from a high school massacre to a revelation of faith, the four narrators of this book lead the reader through situations of surrealism, brutal honesty, grief, desperation and love. The final section is superb.



***Still* ~ bp Nichol**

This brilliant little novel by one of Canada's best poets is a must-read for any fan of contemporary Canadian poetry and fiction. Nichol's sparse prose is more evocative than many writers' excessive description.



***Hard Core Logo* ~ Michael Turner**

This isn't your typical novel. Made up of song lyrics, interviews, photos, phone messages and letters, *Hard Core Logo* defies categorization. I thought it would be difficult to read but it flowed together much more smoothly than I expected. Once you get into it, this book is immensely entertaining.



***The House of Spirits* ~ Isabel Allende**

This is a wonderful book! Allende's storytelling is magical and beautiful and draws the reader right into the lives of the Trueba family. If you loved Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, you'll also love this.



***A Complicated Kindness* ~ Miriam Toews**

Nomi Nickel is a dissatisfied teenager living in a small Mennonite community in Manitoba. Her mother and sister have both left the family in the past couple of years, leaving Nomi and her father to deal with the absence. She struggles with her growing resistance to the community's ideas of faith and dreams of leaving her small town for the excitement of Manhattan. Toews give a unique and unforgettable voice to Nomi, endearing her to the reader.



***Haunted* ~ Chuck Palahniuk**

From the Pacific Northwest's resident writer of some of the most mind-bending, revolting and hilarious fiction comes this new novel about a group of individuals who sign up for a three month writer's retreat which turns out to be nothing like they were expecting. What will they do when they realize they are barricaded in an old theatre and their food, heat and power start running out? This book contains a few of the most disgusting stories I've ever read. But if you're a fan of Palahniuk, you'll love it!



***Ex Libris* ~ Ross King**

If you like books, you'll love this story of a missing manuscript and the man hired to find it. Nothing is what it seems here, and you'll get caught up in the drama and intrigue as you follow London bookseller Isaac Inchbold around England in the 1660s. You don't have to like mysteries to enjoy this fascinating tale.