

## Reader's Advisor Online and LU Authors

### Best of 2008

It's the time of year when we ask our authors, both for the [Reader's Advisor Online](#) and for titles in the [Genreflecting series](#), to pick the best of the year -- and it's not limited to 5 or 10! Yes, it's an eclectic list; you will see a few titles that are on other best of lists, but there will doubtless be some new gems for you to discover!

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#### Crime

##### Selected by Jane Jorgenson

- Unger, Lisa. *Black Out*, 2008. Subgenre: Suspense.  
*Black Out* delves into the life of Annie Powers. Annie has a picture perfect existence. She lives in a gated community in Florida, she has a husband who loves her and a beautiful little girl named Victory. But her peaceful present is shattered when the ghost of her past appears. Though Annie has a hard-won normal life now, it wasn't always that way. And as her past comes out, so too do the dangers. This is a gripping exploration of the difference between being a victim and a perpetrator and the fallout from being both. (Jane Jorgenson)

See also Cindy Orr's [Great Mysteries of 2008](#) in RAO Blog's Under the Radar column.

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#### Historical Fiction

##### Selected by Sarah Johnson

- Edwards, Selden. *The Little Book*, 2008. Subgenre: Time-Slip.  
Wheeler Burden, a forty-seven-year-old resident of San Francisco in 1988, inexplicably finds himself thrust back in time to Vienna in the year 1897. He finds the city very familiar thanks to his beloved mentor, who saw late imperial Vienna as the cradle of modern intellectual thought. Wheeler's story, as related by his mother, encompasses Freudian analysis, the philosophy of baseball, the history of rock and roll, modern feminism, the growing waves of anti-Semitic sentiment in 19th-century Europe, the truth behind many Burden family legends, and much more. The distinct and wonderfully eccentric characters he meets gradually unlock the reasons for his presence there and then; to say more would be to give away too many of this novel's surprises! A poignant and unusual love story, Edwards' debut, thirty years in the writing, is also a delightful tribute to the vanished world of fin-de-siècle Vienna. There are few books that are both very cleverly put together and populated with characters you come to care about, but this is one of them. (Sarah Johnson)

- Morton, Kate. *The House at Riverton*, 2008. Subgenre: Sagas.  
 Grace Bradley, ninety-eight years old in 1999, receives an unexpected missive from a documentary filmmaker interested in knowing about her past: specifically, the years when young Grace was a maidservant for the Hartford family of Riverton Manor in the English countryside. Grace Reeves joins their household in 1914 and, from the sidelines, observes the interactions between siblings Hannah, Emmeline and David. All four grow up as the ebullient Edwardian period gives way to the more sobering pre-war years. A mystery lies at the novel's center, for only Hannah, Emmeline, and Grace know the truth about a talented young poet's alleged suicide at Riverton in 1924. Although the finale may not be as surprising as intended, this is an engrossing Gothic saga written in the grand old style, complete with dark family secrets whose presence haunts future generations. Morton pays homage to Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, which should be clear after reading the novel's first two lines. (Sarah Johnson)
- Viswanathan, Padma. *The Toss of a Lemon*, 2008. Subgenres: Sagas and Literary Fiction.  
 Sivakami, a girl of the Brahmin caste in Tamil Nadu, India, marries at age ten, in 1896, and is widowed eight years later – fulfilling astrologers' predictions. For the rest of her long life, she must adhere strictly to the rules proscribed by her culture: wearing a white sari, shaving her head, and touching no one during daylight hours, not even her young children. Sivakami raises them as best she can, though her decision to give her son, Vairum, a secular education puts him at odds with his mother, who builds her life around honoring and obeying Brahmin ways. This literary saga spans over sixty years of India's turbulent social and political history, as seen from the viewpoint of Sivakami and her similarly conservative granddaughter, Janaki. Readers will come away from it with a greater understanding of the realities of the caste system, as seen from both sides. It's a testament to the author's skill in drawing readers into Sivakami's world that, at over 600 pages, the novel isn't too long. (Sarah Johnson)

## Selected by Jessica Moyer

- Greenwood, Kerry. *Death by Water*, 2008. Phryne Fisher series, #8. Subgenre: Historical Mysteries.  
The latest in the Phryne Fisher series from Australia is available in both audio and print. Ready for some peace and quiet, Phryne takes a commission to seek a jewel thief (and possible murderer) on a cruise to New Zealand. With only Dot for assistance, Phryne's usual helpers are replaced with staff from the cruise ship, a cop from New Zealand, and a ship's cat. The always witty, always fabulous Phryne is at her best here, and narrator Stephanie Daniels is outstanding, especially in distinguishing between Kiwi and Aussie accents, all while keeping it understandable for American listeners. Phryne fans will also want the new Phryne short story collection, *A Question of Death*, which is beautifully illustrated in full color and includes cocktail recipes, and images of Phryne's favorites shoes, bags, and pistols. (Jessica Moyer)
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## Mainstream Fiction

### Selected by Laura Calderone

- Wroblewski, David. *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*, 2008.  
Hamlet-style tale that also celebrates the ancient alliance between humans and dogs follow the coming-of-age of speech-disabled Wisconsin youth Edgar, who bonds with three yearling canines and struggles to prove that his sinister uncle is responsible for his father's death. (Baker & Taylor). Stephen King has compared this novel to *Hamlet*, *Watership Down*, *The Night of the Hunter*, and *Life of Pi*. Readers who like the concept of a Shakespeare play retold in America's midlands may also enjoy Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*. (Diana Tixier Herald)

See also Cindy Orr's [Best General Fiction of 2008](#) in RAO Blog's Under the Radar column.

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## Romance

### Selected by Diana Tixier Herald

- Kenin, Eve. *Hidden*, 2008. Subgenres: Alternate Reality/ Futuristic Romance & Speculative Fiction/ Science Fiction/ Action-Adventure  
Tatiana, an escapee from a lab where a diabolical scientist had held her and her siblings to use their bioengineered tissue and blood in his experiments roams the Waste, a vast land of ice and snow, seeking Tolliver, a scientist who may hold some of the answers she needs. Teaming up with Tristan, they escape Reavers, cannibalistic nomads who roam the Waste preying on anyone they come across, and descend into a network of tunnels and caverns under the ice. There they are beset by horribly mutated Reavers who have lost all semblance of humanity. As Tatiana and Tristan, who may like all the other researchers in the underground labyrinth be infected with the horrible virus that has transformed the Reavers into monsters, try to find a way to the material Tristan needs to try to stop the epidemic they find themselves powerfully attracted to each other even though they both have secrets that they've thought would forever keep them from finding love. Nonstop action, a destroyed world, and convincing (although super smart, talented, and powerful) characters make for an enthralling read. Readers who liked post apocalyptic novels such as David Brin's *Postman* or movies like *Mad Max* will enjoy this fast paced adventure. It also has a lot that fans of *Firefly* and *Serenity* will enjoy. (Diana Tixier Herald)

See also Cindy Orr's [Great Romances of 2008](#) in RAO Blog's Under the Radar column.

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## Speculative Fiction (All Genres)

See also Cindy Orr's [Great Speculative Fiction of 2008](#) in RAO Blog's Under the Radar column.

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## Speculative Fiction/ Science Fiction

### Selected by Diana Tixier Herald

- Aguirre, Ann. *Grimspace*, 2008. Subgenre: Action-Adventure.  
Sirantha Jax is one of the rare few in the known universe who has a gene that allows her as a jumper, to navigate grimspace the parallel place in space that allows faster than light travel. All navigators work for the Farwan Corporation but they usually burn out quickly. In order to fly the ships a navigator must team up with a pilot because to travel from one point to another the navigator must see and the pilot must do. It is the only way travel through grimspace can occur. Jax is in a Corp. facility following a horrendous crash that killed everyone on board including Kai, who was her pilot, her lover, and her entire world. Now that her physical injuries have been taken care of the Corp. keeps sending in a sadistic shrink because Jax can't remember anything around the deadly accident. She is sprung from the facility by March, an independent pilot with a small crew who takes her to a hostile planet. She nearly causes the annihilation of her rescuers and two conflicting groups dirtside on the planet that seems like something out of the old west but with flying dinosaur-like predators to boot. This is only the beginning of a grand universe spanning adventure as Jax tries to find out what happened in her crash as she becomes part of a mission to create a new academy to find or create navigators apart from the Corp. Fast paced action, believable romance, terrific well developed characters, creative world building all in a package that will appeal greatly to fans of the TV series *Firefly* because of the camaraderie, ethics, and strength of the characters. (Diana Tixier Herald)
- Buckell, Tobias S. *Sly Mongoose*, 2008. Subgenre: Space Opera.  
Excellent world building by Buckell makes this blood drenched story of a cloud city fighting for survival rise above the pack. It follows the parallel and sometimes intersecting tales of fourteen-year-old Timas who belongs to an elite class of residents of Yatapek, a city that floats above the crushing pressure, heat, and toxic air of the planet Chilo. His family lives on high level because he is small and smart, able to fit into the antique pressure suits needed to perform work on the deadly surface of the planet. In order to continue as a xocoyotzin he has to starve himself and be bulimic. Pepper a sly old man lands on Yatapek after catapulting himself through space without a parachute to escape a disaster but he is wanted for slaying all his shipmates and creating the disaster. Two types of zombies, one a class of people who link consciousnesses for instant communications and operate on consensus, sends a teenage girl as emissary to Yatapek, the other type are people infected by a blood born disease the makes their consciousness and intellect grow with each newly infected human. Lots of action, blood, guts, and gore, along with hints of the complex history of the people of Chilo make this a great read. (Diana Tixier Herald)

- Martinez, A. Lee. *The Automatic Detective*, 2008. Subgenre: SF Mysteries. In mutant filled, pollution choked Empire City, Max Megaton, a sentient robot cab driver turns hard-boiled detective. Like many other hard-boiled sleuths in noir fiction, he has a soft heart, in this case it is for the neighbor children who have disappeared along with their parents. As he investigates and fights his own programming he uncovers a massive plot by infiltrating aliens and goes up against other robots built like him but that haven't developed the sentience that makes him so unique. This knight who needs no armor since he really is sort of armor himself also has a love interest, the beautiful and wealthy roboticist Lucia Napier. (Diana Tixier Herald)
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### **Speculative Fiction/Fantasy Selected by Diana Tixier Herald**

- Graham, Jo, *Black Ships*, 2008. Subgenre: Saga, Myth, and Legend; also Historical Fiction/Ancient Civilizations. At the fall of Troy, the women were taken as slaves, one of them who was raped gave birth in slavery to a daughter she called Gull. When Gull is crippled in an accident her mother takes her to Pythia, the oracle who live in a cave and takes care of the last rites for the dead. Gull becomes Pythia's apprentice and successor and when Pythia-who-was dies, Gull becomes Pythia, painting her face white and outlining her eyes in black. When a ship arrives with refugees from her mother's homeland, Pythia leaves with them to become the Sybil to the Trojan refugees lead by Aeneas who is searching for a new homeland for his people. A riveting tale, rich in history and emotion and well deserving of all the superlatives reviewers have used to describe it. (Diana Tixier Herald)

### **Selected by Neil Hollands**

- Carroll, Jonathan. *The Ghost in Love*, 2008. Carroll returns to literary fantasy in fine form with his latest tale of a man in unusual circumstances, the luminous woman he loves, and their talking dog. Everything seems normal at the start of a Carroll novel, but very quickly, the world tilts and everything goes strange. Ben Gould should die when he falls and hits his head on a curb, instead he continues to live and that changes all the rules of the game. The angel sent to lead him to the afterlife stays on to see what happens and falls in love with Ben's girlfriend German, while a frightening man capable of killing angels is chasing them all. Out of bizarre events, Carroll fashions a metaphysical tale that will leave you thinking about the way you live your life. This is thought-provoking, often moving writing. (Neil Hollands)

- Parker, K. J. *The Company*, 2008.

Parker writes fantasy novels with very little fantasy that are often at their best when describing mundane details like farming, mining gold, or breaking a line of pikes. Even his or her identity is a mystery, as Parker is a pseudonym for an author of a different sort of book who has yet to be revealed. But this standalone tale of a retired company of super soldiers who cannot sort out life after war is not a mystery; it's an engrossing and suspenseful study in the many ways that a successful method of living in one field of life can become disastrous when circumstances change. Told with plenty of dark humor, psychological insight, and an insistence on maintaining realism in situations which other fantasy novels gloss over, this is speculative writing that should please even the hardest-headed of realists. (Neil Hollands)

### **Selected by Jessica Moyer**

- Carey, Jacqueline. *Kushiel's Mercy*, 2008. [Kushiel's Legacy series, #6](#).  
Subgenre: Alternate Worlds.

This series continues to be some of the best fantasy published, the length and depth of the story will satisfy readers wanting a really "epic" story and the ongoing theme of love will please romantic readers. Imriel and Princess have been forbidden to marry until Imri brings his mother, the famous traitor, home for justice, when a general and a sorcerer from Carthage cast malevolent spell on the city and all its inhabitants, except Imri who is saved by his mother's long reach, only to be considered dangerously insane. A more than satisfying conclusion to one of the best fantasy series of this century, As Imri and Sidonle prove their for each and their country. This was also on the best overlooked speculative fiction of 2008, which was what inspired me to read it this weekend, even though I should have been doing end of the semester work. Totally enthralled, I spent an entire day immersed in Carey's fantastical late medieval Europe, and emerged, desperately hoping she'll write more. Only Diana Gabaldon's [Outlander series](#) grabs me in the same way, keeping me reading through several hundred pages, barely able to break for a snack. (Jessica Moyer)

- Freeman, Pamela. *Blood Ties*, 2008. [Castings Trilogy, #1](#)

The first book in a very promising new fantasy series, it was so enjoyable to read that I went out looking for more fantasy series books, something I haven't looked for in a long time. Darker, bleaker, and more violent than traditional epic fantasy, then only thing I can compare it to is the other really great new fantasy I read this, *Innocent Mage* by Karen Miller. 1000 years ago, Asher's people invaded from the North and stole the 7 domains from their original owners, who were forced onto the road to become Travelers. Despised by many, and ostracized by most, the Travelers live on the fringes of their own lands, keeping the ancient traditions alive. Told from alternating points of view, each chapter is headed with the name of the narrator, from the half Traveler Bramble with a gift for horses, to Traveler turned assassin Ash, to Saker, a sorcerer determined to avenge the past. Readers who enjoyed Martin's [Song of Fire and Ice trilogy](#) will be pleased with the complex moral issues, character and interweaving storylines. (Jessica Moyer)

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## **Speculative Fiction/Horror**

### **Selected by Anthony J. Fonseca**

- Ochse, Weston. *Scarecrow Gods*, 2008 (2005).  
The July 2008 reissue of Weston Ochse's first novel, *Scarecrow Gods*, the 2005 Bram Stoker Award winner for Superior Achievement in a First Novel, promises to turn the heads of horror fans. The action gets off to a rousing start with the introduction of Maxom Phinx, an African-American who served in Vietnam in the Special Forces. By the present day Tennessee setting of the story, Maxom is nothing more than a scarred, horribly disfigured human trunk; he has lost most of his left arm, both of his legs, and all of his body hair. But Maxom's existence does have one silver lining-while he was being tortured he developed psychic powers. Maxom befriends Danny, a troubled twelve-year-old whose older sister has mysteriously disappeared from the family home, and through Maxom, Danny begins to hone his own version of the psychic arts. Meanwhile, in connected plotline, a mysterious preacher known as John the New Baptist has established his own cult complex in Arizona. But he is anything but a savior; he has also learned the art of psychic projection, and he uses it to command an army of coyotes, snakes, and other dangerous animals, in order to terminate anyone who might want to investigate the mysterious disappearances of the young female converts. John the New Baptist has drawn the attention of Brother Simon, an Alexian monk who is aided by Billy Bones-a local homeless character who literally speaks in tongues, communicating in anagrams, palindromes, and metaphors. Throw in an unlikable FBI Special Agent nicknamed The Ghoul, and you have an epic battle of good versus evil to rival any King or Straub epic. (Anthony J. Fonseca)

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## **Teen Fiction**

### **Selected by Diana Tixier Herald**

- Benway, Robin. *Audrey, Wait!*, 2008. Genre: Teen Contemporary.  
When Audrey breaks up with Evan because he really only cares about his band they vow they will remain friends. When she hears the song he wrote about their break up she is not happy but she figures it will blow over. Unfortunately for her it takes off, Evan gets a record contract, and pretty soon even her Dad who has no idea it is about her is humming it. The catchy tune has taken the world by storm rocketing up the charts and making Audrey famous -- or is it infamous -- as the girl who broke the heart of The Do-Gooders cute lead singer. Her fame leads to serious difficulties at work at the ice cream shop in the mall where she is finding romance. (Diana Tixier Herald)

- Cashore, Kristin. *Graceling*, 2008. Genre: Teen Speculative/Fantasy/Alternate Worlds.

Gracelings can be identified by their unmatching eyes and when they are the king takes them into his service so he can use whatever unusual talent they manifest. Katsa, niece of the king has the grace of killing so she is forced to serve as her uncle's assassin. Hating what she has to do she has started up an underground movement to save people when she can which is how she meets Prince Po who has one eye of silver and one of gold. *Graceling* is a stunningly good debut novel with beautiful world building, an interesting form of paranormal powers, a wonderful kick-ass heroine, a touching romance, and strong, though very subtly conveyed, values. This is a major book so take notice. (Diana Tixier Herald)
- Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*, 2008. Genre: Teen Speculative/Science Fiction/Bleak Future.

In a dystopic future North America is divided into 12 districts plus the Capitol. District 12 is the bottom of the barrel. It is economically disadvantaged, its mining industry going downhill. Each year a boy and a girl are chosen from each of the districts to compete in a reality tv show. The winner is the one who survives when all the others are dead. This powerful page turner, the first in a trilogy but which stands alone just fine, is horrifying and thought provoking. It's exploration of what people will do to survive reminded me a little of Sleator's *House of Stairs*. (Diana Tixier Herald)
- Doctorow, Cory. *Little Brother*, 2008. Teen Speculative/Science Fiction/Utopia/Dystopia.

*"Those who would give up Essential Liberty to purchase a little Temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."* -Benjamin Franklin.

Marcus Yallow and three of his friends skip out of school to participate in an interactive online game. In a horrible case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time they witness the San Francisco Bay Bridge being blown up, perhaps by terrorists. When the quartet tries to go to ground in a BART station the press of the crowd proves deadly and his friend Darryl is stabbed. Up on the street, trying to flag down help to get Darryl to a hospital, they are picked up as suspected terrorists by the Department of Homeland Security and taken to a secret prison where Marcus is tortured and interrogated. Days later he is allowed to go home but threatened with retribution if he is to reveal that he had been imprisoned and tortured. An accomplished hacker, he figures out a way to fight back. Full of heart and terrifyingly real, Doctorow's first novel written specifically for teens is sure to be discussed and applauded by both teen and adult readers who realize the significance of the dystopian world that is evolving before us. Readers who have not yet read Orwell's *1984* will want to as they will find interesting and scary parallels. (Diana Tixier Herald)

- Fields, Terri. *My Father's Son*, 2008. Genre: Teen Thriller & Teen Issues. Kevin spends weekends with his dad who is well off and works for a computer company. He mostly lives with his mom who has little money and does data entry for a living. A good student with aspirations of going to Yale, he has just started his first romance when his father is arrested as a notorious serial killer, DB25. As his life veers abruptly off course, Emily claims he is stalking her, his best friend starts going out with her, his father refuses his visits, he gets in fights and is suspended from school. (Diana Tixier Herald)
- Gaiman, Neil. *The Graveyard Book*, 2008. Genre: Teen Speculative/Paranormal/Ghosts  
Nobody Owens, a precocious toddler wanders away from his house and into a mostly abandoned cemetery just as an assassin breaks in and slays his parents and older sister. The ghostly residents of the cemetery take him under their wing, the Owens because they always wanted children in life but didn't have them, and because Bod's newly murdered mother has beseeched them to please look out for her baby. A living child being raised by ghosts presents some logistical problems which are solved by a vampire guardian who is neither alive nor dead who can obtain food for Bod. As Bod grows up he learns many of the ghostly skills such as fading and scaring, human skills such as reading, and finds a living friend whose family figures him for an imaginary companion. As an adolescent he learns that the assassin who killed his original family is still seeking him and he must save himself. (Diana Tixier Herald)
- Werlin, Nancy. *Impossible*, 2008. Genre: Teen Speculative/ Fantasy/ Mythic Reality.  
This lush, beautifully told contemporary story of Lucinda, a young woman who is the victim of an ancient curse is based on the ballad Scarborough Fair. Raised by loving foster parents after being abandoned as an infant by Miranda, her mentally ill teenage mother, Lucy has grown up to be a centered, sensible person who is the last person anyone would figure would turn up pregnant. Along with her foster parents and poodle Pierre, the household also includes Zach, a college student who had been their neighbor and moved in when his family moved away in his senior year of high school. Miranda's legacy to Lucy was a unique form of the song made famous by Simon and Garfunkle and some pages torn from her journal and hidden in a secret compartment of a bookcase. When Zack finds Miranda's journal they discover that generations of Scarborough girls have been cursed but that the song holds the clues to end the curse. Filled with romance and love, this exquisitely crafted tale, will find many devoted readers. (Diana Tixier Herald)

- Zarr, Sara. *Sweethearts*, 2008. Genre: Teen Issues.  
In elementary school Jennifer Harris was the fat-girl outcast who shoplifted treats and ate in secret. Her only friend was Cameron Quick who had his own load of problems. He moved away in 5th grade and then died. Fast forward to senior year of high school and Jennifer has morphed into self confident popular Jenna Vaughn complete with popular boyfriend and crowd. Suddenly, on her birthday, a card arrives from Cameron. Tales of his death were greatly exaggerated but how could he have been gone eight years without ever contacting her? Now he is back and a horrible event from their childhood is haunting Jenna. (Diana Tixier Herald)

### **Selected by Neil Hollands**

- Doctorow, Cory. *Little Brother*, 2008. Teen Speculative/Science Fiction/Utopia/Dystopia.  
The always excellent Doctorow doesn't disappoint as he turns to near-future, young adult science fiction. 17-year-old Marcus thinks he knows all the tricks in his digital world, but when he and three friends are in the wrong place at the wrong time, a terrorist attack on San Francisco, they find themselves the targets of Department of Homeland Security arrest and harassment. A fast-paced cat-and-mouse game through the digital underground results. Readers may or may not respond to rebellious young Marcus, but those who follow the news in a digital age will be chilled by the ease with which digital snooping is implemented and how easily it can expand into harassment and disaster. This young adult fiction should please the techno-savvy of all ages. (Neil Hollands)

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### **Thrillers**

#### **Selected by Jane Jorgenson**

- Connolly, John. *The Reapers*, 2008. Subgenre: Maniacs, Murderers, Psychopaths and Serial Killers.  
Charlie Parker, a former NYPD detective, is similar to Lee Child's Jack Reacher in that he uses unorthodox (often violent) means to solve people's problems. In *The Reapers*, the person in trouble is Charlie's friend Louis. Someone is stalking Louis, and when he and his partner Angel go missing, Charlie enters the fray. Connolly writes beautiful prose describing ugly and gritty events to awesome effect. (Jane Jorgenson)

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## Nonfiction

### History

#### Selected by Sarah Statz Cords

- Penney, Darby. *The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*, 2008. Subgenre: New Perspectives  
In this simultaneously heartbreaking and eye-opening work of history, the authors reconstruct the life stories of individuals who spent years in New York's Willard State Hospital being treated for various mental illnesses, and whose suitcases and belongings were found in the hospital's attic when it was closed. Health and social history are combined in the masterfully told personal narratives. (Sarah Statz Cords)

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## Investigative Writing

#### Selected by Sarah Statz Cords

- Pearce, Fred. *Confessions of an Eco-Sinner: Tracking Down the Sources of My Stuff*, 2008. Subgenre: Exposés  
Journalist Pearce decided to track down the sources of things he saw around him in his own house, including his food, his cotton socks, his computer, his gold wedding band, and many more items. The result is a fascinating but never heavy-handed consideration of how the things we consume are produced and by whom, as well as how the things we consume continue their lives as recycled materials (or not). Fans of Michael Pollan and Wendell Berry might find much to like in this thoughtful expose. (Sarah Statz Cords)

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## Life Stories

### Selected by Sarah Statz Cords

- Jenkins, Steve. *The Food Life: Inside the World of Food with the Grocer Extraordinaire at Fairway*, 2008 Subgenre: Memoirs and Autobiography, Memoirs, Working Life Memoirs, Foodie Memoirs  
Jenkins, grocer and food-lover extraordinaire and author of "The Cheese Primer," offers a look behind the scenes at New York's venerated grocery chain Fairway. Bursting with personal asides, work anecdotes, mouthwatering descriptions of food, and recipes, this is a fun read that will both educate you about food AND make you really, really hungry. (Sarah Statz Cords)

### Selected by David Rainey

- Dorsett, Lyle. *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer*, 2008. Subgenre: Sub-genre: Biography, Christian Reading Interest.  
Lyle Dorsett writes about Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963), a well-known Christian and Missionary Alliance pastor who grew up as a farm boy in Pennsylvania. Tozer, who pastored a Chicago church for 30 years, is famous for writing the Christian classics *The Pursuit of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Dorsett does a great job of revealing both the strengths (devotion to God) and weaknesses (sterile home life) of this self-taught preacher, writer, and editor. (David Rainey)

### Selected by Rosalind Reisner

- Cooper, Helene. *The House at Sugar Beach: A Memoir*, 2008.  
Cooper's ancestors were the free American blacks who settled Liberia in 1820; she grew up as part of an elite governing class, in a luxurious twenty-two room beach house. A coup in 1980 changed all that and her family fled to America, leaving her adopted sister Eunice behind to cope with the ensuing corruption and violence. After years traveling around the world as a journalist, Cooper returned to Liberia to find her sister and make amends for her family's betrayal. (Rosalind Reisner)
- Grant, Richard. *God's Middle Finger: Into the Lawless Heart of the Sierra Madre*, 2008.  
Grant offers a compulsively readable account of his travels in the scenic mountains of western Mexico where tense encounters with trigger-happy drug runners, bandits, and corrupt police satisfied his craving for adventure. He also met up with more benign locals who filled him in on the area's long outlaw traditions. Along the way he--and the reader--acquire an extensive vocabulary of Spanish obscenities. (Rosalind Reisner)

- Gilmour, David. *The Film Club*, 2008.  
Gilmour allowed his disaffected fifteen-year old son, Jesse, to drop out of high school if he agreed to watch three movies every week with his father. They spent several years watching and talking about films--from *The Four Hundred Blows* to *Pulp Fiction*--and in the process father and son learned about each other and connected in unexpected ways. (Rosalind Reisner)
- Shepard, Sadia. *The Girl from Foreign: A Search for Shipwrecked Ancestors, Forgotten Histories, and a Sense of Home*, 2008.  
Growing up in a diverse and accepting household--her father was a white Presbyterian and her mother a Pakistani Muslim--Shepard was stunned to learn that her beloved Muslim grandmother was actually born Jewish, part of the Bene Israel who came to India two thousand years ago. Her compelling memoir about her trip to India to understand this unexpected part of her heritage alternates with chapters about her mother's family history. (Rosalind Reisner)
- Walters, Barbara. *Audition: A Memoir*, 2008.  
Walters' candid autobiography reveals the insecurities that drove her ambition. Her father made and lost several fortunes in the nightclub business, her older sister was mildly retarded, and Walters' fears that she would need to support her family ultimately proved true. As a producer in the early days of TV news, she learned the skills that would propel her to fame as an interviewer of politicians, royals, and stars. Well-paced and absorbing, this is a great behind-the-scenes story. (Rosalind Reisner)

### **Selected by Rick Roche**

- Fuller, Alexandra. *The Legend of Colton H. Bryant*, 2008. Subgenre: Biography/Coming of Age.  
Fuller succeeds where many writers never venture - she has written a compelling biography about not-famous person. Colton H. Bryant was a young man who did poorly in school and died young in an oilfield accident. Though this brief statement makes Bryant sound common, he was in fact a son, brother, husband, and father who touched and troubled many lives. A quick read that many readers will enjoy. (Rick Roche)
- Kendall, Joshua. *The Man Whom Made Lists: Love, Death, Madness, and the Creation of Roget's Thesaurus*, 2008. Subgenre: Biography/ Overcoming Adversity.  
Kendall describes the life of an eccentric 19th century polymath with insanity in his immediate family. Keeping lists kept him sane. Readers will enjoy learning about early Victorian London, too. (Rick Roche)

- Nicholl, Charles. *The Lodger Shakespeare: His Life on Silver Street*, 2008. Subgenre: Biography/ Artists, Entertainers, and Writers  
Much of what Nicholl writes is really speculation. He examines personal documents, court transcripts, and governmental records to learn about the people who lived around William Shakespeare on Silver Street in London, people whom he encountered daily. Nicholl shows how this vibrant neighborhood of European immigrants, criminals, prostitutes, and literary figures appear in Shakespeare's plays. (Rick Roche)
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## Teen Nonfiction

### Selected by Elizabeth Fraser

- Bishop, Nic. *Nic Bishop Frogs*, 2008. Genre: Teen Environmental Writing [Middle School].  
The cover alone makes this a book that will attract an audience: Nic Bishop is one of the best photographers around and the pages of this book are full of colorful, entrancing specimens that will either enthrall or horrify. Each page is full of interesting facts, all of which are illustrated in large, full-color pictures that will have reluctant readers returning to them again and again. (Elizabeth Fraser)
- Fleischman, Sid. *The Trouble Begins At 8:--A Life of Mark Twain in the Wild, Wild West*, 2008. Genre: Teen Life Stories [Middle School/Junior High].  
When Mark Twain launched his speaking career, the posters announcing his engagements let people know that the "Doors open at 7 o'clock. The Trouble begins at 8 o'clock." Twain wasn't sure that people would come to listen to a journalist speak but ended up launching a new career, becoming the man that "made laughing out loud as respectable as afternoon tea." Find out how Samuel Clemens evolved from a steamboat pilot into a newspaperman, traveling from the Mississippi River to San Francisco to the Sandwich Islands while gathering the stories that would allow him to create some of America's greatest literary masterpieces. (Elizabeth Fraser)

- Nelson, Scott Reynolds. *Ain't Nothing But a Man: My Quest*, 2008. [Middle School/Junior High].  
 Scott Reynolds Nelson tried for years to find the truth behind an American legend. He listened to hundreds of versions of "John Henry," the folk song about a "steel driving man" who fought a race against a steam engine and won, without managing to verify John Henry's existence. He started out by visiting any place that had ever been connected with John Henry as well as doing his own research studying the railroad, all of which is documented. This book serves as a valuable reminder of the work involved in historical research. Nelson's epiphany came when he found a clue in a 1910 postcard that allowed him to make a connection that no other historian had yet considered. Find out how a historian managed to track down one possibility for the legendary John Henry among the 40,000 African-American "trackliners" of the Post-Civil war era and learn about these men and the work they did in this well-illustrated history. (Elizabeth Fraser)
- Scieszka, Jon. *Knucklehead: tall tales and mostly true stories of growing up Scieszka*. 2008. Genre: Memoirs and Autobiographies/Humorous Memoirs.  
 Jon Scieszka's memoir may be the funniest book of the year. It will appeal to reluctant readers and boys in equal measure. Readers will learn many things about Mr. Scieszka, including: how to say his name correctly, that he is one of six brothers, that being one of the older brothers in a large family has many advantages and that you never want to be one of six in back of a car when the cat gets sick. The chapters are short, humorous, advocate reading and will be a good step-up for Gary Paulsen's *How Angel Peterson Got His Name: and other tales about extreme sports*. (Elizabeth Fraser)