

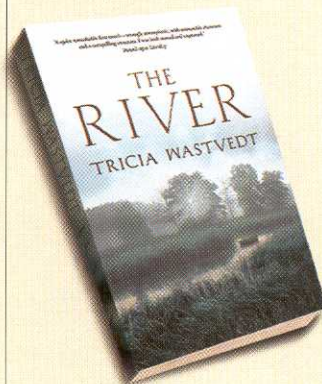
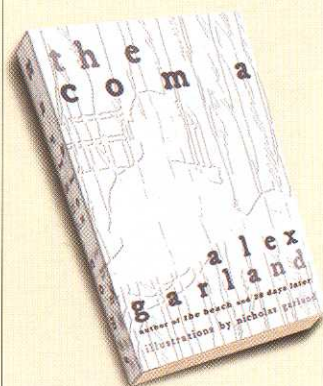
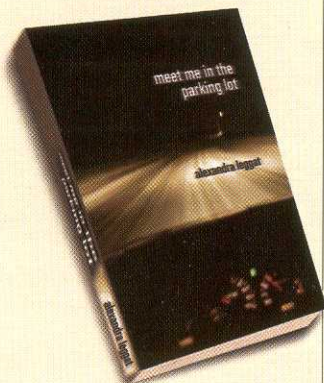
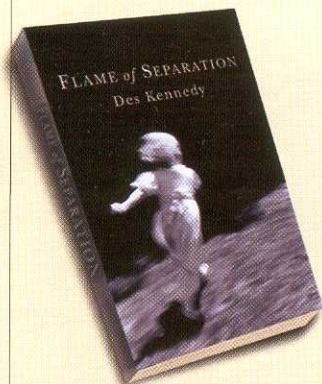
ENGAGING SUMMER READING

Read these books on your vacation. By SUE BOWNESS

FLAME OF SEPARATION

By Des Kennedy
Insomniac Press
270 pages

In *Flame of Separation*, Dexter Cooke is a thirty-something schoolteacher living a mediocre life in a small town. Nudged from his complacency by the return of a spectre from his past, Cooke must reconsider his past experience with a prophet named Gabriel who shook his own teenage years, in order to help his student Susan Slater who also experiences the visitations. Cooke's efforts are further complicated by the discovery of a corpse, and the more figurative ghosts of his own troubling past. Beyond the paranormal, the real wealth of this novel lies in Kennedy's ability to create complex characters and family relationships. From the intricacy of Cooke's bond with a father sinking into dementia, to his stealth navigation through the polite incompatibility between his mother and his wife, the quiet complexity and the tight bonds of family serve to draw readers into this story and keep them riveted.



MEET ME IN THE PARKING LOT

By Alexandra Leggat
Insomniac Press
163 pages

Alexandra Leggat's second short story collection *Meet Me in the Parking Lot* is a series of short, often visual glimpses into difficult relationships with family,

friends, and even objects. While the plot of the collection's opening story "The Car" can be summarized by its own first sentence, "I sleep in the car," the pages that follow describe a woman seeking sanctuary from her family in her relationship with her car. With its starkness and concise dialogue, this story typifies many others in the collection by providing a snapshot of an obviously complex relationship. While these snapshot stories provide poignant glimpses, sampling the longer "Aberdeen," which describes a girl's lost relationship with her mother, allows readers to recognize Leggat's talent for character and makes us hope that in her next collection the author allows us not only to glimpse her characters, but to look at them a little longer.

THE COMA

By Alex Garland
Riverhead Books
144 pages

In *The Coma*, a man attacked in London's Underground emerges from a coma in the hospital, relieved to be alive and awake. Yet just as we share in his waking respite, the reader is also plunged with him into his sinking realization that this awakening is not reality at all but simply another phase of the altered coma world. Undaunted, the man begins using the reality that he has to try to find the catalyst to his waking, seeking out everything from Little Richard songs to his childhood

home to trigger his release. Author Alex Garland's screenwriting talents (he wrote the acclaimed film *28 Days Later*) are clearly apparent in the visual style of this novel, and that combined with his relentless pacing makes for a quick read. The novel's crude and inky woodblock print illustrations, done by the author's artist father, correspond suitably to the murky images of Garland's prose.

THE RIVER

By Tricia Wastvedt
Viking Canada
272 pages

Tricia Wastvedt's first novel tells the story of the small, oddly-named English village of Cameldip. Or rather, it tells the stories of the lives that unwittingly become intertwined in that village. At the centre of those lives is a tragedy; the drowning of two children and ensuing estrangement of their parents, who are among the town's oldest residents and whose sorrow subtly touches all of its inhabitants. Like newcomers to the town themselves, readers learn about these characters' lives in bits and pieces, which at the beginning may cause a struggle keeping names and dates straight, but further on rewards that initial effort with a genuine sense of entrenchment in the town's history and concern for its inhabitants. Like many good novels, this tale takes readers into another world, allowing us to be caught up in the complex lives and simple loves of a beloved country village.

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