

FICTION

New York Times
best sellers

■ Fiction

- 1. The Lake House** — by James Patterson. Little, Brown, \$27.95
- 2. The Da Vinci Code** — by Dan Brown. Doubleday, \$24.95
- 3. The King of Torts** — by John Grisham. Doubleday, \$27.95
- 4. The Face** — by Dean Koontz. Bantam, \$26.95
- 5. Naked Prey** — by John Sandford. Putnam, \$26.95
- 6. Flirting with Pete** — by Barbara Delinsky. Scribner, \$26
- 7. The Devil Wears Prada** — by Lauren Weisberger. Doubleday, \$21.95
- 8. The Lovely Bones** — by Alice Sebold. Little, Brown, \$21.95
- 9. The Guardian** — by Nicholas Sparks. Warner, \$24.95
- 10. Armageddon** — by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Tyndale, \$24.99

■ Nonfiction

- 1. Living History** — by Hillary Rodham Clinton. Simon and Schuster, \$28
- 2. The Teammates** — by David Halberstam. Hyperion, \$22.95
- 3. Who's Your Caddy?** — by Rick Reilly. Doubleday, \$24.95
- 4. An Unfinished Life** — by Robert Dallek. Little, Brown, \$30
- 5. Moneyball** — by Michael Lewis. Norton, \$24.95
- 6. Open** — by John Feinstein. Little, Brown, \$25.95
- 7. A Short History of Nearly Everything** — by Bill Bryson. Broadway, \$27.50
- 8. Dereliction of Duty** — by Robert "Buzz" Patterson. Regnery, \$27.95
- 9. Beyond Belief** — by Elaine Pagels. Random House, \$24.95
- 10. Me and My Dad** — by Paul O'Neill and Burton Rocks. Morrow, \$25.95

Local best sellers

■ Fiction

- 1. The Da Vinci Code** — by Dan Brown
- 2. Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix** — by J.K. Rowling
- 3. Villa Incognito** — by Tom Robbins
- 4. Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire** — by J.K. Rowling
- 5. Death and the Icebox** — by Linda Berry
- 6. Dead Ringer** — by Lisa Scottoline
- 7. Dragon Bones** — by Lisa See
- 8. The Lake House** — by James Patterson
- 9. The Sinister Pig** — by Tony Hillerman
- 10. The Lovely Bones** — by Alice Sebold

■ Nonfiction

- 1. Living History** — by Hillary Rodham Clinton
- 2. Who's Your Caddy?** — by Rick Reilly
- 3. Miss America By Day** — by Marilyn Van Derbur
- 4. The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success** — by Deepak Chopra
- 5. Beyond Belief** — by Elaine H. Pagels
- 6. Golf for Enlightenment** — by Deepak Chopra
- 7. Treason** — by Ann Coulter
- 8. The Ultimate Ride** — by Chris Carmichael
- 9. South Beach Diet** — by Arthur Agatston
- 10. Radical Acceptance** — by Tara Brach and Jack Kornfield

Information for the Denver-area best-seller list is provided by the *Tattered Cover in Cherry Creek, Borders Books in Englewood and the Boulder Book Store.*

Growing through the grief

'Hey Nostradamus!' offers emotional insight amid Columbine echoes

By Jessica Slater
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Best known for his first novel *Generation X*, which characterized the disaffected post-boomer mentality, Douglas Coupland has an extraordinary talent for capturing the essence of a subculture, cutting through its cool pretensions and showing us the guts and soul. As such, his work provides a diverse and accomplished exploration of contemporary life.

Perhaps it isn't surprising, then, that he should tackle one of the most tragic events of recent history in his new book. *Hey Nostradamus!* is based on a high school shooting similar to what happened at Columbine on April 20, 1999. The novel is filled with Coupland's typically wry observations of modern culture, but the horror of the event brings his compassion closer to the surface and gives his writing a more mature, subdued perspective.

The fictional shooting takes place at a suburban Vancouver high school in 1988. Students in the cafeteria hear popping sounds that they think are some kind of prank, until they see a wounded student stagger into the cafeteria and collapse on the floor.

Three 11th-graders carrying guns, dressed in military fatigues and covered with bandoleers of ammunition, appear at the cafeteria doors and start shooting students at random. Arguing among themselves and taunting jocks, they terrorize those sheltered under tables or pretending to be dead.

Cheryl had gone to the cafeteria to meet Jason, her high school sweetheart. When the shooting begins, she scrambles under a table with other students. As sirens sound and the alarm bells ring, escape seems possible, but one of the gunmen shoots Cheryl in the side.

She doesn't die immediately; she hears Jason's voice and the shot that misses him. Then, he lifts up the table and is next to her.

"He tried holding me up, but my neck was limp, and all I could see was across the room, children crushing other children. And that was that."

Through the narratives of four characters — Cheryl, Jason, Jason's eventual new girlfriend, and his father — the novel tracks the reverberations of the tragedy across two decades. If you expect this to be "the story of Columbine," the plot may start to seem tangential, but ultimately it expands on the event and builds its own significance.

The first chapter is written from the perspective of Cheryl, who is talking to readers in some spiritual state between earth and the next reality. Her descriptions of the shooting are interspersed with backstory about her family and her secret elopement to Las Vegas with Jason.

The gravity of Cheryl's fate gives her words potency, but she also emerges as the character who is the most at peace of the four.

"I can discuss the killings with the detachment I have from being in this new place," she says. "The world is pulling away from me, losing its capacity to hurt."

This detachment makes her narrative all the more heartbreaking because her voice is so calm and matter-of-fact: "It had been drilled into us that to feel fear is to not fully trust God. Whoever made that one up has never been beneath a cafeteria table with a tiny thread of someone else's blood trickling onto their leg."

From her position beyond death, Cheryl can hear other people's prayers, though she cannot identify

who is saying them. This device is powerful in presenting characters struggling to reconcile their faith with the unimaginable tragedy. In one prayer, readers can feel the anger and hopelessness attached to such an event:

"Dear Lord,
"If You organized a massacre just to make people have doubts, then

maybe You ought to consider other ways of doing things. A high school massacre? Kids with pimento loaf sandwiches and cans of Orange Crush? I don't think You would orchestrate something like this. A massacre in a high school cafeteria can only indicate Your absence — that for some reason in some manner You chose to absent Yourself from the room — forsake it, actually..."

The novel explores religion and faith through these prayers and its main characters. It raises questions that have existed as long as humans have tried to make sense of their own suffering.

Coupland's characters confront these questions in a culture where religious preference is often expressed by bumper stickers rather than in open discussion.

As the story unfolds over time, the immediacy of the shooting fades, yet Coupland captures the sense of how deeply the scars can penetrate a soul. From the pure simplicity of Cheryl's story, as a much-loved teen whose life was ended in an instant, we move to the complex emotional landscape of the aftermath. The years that follow the shooting see shifting loyalties as each character wrestles with their own private grief.

Jason's narrative is dated 11 years after the shooting. His character reveals the darker side of the media's

Hey Nostradamus!

■ By Douglas Coupland.
Bloomsbury USA, 244 pages, \$21.95.
■ Grade: A-



Author kept Columbine families in mind

The Columbine high school tragedy will not soon be forgotten. The idea of creating fiction from it, as Douglas Coupland has done in *Hey Nostradamus!*, seems like a challenge many authors would decline, an emotional minefield too treacherous to enter. Coupland, however, has chosen to enter it, and the result is a poignant novel, more reflective and subdued than much of his previously-published work.

Given the well of emotions in the mind of any reader picking up a nov-

el ostensibly about Columbine, we asked Coupland a few questions via e-mail.

How directly did the actual events of Columbine lead to your writing the novel?

"When the shootings first happened, I didn't think they affected me more than any other shocked and appalled citizen. But in hindsight, the events formed some kind of seed crystal within me, and the book grew from that seed. I had no idea it was happening until a few

months before I began writing it. It's like that with all the books I've written, but this one surprised me."

What particular challenges did you encounter incorporating such an emotionally charged event into your writing?

"(It was challenging trying to create) dignity for the characters, respect for the living and the dead. The ultimate test for me was always, 'OK, if a family member of one of the victims read this book, would they feel as if their experiences had been honored?'"

(One of Coupland's recurring themes in his writing is religion. "Hey Nostradamus!" is no exception, with characters struggling to understand how God could condone such a massacre) Why is religion such an important subject to you?

"I don't know. I come from a secular household, and it was never much discussed. I come from a modern West Coast city where it's never discussed, and yet I find myself thinking of God for a sizeable por-