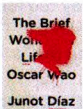


**1. Junot Díaz**  
**The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao**  
*In stores*



**Age 38**  
**Home** New York City  
**Why Him?** After critics went nuts for his 1996 debut, *Drown*, *The New Yorker* labeled Dominican-born Díaz one of the 20 best young writers in America today. Eleven long years later, he makes good on his promise with a funny, moving, slang-filled novel about a fat geek battling a generations-long family curse. **Why It Took So Long** "I had this ridiculous work ethic," says Díaz. "I would write in the mornings and then throw it all away and spend the rest of the day thinking, 'Damn, why can't I get hit by a truck?'" **On His Rave Reviews** "Dude, I feel like I been smoking crack. I come from one of those immigrant families that believes if good stuff happens you're doomed." —Karen Valby

**2. Vincent Lam**  
**Bloodletting & Miraculous Cures**  
*In stores*



**Age 33**  
**Home** Toronto  
**Why Him?** Lam became the youngest winner of Canada's top lit award, the Giller Prize, for his collection of 12 linked stories about four aspiring physicians. A familiar set-up, but he portrays young docs with a defter, more sensitive hand than any TV drama. **Inspiration** He completed the book between shifts as an ER doc at Toronto East General Hospital. "Someone comes to the emergency room [because] they've had a major plot twist," says Lam. "What they're looking for is an interpretation of that plot twist." **What's Next** A novel set in Saigon during the Vietnam War titled *Cholon, Near Forgotten*, due next fall. And an occasional coffee with the writers for a *Bloodletting* miniseries on Canada's Movie Network. —Fred McKindra

**3. Chelsea Cain**  
**Heartsick**  
*In stores*



**Age 35**  
**Home** Portland, Ore.  
**Why Her?** The Oregon newspaper columnist has crafted one of the year's most original crime thrillers—and a truly indelible psychopath, the deliciously depraved Gretchen Lowell. **Inspiration** "There's something intrinsically scary about a woman who kills," says Cain. "We're supposed to nurture, not carve someone up with an X-Acto knife." **What's Next** At least two sequels to *Heartsick* featuring Gretchen and her ardent pursuers, Det. Archie Sheridan and journalist Susan Ward. "But if I ever get around to the story of Gretchen Lowell's childhood," she says, "I hope someone takes the pen from my hand and uses it to stab me in the throat." —Leah Greenblatt

**4. Jenny Downham**  
**Before I Die**  
*Sept. 25*



**Age 43**  
**Home** London  
**Why Her?** In former actress Downham's first novel, *Before I Die*, 16-year-old Tessa is dying of cancer and wants to cram a lifetime of experience—including love—into her last few months. Random House snapped up the YA heartbreaker a week after Downham finished. **Inspiration** "I started with the voice," says Downham. "I didn't know Tessa was dying. She just seemed very sad and angry, and I wasn't sure why. After six months it became apparent." **What's Next** Another novel. "I have a voice, a location, and it seems to be for young adults, but I don't really want to know what it's about," she says. "I'll approach it from a lot of angles and chuck lots of words at it." —Jennifer Reese

**5. Shalom Auslander**  
**Foreskin's Lament**  
*Oct. 4*



**Age 37**  
**Home** Woodstock, N.Y.  
**Why Him?** Auslander, a regular on NPR's *This American Life*, has always feared God. His memoir about growing up as an Orthodox Jew is a grim, uproarious account of how he got that way. **Why He's So Afraid** "Growing up, I was told lots of scary things about Him! 'Hi, kids, there's a guy, and if you piss Him off, He's gonna flood the world,'" Auslander recalls. "Later, a lot of kids realize that's not necessarily the real deal, but I didn't go through that." **Signs From Above?** "I had a flat tire yesterday morning. I didn't think anything about God at that point, but then this morning my car battery was dead. I thought, 'I'm 30 days from publication; this is when He starts to get pissed.'" —Gregory Kirschling