Tatouine

Discussion Guide

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BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR *TATOUINE* BY JEAN-CHRISTOPHE RÉHEL

This book discussion guide can be used by Book Clubs both private or library-run. Or maybe you would like to use this guide to enhance your own reading experience as you follow along with Un Livrel/One eRead Canada program in April 2023.

What is Un Livrel/One eRead Canada? A digital, bilingual cross-Canada book club initiated by the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) to promote digital content in public libraries. Libraries provide access to the title through the eBook and audiobook platforms they subscribe to.

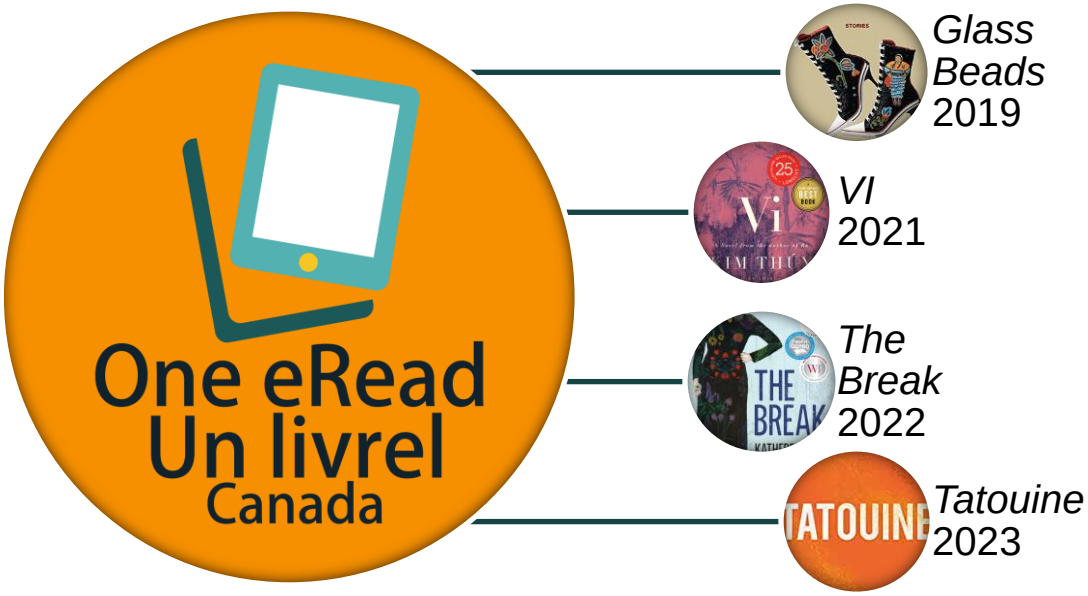
Past books featured by Un livrel/One eRead Canada:

Glass Beads, Dawn Dumont

Vi, Kim Thuy

The Break, Katherena Vermette

Ce qu'on respire sur Tatouine, Jean Christophe Réhel



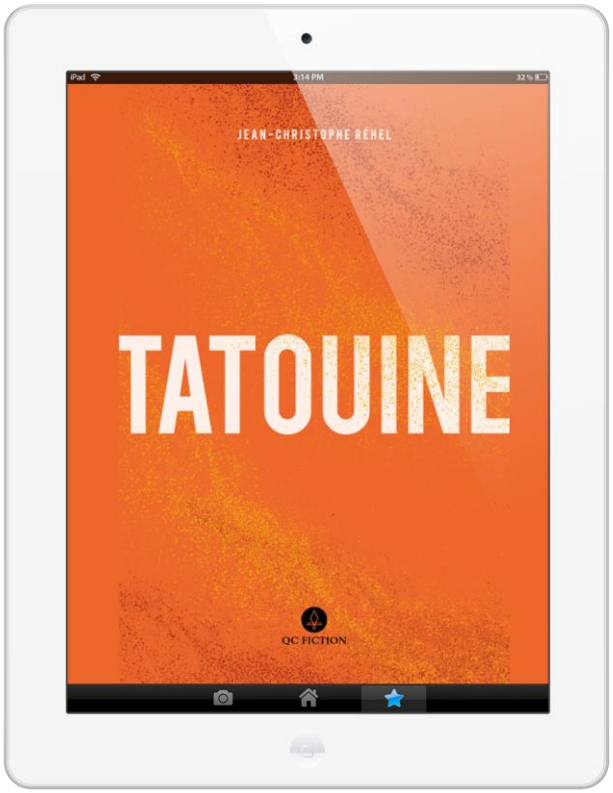
ABOUT THE BOOK *TATOUINE*

It's a long way from a basement apartment in a Montreal suburb to a new life on a fictional planet, but that's the destination our unnamed narrator in ***Tatouine*** has set his sights on, bringing readers with him on an off-beat and often hilarious journey.
Along the way, he writes poems, buys groceries at the dollar store, and earns minimum wage at a dead-end supermarket job. In between treatments for his cystic fibrosis and the constant drip-drip-drip of disappointment, he dreams of a new life on Tatouine, where he'll play Super Mario Bros and make sand angels all day. But in the meantime, he'll have to make do with daydreams of a better life, in which he is John McClane, he is the ghost of Obi-Wan Kenobi (with a bacteria he's never heard of), he is Justin Timberlake... Meryl Streep... a grumpy George Clooney...

STAR WARS (IN REPENTIGNY)

Repentigny is a suburb of Montreal where most of ***Tatouine*** takes place. A theme in ***Tatouine*** is how the narrator reimagines his environment and his relationships through the prism of science fiction, as if the spirit of George Lucas has slowly taken hold of Repentigny. Jean-Christophe Réhel says:
"The most direct link to lung disease is Darth Vader and his relationship to breathing. To dedicate a story to a Star Wars fan character who has cystic fibrosis, I just dove into it, and I had fun writing." (Urbania interview, Jeremy Hervieux)

Tatouine isn’t a book about Réhel, though he understands the association happens naturally: “because the narrator has cystic fibrosis and so do I. But otherwise, it's fiction. I didn't experience what he did: I've never been to New York, I've never lived in an old guy's semi-basement…… I've never done the jobs described in the book, etc." (Urbania interview, Jeremy Hervieux)



Tatouine is distinguished in its style: in addition to being touching from one end to the other, it is often very funny. This humor is found throughout at the Super C, a family Christmas party In New York, playing Santa’s elf: “I often laugh at myself. I think it brings me back to Earth, and it allows me to listen better during the serious moments, the moments when I put things in perspective. In the novel, I had no choice but to inject this madness of imagination there, because otherwise it would have been unbearable.”

This is precisely what infuses so much in Réhel's work: imagination as a lifeline to the blandness of everyday life. "To write, for me, is to try to synthesize everyday life...to make it something wonderful."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: JEAN-CHRISTOPHE RÉHEL

Jean-Christophe Réhel is a Quebec poet, novelist and screenwriter born April 25, 1989 in Montreal. His début novel, ***Ce qu'on respire sur Tatouine*** won Quebec's prestigious Prix littéraire des collégiens. It's his only novel so far, but he's busy writing a second. Réhel is also the author of five books of poetry. From January 2020 to April 2021 he published "Le poem à Réhel" every week in the newspaper *Le Devoir.* He leads poetry workshops for all ages. *Tatouine* is also his only book translated into English, but we hope that will change!
Réhel's writing describes both the beauty and the blandness of everyday life. He explores themes of fatigue, loneliness, and illness, while weaving a good dose of self-deprecating humour.

Foremost a poet, Réhel says:

"I didn't like poetry when I was in school. I shunned poems like the plague. I didn't understand and I didn't want to understand. I had a kind of revelation when I realized that poetry allowed me to go to the heart of feeling and intimacy." Interview with Voices of Poetry

Once you start reading ***Tatouine***, you realize his poetic imagination knows no bounds. His interiority captures the most fascinating details that resonate, make you laugh (out loud), or even cry. "To write, for me, is to try to synthesize everyday life...to make it something wonderful."

ON *TATOUINE* BEING CHOSEN

"When I was younger, there wasn't a ton of books in the house. I discovered literature thanks to the libraries in my schools. In elementary school, stumbling upon La Courte Échelle books. Then, fiction novels in high school. My college library introduced me to poetry. Then, in the cities I moved to; I read books on art, history and mechanics. Books, I loved some, I hated some, I read a few and leafed through thousands. Each library has taught me something. Each library has taught me something. Each library has opened a door no bigger than a quarter in my head. Now I have loose change coming out of my mouth and ears, and I'm glad to be so rich in my head. It's a real honour to be part of the One eRead Canada book club."

Jean-Christophe Réhel (translated)

INTERVIEWS WITH THE AUTHOR

Jean-Christophe Réhel: Writing to Synthesize Love for Urbania.

Jean-Christophe Réhel for les Voix de la poésie.

“My whole life has been connected to poetry", Jean-Christophe Réhel for Hebdo Rive Nord.

WORKS BY JEAN-CHRISTOPHE RÉHEL

NOVELS

Ce qu'on respire sur Tatouine
Montréal : Del Busso, 2018

Tatouine
Québec: QC Fiction, 2020

POETRY

Bleu sexe les gorilles - ***poèmes***
Montréal : Les Éditions de l'Écrou, 2014, 81 pages.

La douleur du verre d'eau: poésie
Jean-Christophe Réhel, La douleur du verre d'eau - poésie, Montréal : les Éditions de l'Écrou, 2018, 111 pages.

La fatigue des fruits; poèmes
Montréal : L'Oie de Cravan, 2018, 79 pages.

Les volcans sentent la coconut*: *poésie
Montréal : Del Busso, 2016, 94 pages.

Peigner le feu: poésie
La Courte échelle, 2019, 64 pages.

MEDIA

Television: L'Air d'aller - Hiver 2023

Web Series: Peigner le feu - 2020

Ce qu'on respire sur Tatouine: A Radio-Canada OHdio audiobook production
Director: Jocelyn Lebeau

Read by Marc-André Grondin, Catherine Brunet, Marianne Fortier, Gaston Lepage, and several actors.

Description: It's not easy to escape a stifling daily life when our road seems to want to lead us tirelessly from the banana department of Super C to the sixteenth floor of the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM). Where to flee when disease, loneliness and poverty keep us prisoners in our basement in Repentigny? On the planet Tatouine, with a little luck! A touching and self-deprecating story.
New York Festival Radio Awards 2022: nominated for Best Audiobook – Fiction

You can listen to the French audiobook through Radio-Canada OHdio.

A POEM – EXTRACT

For a taste of Jean-Christophe Réhel's poetry, **Radio-Canada OHdio** has this:

Jean-Christophe Réhel, caught in the doldrums of autumn and discouraged by the policies of Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette, is desperately looking for the light. It is from the writer Josephine Bacon that he finds his sun, and thanks to the Innu poet, he even considers coming to terms with the cold, the snow and the winter that lingers too long.
An excerpt from his letter (*with thanks to Google translate as well as Jean-Christophe*):

On TV I come across an interview with Josephine Bacon
She says don't insult the snow
I think it's beautiful so beautiful
Josephine
It's orange juice The first glass of orange
juice in the morning
It radiates
It overflows everywhere
I'd like to be her friend I'd like to be her best friend

I could ice with her I'd take her
to see the retired
gentlemen Who fish next door in February
There they call me the tourist
There they welcome me as if I were an old gentleman
They prepare me pogos no ketchup no mustard in the cabin
They tell me about the price of gas
New four-wheelers
A gang of white people who don't know the names of the trees
Nor how to kill the good caribou in the herd
I'm one of them
All grandfathers I've never known
A handsome ignoramus who got dropped here
How many flakes per second on your coat?
How many I love you in 24 hours?

For the complete poem/letter :
Jean-Christophe Réhel : lettre à Joséphine Bacon et Simon Jolin-Barette (radio-canada.ca)

ABOUT THE TRANSLATORS OF *TATOUINE*

Peter McCambridge

- Originally from Ireland, Peter McCambridge holds a BA in modern languages from Cambridge University, England, and wrote a dissertation on the Montréal Canadiens and popular culture in Québec. He has lived in Quebec City since 2003. His translation of Eric Dupont's *La Fiancée américaine*, *Songs for the Cold of Heart*, was shortlisted for both the 2018 Scotiabank Giller Prize and the 2018 Governor General's Award for Translation. He runs Québec Reads and now QC Fiction, an imprint of Baraka Books. QC Fiction's focus on translations of Québec literature brings to the table "the best of a new generation of Quebec storytellers".

Katherine Hastings

- After immigrating to Canada from the U.K., Katherine Hastings spent ten years in Ontario before moving to Montreal, where she completed a degree in modern languages at McGill University. She has worked as a Quebec-based translator and copy editor since 1995. She also translated the novels The Electric Baths and The Unknown Huntsman, both by Jean-Michel Fortier.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *TATOUINE*

Questions about the Characters

Why is the narrator nameless?

Why does the narrator call certain characters by their real names, Cammy and Aaron for example, but not others?

The narrator shines a light on living with chronic illness. How did the book do this?

How did the narrator build and sustain relationships with those around them?

The narrator gravitated to individuals that were “imperfect”, othered or invisible? Why was this?

Which characters did you like best? Which did you like least?

Which character did you relate to, or empathize with, the most?

Questions about the Plot & Setting

“The days are long” is repeated numerous times throughout the novel. Why is this significant?

Could you sympathize with the narrator’s experiences at any of his jobs? Did you find them funny or troubling?

What was your favourite or least favourite part of the book?

How did the setting impact the story? Would you want to read more books set in that world?

Were you satisfied by the ending?

Questions about your Reading Experience

Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?

What surprised you most about the book?

Did this book remind you of any other books?

How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?

Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?

Who do you most want to read this book?

Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?

What was your favourite or least favourite part of the book?

Questions about the Author

Was the author's background as a poet visible or apparent in this book?

Would you want to read another book by this author?

Translation Questions

"I also found out there's an expression: to go to *Tataouine*. It means to lose yourself at the end of the world (page 65 ebook edition)." "There is even a variation on it in Quebec: tataouiner, to lack speed, to dither (page 65 ebook edition)". How did you interpret the ending?

Why do you think the title changes with the French ("*Ce qu'on respire sur Tatouine*") and English ("*Tatouine*") version?

REVIEWS OF *TATOUINE*

“Réhel gives the reader a front-row seat to a baroque and often hilarious interiority – one that highlights the complexity and tragedy of the human condition, while playfully revealing the capacity of the human mind for turning the struggles of existence, large and small, into a source of amusement….in addition to the often-dark humour. Réhel has a poet’s eye for rhythm, repetition, and stark imagery that thankfully isn’t lost in the exceptional translation by Katherine Hastings and Peter McCambridge.” *Dean Garlick, Montreal Review of Books*

“I’m **completely smitten** with the narrator of ***Tatouine***, thanks to his deadpan humour, dreamy melancholy, vivid imagination, and a heart as big as the hole in Percé Rock. As heroes go, the guy rivals any Jedi knight…..one of my favorite Canadian books of all time” *(Neil Smith, author)*
“I’m still in shock. It’s just incredible. EVERY line in this first novel deserves to be underlined. It’s a book to scribble hearts and stars all over… One thousand stars for this author.” *Claudia Larochelle, arts columnist*

“I was moved by ***Tatouine***, a down-to-earth poet’s novel that oozes emotion and imagination**.** Recommended if you’re lonely, sick or tired.” *Guillaume Morissette, author of New Tab*

“The internal dialogue of this book, with its balanced mix of humour, honesty, and heart is the perfect fit to rescue you from any socially-distanced funk.” *Leyla Top, All Lit Up*

At the end, we want to say: I am Réhel. I am Anakin. I’m a comedian. I’m Yoda reading a book and crying in the bath.” *Laurie Bédard, Spirale magazine*

“I read the whole thing without putting it down once, as though I’d just heard from a friend I’d been worrying about.” *Véronique Côté, Le Devoir*

“There’s no shortage of light in this novel.” ★★★★ *Dominic Tardif, Le Devoir*

“Jean-Christophe Réhel is one of my big discoveries this year. […] Uncompromising urban poetry, sometimes violent, sometimes funny, bursting with self-deprecation.” *Christian Bégin, Canadian actor & TV personality*

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Canada Reads 2021 Longlist - *Tatouine*

Literary Prize: College Students choose *Tatouine*

DISTINCTION

Taken from https://www.jeanchristopherehel.com/bio

2022

• Nomination at the “New York Radio Festival” with *Tatouine* .

2021

• Winner at the “Sydney Web Fest” with *Peigner le feu* (Tame your fire) for the best animated series.
• Two “Gémeaux” nominations with *Peigner le feu* for the best original program or series produced for children's digital media: fiction.
• Official selection at the “Chicago International Children's Film” festival, “International Shorts” and “Universal Kids Film Festival” with *Peigner le feu*.

2020

• Winner of the “Alvine-Bélisle Prize” with *Peigner le feu*
• *Nomination* in the long list at “Canada Reads” with *Tatouine*.

2019

• Winner of the “College Literary Prize” with *Ce qu'on respire on Tatouine*.
• Nomination among the “10 young authors to watch in 2019” on the program *Plus on est de fous, plus on lit!*
• Preliminary list for “Rendezvous of the first novel” with *Ce qu'on respire on Tatouine*.
• Preliminary list for the “Grand prix du livre de Montréal” with *Ce qu'on respire on Tatouine*.
• Preliminary list for the “Prix des libraires du Québec” in the Quebec novel category with *Ce qu'on respire on Tatouine* .
• Preliminary list for the “Prix des libraires du Québec” in the Poetry category with *La fatigue des fruits*.

2017

• Finalist for the “Prix Geneviève-Amyot” with the poetic suite *Rain always falls asleep on the left side*.
• Finalist for the “Prix des libraires du Québec” in the Poetry category with *Volcanoes feel the coconut*.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE RÉHEL RECOMMENDS

Poetry

Les peintures de forêt by Myriam Cliche

Novels

Conversations with Kafka by Gustav Janouch

Graphic Novels & Comic Books

Un Paris pour Dallaire by Marc Tessier, Illustrated by SIRIS

Gaston Lagaffe by André Franquin

READALIKES FOR *TATOUINE*

If you like bittersweet stories try reading:

Almost Visible by Michelle Sinclair

Wind / Pinball by Haruki Murakami

Lying Under the Apple Tree by Alice Munro

If you like books with offbeat humour try reading:

Death Sentences by Suzanne Myre

Many People Die Like You by Lina Wolff

All My Puny Sorrows by Miriam Toews

If you like gritty writing styles try reading:

Wild Gestures by Lucy Durneen

The Right Intention by Andrés Barba, Lisa Dillman (Translator)

Sleep of Memory by Patrick Modiano, Mark Polizzotti (Translator)

If you like books about daydreaming and imaginary worlds try reading:

Mondo & Other Stories by J.M.G. Le Clezio, Alison Anderson (Translator)

Before the Coffee Gets Cold by Toshikazu Kawaguchi, Geoffrey Trousselot (Translator)

If you like books about everyday life featuring people living with illness and different abilities try reading:

Sorrow and Bliss by Meg Mason

Being Seen: One Deafblind Woman's Fight to End Ableism by Elsa Sjunneson

Dirty River: A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

TIPS AND RESOURCES

How to Read a Book for a Book Club

Reading a book to discuss it is different from reading for pleasure. Ask yourself questions, read carefully, and imagine yourself in the story. Think about the style and structure of the book.

1. **Make notes and mark pages [with post-its] as you go.** This may slow your reading but saves time searching for key passages later.

2. **Ask tough questions** of yourself and the book.

3. **Analyze themes.** What is the author trying to say in the book?

4. **Get to know the characters.** Consider their faults and motives and what it would be like to know them.

5. **Notice the book's structure.** Do the chapters begin with quotes? How many people tell the story? Is the book written in flashbacks? Does the order make sense to you?

6. **Compare to other books and authors.** Themes often run through an author's works. Comparing one author's book with another's can help you decide how you feel about the book.

Adapted from: https: //www.spl.org/programs-and-services/authors-and-books/book-groups/book-group-how-tos

Book Club Best Practices

Book clubs are a fun and engaging way to bond with other book lovers and explore new ideas and authors. By showing respect for each other and the book, we create a friendly atmosphere for discussion.

Here are a few simple rules to guide us:

1. *Take turns.* When someone has something to say about the book, we want to make sure that they are heard.

2. *Remember to talk about the book.* All of you committed to reading the book. With that in mind, let’s stick to the book discussion.

3. *If you didn't read the book, that's okay.* Please participate anyway. You probably have some good general input to give, even without reading the book.

4. *Be gracious and respectful in your comments.* If you didn't like the book, consider a statement such as "This book was horrible!" might halt the conversation and be seen as disrespectful to those who did enjoy it. It's fine to say that it wasn't your favourite title. Beyond that, find constructive ways to contribute to the conversation. And remember, there are many ways of interpreting a book/passage.

5. *Bring some questions for discussion if you want.* Book clubs are always more enjoyable when members are participating and engaging with one another. Feel free to ask the group your questions.

6. *Keep an open mind.* Even if this book isn't something you think you're interested in, please give it a chance. It might surprise you. Un Livrel/One eReads Canada promotes Canadian authors and we hope to introduce you to some new favourite titles.

Credit: Oakville Public Library

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CULC / CBUC Digital Content Working Group wishes to gratefully acknowledge and thank the following people and organizations for making this Discussion Guide possible:

- Jean-Christophe Réhel
- Del Busso Éditeur
- Baraka Books and QC Fiction
- Peter McCambridge
- Katherine Hastings
- ECW Press
- Radio-Canada OHdio
- Canadian Public Libraries