



# The Perfect Summer Read

*Bookseller Roxanne Coady shares her new system for helping readers find the perfect summer read—and recommends a few under-the-radar titles that people might have missed.*

by [Roxanne Coady \(/contributors/roxanne-coady.html\)](/contributors/roxanne-coady.html) | August 22, 2011 11:28 PM EDT

I get the whole argument behind the wisdom of crowds. I do. But in this increasingly frenetic world, there's something to be said for focused, individualized attention. We've all experienced it before: discovering an untested restaurant with excellent food and service where you are introduced to flavors and combinations for the first time, or following a local around a new city and exploring thrilling hot spots that didn't make it into the guide book. Sometimes you just need an expert or two to help you find what you're looking for.

I've always held this belief in terms of bookselling, too. Bookselling services that rely on popularity rankings or sales figures for recommendations (*12,000 people bought this book, so you must buy it, too*) lose track of the fact that *bestseller* doesn't necessarily mean *good book* or, most important, the *right book for you*. My goal has never been to over-mechanize the bookselling process. It's about people, moods, tastes, interests. It's about taking the time and asking the right questions to be sure the right book gets into the right hands. And when I launched our online premium-subscription service [Just the Right Book! \(http://justtherightbook.com/\)](http://justtherightbook.com/), it was written into its DNA that just because a customer isn't in the store when they use the service, a team of booksellers will always be waiting on them.

This spring, our team of booksellers and I decided to go a step further: we decided to offer a piece of our expertise for free to prove our point. We poured over galleys and new releases and whittled a list of more than 100 must-reads down to our absolute favorites, finally focusing on 40 brand-new books (or just released in paperback). We drew on our combined century of bookselling experience to carefully and thoroughly code each book to be sure the titles would connect with specific moods, tastes, likes, and dislikes. We call this system the "human algorithm," one designed and constantly tweaked by a roundtable of experts for real human beings, not by the general masses or a blind formula and for generic groups of readers.



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The result: a quick and easy [Summer Reading Quiz \(http://www.JustTheRightBook.com/quiz\)](http://www.JustTheRightBook.com/quiz), which offers three personalized summer-reading recommendations. Because the books in the quiz are relatively new or just released, and because they're from everything from micro-presses to the biggest publishing houses, the suggestions are ahead of the curve and the masses. No need for readers to wait to see what's popular or selling well or has the biggest marketing budget behind it.

If you're already on vacation and straining to read this on your smart phone before you lose all reception on the beach, or if you'd simply like a little immediate gratification, here are a few suggestions for new books we highly recommend from the smaller, under-the-radar publishers:

An unusual and compelling family saga, [\*\*THE HOTTEST DISHES OF THE TARTAR CUISINE\*\*](http://www.rjulia.com/book/9781609450069) (<http://www.rjulia.com/book/9781609450069>), by Alina Bronsky, is set behind the Iron Curtain in Germany, and narrated by an outrageously nasty and wily character named Rosa Achmetowna. The grandmother, mother, and daughter head to the West determined to survive and thrive. Their family dynamic becomes by turns hilarious and tragic. Bronsky is wonderful in displaying the irony and wit of some of the best Eastern European writing. A great pick for your flight to Eastern Europe (or while you're dreaming of Berlin in your hammock).

While you're watching the sails go up on the horizon from your perch in the sand, take in the rough waters within the pages of [\*\*THE SEA CAPTAIN'S WIFE\*\*](http://www.rjulia.com/book/9780452296954) (<http://www.rjulia.com/book/9780452296954>), by Beth Powning. A seaman's wife gets her wish to come aboard and travel the world as a family, only to find that being alone in a male world and juggling the splendor of foreign ports with the terror of the open seas are more than she bargained for. The terrifying risks she experiences make for riveting reading.

It's 1974, gas is scarce, and Martin Anderson's cushy life is taking a serious nosedive in David Anthony's clever and surprising heartfelt debut, [\*\*SOMETHING FOR NOTHING\*\*](http://www.rjulia.com/book/9781616200220) (<http://www.rjulia.com/book/9781616200220>). The parallels between the economic crisis nearly 40 years ago and our own are powerful precisely because they're subtle, just like Anthony's depiction of Martin—perhaps the most lovable drug smuggler in ages—as an

antihero he succeeds because his ridiculous antics are laced with a yearning to belong that's so intense it borders on deranged innocence.

**TURN OF MIND** (<http://www.rjjulia.com/book/9780802119773>), by [Alice LaPlante](#), (</articles/2011/07/27/alice-laplante-on-her-alzheimer-s-mystery-turn-of-mind.html>) is a stunning literary thriller told in the voice of a retired doctor whose own deteriorating mind due to the onset of dementia prevents her from fully knowing the truth behind the murder of her best friend. Chilling and intense. You'll be asking yourself, "Did she, or didn't she?" until the very last page. Not only was I mesmerized by LaPlante's ability to put the reader in the circumstance of a slowly evaporating ability to stay in the present but the ending of the book was also one of the most indelible I have read in years—I was stunned, silent, and shaken.

**LONG DRIVE HOME** (<http://www.rjjulia.com/book/9781416543039>), by Will Allison, is a book that once you pick up you won't put down. How many times have you been on the verge of road rage—thinking about how to get back at the guy driving too slow, too fast, too close when you are in no mood to deal with it? What if you do and there are dramatic and unpredictable repercussions? What if you can't really get caught? How easy is it to lie? If you go for the easy lie, will you be caught in the net? It's not the first mistake that is the most detrimental, but the ripples of tiny bad decisions that follow in its wake that can cause real damage. Perfect distraction-perfect pace.

Happy reading!

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