

## Library Users Sharing Their Reading Adventures with Us

I love the Adult Summer Reading Club days in the library.

The Reference Desk is swamped with all kinds of paraphernalia: a shoebox with member's cards, a fishbowl with members' names to be drawn once a week, a box overflowing with coupons for treats awarded for each book read (up to four books!), extra pens, free Fever basketball tickets. Enthusiastic readers, I'm not kidding, lining up for this stuff, plus a chance to win the drawing for a Nook e-reader at the end of July.

The thing I enjoy the most is the way they share their books with me. I am learning about many more authors than I would normally read, and I read a lot. Moms come in with teenage kids and they all seem to really be into the fun of reading. Younger moms come in with babies in strollers and toddlers always on the move.

Why do we read? Is it escapism? Boredom prevention? I'm not really sure, but whatever it is, readers share a common denominator: the joy of the hunt for a book they will really like. Some authors step up to the plate and hit this requirement right out of the ballpark; other authors, not so much. Some, whose names won't be mentioned, tell a fascinating tale but could not give a book a satisfying ending if their lives depended on it.

One of my readers, a man whom I doubt is a member of the Reading Club and whose name I do not know, gave me a little list of his favorite authors, which I have kept. I read their books from time to time, and recently finished *Red Square*, by Martin Cruz Smith, the author of *Gorky Park*. Investigator Arkady Renko is back in Moscow after years in exile. The city he returns to in 1991 (he'd been head of the police homicide department there) is totally different from the one he left. The Communist Party is dead, the ruble is worthless, and organized crime is the only entity that is functioning. In fact, the Russian Mafia is the only part of the country's economy that works. Corruption collapses Moscow around Renko, and he escapes to Germany, which is frighteningly efficient but also corrupt with Russian Mafia. How he manages to find solid answers to questions - motives and murderers - is brilliantly told, and the reader is with Inspector Arkady Renko every step of the way.

A brand new thriller, *The Informationist*, by Taylor Stevens, takes us to lawless central Africa, of all places. You need an atlas nearby for this one. The exceptional heroine, Vanessa "Michael" Munroe grew up there with missionary parents. She'd left their home at fourteen, taking up with an infamous gunrunner and his mercenary crew, becoming his protégée and earning the respect of the jungle's most dangerous men. A Texas oil billionaire has hired her to find his daughter who vanished in Africa four years earlier. Michael finds herself back in the land of her childhood, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. She is betrayed, cut off from civilization, and left for dead. If she has any hopes of escaping the jungle and the demons that drive her she must come face-to-face with the past she's tried so long to forget. This all sounds preposterous, and takes place in a land totally unknown to us, to boot. The author, who was raised in communes across the globe and denied an education beyond sixth grade, actually broke free from a cult, the Children of God. Incredibly, she has fashioned a totally believable first novel that sinks its teeth deep into the reader.

A British writer, Kate Atkinson, has received extraordinary acclaim for several of her other books, but a must-read is her newest, *Started Early, Took My Dog*. Her work is not only entertaining, but staggeringly original. What reading group fun this would be!

It's hard to imagine a novel starting in a more terrifying way, with the fifties-something retired policewoman Tracy Waterhouse, who is supplementing her pension by pulling security duty in a shopping center. She makes a purchase she hadn't bargained for, and in that one moment of madness her humdrum life is replaced with fear and danger. Tracy has just bought a child from an abusing mom. Bought a crying child, just like that. Jackson Brodie, a reluctant detective whose own life has been stolen and who now has been hired to find someone else's, crosses paths with Tracy. Neglected dogs and unwanted children and keepers of dark secrets all figure into this astonishing tale, proving the past is never history, and that no good deed goes unpunished. What a book discussion group could do with this! In fact, there is a reading group guide at [WWW.HATCHETTEBOOKGROUP.COM](http://WWW.HATCHETTEBOOKGROUP.COM).

These three novels are significant reads, unusual and enjoyable, really worth your time, Summer Reading Club or no.

*Suzanne Smith is a Reference Librarian at Bartholomew County Public Library.*