



# Summerlong

*Dean Bakopoulos*

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## Summerlong Dean Bakopoulos

The author of *Please Don't Come Back from the Moon* and *My American Unhappiness* delivers his breakout novel: a deft and hilarious exploration of the simmering tensions beneath the surface of a contented marriage that explode in the bedrooms and backyards of a small town over the course of a long, hot summer

In the sweltering heat of one summer in a small Midwestern town, Claire and Don Lowry discover that married life isn't quite what they'd predicted.

One night Don, a father of two, leaves his house for an evening stroll, only to wake up the next morning stoned and lying in a hammock next to a young woman he barely knows. Meanwhile, his wife, Claire, leaves the house to go on a midnight run — only to find herself bumming cigarettes and beer outside the all-night convenience store.

As the summer lingers and the temperature rises, this quotidian town's adults grow wilder and more reckless while their children grow increasingly confused. Claire, Don, and their neighbors and friends find themselves on an existential odyssey, exploring the most puzzling quandaries of marriage and maturity. When does a fantasy become infidelity? When does compromise incite resentment? When does routine become boring monotony? Can Claire and Don survive everything that befalls them in this one summer, forgive their mistakes, and begin again?

Award-winning writer Dean Bakopoulos delivers a brutally honest and incredibly funny novel about the strange and tenuous ties that bind us, and the strange and unlikely places we find connection. Full of mirth, melancholy, and redemption, *Summerlong* explores what happens when life goes awry.

## Summerlong Details

Date : Published June 16th 2015 by Ecco

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Author : Dean Bakopoulos

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## From Reader Review Summerlong for online ebook

### Lisa says

I picked up on the word "hilarious" in the description of the book, but I didn't find anything in it to be hilarious. "Depressing from start to finish" would be a much better description.

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### Sarah says

Every time I think about this novel I come back and rate it one star lower.

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### Ron Charles says

One novel you might tuck in your bag for poolside diversion is "Summerlong," a sexy but surprisingly poignant new novel by Dean Bakopoulos. This is a story for adults about adults gone wild. Bakopoulos, who teaches at Grinnell College, sets his tale in that Iowa town in the summer of 2012. As the temperature rises, Don and his wife, Claire, are failing and flailing. "Summerlong" contains such revealing depictions of the unequal duties of fathers and mothers that you'll want to laugh or weep, depending, I suppose, on whether you're a father or a mother.

Claire is a writer who hasn't written anything since the couple's young children were born, but nothing else gives her pleasure anymore. "This," Claire thinks, "is the curse of her life: everyone around her demanding reassurance, as if there is a bottomless well of it, as if there is nothing that scares or overwhelms her, as if she is a source of endless cuddles, backrubs, and soothing tones."

Don, meanwhile, is doing. . . .

*To read the rest of this review, go to The Washington Post:*  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/enterta...>

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### Sarah at Sarah's Book Shelves says

Summerlong was a surprise hit for me...it's darker and edgier than the cover would lead you to believe and is going on my 2015 Summer Reading List.

You can really feel this book...the simmering suburban discontent, everyone having an itch that's just waiting to be scratched, the restlessness that comes with sweltering summer days. It's like a sea of smoldering embers threatening to ignite at the slightest catalyst.

To continue reading, please visit my blog: <http://www.sarahsbookshelves.com/fict...>

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## Cher says

### 3 stars - It was good.

What a quirky little novel. The tone put me in mind of *Little Children*, though I preferred the writing of the latter.

The book starts with a couple of chapters that dump the reader into the strange characters instead of easing them in and will be a turn off for some. If you give it at least 10-15 chapters (they are very short), you will have a better idea of whether or not you will become engaged in the story.

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**Favorite Quote:** We're all terrible people. Eventually, we all become terrible, maybe around the middle of our lives, and then, if we're lucky, we have time to find a way to be good again.

**First Sentence:** In the hay gold dusk of late spring, Don Lowry takes his usual walk through town and out to the fields beyond it.

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## Gayle says

Full review at: <http://everydayiwritethebookblog.com/...>

Summerlong is about an odd love square (is that a thing?) that forms one hot summer in Grinnell, Iowa. Claire and Don are married, in their late 30s, and at a precipice in their marriage. Don, a realtor, has hidden their dire financial situation from his wife, and the two now face foreclosure on their house and an inevitable bankruptcy filing. Meanwhile, Charlie, an underemployed actor in his late 20s, is back in town to go through his father's papers and prepare his house for sale after his father is moved to a nursing home with dementia. And ABC, a recent Grinnell graduate, has returned to her college town after the death of her best friend/lover, mired in grief.

One night, these characters interact in an unexpected way: Don comes across ABC lying in the grass, smoking pot, and joins her for an intimate but chaste evening of sleeping next to each other and getting stoned. Claire goes for a midnight run and meets Charlie in the parking lot of a convenience store, where they share an instant attraction. Over the course of the next 3 months, the characters couple off in a variety of combinations, sometimes consummating their attractions and sometimes not. Don and Claire's marriage deteriorates until they decide to separate, while ABC floats along in her grief and depression and Charlie tries, unsuccessfully, to find his father's missing manuscript and redeem his academic reputation.

I really didn't like *Summerlong*. I did appreciate some of the insights into marital harmony and middle age that Bakopoulos infused into Claire and Don's relationship. But I found the other relationships unrealistic and strange, and I had a really hard time with most of the dialogue in the book. I don't think people talk to each other in real life like they do in *Summerlong*. Claire and Don were blunt and sharp to the point of meanness – do most married people act like that to each other?

Lots of drugs, lots of sex. I don't have a problem with that, but they became a crutch for the author. These characters didn't have much to say to each other or a genuine attraction, so he just had them get stoned and hook up. Problem solved! There are also too many unlikely coincidences.

There's a feisty old grandmother type who says it like it is and eventually saves some of these doomed characters. Meh.

Didn't these characters have ANYONE else to hang out with other than the other three?

Don and Claire's kids – didn't THEY find the whole setup kind of weird?

Why is Claire so angry all the time? And why hasn't she worked for the last 10 years? For a feminist New Yorker, she sure depends on her man to make everything better.

These questions plagued me as I read Summerlong. I just didn't get it. I know I am in the minority on this one – people seem to love this book. It just made me angry.

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### **Wendy K. says**

3+ for the story, 5 for the writing & the abundance of quotes about motherhood/family that were pretty dead-on ("This, she has begun to believe, is the curse of her life: everyone around her demanding reassurance, as if there is a bottomless well of it, as if there is nothing that scares or overwhelms her, as if she is a source of endless cuddles, back rubs, and soothing tones.")

Unfortunately the NPR book review ("it will kill you..." "It will break you.") might have raised my expectations too high. The book was entertaining & slightly humorous, but I didn't find it to be the gut-wrenching intimate account of middle age that it's being hailed as.

Also, did anyone else find it strange that their children, born in the late 90s, have 1970s names? And what kind of nickname is "ABC"? These little things bothered me ... And little things don't usually bother me.

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### **Tara - Running 'n' Reading says**

The fact that this narrative reminds of something I've read in the past, and really enjoyed, yet cannot remember is driving me crazy; nevertheless, this was a great read! I was already sold, based on the marketing description, and I'm so thankful that it did not disappoint. Here's a passage that I just have to share; Claire, one of the main characters, is at the community swimming pool with her kids:

"Claire focuses on the many middle-aged women, mostly mothers, around her, also wearing bikinis, but none of them, as beautiful as some of them were, suggested that kind of pending eruption she sees in the half-naked young people around her. No, Claire and her almost-forty contemporaries stand about suggesting the virtues of endurance. They had made it to middle age with a remnant of hotness, and despite the attendant sagging and indignities of aging, they managed to transcend the reality that a tattoo above the ass or behind the shoulder had been a bad idea. Yes, many of the women, Claire included, have approached forty with a verve and vigor, had Pilated and power-walked themselves into a kind of level of fitness that they had not seen since sixteen, and when they went to the pool, the self-loathing they'd been taught to feel as teenagers had been replaced by a sexy confidence."

Isn't this great? I can't even do it justice. I feel like the author has imbued this entire novel with a sarcastic, yet awfully true, and humorous portrayal of life in the 'burbs; these characters long for something different, but they seem trapped in the only reality with which they are familiar. I think the writing is fantastic, and I highly recommend this one.

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## **Joy Findlay Jones says**

I can't believe this has gotten so many great reviews! I am reading it for my book club and we all gave it 2 thumbs down. I live in Grinnell, Iowa and live 2 blocks from Grinnell College, that was the only aspect of this book that I enjoyed. I personally didn't like his writing style, for me, it read like a screenplay more than a book. There wasn't much depth to any of his characters (except for Ruth), they all liked weed, fucking and whining, and with that you kinda of begin to hate them all towards the end of the book.

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## **William Koon says**

Summerlong (sic)

The old lady who is smoking dope with the lesbian whose lover has died, is just making up the stuff about fireflies and the spiritual life and the real estate agent. She just wants to commit suicide 300 pages later. Bakopoulos also uses the gun he shows in act I, but he takes his time and stretches the plot so thin you can see right through it. In fact there is no plot. No action either. No character development as well. But you do have the following: Ironic comments on academia, references to Lindsay Lohan (2), a middle aged woman failed writer finding herself, homosexuals with children, and a critique of small town America.

He uses the passive voice as in the following passage when the old demented professor kills himself: "He puts the gun in his mouth and the trigger gets pulled."

And amidst the sloppy sentences you have "Reader, she blows him." And this jewel: "she smiles but doesn't smile."

He. Also. Uses. Periods. For. Emphasis. OMG!!!!

Towards the book's slimy finish, he describes a party: "A stupid, shallow party of middle-aged professors and their ilk milling about in a wine-soaked haze of sexual innuendo and intellectual pretension." That's a fair description of the novel itself, one of the worst I have read in years.

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## **Erin says**

Just another entry in the overcrowded genre of suburban angst. I found this one pretty boring and filled with unlikeable characters. A dark atmosphere pervades much of the story. Rather depressing overall.

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## **Tina Humphrey Boogren says**

Oh, this book. How do I describe it? It's devastating. And hilarious. It's dark. And beautiful. And it takes place in Iowa. Read it. Soon.

I re-read this for book club this month and I still loved it and underlined even more this time around. The wit, drama, lust, and tragedy of a Shakespearean tale set in my home state with characters around my own age

facing similar mid-life questions.

And Ruth. I love Ruth.

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### **Tamara says**

I heard a review on NPR and thought this sounded intriguing. I expected an exploration of some dark characters, and have often enjoyed that sort of read. What I found was a book that felt like it was written to be a movie, a bunch of “middle-aged,” dissatisfied navel-gazers and loads implausible coincidences. The characters weren’t dark and complex, they were shallow, unlikeable and insincere. Plus, it seemed like one of those books where you think the author may fancy himself as one (or possibly two) of the main characters.

Full disclosure, I spent too much time with these characters while in a hospital waiting room today, and probably needed a break. Normally, I’d take more breaks when reading and not become so sick of slightly annoying characters in a book. Instead, I feel like I spent a year with a horrible roommate and just need to get away from some tedious habits.

I did find two quotes worth contemplating:

“Midlife is when you have to accept what you’ve created, knowing that the life you have is the only one you will live. And that can be terrifying, until you accept it, and then you’re free of terror.”

“We’re all terrible people...Eventually, we all become terrible, maybe around the middle of our lives, and then, if we’re lucky, we have time to find a way to be good again.”

These sort of sum up the themes of the book, and are worth reflection, but I don’t really agree with them. Life is messy and beautiful, at any stage, and a person may adjust their course at any time and many times

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### **Gregg says**

Last week, we had to put my thirteen-year-old dog Batman to sleep. The poor guy was the toughest, most resilient little chihuahua you could ever meet, but his blindness, deafness, general confusion over the world and his place in it, and overall lethargy mixed with anger, made his passing inevitable.

So since we saw it coming, the past year or so has been one of my more philosophical. We all have to go sometime, but we don’t always realize deep down inside just how transitory everything is; for me, it took the physical decline of a five-pound dog to really get it. Batman was a metaphor for my own mortality, a reminder that there are some things that just can’t be avoided. Our consumer culture and ten-minute attention span concerning world and national news might appeal to different sentimentalities, but it’s the job of literature to shine a light on the inevitable and (on a good day) plant some seeds as to how these inevitabilities might be dealt with.  
inevitable.

It was with just this spirit that I picked up Summerlong and read it cover to cover within the space of my first Batman-less weekend. The novel takes place over a hot Iowa summer in a small town that’s host to a liberal arts college. Realtor Don Lowry, fallen on hard times after an attempted house-flipping career, finds his job and marriage threatened by the Great Recession and his own shortcomings. His wife Claire, a novelist and

former academic, can still turn heads at the swimming pool but is increasingly coming to view her own life as "wasted." Amelia (nicknamed ABC), a young woman mourning the loss of her one true love, returns to town to die, and winds up linked to Don (though not for the reason you might think). Charlie, the son of a local academic, returns home to tidy his father's estate and winds up linked to Claire (for a few reasons, the most obvious of which is just what you'd think). inevitable.

The drama develops beautifully: Charlie and Claire cross paths when she bums a cigarette and beer off him outside a local convenience store; Don and ABC cross paths when he finds her lying outside, believing her dead, while she remembers his name from a private joke between her and her now-deceased lover. Deciding that he's now a link to this lover from beyond the grave, the two of them engage in a summer-long routine of getting high together, all in the proximity of an older woman ABC is caring for, Ruth, who riffs on spiritual matters between tokes off one of ABC's many joints. All of it goes somewhere, but even if it didn't, just eavesdropping on all of this is pleasure enough. inevitable.

Throughout the summer, there are plenty of revelations and struggles for all characters, young and old. It's the middle aged ones who seem to speak the most convincingly in the novel, though, perhaps because, when contrasted with ABC and Charlie and the lives they have ahead of them, our sympathies are more with those who are coming to realize how many choices they've made over the years without realizing it. This realization, like in real life, comes with a share of bad decisions, and drugs are barely the tip of the iceberg. Summerlong makes scant mention of the perspective the Lowrys' children have but I found myself grinning in squeamish, reluctant understanding at the middle aged angst the Lowrys are carrying around. Sucking in guts at pool parties, recalling past opportunities gone by, putting on rose-colored glasses with which to look back at college days--all of these are the sins of the approaching-40s, particularly in middle- to upper-class white America, and if we thought when we were young we'd be exempt from all of it, well...you know.

"No one can waste a life," Claire realizes later in the book; "All you can do is live it day by day." The summer, the novel, is a microcosm of struggle, consequence and revelation, and while I wouldn't call its conclusion happy or feel-good, it does contain its own brand of wisdom and perspective.

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## **Marcy Dermansky says**

Strange, this book made me want to live in Iowa and go to Grinnell. Because I wanted to go to be able to go to meet ABC and Charlie Gulliver and have all of these incredible coincidences among smart people. Bakopoulus has a way of ending some of chapters of this novel with this kind of insane perfection -- sentence level, emotional level -- that made me happy to be a person reading a book.

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