

edited by Susan M Shirley

Summer Reading Roundup

Summer often affords us time to relax and escape from the tribulations of everyday life. Whether this summer finds you in an Adirondack chair by the lake, in a jet bound for an exotic destination, or in a hammock in your own backyard, a good book is a welcome companion. The editorial board and staff of *Science Editor* and additional contributors offer the following alternatives to manuscripts and editing books for your reading pleasure. Abraham Lincoln allegedly once wrote in a book review, “People who like this sort of thing will find this the sort of thing they like.” We hope that you will find something in this collection that you will like and that you will enjoy reading this summer.



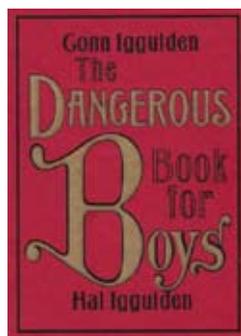
THE ART THIEF: A NOVEL. (NOAH CHARNEY. NEW YORK: WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS; 2008. 320 PAGES. ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-5031-0.)

An altarpiece by Caravaggio vanishes from a Baroque church in Rome. Two paintings worth millions by the modern Suprematist artist Malevich are stolen—one from the National Gallery of Modern Art in London and another from the Malevich Society in Paris. The three seemingly unrelated thefts are soon found to be linked in a tangled web of forgeries and fraud through a series of mysterious clues. Plot twists abound as French inspectors Bizot and Lesgourges, Scotland Yard inspector Wickenden, and art historian Gabriel Coffin follow leads that take them through museums, art auctions, and private collections. Fast-paced action and an extensive cast of characters keep your brain in gear as the plot unfolds. Coffin shares a background with the author: both are experts in art history and art crime. Professor Barrow is a delightful character who provides educational minilectures on symbolism in art through his amusing lectures to students in the museum galleries. At times, Charney’s sentence structure can be as complex as his plot, as in this example: “She led them past a security guard, and through an iron gate, along a faded mint-green-carpeted hall, through smells of must and musk and dust, and dusk slowly rose outside the

barred windows.” Toss this book into your beach bag or carry-on for an entertaining diversion.—Susan M Shirley

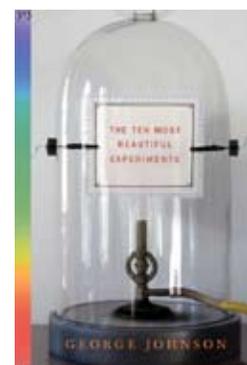
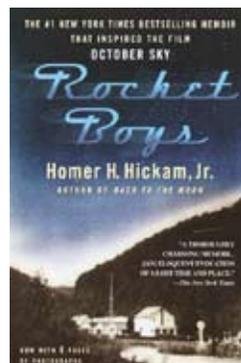
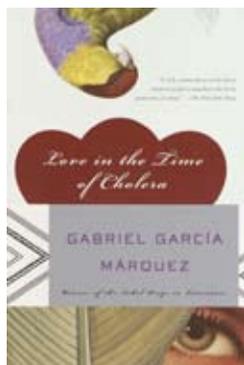
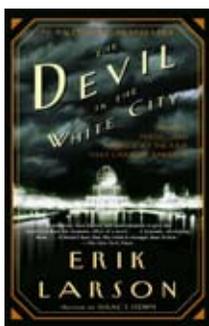
THE DANGEROUS BOOK FOR BOYS (CONN IGGULDEN AND HAL IGGULDEN. NEW YORK: HARPERCOLLINS; 2007. 288 PAGES. ISBN-10: 0-0612-43582.)

Many kids look forward to summer as an opportunity to sit in a dark basement playing video games until their eyes burn. But summertime should be more than just a season of uninterrupted gaming. *The Dangerous Book for Boys* offers plenty of how-to’s on subjects ranging from folding the “Greatest Paper Airplane in the World” to “Building a Tree House”. The materials for most projects are inexpensive, and this should appeal to kids and parents alike. Even for some of the pricier larger projects, costs of materials can be eclipsed by the alternative—a new video game or, worse, a new video-game console. The book also teaches grammar, history, science, and much more. The book hits on subject matter that is often passed over in a classroom setting, such as biographies of little-known war heroes and lessons on creepy-crawly insects. Occasionally, the authors voice a paternalistic, or even patronizing, tone that some parents may not appreciate. The book tends to present some ideas as dogma—which may be forgiven with smaller transgressions (touting *Dungeons and Dragons* as the best role-playing game) but may be more worrisome with more loaded declarations (espousing the superiority of the King James Version of the Bible). Finally, some of the recommended activities appear just plain ancient or unsettling—“Grinding an Italic Nib” or “Hunting and Cooking a Rabbit”, for example. Overall, *The Dangerous Book for Boys* offers high-quality alternatives to a summer spent mindlessly tapping on game controllers. But parents beware: some of the activities (and content) are truly “dangerous”, and supervision is highly recommended.—Naveed Saleh



Reviews

continued



THE DEVIL IN THE WHITE CITY: MURDER, MAGIC, AND MADNESS AT THE FAIR THAT CHANGED AMERICA. (ERIK LARSON. NEW YORK: VINTAGE BOOKS; 2004. 447 PAGES. ISBN-10: 0-375-72560-1.)

Erik Larson wrote *The Devil in the White City* because he was entranced by the energy and the will that Chicago summoned up to produce the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. He interweaves two stunning and absorbing tales: One revolves around Daniel Burnham, one of the greatest architects and city planners of the century, who led the effort to produce the Exposition. The other is the story of a serial killer loose in the city at the same time, methodically luring and charming his female victims before murdering them. This juxtaposition of ambition, triumph, and civic pride with sheer evil—along with Larson's descriptions of inadequate sanitation, injury and death, and exploitation of labor—recreates the glory and the shame of one of America's great cities in the late 19th century. For me, it recalled Carl Sandburg's "city of the broad shoulders" and the boundless energy, courage, and pride of a city that is also well summed up in Burnham's own words: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood."—*Ted Wachs*

LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA. (GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ. TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH BY EDITH GROSSMAN. NEW YORK: VINTAGE BOOKS; 1988. 348 PAGES. ISBN-13: 978-0-307-38973-2.)

Summer can offer fine chances to catch up on novels that one initially missed. Published some 2 decades ago, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, by Nobel prize-winning

writer Gabriel García Márquez, is highly suited for leisurely summer reading. (I admit, though, that I read this work this past autumn, with the student book club that I advise.) A romance (and more) sweeping from spring to winter of life, this book—with its compelling main narrative, engaging subplots, and perceptive descriptions—seems just right for summer savoring. Editors may especially enjoy reading how the love-struck Florentino "wrote everything with so much passion that even official documents seemed to be about love"—and how decades later his style matured and "in a certain sense . . . his closest approximation to the business letters he had never been able to write" served as the most effective missives of his affection. An incidental plus in my case: On seeing me engaged in this book, a stranger next to me on a plane insisted that I also read *The House of the Spirits* (1985) by Isabel Allende. That novel served as excellent winter-break reading and would be an outstanding summer choice as well.—*Barbara Gastel*

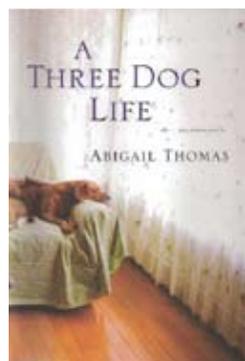
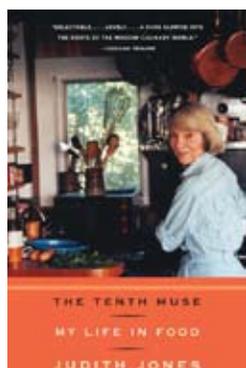
ROCKET BOYS: A MEMOIR. (HOMER H. HICKAM, JR. NEW YORK: DELACORTE PRESS; 1998. 368 PAGES. ISBN-10: 0-385-33320-X.)

Homer Hickam, like much of the rest of America, spent 5 October 1957 listening to news reports about the Sputnik satellite, he writes in his memoir *Rocket Boys*. Hickam was a teenager living in Coalwood, West Virginia, a coal-mining town where it was generally assumed that teenage boys would grow up to work in the mines or, if they were lucky, attend college on a football scholarship. But the Sputnik launch directed the ambitions of Hickam and a

group of his friends skyward and prompted them to start designing rockets. *Rocket Boys* does much more than recount attempts to build and launch rockets, though. The stories of the residents of Coalwood, a town aware that its future depended on the mine, are also vividly depicted. Most people were generally supportive of the so-called Rocket Boys, including their science teacher, Miss Riley, and the mine machine-shop workers who created rocket components for the boys in their spare time. Hickam's father, the mine superintendent who wanted Hickam to follow him in a mining career, was an exception. Hickam's prickly relationship with his father and his mother's efforts not to let his father's apparent disapproval thwart his efforts are central to the story. *Rocket Boys* has also been published as a paperback under its original title and under the title *October Sky*.—*Edith Paal*

THE TEN MOST BEAUTIFUL EXPERIMENTS. (GEORGE JOHNSON. NEW YORK: ALFRED A. KNOPF; 2008. 208 PAGES. ISBN-13: 978-1-40004-101-5.)

Over the years, countless experiments have been performed. How does one choose the 10 most beautiful experiments? Simplicity and beauty are the criteria used by author George Johnson, who received an American Association for the Advancement of Science Journalism Award in 1999. *The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments* aims to help readers appreciate the straightforward, crystal-clear elegance in the chosen experiments, which include classic experiments in physics, chemistry, and physiology performed during the 17th through 20th centuries. For example, the first story



is about how Galileo calculated the acceleration of a falling object (*not* from the Leaning Tower of Pisa!). Stories in this book include detailed descriptions of the experimental designs, brief biographies of the scientists, and accounts of human aspects of science. In particular, the book includes warm and interesting small stories that give flesh and blood to great scientists. For example, we learn that Pavlov respected his dogs as important participants in experiments rather than treating them as replaceable objects. Readers who like new ideas can approach this book as a science-history book. Teachers can use it as a source of interesting material for science courses. For science editors, reading *The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments* could be a perfect experiment in book exploration.—*Min-Fang Huang*

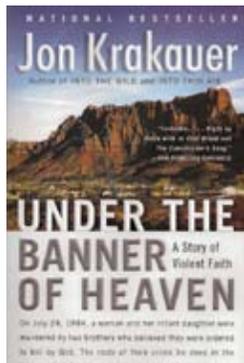
THE TENTH MUSE: MY LIFE IN FOOD. (JUDITH JONES. NEW YORK: ALFRED A. KNOPF; 2007. 292 PAGES. ISBN-13: 978-0-307-26495-4.) What fun to read about an editor—of cookbooks, as well as other things! Judith Jones began her publishing career at the age of 27 at Doubleday in Paris. There, assigned one afternoon to reject a pile of manuscripts, she became consumed by one of them—*Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*—and instead of rejecting it, insisted that her boss publish it. He did. She grew up in a household with delicious unadulterated English-style cooking, but “one wasn’t allowed to talk about food at the table (it was considered crude, like talking about sex). And if we indulged in appreciative sounds like ‘yum-yum’, we might just be sent from the table.” But after World War II, she began to broaden

her culinary experiences; garlic, which had been banned in her mother’s kitchen, was abundant in dishes she tasted. She found the open-air markets in Paris a revelation and was struck by the willingness of the French to stand in lines, even in hard times, to purchase the makings of a good noonday meal. Her future husband, Evan Jones, shared her passion for food, and together they prepared delicious meals and collaborated on the first of several books—*How to Live in Paris on Practically Nothing*. While working at Alfred A. Knopf back in the States, she discovered *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (by then-unknown Julia Child and two coauthors) and so began the first of her many collaborations with cookbook authors. In addition to stories about working with many talented cooks, the book includes 50 recipes, complete with tips. She concludes: “Friends and family who partake of my fare are, I hope, never bored. There is an old Italian saying, *A tavola non s’invecchia*—‘At the table one never grows old.’ Isn’t that reason enough to come home at the end of the day, roll up one’s sleeves, fire up the stove, and start smashing the garlic?” Indeed it is. Last spring, Jones celebrated her 50th anniversary at Knopf, where she is a senior editor and vice president.—*Cheryl Iverson*

A THREE DOG LIFE: A MEMOIR. (ABIGAIL THOMAS. ORLANDO, FL: HARCOURT; 2006. 190 PAGES. ISBN-13: 978-0-15-603323-7.) Abigail Thomas is the author of *A Three Dog Life: A Memoir*. She was busy living her life as a writer in a happy marriage with her second husband, Richard, and their beloved dog, in New York City when tragedy hit out of nowhere. On his nightly

walk with the dog, the leash snapped at a busy intersection, and Richard ran into the street to save his pet. Abbey knew something was odd because those walks never took as long as the one that night had taken. Then curiosity turned to fear when the doorman sent only the dog, which had run back to the apartment, up on the elevator. By the time the puzzle pieces fit together, she was looking at the flashing lights of ambulances and at her husband, apparently dead in the street with his head split open. The book would have been quite different had Richard not survived. That he did was miraculous, but the cost to both of them was enormous. Richard had suffered a severe head trauma that resulted in, among other things, permanent brain damage and a loss of all short-term memory. Thomas takes over from there and answers the questions that she was forced to confront, those which for many of us, thankfully, remain hypothetical. For example, how does one reshape and rebuild a life that has been so suddenly, cruelly, and unexpectedly transformed? How does one learn to navigate when the most important frames of reference have been critically altered or removed? Where do self-preservation, guilt, and personal responsibility intersect? In her gentle way that somehow seems to console and reassure the *reader*, she shows that the incredible resources that she possesses within (that she didn’t know she had) and the love of three dogs allowed her to both reclaim her life and lovingly attend to a Richard that she did not marry but one she came to love for who he had, through fate, become. This is a thought-provoking read and well worth the experience.—*Ken Heideman*

continued



UNDER THE BANNER OF HEAVEN: A STORY OF VIOLENT FAITH. (JON KRAKAUER. NEW YORK: ANCHOR BOOKS; 2004. 399 PAGES. ISBN-10: 1-4000-3280-6.)

The Lafferty brothers, Ron and Dan, murdered their sister-in-law and her infant daughter in 1984 because they believed that God had ordered them to do so. Jon Krakauer uses the circumstances of this crime as a vehicle in *Under the Banner of Heaven* for delving into faith-based violence in Mormon Fundamentalist sects. The Mormons as a people are generally “chaste, optimistic, outgoing, [and] dutiful”, he writes, but “when Dan Lafferty quotes Mormon scripture to justify murder, the juxtaposition is so incongruous as to seem surreal.” Krakauer traces the origin and history of the Mormon religion (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and explains the sacred Mormon texts *The Book of Mormon* and *The Doctrines and Covenants*, which are foundations of the church. Mormonism, sometimes called the “American religion” because it originated in the United States, is one of the fastest growing religions in the Western Hemisphere, according to the author. This book is a fascinating window into the historical and current events, beliefs, and practices that have shaped the religion. Because Krakauer’s text focuses on the extremists, it is not an account of more traditional Latter-day Saints, but he explores the commonalities of and differences between conventional Mormons and the Fundamentalists on the fringe. The appendix of this edition includes a critique of the book by a high-ranking official of the Mormon church and Krakauer’s

rebuttal. This easily readable and well-documented book is a key to understanding recent events like the abduction of 14-year-old Elizabeth Smart from her Utah home in 2002 and the 2008 raid on the Fundamentalist compound in Eldorado, Texas.—*Susan M Shirley*

THE WATCHMEN. (ALAN MOORE, DAVE GIBBONS, AND JOHN HIGGINS. NEW YORK: DC COMICS; 1995. 413 PAGES. ISBN-10: 0-9302-89234.)

Hundred-degree summer days may discourage you from taking an afternoon jog, but despite the onerous heat, Alan Moore’s highly acclaimed graphic novel *The Watchmen* will send your mind on a marathon. Set on an alternative timeline in 1985, *The Watchmen* portrays a gray world on the brink of nuclear war, with the United States and the USSR locked in a tense struggle to balance world power. Masked superheroes, viewed as vigilantes by the American people and government alike, desperately try to save the world (and themselves) as an ever-present Doomsday Clock ticks toward midnight. Dr Manhattan, a cerebral scientist transformed by a nuclear accident, is arguably the most enigmatic of all the characters in Moore’s book. The very powerful (and very blue) Dr Manhattan has the ability to stop the expected nuclear doom and save humanity, but, aloof and disengaged from the world, he does as he pleases. Without giving too much of the plot away, the unpredictable ending was groundbreaking for its day. The ending explores the psychology of our species and the prospect of reconciliation in light of alien threat.



No review of *The Watchmen* would be complete without a few words applauding Dave Gibbons’s stunning illustration work and John Higgins’s masterful coloring. The gritty and visceral visuals aptly reflect the raw sentiment depicted in Moore’s accompanying text. Reader beware: *The Watchmen* is filled with adult content that makes it unsuitable for readers under 18 (25?). The language is oftentimes vulgar, and the themes and illustrations are unabashedly violent and sexually suggestive. But hey, what else would you expect from Alan Moore?—*Naveed Saleh*

SUSAN M SHIRLEY is a freelance science editor in Corpus Christi, Texas. NAVEED SALEH is a graduate student in science and technology journalism at Texas A&M University. TED WACHS is managing editor of Mountain Research and Development and publications editor at the Center for Development and Environment, University of Bern, Switzerland. BARBARA GASTEL is a professor at Texas A&M University and the editor of Science Editor. EDITH PAAL works in human-subjects research oversight at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock. MIN-FANG HUANG is a graduate student in science and technology journalism at Texas A&M University. CHERYL IVERSON is managing editor of the nine Archives Journals (part of the JAMA/Archives family) and chair of the committee that wrote the AMA Manual of Style. KEN HEIDEMAN is director of publications for the American Meteorological Society in Boston.