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Summer reading roundup

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Another summer, another list of (mostly) escapist reading. It doesn't matter if your book choices are in conventional form with actual pages or if they're e-books you've downloaded to an electronic reader. The point is, reading marches on.

Amazon announced in May that sales of its Kindle e-books had surpassed sales of hardcover and paperback print books combined. Since April, the online retailer has been selling 105 electronic books for every 100 print books.

Not that print sales are in decline.

A recent report from the R.R. Bowker Co., which compiles bibliographic data, said "traditional U.S. print title output in 2010 increased from 302,410 in 2009 to 316,480." Since 2002, it said, "the production of traditional books has increased 47 percent."

So it appears we're reading more than ever, especially in the summer months, when we have vacation time. Invariably, among the summer book avalanche are titles destined to take off. For instance, this year look for "In the Garden of Beasts" by Erik Larson, "State of Wonder" by Ann Patchett, "A Writer at Work" by Philip Roth, "Portrait of a Spy" by Daniel Silva, "Dead Reckoning" by Charlaine Harris, "A Dance With Dragons" by George R.R. Martin and "Folly Beach" by Dorothea Benton Frank (who will appear July 14 at the Tsakopoulos Library Galleria for the Sacramento Bee Book Club).

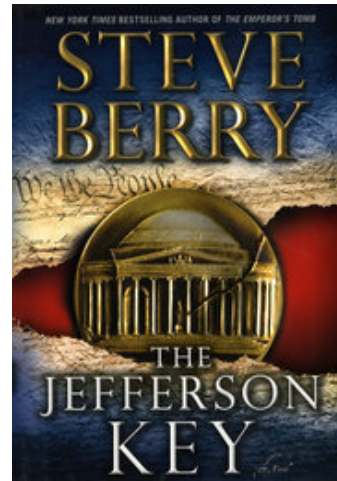
A somewhat less predictable list includes beach reads, airport/airline reads, word-of-mouth reads and good ol' guilty pleasures – heavy on the thrillers.

This list offers a sampling, arranged alphabetically by authors' last names. Many are on sale now; for the others, publishing dates are noted.

"Adrenaline" by Jeff Abbott (Grand Central, \$24.99, 416 pages; July 1): An up-and-coming CIA agent is framed for multiple murders, then his family is kidnapped. If he can escape from prison, can he manage to track down the the abductor?

"The Jefferson Key" by Steve Berry (Ballantine, \$26, 480 pages): Former Justice Department operative Cotton Malone returns to U.S. soil from Copenhagen to confront a particularly nasty group of modern-day pirates. Berry appeared for the Sacramento Bee Book Club in January.

"Back of Beyond" by C.J. Box (Minotaur, \$25.99, 400 pages; Aug. 2): Edgar Award-winner Box, best known for his Joe Pickett series, introduces a new lawman – one who tracks a killer in Yellowstone



The Jefferson Key by Steve Berry

Park.

"Crime Fraiche" by Alexander Campion (Kensington, \$24, 320 pages; June 28): This "culinary mystery" involves French detective Capucine LeTellier and her food-critic husband vacationing at a manor house in Normandy. While the meals pile up, so do the bodies.

"Summer Friends" by Holly Chamberlin (Kensington, \$15, 352 pages; June 28): Two best friends who grew up together reunite one summer after a 20-year separation.

"Girls in White Dresses" by Jennifer Close (Knopf, \$24.95, 304 pages; Aug. 16): Three very funny single young women must deal with the pressures of jobs, romance and family dynamics – and their girlfriends' weddings and bridal showers. This is Knopf's big "debut novel" for the summer.

"Carte Blanche" by Jeffery Deaver (Simon & Schuster, \$26.99, 432 pages): The Ian Fleming estate scored a coup by signing best-selling novelist Deaver to continue the James Bond pastiche. In a statement, the publisher says, "The plot – which brings 007 firmly into the modern age – is being kept tightly under wraps until publication."

"Trespasser" by Paul Doiron (Minotaur, \$24.99, 320 pages; June 21): Maine game warden Mike Bowditch gets the call when a woman hits a deer with her car. When he reaches the scene, the driver and the deer are gone – but there's blood on the road. Now he must find the vanished woman.

"Centuries of June" by Keith Donohue (Crown, \$24, 352 pages): A strange but satisfying story of a man with a concussion who takes a trip through time and space when confronted by seven ghostly women (including his wife) with tales to tell.

"Smokin' Seventeen" by Janet Evanovich (Bantam, \$28, 320 pages; June 21): New Jersey bounty hunter Stephanie Plum is in a killer's cross hairs. Worse, she must finally choose among her various boyfriends.

"Eyes Wide Open" by Andrew Gross (William Morrow, \$25.99, 352 pages; July 12): Gross, co-author of five No. 1 best-sellers with James Patterson, continues on his own with this tale of a suicide that may have been murder.

"Misery Bay" by Steve Hamilton (Minotaur, \$24.99, 304 pages): Ex-cop-turned-PI Alex McKnight returns to the award-winning series to investigate the apparent suicide of a troubled teen.

"Silver Girl" by Elin Hilderbrand (Reagan Arthur, \$26.99, 416 pages; June 21): Possibilities are in the air on Nantucket Island, when Meredith and her best girlfriend escape their woes for the summer.

"Summer in the South" by Cathy Holton (Ballantine, \$25, 352 pages): In mourning for her mother, Ava accepts an invitation to spend a summer in Tennessee with a friend and his two aunts. There, she uncovers startling family secrets.

"The Hypnotist" by Lars Kepler (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$27, 512 pages; June 21): The only person to survive the murder of a family is a young boy, who is in a state of shock and cannot talk. When a hypnotist is brought in to help the investigation, matters get much worse.

"Trader of Secrets" by Steve Martini (William Morrow, \$26.99, 400 pages): Martini has made a career out of legal thrillers starring his hard-driven defense-attorney character, Paul Madriani. International terrorists are the target in this excursion. Martini got his own law degree from the McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento.

"The Paris Wife" by Paula McLain (Ballantine, \$25, 336 pages): Life with expatriate novelist Ernest Hemingway in 1920s Paris is imagined through the perspective of Hadley Richardson Hemingway, wife No. 1 of four.

"Devil's Plaything" by Matt Richtel (Harper, \$9.99, 448 pages): The Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times reporter weaves a tale of a "world-changing conspiracy" set in Silicon Valley.

"Bright's Passage" by Josh Ritter (Dial, \$22, 208 pages; June 28): A World War I soldier returns home to domestic tragedies, but the angel that has accompanied him from the European battlefield vows to protect him and his infant son.

"The Devil Colony" by James Rollins (William Morrow, \$27.99, 496 pages; June 21): The Sacramento thriller writer weaves global travel, secret codes, ancient documents, U.S. history, and two of his most daring characters in another action-filled page-turner.

"The Two Deaths of Daniel Hayes" by Marcus Sakey (Dutton, \$25.95, 400 pages): A half-drowned man wakes on an empty beach, not knowing who he is. Conveniently parked nearby is a car, with cash and clothes that fit. So why are the cops hunting him down?

"Buried Prey" by John Sanford (Putnam, \$27.95, 400 pages): One of the best entries in the multimillion-selling "Prey" series. When the buried bodies of two girls are accidentally discovered, Minneapolis lawman Lucas Davenport must revisit his past to erase an old regret.

"Dreams of Joy" by Lisa See (Random House, \$26, 368 pages): This sequel to "Shanghai Girls" finds sisters Pearl and May in Red China of 1957 – unaware of the threats posed by the communist regime.

"The Final Storm" by Jeff Shaara (Ballantine, \$28, 480 pages): The historical-fiction novelist has set his tales in the Civil War, World War I and World War II. Here, he moves from war-torn Europe to the Pacific Theater to dramatize the taking of Okinawa. Shaara appeared for the Sacramento Bee Book Club on June 9.

"The Dog Who Came In From the Cold" by Alexander McCall Smith (Pantheon, \$24.95, 304 pages; June 21): The whimsical and rollicking "Corduroy Mansions" series continues, with the residents involved in situations more bizarre than ever.

"Beachcombers" by Nancy Thayer (Ballantine, \$15, 400 pages): Healing and changes occupy the Fox family, as widower Jim Fox and his three adult daughters form new relationships during a Nantucket Island summer.

"Then Came You" by Jennifer Weiner (Atria, \$26.99, 352 pages; July 12): Four women from disparate backgrounds bond over the issue of surrogate motherhood.

NONFICTION

"The Lost Girls" by Jennifer Baggett, Holly C. Corbett and Amanda Pressner (Harper, \$15.99, 560 pages): Dissatisfied with their lives and jobs, three 20-something friends decide to explore the world for a year.

"Lessons From a Desperado Poet" by Baxter Black (TwoDot, \$22.95, 232 pages): The wit and wisdom from "America's Cowboy Poet" gallops across the pages with inspiration and humor – and the occasional poem.

"Robert Redford" by Michael Feeney Callan (Knopf, \$28.95, 496 pages): Consulting Redford's personal journals, letters and notes, and conducting "hundreds of hours" of interviews, the veteran biographer offers fresh insights into the iconic actor-director-producer.

"Last Men Out" by Bob Drury and Tom Clavin (Free Press, \$26, 304 pages): The dramatic "true story of America's final hours in Vietnam" recounts the evacuation of the American embassy in Saigon in April 1975.

"Incognito" by David Eagleman (Pantheon, \$26.95, 304 pages): Our brains have "secret lives," writes neuroscientist Eagleman, who goes on to answer questions such as: "Why is it hard to keep a secret? How is it possible to get angry at yourself when there's only one you?"

"Elixir" by Brian Fagan (Bloomsbury, \$28, 416 pages): The anthropology professor surveys "a history of water and humankind" over a 5,000-year span. He cautions that the world's dwindling water supply demands a global realignment.

"Marriage Confidential" by Pamela Haag (Harper, \$25.99, 352 pages): Modern marriages are a sociological stew of tepid relationships, demanding careers, needy children, too much money and not enough money, and a disturbing "new normal" of semi-happiness. Haag claims it's an institution "on the edge."

"Wrestling the Hulk" by Linda Hogan (William Morrow, \$25.99, 256 pages; June 28): It wasn't easy being married to wrestling-ring master Hulk Hogan for 24 years, writes the former VH-1 reality TV star. Here, she tells why.

"Area 51" by Annie Jacobsen (Little, Brown, \$27.99, 544 pages): What actually goes on at the super-secret military base? Is the government really hiding the bodies and spacecraft of extraterrestrial beings? Investigative journalist Jacobsen interviewed 72 people with ties to the base – 32 of whom lived and worked there – and finds shocking discoveries.

"Someplace Like America: Tales From the New Great Depression" by Dale Maharidge and Michael S. Williamson (University of California Press, \$26.95, 256 pages): Writer Maharidge and photographer Williamson – both of whom worked at The Sacramento Bee – continue their 30-year Pulitzer Prize-winning words-and-pictures examination of poverty, homelessness and joblessness in the world's richest country.

"The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" by Rebecca Skloot (Broadway, \$16, 400 pages): Before Lacks died of cervical cancer in 1951, doctors removed tissue from her without her knowledge. The "cell line" that resulted led to medical discoveries. This account examines the human impact and questionable ethics.

"The Joaquin Band" by Lori Lee Wilson (University of Nebraska Press, \$29.95, 336 pages): Was legendary bandit Joaquin Murrieta a Mexican Robin Hood or a common criminal? This erudite study answers that and more.

AL'S TOP NONFICTION PICK

Fire Season

Philip Connors

Ecco, \$24.99, 246 pages

This one takes readers to a place of extremity, which leads to the question: Could I do this?

Understandably, Philip Connors was under stress as an editor at the Wall Street Journal in New York. When the chance came along to spend a summer as a fire lookout in New Mexico's Gila National Forest, he quit and moved into "my tiny glass-walled perch."

That was 10 years ago. Since then, he has spent six months a year as a fire lookout (with no electricity and sleeping in a nearby cabin), a job that grows more scarce each season. "Ninety percent of American lookout towers have been decommissioned, and only a few hundred of us (lookouts) remain," he writes.

Connors tells us about the history and mechanics of the job from his tower 10,000 feet above sea level. He also discusses the changing politics and policies within the U.S. Forest Service, and their effects on ecology.

Things turn more interesting when he turns on the lyrical narrative, charting one season's month-by-month goings-on. He recounts a few tense moments and the occasional encounters with hikers, and ruminates on the varying nature of fire, the habits of the animals he sees in the forest, the beauty of nature, and the notion of being satisfied in solitude, with only his dog for company.

In an online podcast, Connors told an interviewer, "I do my job on a mountaintop, five miles from the nearest road, overlooking one of the most stunning landscapes in North America. Basically, I'm paid to watch mountains. My job is pretty much perfect."

Could be, but he adds, "There's no escaping oneself."

AL'S TOP FICTION PICK

The Devil's Star

Jo Nesbo (translated by Don Barlett)

Harper, \$25.99, 452 pages

Crime-fiction readers may have met Oslo police detective Harry Hole prior to his starring role in this excellent thriller. He's the central character in two previous English-language translations of Nesbo's novels, "Nemesis" and "The Redbreast."

Nesbo, who is Norwegian, is among the most sizzling novelists in Europe.

"The Devil's Star" is impeccably crafted, with intelligent writing and plotting, deep characterizations, unexpected curves, grim humor and a faithful sense of place (in this case, Oslo, Norway).

Harry's specialty is solving serial-murder cases, for which he is grudgingly respected by his superiors and peers. But his alcoholism and disdain for authority are self-inflicted impediments.

This outing opens during a rash of murders bearing obvious similarities. Harry is told he will be fired from his job when the police chief returns from vacation. In the meantime, would he mind looking into these killings?

The twists and turns begin, made richer by Harry's ongoing conflict with fellow detective Tom Waaler, who almost certainly killed Harry's former partner. Or did he?

Yes, Harry is weary and drinks too much, but when it comes to his profession, he's the best. We'll be on the lookout for translations of more Harry Hole adventures in "The Redeemer," "The Snowman" and "The Leopard."

ON THE WEB

For more summer reading suggestions, look at these sites:

- www.nybooks.com (New York Review of Books)
- www.npr.org/series/summer-books (National Public Radio)
- www.thedailybeast.com/newsmaker/book-beast (Daily Beast)
- www.newyorker.com (New Yorker magazine)
- www.oprah.com/book_club.html (O magazine)

WHAT WILL YOU BE READING?

Whether you're filling a beach bag with paperbacks or loading an electronic reader with e-books, we're curious about what you'll be reading this summer.

We'll share your reading lists with other readers in each Monday's "Between the Lines" column as the summer goes on, so everyone will be on the same page, so to speak.

Please email The Bee's Allen Pierleoni at apierleoni@sacbee.com with a list of the books (and their authors) you plan to dive into this summer. Please include your name, city of residence and daytime phone number.

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