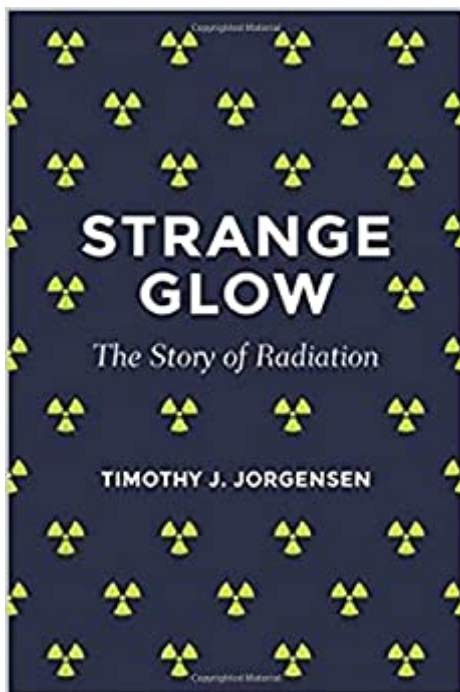


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# Strange Glow: The Story Of Radiation



## Synopsis

More than ever before, radiation is a part of our modern daily lives. We own radiation-emitting phones, regularly get diagnostic x-rays, such as mammograms, and submit to full-body security scans at airports. We worry and debate about the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the safety of nuclear power plants. But how much do we really know about radiation? And what are its actual dangers? An accessible blend of narrative history and science, *Strange Glow* describes mankind's extraordinary, thorny relationship with radiation, including the hard-won lessons of how radiation helps and harms our health. Timothy Jorgensen explores how our knowledge of and experiences with radiation in the last century can lead us to smarter personal decisions about radiation exposures today. Jorgensen introduces key figures in the story of radiation—from Wilhelm Roentgen, the discoverer of x-rays, and pioneering radioactivity researchers Marie and Pierre Curie, to Thomas Edison and the victims of the recent Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident. Tracing the most important events in the evolution of radiation, Jorgensen explains exactly what radiation is, how it produces certain health consequences, and how we can protect ourselves from harm. He also considers a range of practical scenarios such as the risks of radon in our basements, radiation levels in the fish we eat, questions about cell-phone use, and radiation's link to cancer. Jorgensen empowers us to make informed choices while offering a clearer understanding of broader societal issues. Investigating radiation's benefits and risks, *Strange Glow* takes a remarkable look at how, for better or worse, radiation has transformed our society.

## Book Information

Paperback: 512 pages

Publisher: Princeton University Press; Reprint edition (August 22, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0691178348

ISBN-13: 978-0691178349

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 21 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #297,208 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in [Books > Science & Math > Chemistry > Nuclear Chemistry](#) #154 in [Books > Science & Math > Physics > Nuclear Physics](#) #187 in [Books > Science & Math > Physics > Electromagnetism](#)

## Customer Reviews

Winner of the 2017 PROSE Award in History of Science, Medicine & Technology, Association of American Publishers  
One of Physics World's Top Ten Books of the Year, 2016  
One of Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles for 2016  
#6 on The Telegraph's Top 50 Books of the Year 2016  
One of Smithsonian Magazine's Best Science Books of 2016  
Shortlisted for Physics World's Book of the Year 2016

"Jorgensen walks readers through the history of humanity's interaction with radiation. . . . [Strange Glow] is a solid, accessible work, but perhaps its most beneficial aspect is that Jorgensen equips readers with enough knowledge to make their own risk assessments, whether it is of a potential medical diagnostic test or a particular consumer decision."--Publishers Weekly  
"Unbiased, comprehensible information on radiation risk is hard to come by. . . . Strange Glow fills this gap."--Science  
"Narrative science at its best . . . a propulsive story, each piece building on the next in a series of progressive revelations. . . . A seismic piece of scientific inquiry, top shelf in narrative style and illumination."--Kirkus, starred review  
"The only antidote to irrational fear is knowledge, and Strange Glow imparts this in spades."--Independent  
"Strange Glow isn't about lessening what is largely a sensible fear, but about removing some of the mystery and misunderstanding. . . . This is a long overdue and successful attempt to rationalise an emotional subject by telling its story in very human terms."--Engineering & Technology News  
"Strange Glow . . . integrates detailed science and carefully illuminated medical statistics with the personal lives of scientists. . . . The book's goal--to present the facts about radiation as objectively and even-handedly as possible, leaving you to decide which aspects to fear--is achieved with authority and style."--Andrew Robinson, Lancet  
"This book can be enjoyed as a sort of scientific QI--a string of interesting facts you can't wait to share with anyone who can be persuaded to listen. . . . Jorgensen proves that there's no excuse for convoluted writing, however difficult the subject. His conversational style makes even the most complex equations seem attractive."--William Cook, The Spectator  
"[Strange Glow] is . . . the story of human interaction with radiation--beginning with the one type that we can see (light) and continuing through radio waves, atomic blasts, cellphones, radon, microwave ovens, luggage scanners, the Fukushima accident, and on and on. . . . Jorgensen avoids graphs and numbers, instead relying largely on entertaining--if alarming--anecdotes."--Nancy Szokan, Washington Post  
"What I certainly did not expect was to get caught up in the stories of the scientists [in Strange Glow]. . . . Jorgensen has written a compelling book about the history of radiation. . . . [His] gift is that he make us care about the scientists."--Jacqueline Cutler, Newark Star-Ledger  
"Strange Glow is a cracking good read, filled with fascinating stories about the people behind the science."--Literary Review  
"Timothy Jorgensen is a scientist with a knack for narrative storytelling."--Ryan Stellabotte, Fordham News  
"Strange Glow

is clear, engaging and refreshingly willing to treat the reader as a thinking adult."--Japan Times"Strange Glow is a fantastic, well-written book about the benefits and risks of radiation. Jorgenson uses common prose so that a wide range of readers can follow the discussions. . . .The book includes extensive, useful, and lucid discussions on medical x-rays and radon gas. Readers also learn the facts regarding the Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima nuclear reactor meltdowns and the problems they cause. [A] well-researched book."--Choice"Informative, fast paced and entertaining. . . . I guarantee you will be engaged and surprised."--Chemistry World"Jorgensen's lucid writing and strong story-telling skills are demonstrated thoroughly in this book, making it a pleasure to read. . . . In its simplicity and conciseness, it greatly contributes to removing some of the mystery and misunderstanding that surrounds radiation. . . . I feel it will become a very useful resource to the general public as well as to radiation experts."--Jun Deng, Physics World"A narrative history, which integrates detailed science and statistics with the personal lives of the pioneers. [Jorgensen's] goal--'to present the facts about radiation as objectively and even-handedly as possible, leaving you to decide which aspects to fear'--is achieved with authority and style."--Andrew Robinson, The Telegraph"Jorgenson lays out the progression of mankind's understanding of radiation science over the past century, including the figures, breakthroughs and disasters that moved the field forward (for better or worse). An informative read that chronicles the history and science of humankind's 'ambivalent' relationship with this strange force."--Rachel Gross, Smithsonian"[Jorgensen] . . . has chosen another original but interesting and straightforward way of storytelling, devoid of scientific jargon, to achieve the aim of reaching the widest possible audience of readers, regardless to their technical background. . . . Strange Glow: The Story of Radiation . . . Will certainly be useful due to the striking and exciting style of its presentation."--R.M. Alexakhin, Radiation Protection Dosimetry"It is engaging, thoughtful, and useful to anyone with an interest in the controversies surrounding the use of ionizing radiation. . . . An accessible, indeed enjoyable, contribution to the literature on an exceedingly important and often emotional subject. It deserves to command the attention and respect of scholars as well as the general audience that Jorgensen hopes to reach."--J. Samuel Walker, IsisPraise for the previous edition: "The book's goal--'to present the facts about radiation as objectively and even-handedly as possible, leaving you to decide which aspects to fear'-- is achieved with authority and style."--The Lancet

People like to get their learning in the form of stories. If you tell an engaging and compelling story, people will learn something from it and they will retain that knowledge. So that's what I

attempt to do in *Strange Glow*. The book is the story of man's encounters with radiation, and how mankind has been transformed by the experience. The story is told with an emphasis on the human aspects, and it is told from a health-centric perspective. The goal is to integrate the technological aspects of radiation within the human experience and, thereby, remove some of the mystery and misunderstanding that surrounds radiation. Nevertheless, this is not a book about lessening your fear of radiation. Fear is a very subjective emotion, driven by many factors. The only thing that this book can achieve is to present the facts about radiation as objectively and evenhandedly as possible, leaving its readers to decide for themselves which aspects of radiation they should fear. Another purpose of this book is to dispel the myth that the subject of radiation risks is so complicated that it is beyond the capability of ordinary people to grasp, leaving as their only recourse reliance on radiation "experts." This is simply not true. Intelligent people, even those lacking any technical background, should be able to understand the fundamental principles that drive radiation risk and make their own decisions about how large a threat radiation poses to them individually and to society at large. This book seeks to convince people that they can be masters of their own radiation fate, and to empower them to make their own well-informed decisions about their personal radiation exposures. Lastly, this book is an experiment in risk communication. The open question is whether radiation risks can be characterized accurately and effectively without reliance on a lot of mathematics, tables, and graphs. These highly quantitative approaches have proved to be largely ineffective in communicating the essence of risk to the public. This book is devoid of graphs and tables and keeps the mathematics to a minimum. Instead, it tries to instill a sense of the magnitude of the threat through a historical scientific narrative about the people who encountered radiation of various types and dose levels, and the health consequences of those exposures. In this way, we can get an accurate sense of the level of the radiation hazard even without a detailed understanding of the underlying technology. If I have done my job well, all readers of this book will enjoy interesting stories of scientific discovery while, at the same time, learn a tremendous amount about radiation. They should also find their new understanding of radiation personally useful in many practical ways. I hope you will find it so. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

*Strange Glow* is a good read for the average person. If you are PhD radiochemist you might be frustrated by the lack of equations, functions, and charts. If you are decent at understanding the basics (or at least willing to reread the paragraphs that are a bit technical), you will begin to understand radiation a bit more. What Jorgensen does is unravel the mysteries around radiation for

eh average person. I took the required one year of chemistry and physics in high school and college, so do not live in his world. But his approach of relating the advances made, especially in last century or so are more a historical or detective novel  $\hat{A}f\hat{A}\phi\hat{A} \hat{a} \rightarrow\hat{A} \hat{a} \in$  personalities, rivalries, financial gains, etc. Each seems to build off the other in a way that I appreciated understanding (maybe my high school chemistry teacher was right after all  $\hat{A}f\hat{A}\phi\hat{A} \hat{a} \rightarrow\hat{A} \hat{A}$  gentlemen, you have to keep up, as tomorrow $\hat{A}f\hat{A}\phi\hat{A} \hat{a} \rightarrow\hat{A} \hat{a}$ ,s lessons will build off today!). Strange Glow allowed me access to the technical discussions we read about in the news. I wish more scientists would speak to me as a lay person, in analogies or a language that I can understand. That is one of the strengths of Jorgenson $\hat{A}f\hat{A}\phi\hat{A} \hat{a} \rightarrow\hat{A} \hat{a}$ ,s work. Without telling me what to think, he presents facts about nuclear power, radiation we get in everyday life (who knew flying across th country actually provided a dose of radiation)  $\hat{A}f\hat{A}\phi\hat{A} \hat{a} \rightarrow\hat{A} \hat{A}$ . But also puts things in perspective for me to decide on my own. For the average person who wants to get a bit smarter about a topic, this is good read and good information.

This book explains the history of mankind's interaction with radiation in a most relatable way, using the personal histories of the pioneering scientists who "discovered" it. Then the author goes on to discuss--and demystify--how to analyze the risks and benefits of radiation in many contexts, including natural sources of radiation like radon, nuclear medicine, nuclear powerplant accidents, and nuclear weapons. Anyone who reads this book carefully will be better able to understand the uses, benefits, and risks of radiation. Highly recommended.

Thorough, detailed discussion of the subject; sometimes a bit complicated, but interesting and (apparently) well-documented vignettes about the subject. Worth a read, IMHO. (The book jacket glows in the dark!)

Absolutely delightful read. He has skillfully merged many relevant stories into a dynamic learning experience. I will re-read this book to savor his perceptive style, wit and humble portrayal of historic figures.

Nice overall review of radiation. A must read for the lay audience interested in this incredible science.

Very educational and written in a very understandable way. The story line keeps you want to read.

Really hard to make interesting story line of scientific subject to the general public. Great work highly recommended for people that want to find how radiation affects humans and the history behind it!!!PS read the footnotes lots of details.

"Strange Glow" is a delightful, informative book, not patronizing the radiation experts while, in a very pleasant, absorbing style, enlightening the layperson. Jorgensen's knowledge of radiation history is vast and comprehensive. In telling the science story he also recounts the intriguing and absorbing personal stories of many major individuals, opening to the reader new and interesting insights into the lives of these scientists. As I read the book I came to realize how very little I knew about the scope of radiation-- its presence in nature, radioactivity everywhere; in our homes; nuclear bombs--Nagasaki, Hiroshima; Fukushima and nuclear power plants; its risks and benefits to health from microwaves and cell phones to CAT scans, cancer treatment, and much more. Jorgensen deftly answered my queries while providing me with the knowledge to make my own satisfactory, informed decisions.

Excellent book - good historical coverage

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