The spiritual text that forms the basis of Mormonism—in the last edition edited by its founder, Joseph Smith, Jr.

THE BOOK OF MORMON is one of the most influential— as well as controversial—religious documents in American history, and is regarded as sacred scripture by followers around the world, including members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the fourth-largest religious body in the United States. According to Mormon belief, The Book of Mormon was inscribed on golden plates by ancient prophets. It contains stories of ancient peoples migrating from the Near East to the Americas, and also explains that Jesus Christ appeared to the New World after his resurrection. The golden plates were discovered in upstate New York and translated by Joseph Smith, Jr., under the guidance of an angel, Moroni. From this divine revelation, Smith founded the Mormon sect, which is now comprised of more than 12.5 million members worldwide.

My Personal Review:
Permitted space hardly allows me to do justice to this book, especially considering the many reviews already given. However, I believe that I can add something useful to the discussion and clear up some misconceptions, while avoiding both the zealousness of the believers and the animosity of the detractors. I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but my remarks, unless otherwise noted, are directed mainly at the Revised Authorized Version published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Much ado has been made by Latter-day Saints that this version is published by the Reorganized Church and is therefore not authorized or official. Such criticisms are disingenuous, since a Latter Day Saint may very well make the same accusation of the LDS edition. One reviewer alleges that [t]his edition has many things which were not translated by Joseph Smith, and are not in accordance with the teachings of the LDS
church, and are therefore false doctrines meant to confuse those who don’t know any better. This reviewer does not provide any specific examples of this edition making additions that are false doctrine. Despite the differences noted below, there are none that affect the doctrine of the LDS Church.

Latter-day Saints will find plenty of differences between the RAV and the current (1981) edition by the LDS Church. The foreword makes it clear that these changes represent an updating of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Otherwise, this version is hardly what one could call a modern language edition. This version otherwise retains King James style language and is only marginally easier to read. Readers looking for a modern language version of the Book of Mormon should instead be referred to Lynn Matthews Andersons The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon (Apple Valley, MN: Estes Book Company, 1995).

The RLDS version of the Book of Mormon also follows a different versification system than that of the LDS version. The chapter divisions follow that of the original (1830) edition. In a sense, this does improve the reading by allowing us to more easily view the immediate contexts as they were intended. The chapter divisions of the LDS edition may in some cases lead to misinterpretations. For example, LDS Alma 29 is usually taken to be in the voice of Alma, whereas a reading in the original context shows that this section is more likely to be in Mormons voice, see RLDS Alma 15.

Most of the reviews of the Book of Mormon can be placed in two categories: unmitigated praise, or extremely critical. The type of response is directly related to whether or not the reviewer believes the book is of divine origin. In both cases, the reviewers usually wind up overstating their cases.

If read merely as a work of historical fiction, you may very well find the Book of Mormon very boring. However, I do not believe that this is the best way to approach this book, simply because of its claims of divine origin. If read as a non-historical work, it should be approached as a work of a religious genius, a snapshot of the religious thinking of a person who would begin a new religious tradition that has millions of adherents around the world. If approached in this manner, the Book of Mormon contains insights into how this religious movement dealt with the religious issues of the day, and provides for more interesting reading than a mere historical novel ever could.

The historicity of the Book of Mormon cannot be proven. Despite one authors opinion that literary, scholarly, and archaeological evidences that support the Book of Mormons claims vastly outnumber the unsupported attempts to discredit it, this is not actually the case. Most of the evidences advanced by believers in the books historicity can be countered by claims that those elements could have been gleaned from Joseph Smiths environment, including chiasmus, so-called Hebraisms, and even some of the archeological claims. I would urge the reader to study that matter for themselves, pro and con, and decide for themselves. The claim for divine authenticity is another matter, and should be separated from historicity as such. Here, the question is ultimately whether
or not God speaks to you through this book. I can't answer that one for you. That is between you and God, regardless of what critics think of the biblical basis for the admonition of Moroni 10:3-5. I can only tell you that for me, the answer is yes.

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