Amazon Best Books of the Month, September 2011: Simon Garfield's Just My Type presents an entertaining history of fonts, from font pirating dating back nearly as far as Gutenberg to the creation of Comic Sans and Ikea's font-change controversy. With a variety of recent, news-making examples and font samples throughout, Just My Type explains how and why certain fonts can elicit emotions or gut-instinct reactions. Garfield's humor and historical anecdotes add to his deep understanding of how something as simple as font choice can speak volumes about our cultural climate—and why it's so easy to agonize over what font to use on a party invitation. Whether you're already a font aficionado or can't tell the difference between Times New Roman and Arial, this entertaining history will give you a greater appreciation of the typefaces that surround you every day. --Malissa Kent

My Personal Review:
You are looking at it right now, and if it is doing its job, you dont even notice it. It might represent a creation that has taken centuries to come to its current state of perfection, or it might be something that a dedicated specialist worked on for years and brought out a decade ago. It represents artistry directed within a circumscribed realm. I am talking about the font in which these letters are presented. Thirty years ago, fonts were usually the interest of only a select few in the printing world, but now every computer is charged with fonts and everyone gets to be an amateur typographer (technically, the font is a specific set of metal parts, or digital files, that allows reproduction of letters, and a typeface is the design of letters the font allows you to reproduce, but you can see how the words would get used interchangeably). Simon Garfield is not a professional typographer; his role is bringing out fine nonfiction about, say, stamp collecting, history, or the color mauve. But he has an amateurs enthusiasm for fonts, and communicates it infectiously in _Just My Type: A Book About Fonts_
This is not a collection of type designs, though there are many illustrations. In most cases it won't help you in finding out what font you happen to be looking at (but it will tell you how to do so in surprising ways). It is a book of appreciation for an art that is largely invisible, but is also essential.

I would not like to read pages set in any of the fonts in one of Garfield's last chapters, The Worst Fonts in the World. On the list is Papyrus, which caused a stir when it was used extensively in the film _Avatar_. The expensive film used a free (and overused) display font, and font fans noticed. There was also a font war (also known as a fontoversy) when in 2009 Ikea decided to change its display font from Futura to Verdana. The change inspired passionate arguments in mere bystanders, like the passion of sports fans, says Garfield, and the _New York Times_ joked that it was perhaps the biggest controversy to come out of Sweden. The biggest of font wars has had a comic edge to it, and it is the starting point for Garfield's book. Comic Sans is a perfectly good font. It looks something like the letters you see in comic books, smooth, rounded, sans serif, clear. Because it caught on and was quickly overused, there has been a ban on Comic Sans movement. Even the heads of the movement, which is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, admit that Comic Sans looks fine, say, on a candy packet; but they have also seen it on a tombstone and on a doctors brochure about irritable bowel syndrome. If you see a font and you wonder which one it is, you can take steps to identify it. Lots of people like to do this. It is especially useful to examine the lower case g. (The other character that reveals a lot is the ampersand, which, maybe since it is not a letter or a punctuation mark, appears in exuberant eccentricity even in some calm fonts.) That g has a lot of variable points; it might have a lower hook or it might have a loop, it might have a straight line on the right, or the upper loop might have an ear that rises or droops, and this doesn't even get into whether the upper loop is a circle, a long or wide ellipse, or has uniform width. Take a look at the g letters shown here, or in your regular reading matter, and you will be amazed at how variable a selection of even only a few can be. If you have your g, you can look it up in font books, but there are so many fonts now that no book comes close to showing them all. There is an application for the iPhone which allows you to take a picture of the letter in question, upload it somewhere, and then get suggestions of possible matches. Or you can go to a type forum and ask there, because there are lots of people devoted to hunting down this sort of thing. And they take it so seriously that, as on many internet forums, they get rather snarky about disagreements.

If you don't pay attention to fonts (and most of them do their work best by not calling attention to themselves), Garfield's entertaining book might get you started. There are chapters about the difficult matter of copyrighting a font, because if you design a good font it is easy to copy it, and there isn't much that can be done about font piracy. Font designers work for love, not money. There is a chapter on The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy white dog and other phrases that show all the letters, or particular words
that display a lot of the letters most important to font design. There’s plenty of history starting with Gutenberg and the historical Roman types from which are descended many of the fonts we read every day. Between the chapters are font breaks to praise Albertus or Gill Sans and to tell about how they came to be designed, with plenty of anecdotes and other funny or sad stories. This is a delightful, amusing book about a whole world most of us take for granted.

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