

I Believe...
Books are a Minds Best Friend, PART 1
By Rhett DeVelay
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I Believe...books are some of the greatest things invented by mankind. Above and beyond all the clichés of taking us to different countries and generating different ideas, they're just plain wonderful. They even smell good. If they ever invented a book you could literally ingest it would encompass all the senses. So, in honor of books and those who love them I'll give a brief description of my favorites which will have to be broken up into two articles since there are too many to list here. Some of these are very well known so I won't go into any great length about them, but others I am sure most people have never heard of. Hopefully, at least one of them will be of interest to you:

1) **“The Lost Girl”**. D.H. Lawrence is well known to his readers for “Sons and Lovers” and “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, but have you ever heard of “The Lost Girl”? It was the only book Lawrence ever won an award for and yet it’s not really known. It tells the tale of a young, plain, British woman who meets and falls in love with an Italian man. They move away from her family and go to live in Tuscany where she learns about heartbreak and deprivation when her young husband is sent off to war. Lawrence reveled in sad stories.

2) **“Little Lives”**. John Howland Spyker (pseudonym for Richard Elman) is a delightful storyteller who has written a lovely book about the forgotten lives of people in Washington County, NY. He reconstructs the story of each one in brief detail (sometimes in just one half page). Lovely, enchanting and sometimes very funny, especially with real names like Serendipity Flatch, Fidelity Hasbroek, Vartus Vartun, Bonar Thomas, Lacey Curtains and Caleb Ganthem. It’s a wonderful, lively read.

3) **“Imajica”**. Clive Barker is an imaginative horror-storyteller but this incredible book is less about horror than incredible worlds that melt and meld into the World we know. Just when you think you know where this story is going it veers off. Try it.

4) **“The Dreamquest of Unknown Kadath”**. H. P. Lovecraft was the missing link between Edgar Allen Poe and Stephen King. Aficionados know him well but many may not. This book, which I’ve read about a dozen times, has little to do with horror than with incredible imagination yet I warn those who don’t like supernatural and fantasy stories will not like this. It’s about a man who dreams of the fantastical city of Kadath, but the only way to find out how to get there is in his dreams (duh!), but there are creeping horrors that are trying to stop him from finding the city.

5) **“The Charioteer”**. Mary Renault is another well author of “The Persian Boy” and other great historical novels. This novel is one of the first she ever wrote and was completed soon after WWII where she was a nurse, thus the story of a nurse named Laurie during WWII who falls in love with a sea captain. However, there’s a twist: They’re both men. Very shocking stuff to be written in the early 1950’s.

6) **“Sense and Sensibility”, “Pride and Prejudice”, “Mansfield Park”, “Emma”, “Northanger Abbey”, “Persuasion”**. Obviously, these are six books, but I couldn’t decide on one so I include them as “one”. The incomparable Jane Austen. What can I say that many others have not said before me? She was not highly regarded by the critics in her day only because she dared to be a woman who used her actual name and not a male pseudonym. However, her books were successful in her lifetime only to become

wildly successful and required reading long after her death. And for good reason: They're great, funny, satirical and still great literature.

7) **“Of Men and Monsters”, “The Seven Sexes”, “The Wooden Star”, “The Square Root of Man”, “The Human Angle”, “Of All Possible Worlds”**. Another case of a writer and his six books that I can't choose from. William Tenn is one of the great unsung and unremembered Sci-Fi writers from the late 50's-60's. My brother first bought the books in the 60's and I read them, too, and have been a champion of his ever since. Tenn was the pseudonym of the English professor Philip Klass. Of all the books he wrote only “Of Men and Monsters” is a novel, which I've read a dozen times. The others are short stories. And great ones. Thankfully, you can now find his works again on Amazon.com or Alibris.com. He's definitely worth rediscovering.

8) **“Gone With the Wind”**. Margaret Mitchell only wrote one novel and it's considered one of the greatest American novels in the World, for good reason. Although it's been described as a Civil War soap opera, it's one of that rare breed of book: It's entertaining and historically informative. If it's been awhile since you've read it, try it again. If you've never read it, give it a try. It's an amazing book that gave me my name: My Parisian mother was 20 years old when the book was first printed. When the film came out the following year the war had started in Europe and she was not able to see it even though she had adored the book. Every seven years they would re-issue the film and in 1946 she missed the film again, for some unknown reason. Finally, in 1953, again they re-issued the film, however, after two miscarriages she was pregnant with me and since she had been ordered not to get up or walk for her entire pregnancy she was determined to see that damn film. So, she had my father carry her from the car into the theater and back. Thus, my name.

In a few months I'll continue with Part II of my list of favorite books. Hopefully, I've been able to introduce you to some authors well worth reading and you'll pass them on to others, too.

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