

Dr. T's Favorite

Books & Authors

If you check out any of these recommendations, let me know what you think. If you have some favorites, share them with me!

It's impossible to list every good book I ever read, or every author I think is worth reading. These are some titles and names that immediately come to mind when I think of enjoyable books I've read and authors who rarely fail to hold my attention.

(My [Year In Books 2019](#) on GoodReads.com)

Books (in no particular order):

- The Benefits of Being an Octopus by Ann Braden - This is a realistic fiction story about seventh-grader Zoey, whose life is not like her teachers' or classmates'. It's hard to care about doing homework when your home life is slowly spiralling out of control. Zoey's family lives in her mom's boyfriend's trailer, which is a huge step up from when they were homeless. But Zoey is starting to see that things are a lot more complex than she ever realized. The writing here is great, and seeing Zoey figuring out how to blend in, and how to stand up for herself, is both wonderful and heartbreaking.
- The Last Fifth Grade of Emerson Elementary by Laura Shovan - This is a verse novel - it's a story written as a series of poems. Each poem is by a different character, each of whom is part of the last class of fifth graders that will go through Emerson Elementary School before it is closed. The story itself is a fun realistic fiction story; but the variety of voices for the characters in this book is really amazing!
- Operation: Frog Effect by Sarah Scheerger - Each chapter of this realistic fiction novel switches perspective between the middle grades characters. Each of them is learning that life can bring some unexpected changes, and that life is all about learning to stand up for yourself and work with the unexpected.
- The Bloom County series by Berke Breathed - These cartoons originally came out when Dr. T was in middle and high school. It's a series about a couple of young kids and some talking animals who are all trying to make sense of the current events of the time, usually in really weird ways.
- You're Welcome, Universe by Whitney Gardner - Realistic fiction about a high school graffiti artist who is Deaf. The story is very engaging and enjoyable, but it also made me think a bit about what it means to be differently-abled.
- So You Want to Be a Wizard by Diane Duane - This is the first in a series of YA books that came out at least 10 years before Harry Potter, but is similar in terms of the basic plot. Set in 1980's New York, a middle-school-aged girl is bullied, until she finds a book that only she can read that teaches her how to do magic. Suddenly, her world has a lot more in it than she realized.

- The Dresden Files series by Jim Butcher - A private investigator in Chicago is ALSO a wizard dealing with supernatural situations that come his way. Kind of like, "What would Harry Potter be if he grew up?" Mostly lots of fast-paced action centered around the idea of a wizard living in the modern world. The main character, Harry Dresden, is a wise-guy, but always stands up for his principals - a character type I love. As the series progresses, Butcher's writing skills grew, and he started bringing some interesting moral and philosophical questions into the action.
- The Martian by Andy Weir - A fictional story that is built around state-of-the-moment knowledge and real space science. An emergency during a mission to Mars leaves a NASA astronaut stranded, and no one knows he's alive. He has to use his intelligence and skills to survive until he can be found - which could be years. A thrilling tale of survival in a deadly environment (somewhat reminiscent of Jack London's work), and super-informative about what living on Mars would really be like.
- The Lies of Locke Lamora by Scott Lynch - Take a bit of the fantasy, action, and unpredictability from Game of Thrones, mix it with the scheming and intelligence of Ocean's 11, and add a dash of whimsy from The Princess Bride, and you've got the basic idea of this novel. It hooked me from the first page, and kept me guessing to the very end. There were several parts where I was literally laughing out loud, and there were parts where I teared up; and I had trouble putting it down all the way through.
- The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry by Gabrielle Zevin - This is a book written by a book lover for other book lovers. It's story is small, slow, and sweet, with plenty of humor, lots of interesting characters patterned on your favorite stock characters, and some book-world in-jokes. If you have read a ton of books, this one might appeal to you.
- Jaws by Peter Benchley - This is the novel that inspired the movie. The movie is a little bit better, but this is a nicely written tale. A giant Great White shark is terrorizing a small Massachusetts island, and it's up to the local sheriff (with some help from a professor and a game fisherman) to stop it. A great read if you don't ever want to go to the beach again.
- Anything by Spider Robinson - He's mostly a sci-fi writer, but his stories (from short pieces to novels to series) tend to focus on good people trying to do the right thing. Lots of puns, lots of (older) pop-culture references, and lots of really interesting ideas. Many of his stories feature twists and turns you probably won't see coming, but after they arrive, you realize the story had to go that way. One of the few authors who made me cry at the end of a story, both because of the tragedy of the story and because I didn't want the book to end.
- Starship Troopers by Robert A. Heinlein - The book is nothing like the movie. It's an interesting look at society, a fast-paced action story, and a sly social commentary, all wrapped up in a well-plotted narrative.
- Expanded Universe by Robert A. Heinlein - A collection of short stories and essays by the amazingly gifted (and prolific) author. His thoughts are not only interesting, they make you ask, "Why don't we do things his way? It makes so much more sense!"
- Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli - The story of a girl with an unusual name, told by a boy at the high school she transfers into. This is a fascinating story in its own right, filled with

mystery and interesting characters; but this story goes deep, too, examining teen-relevant questions such as "What is popularity?", "Why do we treat people the way we do?" and "What price do you pay to be popular?"

- Longitude by Dava Sobel - Two stories told at once. One is about the man who created a portable clock, which allowed accurate shipboard navigation. The other is about the man who re-discovered the timepieces created nearly a century before and his attempt to restore them.
- The Right Stuff by Tom Wolfe - Wolfe is a former reporter who tells the story of America's attempts to start a "Man on the Moon" program in the late '50's and early '60's. A fascinating story in and of itself, described in gripping prose. Part fact, part fiction, all entertainment.
- The Case for Mars by Robert Zubrin - A very coherent explanation of how we can put a man on Mars almost immediately, with a relatively small cost, and why we should.
- The "Ender" series & the "Bean" series by [Orson Scott Card](#) (listed here in their in-story-universe chronological order):
 - Ender's Game - A young boy's ability to play games may be humanity's only hope in a war with aliens.
 - A War of Gifts - a short tale set in Battle School during Ender's early days there.
 - Ender's Shadow - This book is a "companion novel"; the story takes place at the same time as Ender's Game. It follows Bean, the boy who was supposed to be Ender's "understudy." It tells basically the same story as the second two-thirds of Ender's Game, but from a different perspective, thereby creating a very different story.
 - Shadow of the Hegemon - Bean's story continues: What happens to Earth after the Second Formic War?
 - Shadow Puppets - Bean's story continues: Bean helps Ender's brother, Peter, as he tries to take over the world.
 - Shadow of the Giant - Bean's story (mostly) concludes: Will the Earth be saved from another World War? Will Bean be saved from his enemies?
 - Shadows in Flight - Bean encounters buggers in space. Meant as a "preview" of what is supposed to be the last book(s) of the Ender series, which are supposed to unite with the Bean series.
 - Ender in Exile - Picks up right after the Bugger War, but goes on to overlap with some of the events from the "Shadow" series.
 - Speaker for the Dead - This book picks up several centuries after the events in Ender's Game. Ender is still alive; he's an adult who travels from planet to planet. Can he help the inhabitants of a colony planet deal with their secrets?
 - Xenocide - This book picks up several years after the events in Speaker for the Dead. Ender's home is threatened by an alien species, the second one encountered by humans. Will humans destroy this species, too?
 - Children of the Mind - (Mostly) concludes the story of Xenocide. Will humans destroy Ender's human colony to stop an alien disease?

- The "Harry Potter" series by J.K. Rowling is a wonderful set of books that give an interesting view of what it would be like to find out when you are about 10 that you are a magician with an enemy who tried to kill you as a baby. Each book in the series follows another year in the protagonist's life. The language is fun and often based on root words (yay, Latin!), so you can learn something about language while you enjoy this fantasy.
 - Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (released in the U.K. as Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone) - First in the series. A boy named Harry Potter discovers he is a magician and is sent to a school to learn magic. This book finds a nice balance - it's fun-mixed-with-danger, and it is present throughout pretty much each book. This first book also does a great job of world building, creating a wizarding world that seems quite magical.
 - Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets - This book expands on the world building of the first book, adding new characters and details while telling an engaging story.
 - Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban - What happens to wizards who commit crimes? They are sent to the wizard jail - Azkaban! It's a terrible place, and one of the inmates has escaped and is coming after Harry!
 - Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire - Harry gets drawn into the TriWizard Tournament, a test of the strongest young wizards around. And the penalty for losing could be death...
 - Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix - He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named may have been stopped once by this fabled group, but can they do it again?
 - Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince - While there is action and adventure in this book, it is the character building and the suggestions that all is not as it seems that I thought made this one of the better books in the series.
 - Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - The finale! I won't lie - I didn't think this book worked as a final piece of this series. But it did have some good moments, and you will probably cry when you read the toll taken by the final battle (I got a bit squishy).
- The "Bartimaeus" trilogy by Jonathon Stroud - Another amazing writer. This series poses the question: "What if magic was real, and had developed alongside, but separate from, technology?" In this story, Britain is a world power because it has the most magicians, who live in amazing mansions and drive the fanciest cars. The action starts in the first paragraph and doesn't stop until the last page of the last book. When I finished this series, I wanted more!
- The "Myth" series by [Robert Asprin](#):
 - Another Fine Myth - First in the series. A young man, Skeeve, accidentally becomes a magician, accidentally becomes the apprentice of a demon, accidentally buys a dragon, and accidentally becomes involved in stopping the strongest magician of all time.
 - Other "Myth" books:
 - Myth Conceptions
 - Myth-ing Persons

- Hit or Myth
 - Myth-ion Improbable
 - Little Myth Marker
 - M.Y.T.H. Inc. Link
 - Myth-nomers and Imp-Pervections
 - Myth Directions
 - M.Y.T.H. Inc. in Action
 - Sweet Myth-tery of Life
- The "Twilight" series by Stephenie Meyer
 - Twilight - Introduces the main characters of the saga, all of whom are interesting. Adds a fresh perspective to the vampire mythology, as told from the perspective of Bella, a fairly average teen who winds up in an extremely unusual situation.
 - New Moon - Brings an unexpected twist to the lives of the main characters.
 - Eclipse - Jake and Edward's battles over Bella escalate.
 - Breaking Dawn - The resolution!
- The "Septimus Heap" series by Angie Sage - If you liked Harry Potter, you'll probably dig this series. It's about a boy wizard who is learning how to be a magician from an adult magician... There are boggarts and other familiar beasts... But don't let the similarities fool you! This is a completely different kind of story. It starts out darker in tone, and though it has some extremely funny and endearing moments, there is always an undercurrent of danger lurking.
 - Magyk - Introduces our main characters and sets up the series. From the beginning, darker in tone than Harry Potter, but more entertaining because of that.
 - Flyte - Septimus discovers that there are things even his teachers don't know, and his brother may kill him to learn them!
 - Physic - Septimus is kidnapped, and only his own wits can save him. But what if he doesn't want to be saved?
 - Queste - Septimus and friends try to save Septimus's brother from a fate worse than death.
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Authors (listed alphabetically):

- **Piers Anthony** - Writes fantasy, mostly. The stories of his I've read have been very playful, both in having fun and interesting plots and in his use of language. The more you know about English, the funnier his stories are.
- **Robert Asprin** - Writes sci-fi and fantasy. Very humorous guy. His "Phule" series (about a rich guy in the future who joins the army) and his "Myth" series (about a young man in a fantasy setting who accidentally becomes a magician) are full of odd and interesting characters and situations. The "Thieves' World" series he edits and writes for is also very good, but much darker.
- **Dave Barry** - A hilarious writer! His newspaper columns were so wacky and laugh-out-loud funny that they were collected and published as books a dozen times. He follows in the tradition of Peter Benchley

- **Jim Butcher** - Writes fantasy/action stories. I'm enamored of his Dresden Files series; I haven't checked out his Furies of Caldera series, which is more of a sword-and-sorcery (set in space?) series, I believe.
- **Orson Scott Card** - Writes sci-fi and fantasy books with amazing characters and insights into why people do what they do
- **Michael Crichton** - A brilliant man who writes about many different topics and in many different genres. Every book of his I've read has been a page-turner.
- **Cliver Cussler** - Writes action/adventure, mostly. His "Dirk Pitt" books are very entertaining stories about a marine historian who manages to save the world in nearly every book.
- **Roald Dahl** - Wrote in many different genres. Author of James and the Giant Peach, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, The Great Glass Elevator, and many other stories. Also a prolific writer of short stories, every one of which is fascinating.
- **Phillip K. Dick** - Wrote sci-fi short stories. Most of his stories deal with the questions, "What is reality?" and, "How do we know who we are?" Great mind-bending stuff. Many of his stories have been made into movies (The Minority Report and Total Recall ["We Can Remember It For You Wholesale"] are two of the most popular)
- **Harlan Ellison** - Writes mostly sci-fi. Wrote hundreds of scripts for some of television's greatest shows, including Star Trek and The Twilight Zone. Great characters, interesting plots.
- **Jasper Fforde** - Writes fiction that's really creative, quite funny, and not easy to classify. I have read parts of two series by Mr. Fforde that I have really enjoyed. The "Tuesday Next" stories are about a woman who gets pulled into the world of books - composed of all of the characters from all of the books ever written - and must solve mysteries to help the literary characters she encounters in this strange world. The second is the "Nursery Crimes" series, which has a similar premise - there are police who maintain order inside the world of nursery rhymes; these books follow the characters who try to solve the case when nursery rhyme characters start murdering each other. Part crime story, part literary allusions, all fun!
- **Robert A. Heinlein** - A former admiral in the U.S. Navy, Heinlein turned to writing later in his life. I don't like all of his stories, but there's so many, it's hard not to find something enjoyable. My personal favorites of his are Stranger in a Strange Land and Starship Troopers. I also like his essays.
- **Stephen King** - Writes horror and fantasy. A brilliant writer; he can craft characters so realistic that when they get into weird and horrible situations, you believe it.
- **Ogden Nash** - Wrote poetry. A very unusual poet. He played with expectations and forms to create unusual combinations. Most of his poetry is written in rhymed couplets. Some of his poems are two lines long, some are pages and pages long. Rarely are any two lines of the same length. He also wasn't afraid to make up words or change their spelling to fit his rhyme scheme. His series of animal poems are among my favorite poems.

- **Spider Robinson** - Writes sci-fi, mostly, though some of it is extremely subtle. Most of his stories have to do with the ability to read minds, and what good and bad can come of it. Most of his stories have very positive, optimistic, hopeful endings.
- **Joel Rosenberg** - Writes fantasy, mostly. Another great character creator. His "Guardians of the Flame" series, about some college kids who end up in a medieval setting, is interesting in how it deconstructs the "Sword and Sorcerer" genre, turning it inside-out. Humorous, dramatic, and full of heart.
- **John Scalzi** - Writes mostly sci-fi, some of it space-opera, some of it near-future, all of it centered around great characters. I have devoured the "Old Man's War" series and eagerly await the next installment. I also quite enjoyed Lock-In, about a near-future world that seems extremely possible to my mind, where some humans are more than human due to technological "upgrades".
- **Shel Silverstein** - Wrote poetry. An amazing poet. His work is sometimes considered to be "for kids," but it's very deep and rich, in addition to being fun to read. Also wrote several "children's" books.
- **Scott Westerfeld** - This guy can write! His focus on modern life, and its short- and long-term effects, is engaging; readers can really relate to his stories, because they're living lives like the characters in these books. Uglies is a great starting point.
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