

A Reading Problem

Description

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[Source.](#)

I have a problem. It's not a big one, like "what am I going to do with my life" or "if I propose to this girl, will she say yes" or anything like that. It doesn't have the capacity to ruin lives or marriages or continents, but it is worrisome. So, it is more of an issue than a problem.

I've already briefly discussed this issue on this blog before, but it continues to grow.

The truth is, I own too many books. And I keep buying more. I would have to take months and months from work just to put a dent in my pile. I have a stack of books by my bed, another on the floor, and shelves on my bookcase stacked sometimes two-deep with books that I haven't read. It is not that I do not intend to read them, as I bought them for that purpose. And it is not that I don't have the time, as I do. It is just they are multiplying faster than I can read them.

But I do have a theory as to the cause behind it.

When I was a kid, I absolutely loved to be read to. My parents and sister would read my brother and I books every day, as it was one of the only things that would calm us down. I loved the escapism aspect of books for the same reason I love movies and video games, as it takes you away from everything and plops you down into a world where anything is possible. If you want to read about former president Taft fighting werewolves, there is probably a book about that somewhere. Or what about a killer clown hunting children over decades? Or a story about a boy wizard embracing his destiny? Or a true story

about a free man being sold into slavery? Anything you could want to read about probably already exists in some form or another.

But, for all my love of reading and knowledge, I learned to read books later than other kids.

I can't remember the exact age, as I was pretty young, but as other kids were learning how to read, I simply didn't. It wasn't a problem or anything, I just wasn't engaged with the idea. I loved being read to, especially before bed, but I had no real interest in doing so myself. That is, until I discovered science – specifically dinosaurs.

I remember learning how to read using a book about dinosaurs, as well as the other standard books we all used to learn how to read – Fraggles Rock, Robert Munsch, Berenstain Bears, etc. But dinosaurs were what stoked the fire. And the more I read, the more I wanted to read.

As my dad once told me, “You learned to read late, but once you did, you didn't stop.”

I flung myself into books and soon I was reading along with the other kids, then surpassed them. I progressed onto young adult books while in grade 3/4 (I still remember reading the novelization of Home Alone 2: Lost in New York when I was around 8 or 9). Then, in grade 5, I was the only kid in my class who was reading an “adult” book for my book report.

And what was that first book suited for adults that I was reading when I was only 10? Jurassic Park by Michael Crichton.

From that point on, there was no stopping me.

I spread out from Crichton to medical fiction, as it was what I was familiar with at the time. After reading a few more novels, I spread my wings to horror and Stephen King. I devoured King's books so much that I started having to specially order his lesser-known books from the bookstore so that I could read them. After that, I proceeded to fantasy and science fiction.

Now I read a little bit of everything, as my tastes are extremely eclectic, but there are some books that stay with you, no matter how many times you read them. There is a trend on Facebook where you list the “10 books that have stayed with you,” and I'm going to list them here and attempt to explain why.

- 1) Animal Farm by George Orwell
- 2) Dracula by Bram Stoker
- 3) The Stand by Stephen King
- 4) Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams
- 5) Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien
- 6) The Dark Tower by Stephen King
- 7) Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
- 8) Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
- 9) Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling
- 10) Jurassic Park by Michael Crichton

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- 1) After reading it more than 15 years ago, Orwell's masterpiece still remains at the top of any list I create about books. The main reason is because *Animal Farm* taught me about layers and subtext. On the surface, it seems simple " farm animals can talk and are unhappy with the way they are treated, so they rise up and take control of a farm. But, in reality, it is a satirical look at Stalinism and greed. And you do not have to be aware of the subtext of the Russian revolution to enjoy it, as it is simply a great read.
 - 2) I have detailed my affection for *Dracula* in an earlier post (<http://thedavidmanly.com/the-dreadful-facts-of-life/>), but it comes down to the fact that this book showed me why classics are so revered, opened my eyes to the horror genre (of which I am still a huge fan), and demonstrated that not everything needs to follow traditional narrative flow. Add those to the fact that it is a good read, and you've got yourselves a keeper.
 - 3) Even though I had been a fan of Stephen King's for years, I didn't read *The Stand* until first year university. I had wanted to read it years and years before, but never could find it in stores or even special order it. But I did find it in a bookstore one day, and devoured it. It is probably one of the few books that I would describe as "epic." It is told from a variety of different perspectives, features an intimidating villain (who, unbeknownst to me at the time, was tied into King's other works), and tells a story about what people do at the end of the road.
 - 4) *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* " Don't Panic. Towels. Zygons. Marvin the depressed robot. The Infinite Probability Engine. Deep Thought. 42. Super-intelligent mice. "Nuff said.
 - 5) Like *The Stand*, the *Lord of the Rings* (LotR) trilogy helped introduce me to the "epic" genre of novels. I remember reading this trilogy and then immediately reading it again, just to make sure I understood everything. LotR not only had a pretty good story, but also an impressive amount of history and backstory that you are not even aware of while reading the main series. Reading the Appendices at the end of *Return of the King* is like reading a completely separate story into itself, which links back to the main story in subtle ways. It is one of the most detailed series I have ever read, and I still marvel at the care and effort Tolkien put into creating such a rich world.
 - 6) I started reading the *Dark Tower* series after *The Stand*, as King was planning to release the last few entries into the series, so I wanted to be caught up in time for their release. As a whole, it is not a perfect story and has a lot of meandering, but it hits some incredible heights, and Roland the gunslinger is a hell of a character. And it ends in a way that only the *Dark Tower* series could " because Ka is a wheel, and its only purpose is to turn.
 - 7) My sister Sara bought me my first ever Sherlock Holmes book " *The Hound of the Baskervilles* " so you can blame her for my Sherlock fandom. I have read all the stories and books many times, and even dressed up like the great detective on Halloween on more than one occasion. Personally, I like Holmes because, as brilliant as he is at some things (and there are a lot of them), the humble Watson is superior in others. Many of my forays into "classic" literature stem from reading Holmes, and my collection of the stories/novels is one that will always be nearby if I ever feel the need to be outsmarted by the smartest man in the room.
 - 8) *Frankenstein* was probably the hardest book for me to come up with on this list. But I chose it because it was the first horror book I read after *Dracula*, and started me on a path to read all the "classics," such as *The Wolf-Man*, *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *Doctor*

Faustus (another sister suggestion), The Portrait of Dorian Gray, etc. And reading those books greatly influenced my own writing, as my novel "The Black" draws its influence from those books, as well as science fiction.

9) The Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling is not the best or even the most well-written book series. But, what the series does have is an impressive amount of world building, a thick mythology and a lot of character development. There is a reason why the adventures of a boy wizard has touched so many people and become a world-wide phenomenon. I really enjoy the books, and still read them to this day. I still remember reading the last book in only a few hours, as I couldn't wait to find out how it ended. I then passed it to my brother Daniel, who also read it incredibly quickly, before passing it back to me, so I could read it again for a second time later that afternoon "taking my time, so I could relish the experience, having already known how it ended. And there aren't many books out there that filled me with that amount of passion and enthusiasm.

10) Jurassic Park, for being the first adult book I ever read, deserves to be on this list. However, it also tapped into my childhood obsession with dinosaurs (which I have written about on this blog more than a few times), and there is nothing so powerful as revisiting something that you lived, breathed and ate as a kid. Jurassic Park will always be one of my most influential books, no matter how many I read.

Now if you'll excuse me, I have some reading to do.

But, now I am curious, what are your most influential books that you have read?

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