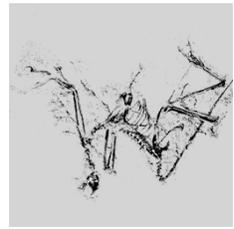


## Top 10 Favorite Books



(Commits many sins of omission, few or none of commission.)

Olaf Stapledon *Starmaker* Most science fiction gives us fictional worlds that are less fantastic, and much less interesting, than the real worlds science and history present us with. *Starmaker* is a grand exception. Mind-stretching.

Hermann Weyl *Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science* A survey of the whole field of mathematics and science, as it stood in the mid-twentieth century, by one of the greatest and wisest mathematical physicists. Interesting both as intellectual history and as intellectual doctrine.

Richard Feynman *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* This short book is a unique, brilliant attempt to present a key component of our most advanced theories of physics in an intellectually honest, self-contained way. Feynman presents the actual rules that govern elementary processes in quantum theory, and shows how to get from those weird rules to some familiar (and some not-so-familiar) physical phenomena.

Donald MacKay *Information Theory, Inference, and Learning Algorithms* A great challenge of our time is to realize the potential of modern computing technologies for creative achievement. I feel we've only scratched the surface, and that giving machines the ability to learn is the key. This book presents many relevant insights, and is quite entertaining to boot.

Nick Lane *Power, Sex, Suicide* Lest you get the wrong impression, the subtitle of this recent book is "Mitochondria and the Meaning of Life". It would be surprising if all the ideas discussed here are correct, but I found it an exhilarating visit to some frontiers of modern biology, by a writer who's not afraid to think big – and think hard.

Raymond Smullyan *The Chess Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes* You don't need to know much about chess to have fun with these strange puzzles. They ask you not to predict the best moves, but rather to retrodict what happened in the past. The framing stories are also quite amusing. One of the cleverest books I've ever encountered.

David Halberstam *The Best and the Brightest* Two painful lessons: denying reality won't change it; cleverness is not the same as wisdom. A sad and infuriating, but necessary, book for anyone with responsibility for public issues.

Gary Wills *Lincoln at Gettysburg* This short, beautifully written book is a close reading of a very brief speech that just might be the greatest poem ever written (or maybe that's the Second Inaugural). It contains depths within depths.

Dale Carnegie *How to Win Friends and Influence People* Capsule summary: put yourself in the other guy's shoes. A short, sweet book that is interesting on several levels. We could all benefit from taking it to heart.

Vikram Seth *Golden Gate* This novel is written in the form of a series of sonnets in verse. It is an amazing feat, delightful to witness. Now we need a modern Lucretius, who'll put our best (scientific) concept of the world to verse.

Frank Wilczek