

What Makes A Book Great?

by Dr. John Flynn

(NAPS)—As the millennium drew to a close, dozens of organizations released lists of their respective “100 best.” Of these summaries, few drew more criticism than the Random House Modern Library’s ranking of the top 100 English language novels of the 20th century—a list which was chosen by their board.

Readers, on the other hand, had a different view of 20th century literature. For example, among their top ten are books by Ayn Rand, L. Ron Hubbard, J.R.R. Tolkien and George Orwell. I wholeheartedly agree with these choices, since most of them are on my own personal “100 best” list of authors and titles. Two emphatically stood out, particularly in their genres: Hubbard’s *Battlefield Earth* and Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (which, for many people, includes *The Hobbit*).

In both of these novels, there exists a compelling and well-thought-out story of overcoming insurmountable odds through the selfless achievement of a noble objective by a very strong character. In *Battlefield Earth*, the hero, Jonnie Goodboy Tyler, leads a battle with the remnants of humanity against an army of intergalactic conquerors, the alien Psychlos. Despite 1,000 years of domination by the Psychlos, Jonnie is able to prove himself by an indomitable determination to make mankind survive. The result is storytelling gold: an action-packed science fiction adventure.

Likewise, in *Lord of the Rings*,



Science fiction and fantasy novels top many readers’ lists of the best books of the 20th century.

the heroic Frodo battles many evil creatures, including the sinister Gollum and his master Sauron, to save his fellows from the menace represented by the ring.

In these times of cynicism and an evident lack of heroes, these books make clear that the striving for and the attainment of a noble purpose, however daunting the obstacles, is a trait to be admired and, indeed, emulated.

This was strikingly reaffirmed when *USA Today* ranked *Battlefield Earth* and *The Hobbit* at the top of their list of best-selling science fiction and fantasy novels for the year 2000.

All of which serves to prove my point—that a book is great when it is irresistibly captivating and carries you swiftly and with a noble objective, from its opening line to its closing statement.

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