Watchmen by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons
Sure, it’s formally impressive, but is it good? And please, for the Pete’s sake, stop giving this to people who’ve never read comics before! “Oh, superheroes would be terrible if they were real people!” Just cuz you got there first doesn’t make it any more insightful, Alan.

Brighton Rock by Graham Greene
Graham! What are you doing here? I’ll allow it’s an early novel, but it’s just miserable. This Pinky guy has to be the whiniest sociopath I’ve ever encounter in a story, and thank goodness it didn’t become some kind of archetype. That I know of, anyway.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman by Laurence Sterne
Okay, I want to recommend this, but I just have to admit being defeated after like half a chapter. So at least I have that in common with the lead actor in the film adaptation (which absolutely IS recommended)!

Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov
Ugh, what a creep.

Why “Not Recommended”?
(Also it’s fun to trash-talk books, and librarians almost never get to talk about it, not to ban it from libraries and schools.

We think it’s good to have a reminder now and then (generally timed with Banned Books Week) that disliking a book is a reason to talk about it, not to ban it from libraries and schools.

Recommended Reading

Super Sad True Love Story by Gary Shteyngart
Ugh, what a creep.
We didn't like these books, but you might love them!

Karen Memory by Elizabeth Bear
This one looked so good! The setting is great—a muddy Wild West sort of town—and the characters are a great mix. Even the steampunky elements have promise: who doesn't love a sewing machine mech suit? But the story just goes nowhere. Or it goes somewhere, but nowhere in particular? I think it was a good idea, but maybe it should've just been split up into two or three more carefully plotted volumes. (And that cover art has so much promise!)

Underwater Welder by Jeff Lemire
Jeff! I know this scratchy, sketchy style is your jam, but you gotta mix it up some! And everyone has that same facial expression, so I can't tell how much emotion I'm supposed to invest at any given moment! And I'm afraid you drifted over the line between “mysterious” and “what even is happening” with your spooky plot.
So, yeah. Maybe an abridged version someday. Maybe with a different artist.

Casino Royale by Ian Fleming
Ugh, what a creep.

Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood
So, obviously Margaret Atwood is brilliant, but this feels like it's written by someone thinks they're better than science fiction, but still thinks they can outdo all the other science fiction authors at their own game. And this from the author of the incomparable Handmaid's Tale! Disappointing.

Saturday by Ian McEwan
It's a great premise and a nice plot, but it's sooooooooooooooooooooooo videogame
slooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooww!

The Paper Magician by Charlie Holmberg
A student of magic (and top of her class) is assigned to intern for a curmudgeonly master of paper magic, the lowest form of magic she can think of. As the student's powers grow, she gets caught up in a terrifying crime. She must set off on a journey to make things right and ultimately discovers her purpose in life: to look pretty and cook for a husband. Wait, what?

Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë
Ugh, what a creep.

Watership Down by Richard Adams
The book is about bunnies looking for a home so they can breed. What is there to like about it?

Ready Player One by Ernest Cline
Let me say up front that I enjoyed this book while I was reading it. And the pleasure was genuine, not guilty. But upon retrospect? It's SO BAD. “Hey here's a cultural reference! And an explanation of said cultural reference! And a smug attitude about being able to make said cultural reference even though I also felt the need to explain it, which I guess is supposed to just reinforce how cool I am for being able to make said cultural reference!” Shockingly, I'm not terribly pessimistic about the movie adaptation, unless it fills the screen with citations for each cultural reference it makes. (Which might actually be a fun DVD extra...)

Armada by Ernest Cline
See above.

Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger
Ugh, what a phony.