

# Good Guys: Celebrating Men and Honoring Manhood

Men increasingly have a tough road stretching out ahead of them. No longer does it seem that strong and virtuous manhood is celebrated and honored. Instead, it is often condemned and shamed.

What better way to buck the trend and grab a book full of adventure and entertainment, a story to whisk us away from our daily duties and the headlines, and best-case sacenario, one that might inspire us to be better men?

Below are five such books whose ink-and-paper heroes fit this bill. Readers will doubtless think of many other authors and books that meet these criteria, and I hope you'll share your favorites in the comments section.

## [A Soldier of the Great War](#)

Mark Helprin's saga of Alessandro Giulliani and World War I is a modern classic and a primer on manliness. It's 1964, and when they are ejected from a bus, Alessandro along with his new young friend, Nicolo, decide to walk seventy kilometers to the village of Monte Prado. On this journey, Alessandro, a retired professor of aesthetics, shares his story with the illiterate Nicolo, a history of the transformation of a boy into a man during a time of bloody war: the desperate years spent fighting the Germans, the inept bureaucrats, his abiding affection for his comrades who died, his love for a woman, his thoughts on subjects ranging from the goodness of his son to the nature of God.

I have given this novel to several young men to encourage them on their journey and in their quest for honor. Even now, having read this book in its entirety twice and having dipped

into it more times than I can count, *A Soldier of the Great War* has the power to make me laugh or bring me to tears.

## **Lonesome Dove**

Older readers will be familiar with Larry McMurtry's magnificent tale of a cattle drive from Texas to Montana, so I'm pitching this splendid novel to the younger crew. Woodrow Call and Augustus Cray – Gus – are two ex-Texas Rangers turned ranchers who decide to drive a herd of cattle from Texas to Montana. Along the way, they and their hired hands must battle floods, storms, snakes, bears, Indians, and outlaws, all the while keeping the cattle safe and moving. Woodrow is the driving force behind this outfit; Gus keeps the reader laughing with his humor and witty take on all sorts of situations.

For those disinclined to read the book, I urge you to see the mini-series by the same name. It is one of the finest productions in the history of American television.

## **Last of the Breed**

Set in Soviet Russia, Louis L'Amour's novel tells the story of Joe Mack, an American pilot whose experimental aircraft is shot down over Russia. Sent to a Siberian prison, Joe escapes and tries to find his way to freedom, bringing to the fore his skills learned as a boy – he is a Sioux Indian – and those taught him by the Air Force. Here is a fine tale set against the backdrop of the Cold War, an exciting story of pursuit and evasion, and a portrait of a decent and patriotic American.

Though I have never read them, friends tell me L'Amour's novels about the Sackett family are also excellent and should appeal to teenagers.

Readers, especially those who love "books about books," will

also find enjoyment in L'Amour's autobiography, [Education of a Wandering Man](#), for its sketches of America, the author's interest in history, and the books from which he derived both education and enjoyment.

## **Once an Eagle**

Sam Damon enters the U.S. Army just before World War I, wins the Medal of Honor, becomes a general in the Pacific in World War II, and is even sent as an observer to a Vietnam-style conflict. Along the way Damon learns various lessons of leadership, chief among them – and one forgotten by so many leaders today – is that he love and serve the men under his command. For these reasons, this novel is required reading for Marine Corps first lieutenants and is often used in the classrooms of the United States Military Academy.

## **Patriot Games**

Literally from the first pages to the last, Tom Clancy's tale of the Irish troubles and the involvement in that clandestine conflict of American Jack Ryan celebrates the importance of fatherhood and family. After interrupting the radical Ulster Liberation Army's attempted kidnapping of the Duke and Duchess of Kent, killing one of the attackers and wounding the other, and protecting his family in the bargain, Ryan finds himself, his wife, and his daughter the target of IRA terrorists, one of whom will go to any lengths to revenge the death of his comrade.

The movie by the same name, starring Harrison Ford as the intrepid Ryan, Anne Archer as his strong wife, Cathy, and Sean Bean as the brutal Sean Miller, is also worth seeing.

These books tell fine stories about strong men, soldiers, cowboys, and professors who fit Ernest Hemingway's definition of courage: "grace under pressure." In them we see embodied

that truth taught so long ago by the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius: “Waste no more time arguing what a good man should be. Be one.”

These books and others can help us to do the same.

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