

# Levchin's Book Canon, Plus Two Timely AI-Era Recommendations

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

2026-06-11

## Levchin's Book Canon, Plus Two Timely AI-Era Recommendations

*By Recommended Reading from Tech Founders • June 11, 2026*

The clearest signal today came from Max Levchin's unusually specific book recommendations, from *The Master and Margarita* and *Seven Powers* to the sci-fi that shaped his engineering worldview. Jeremy Howard added two grounded AI-era picks: Rachel Thomas on vibe coding and Brett Victor's interactive computing demos.

### What stood out

Today's cleanest recommendations came from long-form conversation and talks: Max Levchin shared a reading stack that spans literary fiction, business strategy, leadership, and sci-fi [1], while Jeremy Howard pointed to one article and one body of demo work that speak directly to AI-assisted creation [2].

### Most compelling recommendation

The strongest save today is *The Master and Margarita*. It is the least obviously tactical item in the set, but it carries the clearest evidence of durable personal impact: Levchin said it is his favorite book, buys copies in bulk for new friends, keeps copies on his desk, and credited it with shaping both his life and his marriage [1].

#### *The Master and Margarita*

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Mikhail Bulgakov
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
- **Who recommended it:** Max Levchin

- **Key takeaway:** Levchin treats it as a book worth repeatedly gifting, not just admiring [1]
- **Why it matters:** This was the clearest example in today’s notes of a recommendation with long-term personal significance, not a passing mention [1]

“It’s my favorite book. It’s always been my favorite book.” [1]



*The Path from The Soviet Union to Building Multi-Billion Dollar Companies — Max Levchin (17:57)*

## Best practical picks for builders

### *Seven Powers*

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Hamilton Helmer
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
- **Who recommended it:** Max Levchin
- **Key takeaway:** Levchin called it a “really worthwhile distillation” of what it takes to build a competitively lasting business, including why network businesses last longer and what brand actually means [1]
- **Why it matters:** It was the most direct framework recommendation in today’s set for readers trying to understand durable advantage [1]

### *Influence*

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Robert Cialdini

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
  - **Who recommended it:** Max Levchin
  - **Key takeaway:** Levchin said anyone trying to start a business should read it and called it “probably the most important social science book published in the last 50 years” [1]
  - **Why it matters:** This was the strongest explicit recommendation for founders in the notes [1]
- “If you’re trying to start a business, you should read *Influence...*” [1]

### *Titan*

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Ron Chernow
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
- **Who recommended it:** Max Levchin
- **Key takeaway:** Among Chernow’s biographies, Levchin singled out *Titan* on John D. Rockefeller as the one closest to business advice [1]
- **Why it matters:** It was the clearest biography pick for readers who want business lessons rather than a general historical survey [1]

### Sci-fi that shaped a founder

All three of these came from Levchin’s reflection on the books that shaped how he thought about software, digital currency, and the future [1]. Source conversation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOjgVxOfxXo>

### *Cryptonomicon*

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Neal Stephenson
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
- **Who recommended it:** Max Levchin
- **Key takeaway:** Levchin said it was effectively required reading for the early PayPal team because it felt like it was describing exactly what they were trying to do with digital currency and cryptography [1]
- **Why it matters:** It was one of the strongest examples today of fiction intersecting directly with startup execution [1]

### *Snow Crash*

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Neal Stephenson
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
- **Who recommended it:** Max Levchin
- **Key takeaway:** Levchin said it shaped his software engineering life, and the conversation notes it as the book that coined “metaverse” [1]

- **Why it matters:** It was the sci-fi title he tied most directly to his engineering identity [1]

### *Neuromancer*

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** William Gibson
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
- **Who recommended it:** Max Levchin
- **Key takeaway:** Levchin said it was the first book he read after arriving in the US and part of the science-fiction canon that defined his early years there [1]
- **Why it matters:** It shows how foundational cyberpunk fiction was in his early US experience and friendships [1]

### Two timely AI-era recommendations

Source talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUZwYV5JYBM>

### *Breaking the Spell of Vibe Coding*

- **Content type:** Article
- **Author/creator:** Rachel Thomas
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
- **Who recommended it:** Jeremy Howard
- **Key takeaway:** Howard said Thomas shows how some AI coding interactions can harness a “dark flow,” contrasting it with the productive flow that comes from high challenge and high skill [2]
- **Why it matters:** It was the sharpest corrective in today’s set for readers who want a more grounded view of AI-assisted programming [2]

### Brett Victor’s work

- **Content type:** Videos / demos
- **Author/creator:** Brett Victor
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
- **Who recommended it:** Jeremy Howard
- **Key takeaway:** Howard pointed to Victor’s demos of graphical code editing and even a “time machine” for code, then said readers should watch everything he has done [2]
- **Why it matters:** Howard framed this as a body of work worth exploring in full, not a one-off demo [2]

## One more worth saving

### *A Mind at Play*

- **Content type:** Book
  - **Author/creator:** Not provided in notes
  - **Link/URL:** Not provided in notes
  - **Who recommended it:** Max Levchin
  - **Key takeaway:** Levchin highlighted it as Claude Shannon's biography and used Shannon as an example of someone who did serious work while staying playful [1]
  - **Why it matters:** It complements the more tactical books above with a model of technical creativity and playfulness [1]
- 

### Sources

1. The Path from The Soviet Union to Building Multi-Billion Dollar Companies — Max Levchin
2. Growing on Purpose: The Work That Makes You. Jeremy Howard on human flourishing in the time of AI.