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📷 Say, do you have a copy of a book that doesn't exist?' ... Dorothy Malone can't help Humphrey Bogart find a fake book in *The Big Sleep*. Photograph: Kobal

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Which are the best books that never existed?

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Come over to my imaginary flat and discuss the books that writers have only dreamed about

[David Barnett](#)

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I'd like to thank everyone who joined me on my [night out in fictional pubs](#) a couple of weeks ago. I think most of you who attended will agree it was a good craic. By way of showing my appreciation, I'd like to organise another meeting (of minds). But so as to be less tough on your pocket in these troubled financial times, I'm suggesting an all-back-to-mine sort of thing.

But not for any old house party. There'll be drinks and nibbles, of course, but to give the evening its requisite literary bent I suggest an informal book club affair ... with a difference. We're only going to consider books that never actually existed outside novels.

So, what to discuss on the night? Two of the most well-known fictional books I think we'll have to discount straight away. There is, of course, *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy* from the novel of the same name and its sequels by [Douglas Adams](#). A fine example, but for our purposes "mostly useless", to mangle a turn of phrase; who wants to discuss a travel guide at a book club?

Similarly with the [Necronomicon](#), first utilised by the troubled horror writer HP Lovecraft in his 1924 story *The Hound*. Although forming the basis for many of Lovecraft's short stories, and making the leap into works by other writers, the *Necronomicon* is essentially a black magic book used in the worship and summoning of eldritch entities from beyond space who are very often dripping with slime and hungry for human souls and strange geometry. Not round my house, thank you very much.

Perhaps the finest exponent of the fictional book was Jorge Luis Borges. The Argentine writer, poet and essayist's 1944 collection [Ficciones](#) gives us more fictional books than we could possibly discuss in a single night ... had I to choose from that volume I might suggest *The Circular Ruins*, which purports to be a story by Irish author Herbert Quain, who receives his own literary appreciation in a separate story by Borges in the same collection.

When he wasn't Trout Fishing in America, Richard Brautigan was chronicling the goings-on in a strange library in his book [The Abortion: A Historical Romance 1966](#). This library has on its shelves only unpublished works. A quick browse reveals *Bacon Death*, by Marsha Patterson, or perhaps *Pancake Pretty*, by Barbara Jones, might be more appealing. Susan De Witt's *UFO* vs. CBS sounds intriguing, but for me the winner has to be *Your Clothes are Dead*, by Les Steinman.

Ever since I read John Irving's [The World According to Garp](#), I always wanted TS Garp's short story The Pension Grillparzer to exist in the real world. Of Garp's novels proper, The World According to Bensenhaver is just too grim from the extract printed in the "real" book, with its kidnap, rape and bleak shot at redemption. To be honest, though, much of Garp's work seems suspiciously like Irving's, so we might have to discount them on account of if we really wanted to read The Pension Grillparzer, we could just pick up the very un-fictional novel The Hotel New Hampshire.

My final choice, then would be The Blind Assassin [LINK] by Laura Chase, an enigmatic story of the affair between a woman and a political activist. It appears in the novel [The Blind Assassin](#) by Margaret Atwood. Laura Chase's novel The Blind Assassin also has a fictional book-within-a-book-within-a-book, a science fiction story written by the political activist that might also be called The Blind Assassin.

There's plenty for us to go at there, I think, but I'd like to have your suggestions before we decide. The fridge is full of beer and wine and I've got the Pringles in. Over to you ...

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