I am currently reading again. I intended to completely eliminate my book backlog that I have accumulated over the years. I look forward to being fully reset, tabula rasta, renewed in the springtime, and choosing new books in a more conscious manner going forward.

I also realize my previous Book Recommendations post was too generous. This is not a revision of my old ratings, however the following ratings I will attempt to be a stricter judge.

The following are books I have recently finished and a corresponding short review:

(1)

**Howl's Moving Castle**

<https://amzn.to/3AeRpSj>

I've never read this book or seen any media about it. It's short and charming and simple to read. A fantasy children's book with wonderful characters.

6/10

(2)

**The Mastery of Love**

<https://amzn.to/3dpewRt>

A book on self-love. The author famously wrote *The*

*Four Agreements* and here he advocates that insecurity and externalizing internal problems is the root of many relational conflicts.

The root of our discontentment is largely internal. We fallaciously associate and fix outward problems however they never fit because insecurity and our root problems are within.

This is a short opinion book; the author shares his perspective with anecdotes and metaphors. There is zero evidence or substantiation therefore if one disagrees with this book it will be frustrating. That said, I'm largely in agreement with his premises and was able to reasonably enjoy and reflect.

6/10

(3)

**The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories**

<https://amzn.to/3SJprWb>

A collection of short stories which fit into the sci-fi or historical fiction genres. The stories have themes on politics, racism, culture, technology, morality, etc.

I'm unfamiliar with Chinese literature and had zero idea what the book was about (and that it was multiple short stories) so I was pleasantly surprised as I am a fan of East Asian literature and find the shorter the story the more enjoyable.

Some of the stories are absolutely brutal. A good amount of the stories made me cry.

There are some stories that overlap in themes and aren't particularly well-done but overall there are several incredibly memorable scenes and interesting conceptualization of the future.

I'd primarily recommend "The Regular", "The Literomancer", and "The Paper Menagerie".

8/10

(4)

**House of Leaves**

<https://amzn.to/3Agesw5>

At the core is a thrilling horror/mystery plot. However it is completely experimental and meta; a book within a book, varying typography, one storyline in the main section with another in the footnotes, etc.

To me, it's a masterpiece art project that exploits the medium of a book perfectly.

If you appreciate the experimental, wonder, avant-garde then \_\_\_\_\_ could be for you.

One pro/con is that the book respects the reader and is uncompromising. This means that the book is supremely confusing in the beginning and sometimes is an intentionally difficult read…

It's the perfect book.

9/10

(5)

**Overthinking About You**

<https://amzn.to/3Ad0w6a>

This is a cute, short, fun read on dating with mental maladies. This is a very honest book that tackles topics that I haven't heard much perspective on (admittedly I have read very few books on relationships).

To share three things I found applicable:

(1) Relationship OCD (ROCD). I don't prescribe to that label, but do identify with this harmful phenomenon where I have tons of extraneous criteria to judge and rank a person as more or less optimal.

(2) Dramatizing one's own love life. One change is to not discuss my romantic endeavors with others. Not to keep it a secret but to avoid unnecessary externality complications. While friends, families, and myself have good intentions, it isn't necessarily helpful to keep everyone up-to-date.

(3) VP of your life. Viewing dating as a job interview and being more active with agency over outcomes. In the same way one advocates for their career growth, one can advocate for the life partner they want. Do you respect them? Would you invest in them? etc.

My first thoughts on finishing the book was 5/10 however in writing this review I see that this book was more useful to me than I thought. The book is concise in its prescribed goal and I enjoy the bullet point TL;DR list at the end of each chapter.

6.5/10

(6)

**Night Train**

<https://amzn.to/3JLK6F7>

The author coined a new genre "very short stories" or in Russian "zeer korte verhalen" (ZKV).

While beautifully prosed, at the core everything falls short.

I significantly prefer Japanese koans or actual poetry. I've probably missed the memo here but…

4/10

(7)

**Man's Search For Meaning**

<https://amzn.to/3vYHmyd>

While there are interesting anecdotes and lived experiences, I wholeheartedly disagree with the author's implied premise – those who survived and lived are successful and should be emulated.

Everyone who died failed, while those who survived are winners. Is it a prohibited thought when confronted with such harsh circumstances to die?

I wholeheartedly reject the author's framing, premise, and his entire sales pitch on logotherapy. Definitely read *Night* or many of the other more insightful books on the Holocaust tragedy.

3/10

(8)

**Sapiens**

<https://amzn.to/3p9TpFk>

Not quite non-fiction but posits theories. An incredible, wide-sweeping, generalist overview of humanity's technological and cultural progression.

I could rebuttal and advocate for many of the fascinating points in this book in it's own section but to make it brief:

The author's primary conclusion and advocacy is for us to be conscious (and wary) of increasing progress.

Most interestingly he outlines the common game-theory fallacy where every step is rational, however as an aggregate it leads to worse results and makes this case using the agricultural revolution and others points in the technological evolution.

As a society we are more productive but less happy. The pizza is larger (there are more slices), however each individual slice is smaller than before.

To optimize for happiness we should be an endpoint or at least be conscious of our decision making. We use systems (technology, culture, etc) to help us but ultimately we become slaves and controlled due to normalization.

8/10

**Current:**

* The Happiness Hypothesis
* The Last Mrs. Parrish
* The Master and Margarita
* Node.js Design Patterns
* Berserk

**Backlog:**

* Circe
* Killing Commendatore
* In The Dream House: A Memoir
* Gravity's Rainbow
* Submission
* Invisible Cities
* Sun and Steel
* Autobiography of Red
* The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy
* 1Q84

**Deprecated:**

The following are books that were on the backlog but after short engagement are rejected:

* An Apprenticeship of The Book of Pleasures: Clarice Lispector
* Leaders Eat Last
* Algorithms to Live By
* Dune

Rome didn't fall in a day.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ghhxb5txPg>

Ruel - as long as you care