

MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

I'm Sick of Dating Apps

**How to Look for Love Without
Turning It into a Second Job**



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

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INTRO

At 9:14 p.m., you open a dating app for what you describe to yourself as “just a quick look.”

This is technically true in the same way that entering IKEA for one candle is technically a quick shopping trip.

Twenty-seven minutes later, you have rejected a man because he is holding a fish, reconsidered him because maybe he simply enjoys nature, rejected him again because the fish appears to be his entire personality, and spent several minutes analyzing whether “fluent in sarcasm” is a joke, a warning, or a cry for help. You have also encountered someone whose bio consists entirely of “Ask me anything,” which feels less like flirting and more like being assigned homework by a stranger.

Then you match with someone promising.

They look normal. Their profile contains actual sentences. No one is posing next to a sedated tiger. There is no motivational quote about loyalty written over a photograph of a Lamborghini they almost certainly do not own.

Excellent.

You send a message.

And now your evening belongs to the Department of Waiting.

You put the phone down and immediately become aware of the phone. It sits beside you like a tiny electronic hostage negotiator. You decide not to check it. You make tea. You check it. Nothing. You watch eleven minutes of a show without understanding what anyone said. You check again. Still nothing.

Twenty-three minutes later, the person replies:

"haha yeah"

Romance is alive.

Dating apps were supposed to make looking for love easier. In several obvious ways, they did. You can now meet people you would never encounter through work, friends, school, hobbies, or accidentally reaching for the same avocado at the grocery store. You can specify what you are looking for, learn something about a person before meeting them, and avoid spending six months hoping the attractive stranger at the coffee shop will magically infer that your repeated purchase of cappuccinos is a sophisticated mating ritual.

The problem is that a tool designed to help you meet people can quietly turn into a second job.

There are profiles to review, photos to choose, prompts to improve, messages to answer, matches to maintain, conversations to revive, suspiciously intense strangers to escape, dates to schedule, dates to cancel, and dates after which you have to explain to your friend why the person who seemed charming online spent forty-five minutes discussing cryptocurrency and their former partner.

Eventually, you are no longer "dating."

You are managing a romantic sales pipeline.

Monday: answer messages. Tuesday: swipe. Wednesday: schedule coffee. Thursday: discover that someone who described themselves as "6'1" if that matters" has somehow made height the central theme of the conversation. Friday: first date. Saturday: emotional performance review. Sunday: consider deleting every app and becoming mysteriously unavailable to society.

Then Monday arrives.

You reinstall one.

This cycle can make perfectly reasonable people feel exhausted, cynical, insecure, strangely competitive, and occasionally tempted to judge another human being because of the angle at which they are holding a cocktail in photograph number four.

The apps encourage fast decisions because fast decisions are what apps are good at. Human beings, unfortunately, remain inconveniently complicated. A profile is not a person. It is a small advertising campaign created by someone who may have chosen their best six photographs while sitting on the couch eating cereal directly from the box.

You are doing the same thing.

Everyone is presenting. Everyone is evaluating. Everyone is trying not to look like they are trying too hard while carefully selecting which vacation photo best communicates, "I enjoy life, but in an emotionally available way."

It would be funny if it were not so tiring.

Fortunately, it is both.

One reason dating apps become exhausting is that they remove many natural stopping points. If you went to a party and spoke to four new people, you would probably consider that a reasonably social evening. You would not stand by the door afterward demanding that the host produce another 180 singles because perhaps your ideal partner is currently hidden behind the potato salad.

An app can always show you someone else.

Maybe the next person will be better.

More attractive. Funnier. Taller. Kinder. More interesting. Less interested in mountain climbing. More interested in mountain climbing. Somehow adventurous but also available every Thursday evening. Emotionally mature, financially responsible, great with dogs, close to their family but not too close, ambitious but never busy, attractive but mysteriously unaware of it.

Continue swiping and perhaps the database will eventually produce Chris Hemsworth with the communication skills of a couples therapist and a flexible schedule.

This creates a subtle problem: instead of helping you choose, unlimited options can train you to keep evaluating.

A good conversation becomes "pretty good."

A nice date becomes "maybe."

A perfectly interesting person gets compared not with another real person, but with the theoretical possibility that someone even better might appear after three more swipes.

The imaginary candidate has an enormous advantage.

They have no flaws because they do not exist.

At the same time, rejection becomes unusually frequent and unusually vague. Someone disappears. Someone stops replying. Someone matches but never speaks. Someone enthusiastically suggests meeting and then vanishes with the efficiency of a magician who has finally perfected the trick.

You often do not know why.

Naturally, your brain volunteers to investigate.

Was my message boring? Did I reply too quickly? Too slowly? Was the joke weird? Was the photograph wrong? Did they meet someone else? Did I use too many commas? Is punctuation destroying my love life?

Your brain is an excellent employee when there are actual facts to analyze.

In dating, it is frequently working without supervision.

The result is that many people react by investing even more energy. They optimize the profile again. They swipe more. They maintain more conversations because “you never know.” They keep talking to people they do not actually want to meet because abandoning a match feels wasteful. They agree to dates when they are already tired. They treat every silence as information and every match as an opportunity that must be professionally managed.

This is how looking for a relationship begins to feel suspiciously similar to applying for jobs.

Except the interviews involve cocktails.

And sometimes kissing.

This book is about getting out of that system without giving up on the possibility of meeting someone.

You do not need to become anti-app. You do not need to delete your accounts, move to a small village, and wait beside a bakery until fate introduces you to an architect named Daniel.

Dating apps can be useful.

They are just terrible bosses.

The goal is to put them back in their proper role: one method of meeting people, not a permanent part-time occupation that follows you into bed, onto the couch, into the bathroom, and occasionally into conversations with your mother, who would like to know why you rejected “that nice accountant.”

We will look at why app dating becomes so mentally expensive, why more matches do not necessarily improve your chances, how endless choice changes your behavior, why texting can consume far more energy than meeting someone, and how to stop investing heavily in people who still exist mostly as pixels.

More importantly, you will build a simpler way to date.

You will decide how much time the apps are allowed to take. You will learn when to move from messaging to meeting, when to stop a conversation, how to avoid maintaining twelve mediocre chats out of fear that one might secretly become wonderful, and how to use real-life opportunities without turning "meeting people organically" into another project involving spreadsheets and weekly performance targets.

You will also learn how to protect yourself from the two extremes that make dating miserable.

Extreme one: treating every match like a potential spouse before you have established whether they can maintain a conversation without writing "wyd."

Extreme two: treating every person like a disposable preview because another profile is always available.

There is a large, sane middle ground.

That is where we are going.

You do not need to date harder. You do not need to become more marketable. You do not need to spend Sunday afternoon A/B testing photographs of your own face.

You need a system that creates opportunities without consuming your attention, optimism, and entire evening.

Love may require effort.

It should not require project management software.

Chapter 1 - You Are Not Bad at Dating. You Are Overexposed to It.

You open the app while waiting for coffee.

One profile. Two profiles. Someone has written that their greatest talent is “making people laugh,” which is immediately followed by a prompt answer that contains no detectable evidence of this. You swipe a little more. The barista calls your name. You leave with your coffee and the vague impression that you have already rejected twenty human beings before 8:30 in the morning.

A strong start to the day.

This is one of the strangest parts of app dating: it can become something you do everywhere without ever consciously deciding to do it. You check matches while standing in line. You reply to messages during lunch. You swipe while watching television, which means you are now simultaneously judging a Netflix series and another person’s facial proportions.

None of these sessions feels significant. Five minutes here. Seven minutes there. A quick reply while brushing your teeth.

But dating does not only consume the minutes you spend actively using the app. It also consumes the mental space around those minutes.

You wonder whether someone replied. You reconsider a profile you passed. You think about what to say next. You analyze why a conversation suddenly cooled. You check whether a person updated their bio. You notice that someone unmatched you and spend nine completely unnecessary

minutes trying to reconstruct a relationship that consisted of six messages and a discussion about tacos.

This is not love.

This is administrative overhead.

The first thing to understand is that app fatigue does not necessarily mean you are cynical, emotionally unavailable, too picky, not trying hard enough, or doomed to eventually share an apartment with twelve houseplants and a suspiciously judgmental cat.

You may simply be overexposed.

Human attention does not care that dating is supposed to be exciting. If you expose your brain to enough profiles, choices, evaluations, conversations, notifications, mini-rejections, and uncertain outcomes, it starts treating the whole process as work.

Because in a very real sense, it is doing work.

You are making decisions constantly.

Interested or not interested?

Reply or do not reply?

Meet or keep chatting?

Was that joke charming or alarming?

Is "entrepreneur" a profession or a warning label?

Do I like this person, or do I merely appreciate that they used punctuation?

Individually, these decisions are tiny. Together, they create decision fatigue: the gradual decline in the quality and enthusiasm of your choices after making too many of them.

You have probably experienced this outside dating. You spend forty minutes comparing headphones online, read sixty