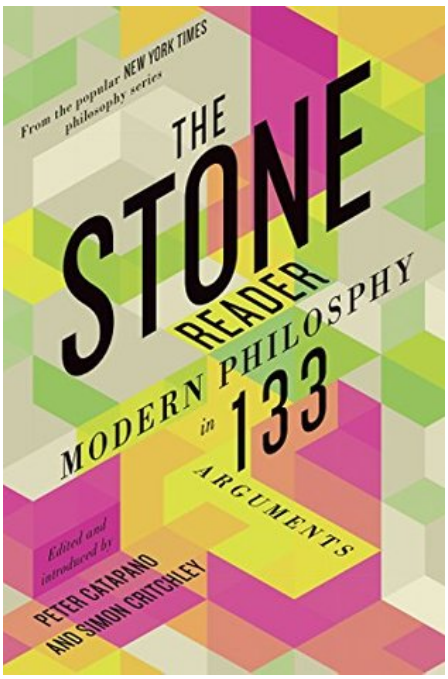

The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments

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A timeless volume to be read and treasured, *The Stone Reader* provides an unparalleled overview of contemporary philosophy.

Once solely the province of ivory-tower professors and college classrooms, contemporary philosophy was finally emancipated from its academic closet in 2010, when The Stone was launched in *The New York Times*. First appearing as an online series, the column quickly attracted millions of readers through its accessible examination of universal topics like the nature of science, consciousness and morality, while also probing more contemporary issues such as the morality of drones, gun control and the gender divide.

Now collected for the first time in this handsomely designed volume, *The Stone Reader* presents 133 meaningful and influential essays from the series, placing nearly the entirety of modern philosophical discourse at a reader's grasp. The book, divided into four broad sections—Philosophy, Science, Religion and Morals, and Society—opens with a series of questions about the scope, history and identity of philosophy: What are the practical uses of philosophy? Does the discipline, begun in the West in ancient Greece with Socrates, favor men and exclude women? Does the history and study of philosophy betray a racial bias against non-white thinkers, or geographical bias toward the West?

These questions and others form a foundation for readers as the book moves to the second section, Science, where some of our most urgent contemporary philosophical debates are taking place. Will artificial intelligence compromise our morality? Does neuroscience undermine our free will? Is there is a legitimate place for the humanities in a world where science and technology appear to rule? Should the evidence for global warming change the way we live, or die?

In the book's third section, Religion and Morals, we find philosophy where it is often at its best, sharpest and most disturbing—working through the arguments provoked by competing moral theories in the face of real-life issues and rigorously addressing familiar ethical dilemmas in a new light. Can we have a true moral life without belief in God? What are the dangers of moral relativism?

In its final part, Society, *The Stone Reader* returns to its origins as a forum to encourage philosophers who are willing to engage closely, critically and analytically with the affairs of the day, including economic inequality, technology and racial discrimination. In directly confronting events like the September 11 attacks, the killing of Trayvon Martin, the Sandy Hook School massacre, the essays here reveal the power of philosophy to help shape our viewpoints on nearly every issue we face today.

With an introduction by Peter Catapano that details the column's founding and distinct editorial process at *The New York Times*, and prefatory notes to each section by Simon Critchley, *The Stone Reader* promises to become not only an intellectual landmark but also a confirmation that philosophy is, indeed, for everyone.

The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments Details

Date	:	Published December 7th 2015 by Liveright
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From Reader Review The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments for online ebook

William2.1 says

These essays may at times seem too truncated and the editorial policy of the *New York Times*, where they first appeared in a column called The Stone, may be partially at fault. However, for someone who quickly glazes over at the massed abstractions of the Great Systematizers, I find the better essays clear and cogent. Here's my *crème de la crème* so far. My gratitude to the editors for their approach which touches on current social, political and cultural issues.

"Of Cannibals, Kings and Culture: The Problem of Ethnocentricity" —Adam Etison
"The Limits of the Coded World"—William Egginton
"On Modern Time"—Espen Hammer
"Stormy Weather: Blues in Winter"—Avital Ronell
"On Ducking Challenges to Naturalism"—Timothy Williamson
"The Core of *Mind and Cosmos*"—Thomas Nagel
"Things Fall Apart"—Philip Kitcher
"Bursting the Neuro-utopian Bubble"—Benjamin Y. Fong
"Is Neuroscience the Death of Free Will?"—Eddy Nahmias
"Is the 'Dumb Jock' Really a Nerd?"—Jason Stanley and John W. Krakauer
"The Dangers of Certainty: A Lesson from Auschwitz"—Simon Critchley
"The Importance of the Afterlife. Seriously."—Samuel Scheffler
"Why I Love Mormonism"—Simon Critchley
"The Light at the End of Suffering"—Peg O'Conner
"Should This Be the Last Generation?"—Peter Singer
"Questions for Free-Market Moralists"—Amia Srinivasan
"What is Economics Good For?"—Alex Rosenberg and Tyler Curtain
"The Taint of 'Social Darwinism'"—Philip Kitcher

James Murphy says

Beginning in 2010 The New York Times's online format began publishing a series devoted to contemporary philosophy called The Stone. It proved so popular it was soon included in the paper's print edition. It's devoted to examining a wide range of contemporary issues from the context of philosophical argument as well as older, universal philosophical questions considered in the light of modern practice. Therefore, discussions in a discipline which is both changing and unchanged since the time of Socrates and on such topics as the morality of using drones alongside those pertaining to truth or knowledge mean the ideas deliberated here are both old and new.

As the title indicates, editors Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley have assembled a selection of 133 of the Stone essays divided into 4 broad sections: Philosophy, Science, Religion and Morals, and Society. Within those divisions are subsections which focus on distinctive issues. Beginning with "What Is a Philosopher?" and ending with the 133d essay, "Navigating Past Nihilism," 97 philosophers of our time write about modern ideas and affairs within a philosophical perspective, from the current meaning of freedom to racial democracy in America to the threat of global warming to the need for creating moral machines as we approach the onset of artificial intelligence to how much better literature makes us to the meaning of time. The fascinating list goes on.

Each of the essays is brief, only a few pages. They're accessible to any interested reader and thankfully free for the most part of philosophy's knottier idioms and terms which confuse laymen like me. I think it remarkable, given the large number of individuals writing here, that each piece is comprehensible and lacking in academic aridity.

I became attracted to the book because I'm attracted to the subject, but the format also lends itself to the slow, reflective read I had in mind. I kept to my plan of reading an essay a day so that over the course of those 133 days my deliberate pace allowed me to move slowly through the most interesting, important, and complex topics we live with today. Finished, I regret there aren't more. But the volume is so huge and inclusive that it seems bottomless, meaning I can return to it whenever I want as well as investigating the online essays available. I highly recommend this.

Jake says

Let me preface this review by saying that the two stars are more a reflection of me than of the content of this book. I am not the target audience for this book--I don't know a Kant from a Kierkegaard, but I'm open to learning more about the basics of philosophy. However, I think the contributors to this book assume a hefty bit of background knowledge. I did not read every essay in the book, rather I chose the ones whose subjects interested me (and skipped essays that didn't pique my interest after a paragraph or three).

That being said, I found some of the essays to be very thought provoking, particularly the sections on contemporary interpretations of philosophy as a discipline ("New Impressions of an Old Profession"), contemporary American political thought ("Politics and Economics"), and what science can, can't, should, and shouldn't do ("Can Science Explain Everything?"). Also, each essay is available online (where they were originally published on the New York Time's website) so I can cite them when getting into arguments with strangers online...I mean, re-read and cite my favorite pieces.

Laurel says

I got about a third of the way through this 700+ page collection of essays. Most were too dry and not related to my current perception of my world to keep my interest. I rarely give up on a book. I imagine I will periodically enjoy The Stone essays in the NYTimes.

D says

A compilation of 133 essays. My favorite was the last: Navigating Past Nihilism by Sean D Kelly:

Herman Melville articulated and hoped for the possibility of a different kind of happiness from that which the Judeo-Christian epoch of Western history sustained, writing 30 yrs before Nietzsche, in Moby Dick, “lower the conceit of attainable felicity.” Find happiness and meaning not in some universal religious account of the order of the universe that holds for everyone at all times, but rather in the local and small-scale commitments that animate a life well-lived. The meaning that one finds in a life dedicated to “the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fireside, the country.” -- these are genuine meanings.

Someone else with radically different commitments might nevertheless be living in a way way that deserves

one’s admiration

There are many different lives of worth, and no single principle or source or meaning in virtue of which one properly admires them all.

Gary Kaiser says

Modern philosophy for non-philosophers. Well, maybe. Eminently enjoyable, in part because these are short essays. That means the half that I can understand reasonably well and find quite rewarding offset those that border on impenetrable (for me, anyway).

Erika Schoeps says

Disclaimer: I won this book in a GoodReads First Reads Giveaway.

I was SO excited to win this book. I had read the Stone column in NYTimes before receiving this, and a professor I knew was using this book in his beginning college writing class to teach thesis-driven papers/arguments.

And it doesn't disappoint. It covers so many topics. Just when you think you're getting tired of one topic, it switches. It lingers longer on some topics, sometimes because a scandal/event concerning that topic was big in the news (i.e. Dylan Roof, healthcare)). When it lingers longer on a certain issue, the essays take the format of a conversation. The following author usually comments on the previous author and disagrees or pushes back on a single point. It's fantastic because if an essay leaves you convinced, there will be someone smart and well-written to make sure you fight back against feeling too comfortable.

When I first started reading, I was taking a Philosophy of Science class, and the "Science" section of this book matched up beautifully with my course material. I think it even integrated an author from the textbook I was using. If you don't have time to take a class, this book provides a brief but well-written summary by philosophers from the field. Almost all of it rung true to things I was reading at university.

A tip for reading: don't get too picky about certain points. These essays need to be broad, and sometimes they will make leaps in order to make a larger point about something else. Don't focus on the leaps when thinking about it; grab a hold of the salient argument and push back against that. You will notice that this is how the conversation-type essays responding to each other work.

Very happy to add this galley to my collection even though it's a galley and does have some weird little errors. Maybe I'll even use it when I become a teacher/professor.

Troy says

As with any book with 113 distinct essays, there will be some that stand above the others but, in general, this is a very nice collection from public intellectual philosophers. I'm thinking, actually, of using some of these essays to supplement the harder core primary readings that I assign my students.

Mark Broadhead says

Quite laughable in retrospect, but it made me furious with its poor and/or inane arguments. It does have some respected writers, like Critchley and Avital Ronell, so I can only assume it is the online newspaper format that leads to idiocy.

Richard says

This book is a collection of 133 philosophical essays originally published in the New York Times. The book was edited by Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley. Even if you don't like philosophy, or if you don't believe that philosophers have anything relevant to say in the 21st Century, you might change your mind after reading about some of the topics that are discussed by the various philosopher-authors, and by the force of their arguments. Some of the essays are refreshing, thought-provoking and enlightening. Others – not so much. One essay that I found to be especially compelling is titled "The Enlightenment's 'Race' Problem, and Ours" by Justin E. H. Smith, in which he discusses the differences between race and culture. It is lucid and well argued.

Less compelling, in my view, is the essay by Huw Price titled "Cambridge, Cabs and Copenhagen: My Route to Existential Risk." In it, the author argues for the existential risk of uncontrolled Artificial Intelligence (AI). He has completely ignored the fact that humans have risen to dominance, not solely due to their large brains, but also because of their hands with opposable thumbs, their eyes with the ability to discern color and distance, their ears that can hear and detect many forms of danger, their mouths that allow efficient communication with others of their species, and their fine motor control that enables them to build sophisticated and very small machines like watches and microprocessors. When artificially intelligent machines develop these same capabilities, I might worry a bit. That will, IMO, be a long distance into the future.

Simon Critchley's essay on Mormonism is a fascinating and thought-provoking analysis of some of the philosophical roots of that religion. His thoughts arose from a series of lectures that he delivered at BYU in 1994, and from questions and comments that he received from his audiences. I found it to be well worth reading.

Another great essay is the one by Joseph Levine regarding the claim that Israel has a "right to exist." The author points out that, although the Jewish people have a right to exist, the Jewish state does not. I interpreted his words to imply that lending credence to the claim that Jews have a right to their own state is to concede, for example, that Mormons might also have a right to their own state. After all, there are about the same number of Mormons in the world as there are Jews. His argument is forceful.

In her thoughtful and compelling essay titled "Think Before You Breed," Christine Overall raises philosophical and ethical questions regarding whether, when, and how many children people should bear and rear. Amia Srinivasan, in an essay titled "Questions for Free Market Moralists" raises interesting and important points regarding the one topic that seems to be dominating political discourse in America today: Income Inequality. In an essay titled "The Veil of Opulence," author and philosopher Benjamin Hale introduces the concept of a "veil of opulence" that should replace the "veil of ignorance" that has been debated by philosophers for decades when discussing the philosophy of economic justice. I found it to be insightful and incisive. It accurately describes and complements modern-day economic and political debates

between liberals and conservatives.

In contrast to most of the other essays, I found that some of them, and especially those regarding race relations in the United States and elsewhere, and those on the issues of gun control, to be based on questionable premises, and tenuous logic. Some appeared to be not particularly well thought-out. In short, I found them to be less than compelling. Upon reading a couple of them, I was reminded of the story of the three blind men and the elephant. To me, the reasoning seems similarly faulty. All of the essays in the book have been ordered by thematic content, rather than chronologically, so this might be the reason why these particular essays are near the end of the book.

The essay “Who Needs a Gun?” by Gary Gutting is an example of one such weak argument. It rests on a shaky foundation. Gutting says that “[u]nless you live in (or frequent) dangerous neighborhoods or have family or friends likely to threaten you, it’s very unlikely that you’ll need a gun for self-defense.” He conveniently ignores the fact that crime has spread outwards from the inner-city, and that many, many of us now face threats from potential home invaders who enter our homes by force and brutally attack our residents. We can be sitting peacefully watching television, eating our dinners, or reading a book when criminals burst through the door and assault us, injuring and sometimes killing us. It happens. Guns are the only defense such victims might have because the perpetrators are able to wreak their violence, steal what they can grab, and are gone long before police can arrive. Mr. Gutting also has not addressed issues of car-jacking, road rage, terrorism attacks, or just plain random violence that can make victims of us regardless of our stations in life, or of the places where we happen to be eating or shopping when an attack takes places. His argument is naïve, at best. In the view of many, the only way that such potential victims can effectively defend themselves is through the use of guns. Gutting’s analysis is surprisingly shallow.

In his essay titled “The Weapons Continuum,” Michael Boylan continues Gutting’s philosophical arguments against gun ownership. His position is almost as weak as that of Gutting, resting on premises that are misleading or inaccurate. Fermin DeBrabander then goes on in the same vein in his essay titled “The Freedom of an Armed Society.” He uses much of the same sort of fuzzy and misleading terminology, such as “high caliber weapon.” Never mind that none of these authors has defined this term. Never mind that the word “clip” is used incorrectly by them. Never mind that the small caliber .223 (5.56mm) is a very potent and potentially deadly weapon that can readily deal death and destruction, and that it is the weapon of choice for such shooters as Adam Lanza (Sandy Hook Elementary School), James Holmes (Aurora, CO movie theater), Syed Farook (San Bernardino, CA), to name just three. Many other mass shooters have also chosen this small caliber weapon as the instrument of their evil deeds. For philosopher authors such as Gutting, Boylan and DeBrabander to rest their positions on such false and misleading premises weakens their arguments and contributes nothing meaningful to the national discourse on gun control. Perhaps they should have done their homework before writing their essays. You should, however, read them and judge for yourself.

DeBrabander goes on to decry the Oklahoma law that legalized “open carry,” in which guns can be carried openly, visible to all. He somehow seems to believe that a gun that can be seen by everybody is somehow more dangerous than a gun that is concealed from view. How does that make any sense at all? He appears to be making a distinction without a difference. In my view, the essay by Todd May titled “Is American Nonviolence Possible?” is a much more carefully analyzed and presented argument for gun control. In it, the author digs more deeply into the roots of gun violence in America, and presents weightier questions than those to be found in the latest TV news sound bites. In his essay, May avoids the use of trite and false gun terminology such as that often heard on TV news shows. He looks much more deeply into the causes of violence, and not just into the use of guns. I found his essay to be definitely worth reading.

John Kaag and Sarah Kreps wrote an essay titled “The Moral Hazard of Drones,” in which they argue the immorality of the use of drones in warfare. Never mind that the same sort of argument can be made against the use of aircraft of any kind in warfare, including those with pilots. The same logic used by these authors to

argue against the use of drones could be employed against the use of any kind of aircraft against soldiers on the ground, or against the use of tanks or other armored vehicles against unarmored infantry soldiers, or against the use of machine guns against riflemen. It could apply to a large and strong soldier in unarmed combat against a smaller, weaker soldier. The entire argument can be reduced to absurdity. The authors also use an anecdote about a mythical figure named Gyges who supposedly finds a ring that can make him invisible and subsequently uses it to murder a king. They use the story to support their assertion that the use of drones is immoral. I found it to be a thin and unconvincing argument. In fact, it is ludicrous.

J.M. Bernstein wrote an interesting analysis of why the Tea Party and its individual members seem to be so angry. The essay is appropriately titled " The Very Angry Tea Party." It is worth reading and considering. Although written almost six years ago, it neatly and convincingly describes the reasons for the rise of Donald Trump in our American politics of 2016.

Readers will probably find that, depending on their individual perspectives, some of the essays might be more interesting and stimulating than others. At 133, there were far too many of them for me to comment on all of them. Most of them, however, were quite thought-provoking, even though I chose only a few on which to comment. I hope that readers of this review might gain a flavor for the contents of the book and appreciate some of the essays I described.

This is a truly excellent book. Even though at 775 pages it is hardly light reading, it is worth the effort for anybody interested in philosophic arguments, and especially as those arguments might apply in the modern era.

Judy Gacek says

I need to own the book as it is one that cannot be enjoyed when the library gives you two weeks to read. It is a book you put up and down. It is a book that draws you to the essays you think you will enjoy reading the most first. You want time to mull them over. But the book is almost forty bucks so will check it out a couple of more times when in the mood.

Sue says

I received this book free from Good Reads.

Definitely worth having. Lots of short, well written articles by a variety of philosophers, most with thought provoking ideas.

I thoroughly enjoyed the articles about "god" and animal rights, having traveled a bumpy road to my current beliefs, which constantly evolve.

Ci says

This book is a collection from NY Times' online columns on "The Stone", most of the works dated around 2010. It is organized as short essays covering a wide range of topics, mostly "practical" as per NY Times'

core reading constituents. The articles have a general consistency of lengthy, tone, and brevity, and facile breeziness for the medium they were originally presented. One imagines the academics holding their assignments with editorial injunctions for word counts, contents, and tonal preferences.

For this reader, the value of this voluminous book is to find a few voices that provide deeper insights. Here they are:

Jim Holt : for questioning the literature quality in contemporary philosophic writing. Quoting others, the prevailing style is "correct, scientific, abstract, hygienically pallid", "a kind of all-purpose solvent", "long haul of technical reflection".

Tim Crane: on Mystery and Evidence, tackling the issue of scientific process versus religious myths. He thinks *"while religious thinking is widespread in the world, while scientific thinking is not. I don't think that this can be accounted for merely in terms of the ignorance or irrationality in human beings. Rather, it is because of the kind of intellectual, emotional and practical appeals that religion has for people, which is very different from the kind of appeal that science is."*

Simon Critchley: a very thorough review of Kierkegaard's "Works of Love", stating that "It is very hard to be Christian ... Kiekegaard writes, 'you have absolutely nothing to do with what others do to you, essentially, you have only to do with yourself before God.'" Hence the social relationship of man-vs-man becomes man-God-man, where the relationship is anchored by God in the middle. The central theme comes from Matthew 7:3 *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?* We can not judge others, our relationship with them can not be defined by the quid pro quo, that is the main point of Critchley's "Rigor of Love".

Robin Friedman says

Education For Adults

Philosophy has aptly been defined as "education for adults". This recent collection of essays, "The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments" (2016) shows how philosophical thinking may be practiced by reflective individuals who do not necessarily have philosophical or even higher academic education. The book is part of a long series of efforts by philosophers to persuade lay readers of the vitality and breadth of the passion for philosophical reflection. The book is an anthology of 133 articles from a series "The Stone" (after the proverbial Philosopher's Stone) that has been published in the New York Times beginning in 2010. The Stone series is the work of New York Times editor Peter Catapano and philosopher Simon Critchley who jointly also edited this volume.

The essays in this volume fulfill their promise of making philosophical thought accessible. The essays are short, well-written and argued, provocative, broad in scope, and snappy. They combine admirably thought and journalistic style. The book will help show readers how they often raise and explore philosophical questions in their own lives, sometimes without being aware that they are doing so. I was reminded of the book, "The Spirit of Modern Philosophy" (1892) by the American idealist thinker, Josiah Royce, which is a series of lectures on philosophy, its history, and its issues that Royce delivered to lay audiences. Royce too wanted to show non-specialists the pervasive character of philosophical reflection.

The book is divided into four large sections, each of which receives a brief introduction by Simon Critchley. The four sections are further divided into manageable subsections. The first section of the book is titled simply "Philosophy" and it explores a range of questions about what Critchley describes as "the nature scope and identity of the discipline" and why it matters. Many of the essays take a broad approach to the question using, for example, questions posed by the ancient Greeks, while others bring in topical, contemporary issues, such as the status of women in philosophy. Throughout the volume, I found the essays of the former scope far more interesting than the topical essays. Among the essays I most enjoyed in this part of the book were "Philosophy as an Art of Dying" by Costica Bradatan and "Spinoza's Vision of Freedom and Ours" by Steven Nadler.

The second section, titled "Science" explores competing views on the nature of science and, as Critchley asks, on whether science "can explain everything". The essays explore the strengths and weaknesses of philosophical naturalism and discuss matters such as the nature of mind, evolution, neurology, and computer science in exploring what is left for thought separate from scientific investigation. A group of related opening essays by Timothy Williamson, Alex Rosenberg, Thomas Nagel, and Philip Kitcher explore the questions of naturalism at the broadest and, for me, were the highlight of this section.

The third section of the book "Religion and Morals" discusses questions surrounding the existence of God and the importance, if any, for religious belief to ethical behavior. In this section as well, the essays range from broad philosophical reflection on matters such as the existence of evil to current topical and political issues. Among the many fine essays in this section, I enjoyed Time Crane's "Mystery and Evidence", "Morals without God" by Frans de Wall, and Steven Asma's "The Myth of Universal Love".

The final section of the book, "Society" explores philosophical thinking on the nature of the good society, a question which was explored by philosophers from Plato and Aristotle through Hobbes, Locke, and Spinoza. There are some broad, insightful essays in this part of the book together with several essays that I liked less well. The weakest parts of this book are the essays dealing with topical American political issues such as feminism, the nature of marriage, (or as a contributor calls it "marriage") race relations, immigration, and gun control. These essays are marred because they are polemical, politically correct, and uniform -- all the contributors rush to say essentially the same types of things. I found most of these essays unconvincing and little better than the political speech that may readily be found elsewhere. Philosophers display no special competence on specific political issues. There are still some outstanding essays in this part of the book, including the final three: "The Myth of Just Do It" by Barbara Gail Montero, "How to Live Without Irony" by Christy Wampole, and Navigating Past Nihilism" by Sean Kelly. These essays, far more than the polemics, helped me think about contemporary life.

I want to mention as well the several essays in this book by Gay Gutting and by Simon Critchley himself, all of which are thoughtful and rewarding. Gutting's essays include "Is Our Patriotism Moral", one of the relatively few works which sound a note different from political correctness. An example of Critchley's essays is "Why I Love Mormonism" from the section of the book on Religion and Morals.

"The Stone Reader" is a fine, thoughtful book for readers wishing to engage in philosophical thinking. The essays are challenging and many of them deserve to be read more than once. The book shows the virtues of a definition of philosophy as "education for adults"

Robin Friedman

Ryan Johnson says

I finally finished this book, Phew....

It is wise to know when one is ignorant said Socrates in Plato's dialogue, "The Apology" and this book reaffirmed my ignorance in many thought provoking philosophical debates.

The desire to finish this book was motivated by the Japanese word "Kaizen" , a Desire to improve, hopefully I have improved myself by reading this, though I cannot be sure, LOL....

On to Ready Player One.
