



# History of a Pleasure Seeker

*Richard Mason*

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From the acclaimed author of *The Drowning People* (“A literary sensation” —*The New York Times Book Review*) and *Natural Elements* (“A magnum opus” —*The New Yorker*), an opulent, romantic coming-of-age drama set at the height of Europe’s belle époque, written in the grand tradition with a lightness of touch that is wholly modern and original.

The novel opens in Amsterdam at the turn of the last century. It moves to New York at the time of the 1907 financial crisis and proceeds onboard a luxury liner headed for Cape Town.

It is about a young man—Piet Barol—with an instinctive appreciation for pleasure and a gift for finding it. Piet’s father is an austere administrator at Holland’s oldest university. His mother, a singing teacher, has died—but not before giving him a thorough grounding in the arts of charm.

Piet applies for a job as tutor to the troubled son of Europe’s leading hotelier: a child who refuses to leave his family’s mansion on Amsterdam’s grandest canal. As the young man enters this glittering world, he learns its secrets—and soon, quietly, steadily, finds his life transformed as he in turn transforms the lives of those around him.

*History of a Pleasure Seeker* is a brilliantly written portrait of the senses, a novel about pleasure and those who are in search of it; those who embrace it, luxuriate in it, need it; and those who deprive themselves of it as they do those they love. It is a book that will beguile and transport you—to another world, another time, another state of being.

## History of a Pleasure Seeker Details

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Author : Richard Mason

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# From Reader Review History of a Pleasure Seeker for online ebook

## A says

An utterly charming, witty, and engrossing sex romp done up in the trappings of a Henry James or Edith Wharton novel. At times it seems nearly impossible that this book was written in this century: Mason nails James's and Wharton's exhilarating milieu of belle epoque glamour and Gilded Age intrigue, while keeping the tone light and leaving out the more depressing aspects of literature of that era, be it James's paralyzing emotional density or Wharton's undertow of stultifying classism and woe. Though this book is not nearly as affecting as Towles's book -- this is a *really* light and breezy read -- I'm reminded of Amor Towles's *The Rules of Civility*, a novel written in 2011 (and with thoroughly modern preoccupations) that was not only set in a pitch-perfect recreation of Jazz Age New York, but was so stylistically flawless it felt like it was written by a contemporary of the characters.

Anyway. I'll admit that, yes, the titular pleasure seeker feels a little preposterously constructed: in just 279pp., Piet Barol cures autism, saves the American economy, rekindles a frigid marriage, outclasses the upper classes, jump-starts women's lib in Europe -- and of course does it all while having stunning blue eyes, a beautiful body, and a gigantic cock of "remarkable girth and enduring stolidity." But I think the point here is that everything is meant to be a little preposterous. This is a thrilling trifle of an adventure novel with about as much heft and seriousness as the magnums of Champagne that are consumed near-constantly throughout the book. One review compared Piet Barol to a "bisexual Flashman," and that seems accurate -- though Piet is much more dignified, fair, and suave than the brash Flashman, and MY LANDS does he enjoy it when a man eats his butthole! In the end (har har), I enjoyed this book thoroughly and cannot wait for the next installment.

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## Alexis Hall says

I actually wrote a review of this when I first read it ... and then GR ate it (why does this happen to me all the time) and I couldn't be bothered to re-write it.

And, as ever, the book has subsequently faded into a blur.

This is essentially the story of a hot bisexual social climber which, y'know, is just up my alley. So to speak. I've seen other reviews mention its eroticism because I guess I'm jaded by romance or something because it's honestly not that steamy. It has an air of incipient smuttiness, however, that probably contributes to the sense it's going to be more outrageous than it actually is.

I'm interested in stories about nobody people who are determined to be someone people - and the ... I hesitate to use the word hero ... protagonist, Piet Barol is an intriguing mix of arrogance and insecurity. The kind of too-much-too-little combination I recognise from having being largely self-invented. It opens with him acquiring the position of tutor with a rich Dutch family, a 'between worlds' position that allows him to scheme his way into closeness with the family. And for everything to go wrong, of course.

There are various threads in the novel which aren't exactly sub-plots and usually revolve around Piet's relationships with various members of the family - the sexually-frustrated mother, the daughter who is determined to expose him as a pretender, the tormented boy his supposed to be tutoring. Despite the

promising of salacious carryings-on, I was most intrigued by the latter - Egbert is enslaved to the voices he hears in his head (perhaps some form of OCD?) which demand certain tasks and repetitions from him. One of the problems with a fundamentally selfish narrator is that they're rarely as emotionally engaged as you are -- so I'm not sure how we left poor Egbert, really.

But this is pretty entertaining all told. Although, be warned, it ends with a TO BE CONTINUED.

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## **Meg says**

Richard Mason's *HISTORY OF A PLEASURE SEEKER* is a lush, sensuous and finely-wrought story of how, through charisma and seduction, one man is able to change an entire family and free them from their stuffy, well-made cages. In return, Piet is able to leave behind his poverty-stricken youth and seek all the pleasures to which he feels entitled as a self-made man.

I was initially attracted to this book because of a line drawn between it and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *THE GREAT GATSBY*, one of my favorite classics. After finishing *HISTORY OF A PLEASURE SEEKER*, I can see the parallels between the two. Though our setting here is The Netherlands, Piet functions as a sort of Gatsby-like anti-hero. I took turns loving and despising him, wondering if he possibly felt for the Vermeulen-Sickerts family or merely sought to snap off a piece of their prestige. That feeling morphed many times over, and I'm still not completely sure how I feel about Piet. Other than, you know . . . seduced.

On one hand, he's a selfish devil accustomed to getting what he wants -- and when he wants it. Whether a lusty embrace comes from a man or woman seems to be of little consequence, and he's already daydreaming about receiving satisfaction from a fellow employee at the Vermeulen-Sickerts' residence just hours after arriving. I don't think this was so much a bisexual tendency as a rampant desire to be pleased when he felt the urge -- regardless of who was there to satisfy him. The true nature of his sexuality didn't seem to be of much consequence outside of what it asked him to do for others, and what he asked others to do for him. As you'd expect from a book with such a title, *HISTORY OF A PLEASURE SEEKER* is really all about Piet's pleasure.

And it's hard not to be seduced by Piet. On the surface, he's a talented pianist, an educated dreamer, a reliable employee. He's described as devastatingly handsome and all too aware of what his attractive physique can afford him from others. Whether everything is just an elaborate scheme to buy himself fortune, I'm not sure - - but I'm leaning toward not. At his heart, I don't think Piet was a cold and calculated gold digger. I think he was just a little tortured and entitled.

Though Piet is our central character, he isn't the only one craving release. Louisa and Constance Vermeulen-Sickerts want to be freed of the confines barring women from doing much beyond finding a good husband, becoming a good mother. Bright and devastatingly sarcastic, Louisa was a favorite character of mine; her sassy observations and unwillingness to become a pawn in anyone's game made me smile. Little Egbert desperately wants to be freed of his inner demons, and Maarten craves only the security to take care of his family in the manner to which they've been accustomed. And Jacobina? She just wants to be loved.

*HISTORY OF A PLEASURE SEEKER* was a fast, intoxicating read -- and though my interest waned slightly as Piet moved on from Amsterdam, I was very invested in the plot and characters. The novel features several scenes steamy enough to make my cheeks flush, but I wasn't bothered by the erotic and hypnotic nature of the story. If you're easily offended by sexual content, I'd suggest tiptoeing around this one -- but

those seeking a raucous, entertaining and sexy story of one social climber pawing his way to the top will find Richard Mason's novel goes down a treat.

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### **Librarmouse says**

This book had a lot of potential, but I think it only partially lived up to it.

I liked the first half of the book, where Piet is in Amsterdam and working as the tutor to a wealthy family, the best. In this portion of the book the author took care to develop Piet's relationships with the other characters, and since this is a novel that's primarily about character relationships (as opposed to some action-packed, twists-and-turns plot) it worked well. Of course, there are plot developments as well, and because they're backed up by all of this character interaction, they're very impactful.

Unfortunately, this wasn't as effective in the latter portion of the book, where many new characters appear briefly. Because this novel is fueled by character interaction and Piet doesn't get as much interaction with these people, I feel that the plot points that happened had less impact. I also wasn't too fond of Piet by the end - yes, he's an amoral cad, but he's supposed to be a *likeable* amoral cad, and I felt that he stopped being likeable about halfway through.

There were some other problems here, as well. Every single person who encounters Piet seems to suddenly have an immense desire to get in his pants, and while I can buy that Piet may be extremely handsome and perhaps extremely charming, I really can't buy that *everyone* he meets immediately wants to sleep with him.

I also wasn't fond of the way the book ended. In the last few pages, we're introduced to a brand-new character, have a really important plot development (that probably would have had greater effect if that new character had gotten a little more screen time) and then - 'to be continued!'

This wasn't a bad read, but I don't believe that I enjoyed it enough to pick up a sequel.

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### **Elise says**

Forget "50 Shades of Grey," and pick up this beautifully written erotic novel. "History of a Pleasure Seeker" is lush, atmospheric and a delicious escape into belle epoque Amsterdam--such a treat! Readers will fall in love with Piet Barol, the novel's seductive twenty-four year old protagonist who embarks on sensual adventures in the upper class world (a world alien to him as the novel begins). Even though he at first appears to move through the novel like a destructive whirlwind of desire--liberating those who desperately need it--the consequences of his actions will surprise and delight you.

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### **Eric says**

This wasn't in my wheelhouse. It's well written erotica, with some interesting characters, but I expected more in terms of thematic depth. It was recommended as more of a literary novel than it turned out to be. I guess erotica can be literary, but this book didn't deliver what I was looking for.

The title character, Piet Barol, is engaged as a tutor to a prosperous Dutch family's OCD son, and proceeds to become embroiled in an affair with the lady of the house. He is also pursued, to varying degrees, by the two young daughters and a couple of male servants. I made it a third of the way through the book before realizing it wasn't for me. It seemed to follow a pattern of building up to one unsatisfying (for Piet) sexual encounter after another, which I suppose would eventually lead into some major fireworks. But what interested me the most were the psychological peculiarities of the boy, Egbert, and his father, Maarten. The book (to me at least) squandered too much time on the sexual frolics and didn't get back in time to what was, to me, the intellectual meat of the story.

I met Richard Mason at Booktopia in Vermont. A smart, charming, engaging man he is, and maybe he's got a book in him that would be more to my taste, but this wasn't the one.

I should say here that I'm not anti-erotica. But I don't seek the stuff out. One book along these lines I can recommend is Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's graphic novel, . That book, which, like this one, is set in Europe in the Gilded Age, has the additional draw of being itself not only erotica, but an argument in favor of erotica, of engaging the Eros urge instead of aggression. Moore and Gebbie (who are husband and wife) score some serious points in that regard, amid the titillation.

Edit:I went back and finished the book on May 11, 2012 I see no reason to change my review or rating.

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## **Filip says**

For the first 50 pages or so of this novel, I was wondering whether I'd accidentally purchased a bodice-ripping Harlequin novel for middle-aged ladies. Having finished the book in only two sittings (and enjoyed quite a lot of it), I now prefer to think of it as an "erotic picaresque novel" (a bodice-ripper by any other name... :-)

Smoothly written, with a keen eye for historical detail in its analysis of an upper-class family in 1907 Amsterdam, the story takes some odd twists and turns as the protagonist seeks to better himself in society. The main character, however, is also the main problem of this novel: a man of so many qualities as to be highly improbable. A good scholar, linguist (a cunning linguist, even), with a beautiful singing voice and an instinct for ingratiating oneself - quite possible. Extremely good-looking - fair enough. Rippling muscles that show through the fabric of his suit - a bit improbable, since no muscle-building physical activity is ever described. Highly intelligent, but without intellectual depth. Ruthlessly straight, but setting off the gaydar of every man around, married or not (the fact that the protagonist still has some unresolved mommy issues may have to do with that). The story becomes even more unhinged when the hero boards an ocean vessel that for all the longing male stares and swimming pool romps probably was the first gay cruise in history. My frustration was probably only caused because friends had spoken so highly that I was expecting an accomplished novel. As it stood, I did enjoy it - I only wish I could have read this erotic fantasy for ladies & gay men by the pool with a cocktail, where it belongs.

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## **Noce says**

**E per fortuna che stiamo al 28 di Dicembre**

Perché a me di finire l'anno con un libro così così, non mi va proprio.

Cioè: già quest'anno non è stato brillante, già il mio Capodanno si prospetta piatto come il Natale, forse di più; e per quanto io abbia una certa attitudine al masochismo, non vedo perché debba infierire a oltranza anche sul mio curriculum di brava e onesta lettrice.

Questa volta Mason mi ha fregato.

E so anche perché. Probabilmente ha letto il mio diario segreto in cui dico le peggiori cattiverie del mondo e mi lascio andare all'invidia più sfrenata. E ha quindi deciso di darmi una lezione.

Perché in effetti, a me Mason piace tantissimo, ma lo odio.

Ma è bene che vi dia qualche delucidazione:

da ragazzetto Mason era un mix tra Ethan Hawke e Tom Cruise, adesso invece è nel bel mezzo dell'età in cui si sta felicemente Clooneyzzando, però con stile.

Ecco una diapositiva: [http://www.ilgatto Nero.it/sito\\_gn\\_in\\_...](http://www.ilgatto Nero.it/sito_gn_in_...)

Si certo, avete ragione. Probabilmente quando Dio distribuiva le labbra, lui era fuori a fumare in balcone, ma volete che i miei ormoni si sottilizzino per così poco?

E fin qua, un punto nettamente a suo favore: era ed è molto carino.

Ma quando io scoprii Mason, era il lontano 2004, anno in cui uscì: "Noi". Libro che mi aveva immediatamente conquistato, la storia, lo stile, la struttura originale, tutto.

Altro punto a suo favore: carino e per niente stupido. Anzi, baciato dal talento.

Leggendo poi la sua breve biografia sul retro del libro, appresi che era del mio stesso anno.

Terzo punto a suo favore: carino, baciato dal talento, e coetaneo. Avevo ancora la possibilità di incontrarlo, sedurlo e sposarlo.

Ma immaginate la mia faccia, quando mi resi conto che "Noi" era già il suo secondo libro, e che il primo venne pubblicato nel 1999!! Capito?!?!? 1999!!!!

Praticamente mentre lui nel '99 era alle prese col suo successo, e gestiva il suo tempo tra presentazioni del suo libro e interviste a fiumi, io cercavo di gestire i miei genitori che mi chiedevano pressantemente a che punto fossi coi miei esami universitari!!

E qua ho incominciato a odiarlo: carino, baciato dal talento, coetaneo, e maturo letterariamente già dal '99!!!

Ma andiamo al sodo.

Siamo nel 2011.

A tutt'oggi non ho ancora letto il suo libro più famoso "Anime alla deriva" (anche se so che prima o poi lo

farò). Ho letto invece “Le stanze illuminate”, e per quanto l’abbia trovato per certi versi meno originale di “Noi” mi è piaciuto, e la mia stima nei suoi confronti è cresciuta di pari passo con l’invidia.

E arriviamo finalmente al suo ultimo libro. “Alla ricerca del piacere”. Mason c’è, è lui, l’ho riconosciuto subito, lo stile curato ed elegante è sempre il suo, la capacità di rendere affascinanti tutti i suoi personaggi, anche quelli che meno dovrebbero, è lì, agli occhi di tutti. Anzi, c’è qualcosa in più. Perché con questo libro, Mason ha voluto persino giocare la carta difficilissima dell’erotismo. E c’è riuscito magnificamente.

Storia pepata al punto giusto, senza mai scadere nel volgare.

E a questo punto il dramma. Non mi ha fatto il pessimo scherzo, di mollare tutti i personaggi, e dico tutti, per strada?

Non ce n’è manco uno, dico uno, di cui si sappia la fine.

Neanche il protagonista!!!

Ma porca pupazza!! Ma si può concepire un libro come una bionda che ha appena fatto l’anestesia?? Bella, sexy, elegante e curata, ma che quando parla lascia i concetti a metà?

Fosse stata bionda e svampita mi avrebbe fatto arrabbiare di meno. Se un libro è senza contenuto è facilissimo smontarlo. Ma il problema è che qua, il tessuto c’era tutto, ma Mason non si sa per quale motivo, s’è rifiutato di lavorarlo e confezionarlo.

Ma veramente può essere che lo abbia fatto solo per vendetta?

O forse non sarà, che siccome mi ama smodatamente, non vuole umiliarmi con la sua bravura e ha quindi deciso di abbassare il suo livello di prestazioni? Nel dubbio, mi attingerò a persona saggia e riflessiva che ci pensa bene prima di liquidare una faccenda importante, e gli darò quindi un’altra possibilità.

Ma ti avverto Mason: un’altra fregatura così e sei out!!

Non sfidarmi, altrimenti dirò a tutti che hai la bocca di una rana, e forse forse, anche un leggero strabismo!! E non so se ci siamo capiti!!!

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### **switterbug (Betsey) says**

Twenty-three-year-old Piet Barol is a hedonist with a purpose. He's turned pleasure into an art, and made an art of pleasure. In 1907, he leaves behind his austere beginnings in South Holland for the splendor of the rich and modern, via employment in a powerful family in Amsterdam. Although raised in lower-middle-class surroundings, his Parisienne mother imparted gentility and musical refinement to Piet before her premature death. His sensuous lips, striking physique, keen blue eyes and cultivated, easy charm ignites passion in others, and he is as resourceful as he is alluring.

With confidence and authority, Piet secures a position in the Vermeulen-Sickerts' household as ten-year-old Egbert's private tutor. Egbert's agoraphobia presents a challenge for Piet, who is paid well to teach and to



hopefully "cure" him. From the moment he steps foot in their grand house, class distinctions are noted and deftly exploited by the agile and ambitious new tutor.

This promise of the title delivers, and the sex is candid. If you are turned off by explicit sexuality, you may want to reconsider this book. However, Mason writes with a poised pen and a light, poetic touch in this romp of rumps. It's ripe, but not vulgar, and he has a knack for regulating the sexual exuberance. In lesser hands, it would be meretricious and puerile, but he harnesses the narrative's carnal energy with a droll and nutty bite. The bi-curious Piet jettisons the limited definition of heterosexuality. He is a card-carrying lover of women, but he has a sensuous appreciation for the subtle bonds of carefree, liberated men.

This savvy novel of class and manners displays Piet's acumen for blurring divides and situating himself as a "guest" of the house. Barol quickly intuits the vulnerabilities of the domicile, including the servants, and makes an enterprise and métier out of his talent for soothing egos, from the bottom to the top. However, he is not without a nemesis. Daughter Louisa, a strong and independent woman who assesses him as a canny and insouciant opportunist, mistrusts his motives, although her sister Constance is mildly afflicted with his charms.

Maarten's anguish over his son blindly binds him to a severe and persecutory God. His religiosity is so extreme that it has become anathema to intimacy with his wife. There is more at stake here than just a pleasure seeker's desires. The sins of the father have infected the child. The author's understanding of Egbert's illness and its roots in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (although the term isn't named in the book) were penetratingly accurate. What is even more profound is Mason's ability to illustrate a theory that I have always held: that fervent religiosity is also linked to OCD. He shows without telling.

Word has it that Mason intends to continue the adventures of Piet Barol in at least two subsequent books. Knowledge of that mitigates the appearance of a pat and abrupt ending here as the ship sails into South Africa. There is much potential for past liaison's to threaten Piet's future, and for his usual composure to careen as he walks a tightrope--which is an extended metaphor and a prime subtext of the narrative. The novel ends with a promise that pedigree, passion, and ambition will continue to quiver and clash in Piet Barol's pursuit and parlay of pleasure.

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## Charlie says

### 3.5 Stars

Piet Barol is a classic, seductive, golden boy who comes from modest means, but rises with the help of good looks and some common-sense charm that carries him a long way. The book is divided into two parts, with Piet Barol the focal character that pulls it together. The first half is intriguing and builds as the imperfections, phobias, morals and obstacles of the characters are revealed. Based on this, I would have rated the book higher, but then disappointment occurs when the period with the Vermeulen-Sickerts family is neatly tied up and Piet Barol abandons ship and sets sail to Cape Town. It is too neat and tidy for my taste. All is so quickly forgiven and realized, which gave me pause. However, there is room for a sequel and I'm hoping this is merely a set-up for more to come, but despite Piet's evident talent of the tongue, he left me unsatisfied. The second half takes place on the ship heading to Cape Town. This is a bit rushed and convenient as well. Piet gets himself in some situations, but is always saved or let off the dangle rather easily. This decreases the tension and gives a ho-hum outcome. It's a touch taboo and a bit randy in places, but all in all too light in scandal and risk. I wanted more at stake, or at least a better build up with nail-biting disappointment. *History of A Pleasure Seeker* floats causally like an imposter at a party no one really cares if you crash.

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## Monica Emerich says

The description of the book enchanted me! I put it on my queue at the library and couldn't wait to dive in...and then, I started reading. First chapter, okay, I thought, but not great. I remonstrated myself, thinking my lack of enthusiasm was due to the fact that I'd just finished a book I consider one of the best I've ever read--*Out Stealing Horses*. Give it a chance, I thought.

Honestly, the premise of the book is delicious, but it failed me on several counts.

1) I found it simply unbelievable that class differences would be so easily discarded, for lust, compassion or empathy. Just not buying it. The main character, Piet, is devastatingly handsome and a smooth operator, but everyone who looks at this kid suddenly drops every smidgeon of training, tradition and culture to help him or seduce him, or both at the same time. A little boy with terrible schizophrenia or autism is nearly cured by Piet overnight.

2) I needed a lot deeper look into the characters to understand why, for example, a simple servant fellow would drop every last cent he'd ever made in his life to get himself to a city just to attempt to get a job on a cruise liner the hero MIGHT be sailing on so that he could have the thrill of MAYBE running into him.

The writing is good; the erotica well handled, at least in my opinion. I wanted more intelligent writing, more depth of character, more literary in the literary fiction.

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## Chris says

A warning to readers: This book is hot, hot, HOT! Have a fan on the nightstand when you are reading this! Mason introduces us to Piet Barol, a man who attracts both women and men, and who is cunning enough to weave seamlessly through high society. In Part I, he is hired as a tutor for a young boy with OCD, and quickly becomes the one everyone in the house wants. Upon leaving the house, we enter Part II, where he aboard an oceanliner on its way to South Africa. I felt like something was missing in Part II, the storyline sort of lost its way, no pun intended, but perhaps that is what Mason was looking for, as Barol had no direction once he reached land. He ends the book, "To be continued" so I presume we will be seeing more of Piet. Unfortunately, I couldn't connect with any of the characters, and honestly didn't even like any of them.

Richard Mason wrote this book by hand, in a handbound book, and it shows. Each word is carefully used and very quietly lands on the page. Yet I'm sure I wouldn't have picked up on it if I hadn't known that beforehand. I also wondered if there was a bit (or more) of Piet in him. He is incredibly charming!

I saw one reviewer refer to this as "X Rated Downton Abbey," which I totally agree with. So that said, it's not a book for everyone, but I enjoyed it, more for the great writing than for the storyline.

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## M says

I can explain.

I'm in the library, and it's an urgent mission. There has been a dearth of good reads for far too long. My writing is suffering. I am suffering. I scan the scant 'new books' section and start yanking at anything that seems at all interesting. Obviously the title for this one had me raising an eyebrow, but a quick peek inside tells me institutions such as The New Yorker are behind this man, so, ok.

Literary, they called it. Smutty and pretentious, I call it. The fact that I needed a dictionary to get through this is NOT impressive, it's a pain. This book had the feel of a high school student right clicking the thesaurus option for every other word in his paper, not the flowing hand of a true wordsmith. Dude, lighten UP. The main character is a veritable sleaze bag. Apparently I am meant to root for him but his one clear 'quality' is a thirst for hedonistic happiness, be it fine food, plush furniture, or women. Yeah that's what I call a hero. The author bends over backwards to make this guy appealing, but telling me that every woman - and man! - falls for him only makes me wary, and slightly ill.

This dude proceeds to have an affair with his boss's wife (and really, were these over the top details so necessary? I have never before encountered an author THIS in love with his main character and his accompanying six pack) and do all sorts of underhanded things to continue his path to riches. He was boring and unlikable as was everyone else. Want to hear the real kicker? This tedious read ends with the line: to be continued...

Ah well how WILL I live without knowing what happens to this fascinating creature???? THANK YOU for letting me know there will be follow up. Hear my bated breath as I toss and turn. DID SOMEONE ACTUALLY AGREE TO PUBLISH MORE OF THIS???

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## Jennifer says

*History of a Pleasure Seeker is a fun, frothy, sex romp. It's a book about class but there is nothing new to be learned here about "the haves" and "the have nots". Mason creates an appealing setting - a 1907 upper class household in Amsterdam where Piet Barol comes to tutor the young, agoraphobic son Egbert and ingratiates himself into the family along the way. It's fun to read about the flirting, the messages conveyed through the cut of a dress, the looks given across the grand piano as Piet plays meaningful opera arias.*

*Mason writes as an omniscient narrator - getting inside the heads of multiple characters (even a horse who is affronted by Piet's lack of riding experience! Really?). I found this technique diffused whatever tension might have been built. Piet is sure that his little messages are understood (something like: I will play this song from Carmen because it shows that I clearly want to have sex with Egbert's mother but only she will know) and then we also read the other character's reactions or follow them as they try to attract Piet. Bottom line is the reader knows too much. We never wonder if an assignation will take place - we know from both sides that it will. We know who is attracted to whom at all times (Spoiler - EVERYONE is attracted to Piet.)*

*The story of a servant striving to climb the ladder of society is nothing new and it's been done better in books where the stakes are higher and the protagonist is more daring. Mason wants the reader to like Piet and seems afraid to make him much of a scoundrel. There are many more women (and men) to bed and advantages to be had but Piet doesn't want to rock the boat and feels too much affection for the family to*

*push those limits that would have been entertaining to the reader and raised the stakes of the story. The book lacks the tragedy of Fitzgerald's Gatsby or the psychological tension of Highsmith's Ripley. Piet really doesn't have much to lose. He made his small fortune in 11 months and the reader has no doubt that if lost, he could remake it with his easy charms. So when the stakes are low the tension and suspense of the story are also low.*

*The book ends with the words "To be continued" - seems cocky to assume that we want more, doesn't it? While this was a fast, enjoyable read I don't think there is enough here to compel me to read the next installment.*

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## **Christie says**

I was very excited to start this book, because the reviews made it sound very interesting with the talk of turn of the century Amsterdam and Cape Town. However, the book was a major disappointment mainly because there were so many great passages and relationships within the book that the author could have explored but did not. Throughout reading the book, I found myself enjoying many passages between the main character Piet Barol and a secondary character in the book only to be confronted with yet another sex scene. I think that I would have enjoyed the book much more if the author had focused this first work of what appears to be a series on Barol's time in Amsterdam with the Vermeulen-Sickerts and fully developed his relationship with each of the characters, instead of only giving a shallow glimpse into the relationships. Also, it seemed that every time Barol met a new man, the new man immediately lusted after Barol. Quite frankly, it became a bit ridiculous. Also, the very end has "To be continued . . ." which seems a bit of a clichéd way to end the first in a series.

I feel that my main disappointment with this book was that there was so much potential in this story that the author did not capitalize on, which is quite a shame.

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