
Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by dogbeak - 03-04-2008 09:05

Do you stop reading books halfway through? I hate doing this, and can only think of three books I've stopped in the middle of:

Fyodor Dostoyevsky - The Possessed (not that I disliked it, I just started reading something else and forgot about it.)

Nick Cave - And the Ass Saw the Angel (because it's really really really really really terrible.)

Tolkien - Lord of the Rings (I didn't have the patience as an 11 year-old, and have no desire to try again now.)

I'd say Felipe Fernández-Armesto's Millennium, but I'm actually reading it, just at a glacial pace. It sits by (actually, under) my bed, and I've been getting through about twenty pages a month for the last few years. Then I'll put it down for a few months, and dip back in at a random place and start again. So I'm learning all sorts about colonization, and Mwene Mutapa, but nothing about the twentieth century or the industrial age.

=====

Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Crusoe - 03-04-2008 09:13

I gave up on Guns, Germs & Steel after the first few chapters. The first chapter felt like a thorough and detailed summary, but the remainder of the book seemed a fairly dry set of supporting information. After the first chapter explained his theory so well I didn't really see the point in the rest of it.

I can't even remember if I limped over the finish line with One Hundred Years of Solitude or not. I just thought it was a bit dull.

And although I want to like Murakami, after the 'meh' response I had to Norwegian Wood and After Dark, I put down The Wind Up Bird Chronicle after no time at all. I should've learned my lesson by now.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Mitch - 03-04-2008 09:26

Hmm... I've not managed to get through to the end of any Hunter S Thompson, apart from Fear & Loathing In Las Vegas. Which is brilliant, but maybe its only the fact that it's so much shorter than the other books, that makes it readable?

And I've had loads of attempts at Catch-22, but I just can't stand it.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by King Mob - 03-04-2008 09:28

The only ones I've given up on in the last few years have been Jeff Noon's 'Pollen' (more fool me for trying a sci-fi novel in the first place) and Justin Cartwright's 'In Every Face I Meet', which I only gave a punt because the first paragraph was about sun-dried tomatoes and it made me laugh when I read it in Waterstones.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Lyra - 03-04-2008 10:11

I've been about halfway through Don Quixote for about a year now. I don't know why. I was really liking it and there was all sorts that I was getting excited about wrt my thesis. But somehow I got distracted. I deserve to be judged for that one.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Lyra - 03-04-2008 10:13

But also, life's too short to read all the books you'll really love, so in general I think there's nothing wrong with abandoning one that isn't doing it for you. Either you'll try it again one day and realise that the time was wrong, or not, it doesn't really matter.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 03-04-2008 11:26

God, I'm forever doing this. It's shameful, really. I've never got right to the end of anything by Thackeray, for a start.

I dunno what it is: if something grabs me it grabs me. A lot of people struggle with Ulysses, for example, but I couldn't put the bastard down when I read that. Yet other books that people breeze through I can't seem to handle.

Why, for example, did I devour Middlemarch yet put down Silas Marner after a few pages?

I hate this about me.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Andy C - 03-04-2008 11:37

I abandoned reading Don Quixote some distance into my first attempt because the paperback got rained on and fell apart.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by boris - 03-04-2008 11:44

The first two times I started the first Gormenghast book I only got about a third of the way through (I was probably too young to appreciate it properly). The third time, though, I was swept up by it, and read that one, and the other two, straight through. And I've reread them all a couple of times since (forgot about that in the rereading thread).

Generally speaking I always try and get through to the end of a book (I figure if someone's gone to all that trouble to write it, then the least I can do is read the bugger), but sometimes it is just too painful or laborious to continue. Hasn't happened for a number of years now (maybe I'm more discerning in my choices, as most of my reading these days is by way of a recommendation rather than picking something at random). I think the last book I failed to finish was The Bone People, by Keri Hulme - it was the most insipid, ghastly, cliché-ridden load of old bollocks I've ever come across. Highly unrecommended.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 03-04-2008 11:49

"Why, for example, did I devour Middlemarch yet put down Silas Marner after a few pages?"

Huh. I'm precisely the opposite - loved Silas Marner, couldn't slog through Middlemarch.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 03-04-2008 12:02

Collapse by Jared Diamond, for exactly the reasons Crusoe mentions about GG&S (which I didn't mind so much).

The Ingenuity Gap by Thomas Homer-Dixon, because it's aggressively boring and I really wasn't in the mood.

The Decameron by Giovanni Bocaccio, because, you know, I kind of got the point after the first six books.

Bowling Alone by Robert Putnam because while his methodology is solid, his understanding of community and social capital is irritatingly two-dimensional.

But here's the thing. Those books are all on my shelf. I do intend to read them one day. I feel it a moral failure on my part that I didn't finish them, and they sit there, acting as a silent reproach each time I pass them.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 03-04-2008 12:02

Lots of familiar stuff here. Titus Groan, Don Quixote, both about 100 pages in because I just got bored and it felt like I wasn't getting anything new. Finnegans Wake after a paragraph. Peter Ackroyd's Biography of London, about 450 pages in, expecting to go back to it and never having the patience.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by The Chubby Cyclist - 03-04-2008 12:05

And I finished Guns, Germs and Steel and Collapse, but I completely sympathise with AG and Crusoe. You read the opening chapter, and then the rest of the book tells you why it's right. You learn quite a lot of interesting trivia but really it's all supporting the opening thesis, over and over and over again, with nothing really new in the way of ideas, just more reinforcing data.

=====

Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Crusoe - 03-04-2008 12:17

I wondered sometimes if Jared Diamond had written a lot of "executive summaries" in a past life as a report writer.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 03-04-2008 12:23

"You learn quite a lot of interesting trivia but really it's all supporting the opening thesis, over and over and over again, with nothing really new in the way of ideas, just more reinforcing data."

That's what I like about the book. It's a very controversial and ambitious hypothesis. It needs a lot of evidence to back it up.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 03-04-2008 12:23

But the Third Chimpanzee wasn't like that at all, so he does know how to write differently.

But Chubby's criticism of Executive Summary-ism applies to a lot of books on history and politics. I don't think Diamond's

particularly unique in this respect. You could make a similar argument about pretty much everything Niall Ferguson's ever written, for instance.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Lyra - 03-04-2008 12:39

The thing about Middlemarch is it does reward the persistence of those who keep going; it starts off good and then you kind of meander along despite yourself and then the last hundred pages or so, it's like reading Red Dragon, it's that compulsive,

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Lyra - 03-04-2008 12:39

and so is basically an exception to the rule of life's too short that I mentioned before.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by ursus arctos - 03-04-2008 12:41

La Misteriosa Fiamma della Regina Loana

Eco's latest from a couple of years ago. An "illustrated novel" that makes Foucault's Pendulum seem as accessible as See Jane Run.

And what everyone else has said about Diamond.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Not me - 03-04-2008 13:00

Like Wyatt, I'm constantly doing this. And I suspect the fractious effects of heavy internet use on my consciousness and walking to work instead of commuting have made it worse over the last couple of years.

It's basically greed: when you've got 50 great-looking books on the shelf it's hard not to "just dip in"; before you know it, you've got 20 half-read corks staring you out. So you start another one.

Libraries are a good remedy for this, in that they give you a clear time-frame to finish up properly.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by imp - 03-04-2008 14:23

Bloody 'ell, Books is buzzing these days, and with some great threads too.

Tried and failed no less than four times with TE Lawrence's The Seven Pillars of Wisdom (I suppose I should try and fail seven times before I die, just to make the numbers correspond). Around the same number of times with Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus. When I was younger I'd struggle on for weeks with stuff like this, either because I'd paid for the books or received them as presents and felt it was rude to not read them. Now I'll dump something I don't like after 30 pages - like Andrew Collins' terrible book about having a normal upbringing in the 70s.

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 03-04-2008 15:22

I'm with GY on Diamond. He's of the "one long argument" school of nonfiction writing; his model is Darwin. I've never given up on one of his.

I did, though, fail to finish The Origin of Species. To be fair, I was convinced of the gist before I picked it up.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Reed Miller - 03-04-2008 15:32

As mentioned on that other thread, I can't get anywhere with Catch 22. I also couldn't get anywhere with The Bell Jar or Henry Miller's stuff, even though they were assigned to me for a class. I just faked it. I recently stopped For Whom the Bell Tolls and haven't resumed yet.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Bafflin Smoke Signals - 03-04-2008 15:33

Years ago, I bought It's You That I Want To Kiss by Maxim Jakubowski. (I didn't know who he was at the time). It was teeth-grindingly, rage-inducingly bad. Just unmitigated shit. The literary equivalent of getting sand blown into your eyes - painful and infuriating at the same time.

I'd never had a book make me physically annoyed before. It made me so angry that I'd spent money on it that, after hurling it across the room in disgust, I set it aside, with the firm intention of posting it back to him in his shop (I'd found out who he was by this point) with a letter asking him to never write anything, ever again. Then I just sort of never got round to it, and I'd forgotten all about it until I read this thread. I wish I still had it, now...

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 03-04-2008 15:38

Maxim JakubowskiGod, man: I've never read anything actually written by him, but he must be the worst translator from French in the history of literature. I read an anthology of French sci-fi translated by him when I was about 15. He did things like translating amateur, meaning "lover", as "amateur". I remember thinking he'd fail O-level.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Hofzinsler - 03-04-2008 18:09

Not an exhaustive list, but I've got about half way through all of the following without ever finishing them:

Cloud Atlas
A Brief History of Time
No Logo
Almost Like a Whale (by Steve Jones)

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Oldelpaso - 03-04-2008 18:46

The stubborn part of me means I normally finish such books eventually, but I couldn't manage:

One Hundred Years of Solitude
Joseph Conrad's Nostromo
The fourth book in the Dune series, and hence the rest of the series.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Reed Miller - 03-04-2008 19:46

I could never get through the first book of the Dune series.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by gyp - 03-04-2008 23:42

I don't do this very often at all. The examples I can think of:

Nostromo - Conrad
Gravity's Rainbow - Pynchon (twice!)
60 Stories - Barthelme (although I'm telling myself that I'll dip in occasionally and knock off another few stories)

I'm with GY and Wyatt on Collapse and GG&S - while you get the gist of his theory from the beginning, it's pretty worthless without the wealth of evidence he churns out.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Gyuri - 05-04-2008 00:59

I get sidetracked in the middle of books all the time, generally because I either lose interest or find something else shiny that catches my attention.

Sometimes, though, I'm reading something I genuinely enjoy, lose track of it for awhile, and then don't pick it back up because I've lost the plot/characters a bit and don't have the will to start back up from the beginning. Two of the more painful examples of this were Moby Dick, which I didn't bring on a 2-day business trip to NY that turned into a 3-week trip, and War and Peace, which I accidentally left at my parent's house following winter break in college with 100 pages to go. I then screwed up the will to read it again eight years later, only to leave it at my brother's house in DC when I moved to Germany. Ah, War and Peace, my own literary Waterloo.

Actually, now that I think about it, I'm not sure I was genuinely enjoying Moby Dick (I was about 1/3 through). I think I appreciated it more than liked it.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by erwin - 05-04-2008 04:21

I bought and started 'The Life and Times of Tristram Shandy' when I was going through a mini 'must improve myself' phase, but just found it too difficult.

Was enjoying Peter Carey's 'Oscar and Lucinda' when I agreed to do some book reviews for a friend's local newspaper. As that took up all my available reading time, I had to lay down the Carey. Will return to it one day.

.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by ant259 - 06-04-2008 17:59

I was once 250 pages into Bleak House when I went on holiday without it and picked up something else. When I got back to the Dickens job, I couldn't remember where I'd got to or what had really happened. Result: I gave it up. Luckily, I had the will to start it all over again a couple of years later, as it is one of the greatest books I've ever read.

I didn't have as much luck with the following, which I discarded with a "beh":

Life of Pi - Yann Martel
A Short History of Nearly Everything - Bill Bryson
Women in Love - D.H. Lawrence

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Fatter Hipper - 06-04-2008 18:23

more fool me for trying a sci-fi novel in the first place
Maybe it's because I'm currently banging my head against the desk trying to write my Research Masters proposal on Yevgeny Zamyatin's We, and maybe it's because that and Ursula K Le Guin's The Dispossessed are two of the four or five novels that have helped define who I am, but that kind of comment really narks me.

I've not got on with any of the Gabriel Garcia Marquez I've read- which is a bit of a shame as my parents bought me ten of his novels last Christmas (they did only cost a tenner, mind). I didn't particularly like Catch-22 either, but the weight of opinion telling me I had to like it dragged me through.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Gyuri - 06-04-2008 19:47

I didn't particularly like Catch-22 either, but the weight of opinion telling me I had to like it dragged me through. That was my exact experience when I first read Catch 22. About five years later, I picked it up again because I was in bed sick and bored, and thoroughly enjoyed it. I have no idea why I had such distinctly different experiences of it, unless pre-existing expectations play a huge role. If that's the case, then I should probably give Madame Bovary another shot, because I despised that book despite the overwhelming praise it had been given by people who's taste I usually trust.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 07-04-2008 16:28

Hunter S Thompson, apart from Fear & Loathing In Las Vegas.

The only one I've read, as well, aside from a lot of short stuff. Mischievously - knowing that my dad reads anything he sees laying around - I left this on top of the TV at their cottage. A week later, I got a phone call that began "What the hell was that you left me?"

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Jimski - 09-04-2008 22:20

I find that I am lucky (or discriminating) enough to rarely start a book that I don't end up at least somewhat enjoying, so in recent years there is only one book that springs to mind that I have put down halfway through, and that is Voyage to the

End of the Room by Tibor Fischer. That really was appalling. Smugly appalling.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by meerkat - 23-04-2008 21:38

I feel particularly embarrassed that I couldn't get through White Teeth. It's one of those things I feel I should have read, but it did nothing for me.

I managed to finish Falkner's As I Lay Dying, losing most of my will to live en route. But I couldn't make it through Absalom.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by the cantering captain - 07-05-2008 23:41

I lost my copy of dracula half way through, in the back of a bank managers car.

Still haven't finished snow, or midnight's children.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Alderman Barnes - 08-05-2008 07:35

When I was ten, I read The Hobbit and liked that, so my parents got me the Lord Of The Rings for Christmas.

God, that was hard going. I got half way through the second book and gave up, and didn't read anything other than non-fiction until I was at university.

It left me with a huge gap in my education when it comes to English literature, but an encyclopaedic knowledge of everything else.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Crusoe - 08-05-2008 08:52

Recently: Grotesque, Natsuo Kirino. Sterile and tedious, no sense of menace or foreboding as the story unfolded. The distant, dispassionate prose worked in Out as you wondered who would crack and what would happen next. This time the story is told retrospectively, but there was no pace or heat that made me care whodunnit.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Hofzinsler - 08-05-2008 12:11

I'm currently reading Tim Pat Coogan's hefty tome about the IRA. It's interesting stuff but I do have a sneaking suspicion that I'll get distracted before I get to the end.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by And I am the Life - 08-05-2008 17:06

One Hundred Years of Solitude

Is that the one where everyone has the same name. That book is very enjoyable until it becomes completely incomprehensible. Catch 22 is about 300-400 pages too long. It could do with more jokes as well.

Underworld is just tooooooo big. It's well written in spots, but if something is going to be about the size of a bale of briquettes, at least it should whip along at a decent pace.

I've never been able to finish At swim two birds, mostly because I lose the book. I always found myself running out of steam halfway through.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Drunk Academic - 16-05-2008 10:08

I do this all the time. It's got to the point where I can just open one of my unfinished books at a random page and still enjoy it - Yay! I'm freed from plot and narrative.

Most recent entries are:

Wolf Solent by John Cowper Powys. I felt I should really like it but got stuck about halfway through then accidentally on purpose left the book in a cottage in Norfolk. I then contrived to buy another one secondhand and lent it to someone almost immediately, as if scared out of my wits that I'd have to try and read it again.

The Book of Prefaces (ed. Alasdair Gray) - probably not supposed to read it all in one decade anyway.

Albion by Peter Ackroyd. I just know it'll be one of my favourite books but I just fall asleep when I open the pages. Currently on chapter three after three years.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Purves Grundy - 16-05-2008 10:28

And I am the Life wrote:

I've never been able to finish At swim two birds, mostly because I lose the book. I always found myself running out of steam halfway through.

Coincidentally I tried reading a that couple of weeks ago and gave up very swiftly, abandoning my copy on a train so someone else could have a go.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Robbos Left Nut - 28-05-2008 18:25

Hofzinsler wrote:

I'm currently reading Tim Pat Coogan's hefty tome about the IRA. It's interesting stuff but I do have a sneaking suspicion that I'll get distracted before I get to the end.

I'm reading Ed Moloneys take on the IRA and have discovered the same problem. It was great whilst I knew the beans were yet to be spilt on certain events but now I'm at the cease-fire/politics stage its lost its appeal...can't think why that is.

=====

Re:Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Lyra - 29-05-2008 09:02

And Steve McQueen's Hunger just won the Palme d'Or.

=====

Re: Judge me by books I've put down halfway through

Posted by Pants - 29-05-2008 11:04

Underworld is just tooooooo big. It's well written in spots, but if something is going to be about the size of a bale of briquettes, at least it should whip along at a decent pace.

I'm a pretty slow reader, but I flew through 'Underworld'. I found it really pacey. Not in a Dan Brown way, but in a so-addictive-you-want-to-pick-it-up-at-every-opportunity way. It was originally conceived as a novella (just that 80-something page first section). But when he'd done it, De Lillo saw an opportunity to turn it into something much wider. Which I reckon is one of the things that marks him out as a great.

=====