



An Underachiever's Diary

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Meet William, a devout underachiever. He enters life as the firstborn of identical twin boys. It is the last time he will beat his overachieving brother Clive, or anyone else for that matter, at anything.

This is William's manifesto for the underachiever. It is the chronicle of a lifetime of failure—part diary and part handbook for self-defeat. At once corrosively funny and surprisingly tender, **An Underachiever's Diary** is a classic tale of perverse perseverance.

An Underachiever's Diary Details

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From Reader Review An Underachiever's Diary for online ebook

Arwen56 says

Avrei dovuto attribuire al titolo un significato più reale che simbolico. Ma tant'è. Ormai i 14 euro li ho spesi (anche se l'inutile spreco risale ormai al 2002).

Scrittura mediocre, svolgimento mediocre, interesse mediocre. Non capisco proprio come The New York Times Book Review abbia potuto scrivere che questo sarebbe "un romanzo irresistibile, intriso di beffarda ironia" o come il Times Literary Supplement lo abbia potuto definire come "il manifesto di un giovane Holden dei nostri tempi".

Al di là di qualche sporadico brillante passaggio, è piatto come l'encefalogramma di un morto.

Steve says

Darkly funny, almost sour.

Laurie Reyes says

Long story short, this book was not as intriguing as I hoped it to be.

Sara says

This short novel is another I can add to the growing list of what seems to be predictable genre for me; that of the coming-of-age tale set in a prep school environment. Perhaps I crave these books to fill my regret at turning down a scholarship to attend one of these pretentious, torturous, academically-snobby (yet still highly coveted) prep schools, and I live vicariously through the pages. Such would be true of such books as Sittenfeld's "Prep", or Tobias Wolff's "Old School" perhaps, but An Underachiever's Diary is in an entirely different vein than such books. It chronicles the chronic underachieving of one half of a pair of twins; he is the opposite of his endearing yet perfect identical twin, Clive. William, his forever underachieving twin, details his lack of goal-orientation and his unfortunate imperfections as compared to Clive, beginning from birth and continuing, as William orders his life, through infancy, the latency period, adolescence, and into early adulthood. It was a funny, relate-able read, even for those high-achievers out there - or perhaps especially for them.

Hobart says

The recommendation I read for this called said it "may have been the funniest, most underappreciated book of the 1990s". Really? I remember the 90's having better taste. This is the very colored reminiscences of the lesser of two twins. William is constantly outshone by his brother Clive (despite testing as well as, if not

better than) from the cradle onward. Clive's more successful in school, socially, athletically, etc. He's better looking, healthier...better in ever conceivable fashion. William sees this from an early age and determines to keep things that way--to basically excel at not being as good as his brother (or anyone else for that matter). And in that, and in that only, does he find success. There are sentences/paragraphs scattered throughout the novel that almost make it worth the effort, like:

universal LOVE, the failing panacea of my parents' generation: flower children, baby boomers, whatever name you'd like to use. Exactly what had the sexual revolution gained them, after all? Some measure of bodily happiness, a sex instinct unfettered, the herpes virus, the social acceptability of T-shirts and cutoff shorts, but what else? Had they really changed our values and attitudes?

Aside from those momentary displays of authorial talent, there's no profit from spending time with this determinedly miserable character.

Julie Ehlers says

I bought this because I was interested in reading Anastas's recent memoir, *Too Good to Be True*, but I thought that, before reading his personal story, I should take the time read his most famous novel. Wow, am I sorry I did. A narrator who's even more loathsome than he's clearly intended to be--misogynist, judgemental, dull. A relentlessly one-note, droning monologue. The other characters sketchily drawn--which is a shame, because they all seem more interesting than the narrator.

I tried approaching this in a couple of ways. First, I tried to see the narrator as an emblem of Generation X, the supposed "slacker" generation. Yet if slackers really did exist and were not just a media creation, I think they felt as they did because they thought the world had failed their ideals. This narrator doesn't have any ideals, except for always wanting to be with a beautiful woman even as he wanders around unshowered.

Then I tried to tell myself that such a listless narrative is exactly what an underachiever *would* write, but honestly, an actual underachiever probably wouldn't bother to write down his story anyway, so that didn't work. It certainly didn't make the book any less excruciating.

At a certain point, the narrator tries to write an academic article that explores underachievers, and an excerpt of this article is included. This is clearly the author's attempt to explain why the narrator, and the narrative, are the way they are. It's interesting in a way, but none of it comes through in the actual character or narrative, so ultimately it's both clumsy and futile.

Perhaps the question is whether we can care about a narrator enough to read an entire book about him, when he gives us no actual reason to care about him. The answer is: we can probably make it through 144 pages, but no more than that, and even that will make us resentful.

Angie says

This was a quick read. The book is a fascinating tale of twins through the eyes of the lesser twin. It makes you wonder how the world would look if you constantly shared the space and the spotlight of literally your

better half."the spare" It sounds a little painful but the author gives you the impression that attaining the underachiever status is both an accomplishment and an experience worth trying!

Russell13013 says

A fine drunk read. No overarching beauty or grace to speak of, but sprinkled throughout with wit and intelligence. The narrator, like most of us, doesn't get what this game is all about, only that he's losing before he can balance his head well enough to see the score, let alone where the points are coming from. The novelty, maybe, is that he's naive enough not to think that position more than personally problematic.

It's one of the few novels I've read where I would've preferred a little less self-awareness and fewer frames between reader and subject, subject and plot.

Still, I'm glad I found it, glad it was printed, glad it was picked up, secondhand, by a bookstore near my my home. Physical objects in physical places can seize us, unaware, in a way that takes effort to click past. The virtual, the instant, and the on-demand can never touch that, can never add anything exterior to the conversation; it can only ever feed the frenzy.

I should go to bed.

Elizabeth says

Enjoyable for the most part.

This book started out great. I loved part one as he described his childhood and many (humorous) illnesses. But almost as soon as I internally declared my love for the book, it started to sound more like whining than wit. There are some fun passages, but the last half of the book started to get tedious. Though, the author did stay true to the title. I kept waiting for a payoff, but wouldn't that be against character?

christina says

Short but surprising. I hadn't realized that it mostly set in West Cambridge and his send up of the neighborhood is at times laugh-out-loud funny. The first 1/3 of the book from the "perspective" of a baby is insanely brilliant. One of my favorite sentences is on page 4: "I am lifted from my mother's arms to discover, for the first time, how solitude is really filled with other people, and I am unoriginal, a copy made from disparate parts: some drunk idea my father had, a soft place inside my mother's arguments for equal rights, organs and fluids, fireflies and stars."

samkrunch says

This redefined underachievement for me the way Camera Obscura's LP, *Underachievers Please Try Harder*, redefined underachievement for me. Underachievers cannot try harder if their underachievement is intentional and teleological (however delusional that purpose may be).

Although, I don't believe that this protagonist's underachievements were truly intentional; his diary reads like a post-hoc justification for past mistakes -- a telltale sign of unreliable narration. Otherwise, it's more or less a plotless story about middle class privilege, Cambridge liberals, old money, and a protagonist who stubbornly refuses to come of age. The antithesis of bildungsroman. Freud gets referenced a lot, which is kind of weird because I didn't know that people still took Freud seriously.

It's a short read. Four hours is plenty to finish this in one sitting. And it's funny, and I guess sorta original.

Eric says

A great example of it's the "how" not that "what" that often makes an enjoyable and memorable reading experience. The set up is simple: the narrator is the massive underachiever of the title to his overachiever identical twin brother. What could have been a tedious and clichéd exercise, ends up being clever and charming. I haven't laughed out loud so frequently from reading a novel in a very long time. The trick this author plays on us is he creates a sympathetic main character that steadfastly refuses and denies our sympathy, no matter how much he truly deserves it.

Conor says

I'm stuck between three and four stars on this one.

The case for three: It's nothing really mind blowing, and the character isn't really someone you would want to hang around with. It's also odd in that were it true, it would seem more bragging about one's faults. It's not true however, so it almost seems like projecting some sort of angry motive into laziness. Or none of these things...which is the case for four stars...I can't really figure out how I feel about the book. Things are very blurred together, and even the second part of my nearly bulleted thoughts on the matter have failed. If you're confused...it must be good?

Kate says

"And there I was, on a golf course at midnight with a girl I really liked, underachieving all over again in a misguided attempt to make it new, and pioneer a romantic avant-garde where nothing started, in the moonlight, would ever finish, and the greatest love, or kiss, would be the one that never grew beyond its promising beginning; that way no one would ever have to live with an imperfect lover's guilt when things came to an end, inevitably."

"No one would ever know me. No one would think of me first thing in the morning, call me to fill an empty afternoon, sit beside me in a movie theater and shudder, for a second, when I slipped my hand over the soft skin on the inside of a knee, remembering a deep caress."

Jay says

The tale of twins. One is the golden boy, bright, he has it going from the time he's born. The other, the

author of this book, is always ill, a late bloomer, a bit of a dullard. Outside of one test in grade school, where the second is tested as smarter than the first, the second twin really never wins. This is the story mostly of that second twin, going with the flow, optimizing his underachiever life trajectory. You can tell the story itself is a downer. It is. I did not appreciate the story or the character. But some of the lines in this book are the funniest sentences I have read. A typical description: "Underneath a tree on the grounds of the Divinity School I failed to kiss Missy Aronson, a submissive girl with shingles (chronic pain informed the corners of her smile). She hated me quietly, and refused my offer to walk her home. " If you like that kind of writing, you will like this book. I did.
