

HANNAH IS... OUTSPOKEN

“I’ve swapped binge-watching for binge-reading”

“

It was during the Christmas holidays that I finally admitted I had a problem. ‘I’ll

do so much with the time off work!’ I’d told myself. ‘I’ll run all my errands, do all the life admin I’ve been putting off. I’ll work out twice a day, socialise every evening, get out and enjoy the winter weather, and sleep at least eight hours a night!’

What I actually did was binge on TV. I watched so many Scandi crime dramas that they’ve since merged into one bleak but impeccably dressed haze, and then put away all ten hours of *Making A Murderer* in two days flat before desperately trawling through Netflix’s true crime category at 3am, a wild-eyed junkie in search of her next fix.

Thanks to live-streaming services binge-watching has become a generational affliction, but I was determined to resist the trend and do more with my life. Ever supportive, my dear partner bought me a Kindle for my birthday. Sigh. So naive. He wasn’t to know what he was about to unleash. After all, this is the man who is always vaguely reading half a dozen books at any one time, getting bored halfway through and then picking them up again months later. (I suppose I should feel honoured that we’re even in a relationship, given the alarming lack of commitment that such behaviour suggests.)

The thing is, long before I was addicted to TV, I was addicted to books. I was the nerdy kid who read with a torch under the duvet after lights-out, the precocious (ok fine, pretentious) pre-teen writing poems instead of

swapping Pokémon; I was the day-dreaming teenager with her nose permanently stuck in a novel. I loved books so much that, at the time, it seemed like a good idea to study English at Cambridge University.

I remember reading once that an English literature student at Oxford or Cambridge will read, on average, 300 books a year. I don’t know if that’s true, but it certainly felt like it at the time. Three years and an estimated 900 books later, I left university feeling like Bruce Bogtrotter after being forced Miss Trunchbull’s cake. What followed was a years-long period of rehabilitation through abstinence.

That is, until the Kindle came into my life. Has it made me more productive? Get out more? Sleep better? Absolutely not. All that’s happened is that I’ve swapped gorging on boxsets for bingeing on books. I’m getting through almost a book a day, forcing my eyes to stay open at 2am so I can finish one more chapter by dim lamplight. I’ve risked death-by-book numerous times, as I can’t look up from my Kindle long enough to safely cross the road. I spent an entire week talking to my partner in an Irish accent while in the midst of reading a series set in Dublin (at least, I thought it was Irish – I’ve since learned that the trick to me finally nailing an Australian accent is to attempt my version of an Irish brogue). I’ve actually flaked on friends because I’d rather get through another few chapters than a bottle of bubbly at ladies’ night. Worst of all, it’s far more expensive than my previous addiction – Netflix only cost me Dhs30 a month, but now I’m spending at least Dhs150 a week

on books.

Come on, I can hear you thinking – it’s hardly the most destructive of vices. You presume I must be edifying my intellect with great works of literature: wading through *Finnegan’s Wake*, perhaps, or mounting an assault against all 1,261 pages of *War and Peace*.

Nope. No Shakespeare here – instead I’m flicking from smash hit psychological thriller to page-turning police procedural like a woman possessed. My Cambridge professors must be turning in their ivory towers as I speak. I can hardly claim a cultural high ground when I’ve directly replaced bingeing on entire true crime TV series in one viewing with reading every Sophie Hannah detective novel in a matter of days.

But you know what? I don’t care. My man might be rueing the day he swapped his partner for an Irish-Aussie pseudo-detective with dirty hair (why wash when there are books to read?) and bruised knees from walking into lampposts, but when he gave me that Kindle he inadvertently gave me the best present I could ever receive: the gift of rediscovering the joy of reading. The joy of being utterly transported to another world – whether that’s the wild moors of *Wuthering Heights* or Tana French’s dingy Dublin police station.”



Hannah Bass is Stylist Arabia's deputy editor



WHAT DO YOU THINK? TWEET US @STYLIST_ARABIA
WITH YOUR OPINION ON THIS COLUMN