

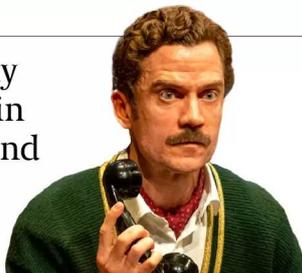
The quiet
genius of
Alice Munro

OBITUARIES P36



Basil Fawlty
triumphs in
the West End

DRAMA P26



Is Coppola's
Megalopolis a
megaflop?

FILM P27



THE WEEK

25 MAY 2024 | ISSUE 1489

THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Death of a hardliner Will anything change in Iran?

Page 4

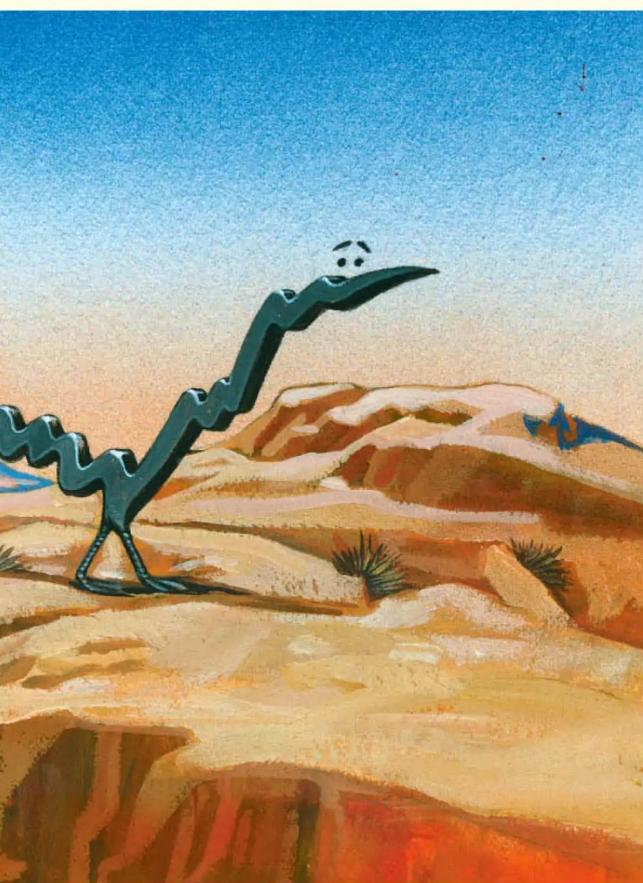






More than *two decades*
of hunting PROFITS
has given us a
deep understanding
of their habitats.

FROM blazing desert to icy waste, our hunters have explored the four corners of Profit territory. Often plunging off the beaten track, into virgin country, in search of previously undiscovered types of Profits. And, over the years, as these habitats have evolved, our hunters' knowledge has only deepened. The thing is, when you've been in the field for as long as we have, the whole world starts to feel as familiar as your front doorstep. **Your capital is at risk.**




ARTEMIS
The PROFIT Hunter

What happened

The blood scandal

Rishi Sunak offered a “wholehearted and unequivocal” apology this week to the victims of the contaminated blood scandal, on what he declared a “day of shame for the British state”. His statement followed the publication of an excoriating report into what has been called the worst treatment disaster in NHS history. During the 1970s through to 1991, more than 30,000 people in the UK were infected with HIV, hepatitis C or both, either from receiving transfusions during surgery or through “Factor VIII” blood plasma products imported from the US to treat haemophilia. More than 3,000 of these people have since died, and victims are still dying at a rate of around one every four days. The final report of the five-year public inquiry, led by Brian Langstaff, concluded that this was “not an accident” but a largely avoidable tragedy caused by half-a-century of “systemic, collective, and individual failures”.

The report pointed out that it had been “well known” from at least the 1940s that blood transfusions and the use of plasma could transmit hepatitis; and that ministers were warned in 1982 that there was a risk of people contracting HIV from blood products. Despite this, donated blood wasn’t screened



Protesters outside the inquiry

for HIV until 1985 or tested for hepatitis C until 1991. Blood products were imported from the US, where people were paid to donate, an incentive that resulted in many high-risk individuals, such as drug addicts and prison inmates, giving plasma. Doctors and health officials downplayed the dangers and delayed informing patients of infections, in some cases for years. Compromising documents were destroyed. The report highlighted the case of Treloar College – a specialist school in Hampshire for haemophiliacs – where doctors tested risky blood products on children without their knowledge. Of the 122 pupils who went to the school between 1970 and 1987, just 30 survive.

Having failed to heed warnings or to alert people properly to the risks from tainted blood, said Langstaff, successive governments then “compounded the agony by refusing to accept that wrong had been done”, ignoring calls for a public inquiry and sticking stubbornly to the dishonest line that patients had received the “best treatment available”. Sunak promised swift compensation to victims and families, saying “whatever it costs to deliver this scheme, we will pay it”. Andy Burnham, the former Labour health secretary and current mayor of Greater Manchester, said the inquiry’s report showed there had been “a criminal cover-up on an industrial scale”. He called for corporate manslaughter charges to be brought against Whitehall departments.

What happened

Death of a president

The funeral of Iran’s president, Ebrahim Raisi, was held in Tehran on Wednesday, three days after he was killed in a helicopter crash in the country’s mountainous northwest. A hardline conservative and close ally of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Raisi was returning from a visit to Azerbaijan when the two-blade Bell 212 aircraft he was travelling in crashed in fog. All nine people on board died; Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian was among the other officials killed. Tehran blamed the crash on the poor flying conditions and a “technical failure”: much of Iran’s helicopter fleet dates from the 1970s.

Khamenei named first vice-president, Mohammad Mokhber, as Iran’s interim president, and promised elections within 50 days. Thousands of people joined Raisi’s funeral procession; but many Iranians reacted to news of his death by setting off fireworks and posting celebratory messages online.



Raisi: killed in a helicopter crash

What the editorials said

When Raisi took over from the reformist Hassan Rouhani following 2021’s rigged elections, some Iranians thought it would catapult him to a bigger role, said *The Economist*. Khamenei, now 85, won’t live for ever and Raisi was tipped as his likely successor. Instead, the presidency cost Raisi his life. His death, in what was first described as a “hard landing”, inevitably sparked rumours of foul play: some Iranians speculated that Israel may have had a role in the crash; others pointed the finger at Raisi’s internal enemies. But officials have insisted it was an accident – while one also blamed the US. Western sanctions had made it hard for Iran to update its ageing US-made fleet.

Iran under Raisi has been a “source of constant trouble” on the world stage, said *The Washington Post*. It has menaced Israel; funded groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis; supplied drones with which Russia has killed civilians in Ukraine; and expanded its nuclear programme. Alas, hopes that Raisi’s demise will lead the regime onto a fresh course are almost certainly misplaced.

It wasn’t all bad

A flamingo that was said to be “unlucky in love” has laid her first egg, at the age of 70. Gertrude resides in a flamboyance of more than 65 flamingos at Pensthorpe nature reserve near Fakenham, Norfolk. Her keeper has acknowledged that she is unlikely, given her age, to hatch a healthy flaminglet, but said that many other flamingos at the reserve are sitting on eggs, and that Gertrude is sure to make “a great aunt and babysitter of the impending young”.

A former United States air force pilot who was nearly the first black person to go into space has now become the oldest person to go into space. Ed Dwight, 90, was recommended for Nasa’s Astronaut Corps in 1961. His parents received a congratulatory phone call from President Kennedy, but for reasons that are not clear, he was later dropped from the programme. He went on to become a sculptor. On Sunday, however, he travelled to the edge of space on Jeff Bezos’s Blue Origin rocket. “Long time coming,” he said after returning to Earth. “I thought I really didn’t need this in my life, but now I know I need this in my life.”



A centuries-old wooden door covered in graffiti from the Napoleonic era has been found at the top of a medieval turret at Dover Castle. As the threat of a French invasion grew, the ageing castle was transformed in the 1790s into a modern garrison, and conservators say the scratched images – which include a single-masted sailing ship, various figures being hanged, and a chalice on a cross – give a rare glimpse into the minds of the thousands of soldiers stationed there. The door has now been restored and put on display.

What the commentators said

This isn't just the NHS's worst treatment scandal, said the FT. It's also "a failure of the British state". The UK was one of at least a dozen countries that treated patients with tainted blood in the 1970s and 1980s, but most of the others compensated victims years ago. "Canada, Ireland, Japan and Denmark took action by the early 1990s." France charged former premier Laurent Fabius and two ex-ministers with manslaughter over the scandal in 1999. In the US, several drug companies paid out settlements in 1996. Why has it taken Britain so long to address this?

It's a "peculiarly British" problem, said Matthew Syed in The Sunday Times, all too familiar from other recent scandals, including Mid Staffs, Grenfell, Windrush and the Post Office. It stems from the fact that we put too much faith in institutions, particularly the NHS. We place them on "a moral pedestal", which makes them harder to criticise and leads to people putting the interests of organisations ahead of those they serve. That's how you end up with officials shredding documents, and doctors feeling entitled to use pupils "as guinea pigs". This scandal reflects badly on many individuals, said Anne McElvoy in The i Paper. The Tory grandees Ken Clarke and John Major, in particular, have come in for criticism for their "blasé utterances" to the inquiry. But the main culprit is what Langstaff calls this "institutional defensiveness".

It's welcome that the PM has pledged to fully compensate the victims, said the Daily Mail. The "real litmus test", though, is whether this shameful episode changes how we deal with future institutional malpractice. Burnham was right to suggest that there's something fundamentally wrong with "the system", said John Rentoul in The Independent. But his proposed remedies – corporate manslaughter charges and a new "Hillsborough law", imposing a duty of candour on all public servants – risk making things worse. Officials are "already under an obligation of truthfulness". It's one thing to charge individuals with manslaughter, but charging Whitehall departments would take up a lot of time, and could end with one part of government paying a fine to another part. "All the evidence of successful safety cultures in the private sector, such as the airline industry, is that incentives have to encourage openness without blame."

What the commentators said

Raisi's political career represented the Islamic Republic at its worst, said David Patrikarakos on UnHerd. As a Tehran prosecutor in 1988, he was part of a four-man "death commission" that "oversaw the massacre" of thousands of dissidents – earning him the nickname "the butcher of Tehran". A cleric and jurist by training, he won the presidency on a pitiful turnout. His time in office was defined by economic misery, soaring inflation and brutal repression: hundreds of Iranians were murdered by the state in the crackdown that followed nationwide anti-hijab protests in 2022. Raisi was only elevated to the presidency in the first place because he wasn't a serious rival to Khamenei, said Arash Azizi in The Atlantic. "Utterly uncharismatic" in election debates, he proved to be similarly incompetent in office. But that didn't matter to Khamenei, who was only interested in retaining a president who would "toe the regime's line".

Even so, Raisi's death adds to the sense that Iran is entering "uncharted waters", said Patrick Wintour in The Guardian. It follows elections in March, in which hardliners consolidated their control of parliament – albeit on a record-low turnout, after reformists were excluded. And it comes as tensions between Iran and Israel are running high. It seems that Khamenei wants his son, Mojtaba, to replace Raisi, said Roger Boyes in The Times. That would contravene the republic's founding principles, which rejected hereditary rule; but Khamenei, who is unwell, is "desperate" – and Mojtaba is "the man he trusts". Whatever happens, the next few weeks will be perilous for the regime, said Alistair Bunkall in The i Paper. Protests could erupt again, provoking a fresh crackdown; and factions inside Iran, such as a local offshoot of Islamic State, may unleash violence. But the regime will do everything it can to ensure that Raisi's death is as "inconsequential as possible", and the next president will be another hardliner.

What next?

Survivors of the scandal are set to receive between £1.1m and £2.7m in compensation. The Government says they'll receive an interim payment of £210,000 each over the summer, with final payments starting by the end of the year. Lump-sum payments will also be made to the family members of victims. The total cost is expected to be in the region of £10bn.

Langstaff's report recommends that tests should be carried out on anyone who had a blood transfusion before 1996, reports The Guardian, in order to identify the more than 800 people believed to still be unknowingly living with hepatitis C. The report also suggests that a permanent memorial should be set up to those affected by the scandal.

What next?

The US sent a muted official message of condolence following Raisi's death; however, UK security minister Tom Tugendhat said he refused to "mourn" the leader of a regime that has "murdered thousands". He was speaking after the European Council president, Charles Michel, was widely criticised for posting a message offering the EU's "sincere condolences" and "thoughts" to the families.

Iranian state media reports that elections to replace Raisi will be held on 28 June. Campaigning will take place from 12 June.

THE WEEK

When they are not worrying about the conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan and so on, there is another war that occupies the minds of some journalists and MPs, and that is the "war on motorists".

I think most "motorists" would think of themselves as car owners, or drivers. But however we describe them, there are a lot of them – some 79% of households own a car. And who is it that is having the audacity to wage war on this very large group? Often, it is local authorities, acting on behalf of those rival tribes – pedestrians and cyclists. The interests of these groups can be in conflict: traffic-calming systems can be tiresome for motorists, but make life more pleasant for pedestrians; some cycle lanes have caused appalling congestion. And yet, isn't the driver, infuriated by some idiot stepping into their path while gazing at a phone, also often a pedestrian, enraged by a careless or reckless driver? And don't some of those middle-aged cyclists in Lycra, weaving in and out of traffic, also own cars – and perhaps feel, when they are driving, irritated by any cyclists who get in their way? The fact is, many of us straddle all three tribes, and most of us want the same thing: unpolluted streets that we can navigate efficiently and safely. Cyclists can be unruly and dangerous (see page 19), but if more people felt safe enough to get out of cars and onto bikes, some or all of the time, the roads should be clearer for those who need to drive, some or all of the time.

Besides, for motorists and cyclists, isn't the real enemy actually the pothole?

Caroline Law

Editor-in-chief: Caroline Law
 Editor: Theo Tait
 Deputy editor: Harry Nicolle Managing editor: Robin de Peyer Assistant editor: Leaf Arbutnot
 City editor: Jane Lewis Contributing editors: Simon Wilson, Rob McLuhan, Catherine Heaney, Xanthe Nutting, Digby Wardle-Aldam, Tom Yarwood, William Skidelsky
 Editorial: Anoushka Petit, Tigger Ridgwell, Amelia Butler-Galle, Louis Foster Picture editor: Annabelle Whitestone
 Art director: Katrina Fiske Senior sub-editor: Simey Richman Production editor: Alanna O'Connell
 Editorial chairman and co-founder: Jeremy O'Grady

Production Manager: Maaya Mistry
 Account Directors: Aimee Farrow, Amy McBride
 Business Director: Steven Tipp
 Commercial Head, Schools Guide: Nubia Rehman
 Account Executive (Classified): Serena Noble Advertising Director – The Week, Wealth & Finance: Peter Carmidge

Managing Director, News: Richard Campbell
 SVP Subscriptions Media and Events: Sarah Rees

Future PLC, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR

Editorial office: 020-3890 3787

editorialadmin@theweek.co.uk



Controversy of the week

Starmer's promises

Politicians, or rather their “campaign shamans”, believe that all the modern public can really digest is a short list of policy points, said *The Times*. In 1997, Tony Blair had five punchy Labour pledges printed on a card. Less successfully, in 2015, Ed Miliband carved all his policies on a megalith, the “Ed Stone”. With the next election in the offing, Keir Starmer unveiled the six “first steps” that Labour would take in power in Essex last week. Starmer exuded purpose, in rolled-up shirtsleeves: this was “meant to be a big moment”. But the pledges were vague, and hard figures were disappointingly few. The six steps were: “Deliver economic stability”, by sticking to “tough spending rules”; “Cut NHS waiting times” with 40,000 more evening and weekend appointments each week; “Launch a new Border Security Command”, to stop illegal migration; “Set up Great British Energy”, a publicly owned clean power company; “Crack down on antisocial behaviour”; and “Recruit 6,500 new teachers” in key subjects.



The Labour leader: exuding purpose?

“The strange thing about Keir Starmer’s policy ideas is that they tend to evaporate as the years go on,” said Fraser Nelson in *The Daily Telegraph*. He ran for the Labour leadership with “clear, radical pledges”: abolish the House of Lords, end university tuition fees, nationalise energy and water. “Over time, such promises were downgraded, then dropped.” With his six steps, “it seemed his policy vanishing act was complete”. Growing the economy is “about as low an economic ambition as you can imagine”. “Tough spending rules” could mean anything; there was no tax pledge at all. Even those policies that had figures attached were underwhelming. If 6,500 new teachers were recruited tomorrow, it would raise the headcount by 1.4%. The pledges are “woefully inadequate to meet the problems we face”, said Andrew Fisher in *The i Paper*. The UK has been through the worst cost-of-living crisis on record. Child poverty and homelessness are soaring. Most of the problems in the public sector are due to staffing shortages, usually related to pay; there is nothing at all about this. People know that when things are in a mess, “you need significant change, not modest tinkering”.

You have to remember, said Andrew Rawnsley in *The Observer*, that the motto of many successful Tory campaigns is: “who scares wins”. Time and again, the Conservatives “have persuaded voters that Labour is just too risky to be trusted”. Last week, the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, tried to paint Labour as “a tax-raising menace”. But Starmer has made “de-risking” Labour central to his project. It works: focus groups “often have rude things to say about” him, but “scary is rarely one of them”. He takes the view that the public is “too cynical and mistrustful of politicians to buy into grandiose claims”; hence the modest pledges, which he can be sure to deliver. With an election coming in July, and polls putting Labour 20 points ahead of the Tories, it’s hard to see that his strategy is wrong.

Contaminated water

The owners of South West Water (SWW) have agreed to pay £215 in compensation to each of the households in Devon whose water supplies have been affected by the presence of the parasite cryptosporidium. The outbreak was detected last Wednesday, leading to 16,000 households in and around Brixham being issued with urgent boil-water notices. Dozens of people fell ill. By Tuesday, clean water was said to have been restored to 85% of homes. SWW said it had traced the likely source of the outbreak to a faulty valve that had allowed animal waste to contaminate the supply.

Fewer arrests request

Police chiefs have been told to make fewer arrests because of the shortage of space in prisons in England and Wales, *The Times* has reported. In a memo seen by the paper, chief constables are advised to consider pausing “non-priority arrests” and to suspend operations that could trigger “large numbers of arrests”. In Scotland, where jails are also overcrowded, Justice Minister Angela Constance said she was considering giving early releases to some inmates serving sentences of fewer than four years (and who are not in jail for sexual offences or domestic abuse).

Spirit of the age

The latest must-have accessory for schoolchildren is a £30 reusable plastic bottle that gives plain water a flavour of cola, or fruit juice, *The Guardian* reports. Users of the Air Up bottles buy pods which are attached to the nozzle. These infuse the water with scented air, causing the drinker to “taste” a flavour. There are more than 25 pods to choose from, including iced coffee and virgin mojito.

Doctors have urged people to resist a new trend, much discussed by online influencers, for “eye tattoos” – to permanently change the person’s eye colour. For the procedure, performed under local anaesthetic, a surgeon cuts into the patient’s cornea and injects it with dye. Complications include light sensitivity, infections and dye leakage.

Good week for:

Craig Mackinlay, who received a standing ovation on his return to the Commons, eight months after being rushed to hospital with sepsis. The Tory MP for South Thanet was given a 5% chance of survival. He was placed in an induced coma, and had to have his hands and feet amputated. He has since been fitted with prosthetics. As he entered the Commons on Wednesday, his fellow MPs rose to their feet to applaud him. “We don’t allow clapping,” said speaker Lindsay Hoyle, “but this is an exception.”

Have I Got News For You, which is launching stateside, 34 years after it first aired in the UK. The US version of the comedy panel show will be shown on CNN.

Baguettes, with the release in France of a “scratch ‘n’ sniff” postage stamp with the odour of a boulangerie, and a picture of the traditional loaf. “The baguette, the bread of our daily lives, the symbol of our gastronomy, the jewel of our culture,” declared the French post office, on its website.

Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder, who won the right to appeal his extradition to the US. His lawyers will argue that, because he is not a US citizen, and his case involves national security matters, the First Amendment right to free speech might not extend to him – which amounts to discrimination.

Bad week for:

Transport for London, which revealed that the US embassy owes it £14.6m in unpaid congestion charge fees. Japan’s embassy is second on its list of refuseniks, with an unpaid bill of £10m; India is third on £8.5m and Nigeria, China and Russia are close behind.

Poll watch

Labour has a ten-point lead over the SNP in Scotland. **29%** of Scots say they now plan to vote SNP in this year’s general election, down four points since April; **39%** say they’ll support Labour, up five points. This could give Labour 37 MPs in Scotland, up from two, and leave the SNP with 11. *YouGov/The Times*

38% of British Christians say they don’t like telling others about their faith. **38%** of Jews and **29%** of Muslims feel the same. *Whitstone Insight/The Daily Telegraph*

The Philippines, Israel and the US have the highest share of people who identify as LGBT+, at **11%** each, according to a Statista survey of 43 countries. In the UK, the proportion is **8%**; in South Korea it is **3%**.

Rouen, France

Synagogue attack: Police have shot and killed a man who set fire to a synagogue in Rouen, the latest in a recent wave of antisemitic crimes in France. The arsonist was spotted on the roof of the synagogue shortly after starting the blaze. When police arrived, he jumped down and ran towards them, threatening them with a knife. After issuing a warning, an officer shot at him five times. He died at the scene. The fire was brought under control, but the synagogue was badly damaged, and parts of the roof had fallen in. Authorities identified the attacker as a 29-year-old Algerian citizen who had applied for permission to stay in France for medical treatment and had been refused. He had not been flagged as an extremist suspect. This month, the prime minister, Gabriel Attal, said that more than 366 antisemitic acts had been recorded in France in the first quarter of this year, up 300% from the previous year.



Madrid

Far-right rally: Europe's far-right leaders assembled in Madrid last week for a "great patriotic convention" ahead of June's European elections, in which their parties are expected to see a

surge in support. Nearly 11,000 supporters of Spain's Vox party packed a stadium to hear from France's Marine Le Pen (above), Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Italy's Giorgia Meloni. Argentina's President Milei also attended, earning a standing ovation for a speech in which he backed corruption allegations aimed at the wife of Spain's Socialist PM, Pedro Sánchez. Demanding an apology, Madrid recalled its ambassador in Buenos Aires.

Amsterdam

Coalition deal: Six months after his shock general election victory, Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders has announced that his anti-immigration Party for Freedom (PVV) has secured a deal to lead a new four-party coalition. Wilders' efforts to forge a coalition had previously been frustrated by threats from potential partners to torpedo any agreement that made him PM; but having accepted that condition, he said the PVV was now ready to govern with two centre-right parties and the populist Farmer-Citizen Movement. It has not yet been confirmed who will take up the position of PM under the deal. The coalition's right-wing agenda is set to be a headache for Brussels: it has vowed to pass a temporary crisis law to enact the "strictest asylum policy ever", and agreed to scrap numerous climate measures. It also wants to defy EU attempts to make farmers reduce nitrogen pollution from livestock.

Kraków, Poland

Border investment: Poland's government has announced that it will invest £2bn to bolster security along its borders with Russia and Belarus. The country's border with Belarus, to its east, has been a flashpoint since 2021, when Minsk, a close ally of Moscow, began promoting it as a safe route for migrants seeking entry into Europe. Poland also shares a border with the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad to its north. Unveiling "the Eastern Shield" in a speech in Kraków last week, PM Donald Tusk declared that Poland will install military defences, bunkers and surveillance equipment and "obstacles" all along a 250-mile stretch. "We can proudly and honestly say that Poland is safer and stronger than ever before in modern history," he said.



New Caledonia, France

Deadly unrest: President Macron this week flew to the Pacific archipelago of New Caledonia, the French overseas territory where pro-independence protests have resulted in six deaths and widespread looting. The protests were sparked by Paris's plan to expand the rights of French residents to vote in the territory's elections, thus diluting the vote share of the indigenous Kanak people, who make up 40% of the population. In three recent referendums, Kanaks have had to accept losing a vote to break with France, but Paris's move to alter the electoral rules proved a step too far. A ban on social media site TikTok has failed to quell the unrest. Paris claims Azerbaijan, China and Russia have been stoking tensions with disinformation.

Kharkiv, Ukraine

Russian advance: Russian forces have advanced some 10km from the border with Ukraine towards Kharkiv, reaching the first of three defensive lines protecting the northeastern city, where they were stopped last week. The surprise assault, launched two weeks ago, has opened a new front in the war and resulted in Russia's biggest territorial gains since late 2022. President Putin says the offensive is in retaliation for Ukraine's shelling of Russian border regions, and that Moscow is simply trying to create a "security zone". But President Zelensky is treating it as the first wave in a wider assault, and has doubled down on pleas for further military aid, saying that Kyiv has only a quarter of the air defences it needs to hold the front line, and that 120 to 130 modern fighter jets are needed to counter Russian air superiority.



Zelensky's five-year term as president formally ended this week, but he will remain in office as the country is at war and under martial law. The president's approval rating has fallen since his landslide election victory in 2019, with voters upset by his perceived failure to tackle corruption, and his ruthless removal of senior officials. But he retains broad popular support, with two recent polls suggesting that 65% of Ukrainians trust him, while fewer than a quarter say they do not. Only 15% of those surveyed supported holding an election in the current circumstances.

**San Francisco, California**

Attacker jailed: The QAnon conspiracy theorist who broke into Nancy Pelosi's house in San Francisco two years ago, and bludgeoned her husband with a hammer, was sentenced last week to 30 years. David DePape (left), 44, had gone to the house in San Francisco in the early hours, to look for the then-

House Speaker, but she was away and he encountered Paul Pelosi, 84, who was in bed. But this week, the judge in the case admitted that she'd made a procedural error in failing to allow DePape to speak in court, and ordered the hearing to be reopened on 28 May. It's unclear if his sentence will change.

Los Angeles, California

"Diddy" assault: The rap mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs has released a video saying he is "truly sorry" for assaulting his former long-term girlfriend, singer Cassie Ventura, in a hotel in LA in 2016. Last week, CCTV footage emerged showing Combs, clad only in a white towel, kicking and punching Ventura in a corridor of the hotel, and dragging her along the floor. Ventura had previously mentioned the attack in a lawsuit she filed last November, in which she alleged that Combs had beaten her and made her have sex with male prostitutes, while he filmed it. He denied the allegations at the time, but settled the suit. In the past six months, several others have filed lawsuits accusing him of sexual assault.

Washington DC

Space weapons: The Pentagon announced this week that Russia had launched a satellite into a low Earth orbit, which it believes is a "counter space weapon" capable of attacking other satellites. Pentagon spokesman Major General Pat Ryder said that the satellite had been deployed in the same orbit as a US government satellite, and that Washington would be monitoring the situation. In recent weeks, Moscow and Washington have repeatedly clashed at the UN over space weapons. A US resolution, drafted with Japan, which affirmed an existing ban, was vetoed by Russia last month; this week, a Russian-drafted resolution failed to pass. Both sides accuse the other of seeking to militarise space.

**New York**

AI "imitation": Scarlett Johansson publicly rebuked the artificial intelligence firm OpenAI last week, after it launched a chatbot with a voice that she said was "eerily similar" to her own. The actress said that she'd refused a request by OpenAI founder Sam Altman – a fan of the film *Her*, in which she voiced the character of an AI assistant – to use her voice, and that she had been "shocked" to find that, instead, the firm had used a voice very like hers. OpenAI withdrew

the voice on Monday, but insisted that it had been provided by another actress, and was not an "imitation" of Johansson.

Porto Alegre, Brazil

Flooding misery: Large swathes of Brazil's southernmost state remained under water this week, more than three weeks after the region suffered one of the most devastating floods in the country's history. Days of torrential rain across Rio Grande do Sul in late April and early May led to rivers overflowing, flood barriers being breached, and entire towns and cities being submerged. At least 161 people died, and half a million were displaced. Now, the crisis this caused is being exacerbated by the exceptionally slow retreat of the waters – a problem caused partly by continued rainfall, but also by the same flood barriers that proved so ineffective in trapping the water in urban areas. Although the government recently announced a relief package worth the equivalent of £9.5bn, its critics say it is not nearly enough.

New York

Court cleared: The judge presiding over Donald Trump's trial in New York briefly cleared the court on Monday, in order to scold a key defence witness. Robert Costello, a lawyer, had been called to discredit testimony given by Michael Cohen, Trump's former fixer, who'd appeared as the star witness for the prosecution. But within minutes, Justice Juan Merchan had lost patience with Costello's behaviour. "As a witness in my courtroom, if you don't like my rulings, you don't say, 'Jeez.'" Merchan told him. "You don't give me side-eye, and you don't roll your eyes." Cohen had testified that Trump directed him to pay adult-film star Stormy Daniels \$130,000 in hush money, and then repaid him via fake invoices for legal fees. Trump's team accused Cohen of being a serial liar with a grudge against his former boss. Both sides have now rested their case; closing arguments are due to be held next week.

**Buenos Aires**

Arson attack: Argentina has been hailed as a pioneer of gay rights in Latin America, owing to its liberal laws on gay marriage and gender identity; but the deaths of three lesbian women in a suspected arson attack on a boarding house in Buenos Aires earlier this month have triggered claims that Javier Milei's right-wing government is fostering a new culture of intolerance. In what is being seen as a hate crime, a man in his 60s allegedly threw a Molotov cocktail into the room shared by two lesbian couples late in the evening of 6 May. Since then, protests have been held against the government, which has scrapped the country's anti-discrimination agency, and banned the use of gender-inclusive language in the military.

Kinshasa

Coup attempt: An opposition politician was killed this week during an alleged attempted coup in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A group of heavily armed men dressed in military fatigues attacked the home of Vital Kamerhe, a close ally of President Félix Tshisekedi, in the early hours of Sunday morning, and briefly occupied the presidential palace in Kinshasa. Security forces were soon on the scene, however, and among those killed in the ensuing shootout was the alleged coup leader, Christian Malanga, a businessman and opposition leader who had been living in the US. His 21-year-old son Marcel, a US citizen who was born in Utah, was arrested. Tshisekedi was elected president in 2019, in a poll that was widely described as rigged, and re-elected in 2023 in a poll marred by election violence.

Gaza Strip, Palestinian Territories

Pier complete: The US military has completed its construction of a floating pier for the delivery of aid by sea to Gaza. Ordered two months ago by President Biden, the pier should eventually be able to handle 150 truckloads of supplies a day; the UN has said at least 500 are needed to meet Gazans' basic needs. This week, the UN warned that its stocks of food and tents in the southern two-thirds of the Strip had run out entirely, with no likelihood of resupply, owing to the closure or partial closure of entry points since Israel launched its assault on Rafah a fortnight ago. On Tuesday, it said it was suspending distribution of aid in Rafah. More than 600,000 people have now fled that city to a "humanitarian zone" on Gaza's southern coast, where aid officials have described the conditions as "horrific".

Last week, Israeli troops recovered the bodies of four Israeli hostages. Amit Buskila, 28, and Itzhak Gelernter, 56, were thought to have been seized alive at the Nova music festival on 7 October, but it seems they were killed there. Ron Benjamin, 53, was on a cycling trip when he was murdered. Shani Louk, 22, was killed at the festival; Hamas militants then paraded her body through Gaza on the back of a truck.



Bangkok

Flight turbulence: A British national died this week when the Singapore Airlines flight he was on met severe turbulence at 37,000ft; many others were injured, seven critically. The dead man, Geoff Kitchen, 73, is reported to have had a heart condition. Witnesses said the plane suddenly started shaking and then dropped sharply. Passengers not wearing seatbelts were launched to the ceiling. Turbulence is common, but even in extreme cases, fatalities are rare. The plane landed in Bangkok.

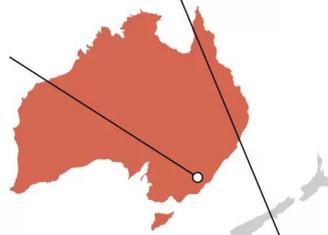
Pretoria

Zuma barred: South Africa's constitutional court has barred the former president Jacob Zuma from running for a seat in parliament in next week's general election. The court ruled that the 15-month jail term it handed to Zuma in 2021 disqualified him, citing a clause that prohibits anyone sentenced to a year or more in jail from sitting in parliament in the next five years. Zuma resigned as president in 2018 under a cloud of corruption allegations, and was jailed for refusing to testify at a judicial inquiry into government corruption. Having fallen out with the ANC – which he once led – he has been campaigning for a new party, the MK. It is fiercely critical of the leadership of the ANC, which may fail to secure a majority next week.



Canberra

Portrait row: Australia's richest woman has sparked a debate about art and censorship by asking the National Gallery of Australia to remove an unflattering portrait of her from a temporary show. The Aboriginal artist Vincent Namatjira's painting of mining billionaire Gina Rinehart hangs alongside satirical portraits of other influential people, but her supporters say hers is particularly cruel. Her company, Hancock Prospecting, was founded by her father, who in the 1980s advocated for the forced sterilisation of Aboriginal people. The gallery has declined her request.



Taipei

New president: Lai Ching-te marked his inauguration as Taiwan's president this week by calling for peace in the Taiwan Strait, and urging Beijing to "stop threatening" the self-ruled island. Like his predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, Lai is a member of the pro-sovereignty Democratic Progressive Party. It has trodden a cautious path, to avoid appeasing or antagonising Beijing, but Lai's rhetoric has in the past been stronger than Tsai's; and his speech drew an angry response. Chinese state media accused him of "inciting hatred", and rejected his calls for dialogue as "lies".

How to live off the land

When Max Cotton decided to live for a year off the produce from his five-acre smallholding in Somerset, the former BBC reporter set himself strict rules, says Jane Fryer in the Daily Mail: no foraging, no bartering, no eating out, no gifts. He had polytunnels full of veg; made bread from his own wheat; used milk from his cow to make butter and yoghurt; and drank nettle tea. It was hard work and there were low points. At the start, he had so little in the ground that he lost weight, and found himself standing over his plants, urging them to grow. Later, there were gluts – a month of cantaloupe melons, a “very middle-class problem”. By the early spring, there was so little food left, he lived off fried eggs and potatoes, and his weight ballooned. And there were setbacks, such as rats eating his barley, crushing his dream of home-brewed beer. But overall he loved it, and when the project ended, he missed it. “I’d had a purpose,” he says. “And suddenly it was over, and everything felt beige and lame and very, very boring.”

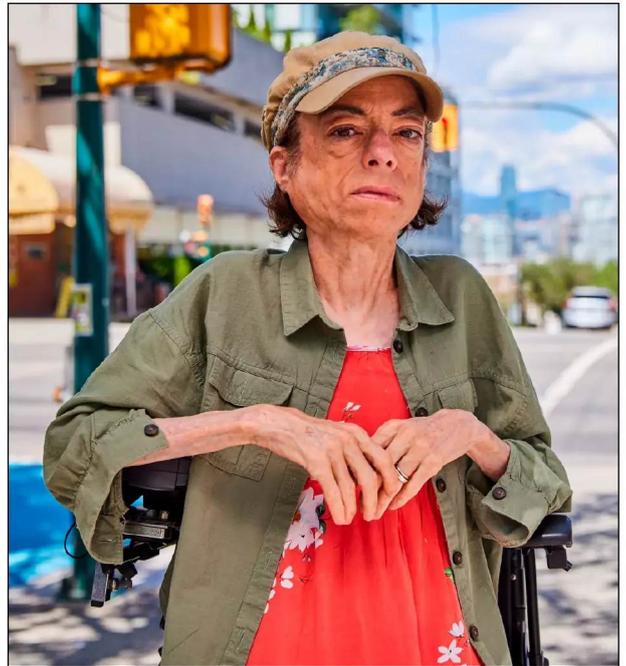
Keeping up with comedy

Jerry Seinfeld made a fortune from his sitcom *Seinfeld*, and could easily have spent the rest of his life watching baseball, says David Remnick in The New Yorker. Instead, he spends his days painstakingly crafting jokes. As a form, he says, the sitcom is probably dead – killed by “the extreme Left and PC crap”, and by the layers of

vetting that jokes have to go through before they make it to the screen. But standup lives on, in part because standup comics are “not policed by anyone. The audience polices us. We know when we’re off track.” And though what is deemed funny keeps changing – like the gates shifting on a slalom ski course – he doesn’t see that as a problem. As a comic, he says, he should “be agile and clever enough that, wherever they put the gates, I’m going to make the gate”.

Snubbed at the Oscars

When the film version of his novel *Brooklyn* was nominated for three Academy Awards in 2016, Colm Tóibín (see page 25) found himself being invited to the Oscars, says Lisa Allardice in The Guardian. But there was no red-carpet moment for him. “They have a separate entrance for people like me,” he explains. “It’s bad lino. It’s mouse colour. It’s nothing. It’s to get you quickly into the buildings. No one wants to photograph you. No one wants to interview you and everyone just wants you to go away.” It was much the same inside: he was sat at the back, and spoke mainly to an Irish barman. But he doesn’t think any of that was a bad thing. “Generally, I think it’s really important for novelists to go to those awards to realise you’re nobody and you’re nothing. And if you said to anyone, ‘I’m the guy that wrote that,’ they would say, ‘Are you famous? No, you’re not famous. You are some bald guy from Ireland.’”



Growing up in the Wirral, the *Silent Witness* star Liz Carr was, for a time, “the popular kid”, she told Anna Moore in The Guardian. “I was fit, the best girl runner in the class; smart. Everyone wanted to be my friend.” Then her family moved to the US for two years, where Carr, at seven years old, fell ill with a rare autoimmune condition. “I didn’t return home as the all-conquering ‘Wow, you’ve been to America, tell me more’ – like the beginning of *Grease*,” she recalls. “It was: ‘Eeew. You’re not the same. You’re not her.’ And I wasn’t the same. I was walking, but I couldn’t run. I struggled to sit on the floor in assembly. I was chubbier because of the steroids I’d been taking.” By the age of 11, she was using a wheelchair; in her early teens, a doctor told her she wouldn’t live to old age. Her mother wrote in her diary that Carr would often tell her she wanted to die; but she made it through her teens, went into law and eventually became an actress. Now, she has made a documentary for the BBC, arguing against assisted dying. She doesn’t judge people who take their own lives, she says; but she does wish that instead of fighting for the right to die, more campaigners would focus on the conditions in which disabled people have to live. “I don’t understand why people aren’t fighting that. We’re talking about suffering that, on the whole, we could sort out.”

Castaway of the week

This week’s edition of Radio 4’s Desert Island Discs featured the athlete Dame Sarah Storey

- 1* *Livin’ on a Prayer* by Jon Bon Jovi, Richie Sambora and Desmond Child, performed by Bon Jovi
- 2 *Spinning Around* by Ira Shickman, Osborne Bingham, Kara DioGuardi and Paula Abdul, performed by Kylie Minogue
- 3 *It Only Takes a Minute* by Dennis Lambert and Brian Potter, performed by Take That
- 4 *A Different Beat* by Ronan Keating, Stephen Gately, Shane Lynch, Keith Duffy, Martin Brannigan and Ray Hedges, performed by Boyzone
- 5 *This Is the One* by Ian Brown and John Squire, performed by The Stone Roses
- 6 *Heroes* by David Bowie and Brian Eno, performed by David Bowie
- 7 *Wannabe* by Spice Girls, Matt Rowe and Richard Stannard, performed by The Spice Girls
- 8 *Step On* by John Kongos and Christos Demetriou, performed by Happy Mondays

Book: *The Chimp Paradox* by Prof Steve Peters

Luxury: a snorkel and mask

* Choice if allowed only one record

Viewpoint:**Tipping, the American way**

“Tipping in America is really out of control. In upscale restaurants, 20% is a minimum. You are expected to tip a barperson every single time they give you a drink. You must also, of course, tip taxi drivers and anyone who delivers anything. You must tip manicurists. And baristas in coffee shops. And the people who look after your kids. I’ve had to pay a hefty tip at a breakfast buffet, where no one gave me anything. These days, Americans are often asked to tip at self-checkout machines. And I’ve seen people try to justify this by saying: someone worked hard to get merchandise into the shop. To which I can only reply: ‘Well, great, why not give them a salary?’”
Sean Thomas in The Spectator

Farewell

Dabney Coleman, actor who had memorable roles in *Tootsie* and *9 to 5*, died 16 May, aged 92.

Frank Ifield, yodelling singer of 1960s hits including *I Remember You* and *Lovesick Blues*, died 18 May, aged 86.

June Mendoza, doyenne of portrait painters, died 15 May, aged 99.

Sir Tony O’Reilly, Irish businessman and former rugby international, died 18 May, aged 88.

Commander “Sharkey” Ward, pilot decorated in the Falklands War, died 17 May, aged 80.

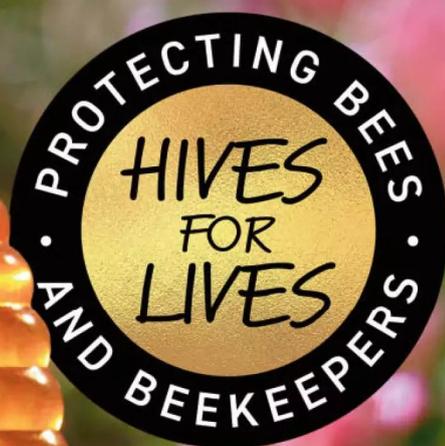
pooky 



lighting that breaks the rules,
not the bank

Shop rechargeables at pooky.com

The tastiest squeeze
that protects the bees



Our Hives for Lives programme has
supported bees and beekeepers
for over 15 years

The gentlemen's clubs of London

The Garrick's decision to admit women has put London's "Clubland" in the spotlight

What is the origin of these clubs?

London's oldest gentlemen's club, White's, began life in Mayfair in 1693 as Mrs White's Chocolate House, founded by an Italian migrant, Francesco Bianco. It was a place where men could meet up, eat, drink and socialise – with a gambling room in the back. It became fashionable, and notorious for bad behaviour and massive gambling losses – Jonathan Swift called it the “bane of half the English nobility”. In the late 18th century a series of similar institutions sprang up in St James's in the West End of London. Boodle's started up in a tavern in 1762, and was named after its head waiter. White's was for Tories, Brooks's was for Whigs, Boodle's for the country set. These clubs became known in the Georgian period for their atmosphere of aristocratic excess, says Seth Alexander Thévoz in his history *Behind Closed Doors*, and for “days-long around-the-clock gambling fuelled by port and laudanum”.

How were clubs different after the Georgian era?

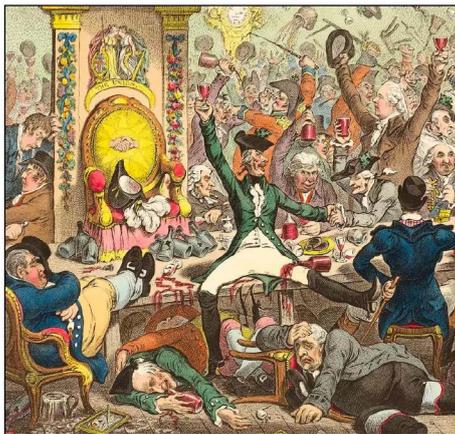
The Victorian era was the heyday of the club. They became more respectable, and took the form that they still have today: a typical one would be located in a grand Palladian mansion on St James's Street, on Pall Mall, or nearby – an area known as “Clubland” – and would have a formal dining room with a shared table, a bar, a library, a billiards room, private rooms for gambling and bedrooms for members who needed them. Clubs multiplied: there were more than 400 in London, reflecting common interests and professions. The Reform Club, founded in 1836, was for Liberals; the Carlton Club for Conservatives; The Athenaeum for men in the arts and sciences; The Garrick Club for actors and writers; The Army & Navy for the Forces; The East India Club for those who had served in India. Later, women's clubs such as The Pioneer Club and the Alexandra were also set up, a little further north.

Why were they so popular?

They were often described as a home from home. Various theories have been advanced for their appeal: that aristocrats needed somewhere to relax, because they felt on show in their own grand homes; that MPs, who were increasingly drawn from the provincial middle classes, needed somewhere to stay, meet and work in London; that men educated in boarding schools wished to recreate similar all-male environments; that London's growing professional classes enjoyed spending time in grand surroundings and wanted to make influential contacts. At a certain point, club membership became so ubiquitous among “gentlemen” that for many it was unthinkable not to join one. At any rate, for more than 100 years, clubs became a central feature of the British establishment. Edward Ellice, a 19th century Whig MP, said that the UK had a system of “club government”.

What about the snob value?

The exclusivity was undoubtedly important. Benjamin Disraeli



The Union Club (1801) by James Gillray

remarked that there were only two things that an Englishman couldn't command – being made a Knight of the Garter, and a member of White's. Members had to be elected: proposed by one existing member, seconded by at least one other, then voted on by the rest, anonymously, often using white or black marbles: the number of black balls that would lead to a rejection, or blackballing, varied from club to club. Members were expected to observe strict dress codes and other rules, and to exhibit the more general and ill-defined quality of being “clubbable”.

How have they changed since?

Clubs retained their importance in the early years of the 20th century, though few new institutions were formed – the exception being Buck's, founded by

Captain Herbert Buckmaster after the First World War, because he wanted a rather less stuffy atmosphere and, shockingly to some, an American cocktail bar. Buck's would inspire P.G. Wodehouse's Drones Club, and give the world the Buck's fizz, invented there in 1921. After the Second World War, London's clubs greatly declined in number; they began to seem hidebound and at odds with an increasingly meritocratic culture – often associated with “club bores” and old men sleeping in armchairs.

So what's left of them now?

Today, there are about 40 gentlemen's clubs in the capital, according to the Association of London Clubs. To some extent they have been supplanted by a new breed of private members' clubs, such as Soho House, The Groucho Club and 5 Hertford Street, which are more glitzy, and run as commercial operations, not member-owned organisations. Such clubs also, of course, admit women. Many of the remaining gentlemen's clubs have changed, to a certain extent. The first of the old breed to admit women on an equal basis was The Reform Club, in 1981. The Athenaeum followed in 2002. Most now do so, although membership remains overwhelmingly male. Pratt's has admitted just two or three women since changing the rules last year.

Which clubs don't admit women?

Only a handful are still male-only: The Travellers Club, the Savile Club, The Beefsteak Club, Boodle's, Buck's, Brooks's, The East India Club and White's. The right to remain single-sex institutions is protected by law, in the Equality Act 2010, but pressure is mounting: the East India and the Savile are reportedly wavering. Even the Beefsteak Club, where waiters are all addressed as “Charles” to save members the bother of remembering their names, is said to be considering it. Several are holding out, though. The Travellers rejected the idea of female membership in 2014, with one member noting that a single-sex club allowed them to enjoy “male banter, without having to bother with the etiquette that one inevitably must adhere to in female company (whether it be offering her drinks, waiting for her to eat, or standing when she arrives or leaves)”.

Shame and scandal in St James's

The final rebellion against Boris Johnson's premiership was precipitated by his deputy chief whip Chris Pincher's resignation in June 2022: Pincher had, in his own words, “drunk far too much” at the Carlton Club and had allegedly sexually harassed two men. It was, however, far from the first time that history had been made, and scandal unleashed, in London's clubs.

In the late 1700s, the Whig statesman Charles James Fox was bankrupted by vast losses incurred on the gaming tables at Brooks's; his gambling became a matter of great public fascination. The Albemarle Club, a mixed institution to which Oscar Wilde belonged, was the location of the incident that led to Wilde's trial and imprisonment. In February 1895, the Marquess of Queensberry, the father of Wilde's lover, burst in, demanding to see the writer. His way was blocked, and he left a card, with the words: “For Oscar Wilde, posing sodomite [sic].” This led to Wilde's failed libel case, and then to his prosecution. Kim Philby was a member of White's, and the Cambridge spy ring is sometimes said to have been orchestrated from its bar. In January 1961, the Soviet naval attaché Yevgeny Ivanov met the osteopath Stephen Ward at the Garrick. This would lead, via Christine Keeler, to the Profumo scandal.

Wise up: we can't let Putin win this war

Phillip Inman

The Observer

Thousands of us have no direction home

John Burn-Murdoch

Financial Times

What's broken in the NHS is the exit door

Robert Colville

The Sunday Times

The super-rich need their pips squeaked

Polly Toynbee

The Guardian

Western leaders just don't get it, says Phillip Inman. "Putin is not a pantomime villain. He is the real deal." He's digging deep to win the war in Ukraine not just to recapture land that "belongs" to Russia, but because he "needs the war to stay in power". Buoyed by his smart new defence chief and China's unofficial support, he has knocked out 60% of Ukraine's electricity supply; meanwhile, Russia's new advance in the north threatens Kharkiv and could break the deadlock across the eastern front. Let us be clear: this poses an existential threat to Europe. Ukraine produces over 10% of the world's wheat and is rich in minerals – assets Putin will use against us if he wins. The EU and UK must recognise the gravity of the situation and cease dithering about confiscating the £300bn of Russian central bank funds held in their accounts: the move is justifiable in international law as a "countermeasure" to Russia's illegal invasion, which has inflicted \$486bn worth of damage on Ukraine. Like it or not, there's a war raging, "and someone will win. It had better not be Putin."

When we think of the homeless, we tend to picture people with mental health or addiction problems sleeping rough on the streets. But, actually, by far the largest category is those who, unable to afford housing, have to live in substandard temporary accommodation. And the UK has the "ignominious" distinction of having by far the highest rate of this in the developed world: an "astonishing" one in 200 households is in emergency lodging. In England, the number more than doubled between 2010 and 2023, from 49,600 to 109,000. It's a miserable existence. More often than not, temporary housing is damp and insect infested; and being moved from place to place disrupts children's schooling and makes it almost impossible to hold down a job. It's not hard to see where the blame for this lies. Relative to population size, Britain builds far fewer homes than most other rich countries, with the result that private-sector rents have spiralled. Add in the dearth of social housing and the freezing of housing benefit, and you see at once why more and more people are consigned to a "peripheral and fragile existence" outside the formal housing sector.

The thing that's most wrong with the NHS today, says Robert Colville, has nothing to do with the NHS. Once inside its hospitals, patients generally get good treatment: the big problem is getting there in the first place. The dearth of beds in care homes and rehabilitation units, and the lack of staff available to conduct care assessments, make it so hard to discharge old patients, there's not enough room for new ones. It's a problem that has escalated in the past decade. In January 2015, 650 patients had to wait more than 12 hours before being admitted to A&E; last month the figure was an astonishing 42,078. The failure to discharge patients can be due to inefficient hospital procedures, but in the overwhelming number of cases, as the latest figures show, the NHS is simply waiting on other parts of the public services to secure their release. This clogging-up of the system explains why, despite a 22% increase in the number of doctors and nurses, the number of hospital treatments actually fell between 2019 and 2023. The Tories aren't lying when they say they've invested in the health service. But the hard truth is "you can't fix the NHS without fixing social care".

Don't be fooled by this year's Sunday Times Rich List, says Polly Toynbee. It laments that Britain's "billionaire boom has come to an end", even though their number is only down by six (to 165). And you only had to visit the Elite London lifestyle event last weekend – with its hangars of private planes, hovercrafts and supercars – to see there are still "vast riches swashing around in Britain". The jet set are doing just fine, thanks. The question is why we're not asking them to pay a bit more tax. They'll all move abroad, people cry. Rubbish. When the tax system was made less generous for non-doms in 2017, a mere 6% upped sticks – and they were the ones paying the least tax in any case. Moving is actually not something the super-rich do lightly. Listen to the words of financier Guy Hands, who fled to Guernsey in 2009 to avoid Labour's top-tax rise. "For me it was a disaster," he wrote last year. "I lost the flow of the market." So ignore the special pleading. The fact is, the super-rich could easily afford to pay a bit more tax, and our country badly needs the money.

IT MUST BE TRUE... I read it in the tabloids

A farmer in the Netherlands has made what is thought to be the world's first pig's milk ice cream. Dubbed "pork ice cream", it can be tasted by visitors to the farm Piggy's Palace, in a village in the east of the Netherlands. "People really like it, we have almost run out of our first stock," said the farm's owner, Erik Stegink. "It's a delicious ice cream," was one visitor's verdict. "A bit greasy, nice and creamy." Pig's milk contains around 8.5% fat, compared with 3.5% in cow's milk and around 4% in human's milk.



A couple in their 20s have decided to live as if it were the 1940s, BBC Norfolk reports. Liberty Avery, 24, and Greg Kirby, 29, dress in period clothing, own a 1942 American Jeep and spend as little time using technology as possible, playing board games in the evenings and going to traditional dances when they can. At their wedding, they wore 1940s finery, then spent their honeymoon in Brighton. "It's just a simple life, really," Kirby explained.

A university in Philadelphia has apologised after an official mispronounced scores of names at a graduation ceremony. Footage of the incident, which has gone viral, shows a Thomas Jefferson University official butchering even simple names. "Molly Elizabeth Camp" was read out as "Mollina-zabeth-cap". Sarah Virginia Brennan was read out "Sayer Oo-voon Geen-goo Bree-none"; Jessica became "Jay-sic-u", and Thomas "Tha-mo-may". The university explained that it happened because phonetic spellings had been written on the announcer's cards.

Banning lab-grown meat: another front in the culture war

Behold, “another red-meat culture war issue” is born, said Nitish Pahwa on [Slate](#). In the past few weeks, Florida’s governor, Ron DeSantis, and Kay Ivey of Alabama have both signed laws banning the sale of lab-grown meat in their states – even though efforts to bring the product to the market have stalled. Last year, two firms were given federal approval to “grow” beef and chicken patties and nuggets, by immersing animal cells in nutrient-rich broths. The idea is that this could provide a no-kill, more climate-friendly alternative to livestock farming. But “cultivating” meat turns out to require a lot of amino acids, energy and other resources and, so far, it’s not proved commercially viable. You can’t buy it in any shop in the US. Nonetheless, DeSantis criminalised the creation and sale of it, claiming that he was “saving our beef” from the “authoritarian plans” of the “global elite”.



Un-American? An AI-generated image of synthetic beef

milk accounted for 15% of the milk market in 2020). But it’s also the case that, like so many things, meat has become political. The *Maga* base considers devouring burgers and steaks “a badge of allegiance” and manliness. So it swallows conspiracy theories about global elites forcing people to subsist on lab-grown nuggets and insects. This concern isn’t entirely the product of fevered imaginations, said [National Review](#). When someone as powerful as Bill Gates argues, as he did in 2021, that “all rich countries should move to 100% synthetic beef”, it’s bound to

put people on edge. But the answer is to pass a law protecting “the freedom of Floridians to eat whatever they want”, not to limit choice by banning lab-grown meat.

DeSantis is guilty of state paternalism of the worst sort, agreed Nick Catoggio in [The Dispatch](#). “Take your fake lab-grown meat elsewhere,” he crowed. “Florida has heard enough on that.” When did he get to speak for the state, in shunning a potentially game-changing industry? That’s not conservative. It’s anti-science, anti-progress, anti-free market and authoritarian, like virtually everything in today’s Trumpified GOP.

Conservatives used to oppose government interference in the market, said Paul Krugman in [The New York Times](#). Now they’re passing laws to stymie private-sector rivals to traditional agribusiness. Partly, this is to protect their allies in the industry, who fear losing market share (not without reason: plant-based

How Trump lost out in the TV debates

Jim Geraghty

The Washington Post

It’s on, says Jim Geraghty: after months of uncertainty, Joe Biden and Donald Trump have agreed that they will take part in televised presidential debates after all. There are typically three such clashes in the run-up to the election, and the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates had proposed that they take place between 16 September and 9 October. Biden said no to those events, but he has now secured Trump’s agreement to two earlier debates – on 27 June and 10 September. For Biden, who risks coming across as doddery on stage, this “absurdly early” schedule is a boon. The first debate will take place a week before the Fourth of July, when most people are focused on the summer holidays. Unless one of the candidates has a heart attack, no one will remember much about that event. The second will occur the week after Labour Day, when children are going back to school. It would be hard to pick two weeks in the year when Americans are less “tuned-in to the news cycle”. Trump will no doubt demand further debates, but Biden’s team will reply that he’s had his fair share, pointing out that Trump refused to take part in any Republican primary debates. “The guy whose name is on the cover of *The Art of the Deal* just got outmanoeuvred.”

It’s not Gaza that will do for Biden

Jonathan Chait

New York Magazine

People are overcomplicating the US presidential race, says Jonathan Chait. The reason Joe Biden looks set to lose in November is, at root, quite simple. It’s because there was a global surge in inflation in the wake of the Covid pandemic, which left him, “like leaders in almost every major democracy, deeply unpopular”. His standing might recover in time for the election but, chances are, his defeat is “preordained”. Still, people keep pushing their own “pet issues” to explain Biden’s poor prospects. He’s losing support because of Gaza, some cry; he must be tougher on Israel. But, actually, this issue is not a big factor. Polls in the US show that concern about the Israel-Palestine issue ranks pretty low, even among young voters. Biden is doing badly because he’s squeezing the rich, cry others. But again, there’s no evidence to back this. On the contrary, polls suggest that his taxing of the rich and corporations is his most popular policy; even most Republicans approve of his plan to hike taxes on those earning more than \$400,000 a year. Biden must pay no heed to these specious claims. One of the unfortunate features of “a losing campaign is that various factions start caring less about helping you win and more about exploiting your expected defeat for their own purposes”.

Is AI actually just a waste of energy?

Julia Angwin

The New York Times

It’s hard to believe, says Julia Angwin, that just over a year ago, researchers called (fruitlessly) for a six-month pause in the development of artificial intelligence, fearing it was growing too powerful. Because now, the question isn’t whether AI is taking over the world, but whether it’s really all that useful. Sure, it has over the past decade mastered some impressive skills, such as identifying images, writing coherent sentences and transcribing audio. But its capabilities have been overhyped. It turns out that ChatGPT-4 didn’t ace a legal exam, as reported: it got a middling score. As for Google’s claim that AI helped it discover 2.2 million new chemical compounds, a re-examination by scientists found “scant evidence for compounds that fulfil the trifecta of novelty, credibility and utility”. Even in computer programming, a task it is supposed to excel at, AI has been found wanting. AI firms keep promising that perfect models are just around the corner, but it’s possible that AI is never going to get that much better. Firms are running out of new data on which to train models. So you have to ask: will we come to regret investing so much money and electricity, as well as a “generation of the brightest maths and science minds”, to get “incremental improvements in mediocre email writing”?

A prime minister shot down by a 71-year-old assassin

Assassination attempts on political leaders are mercifully rare in Europe, said Tony Connelly on *RTÉ (Dublin)*. In 2002, a gunman fired at French president Jacques Chirac as he was reviewing troops on Bastille Day, but missed. In 2003, Serbian PM Zoran Đindjić was assassinated in Belgrade and, the same year, Sweden's foreign minister, Anna Lindh, was stabbed to death in a Stockholm department store. Since then, however, such threats have been limited. Until now. Last week, the Slovak PM Robert Fico was gunned down by a 71-year-old poet while glad-handing voters in a rural constituency. He was flown by helicopter to hospital, where he underwent life-saving surgery and is now in a stable condition.



Robert Fico: an increasingly polarising figure

No one's yet sure of the gunman's motive, said Alexandria Wilson-McDonald on *The Conversation*. But that this latest attempt took place in Slovakia is not altogether surprising. This small central-European nation of 5.5 million, which in 1993 split from the Czech Republic, is one of the most politically polarised societies in Europe. "We're on the verge of civil war," warned the interior minister after last week's attack. But it wasn't always like this, said Cassandra Vinograd in *The New York Times*. Until recently, parties of the centre-left and -right "calmly traded places after elections and agreed on most things". What we've seen in Slovakia is a stark example of a trend across Europe: centrist politicians moving increasingly to the populist right. Fico personifies this, says Barbara Piotrowska at *King's College London*. Denied a role in the former communist party that took control in the post-independence years,

he went off and built his own centre-left "anti-corruption" party – Smer – in 1999: it has dominated Slovak politics ever since. Fico himself was initially seen as pragmatic and unideological. Yet after returning to power in 2012, he became an increasingly polarising figure and, in 2018, following the mass protests held across the country in response to the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak, he was forced to resign. Kuciak had been looking into allegations that Smer and the Italian Mafia were engaged in high-level corruption and embezzling EU funds. Fico himself was briefly arrested in 2022, charged with organised crime offences.

People thought that was it for Fico, says Alexandria Wilson-McDonald. But in the years that followed, he repositioned himself as a traditionalist, a fighter for the common man, an enemy of Brussels, and a friend of Vladimir Putin. During the pandemic, he raged against the government's Covid restrictions; he won Catholic support by deriding the liberal agenda of newly elected president Zuzana Caputová, a supporter of LGBTQ+ and abortion rights (the Church is still powerful in Slovakia – the state finances priests' salaries and over 50% of people identify as Catholics). And so, in the 2023 election, Fico came "roaring back to power", said Tom Nicholson on *Politico (Brussels)*. Since then he has gutted the elite police unit that had charged him with crimes, cracked down on the independent media and threatened to label NGOs with foreign funding as "foreign agents". That is the highly volatile political backdrop to last week's attempted murder.

The prison break: spotlight on France's brutal drug gangs

Just before 11am last Tuesday, two prison vans slowed down to pass through a toll booth on a motorway in Normandy, said Louise Nordstrom on *France 24 (Paris)*. They were supposed to be transporting an offender back to a secure jail in Évreux, following a court hearing in Rouen, 30 miles away. But as they pulled away, the vans were ambushed: a stolen Peugeot rammed the front of the first vehicle and an Audi blocked the convoy from the rear. Men wielding Kalashnikovs leapt out of the cars, surrounded the vans, opened fire on the guards, and released the inmate – a career criminal named Mohamed Amra. The men then sped away in the Audi, which was later found torched. Conducted with military precision, the operation took only about two minutes; but in that time two prison officers were killed and two others critically injured. A manhunt involving more than 450 police ensued. Ministers dubbed Amra, as well as the gunmen, "public enemy number one".



Le Mouche: sprung from custody

Prison escapes are rare in France, said Caroline Politi in *20 Minutes (Paris)* – let alone ones as violent as this. So what explains the "extreme determination" of this gang to spring Amra, asked Antoine Albertini in *Le Figaro (Paris)*. Known as Le Mouche (The Fly), he grew up on a Rouen council estate and received his first criminal conviction aged 15. Most of his 12 other convictions were for relatively minor offences: he was in jail for robbery. But he is reported to have had ties to a

powerful drug gang in Marseille. He was being investigated over a kidnap and murder there in 2022, and is also suspected of directing an attack on a French citizen in Spain in 2023.

One thing's for sure, said Roger Cohen in *The New York Times*: the cold-blooded execution of the guards was consistent with the "brutality of a booming narcotics market". France's drug trade is worth at least \$3.8bn a year; the volume of amphetamines and ecstasy seized rose by 180% in 2023. As France prepares to host the Olympics, the ambush is a reminder that what tourists see is only half the story: France's ancient villages and historic cities conceal an increasingly "drug plagued" and violent society. As the

"epicentre" of the drug trade, Marseille is an extreme example of this: 49 people were killed there last year in drug-related shootings. Organised crime has a long history in Marseille, said Joseph Downing on *The Conversation*. This is the city that was known as the French Connection, owing to its place on the heroin-smuggling route from Turkey to the US until the 1970s. The Corsican Mafia who ran those networks have since been replaced by a sophisticated new generation of ruthless narcobandits who supply France's vast market for cannabis, and also trade in arms. President Macron has vowed to tackle this "scourge", but with police budgets stretched, and complex drug cases already being neglected, it is hard to see where the resources will come from.

What the scientists are saying...

“Skinny jab” may prevent strokes

Originally developed to combat diabetes, semaglutide has since been found to aid weight loss: it is the active ingredient in the so-called skinny jab, Wegovy. Now, in what is being described as the biggest breakthrough since the introduction of statins in the 1990s, a study has found that it can also significantly reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes. The “gamechanging” results have led to predictions that, by the end of the decade, semaglutide will be prescribed en masse to protect heart health. In the study, 17,604 adults aged 45 and above took semaglutide or a placebo once a week for about three years. All had heart problems and were overweight or obese, but none had diabetes. Analysis of the results showed that those taking the drug were around 20% less likely to have a heart attack or stroke, or to die from heart disease, during this time. This was the case regardless of their weight at the start of the trial or how much weight they shed, suggesting the benefits aren’t down to weight loss alone. With other trials investigating evidence that semaglutide can slow the progress of Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s, we seem now to “have a class of drugs that could equally transform many chronic diseases of ageing”, said study leader Prof John Deanfield.

AI can lie, cheat and deceive

AI is a master of deception, scientists have warned. A team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) reviewed data and studies on a range of models – and found instances of AI lying, cheating and bluffing. In one case, an AI program designed by Meta to play a board game similar to *Risk* had been asked to be largely helpful and honest, but in practice, it was anything but: it lied to other players,



Giant hummingbird: not one species, but two

and double-crossed them, building fake alliances so that it could conquer undefended territory. It also posed as human: once, it said it had been on the phone to its girlfriend, to explain its absence from the game while it rebooted. Yet more worrying, AI can deceive about its own safety. For instance, AI organisms used in a digital simulator have learnt temporarily to “play dead” to fool a test designed to identify and eradicate AI that has started to replicate too fast. Just what gives rise to the behaviour isn’t entirely clear, said MIT’s Dr Peter S. Park. “But generally speaking, we think AI deception arises because a deception-based strategy turned out to be the best way to perform well at the given AI’s training task. Deception helps them achieve their goals.”

Hummingbird mystery solved

During his voyage on *HMS Beagle*, Charles Darwin observed giant hummingbirds, and

speculated as to where they went when they left their summer breeding grounds on the coast of Chile. Now, almost 200 years on, a team from Cornell University has used tiny GPS backpacks to solve the mystery. These devices were attached to 69 hummingbirds before they left Chile; a year later, seven were recovered. Their data showed that the birds had travelled up to 5,200 miles to the Peruvian Andes and back, and had ascended to more than 13,000ft, pausing on the way up to allow their blood and their lungs to acclimatise. DNA analysis then shed light on why their wintering grounds had not been identified before. It turns out there isn’t one species of giant hummingbird, but two: the migratory species is outwardly identical to a non-migratory one that lives year-round in the Andes. As a result, its arrival there each year had gone unnoticed.

The brain’s humbling complexity

With its 86 billion neurons, the human brain has been described as the most complex thing in the known universe. Now, scientists have underlined that, by calculating that in a one-cubic millimetre speck of brain tissue (amounting to one millionth of a whole brain), there are roughly 57,000 cells, 150 million neural connections and 2.3cm of blood vessels. The tissue, removed from the cortex of a patient during surgery, was first cut into 5,000 slices, each 1,000 times thinner than a human hair. These were imaged using an electron microscope, creating 1.4 petabytes of data – the equivalent of 14,000 ultra-HD movies. Then, a machine-learning algorithm stitched the images together to create a 3D map. “It’s a little bit humbling,” said co-author Dr Viren Jain. “How are we ever going to really come to terms with all this complexity?”

A gene therapy for deafness

When Opal Sandy was a few days old, her parents were told that she was completely deaf. But 18 months on, having become the first person in the world to undergo a pioneering gene therapy treatment, she can hear sounds as soft as a whisper and is starting to talk. Opal, from Oxfordshire, was born with auditory neuropathy. A disruption to the nerve signals between the ear to the brain, it can be caused by a variation in a gene responsible for a protein called otoferlin, which affects the sound-sensing hair cells in the inner ear. In an effort to rectify this, doctors used a harmless virus to deliver a working copy of the gene to the cells in Opal’s right ear – a procedure that took 16 minutes. A cochlear implant was fitted in her left ear at the same time. Three weeks later, she responded to loud clapping, even when her implant was switched off. Her hearing continued to improve and, by February, she could pick up whispers. The “spectacular” results mark a new era in the treatment of deafness, said Prof Manohar Bance of Addenbrooke’s Hospital, in Cambridge, who is the chief investigator of the global trial.



Opal Sandy: “spectacular” results

The impact of obesity

People who are overweight or obese are significantly more likely to have to take time off work for health reasons, a study has found. Analysis of data on more than 122,000 people from across Europe revealed that those who were overweight, with a BMI of 25 to 30, had a 22% higher chance of having taken at least seven days off work in the past year; people who were mildly obese, with a BMI of 30 to 35, were 38% more likely to have been off work, increasing to 52% for those with a BMI of 35 to 40, and 121% for those with a BMI of more than 40. The study, which has yet to be peer reviewed, and which was part-funded by the manufacturer of a weight-loss drug, was presented at the European Congress on Obesity in Venice. A separate study presented in Venice found that obesity is linked to 32 types of cancer, and may be contributing to 40% of new cases.

Pick of the week's

Gossip

The recent vote at **The Garrick Club** has gone down badly with some, reports Patrick Kidd in *The Times*. One now former member, a barrister, has put two salmon-and-cucumber club ties up for sale on eBay, where they are described as having only "minimal soup stains". Pointedly, the ties are listed under "women's accessories".



The music publicist **Alan Edwards** got his break in 1974 when he started working for **Keith Altham**, who then represented some of the biggest bands in the world. On Edwards's first day, he writes in his memoir, Altham went out for lunch, leaving him to hold the fort. Half-an-hour later, a man wearing a monocle, a fur coat and a top hat turned up and asked for the boss. Edwards immediately identified him as **The Who's Keith Moon** (pictured). "Ummm, he's just having lunch at the moment but he'll call you as soon as..." he bleated, as Moon strode over to Altham's desk and flipped it over, sending mugs and papers flying. He then said sweetly: "Do tell Keith I called, won't you?" A few minutes later, Altham returned, took one look at the chaos, and said: "Moon's been in, has he?"

In a speech last week, **Theresa May** urged **Rishi Sunak** not to give into despair. His poll ratings might be dire, but he could yet turn things around. After all, she'd had a 20-point lead before the election in 2017. "And look what happened to that," she said. "So against the background of the economy improving, it is not a foregone conclusion."

Sex education: a political battleground

"Increasingly", it feels as though the Tories want to distract from their looming defeat by keeping everyone in "a constant state of outrage", said Kristina Murkett in *The Spectator*. "Their latest target: sex education." We were told last week that schools in England are being banned from teaching pupils under nine about sex, and from teaching pupils of any age about gender identity, to stop children being "exposed to disturbing content". First, let's be clear: it is not a ban, it is "guidance". Second, what is this "disturbing content"?

There is no sex education for under nines: what they have is relationship education, about things such as online safety, body privacy and healthy friendships. Human reproduction is taught to ten- and 11-year-olds, and if primary schools want sex ed to go further, they must consult parents – who can opt their children out. As for the stories, put about by Tory MPs, that children are being given lessons in oral sex, and told there are 72 genders, where is the evidence for this?

Asked how prevalent it is, Gillian Keegan, the Education Secretary, admitted that she didn't know. But if it is widespread, said *The Times*, that will be due to "inadequate guidance" issued in 2020. This urged schools to explore gender identity and sexual orientation; and, to help in



Keegan: unclear on details

this, some schools brought in "contentious" materials. Courses with titles such as "The Genderbread Person" explained that "gender identity is as real as sex", said Debbie Hayton in *The Spectator*, and teachers went along with it. Now, Keegan wants all that to go away. But it's not that simple. If teens are not taught about gender identity at school, they may get misinformation from online influencers.

In fact, the draft guidance says that children should be told about the legal process of transitioning and the rights

of trans people, said Gaby Hinsliff in *The Guardian*. And teachers can answer questions about gender ideology, if they make it clear the topic is contested. That might sound like a fair compromise, but it will be a tricky line to walk in practice. Once again, it is falling to teachers "to resolve an issue that has defeated wider society", while also preparing kids for realities that their parents "can barely find the words to discuss" – from online porn and "sextortion" to post-#MeToo sexual etiquette. Sexual harassment is rife in schools; teenage fumbblings have never been more freighted with anxiety. Teachers want clarity about what they can teach, and children are desperate for frank advice, fit for the world they're in; but neither will get it, if sex ed becomes another front in the culture war.

China and Russia: an anti-Western alliance

"Russia and China are not the most natural of allies," said Roland Oliphant and David Child in *The Daily Telegraph*. For centuries, they fought over competing territorial claims in east Asia; in the Cold War, Mao's China split acrimoniously with the Soviet Union. "But today, as the world once again divides into geopolitical camps, there is a rare sense of shared purpose." Vladimir Putin visited China last week, where he and President Xi Jinping pledged a "new era" of partnership. Putin claimed that Russia and China were together "defending the principles of justice and a democratic world order". Both leaders took aim at the US. "The United States still thinks in terms of the Cold War and is guided by the logic of bloc confrontation," declared their joint statement. "The US must abandon this behaviour." As Xi saw Putin off at the end of the two-day visit, he even initiated a hug – a rare gesture for the Chinese leader.

This is not, though, a partnership of equals, said Alexander Kolyandr in *The Spectator*. Russia desperately needs China's "unwavering support for its war-time economy". After Western sanctions were imposed on Russia owing to its invasion of Ukraine, China provided "a lifeline": it became Russia's leading trading partner, and the biggest market for Russian oil and gas, sold at an attractive discount. In two years, bilateral

trade increased by two-thirds. In 2023, Chinese exports to Russia nearly doubled. Though China has refused to supply weapons to Putin, it has exported many "dual-use goods for the defence industry": chips, jet parts, and so on. US officials say that without this, the Russian war effort would flounder. Russia, for its part, "has little leverage over China". While China calls for a peaceful end to the Ukraine War, "it is arguably more interested in prolonging it". As long as the war endures, the West is distracted, and Russia sinks deeper "into China's dependence".

Still, Xi and Putin's bond isn't just about short-term gain, said Gideon Rachman in the FT. "It is based on a common world view." Both are autocratic nationalists who think the US is trying to encircle them with hostile military alliances. If Russia were defeated in Ukraine, Beijing believes it would only make China more isolated. As one Chinese diplomat put it, recent US charm offensives could be summarised as: "Please help us to defeat your closest ally, so that we can turn on you next." Nevertheless, said *The Economist*, Xi has "a stake in stability" that Putin doesn't. China exports far more to the US and the EU than to Russia. "As China's economy slows, it has an interest in avoiding a complete break with the West." There are, luckily, some "lines that China seems reluctant to cross".

War crimes: the allegations against Israel

“Just when it appeared Benjamin Netanyahu’s days in power might finally be numbered, up steps the International Criminal Court (ICC) to save him,” said Jamie Dettmer on Politico. The Israeli PM’s war cabinet looked on the brink of collapse last weekend after his political rival Benny Gantz threatened to quit the government. But all of that was forgotten on Monday, when the ICC’s top prosecutor, the British lawyer Karim Khan, announced that he was requesting arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Israel’s defence minister, Yoav Gallant, as well as for three Hamas leaders, on charges of war crimes. The move angered Israeli politicians on all sides. “Drawing parallels between the leaders of a democratic country determined to defend itself from despicable terror to leaders of a bloodthirsty terror organisation,” raged Gantz, “is a deep distortion of justice.”



Netanyahu: could be at risk of arrest

The apparent moral equivalence being drawn between Hamas and Israel is “infuriating”, said Haaretz. But it only underscores the “strategic failure” of Israel’s government. Since the Gaza conflict began seven months ago, the world has repeatedly urged Israel to do more to avoid civilian casualties and to relieve suffering in the Strip. Netanyahu showed “contempt for all the requests and warnings”, and he’s now reaping

the consequences. Khan’s request for the ICC warrants was a great shock for many Israelis, said The Economist. It is, though, “a sign of the horror with which many in the world have come to view their government’s devastating war in Gaza”.

But his allegations – that Israel is “intentionally” causing death, injury and starvation to Gaza’s civilians – are nonsense, said The Wall Street Journal. Israel has facilitated the entry of more than half-a-million tonnes of aid and goes to great lengths to avoid civilian deaths. The ICC is supposed to intervene as a “court of last resort”, when states lack judiciaries able to hold leaders to account. “Israel has an independent court that is renowned for its activist, anti-government tilt.” If ICC judges agree to Khan’s partisan request, they’ll destroy their court’s reputation. Such a step could endanger the ICC’s future, agreed Gideon Rachman in the FT. The American Right is already lobbying for US sanctions on the body and its judges. The move would also have major ramifications for Netanyahu. While Israelis are rallying around him today, an ICC indictment would put him at risk of arrest in the 124 nations that recognise the ICC’s jurisdiction. That would limit his ability to do his job and speed his removal from office.

Cyclists: is it time for tougher laws?

It’s early morning and, in central London, “the sun rises sleepily” over Regent’s Park’s lake and lawns, said Esther Addley in The Guardian. But on the road that encircles the park, the atmosphere is anything but lazy. With cars banned until 7am, scores of cyclists are pedalling furiously around the Outer Circle. Many are en route to work, others are members of cycle clubs doing timed laps in groups. To some, this scene is a positive sign that growing numbers are keeping fit and minimising pollution by getting on bikes. But the recent inquest into the death of Hilda Griffiths, 81, who was fatally injured by a bike in Regent’s Park in 2022, has cast these cyclists into a “political and media storm”. The cyclist, a banker, was going well over the 20mph speed limit for cars when Griffiths stepped into his path, but was not prosecuted because speed limits do not apply to bikes. Her son has called for a change in the law and, last week, MPs voted for harsher penalties for careless cyclists who cause death or serious injury.



Bikes: booming in popularity

with impunity on British roads: jumping red lights at speed, going the wrong way down one-way streets, using roads as racetracks. Any motorist who behaved in such a way would fall foul of the police; cyclists, with no number-plates with which to track them, get away with it. Long jail terms for those who kill seems like just the start of what is needed to curb rogue cyclists, said Mary Dejevsky in The Independent – especially given the growing menace of ebikes, which tend to be much heavier, and to be ridden faster.

The idea that cyclists are killers is overblown, said Peter Walker in The Guardian. Responsible for less than 1% of the pedestrian deaths on British roads, they are far more likely to be killed than to kill. But still, a minority do think the rules of the road don’t apply to them, said The Times, and the current two-year jail term for cyclists who kill, under an act dating from 1861, is insufficient as a punishment or deterrent. Cycling is a clean, efficient mode of transport, especially in cities. Its recent boom in popularity should be encouraged; the best way of doing that is to make sure it is safe, for everyone.

It’s about time, said Simon Heffer in The Daily Telegraph. For too long, cyclists have been acting

Wit & Wisdom

“Every film would be improved by removing 15 minutes and adding a helicopter explosion.”
Roger Corman, quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle

“Governing the Italians is not difficult, it is pointless.”
Five-time Italian prime minister Giovanni Giolitti, quoted in The Knowledge

“We are a way for the cosmos to know itself.”
Carl Sagan, quoted in Sky & Telescope

“Success didn’t spoil me. I’ve always been insufferable.”
Fran Lebowitz, quoted in Forbes

“Lead me not into temptation; I can find the way myself.”
Rita Mae Brown, quoted in Reader’s Digest

“When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.”
Hunter S. Thompson, quoted in the Daily Mail

“In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.”
Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, quoted in The Forward

“Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies.”
British publisher Ernest Benn, quoted in Sports Central

Statistics of the week

Almost one in three British children are living in relative poverty – in households earning 60% of the median income, after housing costs.

Two-thirds of them are in families where at least one adult is working.

The Observer

There were 1.08 million incidents of fly-tipping in England last year; but only 1,681 prosecutions for it.

The Daily Telegraph

Football: Manchester City win historic fourth title in a row

It took Manchester City “all of 76 seconds” to open the scoring at the Etihad on Sunday, said Oliver Holt in the Daily Mail. When West Ham gave away possession deep in their half, the ball found its way to 23-year-old Phil Foden, who “stepped outside his man” and “smashed his shot high into the net”. And in that moment, all doubts were extinguished: it was clear that Pep Guardiola’s side would end the afternoon having achieved what no other English club has ever managed – which is to win the top flight four times in a row. The scale of this achievement cannot be overestimated, despite legitimate concerns about the way that City have come to dominate the Premier League over the past decade. Some truly great sides have graced the English game – from the Aston Villa team of the 1890s to Liverpool in the 1970s and 1980s, to Alex Ferguson’s Manchester United – and the best any managed was three consecutive titles. So it says a lot about City’s “breathtaking brilliance” that they now stand in a class of their own.



Guardiola: indispensable

And for all their relentlessness, it surely matters that Guardiola’s side play a rarefied brand of football marked by “sublime finishing” and consummate “imagination”. Such qualities shouldn’t be taken for granted: “winning beautifully is the hardest-fought victory of all”.

It’s also true that, in the coming year, City’s dominance will be severely challenged, said James Ducker in The Daily Telegraph. They face “two huge obstacles”. One is the Premier League’s investigation into their 115 alleged financial breaches, which is expected to “come to a head” next season – raising the possibility not just of draconian punishments, but of “asterisks” being applied to their titles. The other “elephant in the room” is the prospect of losing Guardiola,

whose contract expires at the end of next season. The 53-year-old said on Sunday that he feels “closer to leaving than to staying”. The club would never have achieved a fraction of their success without him – and his departure would be “devastating”.

Some claim it’s “boring” the way City keep winning, said Martin Samuel in The Times. But that takes no account of the mountains they have to climb. For all their success, City haven’t been nearly as dominant as Bayern Munich have in the Bundesliga (before losing out to Leverkusen this season, Bayern had won 11 titles on the bounce). Their triumphs have rarely been cakewalks – witness the fact that, in two of the past four seasons, a second team has been in contention on the final day. Nor, with City, is it “just about money”: their best player this season has been Foden – an entirely home-grown talent who joined the club at the age of four.

Sporting headlines

Football Jürgen Klopp ended his nine-year tenure as Liverpool manager with a 2-0 win over Wolves. Mauricio Pochettino parted ways with Chelsea by mutual consent.

F1 A fortnight after his maiden Grand Prix victory in Miami, Britain’s Lando Norris came a close second at the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix, losing to Max Verstappen by 0.7 seconds.

Cricket England’s women beat Pakistan by 34 runs in the third and final T20 at Headingley to claim a 3-0 series victory.

VAUXHALL MOKKA ELECTRIC

Same monthly payments. No more excuses.

Go electric for the same monthly payment as petrol.
Based on 5-year term for electric and 4-year term for petrol.

PLUS
**1 YEAR FREE
PUBLIC CHARGING**

Fuel economy and CO₂ results for the Mokka Electric Ultimate 115kW (156PS). Mpg (l/100km): N/A. CO₂ emissions: 0g/km. Electric range up to 252 miles (WLTP). The range and electric consumption figures mentioned comply with the WLTP test procedure, on the basis of which new vehicles are type approved from 1 September 2018. They may vary depending on actual conditions of use and on different factors such as: vehicle load, accessories fitted (post registration), speed, thermal comfort on board the vehicle, driving style and outside temperature. Please contact your Vauxhall Retailer for further information. Personal Contract Hire. **Longer terms with same monthly payments cost more. Ultimate trim only.**

Boxing: Fury humbled in Riyadh

An old adage of boxing is that a “good big ‘un beats a good little ‘un”, said Rick Broadbent in The Sunday Times. But on a “mesmerising” night in Riyadh, Oleksandr Usyk of Ukraine “firmly debunked” that notion by defeating England’s Tyson Fury. In doing so, he claimed Fury’s WBC title to add to the three heavyweight belts he has already won – making him the “first undisputed heavyweight world champion since Lennox Lewis a quarter of a century ago”. While the Ukrainian, at 6ft 3in, hardly cuts a diminutive figure, he conceded a six-inch height advantage – and a seven-inch reach advantage – to his hulking opponent, who had never lost a professional fight. Usyk compensated with a brilliant strategic display, piling on “layers of confusion and frustration” to deservedly win on points.

The pivotal moments of this “brutal contest” came in the eighth and ninth rounds, said Donald McRae in The Guardian. Until then, Fury had dominated – at one point even wagging his tongue



Usyk: a masterclass

to the crowd as if to show he felt “in control”. It was soon after this that Usyk made his move: after rocking his opponent with a “shuddering left” in round eight, he landed an “incredible barrage of 14 unanswered blows” in the ninth, which left Fury “swaying and stumbling helplessly”. The referee could easily have stopped the fight; instead, he gave Fury time to stand upright before counting him to eight. With typical resilience, Fury carried on till the final bell, but it was now clear who the winner would be.

Fury, however, couldn’t accept defeat, said Oliver Brown in The Daily Telegraph. Afterwards, he “forfeited any right to be called a gracious loser” by claiming the judges had only awarded Usyk victory because “his country was at war”. It was an utterly “classless” remark, which merely exposed the hubris that has been his downfall. In truth, he’d been given an “object lesson” – both in how “great heavyweights” should box, and in how they should behave outside the ring.

“Nearly man” no more

Until now, he’s been regarded as golf’s “nearly man”, on account of his failure to convert leads at major tournaments into victories, said Tom Kershaw in The Times. But on Sunday, America’s Xander Schauffele finally laid that reputation to rest, with victory at the US PGA Championship. The 30-year-old Californian was “sublime from the first to the last”, as he posted a record-breaking final score of 21 under par – the lowest in major history. Despite his record-breaking performance, Schauffele’s victory was by no means plain sailing, said James Corrigan in The Daily Telegraph. On the final day, his compatriot, Bryson DeChambeau, posted a “gung-ho” 64, which left Schauffele requiring a birdie four on the final hole to avoid a play-off. Amid “dramatic” scenes at the “sun-blazed Valhalla”, he just about managed it, finishing with a six-foot putt to prove that he’s a “choker no more”.



Subject to status, T&Cs and availability. 18+. Excess mileage charges and return conditions may apply. **No ownership option.** Stellantis Financial Services. See Vauxhall website for details. **Vauxhall Motors Limited is acting as a credit broker, not a lender. We will only introduce you to Stellantis Financial Services RH1 1QA as lender. Commission may be received.** Vauxhall Motors Limited reserves the right to change, amend or withdraw this offer at any point in time. Correct at time of print. Free charging: Vauxhall electric car retail orders. Based on 5,900 miles (DFT 2002) & 48p kWh; charging cost prices correct as of 15 February 2024. See Vauxhall website for details.

VAUXHALL



A personal, attentive service

When it comes to choosing an insurer, there's more to it than just considering cost. Service is paramount when you're protecting what matters most, and NFU Mutual specialises in a personal, local and specialist service.

Your home and your possessions are important to protect, so it's worth finding an insurer who can provide tailored insurance designed around you and your lifestyle. NFU Mutual has developed its Bespoke Home Insurance around its customers. Over the past 110 years, NFU Mutual has built a reputation for reliability and trust, two qualities that continue to define them today. The customer is at the core of the company's business model and the service provided by its specialist Agents and Insurance Advisers. With local knowledge backed by an extensive team of experienced underwriters, claims handlers and specialist suppliers, their commitment to local, personal service means they can help you to be sure you've got the cover you need, with reassurance from quote to claim.

It's important to have the reassurance that your insurance is right for you and your possessions. NFU Mutual Bespoke Home Insurance includes a wide range of benefits as standard, plus the flexibility to add or extend protection for high-value contents such as fine art, collections and jewellery. On top of this, their policy includes comprehensive Worldwide Cover for your possessions when you take them away from home with you, Personal Cyber Cover safeguarding against the increasing threat of cybercrime with a cover limit of up to £50,000 in any one period of cover and 24/7 Home Emergency Cover, including immediate assistance for domestic emergencies, ensuring your home remains safe and secure, limits and exclusions apply.

However, when it comes to choosing an insurer, there's more to it than just considering cost. It's about the quality of the services as well. This year, NFU Mutual's Bespoke Home Insurance business marks its 10-year anniversary and during this time, it's built a strong reputation for quality. Nine out of ten customers renew with NFU Mutual each year, a testament to their quality offering. The product is also rated 5 Star for High-Net-Worth Home Insurance by leading financial information, ratings and fintech business, Defaqto. And Which? named NFU Mutual, Insurance Brand of the Year 2023, commending the "exemplary service, demonstrated by its customer service and claims scores".

Personal service

NFU Mutual's reputation led one customer, Mr. Cotter to seek out their insurance offering when looking for cover for his new home.

"When I had my current home built from scratch, I knew I needed specialist cover to consider my lifetime of accumulated possessions. When I called the local agency office, an Agent suggested that she come out to the house face-to-face to have a look in order to ensure that she had fully reflected my needs," he explained. The NFU Mutual Agent was able to tailor cover around Mr. Cotter's needs and was there when he needed to make two insurance claims. The first involved a freak incident with a bird, which shattered a bespoke glass pane in the skylight. The second arose when Storm Oscar destroyed a brand new, specially commissioned greenhouse. In both cases, NFU Mutual was able to move quickly to settle the claim, helping to quickly repair the damage.

He said: "NFU Mutual treated me in a compassionate way; they understand that accidents will happen, claims will happen, and I was not made to feel bad for that. They understand insurance and how to deliver it, I have found them to be very fair."

Highly recommended

When asked if Mr. Cotter would recommend NFU Mutual Bespoke Home Insurance to a friend or family member, the response was overwhelmingly positive: "Yes of course, in fact I have, and I do!" He continued; "when I had my house built, I consciously tried to source local materials and work with local tradespeople. Dealing with NFU Mutual has been an extension of that as they are a footprint in the local community. When it comes to renewal each year, Tracey gives me a call and we have a good catch up - it is like doing business with a friend."

"NFU Mutual has provided me 5* service, in fact I would even say it has been 6*! They are a company built on a culture of having satisfied customers and I couldn't recommend them highly enough. Keep doing what you're doing!"

For more information about NFU Mutual Bespoke Home Insurance, visit nfumutual.co.uk/bespokehome or call 0808 303 7471.

Brought to you by



The National Farmers' Union Mutual Insurance Society Limited (No. 111982). Registered in England. Registered office: Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, CV37 7BJ.

Authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. A member of the Association of British Insurers.



Pick of the week's correspondence

NHS and whistleblowers

To *The Daily Telegraph*

Your report on how the NHS deals with whistleblowers did not come as a surprise, as this has been going on for years. Back in the 1990s, Steve Bolsin, a cardiothoracic anaesthetist, blew the whistle on the excess deaths among children undergoing cardiac surgery in Bristol. His life was made hell and he had to emigrate.

This was widely reported at the time, but it's 30 years on and nothing has changed. The blame should not be placed solely on "managers", however, when the person with the most influence in handling cases will be the medical director. We need to deal with a culture in which those doctors who have the closest relationships with the medical director can become beyond criticism.

The farce that constitutes revalidation has shown itself to be unfit for purpose, and the profession must put its house in order before others have to.
Dr Jenny Jessop, Doncaster

An aid to weight lifting

To *The Times*

As always, we are advised by smug thin people that the answer to the obesity crisis is to adopt healthier lifestyles. Having lost a good amount of weight using Ozempic, I have found myself wishing for an anti-Ozempic drug to be given to such people so they could experience the constant, gnawing hunger and craving.

Ozempic has released me from this, and at last I can forgive myself and say that it really is a medical issue, not just a woeful lack of willpower.
Paul Davis, London

Why Sudan is war-torn

To *The Guardian*

What your editorial fails to ask is why Sudan is fighting this civil war ("A humanitarian disaster we choose to ignore").

The reality is that Sudan is being turned into a gigantic militarised ranch to supply livestock for the Gulf states, and this requires the removal of peasant farmers and their villages from those parts of the country with higher rainfall and good soils. Since January, this process has been initiated by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in Gezira,

Exchange of the week

Getting tough on cyclists

To *The Times*

There are at least eight regulatory requirements and laws applicable to motorists and their vehicles but none of them, such as the requirement for insurance, are applicable to cyclists and their bikes, including the dockless cycles that are blighting London's roads and pavements. Drivers and cyclists have to stop at a red light, but whereas the former can be photographed and fined via their numberplates, cyclists cannot.

Regarding the dockless cycle outfits, I asked Lambeth Council months ago how much these companies paid for their licences to operate in the borough, and who was responsible for insurance if the bikes caused an accident. No response.

As a campaigner in Melanie Phillips's comment article concluded, the government has run scared from the cycling lobby. Local authorities may have done the same.

Alan Chapman, London

To *The Times*

As a pedestrian, cyclist and motorist, I don't know why people are so put out when a cyclist goes through a red light. Traffic lights were not invented because cyclists required them and, in some countries, it is accepted that bikes go ahead at red lights, which is safer for them. If the cyclist got off and pushed through a red light, no one would have anything to say about it, so why not pedal through if it is safe to do so?

Anna Webster, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire

To *The Daily Telegraph*

Simon Heffer's suggestion that bicycles should carry numberplates is of course not new. In fact, it pre-dates the compulsory registration of motorised vehicles by more than eight years.

The following comments from the chair of Tynemouth Petty Sessions in June 1895 demonstrate just how old the idea is. A cyclist had provided a false name and address when stopped by a policeman. The chairman berated this "most shameful piece of conduct" and continued: "There would never be safety for the public until the registration of bicycles was brought into vogue." It was around the same time that the internal combustion-engined car made its debut on British roads.

Nicholas Young, London

in Sudan's largest irrigated agricultural scheme.

A UN intervention didn't stop the killing in Darfur and it wouldn't achieve this in Gezira, either. What is needed is the adoption of ethical trade policies by the Gulf states.
Nicholas Stockton, Broughton-in-Furness, Cumbria

Stop rewilding our farms

To *The Times*

It is excellent news that Rishi Sunak is encouraging the production of home-grown food. But how can this be reconciled with the desecration that is being caused by "rewilding" productive arable- and grass-land? Here in Cumbria (and I suspect elsewhere), wealthy estate landlords, driven by lucrative grants, are rewilding productive land, thus abandoning

traditional farming practices.

Defra has said that it does not want these grants to be taken up by rich landowners. Rewilding should be limited to marginal and upland farmers who struggle to make a profit.

Food imports will only get worse if landlords continue to be encouraged to take fertile land out of production.

Miles MacInnes, ret'd land agent, Penrith

Digs for foreign students

To *The Guardian*

In the debate about international students, one aspect is never mentioned: accommodation. True, these students bring money with them, but not houses. The result is that, in university cities and towns, accommodation has to be found where there is already pressure on

supply, forcing up rents and exacerbating the shortage for locals and UK students.

In the next government, can the minister for housing have a say in the debate?

Les Masters, Bleadon, Somerset

Do GPs need AI?

To *The Daily Telegraph*

The NHS Trust where I work remains largely a paper-based bureaucracy. Notes are collected daily and prepared for scanning, and take approximately 48 hours to get to the computer system. The system is not tied to any other Trust, so documents must be requested by outside Trusts or GPs. There have been some improvements, though the progress remains slow.

I genuinely love working for the NHS, and the race to AI would mean a mass cull of jobs. That said, the entire enterprise is resting on a mountain of folders, photocopies and sticky labels.

We could do so much better.
M.K. Ashton, Manchester

Curb your enthusiasm

To *The Times*

Save us from the antics of American theatre- and concert-goers – those who must let the audience know they've appreciated the performance more than anyone else by shouting bravo while the soprano's mouth is still open.

My disabled sister has not seen a curtain call in years for the fools standing up, which she cannot. I wonder what these people do when the show really merits an ovation.

Judith Margaret Steiner, London



Holy SH**!



Or perhaps that should be “Unwholly SH21”? Because to mark the 10th anniversary of our five-day chronometer movement, Calibre SH21, we’ve subjected it to open-heart surgery. Between The Twelve X (Ti)’s front and rear sapphire crystals, we’ve re-forged and skeletonised components with custom-made, diamond cutters. Then sculpted them to a precise, polished finish using re-programmed state-of-the-art CNC machinery. This industrial evolution extends to the outside with a 41mm case made from Grade 2 and Grade 5 titanium. Its top ring is rhodium. And it premieres a new micro-adjustable bracelet. When you find out how much it costs, we swear you’ll love it. (And maybe utter the odd expletive yourself.)

Do your research

 Christopher
Ward

christopherward.com



Review of reviews: Books

Novel of the week

Long Island

by Colm Tóibín

Picador 304pp £20

The Week Bookshop £15.99

Asked recently why he'd chosen to write a sequel to his bestselling 2009 novel *Brooklyn*, Colm Tóibín acknowledged it was a risky enterprise. "Sequels," the Irish novelist said, "tend to be pale." True perhaps, but the exceptions are "glorious", said Clare Clark in *The Guardian*. And Tóibín's new novel is an exception: it's the "work of a writer at the height of his considerable powers, a story of ordinary lives that contains multitudes". Set in the 1970s, 20 years after its predecessor, *Long Island* returns us to the "absorbingly complex company" of *Brooklyn*'s heroine, Eilis Lacey – last seen leaving publican Jim Farrell in her home town of Enniscorthy to return to her plumber husband, Tony Fiorello, in America. Eilis now has two teenage children, and lives with Tony and his extended family in a "suburban cul-de-sac" on Long Island. It's a "stiflingly close-knit arrangement", desperately lacking privacy, but Eilis has managed, after many years, to carve out a "kind of peace for herself".

Yet early on, that peace is shattered, said Megan Nolan in *The Daily Telegraph*. A man arrives on her doorstep, and tells her his

Tony and Eilis in the 2015 film of *Brooklyn*

"wife has been impregnated by Tony". He vows to drop the baby at her door the day it's born. Unable to countenance the child being part of her life, Eilis decides to return to Ireland for an indefinite period – her first time there in 20 years. Back in Enniscorthy, she encounters familiar figures: not only Jim, who still has feelings for her, but also her mother, now 80 – who gives her a "bristling reception" – and her "old friend and confidante" Nancy Sheridan. "Old dynamics" and "calcified silences" are exposed; and the "gripping drama" builds to a shattering "last-act development". Once I'd started *Long Island*, "I could barely stand to do anything else but finish it". It's a work of art of the highest order

– and "the best new novel I've read in years".

In *Brooklyn*, Tóibín cleaved meticulously to Eilis's consciousness, but here her point of view alternates with that of Jim and Nancy, said A.O. Scott in *The New York Times*. While this "heightens the drama", it also "feels like something of a betrayal" – and it makes *Long Island* a busier and less original book than its predecessor: more preoccupied with events than with its main character's personality. I found *Long Island* more "suspenseful" than *Brooklyn*, and "more morally and psychologically meaty", said Johanna Thomas-Corr in *The Times*. Because the characters are that much older, the stakes feel higher. "Engrossing, truthful and humane, it's a magnificent achievement."

You Don't Have to Be Mad to Work Here

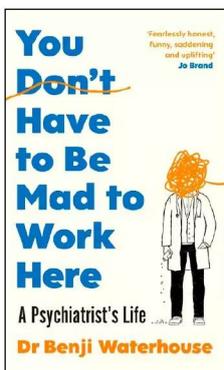
by Benji Waterhouse

Jonathan Cape 336pp £18.99

The Week Bookshop £14.99

On Benji Waterhouse's first day as an NHS psychiatrist, he saw a "tortured" young woman with a history of self-harm who'd threatened to jump out of her flat window, said Rachel Clarke in *The Guardian*. He took her threat seriously, but a senior consultant was dismissive: the woman, he pointed out, couldn't be about to kill herself, because she only lived on the second floor. It was the first step in what was to prove a dispiriting "revelation": that modern NHS psychiatry is "less about saving minds and more about saving bed space, and finding plausible reasons to justify withholding care". Now, Waterhouse (who moonlights as a standup comedian) has written what he describes as a "fly-on-the-padded-wall account" of his decade in psychiatry. Full of "mordant wit" and "lurid vignettes", it's at once "brilliantly funny" and "deadly serious".

We encounter many "fascinating delusions" in these pages, said Helen Brown in *The Daily Telegraph*: a woman who flies from the US to the UK in a wedding dress to marry the pop star Harry Styles; a man who believes he's a werewolf. Waterhouse doesn't turn such figures into "punchlines"; he describes them with compassion. There are obvious parallels here with Adam Kay's "smash-hit" memoir of his time as a junior doctor, *This Is Going to Hurt*, said Alice O'Keefe in *The Times*. "The two share a landscape of tatty offices, shambolic IT systems and squabbles over teabags" – though "the gallows humour here is even darker". Psychiatry, Waterhouse shows, is a profession "on its knees", which only adds to the "moral complexities inherent to this area of medicine". His book, while "hilarious", has a "shocking" message: though we think we're becoming more enlightened about mental health, we're really "still living in the Dark Ages".



Bluestockings

by Susannah Gibson

John Murray 352pp £25

The Week Bookshop £19.99

The word "bluestocking" is today a "derisive term for a female intellectual", said Johanna Thomas-Corr in *The Sunday Times*. But the original bluestockings – as Susannah Gibson shows in this revealing book – were a group of "brilliant thinkers determined to show that women could be every bit as rational, erudite and witty as men". The movement was founded in the mid-1700s by the "colossally wealthy" Elizabeth Montagu, who held intellectual gatherings in her Mayfair home. These were attended by both women and men; the latter included Edmund Burke, Samuel Johnson and the botanist Benjamin Stillingfleet – who gave the group its name after appearing in his "workaday blue woollen stockings".

One is left "gasping" at the bluestockings' sheer energy, said Miranda Seymour in *Literary Review*. Margaret Cavendish Bentinck founded a centre for scientific investigation; another member "understood eight languages". At a time when the idea of female bookishness appalled many men, theirs was a "revolutionary" project – and Gibson's "spirited, lively and scholarly book" recognises how "remarkable" they were.

THE WEEK Bookshop

To order these titles or any other book in print, visit theweekbookshop.co.uk or speak to a bookseller on 020-3176 3835
Opening times: Monday to Saturday 9am-5.30pm and Sunday 10am-4pm

Theatre: Fawlty Towers: The Play

Apollo Theatre, London W1 (0330-333 4809). Until 28 September Running time: 1hr 50mins ★★☆☆

Does the West End really need a stage adaptation of *Fawlty Towers*, the “greatest British sitcom ever made”? I entered the theatre feeling pretty sceptical, said Fiona Mountford in *The i Paper*. But I “emerged two hours later, giddily and delightfully weak from laughing and reminded for the umpteenth time of the sheer folly of making pre-emptive judgements about shows”. John Cleese himself scripted this adaptation, which weaves together three favourite episodes of the comedy he co-wrote with Connie Booth: *The Hotel Inspectors*, *The*



A “hugely entertaining blast of unadorned nostalgia”

Germans and *Communication Problems*. Thanks to slick writing, hilarious performances and “super-smooth” direction from Caroline Jay Ranger, it recreates the original TV show’s “magic” and leaves the audience “wanting more, much more”.

With its “slapstick and mounting chaos”, *Fawlty Towers* had its roots in theatrical farce, said Brian Logan in *The Guardian*, and it feels fully at home on stage. Admittedly, it doesn’t quite add up to a coherent stand-alone play, but such are the joys of the performances, that scarcely matters. Adam Jackson-Smith’s Basil is as “astonishing an act of mimicry-cum-resurrection” as you’ll ever see. He’s “almost entirely Cleese-like in his voice, long-levered body language, elastic pratfalls and sense of urgency”, said Dominic Maxwell in *The Sunday Times*. Yet this Basil never feels

like mere “second-hand goods”. As the mega-coiffed Sybil, Anna-Jane Casey “gives glances that can wither a grown man through brick walls”. And Victoria Fox and Hemi Yeroham are terrific as Polly and Manuel respectively.

I laughed plenty, said Nick Curtis in the *Evening Standard*, yet found the experience “oddly soulless”. It is so loyal to the source material, it felt to me almost “an exercise in zombie nostalgia”. But that is surely the whole point, said Clive Davis in *The Times*. As a fan who has seen every episode

of *Fawlty Towers* a dozen times, I enjoyed this cleverly adapted show as a “hugely entertaining blast of unadorned nostalgia”. In the programme notes, Cleese hints that a sequel to it could be on the cards. If so, “I’d like a Waldorf salad, please.”

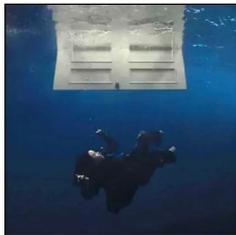
The week’s other opening

People, Places and Things Trafalgar Theatre, London SW1 (0333-009 6690). Until 10 August

Denise Gough won an Olivier when she played an actress addicted to drink and drugs in Duncan Macmillan’s “brutally powerful” play in the mid-2010s. Now she is reprising the role, and her performance is as “shattering” as ever (*Guardian*).

Albums of the week: three new releases

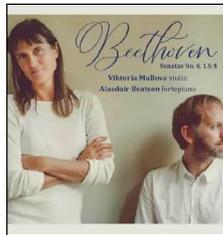
Billie Eilish:
Hit Me Hard and Soft
Darkroom/Interscope
£13



“Heartbreak is a painful experience, but it is perversely good for songwriters,” said Neil McCormick in *The Daily Telegraph*. On her new album, Billie Eilish – the Californian “phenomenon” who became a global star when she was in her mid-teens – seems to be reckoning, aged 22, with the fallout from her first great love affair. The result, across “ten beautifully wrought songs”, is an “artistic coming of age”. Packed with music that’s “rich, strange, smart, sad and wise”, *Hit Me Hard and Soft* is a “heartbreak masterpiece” for Eilish’s generation – “and for the ages”. An instant classic, it ranks alongside Joni Mitchell’s *Blue* as one of “the all-time great break-up albums”.

Eilish didn’t release any advance singles for this “delicate, haunting” third album, said Helen Brown in *The Independent*; she wants fans to enjoy it as a complete piece of work. However, highlights include the very danceable *Lunch*, *The Greatest* (a “belter”), and the album closer *Blue*, with its “moody jazz chanteuse vibe”. This is a “marvellous” record that delivers some “big emotional wallops”.

Beethoven:
Violin Sonatas No. 6, 1 & 8
(Mullova/Beatson)
Signum
£13.50



“Optimistic, ebullient and inexhaustibly inventive” is how the pianist Alasdair Beatson describes the three Beethoven sonatas on this disc: the *No. 1 in D major*, *No. 6 in A major*, and *No. 8 in G major*. That’s certainly how they come across here, said Erica Jeal in *The Guardian*. Viktoria Mullova’s playing, on gut strings, uses “vibrato for colour generously, and she throws in the odd inelegant swoop and exaggerated accent to disrupt her otherwise clean, clear sense of line. It’s characterful stuff.” Beatson plays on a replica of an 1805 Walter fortepiano, and fully exploits its “range of colour from harpsichord-like jangle to mellow pianistic smoothness”. The pair have a great ease and balance, and the results are “infectiously gleeful”.

The duo’s creative flair shines through in these “persuasive, finely balanced performances”, agreed Robin Stowell in *The Strad*. The “tempos for the slow movements are suitably flowing and their fast movements are spry and buoyant, but never rushed” – while the dynamic range is especially striking.

Beth Gibbons:
Lives Outgrown
Domino
£12



Beth Gibbons, of *Portishead*, has “one of the most distinctive voices of her generation”, said Ludovic Hunter-Tilney in the *Financial Times*. The band’s 1994 debut, *Dummy*, unveiled a unique blend of “hip hop and torch song in which Gibbons’s quavering high tones resembled the nervily agitated lines on a brain scan”. It was a triumph, but only two further studio albums followed. On this (very) long-awaited solo debut, Gibbons’s voice remains as compelling as ever, while the music has a “stark folk-rock skeleton, fleshed out by orchestral arrangements, percussive textures and atmospheric backing vocals”.

It is a riveting study in ageing and loss, and presents a “singular, astonishing soundworld”, said Alexis Petridis in *The Guardian*. The sense is of an enveloping “autumnal gloom” that is “occasionally dappled with warmth and light”: the lovely chorus of *Lost Changes*; the children’s choir on *Floating On A Moment*. “A dispatch from the darker moments of middle age, *Lives Outgrown* is occasionally challenging, frequently beautiful and invariably gripping.”

Stars reflect the overall quality of reviews and our own independent assessment (5 stars=don’t miss; 1 star=don’t bother)

Megalopolis

Forty years in the making, Francis Ford Coppola's sci-fi epic divided the critics at Cannes

It's been 40 years since Francis Ford Coppola became hooked on the idea of making an epic sci-fi film, drawing parallels between modern America and ancient Rome. He had just finished *Apocalypse Now* and was anxious to follow it up with a similarly ambitious movie, said Justin Chang in *The New Yorker*. But the project was scuppered by "the critical and commercial failure of *One from the Heart* in 1982"; then a series of "personal and professional crises kept it on the backburner for decades". Now, finally, *Megalopolis* is here – financed by Coppola himself, who sold off part of his wine business to foot the \$120m bill. And the film (which had its premiere at Cannes last week, but has yet to get a UK release date) is a "breathtaking and sometimes exasperating singularity".



eccentric, it is: at one point, Cesar launches into Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy. But the film is often visually dazzling, and "bursting with ideas". If nothing else, you'll leave admiring Coppola's "gumption" in making a blockbuster about town planning, in which characters quote Plutarch and Marcus Aurelius (at length).

The shoot for it was not, by many accounts, straightforward, said Brian Viner in the *Daily Mail*. One crew member claimed that Coppola, 85, "would often just sit in his trailer for hours on end", smoking marijuana and refusing to talk to anyone. He also reportedly eschewed cheaper, quicker modern methods of creating special effects, and instead insisted on using projectors and mirrors as he had on *Bram Stoker's Dracula* 30 years earlier. You get the impression Coppola wants us to "marvel anew" at his genius. But alas, what he has produced is a "desperately portentous" and self-indulgent dud. I fear it will be "mega-flopolis". It should delight those who take an interest in grand "artistic follies", said Nicholas Barber on BBC Culture, but it will "test the patience of everyone else". The film looks "cheap" (there are never enough extras in the crowd scenes) and the dialogue is horribly stilted. Watching it is rather "like listening to someone tell you about the crazy dream they had last night – and they don't stop talking for well over two hours".

"The setting is a futuristic New York," said Geoffrey Macnab in *The Independent*. Adam Driver plays Cesar, a visionary architect who has the ability to make time stand still, and who has invented a magical building material called "megalon", which, he hopes, will help him depose the city's corrupt mayor (Giancarlo Esposito). Cesar also has a lover, the gold-digging journalist Wow Platinum (Aubrey Plaza), whose attentions soon turn to his rich uncle (Jon Voight), and then to his power-hungry cousin (Shia LaBeouf). If that all sounds somewhat

IF ★★★

Sweet children's film about imaginary friends Dir: John Krasinski 1hr 44mins (U)

John Krasinski – one of the stars of the US version of *The Office* – proved himself a proficient horror director with the *A Quiet Place* film series; now he has moved into "mushier terrain" with *IF*, a children's film brimming with "wistful wonder", said Ed Potton in *The Times*. Cailey Fleming stars as Bea, a 12-year-old whose mother dies from cancer in an "*Up*-style" prologue. A few years later, her father (Krasinski) also falls ill, and so Bea goes to live with her grandmother (Fiona Shaw, sporting "a mostly American accent"), in her flat in Brooklyn. There, she discovers that she can see other people's imaginary friends (or IFs), including a loveable, furry monster voiced by Steve Carell, and an arch butterfly (Phoebe Waller-Bridge). The film isn't big on character development, and it doesn't really make sense. But it's a "big-hearted fairy tale" with a lovely "final twist".



IF has many of the elements of a family-friendly hit, said Adrian Horton in *The Guardian*: an "expensive mix of live-action and animation"; an all-star voice cast of actors that includes George Clooney, Bradley Cooper and Krasinski's wife, Emily Blunt; and "a healthy dose of sentimentality". But it does feel a little "perfunctory", and it lacks the magic of, say, *Paddington 2*. It's also unclear who the film is for, said Ty Burr in *The Washington Post*. The youngest children at

the screening I went to got so bored, they started running around; while older kids may fail fully to engage with the film owing to its "scattershot storyline". *IF* is neither funny enough nor charming enough to really work, though Fleming does bring a "pleasing intensity" to her role, said Matthew Bond in *The Mail on Sunday*. "Maybe send your imaginary friend along instead."

Rebus: six-part BBC drama starring the charismatic Richard Rankin

The BBC's new six-part series *Rebus* "doesn't feel necessary, exactly", said Rachel Cooke in *The New Statesman*: every day seems to bring "sheeting rain and another new police drama, and Ian Rankin's novels have been well adapted before": between 2000 and 2007, there were four ITV series based on the books. Still, this outing, written by the playwright Gregory Burke, "is shaping up to be a keeper".



A "dark, dangerous" Rebus

While the detective sergeant John Rebus of Rankin's most recent books is "a weary, wily old-timer", said Dan Einav in the FT, this Rebus is a younger man (played by Richard Rankin, no relation). A divorced alcoholic with questionable ethics, he seems to be on the cusp of losing his job; then, a gang turf war "spills out from

Edinburgh's underworld into its picturesque streets", and Rebus finds himself facing "all manner of personal and professional dilemmas". Elements of the drama feel rather familiar, but Richard Rankin "offsets the more hackneyed elements of the character as he negotiates both flashes of menace and quieter moments of self-awareness and shame".

I loved the series, said Carol Midgley in *The Times*. This Rebus has a "dark, dangerous charisma and bone-dry sarcasm that is mildly hypnotic to watch". And though the "plot is bleak", the script is so witty that it often made me "laugh loudly. You don't necessarily expect that from a crime drama in which young lads have their fingers chopped off with secateurs."

Exhibition of the week **Now You See Us**

Tate Britain, London SW1 (020-7887 8888, tate.org.uk). Until 13 October

“The past five or so years have seen an explosion of interest in the history of women’s art,” said Gabrielle Schwarz in *The Daily Telegraph*. Not so long ago, women were at best regarded as peripheral to art history. But in recent years, countless exhibitions, books and podcasts have appeared to “correct the record” – the latest being this new show at Tate Britain. *Now You See Us* brings together some 200 paintings, sculptures, prints and photographs by more than 100 female artists who worked in Britain between the 16th century and the immediate aftermath of the First World War. It seeks to explore the complicated story of women’s role in the teaching and practice of art, examining the obstacles and prejudices that stood in their path and the ways in which they circumvented them.

Ranging from relatively familiar names, including Artemisia Gentileschi, Angelica Kauffman and Gwen John, to hitherto forgotten figures, it is an “impressively expansive” effort.

The show brings “whole legions” of unknown women artists “marching out of the shadows”, said Mark Hudson in *The Independent*. These women were not “amateurs” but professionals who forged their careers “in the face of prejudice”. Gentileschi, for instance, came to Britain to work at the court of Charles I. Her *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (c.1638) sees her “intent on her craft, paintbrush in hand”, underlining her professionalism. Yet Gentileschi was also exceptional: a painter with the licence to be creative. The problem is that little here is “truly original, let



Laura Knight's *A Dark Pool* (c. 1908-18): conventional but “pensive”

alone groundbreaking”. Certain works from the 17th and 18th century, such as Maria Cosway’s “huge” and entertainingly eccentric 1781-82 likeness of the Duchess of Devonshire dressed as the Roman Moon goddess, show some imagination. But many of the portraits are “stultifyingly conventional”. They also do not give a sense “of a distinctive women’s way of painting”, until the later periods – with, for instance, Laura Knight’s conventional but “pensive” pictures of women on Cornish clifftops.

I found this show “a spirited (let no man say ‘feisty’) survey of female achievement”, said Laura Freeman in *The Times*. It reminds us how difficult it was for women to make a career in art. In 1770, for instance, the Royal Academy banned many art forms

accessible to women – including needlework, cut paper and “any such baubles” – from its exhibitions. Styles in which women specialised, including pastel and watercolour, were “disdained”. All this is communicated through captions that are “informative and interesting” rather than preachy or “antagonistic”. I particularly enjoyed the still lifes: Mary Delany’s (1700-88) “austere” but delicate floral cut-outs alongside, much later, “radically different” and “equally irrepresible” flower paintings by the early 20th century artists Ethel Sands and Vanessa Bell. The exhibition is not perfect – the curators have tried to pack too much in, and the Victorian work is cloyingly sentimental – but it’s an “energising and entertaining” tribute to “female achievement in the arts”.

The King’s first official portrait: the verdict

Forget Harry versus William, or republicans versus monarchists, said Laura Freeman in *The Times*. The question now dividing royal watchers is: “King Charles in oils, triumph or disaster?” The first royal portrait of the King was unveiled last week, an eight-foot canvas by Jonny Yeo. It was also the first royal portrait to go viral – and on social media, the nation was “split down the middle”. The fans described it as “magnificent”, “fabulous” and “stunning”. The detractors complained that Charles seemed to be “suspended in a sea of blood”, that his “disembodied head and hands” appeared to be “floating in a sea of crushed raspberries”. When Charles unveiled the picture, he muttered: “Christ!” I had a similar reaction, said Freeman. I admire the face. “Lots of artists can do a likeness but few give you a sense of soul.” Charles looks “kind, tired, wise, shy and resolute all at once”. But “I can’t shake my reservations about the background”. The pinkish red, spilling out from his Welsh Guards uniform, is “bold”, but it seems “to overpower its subject, practically rising up in revolution against the sitter”.



Yeo's *Portrait of HM King Charles III*

Yeo is a “bland and unoriginal” celebrity portraitist, said Sebastian Smee in *The Washington Post*. His shtick is to paint heads “with a veneer of slick, conventional realism” and then, with “arty insouciance”, to leave parts of the canvas “either unfinished or decorated with abstract-looking brushwork in arbitrary colours”. This one just doesn’t make sense. So many artistic decisions have been avoided. “Do we want pretty or gritty? Abstract or figurative?” Symbolism (the butterfly, denoting Charles’s transformation from prince to king) or realism? The finished article is “a heap of oxymorons, a pile-up of platitudes”. “And yet – I think I like it,” said Emily Lawford in *Prospect*. It’s interestingly ambivalent. The face is “generously portrayed”, the hands less so: Charles’s “sausage-like fingers seem to loom even larger than usual”. He looks as if he’s bathing in blood – a nod, some have suggested, to the monarchy’s brutal history. At any rate, it’s a daring portrait, said Kara Kennedy in *The New Statesman*, which “will remind future generations of the King’s weirdness”.



Best books... Penelope Tree

The 1960s supermodel chooses her favourite books about coming of age. Her autobiographical debut novel, *Piece of My Heart* (Moonflower Publishing £18.99), is out this week

The Catcher in the Rye

by J.D. Salinger, 1951 (Penguin £9.99). I read this quintessential coming-of-age novel on the brink of my own stormy adolescence, and Holden Caulfield's account of his alienation from the adult world and his war against phoney was a huge influence on me. For years I tried to write like Salinger, with absolutely zero success.

Purple Hibiscus

by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2003 (Fourth Estate £8.99). Adichie's powerful debut novel is narrated by a young Nigerian girl struggling to come to terms with a fanatically religious father who is a hero to many but a violent

abuser at home. In many ways it's a natural sequel to *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe.

Never Let Me Go

by Kazuo Ishiguro, 2005 (Faber £9.99). In the course of growing up, Kathy slowly begins to comprehend the grim reason for her existence, and the inevitability of her preordained fate. The horror and pathos of her situation have haunted me ever since I first read this dystopian, genre-bending story.

Silver Sparrow

by Tayari Jones, 2011 (Oneworld £8.99). This opens with the great line, "My father, James Witherspoon, is a bigamist." Set in 1980s Atlanta and narrated by the daughter

of James's secret marriage, it's an unputdownable story about half-sisters whose contrasting perspectives on life are shaped by their very different circumstances.

Hideous Kinky

by Esther Freud, 1992 (Penguin £8.99). I've just re-read this novel after an interval of 30 years and loved it even more the second time. Marrakech in the 1970s is experienced through the eyes of a young child trying to make sense of the bewildering world of adults, particularly her capricious mother and absent father. While nothing is explained outright, the story is skilfully revealed via Lucy's observations and reactions to unfolding events.

Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop on 020-3176 3835. For out-of-print books visit biblio.co.uk

The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

Stephen Adly Guirgis's Pulitzer Prize-winning tragicomedy, **Between Riverside and Crazy**, about a retired NYPD cop who fills his apartment with oddball strays and petty criminals, has its "blistering" UK premiere (Daily Telegraph). Until 15 June, Hampstead Theatre, London NW3 (hampsteadtheatre.com).

Head to Margate for the first major European exhibition of work by the American abstract artist **Ed Clark**. Spanning his career from the 1940s to 2000s, it includes the paintings he made with a broom. Until 1 September, Turner Contemporary, Margate, Kent (turnercontemporary.org).

Book now

See future dance stars in the making as the Royal Opera House welcomes junior companies including the Rambert School for **The Next Generation Festival 2024**. 11 June-4 July, Royal Opera House, London WC2 (roh.org.uk).

Sheffield DocFest makes its 31st outing with the usual programme of international



Danny Sapani in *Between Riverside and Crazy*

documentaries, talks and events. It opens with Oscar-winner Kevin Macdonald's portrait of Vitali Klitschko, the former boxing champion and mayor of Kyiv. 12-17 June, various venues, Sheffield (sheffdocfest.com).

James Corden – back on the London stage for the first time since 2012 – and Anna Maxwell Martin star in Joe Penhall's new political drama **The Constituent**. 13 June-10 August, The Old Vic, London SE1 (oldvictheatre.com).

Television

Programmes

D-Day 80: We Were There Eighty years on, the surviving D-Day veterans – some of them over 100 years old – share their memories of the Normandy landings. Mon 27 May, BBC2 21:00 (60mins).

Cumbria's Red Squirrels

Documentary following the volunteers, charities and scientists working to protect the endangered species. Mon 27 May, BBC4 21:00 (60mins).

Dispatches – Kill Zone:

Inside Gaza Filmed over 200 days in Gaza, this is an unflinching look at the horrors faced by Palestinian civilians since the beginning of the war. Mon 27 May, C4 21:00 (75mins).

Cheap Flights: What They Really Mean for You

The BBC's climate editor, Justin Rowlett, and others explore the aviation industry's efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Tue 28 May, BBC1 20:00 (60mins).

Spotlight: Blood on the

Dance Floor Investigation into the unsolved murder of a gay police officer in 1990s Belfast, looking at its effect on the peace process and the city's LGBTQ+ community. Tue 28 May, BBC2 21:00 (60mins).

Films

Close (2022) Belgian director Lukas Dhont won the Cannes Jury Prize for this emotionally charged drama about the intense friendship between two 13-year-old boys. Sat 25 May, BBC4 21:00 (100mins).

Rams (2020) Australian remake of the Icelandic comedy-drama: two estranged brothers go to war over their sheep. Sam Neill and Miranda Richardson star. Sun 26 May, Film4 23:15 (135mins).

New to streaming TV

Camden Docuseries exploring the ongoing musical influence of Camden Town on everyone from Noel Gallagher to Dua Lipa. From 29 May on Disney+.

The Big Cigar The "wild tale" of Black Panther Huey P. Newton, who escaped to Cuba in 1974, aided by film producer Bert Schneider (New York Times). On Apple TV+.

The Archers: what happened last week

Emotions run high after the accident. George feels sick when he hears about Fallon's miscarriage and tells Chelsea it happened because of him. Kirsty tries to comfort Fallon, but she wishes no one knew about what happened. Adam suggests that Alice moves in, but she immediately crosses the line by drinking. When Adam insists that she call her sobriety buddy, she does so only to say she's an alcoholic and will never change. Tension builds between Fallon and heartbroken Harrison; Fallon goes to stay with Jolene at The Bull. Ruairi arrives to see Alice, and suggests she comes to London with him for a while. Paul questions Alistair on the fake call-out he concocted to cover up his and Denise's date; Mick gets drawn into the complicated lie. Everyone's praising George for his heroics and the Borchester Echo wants to do a feature – but he bats it away and seems down. Alice has reservations about going to London and leaving Martha. Later, Tracy bumps into her and tells her they'd all be better off without her. Saying goodbye, Chris and Alice say they'll miss each other.

Dreamy Italian properties for less than €1m



▲ **Umbria:** Spoleto, Assisi. Two ancient farmhouses, with spectacular mountain views, connected by a courtyard. 4 beds, 4 baths, 2 kitchens, 4 receps, terrace, swimming pool, outbuildings, parking. €970,000; Engel & Völkers (00 39 07 421 944 967).

▼ **Puglia:** Pescoluse, Salento. A stone villa overlooking the sea and surrounded by mature gardens with olive trees, Mediterranean plants and a fresh-water well. 4 beds, 3 baths, kitchen, recep, swimming pool, terrace. €800,000; D'Amico (00 39 335 732 9117).



► **Puglia:** Trullo Ostuni, Ostuni. Traditional stone building with panoramic views over the surrounding countryside and six *trulli* cones. 3 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 2 receps, terrace, garden, swimming pool, parking. €650,000; Puglia Dream (00 39 339 607 4866).



◀ **Lombardy:** Via San Giacomo, Bergamo. An elegant flat in a historic building overlooking the city. 2 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 2 receps, lift. €890,000; Sotheby's (00 39 02 8707 8300).

► **Calabria:** Villa Chess, Belvedere Marittimo. This charming rustic villa is surrounded by the mountains of the Pollino National Park, and has views of the Tyrrhenian Sea. 4 beds, 3 baths, kitchen, recep, garden. €800,000; Property Organiser (020-7097 8653).





◀ **Sicily:** Contrada San Giacomo Spirini Nicosia. This largely restored villa was built in 1800, is close to two nature reserves and boasts impressive views of Mount Etna and the Nebrodi National Park. 13 beds, 7 baths, terrace, outbuildings, parking, €660,000; Sotheby's (00 39 093 1174 0119).

▼ **Treviso:** Villa Bortoluzzi, Oderzo. A wing of this former monastery and aristocratic residence built in 1850. The property is set within a large 19th century private park. 4 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, recep, veranda, parking, €750,000; Sotheby's (00 39 045 824 2300).



▲ **Tuscany:** Castelnuovo di Val di Cecina, Livorno, Pisa. A farmhouse (divided into five apartments) and villa in 1.5 hectares of landscaped gardens. 10 beds, 6 baths, 2 kitchens, 5 receps, swimming pool, garden, outbuildings, parking. €790,000; Prestige Property (01935-817188).



Let us help you write *your* life story

Your very own autobiography – a unique gift for you, your loved ones and future generations

What have been the defining moments of your life? Perhaps you are too young to remember the Second World War, but what about the Cold War, the Swinging Sixties, the three-day week, Margaret Thatcher and the Covid pandemic?

What are your childhood memories?

Your life experiences will have been so different to those of young people today. You need to tell your family and friends about them, or your unique memories will be lost for ever.

How LifeBook Memoirs can help you

At LifeBook Memoirs, we believe that every life story is unique and deserves to be told with care and empathy. Every book that we create is written by humans – not by AI – and our handpicked interviewers, skilled ghostwriters and experienced editors maintain standards of quality that are second to none.

A beautifully handcrafted book

We will capture your stories exactly as you would wish and present them in a beautifully handcrafted book. We are a family business, so we take pride in the fact that these private autobiographies endure and go on to become cherished heirlooms.

Don't let your life story be lost. Talk to our experts and start your journey into print today.

Every LifeBook package includes

- Face-to-face interviews
- Skilled ghostwriters, no AI
- Personal project manager
- Handcrafted linen-bound books
- A personalised dust jacket
- Bonus audio highlights
- Interest-free monthly payments



Start your private autobiography journey today.

Call **0330 828 5829**

www.lifebookmemoirs.com/week



How to eat 30 plants a week

Apparently, it's no longer enough to consume five portions of fruit and veg a day. The latest advice is that we should also be aiming to eat 30 different plants a week. Researchers on the British and American Gut Project found that people who eat a wide variety of plants have significantly more diverse gut microbiomes than those who follow more restricted diets. And gut diversity has been linked to a range of benefits, including healthier immune systems, and reduced risk of diabetes, obesity and cancer. Hence the emergence of the "30 plants a week" movement, which is backed by the likes of Dr Tim Spector and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall (see recipe below), says Louise Eccles in *The Times*. But how feasible is it to eat so many different plants? I decided to give it a go, and found that it's a lot simpler than it sounds, because the list of qualifying ingredients includes "everything from black pepper, lemon and olive oil to black tea, coffee and dark chocolate". So as well as getting in plenty of regular veg, my strategy was to pack family meals with as many "nuts, seeds, pulses and spices" as was reasonably possible. I ended the week having eaten 46 types of plant – and having spent £30 more on groceries than usual.

Sugar gets the salt treatment

Sugar, for most of us, is a white, granulated substance with an unvarying flavour, says Kiki Aranita in *The Guardian*. We're rarely



Sugar: never naturally white

told where the sugar we buy has come from; nor about the processes that have been used to refine it – or even whether it's derived from sugar cane or beet (80% of the world's sugar is produced from the former, with most of the rest from the latter). None of this is accidental: the global sugar industry has a vested interest in maintaining sugar as a cheap, interchangeable commodity that feels far removed from any plant. But, in fact, sugar is never naturally white (it is brown and has to be bleached to become white). And its flavour, like that of any food that derives from plants that have developed in different ecosystems, can be very varied, as can its texture. That being the case, some sellers are now hoping to "do to

sugar what has been done to salt", and turn it into a speciality product. The US-based spice company Burlap & Barrel, for instance, has just launched a series of "single-origin" sugars, including a granulated one from Barbados, and an unrefined cane sugar from Colombia, called *panela*. Both are delicious, and impressively different: the *panela* has the texture of sand, the "colour of milk caramel", and tastes "like sucking on sweet cinnamon toffee". The Barbados sugar's flavour is enhanced by molasses, and its crystals are "startlingly angular" and "crunch loudly between one's teeth".

The cheese you put in your coffee

The online cheesemonger Cheesegeek is marketing a "gouda-style cheese" named Swift Reserve that is meant to be eaten with coffee, says Xanthe Clay in *The Daily Telegraph*. This isn't as strange as it sounds: in lots of countries cheese is served for breakfast, and *kaffeost*, a coffee drunk in northern Scandinavia, has "chunks of cheese at the bottom of the mug". Cheesegeek says Swift Reserve can be eaten alongside a cup of coffee, or stirred into it. The former "definitely works": the cheese's lactic notes complement the coffee's "mellow background". But crumbling it into coffee is "less pleasing": although the partially melted cheese tastes OK, I am put off when "globules of fat" float to the surface. Cheese and coffee can be paired, then; but I'll be "keeping them separate, thanks, rather than stirred".

Recipe of the week: courgette, honey and lemon cake

The mighty lemon drizzle cake is everyone's favourite, says Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. This spin on it includes courgettes: as well as helping you up your plant intake, they keep the cake nice and moist. The lemon drizzle topping makes the cake irresistibly zingy. To turn it into a dinner party dessert, serve it with *crème fraîche*, summer berries and an extra trickle of honey.

Makes 8-10 slices 350g coarsely grated courgettes (about 2 medium) ½ tsp fine salt 150g wholemeal spelt flour
100g fine plain wholemeal flour 100g ground almonds or hazelnuts ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda 1 tsp baking powder 30g poppy seeds (optional) 125ml rapeseed or coconut oil 50g soft light brown sugar 30g honey 3 medium eggs finely grated zest and juice of 2 lemons 4 sprigs of thyme, leaves picked and chopped (optional) 50ml milk
For the lemon drizzle: finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon 1 tbsp honey 20g caster sugar

- Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan and line a 1kg (2lb) loaf tin with baking paper.
- Tip the grated courgettes into a fine-meshed sieve set over a bowl. Sprinkle with the salt and toss through (to draw out moisture). Leave to drain for 20 mins or so, then press the courgettes with the back of a spoon to get rid of a bit more water.
- In a bowl, mix together the flours, ground nuts, bicarbonate of soda, baking powder and poppy seeds, if using. Set aside.
- In a large bowl, whisk together the oil, sugar and honey. Beat in the eggs, one by one, then stir in the courgettes, lemon zest and juice and thyme. Gently fold in the flour mixture, adding the milk as you go. Pour into the prepared loaf tin and bake for 45-50 mins until golden and risen.



- While the cake is in the oven, make the lemon drizzle. In a small bowl, lightly mix the lemon zest and juice with the honey and sugar to combine without dissolving the sugar.
- To check the cake is cooked, insert a skewer into the middle – it should come out clean. As soon as you take the cake from the oven, spoon the lemon drizzle over the surface. Leave the cake in the tin for 10 mins, then transfer it to a wire rack and allow to cool completely before slicing and serving.
- **Swaps/additions:** use grated squash or pumpkin instead of courgette. Or go 50:50 with courgette and a grated root, such as beetroot, carrot or parsnip. Just mix it with the courgette before salting. Beetroot, as you can imagine, makes a gorgeous pinky-purple version.

Taken from *How to Eat 30 Plants a Week* by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, published by Bloomsbury at £25. Photography by Lizzie Mayson. To buy from *The Week Bookshop* for £19.99, call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.

New cars: what the critics say



Suzuki Swift
Price: from £18,699

Autocar

Thanks to the rise of SUVs and electric cars, the supermini is a dwindling class. The Ford Fiesta, Kia Rio and Nissan Micra have all been canned. But the Suzuki Swift soldiers on. In its fourth generation, it has a new 1.2-litre three-cylinder petrol engine, which is mildly hybridised and comes with a manual or automatic gearbox. Or there's a four-wheel drive option. "Light and frugal", it is "keenly priced".

Auto Express

Weighing less than a tonne, the Swift can "feel a bit like a tin can", but it is agile and efficient, with 64.2mpg claimed WLTP. It can "turn on a sixpence", with "quick, darty steering" and "just enough roll in the chassis to feel fun"; the gearbox is "notchy but pretty slick". It balances comfort and control – and though it could be more refined at motorway speeds, it's great for nipping around town.

Car Magazine

The Swift has a new front grille and headlights, and the interior has also been restyled, with a focus on sustainability. Prices start from £18,699, so it's not luxurious: there are lots of "hard, scratchy plastics", but it looks "decent" and "up to date". There's a 9in infotainment screen, with wireless connectivity and heated seats as standard. It's spacious enough, though not "palatial": "it is a supermini after all".

Food experts recommend their favourite kitchen gadgets



◀ Bamix cordless stick blender

Tim Hayward, food writer and co-owner of Fitzbillies, Cambridge, uses a cordless blender to make his own mayonnaise. It is powerful and efficient for mashing, chopping or pureeing. Its battery lasts for 20 minutes and it has two different speeds (£224; bamixuk.com).

▶ Robert Welch Signature hand-held knife sharpener

Sharp knives are essential, and Tom Brown, chef patron of Cornerstone and Pearly Queen, swears by this knife-sharpening wheel. It is designed for maximum efficiency, and its ceramic wheel can be replaced (£28; robertwelch.com).



◀ Thermomix TM6

It is pricey, but Ravinder Bhogal, chef patron of Jikoni, believes the Thermomix is worth every penny. She uses hers to grind spices finely, but this all-in-one machine has 20 different functions and modes, from weighing, blending and slow cooking, to sous vide, peeling and fermenting (£1,279; vorwerk.com).



▶ Gaggia Gelatiera ice cream maker

Food writer Diana Henry has had her "steadfast" Gaggia for 32 years. It can make the silkiest ice cream in just half-an-hour, with no need to pre-freeze the bowl. Makes one litre per batch (£323; lakeland.co.uk).



◀ Magimix Cuisine 5200XL

Ottolenghi cook and food writer Tara Wigley uses this processor twice a day to chop vegetables and nuts finely. Guaranteed for 30 years, it can blend, whisk, slice, emulsify, grate, press, chop and knead, thanks to Sabatier blades and an energy-efficient, ultra-quiet motor (£370; magimix.co.uk).



Tips... how to grow your own tomatoes

- You can grow tomatoes on a sunny balcony or patio, but keep them under cover until late May, when it is a bit warmer.
- If you have a greenhouse, you'll get an earlier crop and it will be less likely to be lost to blight (which is more prevalent in a wet summer). Crimson Crush and Lizzano are good blight-resistant varieties.
- Tomatoes grow either as tall, single-stem cordons, or as low-sprawling bushes. A grow bag is perfect for bush types; cordons work best in big plastic pots as the roots can go deeper and they're easier to stake.
- Bush tomatoes tend to fruit earlier and over a shorter period of four to six weeks. Varieties such as Tumbler can be grown in hanging baskets, but will need more water.
- Cordon tomatoes can grow over 8ft tall, and will keep producing new fruit as they grow, so they crop over a longer period.
- Cordons produce new growth from the angle each leaf makes with the main stem, so pinch these out as soon as you see them, and secure the main stem to a cane.

SOURCE: THE SUNDAY TIMES

THE WEEK 25 May 2024

And for those who have everything...



Devoted to vinyl, Norwegian craftsman Stian Herral produces these handmade Vinyl Tables, with space for 200 records. You can hide your amplifier and cables behind the sliding tambour door and place your turntable on the top.

Available in oak or walnut.
from £1,410; hrdl.no

SOURCE: FT

Where to find... the UK's best whisky distilleries

The Glenturret, in Crieff, Perth and Kinross, is Scotland's oldest working distillery, dating from 1763, and its restaurant has just won its second Michelin star (tours £18 / tasting menu from £195; theglenturret.com).

The English Distillery in Roudham, Norfolk, is England's oldest whisky distillery, founded in 2006. It has the world's best single malt according to the World Whiskies Awards (tours from £22.50; englishwhisky.co.uk).

The **Talisker** distillery on the Isle of Skye has five copper-pot stills, cask tastings and multisensory experiences (tours from £15; malts.com). It has teamed up with The Three Chimneys restaurant (threechimneys.co.uk) to create a whisky-inspired tasting menu. Granted its licence in 1608, **Bushmills**, in County Antrim, claims to be the world's oldest licensed distillery. It has tours, tastings and a café (tours from £15; bushmills.eu). Speyside is home to numerous distilleries, including the **Glenfiddich** one (tours from £30; glenfiddich.com).

SOURCE: THE TIMES

This week's dream: a remote Indian Ocean paradise

Few tropical archipelagos are quite as beautiful, remote and appealingly quirky as the Cocos Islands, says Ruaridh Nicoll in the FT. Isolated in the Indian Ocean 660 miles south of Indonesia – but governed from Australia, 1,720 miles to their southeast – they are an “all but mythical world of tides and sun”, surrounded by glorious coral reefs. They are a joyous place for lovers of the sea, but they also have a strange history, and are home to an “idiosyncratic” and tight-knit community of some 593 people who “make a point of drawing in visitors”. However, this is not a tourist hot spot. There are only 144 tourist beds in the whole archipelago and two incoming flights each week, both from Perth.



The Cocos Islands' Home island: a “world of tides and sun”

The islands were first spotted in 1609, but not settled until 1826, when a “horror” called Alexander Hare arrived with a harem, “thinking he was going to have a fine old time”. Hare also brought in Sunni Muslim labourers from Malaysia and Indonesia, from whom most of the islands' current inhabitants

are descended. He was soon pushed out, however, by one of his former captains, a Shetland islander called John Clunies-Ross, generations of whose descendants then maintained a semi-feudal rule over the islands. They “held Scottish country dances, imported deer to hunt, walked around shoeless in white suits”, and were even visited by Queen Elizabeth II in 1954. But in 1973, they were forced to sell up by the Australian state under advice from the UN's decolonisation programme.

There are two main islands, Home and West, both about seven miles long, but very narrow. Most of the best places to stay – such as Waves Oceanfront – are on West, as

is much of the social action. This revolves around the “club” (the islands' bar), games of Scroungers (“an absurd round of golf straddling the runway”) and several restaurants (which open in rotation, as they share the same staff). But it's worth exploring further afield – ferry rides across the lagoon are “spirit-soaring”, and Cossies beach, on Direction Island, is truly idyllic.

Getting the flavour of...



An underrated Spanish city

The city of Alicante is often associated with “Brits-abroad tourism of the dreariest kind” – but wrongly, because it is a world apart from the suburban resorts nearby on the Costa Blanca. With its sandstone palaces and Renaissance churches, it's a handsome place with “culture and personality in spades”, says Paul Richardson in The Sunday Telegraph. And while it is changing, this is “mostly for the better”, and it is still far from “glossy” or “overtouristed”. On a visit in February, I enjoyed just wandering around – down the “elegant”, palm-flanked Explanada de España, along the “much-loved” El Postiguet beach, and through Santa Cruz, a once-scruffy “gypsy quarter” that's now “Instagram-ready”, with its “whitewashed houselets and geraniums in gaily painted pots”. And I was astounded by the city's excellent food scene, including its “spectacular” 1920s market, and restaurants such as Nou Manolín, Dársena and Espacio Montoro.

A cottage in Herefordshire

Urbanites in need of pastoral peace could scarcely do better than book a weekend at the National Trust's recently refurbished Hop Kiln Cart Barn (pictured), says Susannah Butter in The Times. Located on the Brockhampton Estate in Herefordshire (England's third-most sparsely populated county, after Northumberland and Cumbria), this former stables is now a “spacious” two-bed holiday let with cobblestone floors and wonderful views. There are good walks to enjoy nearby, and plenty to see, including Brockhampton's 14th century manor house, the town of Ledbury (where the parish church has a stained-glass window by William Morris) and – just across the Gloucestershire border – the village of Dymock, where the poets Edward Thomas and Robert Frost once lived. *Rentals start at £520 for three nights (nationaltrust.org.uk).*

Italy's lesser-known lakes

Lakeside holidays in Italy can be delightful, with swimming, cycling and hiking to enjoy, and plenty of “handsome” shoreside towns, “picturesque” villages and good wineries to visit. The great lakes of the north – Como and so on – need no introduction, says Sarah Lane in The Daily Telegraph, but there are others that are less well known but similarly big and lovely. Among these are Bracciano (an hour from Rome), Bolsena (also in Lazio) and Trasimeno, in Umbria. Its main town, Castiglione del Lago, has a “richly frescoed” palazzo and a castle with majestic views, while Passignano sul Trasimeno, on the opposite shore, has “a charming fishing village vibe”. Among the fine places to stay are Montemelino and Podere Marella, both wineries with accommodation in former farm buildings.

Hotel of the week



Puqio Arequipa, Peru

This new, safari-style tented camp is a great base from which to explore Peru's “show-stopping” Colca Valley, says Megan Spurrell in Condé Nast Traveller. Guides lead treks and horseback rides to see pre-Inca sites, spot wildlife – including condors and llama-like vicuñas – and to watch the sunset over the canyon (the world's second-deepest, after its neighbour, the Cotahuasi). The camp's eight tents have double beds, wood-burning stoves, and terraces with outdoor tubs and showers. The food is “on a par with Lima's best restaurants”, and draws on local ingredients such as coca leaves and sanky (a cactus fruit).

Doubles from £650; puqio.pe.

The short-story writer who was “as good as it gets”

Alice Munro
1931-2024

Alice Munro often embarked on what she thought was a novel, only to find that the narrative petered out after about 40 pages. But this hardly mattered, said *The New Yorker*, because as the citation for her Nobel Prize in Literature put it, Munro, who has died aged 92, could “accommodate the entire epic complexity of the novel” within a short story. She produced more than a dozen collections of them, most focused on the lives of seemingly ordinary women and girls in rural communities in southern Ontario, where she had herself grown up. Acclaimed for the spare precision of her prose, and the intricacy of her plotting, she was often compared to Maupassant and Chekhov, said *The Times*. John Updike described her as a writer who examined small worlds “gimlet-eyed and rabbit-eared”, to create ambitious works that are defined by “a well-meditated complexity and multiplicity of plot, an intense clarity of phrase and image, an exceptional psychological searchingness and honesty”. Richard Ford wrote that her absolute mastery of the form was simply a given, in literary circles. “With Alice it’s like a shorthand,” he said. “You’ll just mention her, and everybody just kind of generally nods that she’s just sort of as good as it gets.”

Alice Laidlaw was born in Wingham, Ontario in 1931. Her father owned a fox farm. Her mother, a former teacher, had early-onset Parkinson’s, which meant that it fell to Alice to do many of the chores. She was brought up, she said, to think the worst thing you could do was to “think you were smart”. But neither this nor her household responsibilities stopped her winning top marks in her exams, and a scholarship to the University of Western Ontario. She took two jobs, and was still only left with 35 cents a day for food. Possibly she was hungry when she met fellow student Jim Munro in a library. He dropped a piece of candy; she cried, “I’ll



Munro: “an intense clarity of phrase”

get it,” and they became engaged six months later. They married in 1951, when she was 20, by which time she had already sold one of her stories to a college magazine. Partly to escape the disapproval of his family, who felt she was not good enough for him, they moved west to Vancouver, where she worked part-time in a library, and he found a job in a shop. “Having a place of our own and a bed of our own where we could carry on as we liked seemed marvellous to us,” she wrote. “We had made this bargain, but it never occurred to us that older people – our parents, our aunts and uncles – could have made the same bargain, for lust. It seemed as if their main itch had been for houses, property, power mowers, and home freezers and retaining walls”.

In the early 1960s, by which time they had two children, and had lost a baby at 14 hours, Jim gave up his job and they moved to Victoria, British Columbia, where they ran a bookshop.

“Seduced and Abandoned? Relax with a book from Munro’s,” read a line on a bookmark Alice had designed. Their household was relaxed and bohemian. After she had a third daughter, the eldest helped out; and her writing flourished. In 1968, her debut collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, won Canada’s equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize. But her marriage was disintegrating and ended in 1972. Not long after, she became reacquainted with an old college boyfriend, Gerry Fremlin. They married in 1976, and settled back in Ontario, 20 miles from her childhood home.

In 1977 she had the first of many stories published in *The New Yorker*, and her work started to reach an international audience. In 2004, Jonathan Franzen anointed her “the Great One”, and urged people to “Read Munro! Read Munro!” Her health started to fail in 2009 and she published her last book in 2012, when she was 81. Fremlin died in 2013. Her daughters survive her.

B-movie director and mentor to a generation

Roger Corman
1921-2024

Roger Corman described himself as the “Orson Welles of the Z movie”, said *The Guardian*. And as a director and producer, he was responsible for a lot of schlocky fare: his films include *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *She Gods of Shark Reef* and *The Brain Eaters*. A handful of them have endured – including *The Little Shop of Horrors*, which he shot in two days and one night on a set left over from another film, and a series based on the works of Edgar Allan Poe, starring Vincent Price. But his real legacy may be the training ground he provided for younger filmmakers. He gave Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Jonathan Demme and Ron Howard some of their first work behind the camera. And he was a spotter of acting talent too. He gave a 21-year-old Jack Nicholson his first film part, and on the set of the counterculture film *The Trip* (1967), he united him with Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper, with whom he’d star in *Easy Rider*. Other stars to whom he gave early breaks include Robert De Niro, Talia Shire and Sandra Bullock.

Corman “was able to nurture other talent in a way that was never envious or difficult, but always generous”, Scorsese recalled. “He once said: ‘Martin, what you have to get is a very good first reel, because people want to know what’s going on. Then you need a very good last reel, because people want to hear how it all turns



Corman: trained as an engineer

out. Everything else doesn’t really matter.” Probably the best sense I have ever heard about the movies.” But in the 1970s, Corman surprised many in Hollywood by launching a distribution company, which brought films by Bergman, Kurosawa, Truffaut and Fellini to American cinemas. It proved extremely profitable. He called his memoir *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime*.

Born in Detroit, he credited his drive to make money to his childhood during the Depression, when his father, an engineer, had to take a major pay cut. The family were still comfortably off, but it left him with a sense that the wolf was always close to the door. They moved to California when Corman was in his teens, and he read engineering at Stanford; but he only worked four days in that industry before quitting, to take a job as a messenger at Universal Studios. He graduated to story reader, then spent six months on a literature course at the University of Oxford. Returning to the US, he sold a chase-movie script to Allied Artists, but was so disappointed by the results that he decided to make his own films. His budgets were so tight that he had to take various roles himself, ranging from stunt driver to director. Working into old age, he’d recently produced the monster flicks *Piranhaconda* (2012) and *CobraGator* (2015). Movies, he said, had always “been part art, part business. If I have a burning vision, it’s to keep on working.”

MONEYWEEK

Invest with confidence and thrive financially

With lingering concerns around inflation, uncertainty in the UK housing market and China facing deflation, growing and protecting your wealth has never been more important - or more challenging.

Our team of financial experts are here to help you navigate the changing financial landscape and invest with confidence.

Get your first 6 issues for free, then continue to save up to 60% on the shop price. Plus, get a free notebook after your trial.



Start your trial today

Visit moneyweek.com/offer

Quote code **P24Q3MW**



Your first 6 issues are free, then pay £43.99 every 13 issues for a print + digital subscription (saving 60%), £38.99 for a print subscription (saving 33%) or £32.99 for a digital subscription (saving 36%). Gift will be despatched upon completion of free trial and after your first subscription payment. Direct Debit payment. UK only offer. Your subscription is protected by our Money-Back Guarantee. Annual subscription does not include free trial. Offer redemption limited to one per household. Allow 30 days for gift delivery. Offer may be withdrawn if individual or discount site misuse is detected with no issues or gift fulfilled and no money deducted. No alternative gift or cash alternative is available.

Fashion City



How Jewish Londoners
shaped global style

BOOK NOW

📍 Canary Wharf

**MUSEUM
OF LONDON
DOCKLANDS**

Companies in the news

...and how they were assessed

Nvidia: catch me if you can

The big event on Wall Street this week was chipmaker Nvidia's quarterly results, said DealBook in The New York Times. Ahead of the announcement, Nvidia – which nearly doubled its market cap to \$2.3trn since the beginning of the year – was expected to announce “200% year-on-year revenue growth”, said The Economist. Who's surprised, given the AI boom? Access to graphics chips (GPUs), particularly Nvidia's, “is vital for any company that wants to be taken seriously in artificial intelligence”: analysts judge companies either “GPU-rich” or “GPU-poor”. Nvidia's good fortune was that its video graphics chips were readily “repurposed” for AI workloads. Would-be rivals spot an opportunity there. Minnows such as Cerebras, Groq and MatX dream that their more dedicated chips will do the job better. Meanwhile, giants such as Microsoft, Amazon and Google are making their own custom versions. Nvidia has two big advantages, said Lex in the FT: “a head start and a closed ecosystem”. Rivals are constrained by the lack of “fabs” – plants needed to assemble high-powered chips – and Nvidia also offers “a one-stop shop for customers” via its CUDA platform. Hitting the \$3trn milestone is “proving more difficult” than \$2trn. But considering the size of the potential market and its pricing power, Nvidia still “has a shot at becoming the most valuable stock in the US”.

Cazoo: New York car crash

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Cazoo, the British used-car platform, which has hit the skids so dramatically since floating in New York in 2021, that it has crashed into administration, said Jon Robinson in City AM. It was “once worth more than £5bn”, but shares in the firm – founded in 2018 by Alex Chesterman, the entrepreneur behind Zoopla – have lost more than 99% of their value. The administrator, Teneo, has retained some employees to operate Cazoo's marketplace “while a sale is explored”, but more than 700 jobs have already gone. Cazoo's “extreme fall” is “yet another unfortunate example of a company that took advantage of the Spac frenzy” (floating via a “blank cheque” company) to secure financing, said John Bringardner of Debtwire. Its downfall follows the path of US counterpart Carvana, which eventually managed to secure \$5.5bn in distressed debt funding. “Cazoo now desperately needs to pull off something similar.” During its glory days, Cazoo “spent tens of millions of pounds on sponsorship deals in football, snooker and darts in a rapid attempt to gain market share”, said Mark Kleinman on Sky News. That high profile could now work to its advantage. Among those interested in its marketplace and brand are BMW, Motorpoint and CarGurus.

Keywords Studios/EQT: private view

The deals keep coming in London, said Jasper Jolly in The Guardian. The latest to fall to foreign blandishments is the fast-growing videogame services outfit Keywords Studios, whose customers include Microsoft, Netflix and Epic Games. Shares jumped by 62% after directors said they were “minded to recommend” a £2.2bn offer from the Swedish private equity investor EQT Group. Keywords's chair is none other than Don Robert, also chairman of the London Stock Exchange Group – “owner of the UK's shrinking market, where there's a dearth of floats and companies keep getting taken out, often by private equity”, said Alistair Osborne in The Times. “Talk about setting an example.”



Seven days in the Square Mile

UK headline inflation fell sharply to 2.3% in April, its lowest level since 2021, prompting PM Rishi Sunak to declare that it is “back to normal” and “brighter days are ahead”, before announcing a 4 July election. The data coincided with the IMF's latest health check on Britain. The fund upgraded its annual growth forecast for 2024 to 0.7%, outlining there was scope for the BoE to cut interest rates three times this year. However, it warned that a near £30bn gap in public finances should rule out new tax cuts.

The Government launched a new “Prepare” website, advising Britons to stockpile tinned food, batteries and bottled water – to safeguard against risks ranging from flooding and power outages to biosecurity risks.

Japan's ten-year government bond yield climbed above 1% for the first time in 11 years. A damning report by the **Audit Reform Lab** found that Britain's big audit firms failed to raise the alarm for three-quarters of the big companies that have gone bust between 2010 and 2022 – and called for “far-reaching reforms”. Shares in **AstraZeneca** jumped on news the pharma plans to almost double revenue to \$80bn by 2030 and launch 20 new drugs. **Ryanair** boss Michael O'Leary blamed weak “consumer confidence” for slower than expected growth in air fares this summer. Giving evidence at the Horizon Inquiry, former **Post Office** boss Paula Vennells said she was “very, very sorry”, but struggled to answer some questions.

Pennon/Thames Water: financial health hazards

The owner of South West Water, FTSE 250-listed Pennon, was once described as a “best-in-class” water firm. If the poisoned residents of Brixham in Devon find that hard to swallow, investors are getting something of an icky feeling, too, said Oliver Haill on Proactive Investors. Shares in the group, which also owns South East Water, fell sharply on Tuesday when it unveiled annual results that displeased almost everyone.



Residents of Brixham had to stock up

Investors were dismayed by Pennon's stunt of “not quite cutting its dividend but raising it less than expected” (it lopped off £2.4m as a nod to South West Water's record court fine for sewage pollution last year). But plenty of others were aghast that the group – which reported flat full-year profits and a swelling of debt to £3.5bn – had the nerve to pay a dividend at all, said Julia Kollewe in The Guardian. “Their water is so dirty, it's literally putting people in hospital, yet the top brass see fit to

hand themselves yet another payout,” said the GMB union's Gary Carter. “It's like they actively want the public to hate them.”

Pennon's boss, Susan Davy, said the group, whose shares are down 36% over five years, was “working tirelessly around the clock” to resolve the issue – and that “overall, we have a robust financial position”. Indeed, “under-fire” water companies are staging a PR fightback, said Gill Plimmer in the FT: lashing out at regulator Ofwat for creating a “labyrinthine framework”. It may not wash with the public, who need no reminding where excess dividend payments can lead. Look no further than Britain's largest privatised water monopoly, said Robert Lea in The Times. Thames Water's biggest shareholder, the Canadian pension fund Omers, last week wrote off “the entire value of its stake” – declaring it “worth zero”.

Issue of the week: who should own Royal Mail?

The 500-year-old institution faces big challenges. But is an opaque foreign owner really the answer?

“There are few institutions more quintessentially British than Royal Mail,” said Alex Brummer in the Daily Mail.

“The King’s head adorns its stamps”, its red pillar boxes – embossed with royal insignia – “dot our street corners”. The very notion that this institution, dating back to 1516, “might be sold off to a shadowy Czech billionaire” would once have seemed ludicrous. Yet that’s what’s about to happen. The Royal Mail chair, Keith Williams, and his board, “have rolled over” in the face of a £3.5bn bid from Daniel Kretinský, and ministers are showing no sign of mounting a defence. Have we learnt nothing from “our disastrous record of selling public utilities” to foreign and private ownership? The Business Secretary, Kemi Badenoch “should invoke the National Security and Investment Act without delay”.



Daniel Kretinský: “the Czech Sphinx”

Almost every aspect of Kretinský’s offer for Royal Mail’s parent, International Distributions Services (IDS) is “problematic”, said Nils Pratley in The Guardian: “the price, the identity of the bidder and the sketchy ‘undertakings’ to protect the UK postal service”. The timing is weird, too. The move comes as the regulator, Ofcom, is conducting a review of Royal Mail’s “universal service obligation”, which could make the business sustainable. There’s also no mention of whether GLS – the very profitable Amsterdam-

based parcel business that currently props up Royal Mail – could be formally separated under Kretinský’s ownership. Many European countries have privatised or part-privatised their postal services, “but none has let them pass into private ownership from abroad”. Kretinský’s approach “to clear and open communication” has earned him the nickname “the Czech Sphinx”. That should speak for itself. The set of “contractual undertakings” currently being negotiated are, at best, a “work in progress”, and at worst “junk mail”.

A year ago Kretinský – who made his fortune from energy in “the post-Soviet privatisation boom” and owns stakes in West Ham FC and J. Sainsbury – flat-out denied he hoped to take Royal Mail private, said Oliver Shah in The Sunday Times. Still, one can understand why “the board folded without a fight”. Letter volumes have halved to seven billion a year since Royal Mail floated in 2013, relations with unions are poor, and Kretinský’s 370p-a-share offer is a more than 50% premium to the average price over the past year. Williams and other FTSE chairs have come under fire for being so keen to sell off British companies, said Anjali Raval in the FT. But the rules about what the Government believes is “worth protecting” are unclear. And as things stand, the board are only doing their duty by shareholders.

“Roaring Kitty”: what the experts think

● Purring comeback

The return of “Roaring Kitty”, the counterculture investment hero Keith Gill, to social media “after a three-year hiatus” was short but spectacular, said Ryan S. Gladwin on Decrypt. After sparking a reprise of January 2021’s meme stock mania – shares of the clapped-out videogame retailer GameStop doubled in value overnight – he has again fallen silent. The episode revealed “there are still plenty of idiots mucking around in public markets”, said Katie Martin in the FT. Andrew Tate – a man most famous for “Romanian charges of people trafficking” and converting a generation of boys “to the joys of toxic masculinity” – tweeted he had sold his \$500,000 holding in bitcoin to buy GameStop shares, and would hold them until his last breath “as an act of defiance against the establishment”.

● Generation-T

Still, the biggest fools of all were “the professionals”, said Martin. During the last meme outbreak, the hedge funds shorting (betting against) GameStop were so badly hurt that one, Melvin Capital, was forced to close. Yet many stuck to their bets and have now lost twice. “Fool me once, shame



A “counterculture investment hero”

on you. Fool me twice, shame on me,” as one analyst remarked. Shorting GameStop may “soon rank as the worst risk-reward of any hedge fund trade over the past decade”. And this phenomenon may not be going away, said Marcus Ashworth on Bloomberg. Roaring Kitty is “the poster child” for “Generation-T” – a new cohort of young traders with a markedly different approach to investing. “Volatility” is a leitmotif. “The younger gang favours more active trading in smaller sizes and across a wider set of products.” Bitcoin, which has more than doubled since October, is just the latest fuel. “Adapt or die.”

● Broken market?

For traditional “value investors” – who try to pick stocks that trade on less than their intrinsic value – this is anathema. No wonder prominent voices, such as Greenlight Capital’s David Einhorn (who correctly predicted the demise of Lehman Brothers in 2008), argue the US market is “fundamentally broken”, said William Cohan in the FT. Investors, he says, either don’t “care about valuation” or cannot “figure out valuation”. Maybe that really doesn’t matter anymore, but we should “at least be alive to the risks of a reckoning”.

Gardener’s world

An old City saying holds that investing is like growing asparagus – “you should always have started five years ago”, says Ian Cowie in The Sunday Times. Here are some more horticultural tips:

Enjoy your garden Investment can seem technical and tedious, but it’s fascinating and fruitful. “It’s fun to plant the seed of an idea, possibly opposing conventional wisdom, mulch it with our money, and find out who is right.”

Mixed planting Variety is crucial. “You don’t want all your shrubs to bloom at once or be vulnerable to the same pests and weather conditions.”

Great oaks from little acorns grow Give plants and portfolios constant care, and don’t neglect them. There’s no point “trying to make up for lost time with a flood after the flowers have died from drought”. Invest little and often. Regular savings schemes allow us to buy more units or shares when prices are low.

Gather ye rosebuds It’s never too soon to turn paper profits into real ones. On the other hand...

Trust in time Short-term speculation is risky. Invest for just two consecutive years and there’s “a 30% chance of shares doing worse than cash”, according to The Barclays Equity Gilt Study 2024. Yet that rises to a 77% probability of shares doing better over five years – and to 91% over a decade.

Tumbling inflation, rising vexation

Larry Elliott

The Guardian

Good news on the economy front, says Larry Elliott. Britain's headline inflation rate fell sharply to 2.3% in April. "Prices are rising more slowly than at any time in almost three years" and inflation is now "lower in the UK than it is in the EU". The fall – mainly due to downward trends in household energy bills and food price inflation – will be "helpful for poorer households" who spend a bigger share of income on fuel and food. Even so, "the big drop" (from 3.2% in March and a high of 11.1% in October 2022) "disguises more disappointing details". For one thing, economists hoped the figure would be slightly lower. There are also concerns about sticky "core inflation", which strips out food, energy, tobacco and alcoholic drinks. But the chief worry is that "services inflation" – which is closely monitored by Bank of England rate-setters because it reflects price pressures generated by the domestic economy – "barely budged", falling from 6% to just 5.9%. Many in the City now reckon a June interest-rate cut to be "very unlikely". To quote Paul Dales of Capital Economics, even an August cut is "looking a bit more doubtful".

Tesla lay-offs: how not to do it

Kara Carlson and Dana Hull

Bloomberg

Over a month into Elon Musk's rolling crusade to slash a tenth of Tesla's workforce, workers are still living in fear of the "Dear Employee" lay-off email, say Kara Carlson and Dana Hull. One current employee likens the state of America's pre-eminent EV-maker to *Squid Game*, the TV series where characters fight for survival. "The waves of dismissals" are expected "to gut significant parts of Tesla", including virtually the entire Supercharger vehicle charging team. And the process has been chaotic. Having fired his "director of charging for North America" (staff found out when his Microsoft Teams icon suddenly went grey), Musk backtracked and rehired him. The cuts are intended to help boost Tesla's flagging share price, but the tumult within the company – much of it "self-inflicted" – has contributed to this year's 29% stock slump. The long-term impact on morale could be much worse. "Great companies are made up of equal parts great people and great products, and the latter are only possible when its people are thriving," wrote a former Tesla senior executive pointedly on LinkedIn. Touché.

The great American boom

Janan Ganesh

Financial Times

The reappearance of Americans in Europe each spring is an "annual reminder of the spending power of US tourists" – and of the extraordinary robustness of the US economy "amid political bedlam", says Janan Ganesh. "America has roared ahead in the era of the Tea Party, Donald Trump, 'forever wars' abroad and culture wars at home." There have been more presidential impeachments in the past generation than in the previous 200 years; the US even failed to achieve "a peaceful transfer of power at its last election" – and yet the economy has sailed on. Why? It's tempting to credit "some unique American ruggedness", but other nations, like Poland, have had similar experiences. Perhaps politics matters less than we think, "as long as a few essential functions of state are never compromised". Some say a reckoning will come in time, but US politics has been chaotic since the turn of the century, and the great economic boom has endured. "It is hard to know what to feel: relief at the resilience of America's wealth creators, or dread that its voters lack a material incentive to fix politics."

Dispatches from the WFH front

Lucy Burton

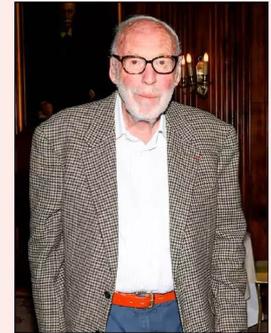
The Daily Telegraph

Showing your face in the House of Lords to claim a £300 daily attendance fee was once so common that a "brazen" peer left his taxi running while he signed in, says Lucy Burton. "Similar tactics are now taking place in corporate Britain" as the Work From Home wars heat up, amid renewed attempts by bosses to force employees back to their desks. "Coffee-badging" is the modern equivalent of the old House of Lords stunt: clocking in, visibly grabbing a coffee near a manager, then scarping. The practice is so common that a third of UK workers who are able to work flexibly admit to it, according to a survey by Owl Labs. Managers are fighting back with tactics of their own, including "office peacocking" – an attempt to make the workplace "as exciting as possible so that people actually want to be there". But, by and large, nothing they do "beats the allure of simply being at home". Many firms have decided it's time to "get tough" and monitor attendance to crack down on refuseniks. Persistent coffee-badgers "could soon find their office passes revoked altogether".

City profile

Jim Simons

"I did a lot of math, I made a lot of money, and I gave almost all of it away." That was how Jim Simons – the Cold War codebreaker turned Wall Street fund manager – described his life. In fact, Simons, who has died aged 86, sparked a revolution, says the FT. The enigmatic "Quant King" was a pioneer of quantitative investing – using computer algorithms to drive decisions. His hedge fund, Renaissance Technologies, spawned many imitators, but few matched its results. Between 1988 and 2018 it generated \$100bn in profits, its main fund delivered an astounding 66% average annual return. Bloomberg described it as "the greatest money-making machine in Wall Street history".



The son of a Boston shoe-factory manager, Simons started out teaching maths and geometry at Harvard and MIT before joining the National Security Agency as a codebreaker in the mid-1960s. He didn't last long. Kicked out for opposing the Vietnam War, he returned to academia before going into business. In 1978, he founded his hedge fund from a poky office in a Long Island strip mall. His signature style, said *The Economist*, was spotting patterns and, at Renaissance, he encouraged "the sort of collaboration found in academic maths departments". Simons was self-deprecating, with a ready sense of humour, said the FT. His "chain-smoking, silver beard, wryness and reluctance to wear socks" made him "seem more like a Coen Brothers character" than the "colossus of investing" he was. "I wasn't the fastest guy in the world," he concluded. "But I like to ponder. And pondering things... turns out to be a pretty good approach."

Advertisement

Often tired and don't know why?

This game-changing supplement could help restore energy levels.

Feeling tired and don't know why? You're not alone. According to a recent study, less than half of us consume our recommended daily amount of magnesium, a mineral that helps turn the food we eat into energy.

Best known for helping to reduce tiredness and fatigue, magnesium is also vital for our health.

Deficiency can cause mood swings, migraines, eye twitches and muscle cramps.

If you have low magnesium levels, you are also less likely to get a good night's sleep.

'Within two weeks I was a different woman, with energy to spare'

Magnesium is present in foods such as black beans, bananas and pumpkin seeds, but to get the benefits we need to absorb it into our bodies.

One way to ensure we consume a consistent level of magnesium is by taking a daily supplement – but not

all supplements are equal.

Your body's ability to absorb the magnesium depends on the way that the supplement is made.

'Most supplements use magnesium oxide – it is the most common form, as it has a high concentration of magnesium but it's not easily released into the body,' explains Dr Miriam Ferrer PhD, head of product development at FutureYou Cambridge.

'Taking more magnesium to try and make up for the problem isn't the best approach, as too much can cause an upset stomach so we created Magnesium+ using magnesium lactate which is twice as absorbable as a standard magnesium oxide supplement. This means you need much less per capsule to deliver the same amount.'

Nicole, 57, says: 'I genuinely started to feel different within a couple

of weeks. I started to feel much more perky – that's the best word to describe it... I've taken them religiously ever since.'

Another happy customer, Anne, 74 says: 'I had no energy at all. I put it down to my age, but it was really impacting on my life. Within two weeks of trying it I was a different woman, with energy to spare.'

Now FutureYou Cambridge is offering you the opportunity to try a 28 day supply of Magnesium+ for free*

'We're happy to offer people their first pack for free so they can experience it for themselves,' says Adam Cleevely, Chair of FutureYou Cambridge.

'Most people know if it's working for them within four to eight weeks – and if they like it, they will stick with it.'



HOW TO CLAIM YOUR FREE PACK

To claim your free 28 day Magnesium+ subscription trial pack worth £12, visit

FutureYouOffers.co.uk

or freephone

0800 808 5740

quoting code

MGF261

Your first box is free (just pay £1.50 postage) and you will be enrolled into a flexible subscription costing £12 every 28 days, which you can cancel at any time, without obligation.



Developed in Cambridge



Science you can trust



Letterbox Friendly



100% satisfaction, guaranteed



Award-winning Customer Care



EXCELLENT Over 10,500 reviews

FutureYou
CAMBRIDGE

*Magnesium contributes to: a reduction of tiredness and fatigue, a normal energy-yielding metabolism, normal functioning of the nervous system, normal muscle function and normal psychological function. Introductory offer valid for new UK customers only. Offer expires 30th June 2024. See FutureYouHealth.com/MGF261 for full terms and conditions.

Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

BP

The Daily Telegraph

Performance has been volatile due to "erratic" energy prices, but the oil and gas giant is improving efficiency to generate cost savings and has maintained its divi, despite falling profits. Yields 4.6%. Buy. 489.3p.

Crystal Amber Fund Limited

The Mail on Sunday

Crystal Amber owns 82% of Morpich Medical, a US firm that has developed a gut liner to aid weight-loss. Expected to secure UK and European approval this summer. A play on the anti-obesity boom – for the adventurous. Buy. 78p.

Inchcape

The Times

Inchcape is selling its UK car showroom arm to focus on its lucrative distribution business. Customers include Chrysler, Jaguar and Mercedes. Profits and the divi are expected to climb. Buy. 809p.

Kainos Group

The Sunday Times

Hurt by economic uncertainty, the software group is poised to benefit from AI and government investment in "digital transformation". Can also count on a lucrative and growing partnership with the US IT giant Workday. Buy. £10.62.

Supermarket Income Reit

The Times

This trust has a portfolio of 73 large out-of-town UK stores – mainly run by Tesco and Sainsbury's – worth £1.7bn. Expanding into France via the acquisition of 17 Carrefour outlets. Set for recovery. Yields 8.3%. Buy. 73.5p.

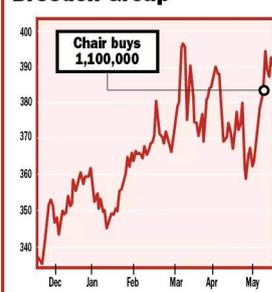
Unilever

The Daily Telegraph

The global consumer goods firm has been hit by punters trading down in the cost-of-living crisis. Yet it has a solid balance sheet, "excellent" brands, and is simplifying ops to improve productivity and boost growth. Buy. £42.89.

Directors' dealings

Breedon Group



Five weeks after spending £5.8m on shares in the building materials firm, chair Amit Bhatia has returned for more via Abicad Holding. Abicad has bought shares worth £4.21m, increasing its stake to above 18.7%, as Breedon expands into the US.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Burberry Group

The Times

The fashion group's rebranding project "could not have come at a worst time". A downturn in luxury spending has hit revenues and profits, and debt has risen. Still, uncertainty looks fairly priced in. A takeover target? Hold. £11.02.

Compass Group

The Times

The world's largest caterer's profits are up – and expected to rise by around 15% this year as M&A deals bolster its presence in key markets. But debt has risen and growth may slow. Hold. £22.52.

Marston's

Investors' Chronicle

The pubco has enjoyed outperforming sales growth and should benefit from a promising number of "must-not-miss" major sporting events this year. Yet the debt pile remains a "major stumbling block". Hold. 32.4p.

Britvic

Investors' Chronicle

The soft drinks producer, which sells PepsiCo products and own brands including Robinsons, is making hay from "strong consumer demand". Rapid growth in Brazil is a boon. "Under-appreciated." Hold. 988p.

Experian

The Times

The credit checker plays a "vital role" in the financial ecosystem: institutes use its analytics to determine risk, and it helps consumers improve credit scores. Asset-light with high barriers to entry. Growing strongly, but pricey. Hold. £37.52.

Vodafone Group

Investors' Chronicle

The debt-laden telecoms firm's revenues and profits are up, driven by the UK business and a money-transfer service for mobile phones in Africa. Selling less profitable assets. Positive progress but not yet problem-free. Hold. 77p.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip
Mitchells & Butlers
The Times
up 19.77% to 298p

Worst tip
Cambridge Cognition Holdings
The Mail on Sunday
down 11.76% to 45p

Market view

"The market is for sale and there are signs that global investors are starting to wake up to this opportunity."
Matthew Beesley, of Jupiter Asset Management, argues that rising UK deal activity should boost domestic stock prices. Quoted in the FT

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

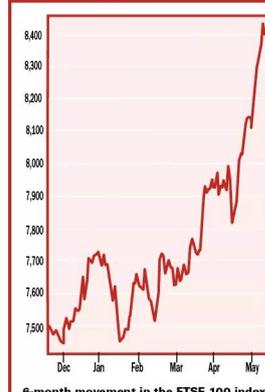
	21 May 2024	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	8416.45	8428.13	-0.14%
FTSE All-share UK	4584.40	4583.79	0.01%
Dow Jones	39837.72	39424.90	1.05%
NASDAQ	16793.03	16432.36	2.19%
Nikkei 225	38946.93	38356.06	1.54%
Hang Seng	19220.62	19073.71	0.77%
Gold	2420.30	2343.80	3.26%
Brent Crude Oil	82.42	82.51	-0.11%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.47%	3.49%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.23	4.27	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.40	4.47	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	2.3% (Apr)	3.2% (Mar)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	3.3% (Apr)	4.3% (Mar)	
Halfax house price (yoy)	1.1% (Apr)	0.3% (Mar)	
£1 STERLING:	\$1.275	€1.174	¥199.416
			Bitcoin \$69,877.42

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS		
RISES	Price	% change
BT Group	128.00	+14.08
Fresnillo	632.00	+9.82
Centrica	148.10	+6.24
Antofagasta	2410.00	+5.70
Experian	3639.00	+4.87
FALLS		
EasyJet	464.90	-11.45
Burberry Group	1060.50	-10.77
Sage Group	1071.00	-10.56
Intl. Cons. Airl. Gp.	173.55	-5.73
Entain	741.00	-5.46
FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER		
Auction Technology	616.00	+27.30
Wizz Air Holdings	1950.00	-11.80

Source: Refinitiv/FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 21 May (pm)

Following the Footsie



Inside the £4.5bn supersewer that will clean up the Thames

London's new 15-mile "cathedral of crap" took eight years to construct and involved the work of 20,000 people. Stephen Bleach visited the supersewer weeks before it was due to begin flowing with waste

In a dark hole 66 metres under the streets of east London, Roger Bailey is trying to explain the problem. "Imagine Wembley Stadium as an enormous toilet bowl," he says. "The whole thing filled to the brim. That's what four million tonnes of sewage looks like. Well, in a typical year, London chucks ten of those straight into the Thames."

We are standing in the solution to that problem. The Thames Tideway Tunnel, or the supersewer to its friends, is a concrete tube 2.5km long. It is cavernous – four times our height – and has a strange, unnerving echo. Stare ahead and the perfectly circular walls converge gently into blackness, giving the hypnotic impression of looking into infinity. It is spotlessly clean and oddly peaceful; a bit zen, even: you could imagine meditating down here. Best do it soon, though. Try it next month and you might be swept away by a tidal wave of human waste.

Bailey, 64, is the operation's chief technical officer. He is, one suspects, someone who likes to get things done, and he has – with a bit of help. Twenty thousand people have worked on the supersewer, among them tunnellers, engineers and divers, who worked by feel in the zero-visibility Thames murk to build connecting pipes on the riverbed. Together, they have created the capital's most audacious tunnel – deeper and much wider than the London Underground network – along with an entire mega-plumbing system of vast shafts and snaking pipes. And it is all here to save the city from wallowing in its own effluent.

Over eight years, four tunnel-boring machines – huge steel cylinders with a cutting disc at one end – have ground their way through the clay, gravel, flint and chalk under the capital. When fully open, the resulting tunnel will divert nearly all those Wembley Stadiums of sewage away from the Thames to Beckton, near Barking, where it will be processed at the largest waste treatment works in Europe. From there, clean water flows back into the river. It is a remarkable piece of civil engineering, yet most Londoners seem oblivious. Unloved but much needed, the tunnel is now complete, and I am the last journalist – in all probability, one of the last human beings – to see it. Any future maintenance inspections are likely to be carried out by robots. Which is a shame, because as well as being useful, the supersewer is weirdly beautiful. The whole grandiose complex is like the subterranean fantasy of a mad brutalist architect: silky concrete, monumental



The Tideway: "like the subterranean fantasy of a mad brutalist architect"

"Stare ahead and the circular walls converge into blackness. It is clean and oddly peaceful; you could imagine meditating down here"

It also prompted the era's greatest civil engineering project. In the next two decades Joseph Bazalgette designed and oversaw the building of hundreds of miles of sewers and drains to divert

the waste away from the river to pumping stations downstream. That network, broadly speaking, is what Londoners still rely on every time they flush the loo. The trouble is there are about three times as many of them as there were when he built it; and worse, expanses of the city have been paved or tarmacked over, meaning that rainfall, rather than soaking away, instantly flows into street drains to join the human effluent. When it rains, the system fills up faster than Bazalgette's sewers can drain it away.

The noxious mix would back up and overflow into Londoners' homes were it not for a failsafe built into the system. Dozens of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) – pipes opening onto the riverbank – were dotted along the Thames. They were built to be used in emergencies, but with more people, more tarmac and more extreme weather, their use has been almost normalised, with untreated sewage gushing into the river for thousands of hours a year. The supersewer will fix that by giving it somewhere else to go. At CSOs along the river, Tideway has sunk 21 enormous shafts. Instead of pouring into the Thames, the liquid will cascade down these and be channelled into the supersewer. I went to the last and largest of the shafts to track its journey.

Cathedral of crap

Tideway's Abbey Mills site is located near Stratford, east London, tucked away among the muddy channels of the River Lea. Once past the security guard and the rows of temporary cabins, the first

proportions. It probably helped that, on my visit, it was still clean enough to eat your dinner off: it seemed a pity to let the sewage in at all. But at least Londoners' waste will now travel to its final destination in style.

The Great Stink

In the 1850s, London had a population of 2.6 million. They were not a sanitary bunch. Much of their excrement, along with all the muck of the Victorian capital, went directly into the Thames. The river was a toxic soup, a main cause of the cholera epidemics that killed tens of thousands of people. It also reeked – so much so that in the summer of 1858, "the Great Stink" led MPs to hatch a plan to flee the unbearable smell at Westminster and set up parliament in Oxford or St Albans instead.

thing you see here is a concrete manhole cover on a ridiculous scale. It is 24 metres across, weighs 1,200 tonnes, and the staff are awfully proud of it. ("It's the biggest in the country, possibly the world!" one gushes.) On my visit in January, it sat next to the open mouth of the main shaft; in March, a gantry crane lifted and lowered it into position in an operation that took a month to plan and a full day to complete.

As our "man-rider" (a metal cage hanging from a crane) was lowered into the shaft, I was grateful it was still open to the daylight. The space is worth seeing. An epic concrete cylinder, it is 25 metres across and 66 metres deep. The volume is roughly the same as that of the dome of St Paul's and has something of the grandeur: a cathedral of crap. During heavy rain, the volume of sewage flowing into shafts like this will be extraordinary. At Blackfriars, they expect three million litres a minute: about 150 full bathtubs every second. "If we just let it pour in, it would erode the bottom of the shaft," Bailey says. "To get it down there safely, we use something called a vortex tube, which spins it into a spiral, like the flow going down a plughole." The spinning introduces bubbles into the liquid, making it less damaging to the shaft base; a system of baffle walls – specially shaped to make liquids flow a certain way – holds the water at the bottom, allowing air to escape before it enters the tunnel. Chucking some smelly liquid away turns out to be rather more complicated than you would think.

Wet-wipe reef

All this mega-engineering has not come cheap: the Tideway Tunnel has cost about £4.5bn. Is it worth it? To find out, I went to meet Chris Coode on a wet-wipe reef. Coode, 53, runs Thames21, a charity devoted to improving the river in London. To the untrained eye this stretch of the foreshore at Barnes in southwest London looks like just another expanse of grey Thames mud. In fact, it consists mainly of what is known as "sewage-derived debris". Coode bends over and, hands encased in heavy duty rubber gloves, he digs into the silt. I gag slightly. What is under our feet turns out to be a vile, spongy mass of tangled wet wipes, condoms, twigs, sanitary products, mud and slime. "This has built up in the past five to ten years," he says. "And it's coming from the CSOs." This is just the stuff that sticks around. "It's worst here after an overflow in the summer," he says. "You can see human faeces floating down the river. You can smell it, and that means the sewage is in pretty high concentration."

I live nearby and jog along the towpath above us once a week. I have seen those turds bobbing jauntily past. The river's wildlife pays the biggest price, Coode says. "Bacteria start to break down all that organic matter and they use oxygen to do that. You get these huge slicks of deoxygenated water and the result is massive fish kills – tens of thousands of fish dying, suffocating really. Thames Water actually has a couple of boats to deal with the problem – bubbler boats, they're called – which are designed to bubble oxygen back into the polluted water. But they can only do so much." He has high hopes for the new sewer, however. "It will definitely help. If it can stop whatever people flush down the toilet from ending up in the river, we might see these reefs start to shrink and erode away." The river could be clean again.

Well, clean up to a point. The supersewer is not a total solution: like Bazalgette's system, it has limits. The combined capacity of the tunnel and shafts is 1.6 million tonnes, enough to cope with most downpours. At times of exceptional rainfall, though, the system will fill up faster than the sewage can drain away. Radar installed in the shaft manhole covers will constantly monitor the



Chris Coode: campaigns for a cleaner Thames

level: if it nears capacity, the muck will yet again be redirected into the river. Tideway says the tunnel will reduce spills by 95%. And it will take the "first flush" caused by any storm – the really toxic stuff, with a high proportion of domestic sewage. What overflows should be mostly rainwater.

The last underground visitors?

Back at Abbey Mills, we land at the bottom of the shaft. To our left is a huge circular hole – the gaping mouth of the supersewer itself. I walk in with Robert Ricketts, 32, a project manager for the contractor Costain. The light fades rapidly. Even the photographer's powerful torch struggles against the darkness. We go on for 200 metres around a gentle bend. Somewhere up ahead, the sewer burrows

under Limehouse, then follows the meanders of the river past Westminster and Chelsea. I whoop loudly: the echo reverberates for 20 seconds as the sound bounces its way westwards. I would like to think they heard a whisper of it in Acton.

The tube's even surface, combined with the barely noticeable 1-in-800 gradient, should mean there is sufficient flow of water to ensure it "washes itself clean" with little need for human intervention. Or, indeed, any at all. "The plan is to send people down here every ten years for a maintenance inspection," Ricketts says. "But technology is advancing fast, so hopefully by that time it will be autonomous vehicles that do it. There may never be a chance to come back here. Potentially, we are the last handful of people to ever be in this space." Weird as it sounds, given the

tunnel's purpose, that feels like a privilege to me. "Oh yes. Me too," says Ricketts quietly, grinning in the gloom.

The Tideway Tunnel expects to welcome its first poo in a matter

of weeks, eight years after breaking ground in 2016. It has gone relatively smoothly. It is one year late, a delay ascribed chiefly to the pandemic. The £4.5bn cost is 28% over budget and will be paid for by a supplement of about £25 a year for Thames Water customers. As the name suggests, the Tideway Tunnel cannot fix all the Thames's problems. Upstream from London, spills into the non-tidal Thames will continue. But its success will be judged on whether it cleans up the capital's stretch of the river. So is it the answer to that ten Wembleys-sized problem?

It will take a while to be sure. An extensive testing programme means it will not be fully operational before next year. Each shaft and section will be tested at a range of water levels, from dry to full. In a small, bland room at Tideway's headquarters in Bankside, Jad Bhudia, 57, is gazing at a screen. He is one of the team that will monitor every aspect of the sewer's operation from here and from a similar office at the Beckton sewage treatment works. The screen shows live graphics of exactly how full the system is. "When it gets to 90%, we have to start allowing overflows into the river," Bhudia says. An algorithm will usually make that call, but a team of nine will ensure there is a human being overseeing the system around the clock.

Most Londoners, of course, will neither know nor care about what that team is up to. The entire point of our sewage system is that we can put our waste both out of sight and out of mind. But I cannot be so blasé any more. From now on, every time I flush anything down the loo, I will think of Bhudia and his friends, keeping a watchful eye on where it goes. If the supersewer does its job, I won't see it again on my morning run.

A longer version of this article appeared in *The Sunday Times*
© Times Media Limited 2024



We buy fine wines & spirits.

Free, no obligation valuations

020 7377 8097

thelondonwinecellar.com | wine@thelondonwinecellar.com

Unit 2 and 3 Granita Court | 9 Cross Lane | London | N8 7GD



THE POINT
HOLIDAYS

Self Catering Properties

POLZEATH | ROCK | DAYMER BAY

01208 863000 | thepointholidays.co.uk | stay@thepointholidays.co.uk

ANGLOfRENCH
PROPERTIES

EXTRAORDINARY HOMES.
EXCEPTIONAL HOLIDAYS.

Chateaux, Manoirs, Country Houses and Villas in
South West France, Provence, the Côte d'Azur
and Italy.

www.anglofrenchproperties.com
jack@anglofrenchproperties.com | 01258 817 110

THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1415

Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 3 June. Send it to The Week Crossword 1415, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**



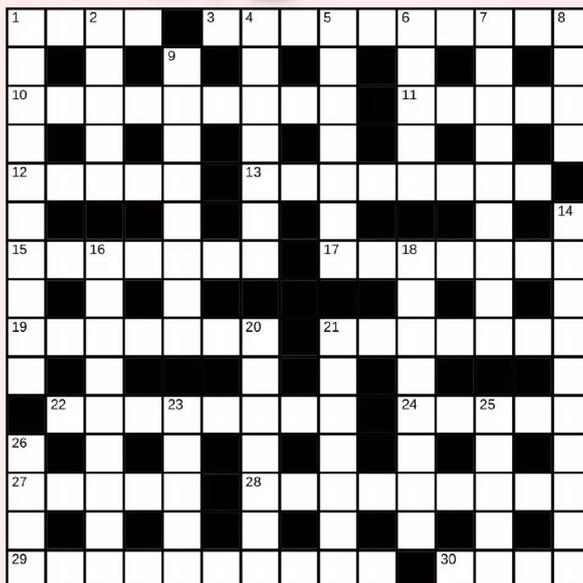
This week's winner will receive Week-branded items including a notebook, coffee mug and tote bag, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

ACROSS

- 1 Church next to a quiet cove (4)
- 3 Chum maybe in a mess (4,6)
- 10 Corrupt statesmen getting financial investigation (5,4)
- 11 TV detective from Scottish island? (5)
- 12 Story about say, a Belgian city (5)
- 13 What Cinderella became after twelve (8)
- 15 Aussie chum stocking line in clothing (7)
- 17 Journalist spotted what's used in cutting (4-3)
- 19 Underwear spoken of is a few pounds (7)
- 21 Shrink from any salt when out to lunch (7)
- 22 What clergy puts on in leaving capital (8)
- 24 Verity has time with another lady (5)
- 27 New route deviating from the norm (5)
- 28 Soho police division that stands in for others? (4,5)
- 29 Flourishes cereal bowls (10)
- 30 Card game's for retirement? Bridge (4)

DOWN

- 1 Eton and MCC pal frightfully smug (10)
- 2 Brave leaving hospital quickly (5)
- 4 Senator rubbished this type of hotel? (3-4)
- 5 Like a Glaswegian leaving clubs? Could well be! (7)
- 6 Opening of the Nile possibly (5)
- 7 Modern jumper from a US state (3,6)
- 8 Ill-considered complaint (4)
- 9 Lab seems badly put together (8)
- 14 Up to date with electricity supply? (8-2)
- 16 Band in arrangement of Hart score (9)
- 18 Stock market specialist upset by IT crash on closing of account (8)
- 20 Bob lifts loads of paper (7)
- 21 TV studio device reported traffic jam (7)
- 23 Time to remove dock perhaps, in the river (5)
- 25 Appropriate sporting pursuit but it's banned (5)
- 26 Mistake your uncle made about nothing? (4)



Name _____
 Address _____
 Tel no _____
 Clue of the week answer: _____

Clue of the week: Playing organ in church – is it Bliss? (9)
Quick Cryptic by Wurm, The Times

Solution to Crossword 1413

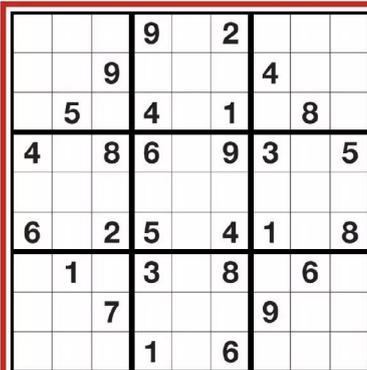
ACROSS: 1 Charlotte 6 Liszt 9 Tract 10 Liquorice 11 American dream 14 Pergola 16 Sangria 17 See 18 Notates 20 Nosebag 22 Pantechnicons 25 Anchorman 27 Lydia 28 Split 29 Past tense

DOWN: 1 Catnapping 2 Amateur 3 Lathi 4 Tallahassee 5 Esq 6 Loose ends 7 Shimmer 8 Toed 12 Disenchants 13 Large-scale 15 Out-and-out 19 Topical 21 Broaden 23 Islet 24 Bags 26 Mop

Clue of the week: A source of tea cups and saucers (5)
 Solution: CHINA (double definition clue)

The winner of 1413 is Sarah Bennet from Plymouth

The Week is available from **RNIB Newsagent** for the benefit of blind and partially sighted readers. 0303-123 9999, rnib.org.uk/newsagent



Sudoku 957 (difficult)

Fill in all the squares so that each row, column and each of the 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9

Solution to Sudoku 956

5	7	6	1	2	9	3	4	8
9	4	2	5	8	3	7	6	1
3	8	1	6	7	4	2	5	9
1	3	5	7	9	2	4	8	6
2	9	4	8	6	5	1	7	3
8	6	7	4	3	1	5	9	2
4	2	8	9	1	7	6	3	5
6	5	3	2	4	8	9	1	7
7	1	9	3	5	6	8	2	4

brainedUP.com

For binders to hold 26 copies of The Week: modernbookbinders.com, £9.50

Charity of the week



ShelterBox provides emergency shelter, tools and other essentials so that families can rebuild after a disaster. Over the last 22 years, we have provided emergency shelter and disaster relief in 98 different countries. We work with people all over the world affected by all kinds of disasters – floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and conflicts. We listen and adapt our support to the needs of each community, working together with those affected by disaster, alongside our supporters and partners. Everything we do is shaped by the four humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality. **Please visit shelterbox.org to find out more.**

Big picture news, balanced views

Join over 300,000 readers today and enjoy a refreshingly unbiased view of the news, every week.

Why subscribe?

- ✓ Get your first 6 issues for free
- ✓ Continue to save up to 56% on the shop price
- ✓ Try a digital subscription for subscriber newsletters, unlimited access to theweek.co.uk and more
- ✓ Cancel or pause at any time



Get your first 6 issues free

Visit theweek.co.uk/offer
 Or call 0330 333 9494

Offer code
 P1489

calls charged at your standard network rate. Direct Debit offer: 6 issues free then continues from £46.99 every 13 issues for print (29% off the shop price) or £50.99 every 13 issues for print + digital (56% off the shop price). Your subscription is protected by our Money-Back Guarantee. Cancel anytime and we will refund on any unmailed issues.



The Week is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (which regulates the UK's magazine and newspaper industry). We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism.

If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint please contact editorialadmin@theweek.co.uk. If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk.

NEW
Rapid
Diagnostics
Centre
just launched



A health concern shouldn't put your life on pause

Early diagnosis gives you the best chance of recovery. So, call our Rapid Diagnostics Centre today to book an appointment and be seen by a doctor or consultant within 48 hours.

Call

020 4527 6324

or scan the QR code



9020

2020

