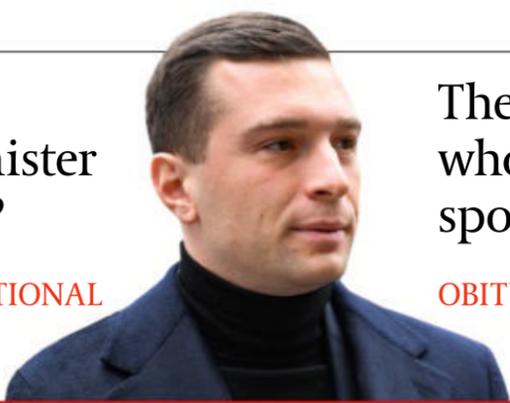


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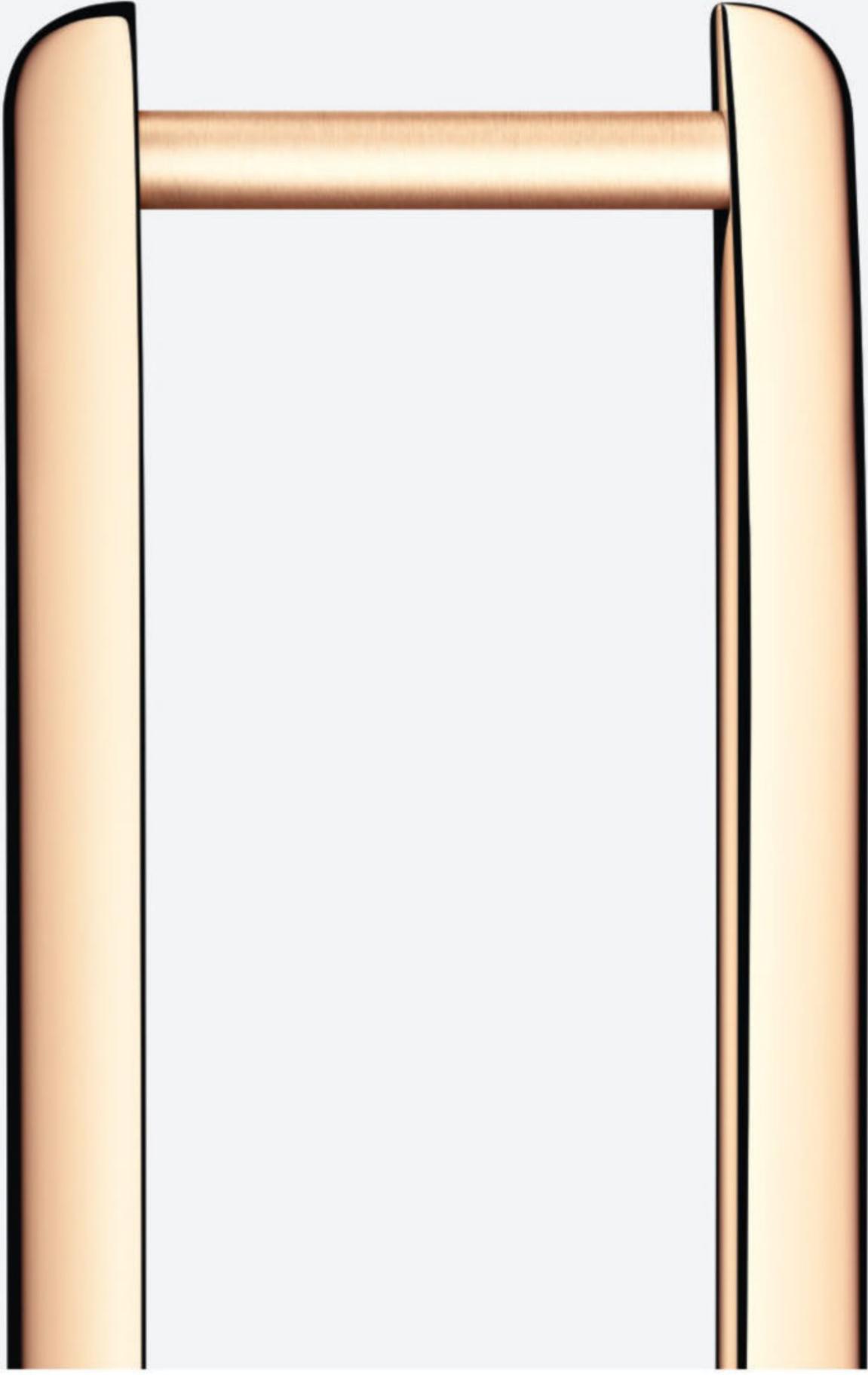
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THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

A plan for growth Can Labour revive the economy?

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TANK AMÉRICAINE
Cartier

What happened

The Labour manifesto

Keir Starmer unveiled Labour's election manifesto last week, declaring that his party was ready to "turn the page decisively" on 14 years of "Conservative chaos". There were no surprises in the document, which mainly consists of previously announced measures. These include some £8.6bn of revenue-raising policies, such as abolishing non-dom status, applying VAT to private schools (*see page 19*), and introducing a more stringent windfall tax on oil and gas giants. The proceeds from these tax rises will be spent on Labour's "green prosperity plan", 40,000 new NHS appointments per week to cut waiting lists, and on hiring 6,500 more state-school teachers. The party also plans to crack down on antisocial behaviour, with more neighbourhood police; to give 16-year-olds the vote; and to make sure that 1.5 million new homes will be built in England within five years.

Launching the manifesto at the Co-op headquarters in Manchester, Starmer called it a "serious plan" and vowed to lead a "pro-business, pro-worker" government that would "rebuild Britain" by kickstarting economic growth. Labour, he said, was "the party of wealth creation".



Starmer: sticking to the script

What the editorials said

Labour's manifesto contrasts sharply with the Tories' one, said The Guardian. Whereas the latter is a slapdash assembly of "gimmicks", Starmer has offered a carefully considered "plan for renewal". On the contrary, the 136-page document is "pure wind", said the Daily Mail. It promises to fix the NHS, energise the economy and wean the national grid off fossil fuels by 2030, yet gives no clear roadmap for how this will be achieved. We're expected simply to "trust the driver".

The manifesto is "bombproof" on its own terms, said The Independent. But Labour is being "disingenuous" about future public spending. The plans it's set to inherit from the Tories, which Labour has largely accepted, imply "substantial real-terms cuts in unprotected services". If a future Labour government isn't prepared to push up borrowing or accept a return to austerity, it will have to make more tax rises than Starmer and Rachel Reeves, his prospective chancellor, admit. Finding this revenue won't be easy, said The Times. Starmer and Reeves have ruled out rises to income tax, national insurance, VAT and corporation tax, which bring in three-quarters of the tax take. Labour has "boxed itself into a series of restrictions and promises" that will be hard to reconcile without a revival of healthy economic growth.

What happened

Farage's "contract"

A Reform UK government would freeze "non-essential" immigration and enact tax cuts worth £90bn a year, declared Nigel Farage this week, at the launch of his party's manifesto. The 24-page "contract" with voters includes pledges to lift the income tax threshold to £20,000, leave the European Convention on Human Rights and eliminate NHS waiting lists in two years. Reform said that its £141bn of tax cuts and spending increases would be funded by budget cuts and by axing the target to hit net-zero emissions by 2050; the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said that the party's sums "do not add up".

At a launch event in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, Farage admitted that his party wouldn't form the next government, but said that it is aiming for victory in 2029. Last week, Reform was boosted by a YouGov poll showing that it had overtaken the Tories for the first time, leading them by 19% to 18%.



The launch event in Merthyr

What the editorials said

Reform's manifesto "is as fantastical as it is poisonous", said The Independent. Some of the proposals in it are "dangerous":

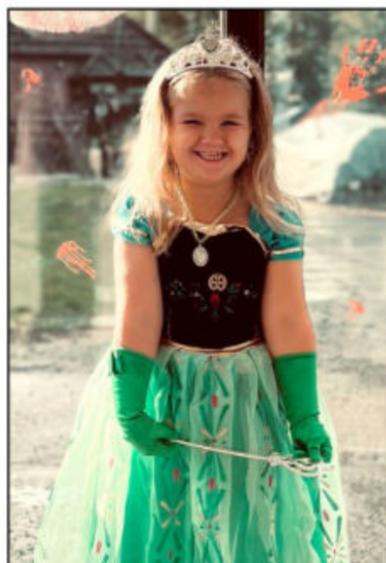
Farage wants a public inquiry into "vaccine harms", an idea that panders to conspiracy theorists, and to halt action to combat climate change. Others are based on "fanciful" calculations: his tax and spending plans would leave a £38bn black hole and unleash panic in the markets on a scale that would make the Liz Truss period look like a picnic. Fortunately, Farage has no realistic chance of becoming PM, so we'll be spared the chaos that would ensue if "this hastily collated rag-bag of populist ideas" were ever to collide with reality.

Not all of its costings add up, said The Daily Telegraph, but Reform's manifesto does contain ideas that will appeal to Tories who feel that their party has lost its way, such as a hike in defence spending and tough action on immigration. It's the latest step in Farage's plan to inflict an "epoch-defining defeat" on the Tories, so that his party emerges as the main opposition to a Labour government.

It wasn't all bad

The longest and deepest canal tunnel in the UK is to open to canoeists. Enthusiasts can apply to join a guided trip down the narrow Standedge Tunnel, which was built in 1811 and runs 3.5 miles from Marsden in West Yorkshire to Diggle in Greater Manchester. At 194 metres under the ground, it is "cold, grimy and not a place for claustrophobes", reports The Guardian. However, it offers a "thrilling" opportunity for adventurous canoeists to paddle under the Pennines.

When a mother collapsed following a major operation, her five-year-old daughter saved her life. Poppy Davies was playing in a princess costume at home in Caerphilly when her mother Leisha, who had recently had surgery on her bowel, slipped into septic shock. Poppy's father was working a night shift, so Poppy stayed by her mother's side; then in the morning, she pulled on her wellies, walked to school and told her teachers: "Mummy's on the floor and I can't wake her up." They rushed to the house and then dialled 999. "I was incredibly proud of her," said her mother, who is now on the mend.



A 95-year-old farmer has been reunited with the treasured Rolex he lost half-a-century ago, when it was eaten by a cow. James Steele's watch fell off his wrist one day in the 1970s as he was tending to the cattle on his farm in Shropshire. He searched the field, but couldn't find the watch, and concluded that it must have been eaten by a cow. But recently his son gave metal detectorist Liam King permission to search the farm, and he turned up the Rolex. "It was an amazing stroke of luck," Steele said. "I never thought I'd see the watch again."

COVER CARTOON: HOWARD MCWILLIAM

What the commentators said

“Stick to the script. Never drop the ball. Get over the line.” The launch of Labour’s manifesto, like the rest of Starmer’s campaign, was understated and disciplined, said Andrew Rawnsley in *The Observer*. Commentators complain that it’s all a bit boring. Where’s the excitement, they cry. Where are the “bold” plans? Starmer has responded that those who want politics “as pantomime” should go to Clacton-on-Sea to watch Nigel Farage. But it’s wrong, in any case, to see this manifesto as a “timid prospectus”. On issues such as housebuilding, clean power and wealth creation, it sets hugely ambitious goals. “Whether a Starmer government can boost growth will likely be the most crucial test of its success or failure as a project.”

Count me among the sceptics, said Andrew Neil in the *Daily Mail*. It’s all very well Starmer describing growth as his “core mission”, but beyond championing a house-building boom, which will take time to reap dividends even if it materialises, he has no policies likely to ignite it. There are no tax reforms to encourage investment; there’s no deregulation. Instead, there are lots of measures that would enmesh business and investment in “a bigger, more intrusive, more activist state. A revolution in growth thanks to bigger government? I’ll believe it when I see it.”

I’m more optimistic about the country’s economic prospects, said Emma Duncan in *The Times*. A fresh government will, if nothing else, lift the national mood and offer the promise of some much-needed stability. Tory policies have been all over the place in recent years. The rate of corporation tax, for instance, has gone from 28% to 20, to 19, to 25. “Merely by not changing its mind every five minutes, the next government can improve economic governance.” During the period in which the Tories have had seven housing ministers, Labour has had one shadow housing minister, Matthew Pennycook, who “knows his brief inside out and will therefore be in a far better position to get stuff done”. My hunch is that things are looking up for the UK economy. Let’s hope so, said Robert Shrimmsley in the *FT*, because the populist radical Right is waiting to swoop if life doesn’t improve for disaffected voters. Starmer “not only carries the dreams of a country demanding change, but the hope of all who fear what follows if he fails”.

What the commentators said

Farage’s so-called contract “is as bankable as a £4 note”, said Andrew Neil in the *Daily Mail*. It proposes a wild array of tax cuts: from allowing people to earn £70,000 before they pay the higher rate of income tax, to abolishing stamp duty on homes worth under £750,000. It promises 40,000 new police officers, 30,000 Army recruits, and “zero” NHS waiting lists – all of which is meant to be funded by public sector savings. Such reckless plans may appeal to some Tory-inclined voters; but “proper conservatives” will see that they have “all the rigour of rough workings done on the back of a Farage fag packet after a two-bottle lunch”. Reform’s contract does contain one good idea, said Iain Macwhirter in *The Spectator*: Farage wants to “claw back” some of the profits made by commercial banks that deposit money with the Bank of England, by cutting the amount of interest the Bank must pay them. But that too is a fantasy, said Jeremy Warner in *The Daily Telegraph*. It wouldn’t raise the £35bn that Reform claims; and it would be “punished by markets with a corresponding degree of monetary devaluation”.

Farage won’t care that his manifesto isn’t workable, said Rachel Cunliffe in *The New Statesman*. On the contrary, he is counting on the fuss that it provokes keeping Reform in the headlines until 4 July, when he hopes to win over disaffected Tories and Brexiters, along with others who see a Labour landslide coming, and don’t want Starmer “to get cocky”. His real dream is for a repeat of Canada’s election in 1993, said John Rentoul in *The Independent*, when the Conservatives were routed and had to join forces with an upstart party called Reform – whose leader later became PM. But the chances of a Farage takeover are slim. He may win in Clacton; but owing to its support being scattered, Reform will struggle to win more than “three or four” seats in all, and the remaining Tory MPs “will mostly regard him as the enemy”.

What next?

Labour’s manifesto pledges to “not increase taxes on working people”. Pressed to expand on the definition this week, Starmer said it referred to those who cannot afford to write a cheque when they get into trouble, prompting Tory claims that his party is planning to target savers.

In an interview on Wednesday, Reeves claimed that Labour had no plans to reform council tax. She also ruled out an emergency budget soon after the election, indicating that Labour would announce a budget, as normal, sometime around September. One of Labour’s first acts, she said, would be to introduce legislation giving the Office for Budget Responsibility greater powers to scrutinise major fiscal events.

What next?

Reform has threatened legal action against a company that it had hired to vet hundreds of would-be MPs, in the wake of a series of damaging revelations about its candidates. *The Times* reports that almost one in ten Reform candidates are Facebook “friends” with Gary Raikes, a prominent British fascist. Others have written controversial social media posts: one said that the UK should’ve “taken Hitler up on his offer of neutrality”; another that King Charles is controlled by global elites. Vetting.com, the firm in question, blamed the election being called early for its failures.

THE WEEK

In recent weeks, the right-wing press has become preoccupied with the impact on families of Keir Starmer’s plan to impose VAT on private schools (see page 19). This topic will chime with many

of their readers, and whether one supports the policy or not, it is not hard to empathise with parents worrying about having to remove their children from good schools where they are happy. But in politics, compassion is applied selectively, and unsurprisingly this story has hardly featured in the left-wing press. There, the focus has been on different problems, such as the number of looked-after children who have had to leave their schools because there are no care home places anywhere near their home towns; and the reports that children are increasingly arriving at school hungry because of benefits cuts for larger families. What will Starmer do to address these issues if he becomes PM, is what they want to know. Already, his critics on the Left are complaining that he is not compassionate enough – as evidenced by his reluctance to commit Labour to abolishing the two-child benefit cap. We’ve seen all this before, of course: David Cameron’s claim to compassionate conservatism was used against him when he introduced austerity measures. But kindness isn’t the virtue voters chiefly look for or expect from Tories, whereas social justice is what Labour is all about. If Starmer becomes PM, demands from interest groups that he exercises more compassion, at a time when finances are tight, will make his crown a heavy one.

Caroline Law

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Controversy of the week

The Tory doom-mongers

Although the Prime Minister has not admitted it yet, the Tory campaign is “now predicated on the assumption of imminent defeat on an epic scale”, said Iain Martin in *The Times*. The Conservative Party has started running adverts that warn against giving Keir Starmer “a massive majority” or “a blank cheque”. Grant Shapps, the Defence Secretary, has spoken of the danger of Labour winning a “super-majority”. This is an “outlandish” electoral strategy, “counter to all democratic custom”. Standard practice is never to concede defeat, and to insist that the only poll that counts is the one on election day. But it may just be realistic, given the “brutal three-way squeeze” on the Tories – from Starmer’s disciplined and reassuring Labour, from a “skilful” Lib Dem campaign, and from Reform UK, under a resurgent Nigel Farage. Extrapolating from the polls, we’re looking at a vast Labour majority of anything from 144 to 336 seats, said John Rentoul in *The Independent*. I suspect we’ll end up at the lower end of that range, but it seems possible that Tony Blair’s postwar record of 179 will be beaten.



The PM on the campaign trail

“Vote for Rishi Sunak: he’s going to lose anyway.” It’s not “an inspiring election slogan”, said *The Times*. And “the reality is that voters thoroughly disillusioned with Toryism are unlikely to buy such an argument”. Even so, the problems that would be posed by a Labour super-majority “are real and should be explored”. Starmer “could pass almost any law”, and govern “almost wholly unencumbered by the safeguards usually present in Parliament”. All but a handful of select committees would be run by Labour. Anger at the Tories, and the quirks of our voting system, look set to bring us close to “one-party rule”, said Daniel Hannan in *The Sunday Telegraph*. It’s not just the new taxes that Labour will inevitably introduce. Just like Blair, Starmer is likely to use his honeymoon period to push through major constitutional changes. He wants to give 16- and 17-year-olds the vote – because, of course, they would overwhelmingly vote Labour – and to give more power to quangos dealing with matters such as racial equality. These will be effectively “immune to the ballot box”.

Is it just possible, asked Matt Honeycombe-Foster on Politico, that Starmer isn’t really going to usher in an elective dictatorship bolstered by “pimple-faced” teenagers? And that these are just Tory scare tactics, designed to push voters back into the Tory fold? The term super-majority is “meaningless” in the British context, said Emilia Randall in *The i Paper*. As long as the government has a solid working majority, it can do as it likes. That’s how Parliament works. The strategy is a sign of desperation, said Rowena Mason in *The Guardian*. The Tories need a “gamechanging moment”. Nothing has worked so far, so the party has moved on to the threat of a super-majority, which it had been “hoping to keep in its back pocket for the very last moment. Sunak is almost out of levers that he can pull.”

No Lawrence prosecution

Four former Metropolitan Police detectives who ran the initial investigation into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence will not face charges, the Crown Prosecution Service announced this week. Lawrence, 18, was killed by a gang of five or six white youths as he waited for a bus in southeast London in 1993; local people named the suspects but, owing to a string of failures, it wasn’t until 2012 that two of them were jailed for murder. In its final ruling on the matter, the CPS said that the allegations against the police amounted to a series of mistakes, which, even if serious, did not constitute an offence, as there was no evidence that they were wilful or the result of reckless indifference. Lawrence’s mother Doreen said she was “bewildered” and angered by the decision.

E. coli outbreak

Thousands of sandwiches, wraps and salads have been recalled from UK supermarkets following an outbreak of E. coli that has been linked to lettuce leaves. More than 210 cases of the infection – which can cause severe diarrhoea, and can be deadly – had been confirmed as of 11 June; at least 67 had required hospital treatment. Retailers involved include Asda, Co-op and Sainsbury’s.

Spirit of the age

A luxury airline that specifically caters to pampered pooches is now going transatlantic. With tickets from New York to London costing from \$8,000 for one dog, plus a human companion, Bark Air promises a “white-glove” experience, reports *The Sunday Times*. On board, dogs can quaff “doggy champagne” (chicken bone broth), enjoy spa treatments, and listen to relaxing reggae music.

Hybrid workers say that working partly from home makes them happier, healthier and more productive. 78% of hybrid workers say that they feel less stressed than when they worked full-time in an office; 68% sleep better. Three-quarters say a return to the office full-time would damage their well-being.

Good week for:

The Princess of Wales, who made her first public appearance since her cancer diagnosis. On Saturday, the King’s official birthday, she took part in a carriage ride down the Mall, and watched the RAF flypast from Buckingham Palace’s balcony.

Kew Gardens, with the rare flowering of titan arum – the world’s smelliest plant, also known as the corpse plant. Hundreds of visitors were drawn to Kew’s Princess of Wales Conservatory to experience the foul aroma, which is emitted for just a single evening when the plant comes into flower.

Tracey Emin, who was made a dame in the King’s birthday honours list. Other awards went to Lulu Lytle (OBE) whose design company supplied Boris Johnson’s wallpaper at Downing Street; Gordon Brown (Companion of Honour); and Alan Bates, the former subpostmaster turned campaigner, who was knighted.

Bad week for:

Craig Williams, Rishi Sunak’s parliamentary private secretary, who is being investigated by the Gambling Commission. On 19 May, he staked £100 that there would be an election in July. Three days later, his boss called a poll for 4 July. Williams, 39, who is standing for re-election as MP for Montgomeryshire and Glyndwr, said his “flutter” had been a “huge error of judgement”.

Sir Ian McKellen, who was taken to hospital after falling off the stage during a performance in the West End. The 85-year-old actor was appearing as Falstaff in *Player Kings* when he lost his footing during a fight scene. The next day, the theatre said he was “in good spirits” and expected to make a “speedy recovery”.

Poll watch

Just 21% of British adults would vote Conservative in an election held tomorrow, according to a poll by Savanta for *The Sunday Telegraph*. It found 46% would vote Labour, 13% Reform and 11% Lib Dems.

A seat-by-seat analysis by Survation for the campaign group Best for Britain has predicted that Labour will win a landslide of 456 seats – 38 seats more than Tony Blair won in 1997, and giving it a majority in the Commons of 262. The analysis leaves the Tories on 72 seats; the Lib Dems 56, the SNP 37, Reform UK 7, Plaid Cymru 2 and the Greens 1. Ipsos predicts that Labour will win 453 seats, the Conservatives 115, the Lib Dems 38 and Reform 3.

According to Public First, 46% of UK adults agree that the Tories “deserve to lose every seat they have”.



Vatican City

Doubling down:

In a meeting with priests last week to discuss the Church's stance on barring gay men from the priesthood, the Pope allegedly remarked that even in the Vatican itself

one could detect an "air of *frociaggine*" (faggotry). It was the same anti-gay slur that he is said to have used in a meeting with bishops last month and for which the Vatican has issued an apology. On that occasion, he had said seminaries were too full of *frociaggine*. The pontiff has generally adopted a more inclusive tone with regard to gay people than his predecessors, but these latest remarks have caused consternation among gay rights groups.

Paris

Elections fallout: President Macron's hopes of winning a parliamentary majority for his centrist Renaissance party were dealt a fresh blow last week, when France's four main left-wing parties agreed to form an alliance to fight the snap parliamentary elections that Macron called two weeks ago. The Socialist Party, the Communists, the Greens and the hard-left France Unbowed will field a single joint candidate on a "New Popular Front" ticket in each of the 577 seats up for grabs in voting on 30 June and 7 July. Polls suggest the alliance could severely dent Renaissance's vote share. Meanwhile, infighting continues among the centre-right Republicans. Last week, the party's leader, Éric Ciotti, was expelled for backing a pact with the hard-right National Rally (RN); but the decision was overturned by a Paris court. If RN wins, as polls suggest, Jordan Bardella will become the PM (*see page 16*).

Berlin

Conscription: In a bid to boost Germany's armed forces in the face of growing tensions with Russia, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius has put forward a bill to introduce a limited form of military service. Military chiefs had rejected as impractical his earlier plans to bring back universal conscription – which was scrapped in 2011 – but his new, scaled-down proposal, inspired in part by Scandinavian models, may prove more acceptable. It will oblige all 18-year-old German males to fill out a form to gauge their willingness and ability to serve: of these, the 5,000 deemed to be most suitable and motivated will be selected to complete between six and 23 months of training. Pistorius wants the number selected to rise over time, ultimately boosting the Bundeswehr's pool of reservists from 60,000 to 200,000. The government also plans to increase the size of the professional army from 184,000 to 203,000 by 2031.

Athens

Acropolis shuts: The Acropolis was closed to the public for two days last week, as Greece suffered through its earliest heatwave in recorded history. The heatwave (defined as a period when temperatures hit 38°C for three or more consecutive days) also forced schools and nurseries to close. Public sector workers were told to stay at home; Red Cross workers in the city handed out water to parched visitors. The widespread fear among traders in and around the Acropolis – which was visited by four million people last year – was that they were about to face a repeat of last July, when the site was repeatedly shut over a two-week period. However this week, temperatures returned to more normal levels (about 35°C).



Bari, Italy

G7 steps up: At their annual summit, held in Bari last week, the leaders of the G7 nations announced an agreement to use the interest on frozen Russian central bank assets to raise \$50bn in aid for Ukraine. The deal is the result of months of negotiation: the US had initially wanted to send \$300bn from frozen Russian assets directly to Ukraine. But EU officials objected, citing concerns about establishing a legal precedent for this kind of expropriation. Under the deal now agreed, the interest on the assets rather than the assets themselves will be used to secure a \$50bn loan. Joe Biden, who has just signed a ten-year bilateral security agreement between the US and Ukraine, welcomed the breakthrough with the words "democracies can deliver".

Other business concluded at the summit included the launch of a G7 coalition to tackle people-smuggling. The launch was announced by Rishi Sunak, who went out of his way to praise his "fantastic" Italian counterpart, Giorgia Meloni, saying that the two of them saw "eye-to-eye" on the issue. But the summit ended with controversy over its closing declaration, with Italy being accused of having arranged for references to gay rights and the right of women to "safe and legal" abortion to be cut from its final draft. France's President Macron told reporters that he "regretted" the omission.



Piraeus, Greece

Coast Guard accused: A BBC investigation has alleged that the Hellenic Coast Guard threw at least nine migrants to their deaths in the Mediterranean between 2020 and 2023, and caused about 34 others to die by forcing them out to sea on unsafe boats. The information on the 15 incidents examined in *Dead Calm: Killing in the Med?* mostly came from local media, NGOs and the Turkish Coast Guard, but BBC reporters also spoke to survivors. Some related how, after reaching a Greek island, they'd been abducted by masked police and taken back into Turkish waters, where they were either put into leaky dinghies, or thrown overboard. In one incident, seven or eight children reportedly drowned after Greek officials left them on a sinking raft. Rights groups have long accused Greece of illegally forcing asylum seekers back towards Turkey, charges the Hellenic Coast Guard emphatically denies.

Washington DC

Abortion ruling: The justices of the US supreme court have unanimously rejected a case challenging the approval of a widely used abortion drug. Mifepristone is one of two drugs regularly used in medical abortions – which now account for at least 60% of terminations in the US. It is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, which had expanded access and now allows it to be mailed to patients – creating an effective workaround for women living in states that banned abortion after the supreme court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, two years ago. The justices did not examine the case's merits and decreed that the plaintiffs – a group of anti-abortion doctors and activists – had no legal standing to sue, because they were not harmed by the drug's availability. Pro-choice activists cautioned that this narrow technical ruling means that the door is still open for further legal challenges.

**Havana****Russian flotilla:**

Four Russian naval vessels, including a nuclear-powered submarine, received a warm welcome when they briefly docked in Havana last week, after taking part in drills in the Atlantic. On Russian state TV, a reporter explained that the US had recently given Ukraine permission to use American weapons to strike targets in Russia; the visit was a signal, he said, that President Putin “reserves the right for a mirror response – that is, supplying long-range weapons to countries that feel the pressure of the US”.

Austin, Texas

Musk controversy: Elon Musk had a sexual relationship with a summer intern at his SpaceX company, and tried to rekindle the relationship when she joined the firm as an executive years later, according to a report in *The Wall Street Journal*. The woman, who was 20 years his junior, said his behaviour was never “predatory”, however. The tech billionaire is also alleged to have had a sexual relationship with an employee who reported directly to him; and to have repeatedly asked a third woman to have his babies, and then blocked a pay rise for her when she rejected the idea. SpaceX, which discourages relationships between managers and their staff, described the exposé as full of “untruths”, as did Musk’s lawyers.

Mexico City

Elected judges: Mexico’s outgoing president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has vowed to push ahead with his controversial plan to fire 1,600 judges, including members of the supreme court, and replace them with elected justices. In recent elections, Obrador’s protégée, Claudia Sheinbaum, won the race to replace him by a landslide, and his Morena party and its allies secured a near super-majority in congress – giving him a brief opportunity to drive through his constitutional reforms before he leaves office on 1 October. Obrador says his judicial overhaul will ensure that Mexico has judges “with integrity, who are honest”; his critics say it will undermine the independence of the judiciary.

**Tegucigalpa**

Mega-prison plan: Honduras is to mimic neighbouring El Salvador by building its first ever “mega-prison”. The country’s president, Xiomara Castro, said the 20,000-inmate facility – which will more than double the country’s prison capacity – was urgently needed to combat escalating gang violence, drug trafficking and related crime. Castro,

a left-winger once seen as soft on crime, who became Honduras’s first female president in 2022, also announced plans to reform the country’s penal code, to allow suspected gang leaders to be detained without charge, and face mass trials.

Washington DC

Spouse reprieve: President Biden has unveiled plans to grant an estimated 550,000 undocumented migrants protection from deportation, work permits, and a route to citizenship. The programme will apply to migrants who have been in the US for at least ten years, and who are married to a US citizen; it will be the largest relief programme for undocumented migrants since 2012, when Barack Obama gave an amnesty to 530,000 “dreamers” – migrants who arrived as children. Analysts said that it could boost Biden’s vote share in swing states such as Nevada, Arizona and Georgia, each of which are home to over 100,000 “mixed-status” households, and placate Democrats angered by his tightening of the border. But it has been slammed by Republicans, who’ve tried to make immigration an election issue. According to a recent poll, 18% of voters think it the most important problem facing the US.

**Buenos Aires**

Violent protests: Riot police in Buenos Aires used rubber bullets, water cannon and tear gas last week to break up violent demonstrations against President Milei’s controversial economic reform bill. As lawmakers prepared to vote on the bill, thousands of people gathered outside congress to protest against the reforms, which are aimed at reviving Argentina’s economy, and include pension cuts, the watering down of labour rights, and the privatisation of public companies. Demonstrators, who say the bill will leave millions worse off, hurled rocks and petrol bombs; but Milei’s “shock” austerity measures were finally approved after a marathon 21-hour debate in which the vice-president cast the deciding vote.

Jerusalem, Israel

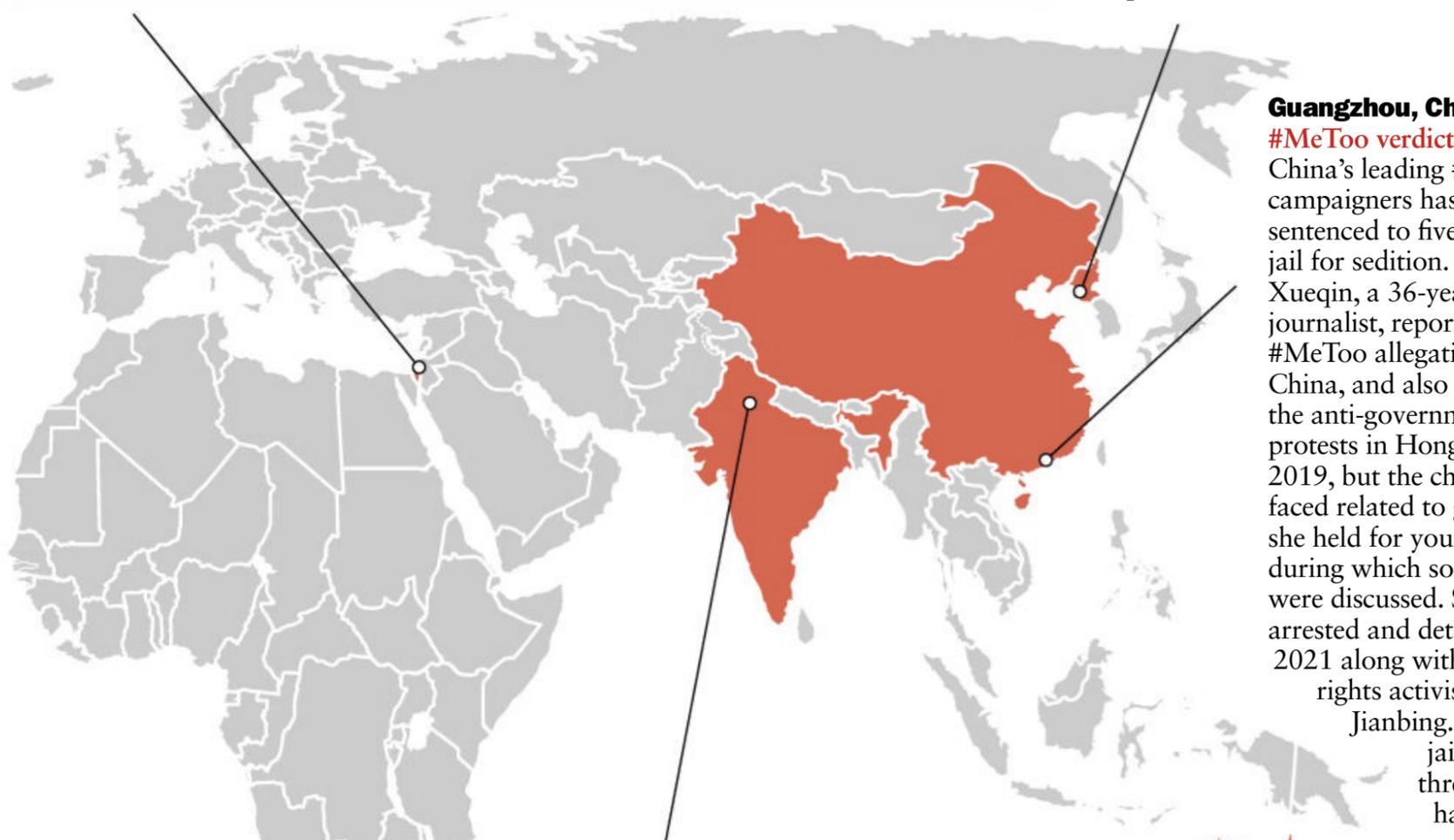
War cabinet axed: The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has dissolved the six-member war cabinet that he formed in the aftermath of the Hamas attack of 7 October. His decision is being seen as a rebuff to far-right allies, who had been seeking a seat on it following the resignation of the moderate opposition leader Benny Gantz. Analysts say that Netanyahu will now have more control over the direction of the offensive in Gaza, and the fighting against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Last weekend, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Tel Aviv to demand a ceasefire-for-hostages deal with Hamas and snap elections, in the biggest anti-government protests since the start of the war.

The Israel Defence Forces has announced it will observe a “tactical pause” in fighting for 11 hours a day close to a key crossing into southern Gaza, to allow the UN to collect and distribute humanitarian aid. The UN says it received 68 trucks of aid a day throughout May, down from 168 a day in April, and far below the 500 that aid groups say are needed to fend off a catastrophe. Netanyahu said he had not been consulted about the decision, which was slammed by some of his far-right allies.



Pyongyang

Putin visits: Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un signed a “peaceful and defensive” pact this week, as the Russian president made his first visit to North Korea for 24 years. Speaking after their talks, Kim described Putin as the “dearest friend of the [North] Korean people”, and the pact as the strongest ever agreed between the two countries: he said it elevated their relationship to the level of an alliance. In a statement that may ring alarm bells in the West, Putin noted that the pact allowed for “the provision of mutual assistance in the event of aggression against one of the parties to this agreement”. Washington and Seoul say that North Korea has sent thousands of containers full of arms to Russia for its war in Ukraine; and that Russia has sent food and parts for weapons to North Korea in return.



Guangzhou, China

#MeToo verdict: One of China’s leading #MeToo campaigners has been sentenced to five years in jail for sedition. Huang Xueqin, a 36-year-old journalist, reported on #MeToo allegations in China, and also covered the anti-government protests in Hong Kong in 2019, but the charges she faced related to gatherings she held for young people during which social issues were discussed. She was arrested and detained in 2021 along with labour-rights activist Wang Jianbing. He was jailed for three-and-a-half years.

Cape Town

Ramaphosa returns: South Africa’s president, Cyril Ramaphosa, has been re-elected by MPs, following the general election on 29 May in which his party, the ANC, lost its majority for the first time since the end of Apartheid. His re-election came after a fraught two weeks of coalition talks, in which Ramaphosa’s centrist instincts eventually prevailed: the ANC, which won 40% of the national vote, will share power with the pro-business Democratic Alliance (DA), which won 22%. Left-wing factions of the ANC have criticised the deal, arguing that the DA favours the interests of South Africa’s white minority, an accusation it denies. Two smaller parties, the Inkatha Freedom Party and the Patriotic Alliance, have also said they will join the government.



Delhi

Author charged: The Booker Prize-winning novelist Arundhati Roy is to be prosecuted in India over remarks she made during a panel discussion in 2010 about the disputed territory of Kashmir. Her comment, that Kashmir was not an “integral” part of India, provoked a storm of protest and a criminal complaint at the time, but the case gathered dust until last week, when a senior member of the ruling BJP granted approval for her to be charged, along with an academic who was on the panel with her. Roy, 62, has become an outspoken critic of PM Narendra Modi.



Adelaide, Australia

Panda diplomacy: Beijing has agreed to lend two pandas to Australia when an ageing pair in Adelaide Zoo are returned to China later this year. The promise was made by the Chinese premier, Li Qiang, during a visit to Australia this week – the first by a senior Chinese leader since 2017. Relations between the countries reached their lowest point in decades in 2020, but have improved since Labor PM Anthony Albanese took office. The lifting of a range of punitive tariffs imposed by Beijing four years ago resulted in bilateral trade of roughly £114bn last year, a record high.

People vs. nature at Knepp

In 2000, the Knepp Estate in West Sussex was a typical English farm, and £1.5m in debt, says Patrick Barkham in *The Guardian*. Then its owners, Charlie Burrell and his wife Isabella Tree, took the radical decision to auction off all the farm equipment and let nature take its course. Today, Knepp is thriving: a maze of flowery glades and thickets, it supports 90 employees, is home to cuckoos, nightingales and storks, and is popular with visitors, who flock to its shop, footpaths and café. In fact, Tree says, the challenge now is to strike a balance between “engaging people with nature” and not allow visitors to overwhelm the wildlife. For example, dog owners declare Knepp’s ponds great for their pets to swim in, but Tree points out that canine anti-flea treatments harm aquatic life. It’s why she has issues with those who demand a right to roam. Of course parents would love their children to be able to splash around in every pond, “but we haven’t yet got enough countryside with recovered wildlife in it to let loose the population – we’ve got to protect areas for wildlife too”.

Fearne Cotton’s retreat

Presenting everything from *Top of the Pops* to *Love Island*, Fearne Cotton became a household name in her 20s, says Rosamund Urwin in *The Sunday Times*. And in the media, she came across as the ultimate party girl.

Yet she describes herself as an introvert – and she found being in the public eye extremely stressful. This was before social media, but on Radio 1, she’d be sitting next to a screen with all the text messages coming in. “It’s ghastly speaking live with people going, ‘You’re a knob!’” In her 30s, her anxiety escalated into panic attacks. “I got to the point where I just thought, ‘Why am I doing this to myself? Am I that desperate to be seen or heard?’” She duly retreated from live TV and radio, and she won’t be going back. It’s cancel culture that scares her, she says: knowing that you one mistake on air “and you’re done, you’re dead. Bye! Everyone’s waiting for you to cock up so they can all point fingers and say that you’ve always been terrible.”

The strange smell of space

In 2015/16, Tim Peake spent six months on the International Space Station. His defining memory of that mission, he told Deborah Linton in *The Observer*, is of peering through a hatch one day and seeing a colleague outside the station. “It’s one thing to look down at Earth and you kind of get used to that,” he says, “but when somebody does a spacewalk, seeing a human with the Earth in the background... That’s not Photoshopped, it’s real!” Another thing that struck him was the unfamiliar smell of space: “A bit like static electricity or burnt metal when you take your jumper off, that ozone-y smell. I’ve never smelt it anywhere else.”



When Eve Gilles was crowned Miss France last year, it parachuted her into a culture war, says Julia Llewellyn Smith in *The Times*. Gilles, 20, has Tamil Indian ancestry, but what angered many of her compatriots was not the colour of her skin, but the length of her hair. A student of maths at the University of Lille, she was the first Miss France in the contest’s 103-year history not to have long bouncy tresses. “There was once a finalist with short hair,” she says, frowning. “Maybe in 1980? But she didn’t win.” On social media, trolls said it was a triumph for “wokeism”, carping that she was “ugly”, too androgynous and insufficiently curvy. Gilles tries not to take it to heart. “I have to just let [the trolls] do what they want to do, because if I focus on them I won’t be focusing on what I want to do. In any case, according to them, no woman is good enough: your hair’s too long or too short. Whether your eyes are blue or brown, there’s always something that doesn’t work.” Since winning the contest, she has spent much of her time touring schools, encouraging girls to share her “passion” for maths. That, she says, is the privilege being Miss France has bestowed. For one year, “I have a voice and people listen to me. Everyone knows who Eve Gilles is. Next year I’ll pass on the crown, like a fairy godmother, and another Miss France can speak about what she wants.”

Castaway of the week

This week’s edition of Radio 4’s Desert Island Discs featured the journalist and news presenter Clive Myrie

- 1 *String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131* by Beethoven, performed by the Kodály Quartet
- 2 *Welcome to My World* by Ray Winkler and John Hathcock, performed by Jim Reeves
- 3 *Così fan tutte ossia La scuola degli amanti, K588 / Act I: “Soave sia il vento”* by Mozart, performed by Kiri Te Kanawa, Ann Murray, Ferruccio Furlanetto and the Vienna Philharmonic
- 4 *All Blues*, written and performed by Miles Davis
- 5 *Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor, BWV 1011: 1: Prélude* by Bach, performed by Paul Tortelier
- 6 *Slave to the Rhythm* by Bruce Woolley, Simon Darlow, Stephen Lipson and Trevor Horn, performed by Grace Jones
- 7* *Long, Long Summer* by Lalo Schifrin, performed by Dizzy Gillespie
- 8 *Stomp!* by Louis Johnson, George Johnson, Valerie Johnson and Rod Temperton, performed by The Brothers Johnson

Book: The Metropolitan Museum of Art catalogue

Luxury: hot pepper sauce

* Choice if allowed only one record

Viewpoint:**Junk info**

“I have been following the election with avidity, but I often wonder how much good it is doing me. I have consumed some policy proposals but also vast quantities of trivia and nonsense: gaffes, pseudo-scandals, meaningless PR ‘wins’. I know about Sunak’s visit to the *Titanic* dockyard and Starmer’s childhood; I can list all of Ed Davey’s stunts. It has been richly entertaining. I doubt it has made me a more competent voter. The writer Gurwinder Bhogal calls it ‘junk info’: an endless, bloating, unfulfilling sugar rush that renders us unable to reflect or see the bigger picture. As a society, we have yet to get used to the idea that not all information is good or useful.”
James Marriott in The Times

Farewell

Anouk Aimée, Oscar-nominated star of *A Man and a Woman*, died 18 June, aged 92.

Kevin Campbell, centre forward who helped Arsenal win the title, died 15 June, aged 54.

Lord Hindlip, Christie’s auctioneer who sold van Gogh’s *Sunflowers*, died 5 June, aged 83.

Willie Mays, baseball all-time great, died 18 June, aged 93.

Dame Jennifer Roberts, judge in landmark divorce cases, died 10 June, aged 71.



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Europe's drug gangs

The illegal narcotics trade is fuelling a surge in gang violence across the continent

Why is this in the news?

Last week, a Dutch court convicted three men of the murder of Peter R. de Vries, one of the Netherlands' most famous reporters, who was shot dead on a busy Amsterdam street in 2021. It was a brazen attack that shocked the nation, and is thought to have been related to the huge "Marengo" trial, in which a drugs kingpin, Ridouan Taghi, and 16 others were convicted of six murders and four attempted murders. De Vries was killed, it seems, because of his role as official "confidant" of Nabil B, a former member of Taghi's gang who turned witness against him; Nabil B's brother and his lawyer had also been killed. These killings were seen as a major assault on the rule of law; during the Marengo trial, which concluded in February, it was alleged that Taghi's gang were also plotting to kidnap the prime minister Mark Rutte, and to target the country's royal family. Amsterdam's mayor, Femke Halsema, warned that the Netherlands was at risk of becoming a "narco state", swamped with criminal money and violence. Similar problems have been seen across western Europe.



A sniffer dog at work at the port of Rotterdam

What sort of problems are occurring?

"Some EU member states are currently experiencing unprecedented levels of drug market-related violence, including killings, torture, kidnappings and intimidation," reported Europol, the EU's law enforcement agency, in March. In Belgium, Brussels has become a hub for drugs coming from Antwerp, and shootings between rival gangs have proliferated. Drug-related homicides in Marseille, France, rose by 50% from 2022 to 2023; last month, two prison guards were shot dead when a prison van carrying Mohamed Amra, a convicted criminal reportedly linked to a Marseille drug gang, was ambushed near Rouen. In Sweden, cities have been blighted by gangs waging turf wars against each other; 11 people were killed in shootings last September alone.

What's behind the violence?

Most of it is linked to attempts to control the EU's growing drugs market. The illegal narcotics market has grown rapidly in recent years, and is now worth an estimated €31bn annually, according to EU agencies. The illicit cannabis market alone is worth €11.4bn a year. Of a similar size, but more profitable and more violent, is the cocaine market – worth €11.6bn annually in the EU. Five of the ten largest cocaine seizures in Europe took place last year. Today, cities such as Lisbon, Brussels and Amsterdam have some of the highest per capita rates of cocaine use in the world. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, people in Europe accounted for 21% of all global users of cocaine in 2021, despite making up just 9.3% of the world's population. Analysis of waste water shows that cocaine use has shot up in many EU cities since 2016.

Why is drug use surging?

Partly because supply has increased. In Colombia, the world's largest cocaine-producing country, the area

planted with coca bushes reached a record high in 2023, with production capacity up by 24% on the previous two years. The same pattern has been seen in Peru and Bolivia; globally, coca production has more than doubled since 2014. With the US market saturated, cartels have increasingly turned to Europe to sell their cocaine, lured by the relative ease with which they can smuggle drugs through major ports such as Antwerp and Rotterdam, and the higher prices at which they can sell: a kilo of cocaine bought for \$1,000 in Colombia is worth more than €35,000 in Europe, about twice its price in the US.

How does the trade work?

Cartels and drug trafficking gangs fight for control of cultivation regions in the Andes, and use smuggling routes to ports such as the crime-ravaged city of Guayaquil in Ecuador. Shipments are sold to crime syndicates in Europe, such as the Dutch-Moroccan "Mocro mafia" in the Netherlands and Belgium, in which Taghi played a major role, the Yoda and DZ Mafia gangs in Marseille, as well as Serb, Albanian and Kosovan gangs, and Calabria's 'Ndrangheta. Authorities say that their methods are becoming more sophisticated. Historically, Spain was the main entry point for Latin American drugs. Now, though, the trade centres on the big ports of the Netherlands and Belgium, and other major container ports, where drugs can be smuggled in among legitimate goods.

How violent are the drug gangs?

Very. About half of all homicides in the EU are linked to drug trafficking. Europol said in a report in April that some 821 dangerous criminal gangs are now operating in the EU; about half of these are involved in drug trafficking. Police have noted, with concern, levels of violence usually associated with Latin America: in the Netherlands, they have found "torture chambers" hidden among shipping containers; the severed head of a rival was left outside an Amsterdam shisha lounge; in Marseille, youths have used Kalashnikov assault rifles to assassinate their enemies.

What are the authorities doing?

The EU has launched a "European Ports Alliance" to improve coordination between European ports and law enforcement. Cocaine seizures have risen sharply, thanks in part to new technology, such as drones and thermal cameras. But the sheer number of containers makes it hard to stop entirely; only 10% of shipments from South America are checked in ports such as Antwerp. Refrigerated containers, which must be processed quickly, are particularly useful for smugglers. Europol's chief, Catherine De Bolle, recently warned that traffickers are chipping away at the rule of law, not just by co-opting socially-excluded youth into their gangs, but by corrupting logistics workers, and even the courts and police. In one port, which she didn't name, she claimed, "everyone was corrupted". "We are in a very difficult situation," she said. "We are behind."

The threat from fentanyl

Fentanyl and other synthetic opioids like it now kill some 75,000 people a year in the US. That's more than double the figure of 2019, and more Americans than died in the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan combined. To date, fentanyl – which is about 50 times stronger than heroin – has largely spared Europe: about 137 people died of drugs of its ilk in 2021, and seizures of the drug are rare. But there are fears that Europe's immunity may not last much longer. About a million Europeans use opioids, with most of the supply historically coming from Afghanistan; but in April 2022, the Taliban banned the cultivation of opium poppies. Areas under cultivation duly shrank by some 95% last year, hindering the supply of heroin to Europe, thus encouraging cartels to start supplying heroin mixed with fentanyl and other opioids.

There is a consensus among experts that fentanyl will hit Europe sooner or later. For now, there are still some reasons for optimism: Europe's welfare state is far better equipped than America's to cope with a synthetic opioid epidemic; and its governments, having seen the effect on the US, are at least prepared for the dangers fentanyl poses. Whether the continent can avoid a US-style epidemic remains to be seen.

Art lovers of the world, let's fight back

Richard Morrison

The Times

Another week, another attack on an innocent artwork, says Richard Morrison. The target this time was Jonathan Yeo's new portrait of King Charles, which was adorned with stickers as part of a protest against alleged cruelty on RSPCA-assured farms. Such stunts aren't novel – 110 years ago suffragette Mary Richardson slashed Velázquez's *The Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery – but now they're horribly routine. There have been dozens in the past two years, most carried out by climate activists. It's a nightmare for galleries, who want their art to remain as accessible as possible but don't have the funds to protect every work. Other countries are now getting tough: in the US, the woman who sprayed paint on a Degas sculpture exhibit has been sentenced to 60 days in prison and handed a \$4,000 cleaning bill. Italy has introduced fines of up to £50,000 for art attackers. The UK should do likewise. A few "severe penalties" might make activists think twice before "molesting any more defenceless Old Masters".

No room for Hollywood in our back yard

John Gapper

Financial Times

A movie studio seeks to move to a quaint English town but is repelled by a group of plucky locals: that could make a charming film comedy "in a fictional world", says John Gapper. But the blocking of a plan to create a new studio complex on the site of a former quarry outside Marlow is occurring in the real world, and there's nothing funny about it. The £750m scheme – backed by, among others, James Cameron, director of *Titanic* – was in line to bring 2,000 direct jobs to the area and £3.5bn in production investment over a decade. It would have added to the cluster of film businesses around Pinewood Shepperton and Warner Bros' studios in Leavesden, helping the UK film and TV industry lure more productions from Hollywood. But local activists opposed the plan and Buckinghamshire Council has now rejected it, ruling it would "result in spatial and visual harm to the openness of the Green Belt". Such concern is no doubt genuine, but it still makes you despair. How will we ever boost economic growth in the UK if we can't even build "infrastructure for one of the UK's most dynamic industries on reclaimed land by a dual carriageway"?

A prejudiced view of age and experience

Dominic Lawson

The Sunday Times

Labour has a plan for reforming the House of Lords, says Dominic Lawson: it wants to boot out its "most respected" members. The party's manifesto declares that the upper house "has become too big" and proposes, by way of remedy, that peers should have to retire after turning 80. Even the Electoral Reform Society, a consistent advocate of Lords reform, has warned of the "arbitrary impact" this could have. Of the 785 sitting members of the Lords, 185 are 80 or over. They include the distinguished scientist Robert Winston, the first female lord justice of appeal, Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, and Joan Bakewell, who was appointed to the Lords by the last Labour government to be "Britain's voice of older people". Would the Lords really be better off without the contributions of such experienced figures? To complain about the large number of peers is, anyway, beside the point. They're not full-time salaried officials: they only attend when their expertise is relevant to the measures under discussion. Yes, by all means let's take action against peers who exploit the system by turning up just to claim their daily allowance and have a nice lunch. But why get rid of good people just because they're old?

Don't let water run through private hands

Editorial

The Guardian

A change of government is a chance to do things differently, says The Guardian, and if there's one area above all that needs a new approach, it's the way we supply our citizens with water. The decision to privatise the industry in 1989 – making England & Wales the only countries in Europe to have a water and sewage system entirely in private hands – was a move that "defied the Thatcherite logic of competition and efficiency". It gave the private water firms an effective local monopoly of a vital resource – and, thus protected from competition, these firms have prioritised profits over upgrading networks. Their pipes now leak a fifth of the water they carry; no new reservoirs have been built; sewage spills have multiplied; the firms have paid out £78bn in dividends while loading themselves with £64bn of debts. Compare all this with the situation in the Netherlands, whose public-sector water firms, funded by a state-owned bank, suffer less than a quarter of the leaks seen in England. Labour talks of tightening regulations. It should go further and just end this disastrous experiment.

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

A Scottish baby was officially named Pasty, rather than Patsy, after council staff got the spelling wrong on her birth certificate. James and Abbie Gallacher, from Clydebank, had wanted to name their first child after his great-great-grandfather Patsy Gallacher, the Celtic football legend. They were notified of the mix-up by The Sun on Sunday. "I dug out the birth certificate and just thought, 'Oh my God,'" said Abbie. "We spent such a long time picking the name as a tribute and it feels like a slap in the face." The name has now been corrected.



A statue unveiled in Kosovo to honour Tony Blair's role in securing the country's independence has been mocked for its poor likeness to the former PM. "Why have they put a statue of Jason Donovan up in Kosovo?" asked one social media user. The statue has pride of place in a square in Ferizaj, in southern Kosovo. Earlier this month, on a visit to Kosovo, Blair met five men named "Tonibler" in his honour.

A Republican politician in Vermont has apologised after being caught on video pouring water into the bag of a Democratic colleague in the state assembly. The victim, Jim Carroll, mounted a camera above the spot where he hung his tote bag to find out why it had been repeatedly soaked over the course of five months. The footage revealed the culprit to be Mary Morrissey, who Carroll has known since childhood. "I am truly ashamed for my actions," she said. She begged colleagues to forgive her "poor judgement", but has yet to explain her behaviour.

Hunter Biden's conviction: a victory for the rule of law?

“As a rule, it is not a good thing for your son to be convicted of a crime,” said Jesse Wegman in [The New York Times](#), particularly if you're a sitting president campaigning for re-election. But the conviction last week of Hunter Biden – for falsely claiming that he was not a drug user on a federal form he signed to obtain a gun – is a “net positive” for his father. The trial provided “an object lesson in the fair administration of justice”, showing that nobody, not even the president's own flesh and blood, is above the law. Some had predicted that the jury in Delaware, “a tiny state where everybody seems to personally know and adore the Biden family”, would go easy on Hunter, said Jonathan Chait in [New York Magazine](#). But they treated him like any other defendant. So much for the angry claims of Donald Trump and his supporters that the justice system is rigged in favour of the Biden administration. Rather than complaining about the result, the president said that he respected the verdict and even promised not to pardon Hunter, who will be tried in September on separate tax fraud charges. This is how things are meant to work. “It could not be more obvious that one candidate in this race genuinely believes in upholding the rule of law, while the other is a criminal who wishes to regain control of the government to run it like a mafia state.”



Father and son: no paternal pardon

committed in October 2018 and known to law enforcement almost immediately. Yet the DOJ sat on the case for years, only bringing charges in 2023 after two whistleblowers accused it of trying to avoid prosecuting Hunter over the separate tax avoidance matter. The DOJ then offered Hunter a plea agreement that would have let him off with a modest penalty while immunising him against other, potentially more serious, charges related to his influence-peddling while his father was vice-president. That unprecedented immunity deal fell apart after a judge publicly challenged it. In short, to “paraphrase Churchill, the DOJ did the right thing after exhausting all other options”.

Don't buy all this stuff about how the verdict proves how fair and neutral Biden's Department of Justice (DOJ) is, said Rich Lowry in [National Review](#). If the department had had its way, this trial would never have happened. Hunter's gun felonies were

That's not the only dubious aspect of this story, said Miranda Devine in the [New York Post](#). Much of the evidence that convicted Hunter last week came from the infamous laptop that he abandoned in a Delaware repair shop, and that came to public attention shortly before the 2020 election. It caused a huge fuss owing to its compromising content about shady business deals; but his father insisted that the laptop was a “Russian plant”. The FBI, however, has now verified that it belonged to Hunter. I don't think that's what most voters will take from this story, said Alyssa Farah Griffin on [The Daily Beast](#). The vast majority are likely to be sympathetic, because “countless Americans” know what it's like when an addict goes off the rails. Many more than, for instance, know what it's like to pay “a large sum of hush money to hide an alleged affair with an adult-film star”.

Congestion charging in NYC: a dream that died

New York City was on the cusp of reinventing itself for the 21st century, said Justin Davidson in [New York Magazine](#), but governor Kathy Hochul has just ordered “a screeching U-turn into the distant past”. At the end of this month, the city had been due to bring in a congestion charge that would have imposed a \$15 toll on vehicles entering the traffic-clogged heart of Manhattan. The toll, proposed by then-mayor Mike Bloomberg in 2007 and approved by the state legislature in 2019, would have made streets safer, less polluted, and more pleasant for pedestrians and cyclists, while raising an estimated \$1bn a year to update the city's ageing public-transport infrastructure. Cities with similar congestion-charging plans – London, Paris, Stockholm – have seen 20% drops in traffic, improved air quality, and fewer traffic deaths. But the New York plan is very unpopular with suburbanites and outer-borough residents who prefer to drive into Manhattan to work, eat, or go to the theatre. In the face of opposition, Hochul got cold feet, placing an “indefinite pause” on the controversial scheme.



Times Square: the traffic-clogged heart of Manhattan

this time would be “lunacy”, said Andrew Stuttaford in [National Review](#). In New York, post-Covid hybrid working schedules have devastated commercial real estate (the office vacancy rate is around 50%), as well as the thousands of local businesses that cater to commuters. “New York City ... needs to avoid doing anything that might discourage people from coming to work (or to play or to shop) in Manhattan.”

It's a shame, said Megan McArdle in [The Washington Post](#). In theory, congestion charging is a great idea. It

Sorry, but “Americans do not want to pay \$15 to drive their cars anywhere” – even in New York City, said Kevin D. Williamson on [The Dispatch](#). Hochul explained her decision by saying the toll “risks too many unintended consequences”. No kidding. Don't all progressive, big-government projects have unintended consequences? Introducing an onerous new toll at

uses the price mechanism to create more efficient use of a scarce resource – road space – that is otherwise rationed only by people's tolerance for wasting time in traffic jams. If it could work anywhere in America, it would be NYC, the country's densest and most walkable city, the place for which the word “gridlock” was invented. The scheme would have inspired some drivers to carpool and others to take public transport or shop closer to home, reducing jams and leaving residents as a whole better off. But there's no getting around the fact that it would also have left a lot of existing drivers worse off – and people objected to that. Polls show that two-thirds of New Yorkers oppose the plan, in a city where less than half of households even own a car. A “less democratically responsive government might have been able to ram it through”, but in fractious America, congestion charging is “a non-starter”.

The rising “superstar” of the French hard-right

“For a glimpse into what the future holds for nationalist parties that are now ascendant across Europe, look no further than Jordan Bardella,” said Stacy Meichtry and Noemie Bisserbe in [The Wall Street Journal \(New York\)](#). At 28, the softly spoken, social media-savvy president of France’s hard-right National Rally (RN) party is unburdened by the “historical baggage” that has weighed down his political mentor, Marine Le Pen, daughter of Holocaust denier Jean-Marie Le Pen. And if RN wins the parliamentary elections called by Emmanuel Macron after his party’s crushing loss in the recent European elections, Bardella will become France’s youngest-ever PM. So who is he? And how has he moved a party with a “dark past” into the political “mainstream”?



Bardella: pulling his party away from its “dark past”

The only child of Italian immigrants, Bardella was born in 1995 in Drancy, a Paris *banlieue*, and raised by his divorced mother on the eighth floor of a “drab tower block”, said [France 24 \(Paris\)](#). He likes to describe himself as the survivor of a dangerous city plagued by drugs and radical Islam. However, his father had the funds to send him to a private school and he went on to study geography at the Sorbonne, before dropping out to work full-time for the RN’s precursor, the National Front. His rise through the party’s ranks was “meteoric”, and in 2019 Marine Le Pen picked the then 23-year-old as the RN’s lead candidate in the European elections. A year later, he began dating Le Pen’s niece, Nolwenn Olivier, and in 2022 took over from Le Pen as the party’s president, said Clea Caulcutt on [Politico \(Brussels\)](#). Since then, his popularity has

soared: hailed in the French press as a “superstar”, he’s even boosted the RN’s standing among “change-averse” older voters. But it’s his ability to speak to the young that sets him apart, said Olivier Galland on [Slate \(Paris\)](#): 32% of 18- to 34-year-olds voted for him in this month’s EU elections compared with just 5% for Macron’s candidate. Bardella speaks their language. He doesn’t bore his 1.6 million followers on TikTok with political jargon; he amuses them with videos known for their brutal put-downs – such as one showing him downing a beer above the caption “drinking the tears of Macron fans”.

Although all this has helped Bardella detoxify his party, said Saskya Vandoorne on [CNN \(New York\)](#), he isn’t afraid to deploy “populist rhetoric”: he’s promised to expel “delinquents, criminals and foreign Islamists”, and warns France could “die” as a result of being “submerged in migrants”. All this might resonate with disillusioned voters, said Saïd Mahrane in [Le Point \(Paris\)](#), but put on the spot with a hard political question, he tends to freeze. This is a man who’s never held serious office: one suspects he’d be incapable of handling the pressure of the notoriously difficult office of French PM. Which is partly what makes him so attractive to Le Pen, said Laure Cometti and Thibaud Le Meneec on [France Info \(Paris\)](#). She’s lining up a bid for the presidency in 2027, and doesn’t want her reputation tarnished by an unsuccessful spell as PM herself. Besides, she’s facing a criminal trial for embezzlement of public funds this autumn; charges she denies. If she survives that, Bardella may soon find his star eclipsed by that of his boss.

Balloon wars: soaring tensions in the Koreas

The “crap attack” is what they’re calling it, said Robert King on [Korea Economic Institute of America \(Washington\)](#). Over a week-long period ending early this month, North Korea released more than 1,000 huge balloons carrying “manure, cigarette butts, used batteries” and other rubbish across the “demilitarised zone” into South Korea. Some were heavy enough to smash car windscreens; others were equipped with timers designed to get the bags to pop open in mid-air and scatter their contents. The blitz was retaliation for an earlier leaflet campaign organised by Fighters for a Free North Korea, a group of North Korean defectors living in the South, who in early May had sent 300,000 flyers tethered to balloons across the border, said Kang Seung-woo in [The Korea Times \(Seoul\)](#). And another “200,000 leaflets, US \$1 bills and USB sticks containing K-pop songs” were duly sent from South Korea in a tit-for-tat reply for the “crap attack”, only to be answered by 300 more rubbish-loaded balloons from the North. Seoul has now vowed to resume loudspeaker broadcasts of pop music and anti-North Korean propaganda across the border for the first time in six years.



Stuck in a field: a balloon from the “crap attack”

This balloon war isn’t a first, said [The Asahi Shimbun \(Tokyo\)](#). It’s a bizarre reminder of a little-known conflict in the Second World War, when the Imperial Japanese Army made use of strong easterly winds to send bombs suspended from balloons made of “washi”, traditional Japanese paper, to the US. Some

9,000 were deployed; only 10% made it across the Pacific, but they still caused fires and killed six Americans. In fact, balloons have often been used in flare-ups between the two Koreas, said [The Chosun Ilbo \(Seoul\)](#): North and South launched millions of leaflets into each other’s air space via balloon during the Cold War. Today, however, the risk of escalation is that much greater, said [The Hankyoreh \(Seoul\)](#). Seoul had banned sending leaflets into North Korea, but that was struck down last year by the constitutional court on freedom of speech grounds. Pyongyang, a nuclear power in the grip of an

economic crisis, is an increasingly unpredictable actor. “If we’re not careful, both Koreas will be annihilated.”

For now, thankfully, the mood in South Korea is calm, said Choe Sang-Hun in [The New York Times](#). On social media, people are happily posting pictures of the North Korean balloons stuck in trees, streets or fields. But in an “ominous undertone”, Seoul has urged people not to touch the balloons and to report them at once to the military, whose officers, clad in biohazard and bomb-disposal gear, have been seen inspecting the rubbish piles. North Korea has large stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons, which its agents famously deployed to assassinate Kim Jong Un’s estranged half-brother, Kim Jong Nam. So far, no real damage has been done – but the resumption of Cold War-era hostilities between the two Koreas doesn’t bode well for a peaceful future.

What the scientists are saying...

Hope for bowel disease sufferers

Scientists have pinpointed one of the principal drivers of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) – a breakthrough that could lead to new treatments, reports The Guardian. Around 500,000 people in the UK and seven million worldwide have IBD, the main forms of which are Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis. It occurs when the immune system attacks the bowel, and symptoms include abdominal pain, weight loss, fatigue, bloody stools and diarrhoea. Existing treatments do not work for everyone and an incomplete understanding of the drivers of IBD has hindered the hunt for new ones. The new research, by a team at The Francis Crick Institute, focused on a “gene desert” – a stretch of DNA that is devoid of protein-coding genes – which has previously been linked to auto-immune disorders. The researchers found that part of it acts like a volume control for nearby genes, and that when turned up too high, one of them, ETS2, causes inflammation of the sort associated with IBD. They then looked for a drug that might tamp down ETS2, and honed in on MEK inhibitors, which are used to treat cancer. In tests in the lab, these reduced inflammation in gut samples. “What we have found is one of the very central pathways that goes wrong when people get inflammatory bowel disease and this has been something of a holy grail,” said the study’s final author Dr James Lee.

Tetanus linked to Parkinson’s

Could the tetanus vaccine be used to treat or even prevent Parkinson’s disease? That’s the intriguing possibility raised by new research at Tel Aviv University. For the study, a team examined the health and vaccine records of 1,446 people who had been diagnosed with the neurodegenerative



The bonobo is the smallest living great ape

disease between the ages of 45 and 75, and compared them with those of 7,230 non-sufferers. This revealed that having recently had a tetanus jab following a wound infection seemed to halve the risk of being diagnosed with Parkinson’s. The researchers speculate that tetanus bacteria attack the nervous system in Parkinson’s patients, possibly via nerve cells in the nose. If further research confirms the results, the vaccine could be used to ward off the disease or slow its progression – something existing drugs are unable to do.

A dye to make cancer cells glow

Prostate cancer is often treated with surgery, but if the cancerous tissue is not completely eradicated, the disease may return. And if surgeons inadvertently damage healthy tissue, it can lead to life-changing side effects, including incontinence. Now scientists have developed a fluorescent dye that clings

to cancer cells, giving them a clearer view of the tumour’s edge and allowing them to identify clusters of cancerous cells that have spread into surrounding tissue. The dye, which is attached to an antibody-like molecule, hones in on a protein that is found on the surface of prostate cancer cells. A special light can then be used to make the cancerous cells glow. In a small trial of 23 patients, the dye was used to successfully identify cells that had spread; further clinical trials are under way, and the hope is that it could in time be made to work for other types of cancer too.

The tiny ape found in Germany

A kneecap and two teeth found in Bavaria indicate the existence of a previously unknown species of great ape that is the smallest to have ever lived, scientists have claimed. Named *Buronius manfredschmidi*, the tiny creature lived some 11.6 million years ago, and is estimated to have weighed just 10kg – roughly the same as a French bulldog and far lighter than any other hominid on record. The thin enamel and light wear on its teeth point to a diet of soft fruits and leaves, while the structure of the kneecap (or patella) suggests that it was a skilled climber. Other fossilised remains found at the same site indicate that it lived alongside a much larger ape that ate tougher foods; the differences in their diets would have allowed them to cohabit without competing for resources. “It’s hard to say why there are no small hominids living today,” said study leader Prof Madelaine Böhme, noting that “in evolutionary lineages you normally start small and get bigger”. But other experts suggested that the fossilised remains could be from a juvenile great ape – or from another type of primate altogether.

Elephants may name their young

Wild African elephants appear to make up names for each other – and to answer to these names, a study has found. Scientists at Colorado State University recorded nearly 500 calls or “rumbles” made by female elephants and their calves in Kenya, and made a note of the caller and most likely recipient. Then, since the rumbles are hard for the human ear to discern, they gave the recordings to a machine-learning program to see if they contained a name-like component that the models could use to identify the recipient. They found that it was able to do this 27% of the time. It turned out that the apparent names were most often used when adults were calling to their young from a distance. When these recordings were played back to the elephants, the animals responded more strongly to the calls that had been addressed to them than to other calls.



Many “rumbles” fall below human hearing

Other animals, including parakeets, have been observed attracting the attention of another creature by mimicking their signature call, but this is the first evidence of a species (other than humans) apparently coming up with names for each other.

A scan to predict dementia

A new scan is able to predict the onset of dementia years before it would normally be diagnosed. The test takes just six minutes, uses MRI scanners that are already in use in NHS hospitals, and has an accuracy rate of 80%. To develop the test, the team at Queen Mary University of London analysed brain scans from more than 1,100 people. They found that those who developed dementia showed less connectivity in a part of the brain’s system called the default mode network, which plays a role in keeping our thoughts in order, and which is the first to degenerate in Alzheimer’s patients. This allowed the development of an algorithm which could use scans to accurately predict dementia an average of 3.7 years before an official diagnosis. The ability to predict dementia should help in the development of treatments – and enable patients to make the most of treatments.

Pick of the week's Gossip

Martin Amis liked to call himself a “father emeritus”, his daughter **Fernanda** recalled at his memorial service this month, but far from being absent, he was at home all the time. And though he didn’t care for theatre, he twice came to see her in her school play, and sat in the front row, “not remotely trying to hide the blue light and cloud” from his vape. He didn’t last long, however. “The plays that I was in were always avant garde slogs,” she explained. “I understood and respected his decision to leave at the intermission.”



Stephen Merchant claims to have been banned by the outsize retailer High and Mighty for criticising their wares in an interview. The 6ft 7in actor discovered he was banned when he was appearing in a TV show, and a member of the costume department went to a branch of High and Mighty to get clothes for him. “[She] said, ‘I’m buying these for an actor – I might need to bring them back.’ And the woman behind the counter said, ‘Which actor?... Is it him?’ And she pulled out a laminated copy of the interview and said: ‘We’re not selling clothes to him.’”

By the mid-2000s, **Peter Mandelson** considered himself a celebrity, says the journalist **Dylan Jones** in his new memoir. And the Labour supremo did love attention. Once, at a party at Davos, he grabbed a beam and started doing pull-ups. This soon had “the desired effect”, and the entire room – which included Rupert Murdoch and Naomi Campbell – “stopped to watch him, like moths around a flame”.

The Greens: a new force on the Left

“With relatively little to lose in this election, or indeed win”, the Green Party of England and Wales has been able to be impressively candid, said *The Independent*. Tax is “the issue that the bigger parties don’t like to talk about”; they pretend that public services can be improved without greatly increasing the tax burden. But the Greens have looked at the state of the NHS, education and welfare, and at the need for new national infrastructure, and have concluded that personal tax rises amounting to £50bn-£70bn a year will be required.

Their manifesto’s “centrepiece” is a wealth tax of 1% a year on assets over £10m, and 2% over £1bn, plus higher taxes on capital gains and property. The Green manifesto promises “everything the Labour party should be doing... but is too frightened to propose”, said **George Monbiot** in *The Guardian*. The Greens would immediately bring rail, water and the “big five” energy companies back into public ownership. They would ramp up NHS funding, including for dentistry and mental health; boost social security spending; scrap university tuition fees; and vastly increase subsidies for public transport.

If enacted, their plans (costing £160bn a year in total) would drive away investment, cause the national debt to balloon, and would end in



Green Party co-leader *Carla Denyer*

national ruin, said **Carole Malone** in the *Daily Express*. And their fiscal recklessness is only one reason to reject them. The Greens’ former leader, **Caroline Lucas**, who is standing down, was a sensible, principled figure who was evidently passionate about the environment. By contrast, the next generation of Green politicians appear to be “bile-spewing hard-left” fanatics obsessed with trans rights, Gaza, and – bizarrely – the need for “natural” childbirth (code for denying women Caesarean sections).

Even so, the new, radical Greens have plenty of supporters, said **Abby Wallace** on *Politico*. And that’s not surprising. Their policies are reminiscent of Labour under **Jeremy Corbyn**’s leadership; they appeal to left-wingers alienated by **Keir Starmer** and upset, in particular, that he has not done enough “about the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza”. The party has identified four seats it hopes to win, up from the single MP they had in the last parliament. Polls suggest that **Siân Berry** will hold **Brighton Pavilion**, Lucas’s former seat, and that co-leader **Carla Denyer** will win in the newly created constituency of **Bristol Central**, beating Labour’s shadow culture secretary, **Thangam Debona**. But even if they don’t hit their target, the Greens will “pile pressure on Labour from the Left”.

Joe Biden: too frail for office?

As a young senator, **Joe Biden** was so given to verbal missteps that he called himself the “gaffe machine”. And during his 2020 campaign, his team played loud music whenever he mingled with the public, seemingly to drown out any off-colour remarks he might make. But lately, a tendency to say the wrong thing has morphed into something far more worrying, said **Freddy Gray** in the *Daily Mail*. At 81, the US president is not only physically frail – he wears trainers to aid his mobility, and has a glacially slow, shuffling gait – he has also become prone to what look like moments of senility. At the commemorations to mark D-Day, for instance, Biden was about to sit down at an event, then realised it was the wrong moment and for “several excruciating seconds”, he just stood there, in mid-squat. Last week, he seemed to freeze during a concert at the White House. His team claim that, behind the scenes, he is as sharp as ever. But Washington insiders have described private meetings at which he’d seemed confused about his brief, or to doze off; and voters won’t forget the words of the special counsel looking into his mishandling of classified files, who noted that the leader of the free world comes across as an “elderly man with a poor memory”.

The Republicans are pushing this line hard, said **Oliver Darcy** on *CNN*. You’ll hear it on *Fox*

News every night. As for the Washington insiders who spoke to the Murdoch-owned *Wall Street Journal*, they were by no means all neutral observers: one of the few people quoted on the record was the former house speaker, **Kevin McCarthy**, who is not a “serious person speaking in good faith”, but rather “a Maga Republican who has for years lied on behalf of Trump”, and who has previously praised Biden’s mental agility. But while right-wing news outlets pore over speeches and video clips, looking for segments they can selectively edit or use out of context to suggest that Biden is gaga, they draw no such inferences from the 78-year-old **Donald Trump**’s bizarre and incoherent rants, or the times he seemed to nod off during his hush-money trial.

Clearly, this issue is preoccupying voters, said **Aaron Blake** in the *Washington Post*. Polls have shown that up to 80% of Americans think Biden is too old; and that 62% think he is not mentally fit to be president. Voters are also concerned about Trump’s fitness for office – and in particular, his mental stability and his ability to handle a crisis. His erratic behaviour has not passed them by. But ultimately, these people are outnumbered by the Biden sceptics. And given the exposure Trump has already had, it’s unlikely that anything he does in the next few months of campaigning will “offset Biden’s liabilities”.

VAT on private schools: a spiteful policy?

“Another day closer to the general election and I’m at my daughter’s prep school in Oxfordshire,” said Arabella Byrne in *The Spectator*. Once again, “I’m having a ‘VAT chat with a fellow mother’”. We’ve known about Labour’s plan for months – stripping the VAT exemption from private school fees. But as the election draws near, the reality is starting to sink in. It will lead to a likely 20% rise in fees, which for many parents, including me, will be unaffordable. “I will have to take my daughter out of the school that she loves.”

This is an appalling policy, motivated by “the politics of envy” and “simple spite”, said Martin Stephen in *The Daily Telegraph*. The success of independent schools has always been “an embarrassment” to Labour. The policy will be a “hammer blow”, ensuring that in future, they are only for “the super-rich”.

This “niche” issue has been given an amazing amount of coverage by the right-wing press, said Catherine Bennett in *The Observer*. There are endless “sob stories” about this “formerly obscure minority of a minority”: private school parents who now “face the brutal prospect of state education”. We hear about all the sacrifices they’ve had to make to pay fees, driving old bangers, denying themselves West End shows, and so on. But let’s not forget that Labour’s



Harrow School: able to take the hit?

policy is actually a moderate “compromise”: private schools are not being abolished or stripped of charitable status, they’re just having their VAT rules changed. Most services, after all, have to charge VAT, said Daniel Freeman on CapX. And I am unconvinced that this policy will lead to a “mass migration” from the sector. Private schools have provided clear evidence that parents aren’t sensitive to fee hikes. Since 1997, average fees have more than doubled in real terms. The effect? “Essentially none.” Besides, there is little reason to believe

that schools will pass on the full cost of VAT, at least in the short term. They’re more likely to cut the lavish facilities they provide.

Bigger, richer schools will be able to take the hit, said Anne McElvoy in *The i Paper*. Others won’t. For example, Downham Preparatory in Norfolk, which gives a third of its places to autistic children, says it will not survive the VAT hike. Admissions to private schools have already fallen by nearly 3% in the past year, said Mike Harris in *The Guardian*. Labour says the policy will raise £1.6bn to pay for more state school teachers. But every child who leaves a private school, so their parents can avoid £3,000 of VAT, will cost the schools budget £8,000. So Labour’s plan risks being “counterproductive”.

Wit & Wisdom

“If at first you don’t succeed, then skydiving definitely isn’t for you.”

Steven Wright, quoted in Reader’s Digest

“When Dr Johnson defined patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel, he ignored the enormous possibilities of the word ‘reform’.”

Senator Roscoe Conkling, quoted in The Times

“Age is of no importance unless you’re a cheese.”

Billie Burke, quoted in The Times of India

“A date is an experience you have with another person which makes you appreciate being alone.”

Quote from the TV show Curb Your Enthusiasm

“Art, like morality, consists in drawing the line somewhere.”

G.K. Chesterton, quoted in The Times

“Sorry isn’t always the hardest word.

It’s often the easiest.”

Stephen Cherry in The New Statesman

“We’re a broad church, not an Amazon warehouse.”

Robert Buckland on whether Nigel Farage should be welcomed into the Tory Party, quoted in The Times

“I don’t like nostalgia unless it’s mine.”

Lou Reed, quoted in Forbes

“Politics is the art and science of running the circus from the monkey cage.”

H.L. Mencken, quoted in The Knowledge

Statistics of the week

69% of undergraduates are still receiving some of their lectures online.

Higher Education Policy Institute/The Daily Telegraph

As of April, there were 391 million square metres of unsold residential property lying empty in China. That is equivalent to more than all the housing in Manchester and Birmingham combined.

The Guardian

The runaway cow: misadventure in Staines

Never mind the election, said Emma Guinness in *The Independent*. The story preoccupying many people this week was the tale of Beau Lucy, the runaway cow brutally apprehended by Surrey Police. The incident occurred last Friday after the ten-month-old animal was spotted roaming the streets of Staines-upon-Thames, having apparently escaped her enclosure by swimming across the river from Staines Moor. Police arrived at the scene and sought to capture her. When that failed, they resorted to ramming the calf with their 4x4 vehicle, knocking her an estimated 30ft down the road. As she struggled to her feet, they drove into her again, leaving her trapped under the car’s bumper. Footage of the incident went viral and provoked widespread outrage. James Cleverly, the Home Secretary, demanded an explanation from Surrey Police; the officer behind the wheel has been suspended pending an investigation.



Beau Lucy being apprehended

What were the police thinking, asked *The Times*. A ten-month-old calf is “a sizeable beast, to be sure” but it’s hardly a “man-eater” requiring lethal force. If the officers had calmly followed

the animal, doing nothing to scare it, they would surely have caught it before too long. Instead, they seem to have gone into “full killer-on-the-loose mode”. Beau Lucy’s owner is hoping that she has suffered no lasting damage (she is “limping, sulky and bruised”, he says), but the officers on the scene should have handled the incident with greater delicacy. “Panicky, shouty, American-style ‘shoot first ask questions later’ policing is not welcome here.”

Forgive me if I don’t get too upset about this story, said Simon Kelner in *The i Paper*. Yes, the footage was “horrible to watch”, but in the grand scheme of things, this highly unusual example of animal mistreatment ranks pretty low (one National Farmers Union official defended the police, saying they were “probably right” to hit the cow before it “sent a child flying”). The reality is that, through factory farming, we inflict far worse cruelty on countless chickens, pigs and cows every minute of every day – it just happens behind the scenes, where we can ignore it. The fuss over Beau Lucy’s misadventure is “a perfect exposition of our double standards when it comes to animals”.

Euros: England's "nervy" opening win

Since Gareth Southgate took over as manager, England haven't once dropped points in the opening game of a tournament, said David Hytner in *The Guardian*. And at Gelsenkirchen on Sunday, his team maintained that impressive record with a 1-0 victory over a determined Serbia. With Denmark having drawn against Slovenia, this result puts England in control of Group C: a win in their second game – which will take place against Denmark on Thursday – will guarantee they advance to the knock-out stages. Yet “the hordes of English in the Arena AufSchalke, and those back home”, are unlikely to have been reassured by England's performance, said Jonathan Northcroft in *The Times*. Although Southgate's team were excellent in the opening half-hour, during which Jude Bellingham put them in front with an emphatic header from a Bukayo Saka cross, the rest of the match was “nervy, exhausting, enervating”. England lost control of midfield, became increasingly defensive, and regularly gave the ball away. When Southgate reviews the tape of the match, not much of it will “make pretty viewing”.



Bellingham: a one-man show

But one thing, at least, did become clear, said Oliver Holt in the *Daily Mail*: the hype surrounding the 20-year-old Bellingham – voted the best player in Spanish football last season – is in no way unmerited. During the first half, “there were times when he

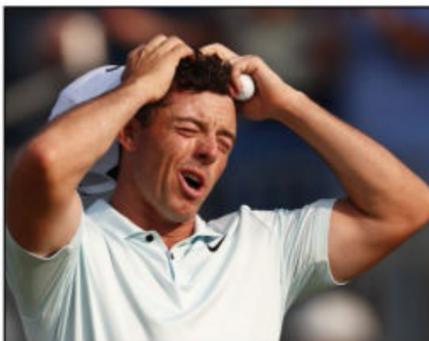
looked as if he were playing Serbia on his own”. He seemed to be “everywhere”: one moment stealing the ball off Dušan Vlahovic deep in England's half, the next turning Ivan Ilic inside out on the Serbian byline. He rode challenges and “ran through the opposition midfield”. So obvious was Bellingham's superiority to everyone else on the pitch that it created a sense that two games were “taking place simultaneously”, said Barney Ronay in *The Guardian*. In one, Bellingham “basically did everything”, including scoring England's winner; in the other, “everyone else got on with a slow-burn 0-0 over 90 minutes”.

There were a few other positives, said Jason Burt in *The Daily Telegraph*. Marc Guéhi was assured in defence, Declan Rice typically “industrious” in midfield, and Harry Kane “took one for the team”

by remaining “up top” in an advanced role, rather than risking unbalancing England's midfield by dropping to deeper positions. Still, the fall-off in intensity was alarming, said Oliver Brown in the same paper, not least because we've seen it all before: it was England's willingness to “sit back” on early leads that cost them against Croatia in 2018, and against Italy in 2021. A team that wins international tournaments “knows when to go for the kill” – and certainly knows how to impose itself for more than just 30 minutes of a game. On Sunday, England were not that team.

Golf: McIlroy unravels at the US Open

Rory McIlroy's quest for a fifth major (he won his fourth in 2014) has been one of golf's big stories in recent times, said James Corrigan in *The Daily Telegraph*. And on Sunday, the Northern Irishman seemed on the brink of ending his drought: with five holes to play at the US Open, he led Bryson DeChambeau by two shots. But then, in a remarkable passage of play, things cruelly unravelled for the 35-year-old. He struck three bogeys in the final four holes – twice missing the simplest of putts. That gave DeChambeau, who himself was struggling with nerves, the opportunity “to steal through”. On the final hole, the American secured the title with a brilliant chip from the bunker, followed by a straightforward putt for a par.



No stranger to “heartbreak”

McIlroy is no stranger to golfing “heartbreak”, said Tom Kershaw in *The Times*: his career has been studded with implosions and

near-misses. But this loss will sting more than any other, because victory was so completely in his own hands. To put his two missed putts in perspective, the first was a mere 2ft 6in, while the second was 3ft 9in, said Bob Harig in *Sports Illustrated*. McIlroy doesn't usually miss these shots. He'd previously had 496 putts of under three feet in 2024 – and had sunk every one. He “hadn't missed inside five feet all week”.

McIlroy “cut a composed but despondent figure” afterwards, said Bryan Armen Graham in *The Guardian*. He declined all interviews and left the Pinewood course in a car “almost immediately after his rival's final putt dropped” – not even staying to shake DeChambeau's hand. McIlroy has certainly “nursed scar tissue before”, said Daniel Matthews in the *Daily Mail*. But you have to wonder how he can recover from this – and whether that elusive fifth major will “ever arrive”.

A historic day for British tennis

Great days for British tennis don't come along that often, especially now that Andy Murray is a diminished force, said Tomaini Carayol in *The Guardian*. Last Sunday, however, was unquestionably great. It marked “the first time in 53 years that a British woman and man have won tour-level titles on the same day”. When that last occurred, in 1971, Roger Taylor and Ann Jones were the victorious duo; this time, it was Katie Boulter and Jack Draper, who claimed titles in Nottingham and Stuttgart respectively. Draper recovered from a set down to beat Italy's Matteo Berrettini, said Simon Briggs in *The Daily Telegraph*. It was the 22-year-old's first ATP title, and means he becomes British No. 1 for the first



Boulter: an impressive ascent

time, replacing Cameron Norrie. Since adding the former world No. 6 Wayne Ferreira to his team in May, Draper has dramatically changed his approach, becoming a “big-hitting aggressor” instead of a “defensive counter-puncher”. The change has taken a while to bed in – early results were unimpressive – but on the grass, it seems to be working.

Boulter's win was her second successive victory at Nottingham, said John Westerby in *The Times*: her victory there last year kickstarted her impressive ascent up the rankings (she is currently 31). She beat former world No. 1 Karolina Plíšková in three sets in Sunday's final, having overcome Emma Raducanu in an equally tough match in the semi-final.

Sporting headlines

Cricket England advanced to the second stage of the T20 World Cup with a 41-run victory over Namibia in a rain-reduced match. Their next match will be against West Indies on Thursday.

Cycling Britain's Adam Yates won the Tour de Suisse. The 31-year-old claimed victories in two of the race's eight stages, and came second in Sunday's closing time trial.

Football Romania won their first match at the Euros in 24 years, with a 3-0 victory over Ukraine. France's 1-0 victory over Austria was clouded by their star player, Kylian Mbappé, breaking his nose.

Pick of the week's correspondence

Paying for GP visits...

To The Times

Further to your article "Should the NHS charge for care?", the UK is hopelessly shackled to a system that does not deliver for its customers, but is instead focused on protecting the interests of the institution and its employees. In France, one pays €26 to see a GP and €53 to see a specialist. Of this, 70% is reimbursed by state insurance within a few days.

The system is not perfect – getting registered with a GP or a dentist can be a problem – but long waiting times for treatments are virtually unheard of. It is immeasurably superior to the NHS.

Ian MacDonald, France

...will hurt the poor...

To The Times

More than two million children – almost 25% of pupils – are on free school meals. They have a net household income of £7,400 or less. How are those families supposed to afford charges for a GP appointment, let alone private insurance?

There are plenty of companies on standby, waiting to make a profit out of privatised healthcare, just as they profit from child and adult social care now. We should be wary of allowing them to. You don't know what you have till it's gone.

Angela James, Swansea

...but help the doctors

To The Times

I offer this observation: as a GP partner running a practice, I provide a service that gives unlimited access to a team of GPs, advanced nurse practitioners, practice nurses, healthcare assistants, phlebotomists and patient advisers. For this service we receive about £155 per patient per year. You cannot insure your dog for that. The funding model has to change.

Dr Ross Mitchell, Jedburgh, Scottish Borders

In the line of duty?

To The Daily Telegraph

When I joined the Met in 1970, the recruits' bible, the Instruction Book, explained how to stop a runaway horse. Guidance on other large quadrupeds was sadly lacking.

Exchange of the week

Reading Labour's manifesto

To The Guardian

So many options for change lost, so few promised. Labour's "dullifesto" could have been written by ChatGPT: "write an anodyne centrist manifesto avoiding any kind of vision that might inspire emotions, positive or negative". Real Tories out, substitute Tories in. Ho-hum.

Anthony Cheke, Oxford

To The Guardian

Boring? Really? I understand and agree with much of what Jonathan Freedland says about Keir Starmer's steady-as-you-go approach ("Is Keir Starmer really a 'political robot'?"). But I urge everyone to please read the Labour Party manifesto. And then dare to tell us it is not bold.

Among other things, it includes: reform of the House of Lords; creativity restored to the school curriculum, with drama, music, art, dance and sports back where they belong to inspire children; an end to single headline-grade Ofsted ratings; safer streets provided by neighbourhood policing; a new race equality act; more decision-making powers to mayors across the country on planning, housebuilding, transport and more; a properly instituted and monitored apprenticeship scheme; and revision of the voter ID rule. Poetry enough for me.

Eva Tutchell, London

If the cow in Feltham had run into a child or an elderly person last Friday, it could have caused serious injury or worse ("Officer who rammed calf removed from duties").

Between 2018 and 2022, more than 30 people were killed by cows. The suspension of an officer for using his initiative in trying to prevent harm is disproportionate.

Roy Ramm, Great Dunmow, Essex

A joy for ever

To the Financial Times

Regarding Jemima Kelly's column "Why our brains crave beauty, art and nature", it's not surprising that the appreciation of all things beautiful is proven to be essential to our well-being. The real miracle, however, is that humans are constructed in such a way that we recognise beauty in the first place.

Think of the complex neurological signalling that translates the physical facts of music – that is the sound waves hitting the ear drum – into the depth of emotion that brings tears to our eyes.

A second miracle is the human capacity to find things amusing, almost from the very beginning. By six months of age, we already delight in the humorous. These then are the greatest gifts we are bestowed, apart from the treasures

of language and love – to be awed by the beautiful and to laugh at the hilarious.

Margaret McGirr, US

Private schools...

To The Times

For years now, private schools have increased their fees by far more than the rate of inflation without suffering a decline in demand for private education. As a result, they have enjoyed facilities that state schools can only dream of while state schools have had to adapt to years of underfunding. It cannot be beyond the wit of private schools to cope with this change to VAT.

Jim Stather, Farnham, Surrey

...and public promises

To The Times

Apropos Jim Stather's belief that it is not beyond the wit of private schools to cope with the change to their liability for VAT, there is a principle at stake: Labour promised that there would be no raising of VAT over the next parliament.

Imposing VAT on school fees will inevitably result in some children moving to state schools. What is the plan to ensure the continuation and matching of studies towards GCSEs or A levels? No plan would be necessary were the Labour Party to eschew the notoriety of becoming the

sole country in Europe to tax secondary education.

Dr Richard Connaughton, Nettlecombe, Dorset

Some wisdom on teeth

To The Daily Telegraph

The Labour plan for health is reported to include a commitment to bring in supervised toothbrushing for three- to five-year-olds.

Dentists have spent hours and hours over many decades trying to teach that toothbrushing per se does not prevent the primary disease of decay in children.

What causes tooth decay? Sweets, biscuits, juices, to name a few. Toothbrushing does not prevent decay. It does help cement a lifetime regime – but parents can do this, and it doesn't really need to be efficient in the three-to-five age group. Brushing is much more important in adults, as it helps prevent gum disease.

Oral hygiene in adults is a far more laudable aim. Spending valuable resources on toothbrushing for three- to five-year-olds is a total waste.

David Burton BDS, Dorking, Surrey

Remembered with pride

To The Spectator

Some years ago I visited the Normandy graves and was touched by the splendid memorials. The inscription which affected me the most and still does, read as follows: "To the world he was one of many, to us he was the world."

To me this sums up the sadness of it all.

George Burne, Woldingham, Surrey



"Is it too early to start blaming Keir Starmer for everything?"

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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

Operation Biting

by Max Hastings

*William Collins 384pp £25*The Week Bookshop **£19.99**

“War histories are usually studies in failure,” said Gerard DeGroot in *The Times*: they’re packed with “needless deaths” and “catastrophic mistakes”. So it’s a welcome change to read Max Hastings’s rollicking new book, which tells the story of a successful British parachute assault in 1942 on a German radar installation. “Operation Biting” was the brainchild of a “brilliant physicist” named R.V. Jones, who’d become intrigued, while studying German intercepts, by references to something called Freya. “In Nordic mythology, the goddess Freya had a fling with Heimdall, who had the power to see, in darkness or light, objects far distant. To Jones, that suggested radar.” And the “boffin with a classical education” was right. Using radar installations on the Normandy coast, the Germans were gaining crucial advance warnings about British bombing raids. Jones conceived a plan to “attack and steal some of the equipment”, thus giving the British the chance to study the German technology.

Operation Biting took place in the early hours of 28 February, when “120 men of 2 Para were dropped by the RAF” close to



2 Para training for the Bruneval raid

a radar site near Bruneval, said Patrick Scrivenor in *Literary Review*. The men removed the radar disc and “associated technology” before being evacuated by landing craft from a beach. Not everything went smoothly: some paratroopers were “dropped two miles short of the target”, and the evacuation was “bedevilled” by unexpected German resistance, which led to two deaths. Still, the raid met its objectives, and ultimately helped Britain counter German radar defences.

Hastings characterises his story as one that “lifts the spirit”, said Laurence Rees in *The Daily Telegraph*. But beneath the “back-slapping”, it

had a “more troubling aspect”. Operation Biting was planned by Louis Mountbatten, head of Combined Operations, and Frederick “Boy” Browning, commander of the Airborne Division. This pair were responsible for two of the biggest disasters of the War – respectively the raid on Dieppe later the same year, and the “Bridge Too Far” calamity at Arnhem. Operation Biting could easily have followed that pattern. In planning, it was “dangerously flawed”, and its success ultimately depended on a “huge element of luck” – not least the fact that the German commander happened to be away that night in Paris. *Operation Biting* is “engaging and entertaining”. In other hands, it could have been a quite different book – “a fable of how posh people sitting safe at home recklessly sent mostly working-class soldiers into danger”.

Battle for the Bird

by Kurt Wagner

*Hodder & Stoughton 368pp £25*The Week Bookshop **£19.99**

The social media platform Twitter (now known as X) has been inextricably linked in the public mind to the unpredictable figure of Elon Musk, ever since he paid \$44bn for it in 2022, said Hugo Rifkind in *The Times*. But as Kurt Wagner reminds us in this “definitive history”, the “madness didn’t start with him”. Before Musk took over, Twitter was run by someone equally “weird”. Jack Dorsey (right) co-founded the platform in 2006, aged 29, and became its first chief executive, despite nursing the “vague idea” that it should perhaps be more like email: a protocol instead of a company. Within a year, the board “kicked him upstairs” to the chairman role, but he returned as CEO in 2015, by which point Twitter was a “global internet fixture, credited even with bringing about the Arab Spring”. Yet behind the scenes, it remained chaotic, and Dorsey’s strangeness didn’t help. By now, he had a “really long beard”, meditated for two hours a day, and would disappear on silent retreats. “He also got seriously into bitcoin, which is never a good sign.”

Dorsey also couldn’t make decisions, said Tom Knowles in *The Daily Telegraph*. That became an increasing problem during Donald Trump’s presidency, when the company tied itself in knots over the issue of free speech. Believing that Twitter was “clamping down” too heavily, Musk expressed an interest in buying the company – something that Dorsey, his friend, encouraged. Once he took over, Musk utterly changed Twitter: he fired more than 6,000 staff, relaxed moderation policies and reinstated banned accounts. Use of the N-word increased by 1,300%, while ad revenues fell by 50%. Wagner provides a “terrific overview” of how “one of the most powerful social media platforms in the world” was brought to its knees by the “actions of two men”.



Novel of the week

Godwin

by Joseph O’Neill

*4th Estate 304pp £16.99*The Week Bookshop **£13.99**

The premise of Joseph O’Neill’s latest novel could hardly be more “unlikely”, said Anthony Cummins in *The Observer*. Mark Wolfe is a failed scientist who now writes grant applications for big pharma. When he falls out with his colleagues at the writers’ co-op he belongs to in Pittsburgh, he decides to take up a proposal put forward by his half-brother – a former footballer-turned-aspiring agent – to travel to West Africa to snap up a gifted, but elusive, young footballer. O’Neill – best known for his 2008 novel *Netherland* – somehow “wrings edge-of-your-seat drama” from this story, with its echoes of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. *Godwin* is an “exceptional” novel, with an “enthraling fireside quality”.

Wolfe is a typical O’Neill creation, said Robert Collins in *The Times*: a “floundering” middle-aged man. But he shares the narration with one of his co-op colleagues – an African-American woman named Lakesha – and her account of her own career crisis gives this “deceptively light comic novel a subtly profound undertow”. Somewhat against the odds, *Godwin* is “great”.

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Opera: The Merry Widow

Glyndebourne, Lewes, East Sussex (01273-812321). Until 28 July Run time: 4hrs 35mins (incl. intervals) ★★★★★

In recent years Britain's leading opera companies have sought to "broaden their audiences and expand their repertoire", said Nicholas Kenyon in *The Daily Telegraph*. We've had *Sweeney Todd* at the Royal Opera and Gilbert and Sullivan at English National Opera; Opera North was an early adopter with its RSC-linked *Show Boat* in 1990, and currently has *My Fair Lady* running at Leeds Playhouse. Now Glyndebourne has jumped on the bandwagon, with a staging of Franz Lehár's "pseudo-opera" *The Merry Widow* (1905) directed by Cal

McCrystal, the specialist in physical comedy whose stagings of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *Iolanthe* were "runaway successes" at ENO.

"Everything has been thrown at this snazzy, frothy tunefest," said Jessica Duchon in *The i Paper*; and though the production is not perfect, it has "all the makings of a classic". The new English-language adaptation is "occasionally wordy, but great fun", and the design, which gives belle-époque operetta the Hollywood musical treatment, is just glorious. "Oh, the gowns! The hats!" The music is light, yes – but also magical. Lehár's score, brilliantly played by the London Philharmonic under conductor John Wilson, "floats up silky, seductive and sophisticated, the textures transparent and the tempi spot-on, crowned by the ear-worm



"Everything has been thrown at the snazzy, frothy tunefest"

waltz". The whole thing is staged with "great wit and style", said Barry Millington in the *Evening Standard* – and there are "genuinely funny moments throughout".

There is lots to enjoy including some fine performances, said Tim Ashley in *The Guardian*. Danielle de Niese is "compelling" as Hanna Glawari, the widow; Germán Olvera is magnificently charismatic as her long-lost love. But though the evening is funny, the double entendres and sight gags come "at the expense of emotional power".

Such is the dedication to "hitting every funny bone" that this staging seems less Lehár's operetta than McCrystal's "high-octane comedy show", said Richard Fairman in the *FT*. Still, the "audience loved it, which is possibly recommendation enough".

The week's other opening

The Merry Wives of Windsor Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon (01789-331111). Until 7 September Blanche McIntyre's "Midas-touched" production – set in modern-day Windsor and sending up Home Counties' snobberies – is a real summer treat. A crack cast performs a "comedy so polished it gleams" (*Guardian*).

Podcasts... from museum mysteries to Mosley's health tips

Hosted by Katie Razzall, and recently broadcast on Radio 4, **Thief at the British Museum** describes how hundreds of the museum's artefacts "went missing and were sold (on eBay!), but nobody at the institution noticed", said Miranda Sawyer in *The Observer*. Although it's true crime, the tone of the podcast is more that of an Agatha Christie-style whodunnit, with an "eccentric foreign detective" – in this case the Dutch antiquities dealer Dr Ittai Gradel, who first alerted the museum authorities to the suspected inside job. It's a compelling and astonishing tale, with a "suspenseful orchestral soundtrack" – and makes for a "delightful" listen.



Michael Mosley: "his positive impact will live on"

"Could this be the first podcast election?" Five years ago, when Boris Johnson battled Jeremy Corbyn, **The Rest Is Politics** didn't even exist, said James Marriott in *The Times*. This time, a "sizeable portion of the electorate" will have spent weeks before the poll imbibing politics "with their headphones glued to their ears". Alastair Campbell and Rory Stewart's creation remains the "king" of political podcasts, beloved by "centrist dads" all over. But there are plenty of pretenders to the throne. **Politics at Jack and Sam's**, with Politico's Jack Blanchard and Sam Coates of Sky News, is a daily 15-minute podcast focusing on electoral tactics, and a "treat for political nerds". **Political Currency**, with

Ed Balls and George Osborne, offers punditry and analysis. **Electoral Dysfunction**, featuring Beth Rigby, Ruth Davidson and Jess Phillips (though guests have replaced her during the campaign) is "down-to-earth" and well-informed. And *The Times's* **How to Win an Election** is the go-to for a humorous approach. It has Matt Chorley marshalling Daniel Finkelstein, Peter Mandelson and Polly Mackenzie. If none of these get your vote, try: **The News Agents** (for daily analysis), **Trendy** (a polling-focused pod with John Curtice and Rachel Wolf), or newcomer **Not Another One** (with pundits from across the political spectrum).

Just One Thing, the late Michael Mosley's hugely popular Radio 4 show and podcast about simple changes to improve your life and health, has long been a "favourite" for me and for people I know, said Patricia Nicol in *The Sunday Times*. Friends have "swapped experiences of standing on one leg while cleaning their teeth to improve balance"; the episodes on swimming are shared on my lido WhatsApp group. The show is a "model of clarity and brevity" – and on BBC Sounds there are more than a hundred episodes for you to try if you've never had the pleasure. "Mosley will be greatly missed as a motivational broadcaster, but his positive impact will live on."

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



Inside Out 2

1hr 36mins (U)

Playful sequel to Pixar's 2015 hit

★★★★

It's been nine years since Pixar released its hit animation *Inside Out*, but this sequel has been worth the wait. Even "funnier, cleverer and more awesomely inventive" than the original, it marks a "triumphant return to form for the studio behind *Toy Story* and *Up*", said Larushka Ivan-Zadeh in the Daily Mail. Like the original, the film mostly takes place inside the mind of Riley (Kensington Tallman), a young girl living in San Francisco "whose inner HQ is controlled by personified emotions, led by the super-perky Joy (Amy Poehler)". But two years have passed, and Riley is now turning 13, at which point she morphs into a "pimply" and obstreperous adolescent, and a gang of new emotions turn up to guide her actions. They include Envy, Embarrassment, Anxiety and even Ennui, voiced by the French actress Adèle Exarchopoulos. Parts of the film will "whizz over pre-pubescent heads", but in an era of "churned-out, dumbed-down content, the level of sophistication" is admirable; and the film might even offer a dollop of comfort to "today's anxiety-riddled youngsters".

It doesn't pull it all off, said Jonathan Dean in *The Sunday Times*: there are too many characters, and there isn't enough in the film "to surprise us". But the "writing is smart, tender and knowing", and serious subjects such as bullying are handled with an appealingly light touch. Directed by Kelsey Mann, *Inside Out 2* "glimmers with diamond-hard truths about the complex business" of being a teenager, said Nicholas Barber on BBC Culture. It also manages to be "a fast-paced and playful comedy adventure". Even so, as Riley struggles with an identity crisis, the film can get a bit stressful. If there is a sequel, "it would be nice if Contentment" joined the cast.



Freud's Last Session

1hr 48mins (12A)

"Dustily decorous" film starring Anthony Hopkins

★★

Based on a play by Mark St. Germain, *Freud's Last Session* wonders what would have happened if "two of the greatest minds of the 20th century" – Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis – had met to thrash out the existence of God, said Deborah Ross in *The Spectator*. "Thrash it out they do but, alas, they cannot thrash any life into this film. If you are planning to see it at the cinema, a few espressos beforehand may not go amiss." The film is set over the course of 3 September 1939, the day that Chamberlain declared war in response to Hitler's invasion of Poland. Freud (Anthony Hopkins), a staunch atheist, is dying of cancer and has invited Lewis (Matthew Goode), a man of deep Christian faith, to his Hampstead home. Unfortunately, "their discussions, although elegantly worded, don't ever amount to much more than a classroom debate – if there is a God, why is there pain? (etc., etc.) – and nothing ever really goes anywhere". To make matters worse Freud, to "counter the usual inertness of a two-hander", is "kept on the move, going from this room to that". I wanted to "shout at the screen: 'For pity's sake, let the poor old fella have a sit! Can't you see he's on his last legs?'"

This "dustily decorous" film didn't charm me, said Robbie Collin in *The Daily Telegraph*. "Every scene feels so quietly pleased with the tweedy prestige of its premise that the duo's rhetorical moves never actually enlighten or surprise"; and many scenes are "blanketed in near-parodic levels of gloom". With apologies to Freud, "sometimes a dud is just a dud". Hopkins performs with "brio", said Tom Shone in *The Sunday Times*. But alas, the film amounts to a pretty lifeless "academic parlour game that turns into a joint therapy session, raking over the tragedies in both men's past".



Treasure

1hr 52mins (12A)

Comedy-drama with Stephen Fry and Lena Dunham

★★

"The blessing and curse of casting hangs over *Treasure*," a comedy-drama that explores the legacy of the Holocaust, said Danny Leigh in the FT. "Much of why the film has been made at the scale it has comes down to the celebrity of stars Stephen Fry and Lena Dunham. Each gives a committed performance. Yet not a nanosecond passes where you aren't acutely aware of watching two famous names on screen, rather than their characters." Dunham plays Ruth, an American journalist who travels to Poland in 1991 with her father Edek (Fry) to explore his past. Edek, we learn, was sent to Auschwitz as a young man with the rest of his family, and was the only one to survive. "The mood should be sober", but "jauntiness pervades"; and what could be a fascinating film about the "right way to remember the past" drifts into a "sudsy portrait of the eternal strains between parents and their adult children. You don't need the memory of the Holocaust for that."

Based on an autobiographical novel by the Australian writer Lily Brett, *Treasure* has a "potentially powerful" premise, said Matthew Bond in *The Mail on Sunday*, but it sometimes feels as if "the tonally inconsistent screenplay" was being written "as they went along". It's a pity, too, that Fry is lumbered with an implausibly broad Polish accent. The film is "a curious confection", said Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*. Fry delivers a "stagey, if heartfelt" performance, and Dunham "looks uneasy, especially in the strange scenes in which she appears in some kind of self-harming way to be self-tattooing her limbs with camp-like numbers". None of it ever "quite comes together".



Sasquatch Sunset

1hr 28mins (15)

Bizarre Bigfoot fantasy

★★★★

"The Sasquatch, aka Bigfoot, is a mythical creature supposedly sighted in remote regions of North America," said Jonathan Romney in the FT. "No less elusive are Texas-based brothers David and Nathan Zellner who, since the late 1990s, have worked on the fringes of US indie cinema."

Sasquatch Sunset "deserves to be their breakthrough; it is genuinely like nothing else." Set over one year, the film has four characters: three adult Sasquatches (played by a totally unrecognisable Jesse Eisenberg, Riley Keough and Nathan Zellner) and a juvenile (Christophe Zajac-Denek). There are no words in the film, only "gestures, grunts" and "chirrup", but their eyes turn out to be "remarkably expressive as they register lust, bafflement, sorrow, nausea". And "bodily functions feature prominently: in one priceless scene, the family encounter something new and troubling, and copiously void their orifices in a spontaneous dirty protest". Moments of such broad humour aside, "the film has a poignant, lyrical spirit", and in the end reaches "bizarrely transcendental" heights.

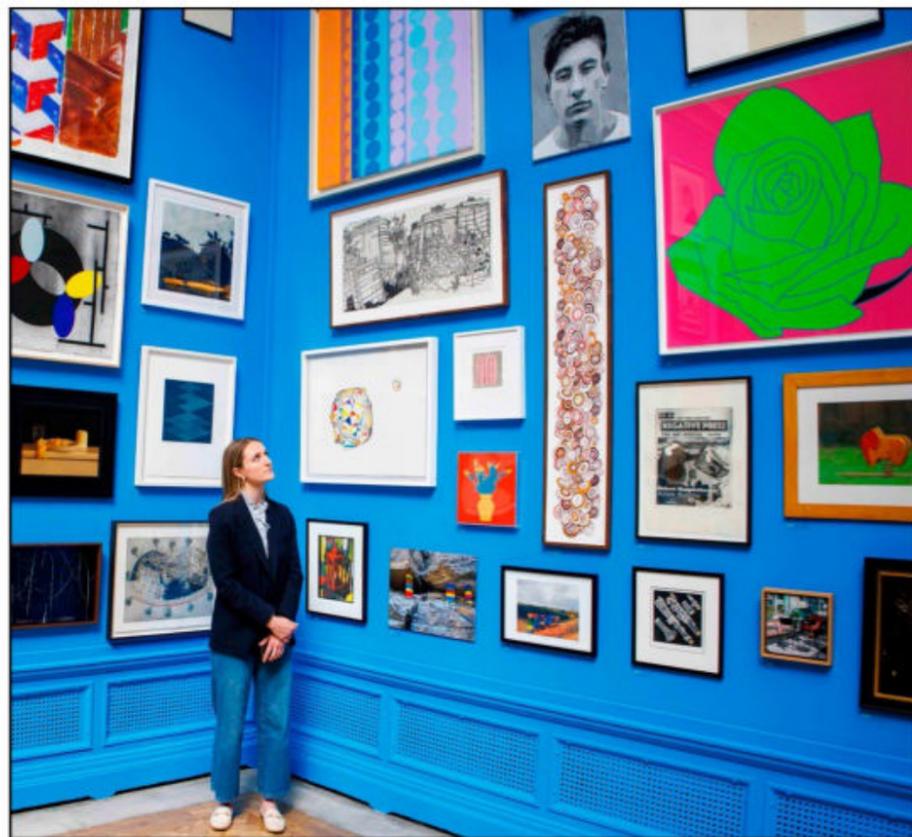
Sasquatch Sunset is "camp, crude and profoundly silly", said Kevin Maher in *The Times*: "there's lots of primitive humping", vomiting and farting. But it's also "audacious, beguiling and disturbing", and one of the "most beautifully shot" films of the year so far. The gags seem "refreshing at first", said Kyle Smith in *The Wall Street Journal*, but "they get stale quickly. Moreover, since there is no plot and no dialogue, the quirky central idea never takes on any narrative momentum. What might have been a brilliant short subject – at, say, 15 minutes – gets stretched to its limits, and then some."

Exhibition of the week **Summer Exhibition**

Royal Academy, London W1 (020-7300 8090, royalacademy.org.uk). Until 18 August

The Royal Academy's annual Summer Exhibition is an event of "maddening incoherence", but it usually also has its charms, said Alastair Sooke in *The Daily Telegraph*. This latest iteration, its 256th, has been overseen by the sculptor Ann Christopher, and sticks closely to the familiar template: as ever, submissions from the public are mixed in cheek-by-jowl with works by members of the Academy, each of whom has the right to exhibit up to six pieces; its 1,710 works include paintings, sculptures, photographs – all for sale – and a room devoted to architecture. Yet where some recent Summer Exhibitions have at least suggested a degree of quality control on the part of their curators, I'm sad to report that this one is "a heap of tedious, shambling parochialism and humdrum bilge". While there are some spirited submissions from amateur artists, even normally dependable professional artists seem to be operating on autopilot: Grayson Perry, for instance, seems to "cringe at being involved", while the usually excellent Hurvin Anderson offers just two "tiny, half-baked monochrome studies".

It is "a miserable garden party of vapid good taste", said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*. There are enough "wan landscapes" here "to fill an actual field", most with the same "puffy clouds" and "neat gardens". Depictions of "pampered dogs and cats" are everywhere. Yet amid the volumes of "dross", a "few decent



"A miserable garden party of vapid good taste"

works crop up as if by accident". Georg Baselitz, Rose Wylie, Sean Scully and Frank Bowling all provide "typically strong entries". Most striking is Anselm Kiefer's "colossal woodcut of sunflowers with black centres", a series of "nightmare blooms" that "penetrate your imagination like ghosts on a battlefield sprouting from dead soldiers' bones". The real highlight is the architecture gallery, said Oliver Wainwright in the same paper. The usual collection of "little model buildings" and drawings has been transformed by the Turner Prize-winning Assemble collective. They have put together "a wonderfully diverse" room celebrating the specialists that "realise architects' visions" – taking in everything from beautiful mosaic panels to an "immaculate scale model of a wooden staircase".

There are numerous "pleasures" to be had, said Laura Freeman in *The Times*. The 86-year-old academician Norman Ackroyd is "on fighting form" with some spray-flecked etchings of the Atlantic, while David Moore and Kate Davis's seascape of the Bass Rock, woven from the musical scores of Scottish folk songs, is both "beautiful and ingenious". But overall, there is "too little to tickle the fancy": some rooms are "so densely hung and cluttered" as to resemble QR codes. Even Tracey Emin disappoints with some "back-of-the-drawer works". At its best, the Summer Exhibition is a "fun and festive" event. This one, however, is "a dirge".

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Celebrating 150 Years of Impressionism

at the Stern Pissarro Gallery

A century-and-a-half ago, the group of artists who would soon become known as "the impressionists" opened their first independent exhibition in Paris. It was a scrappy affair, but the genuinely disruptive pieces on show – by Degas, Monet and Cézanne, to name a few – would change the way we looked at art forever. This exhibition presents a good excuse to reacquaint ourselves with some of the movement's leading lights, containing some first-rate pictures and sculptures. Camille Pissarro is particularly well-represented, notably with a teeming street scene depicting a Paris crossroads after a downpour. Gustave Caillebotte gives him a run for his money with a spooky view of seaside villas, while a clutch



Armand Guillaumin's *La Seine à Paris*

of Mediterranean *plein air* scenes by Renoir hum with the fragrance of rosemary and lavender. There's even a bizarre little c. 1887 sculpture by the fledgling stockbroker-turned-artist Paul Gauguin, a work that justifies a visit on its own. Prices, alas, range from £10,000 to £10,000,000.

66 St James's Street, London SW1 (020-7629 6662). Until 29 June

Taking on the machines

Last year, the German artist Boris Eldagsen made headlines by winning a Sony World Photography award with an image that he later revealed was generated by AI. It raised



fears about AI "muscling in on human photography", says Alex Hern in *The Guardian*. Now another artist, Miles Astray, has submitted a conventional photograph to the AI category of a prestigious competition – and he also won a prize. *Flamingone* (pictured), a striking image of "an orb of pink feathers standing on top of two knobbly legs", won third place in the "AI generated" category of the 1839 Awards. "It occurred to me that I could twist this story inside down," said Astray. "Of course, I deliberately chose a picture that is so surreal, to the point of unbelievable, that it could easily be attributed to AI being at play." After the lack of AI involvement became clear, Astray was disqualified and stripped of his award – which carries a cash prize.



Best books... Adrian Edmondson

The actor, comedian and author chooses his five favourite novels. His latest book, *Berserker!: An Autobiography* (Pan £10.99), is out now in paperback

The Exhibitionist by Charlotte Mendelson, 2022 (Pan £9.99). In a chaotic, crumbling house in north London, an ageing, self-obsessed tyrant wants everyone and everything to shout that he is a better artist than his wife. But he isn't, and he "tends his grudge like a sacred lamp". A vicious and darkly funny novel, with a deeply satisfying comeuppance.

Leviathan by Paul Auster, 1992 (Faber £9.99). I hadn't heard of Auster until I saw his recent obituary and was recommended this as a starting point. It's set in 1980s America but reads like film noir. Narrated by his friend, it tells the story of an author

who loses faith in his writing and turns to direct, violent action as an art form. Bizarre, but strangely plausible. I'm already onto the next one.

Mayflies by Andrew O'Hagan, 2020 (Faber £9.99). A loving examination of a male friendship. It starts with a group of young Glaswegian teens having a wild weekend at a 1980s post-punk festival in Manchester, and ends with a visit to Dignitas a few decades later. Heartbreaking yet joyfully triumphant.

The Cazalet Chronicles by Elizabeth Jane Howard, 1988-2013 (Pan £9.99-£10.99 each). I read all five back to back and was bereft when there were no

more. It's a family saga that runs through the Second World War and into the 1950s. Everything is in decay – the old order, the business, the house, marriages, the world in general. There's a cast of whining, priggish, selfish wastrels, bullies and sops – and it's extraordinary how she makes them all so lovable.

Weirdo by Sara Pascoe, 2023 (Faber £9.99). Most comedians write thinly disguised drama scripts with themselves as the main character, but this is the real deal. We're trapped inside Sophie's over-analysing head, and she's trapped in a more or less permanent state of paranoia. Feverish and savagely funny.

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The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

Hot on the heels of last Christmas's *Oliver!*, Leeds Playhouse has produced "another roof-raising success" with its new staging of **My Fair Lady** (Daily Telegraph). Until 29 June, Leeds Playhouse (leedsplayhouse.org.uk).

Drop in to Cadogan Hall for one of its **Out to Lunch** lunchtime jazz concerts. The performers on the line-up include acoustic band Howl Quartet and singer-songwriter Lana Shelley. Until 30 July, Cadogan Hall, London SW1 (cadoganhall.com).

Book now

The verdant grounds of Charleston provide the setting for the four-day **Festival of the Garden**, which includes talks by gardeners and environmentalists, plant stalls and workshops. 18-21 July, Charleston, Firle, East Sussex (charleston.org.uk).

Book now for a late-summer outing to the **Barbican's Outdoor Cinema 2024**. There's an electric mix of films on show, ranging from Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*



My Fair Lady: a "roof-raising success"

to Prince's concert classic *Sign o' the Times*. 21 August-1 September, Barbican, London EC2 (barbican.org.uk).

Jodie Whittaker – the first woman to play Doctor Who – returns to the stage for the first time in over a decade to star in **The Duchess**, Zinnie Harris's contemporary adaptation of John Webster's revenge tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi*. 5 October-20 December, Trafalgar Theatre, London SW1 (theduchessplay.com).

Television

Programmes

Suranne Jones: Investigating Witch Trials

Two-part documentary in which the actress investigates how witch trials swept through Europe in the 1600s. Sun 23 Jun, C4 21:00 (60mins).

Undercover A&E: NHS in Crisis Secretly filmed over two months, this *Dispatches* special report exposes the severity of the crisis engulfing A&E services. Mon 24 Jun, C4 21:00 (60mins).

Douglas Is Cancelled

New comedy-drama starring Hugh Bonneville as a television news anchor whose career goes into free fall after he's filmed telling a sexist joke at a wedding. Thur 27 Jun, ITV1 21:00 (60mins).

Andy Murray: Will to Win

In-depth documentary using archive footage and interviews to trace the tennis player's journey from childhood in Dunblane to world No. 1. Fri 28 Jun, BBC1 21:00 (60mins).

The Terracotta Army with Dan Snow

The historian travels to China to explore the ongoing excavation of the army of life-size imperial soldiers that were buried for more than 2,000 years. Fri 28 Jun, C5 21:00 (90mins).

Films

The Damned United (2009) Michael Sheen stars as the football manager Brian Clough during his tempestuous 44-day stewardship of Leeds United in 1974. Mon 24 Jun, BBC2 23:15 (90mins).

Licorice Pizza (2021)

Director Paul Thomas Anderson's love letter to 1970s LA is a comedy-drama about a teenage boy who falls for an older woman. Tue 25 Jun, BBC2 23:05 (125mins).

New to streaming TV

The Bear The acclaimed drama set in a Chicago restaurant returns for a third season. From 27 June, on Disney+.

Presumed Innocent Jake Gyllenhaal gets his first leading TV role as a lawyer accused of murder in this eight-part remake of the 1990 film starring Harrison Ford. On Apple TV+.

The Archers: what happened last week

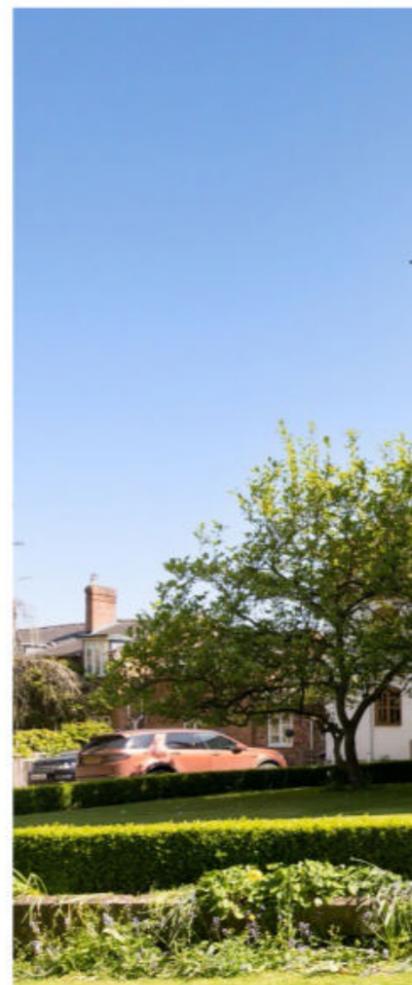
As Harrison grapples with his grief, Alan suggests a church service for the loss of an unborn baby, but stresses Fallon must be consulted. Bartleby impresses a woman at the Dorsetshire County Show. Oliver makes up with Lilian, but his horse Duke is still struggling with strangles. Lily and Josh try to cheer up Paul, who's downcast after his boyfriend Etienne asks to open up their relationship. At George's invitation, Meg, Bartleby's admirer, comes to visit; after questions from Emma, she reveals she wants to buy him. Fallon confronts Harrison after Alan lets slip his plan for the service; he tries to explain but she's furious; Fallon tells Kirsty she wants to go out and celebrate her birthday early. Stella handles a cyberattack at Home Farm. The Grundys deliberate over selling Bartleby and put it to a vote – the decision to sell wins by one vote. Alan and Harrison meet for private prayers; Harrison admits he still can't talk to Fallon but Alan wants him to try. On her night out with Kirsty, Fallon gets drunk and plans to go out dancing with Paul, Lily and Josh.

Houses in conservation areas



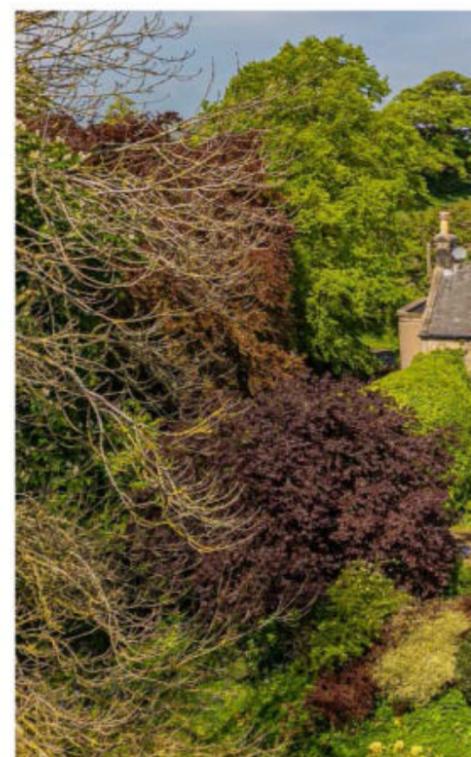
▲ **West Sussex:** Redstack, Aldwick Bay Estate, Bognor Regis. Fine mock-Tudor house on the beachfront. 6 beds, 2 baths, shower, kitchen/breakfast room, 2 receps, garden, outbuildings, garage. £3.5m; Hamptons (01243-884307).

▼ **Yorkshire:** Micklegate, York. A 17th century townhouse set within the city walls. Main suite, 4 further beds, family bath, kitchen, 3 receps, 1-bed annexe, courtyard, garage. £995,000; Hudson Moody (01904-650650).



► **Northumberland:** Horsley House, Horsley. This charming 19th century country house is set in mature gardens. 6 beds, family bath, shower, kitchen, 4 receps, garden, tennis court; 1-bed annexe. OIEO £1.5m; Finest Properties (01434-622234).

▼ **Norfolk:** Catton Place, Norwich. An impressive Georgian house with a wealth of fine period features, next to Catton Park. The 70-acre park, designed by Humphry Repton, offers delightful walks. 5 beds, 3 baths, kitchen, 2 receps, garden, parking. £1.35m; Inigo (020-3687 3071).



◀ **East Sussex:** Church Square, Rye. A 16th century house overlooking the parish church at the front and the River Rother towards the sea at the back. 3 beds, family bath, kitchen/dining room, 1 further recep, garden. £995,000; Phillips & Stubbs (01797-227338).





▲ **Suffolk:** Kyson Cottage, Broomheath, Woodbridge. Surrounded by beautiful mature gardens, the property has views over the River Deben. Main suite, 2 further beds, family bath, kitchen/dining room, recep, workshop, garden, terraces, parking. £1.5m; Savills (01473-234800).

◀ **Warwickshire:** Cleavers, Welford-on-Avon. A Queen Anne-style house built c.1769, boasting elegant formal gardens and grounds of approximately one acre. 6 beds, 2 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, 3 receps, study, garden, outbuilding. £1.75m; Hamptons (01789-868312).



▲ **Wiltshire:** Coppice Hill, Bradford-on-Avon. An upgraded and adapted Grade II Georgian former Wesleyan Methodist Sunday school. Main suite, 4 further beds, family bath, 2 showers, kitchen/dining room, 3 receps, garden, parking. £1.35m; Hamptons (01225-685280).



▲ **Wiltshire:** Donhead Mill, Donhead St Andrew. This picturesque 17th century mill house has a garden on the banks of the River Nadder and its own mill pool. 6 beds, 3 baths, 3 receps, kitchen/breakfast room, library, barn, garden, garage. £1.85m; Rural View (01747-442500).

The tastiest squeeze
that protects the bees



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

Oma 2-4 Bedale Street, London SE1 (020-8129 6760)

“David Carter is one of those rare restaurateurs who cannot seem to put a foot wrong,” says Tom Parker Bowles in *The Mail on Sunday*. His first restaurant, Smokestack, a barbecue place in east London, “has earned the respect of even the most grizzled of American pitmasters”. He followed it up with the thrilling, Italian-inspired Manteca. Now, for his latest venture, in Borough Market, he has switched to a menu inspired by what he describes as the “serenity and simplicity of the Greek isles”. But don’t expect anything resembling taverna fare: Oma’s menu melds Greek with Mexican, Israeli and even Chinese influences – and the result is “nothing short of inspired”. A stream of marvels flows from the kitchen: melted feta and spinach gratin, a “brilliant riff on the classic spanakopita pie”; “charred, buttery *laffa* flatbread for dunking”; a tartare of “pert and pure” chalk-stream trout, served with a “joyously sharp” citrus and jalapeño dressing. Service is the equal of the cooking, and there’s an “epic” wine list. Carter has done it again: “I don’t think you’ll find food like this anywhere else on Earth.” *About £50 a head.*



Oma: “serenity and simplicity”

in London’s Maida Vale, is an exception: run by François Guerin and Jean-François Lesage, it may be “my dream restaurant”. With its mustard-yellow, black-dotted walls and ceiling “wallpapered in boudoir florals”, the interior feels “ever so slightly unhinged”. But the place is an “utter joy.” It is emphatically a restaurant “for locals” – on both of my visits, it was thronged with “couples dating, friends gossiping, families sharing” – and the cooking supports this atmosphere beautifully, being of a kind that “eases life along”. There’s a “stunning ‘tarte Tatin’” of Roscoff onions with blue-cheese mascarpone, and an “astonishingly good” dish of cuttlefish in a tomato and olive sauce, with a “little

smoke” from some Padrón peppers. You hardly need me to explain that “chicken bathed in the nuttiest of morel sauces is a beautiful thing” – and it’s all the better for being accompanied by what are perhaps the best French fries in London. Service is attentive and warm – the staff “actually mean it when they ask how things are”. Given that rents and rates favour corporate owners, I’d been worried that London was “losing these sorts of places”. How brilliant that they can still exist. *Meal for two plus wine and service, about £170.*

Greyhound Inn The Street, Pettistree, Suffolk (01473-932168)

The food at this country pub is “very local”, and its menu is extremely short, says William Sitwell in *The Daily Telegraph*. But visiting it is “an education” in what can be achieved when “lovingly” selected ingredients are “brought to their full potential by a kitchen rich in talent and confidence”. While the starters were impressive (Suffolk saucisson served with pickled prunes; lamb sweetbreads on toast), the real “triumph” was my main course: a roast rack of wild roe doe surrounded by offal faggots with a “parmentier of braised haunch” on the side. I have never eaten a more “beautiful dish of venison”: it possessed everything needed to “convince a waverer” as to the “worth and enjoyment of eating deer”. Offering gutsy, flavourful food, Greyhound Inn is a must-visit if you’re in the area. *Meal for two excluding drinks and service, about £113.*

Paulette 18 Formosa Street, London W9 (020-7286 2715)

I don’t usually give five-star reviews, says David Ellis in the *Evening Standard*. After all, “nothing is perfect”. But Paulette, a small French bistro of “endless charm”

Freekeh with squash, beetroot and pomegranate

This layering of vegetables, torn pitta, pomegranate seeds and yoghurt is inspired by the Middle Eastern dish *fatteh*, says Mark Diacono. You can use shop-bought crispy onions, but to make your own, thinly slice a couple of onions, dredge them in a little cornflour (corn starch) and deep-fry for five minutes or so until golden, then drain on kitchen paper.

Serves 4

200g freekeh, rinsed 600g butternut squash, peeled and cubed 400g beetroot, peeled and cubed 1 tsp fennel seeds
4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to drizzle 150g pitta bread, torn into bite-sized pieces 300g Greek yoghurt
1 garlic clove, crushed 3 tbsp pomegranate molasses 50g crispy fried onions 2 tbsp pine nuts small bunch of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped 1 pomegranate, seeds only flaky sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

- Preheat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/400°F.
- Boil the freekeh in a large pan of salted water for about 30-35 minutes until tender, then drain.
- Toss the butternut squash and beetroot with the fennel seeds, olive oil and some salt and pepper. Spread out on a baking tray and roast for 25-30 minutes, or until tender and lightly coloured.
- Toast the pitta bread in the oven for 5-8 minutes until crisp.
- In a medium bowl, mix together the yoghurt and crushed garlic and season with salt and pepper.



- To assemble, scatter half of the toasted pitta bread pieces in a serving dish. Spread half of the cooked freekeh on top, followed by half of the roasted squash and beetroot. Drizzle with some of the garlic yoghurt. Repeat the layering, then drizzle with the pomegranate molasses and a little olive oil. Top with the crispy onions, pine nuts, parsley and pomegranate seeds.
- **To make it vegan:** use coconut (or other plant-based) yoghurt.
- **To make it gluten-free:** use GF pittas and ensure the crispy fried onions are GF.

Taken from *Vegetables: Easy and Inventive Vegetarian Suppers* by Mark Diacono, published by Quadrille at £27. Photography by Mark Diacono. To buy from *The Week Bookshop* for £21.99 (incl. p&p), call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.

New cars: what the critics say



Subaru Crosstrek
Price: from £34,345

Autocar

Subaru's bestselling and most affordable model, the Crosstrek – formerly known as XV in the UK – has now come out in a revised, third-generation model. The UK line-up is simple: one engine and transmission – a 2.0-litre hybridised four-cylinder petrol engine with a CVT gearbox – and two trims. A “rugged” 4WD hatchback, it is optimised for off-road, with “extraordinary any-surface traction”.

Top Gear Magazine

With 136bhp, a 0-62mph time of 10.8 seconds and a top speed of 123mph, the Crosstrek has “nothing to write home about”, but Subaru has prioritised all-round ability, and the 220mm ground clearance takes you further off-road than most rivals. And even if the performance is “sluggish”, the steering is well-weighted, the ride is “surprisingly composed”, and the handling is “nicely mannered”.

Auto Express

The new Crosstrek looks much the same as its predecessor, but there are bigger changes inside. There's a new 11.6in portrait display with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto plus voice recognition. The system is responsive, but the graphics and layout feel downmarket and the “analogue instrument panel isn't exactly cutting edge”. It's not a luxurious cabin, but on the plus side, it does “feel built to last”.

The best... new-generation hair dryers

▼ Dyson Supersonic

Nural Dyson's new hair dryer has a sensor that measures how close it is to your hair, and adjusts airflow and temperature accordingly to enhance natural shine and protect the scalp. Another sensor recognises the five intelligent attachments as you use them and remembers your styling preferences. And it weighs just 680g (£400; dyson.co.uk).



◀ Nicky Clarke AirStyle Pro

Ultra-lightweight at under 350g, this professional-grade hair dryer and styler uses infrared and ionic technology to protect the hair, decrease drying time, and eliminate static and frizz. It is quiet to use (at 74db) and has four styling accessories (£250; nickyclarke.com).



▶ **Shark FlexStyle** Small but mighty (700g), this is a five-in-one styler – at the flick of a switch it can transform into a curler or straightener, and has a range of attachments including auto-wrap curlers, a paddle brush, oval brush, styling concentrator and curl-defining diffuser (£300; sharkclean.co.uk).



◀ **Zuvi Halo** This sophisticated 534g dryer uses patented LightCare technology to mimic the wind and sun, drying the surface of the hair and protecting moisture within the hair shaft (on offer at £165; zuvilife.com).



▶ **Sutra Infrared Blow Dryer** This uses “FAR Infrared” and ionic technology plus an ultra-powerful brushless motor to dry hair efficiently from the inside out, causing less damage and moisture loss. It weighs 534g (£250; sutrabeauty.co.uk).

Tips... dealing with Japanese knotweed

- Be vigilant for the species. It dies down to ground level in winter; in the spring, reddish purple shoots emerge and it then grows rapidly into tall (7ft) mottled red bamboo-like stems, with large heart-shaped leaves; and in late summer, cream tassel flowers. The roots can be a couple of metres deep.
- If it appears in your garden, try to work out where it came from. It could have arrived in new soil, or via a plant from a knotweedy garden. Often, though, it will be spreading from a neighbouring garden.
- Householders have a legal duty to try to keep knotweed under control. If you think it is coming from a neighbouring garden, speak to your neighbours to find out what they are doing, and if they are not taking action, seek advice from your council.
- It is extremely hard to eradicate it by digging it out, and though glyphosate weedkillers can work, you still face the problem of disposing of it legally. Generally, your best bet is to seek professional help. See rhs.org.uk/weeds/japanese-knotweed.

SOURCE: THE TIMES

THE WEEK 22 June 2024

And for those who have everything...



This egg chair swing seat is handmade by craftsmen in West Sussex from ten hand-beaten copper panels. It can be hung from the oxidised steel frame or from above, and is covered in an exterior-grade lacquer so it can be left outside for years. **£12,995; sophieconran.com**

SOURCE: THE TIMES

Apps... parental control apps for Android and iOS

Modern and intuitive, **Net Nanny** has excellent web filters. It can track location, set time allowances and schedules, and block apps. The built-in App Advisor lets you know which apps to look out for and it has content screening within social media apps such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube (\$55/year).

Like Net Nanny, **Kaspersky Safe Kids** allows you to monitor and control activity on PCs and Macs as well as smartphones. The paid tier (\$15/year) includes unlimited devices, and the free plan lets you set screen-time limits, filter websites and manage other apps. However, the app is not well designed and the web portal can be slow.

With broad multi-platform support including Amazon Fire tablets and Chromebooks, **Qustodio**, lets you set time limits for apps and devices. It has location tracking and is one of the only apps that can log children's texts and calls and block phone numbers (on Android), but its web filtering is unreliable and it can be expensive (£40/year).

SOURCE: TOM'S GUIDE

This week's dream: a restorative retreat in northern Norway

Perched above the Arctic Circle in northern Norway, the Lofoten Islands are one of the great “end-of-the-world archipelagos”, known for their towering, serrated mountains, wild seas and lonely white-sand beaches. My husband and I visited in March, following a health scare, says Sophy Roberts in the FT, and found the trip restorative. That was partly thanks to the islands’ vast silences and the “awesome scale” of the landscape – and partly because we stayed at an excellent hotel. Holmen Lofoten is set beside the sea in the village of Sørvågen, where its owner, Ingunn Rasmussen, grew up. She is the daughter of a local fisherman, and the hotel is largely made of refurbished fishermen’s cabins. They are “close to perfect” – “simple” but “cosy”, with wood burners and soft wool blankets.

Between late August and April, you might see the Northern Lights swooshing past your cabin’s big windows. During the day, you can go hiking – we climbed well above the treeline for a picnic beside a frozen lake, guided by Ingunn’s brother, Audun,



The islands are known for their serrated mountains and wild seas

who recalled hunting for hare and ptarmigan there as a child. And when the seas are calm, there are fishing trips to enjoy. We sailed out past the village of Å, at the archipelago’s furthest end, into the sea channel known as Moskstraumen. Some guests spot orca there – we didn’t, but we did pass close to one of the world’s strongest whirlpools, which is said to have inspired Edgar Allen Poe’s 1841 short story *A Descent into the Maelström*. Back at Holmen, we ate “delicious” dinners, “delicately put together” by the head chef, Richard Cox, a Briton whose passion is “hyperlocal ingredients”, from ceps and lingonberries to cod and lamb. His pantry shelves are crowded with jars of fermented vegetables and flower syrups (including wild camomile, fireweed, and meadowsweet), about which you can learn more on one of the hotel’s regular, five-day gastronomic retreats, co-created by the chef Valentine Warner. A three-night stay costs from £780 per person, b&b (holmenlofoten.no).

Getting the flavour of...



The idyllic island of Lombok

It lies two hours by boat from Bali, and is quite as beautiful and only a little smaller, at 50 miles from top to toe. But the Indonesian island of Lombok sees far fewer visitors than its over-touristed neighbour, says Leyla Rose in The Times, and feels “a world away”. You might stay in the south, in the area around the “lively” town of Kuta, with its “high-end” resorts and “stunning” white-sand beaches. But don’t miss the old royal temples and gardens of Mataram, Lombok’s main city, in the west – or the chance to climb “majestic” Mount Rinjani, Indonesia’s second-highest volcano at 3,726m. The three tiny Gili Islands, 20 minutes away by boat, make for a relaxing final stop – each a tropical idyll with turquoise waters, “chirping” birds and “swaying” palms.

San Francisco’s cautious robotaxis

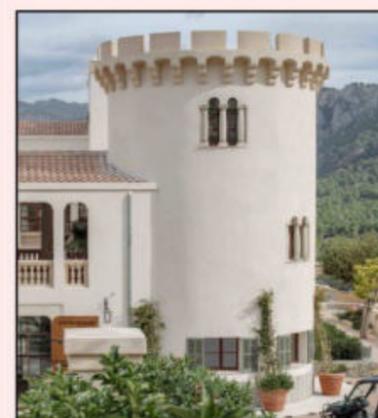
Plying the streets of San Francisco since last August, self-driving taxis have become “the

city’s latest tourist attraction”, says Lauren Sloss in The New York Times. Operated by Waymo (which is owned by Alphabet, Google’s parent company), the vehicles are electric Jaguar I-Paces fitted with radar, lidar, sensors and cameras, and remotely monitored by a real-life customer-support team on the look-out for “unsafe activity”. Riding in one feels “futuristic” at first, but they tend to be “cautious” and “quite slow”, and the chief thrill is often the attention you get from other tourists. Safety concerns have triggered a “public backlash” and a federal investigation, though the company’s data suggests they’re safer than cars with human drivers. The ride-hailing app has a waiting list, so join it well before you’re due to fly.

Sailing on a Thames barge in Essex

In their heyday, from the 1880s to the 1930s, Thames barges carried cargo all over England and beyond (the larger ones were seaworthy). These flat-bottomed commercial sailing boats played a key role in our maritime history, but few survive – so it’s a thrill to be able to take a trip on *Pudge*, says James Stewart in The Sunday Times, a 92ft-long wooden barge, dating back to 1922, with beautiful “rust-red” sails, which was recently restored by the Thames Sailing Barge Trust at a cost of £767,000. *Pudge* (pictured) spent most of its working life carrying cargo between Ipswich and London, but also took part in the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940. Now, it is moored in Maldon, Essex, and crewed by volunteers on regular voyages down the Blackwater estuary. Guests can book a cabin or charter the whole thing, and are free to “haul ropes” or not, as they prefer. It’s “a joy to be aboard, like time out from life”, and there are chances to go onshore, to swim, dine or explore.

Hotel of the week



Son Bunyola Mallorca

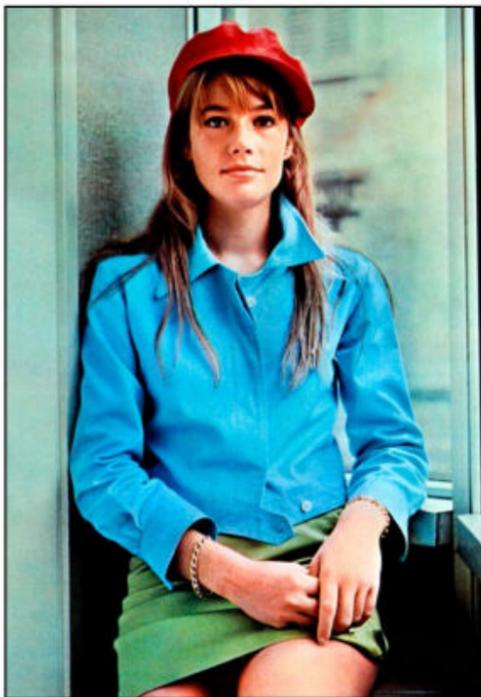
It’s been a year since Richard Branson reopened this 16th century *finca* in Mallorca’s wild Tramuntana Mountains as a 27-room hotel, and it has proved a great success, says Rick Jordan in Condé Nast Traveller. Its setting is spectacular – with “teetering” sea views – and the interiors have been beautifully restored, with “Riviera stripes” and “lobster pinks” in public areas and more restful tones in the rooms. There are also three villas with private pools. The main restaurant serves excellent “vegetable-forward”, farm-to-table food; there is also a large pool, a tennis court, and a pebble beach that’s usually pretty deserted.

Doubles from €600; virginlimitededition.com.

French singer-songwriter and reluctant fashion muse

Françoise Hardy
1944-2024

A cultural icon in France, Françoise Hardy, who has died aged 80, emerged as one of the yé-yé girls who dominated the French charts in the early 1960s: confident young women, many of them still in their teens, who sang breezy, US-influenced pop. Hardy was one of the most successful of them: her debut single, *Tous les garçons et les filles*, sold two million records in 18 months (more, it was noted, than Édith Piaf had in 18 years). But, shy and introspective, she was a different kind of yé-yé girl, said Alexis Petridis in *The Guardian*: her songs were “invariably” melancholic; rather than relying on older male writers, she wrote most of them herself; and she insisted on controlling her own recording sessions to create a less manufactured sound. A pre-Led Zeppelin Jimmy Page played on one of her early records.



Hardy: wrote “sad, romantic songs”

Elegant, nonchalant and understated, Hardy came to epitomise effortless French cool. Paco Rabanne and Yves Saint Laurent dressed her; the fashion label Comme des Garçons was named after a line in her debut single; and during her brief acting career, Roger Vadim and Jean-Luc Godard directed her. A generation of adolescent boys were obsessed by her or, as the critic Sean O’Hagan put it, “with the idea of her”, said *The Daily Telegraph*; as were members of the rock aristocracy. David Bowie admitted in the 1990s that he had been “passionately in love with her”; Mick Jagger declared her his “ideal woman”. Before meeting her, Bob Dylan wrote a poem about her for the back cover of *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, and in 1966, after a concert in Paris, he invited her back to his hotel where he played some of the songs he had just recorded for *Blonde on Blonde* – including *I Want You*. Hardy later said she’d not realised he was trying to seduce her, and that she’d not have been interested anyway. Never comfortable in the spotlight, she described her work for fashion houses as a “chore”, and grew increasingly irritated by the way people took

more interest in her looks than in her music. She stopped performing live in 1967, owing to stage fright, and gave up her film career then too, saying that she couldn’t act, and that her priority was songwriting. To get away from the press and fans, she spent a lot of her time at her second home in Corsica. In 1968, she escaped there to avoid the student unrest in Paris.

Hardy put her anxious temperament down to her star sign, Capricorn, and to the fact that she had been born, in 1944, during an air raid in Nazi-occupied Paris. Her father was married to another woman and largely absent; she and her sister were brought up by their mother in the ninth *arrondissement*, but spent weekends with her “narrow-minded” grandmother, who told her that she was “unattractive and a very bad person”. At her convent school, she faced the stigma of being illegitimate. She took refuge in the rock’n’roll that was starting to be played on the radio; and when her father offered her

a reward for passing her baccalaureate, aged 16, she asked for a guitar. She knew just three chords, but found she could write any number of songs with them. She signed a recording contract at 17, and the next year she topped the charts in France.

In the 1970s, she worked with the Brazilian musician Tuca and almost made an album with Nick Drake. She loved his music, but when they met to discuss the idea, the painfully shy folk singer sat in a corner without saying a word, and the project was dropped. In the 1980s, she took a break to raise her son (with her husband, the musician Jacques Dutronc); but she was soon back recording her own albums and collaborating with the likes of Blur (on their 1994 song *To the End*) and Iggy Pop. Diagnosed with cancer in 2004, she released her last album in 2018. “What a person sings is an expression of what they are,” she told the *Observer* at the time. “Luckily for me, the most beautiful songs are not happy songs. The songs we remember are the sad, romantic songs.”

Psychologist who was a voice for the “disappeared”

Nora Cortiñas
1930-2024

One cold morning in April 1977, Nora Cortiñas’s 24-year-old son Carlos Gustavo left the house and never came back. A former student at the University of Buenos Aires, he had become involved in left-wing politics – which made him a target of Argentina’s US-backed military dictatorship. Cortiñas went in search of her son, but when she made enquiries at public offices, she met evasiveness and worse. “I entered into a spiral of madness,” she recalled. “I was called, threatened, told I would be put in prison.”

A month after Carlos Gustavo vanished, she joined forces with a group of women who were asking similar questions, and who had started to hold weekly vigils for their missing children in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. There were only a dozen of them or so at first, but this group morphed into the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, said the *FT* – “the backbone of perhaps the most successful human rights movement in history”. The mothers, who carried photographs of their missing children and wore white headscarves to represent the nappies their children had once worn, were ignored by passers-by; and three of the group’s founders joined the ranks of the “disappeared”. But the campaign continued, with Cortiñas as one of its driving forces; and following the return to civilian rule in 1983, more than 8,000 victims of the regime were



Cortiñas: “I feel the urge to fight”

identified (rights groups believe the true number is 30,000), and 1,221 people were convicted of human rights abuses. But Cortiñas died without ever discovering what had happened to her son.

She was born in Buenos Aires in 1930, the daughter of immigrants from Catalonia. She left school at 16, and three years later married Carlos Cortiñas, who worked as a civil servant. She raised their two children, while also running sewing classes. Her son had recently had a baby when he was seized at a railway station on his way to work. His mother said his disappearance was like “having an arm amputated”.

In 1986, Cortiñas broke from the original mothers – who had decided to pursue their children’s radical socialist goals – and set up a splinter group, which focused on the narrower agenda of getting archives opened and perpetrators brought to justice. Later, she campaigned for other causes, including the legalisation of abortion (which came about in 2020) and better conditions for prisoners with HIV/Aids. She studied for a degree in social psychology at the University of Buenos Aires, graduating in 1993, and later taught at that university. “I want to change this unjust world,” she wrote in her 2019 biography. “Every day when I wake up, I feel the urge to fight. I don’t see it as an obligation but as a commitment.”

Companies in the news ...and how they were assessed



Seven days in the Square Mile

UK inflation hit the Bank of England's target for the first time in almost three years, slowing to 2% in the year to May from 2.3% in April. Easing food inflation was cited as the biggest contributor to the fall. Trumpeting an inflation rate now "lower than [that of] Germany, France and America", the Conservatives said the figures showed that "difficult choices" were paying off; but Labour claimed pressures on family finances were "still acute". Markets looked beyond the headline figure to focus on services inflation, which disappointed – prompting traders to pare back expectations of a summer interest rate cut. The BoE's **Monetary Policy Committee** was expected to keep rates on hold this week at 5.25%.

Britain's biggest investment platform, **Hargreaves Lansdown**, said it was prepared to "recommend unanimously" an improved £5.4bn takeover led by the private equity firm **CVC Capital**, with backing from **Nordic Capital** and a subsidiary of the **Abu Dhabi Investment Authority** (the fourth proposed offer in recent months).

US chip giant **Nvidia** vaulted past **Apple** and **Microsoft** to become the world's most valuable company. The luxury sports brand **Golden Goose** postponed plans for a high-profile listing in Milan owing to a "significant deterioration in market conditions following European Parliament elections". The US EV-maker **Fisker**, once billed as a rival to Tesla, filed for bankruptcy.

Barclays/Live Nation: sponsorship woes

Hot on the heels of fund manager Baillie Gifford's withdrawal from the Hay, Edinburgh, Henley and Cheltenham literary festivals, another big sponsor has been forced to quit. Barclays has suspended its links with all Live Nation music festivals in the UK in 2024 – including Download, Latitude and the Isle of Wight, said Laura Snapes in The Guardian – "after protests from bands and fans" over its provision of financial services to defence companies supplying Israel. The protest group Bands Boycott Barclays called it "a victory for the Palestinian-led global BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] movement". The decision to pull the plug was agreed with Live Nation, which signed a deal with Barclays in 2023, after several bands (including Pest Control, Speed, Scowl and Ithaca) withdrew from last weekend's Download Festival. Barclays said "the protesters' agenda is to have Barclays debank defence companies, which is a sector we remain committed to as an essential part of keeping this country and our allies safe". The boycott followed the vandalism of at least 20 Barclays branches last week by anti-Israel activists, who were also protesting against its investment in fossil fuels, said James Warrington in The Daily Telegraph. The next big battle is looming. The Wimbledon tennis championship, which begins on 1 July, is coming under sustained pressure to end its Barclays sponsorship deal.

Royal Mail: union deal

The would-be owner of Royal Mail, Czech billionaire Daniel Kretínský, is hopeful of overcoming a major hurdle in his £3.6bn quest to land the prize, said Jennifer Sieg in City AM: union opposition. Following talks with the CWU general secretary, Dave Ward, Kretínský has indicated he is "ready to consider" giving postal workers "a stake" in the business to secure their agreement. The mind boggles, said Alistair Osborne in The Times. If Kretínský takes over Royal Mail owner International Distribution Services (IDS), it will be subsumed into his wider EP Group. Maybe he'll "hand over to the posties one of his polluting coal-fired power plants. Or a few metres of Eustream gas pipeline. Or perhaps a stake in West Ham United?" More scrutiny is needed, said Nils Pratley in The Guardian. So far, the sole big shareholder to protest is Columbia Threadneedle Investments, which claims the deal "undervalues the business". Why don't other big shareholders speak out? The real culprit here is IDS's "nodding dog" board, which has put "our postal service at risk" by "negotiating an unenforceable deal", said Alex Brummer in the Daily Mail. "Labour's first major corporate challenge", if and when it takes office, is to subject it to thorough scrutiny. This is the first big test of "securonomics".

John Lewis/Waitrose: "greed not need"

John Lewis is taking a tough line on shoplifting, said Laura Onita in the FT. The retail partnership, which has 331 Waitrose supermarkets and 34 department stores in the UK, argues that "greed not need" is driving record crime levels. "There's a depressing narrative around cost of living and that shoplifting is because of that," said its director of central operations and security, Lucy Brown. "I'm not seeing that." Instead, she claims the group has been targeted by "organised gangs" for whom "shoplifting to order" is "their occupation". It plans to combat the crime wave with a range of measures: it is trialling "trolleys that lock if people do not pay" and "smart shelves that detect weight changes".

Tesla: Musk claims pay deal victory

"Hot damn, I love you guys!" said a jubilant Elon Musk as he appeared on stage just after Tesla shareholders voted to reinstate his astronomical pay package. The share options award – which has fallen in value from \$56bn to \$44-46bn, in line with the electric carmaker's declining shares – isn't yet in the bag, said Al Jazeera: it doesn't reverse the January ruling of a Delaware judge that the package is excessive. But it "could bolster Tesla's appeal". In a second win for the tycoon, shareholders also approved proposals to move the firm's incorporation from Delaware to the more easy-going regime of Texas.



Musk: "worth every penny"?

But Wall Street clearly "thinks Tesla's value is tied to keeping Musk happy", said DealBook in The New York Times. Big-hitting supporters included Vanguard and BlackRock. More fool them, said Danny Fortson in The Sunday Times. When Musk was in empire-building mode in 2018, he was "worth every penny" of the biggest share incentive package in history. That's a moot point now that he splits his attention between six different companies and is "surrounded by sycophants" endorsing his increasingly suspect choices.

The "big loser" in this affair could be Delaware itself, said The Wall Street Journal.

The vote followed months of lobbying which saw Musk, who had threatened to quit the car company if thwarted, ranged against the influential proxy adviser Glass Lewis, and institutional investors including Norway's gigantic sovereign wealth fund.

Some two-thirds of America's S&P 500 firms are incorporated in this tiny state, with its "specialised" courts. By voting to quit, Tesla shareholders "could be ratifying the view" that "Delaware's shareholder protections have gone too far". Musk fancies himself as a pied piper. It will be intriguing to see who follows him.

Issue of the week: London resurgent?

After 30 years of hurt, there are signs that stock market strength may be coming home

It's a Euros triumph already, said Nils Pratley in *The Guardian*. The tournament's kick-off this week coincided with news that the UK has reclaimed its stock market crown from the French. The value of all the stocks on the London market is now greater than all those on the Paris exchange, by \$3.18trn to \$3.13trn, according to Bloomberg. "Actually, we should probably contain our excitement." Until a few years ago, after all, "London was miles ahead as the biggest stock market in Europe". Moreover, it would merely take "a marginal improvement" in the value of France's heavyweight fashion stocks – LVMH, Hermès and Gucci-owning Kering – to put Paris back on top. A third point is that the UK's renewed leadership is mostly down to "investors having a wobble over French assets" after the snap election call. A fourth: who cares anyway? "Relative size versus Paris is a diverting yardstick", but success should really be measured in terms of the quality of new listings, capital raised and so on. On that score, London still has plenty of work to do.

This is a tale of two elections, said Lars Mucklejohn in *City AM*. The "predicted outcome" in Britain has been welcomed by markets. In France, by contrast, uncertainty has caused chaos. The country's CAC 40 blue-chip index was at record highs last month,



The London Stock Exchange: a revival

but has just endured "its worst week since 2002". The "sharp swing" in investor sentiment is evident in the latest Bank of America poll of fund managers, said Farah Elbahrawy on Bloomberg. France has now assumed the UK's former mantle as "Europe's least favoured stock market". Indeed, French political upheaval is colouring opinion about prospects across Europe. The European Central Bank's latest warning on "fiscal stress in the eurozone" won't have improved the mood, said Martin Arnold in the *Financial Times*. It has only increased "investor anxiety about the sustainability of public finances".

Let's not overlook London's turnaround, said Alex Brummer in the *Daily Mail*. "The obituary for share trading in London has been written many times", but confidence in the UK as a listing venue is rising: witness the surging price of the local computer champion Raspberry Pi since its recent debut. New York is still a threat, but efforts to revive the London Stock Exchange are under way. Listing rules are being eased, and local authorities and pension funds are encouraged to invest in UK stocks and infrastructure. There's a long way to go, but it seems the medicine is working. "Despite a ghastly period for the City's reputation as the home of the free market, I am not abandoning hope." The fortunes of UK-listed companies are looking up.

China: time to venture back?

● Boarding the boat

For emerging market investors, India has been in the ascendancy this year, said Dave Baxter in *Investors' Chronicle*. But the "problem child" of Asia has recently offered "some reason for optimism". Following a "torrid run", the MSCI China index has recovered in the year to date – at the start of June it was up by more than 8%. Some investors, such as Peter Dalgliesh of Parmenion, reckon there are "signs of tangible change coming through to help stabilise financial and property markets". Given "depressed expectations and low valuations", there's "potential for upside surprise". As Valerio Baselli noted on Morningstar in April, "the Chinese stock market has underperformed global financial markets for more than three years now", so equities are "trading at valuations not seen for nearly a decade".

● Safety first

There are plenty of reasons for caution, said Reuters. Although the economy grew by a "faster-than-expected" 5.3% in the first quarter, and industrial output is rising, "China's property market slump, high local government debt and deflationary pressure remain a heavy drag". Lack of



Industrial output is rising

progress in the property market, which provided around 25% of economic output before the downturn, remains a particular worry. The central bank last month announced a re-lending programme in the hope of accelerating sales of "unsold housing stock", but it's unclear if that will do the job. China's

brighter spots are retail spending and exports. "But economists have warned that rising trade tensions with the West ... may impose more challenges to Chinese solar and electric vehicle producers."

● Fund options

Investors betting on China should treat it "as a high-risk satellite position in a portfolio rather than something more central", said Dave Baxter. But there are options "for the adventurous". Killik & Co's Mick Gilligan suggests Fidelity China Special Situations as "a punchy bet": around 40% of the trust's portfolio is tied up in consumer discretionary stocks. Peter Dalgliesh rates Allianz China A-Shares Equity. Rob Morgan at Charles Stanley, meanwhile, makes the case for FSSA Greater China Growth, run by "veteran" Martin Lau, which backs high-quality companies in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

A penny for your ethics

ESG funds "are bleeding", said Lex in the FT. A net \$40bn has been pulled from environmental, social and governance funds this year, according to Barclays. Is it time for a rethink?

Why the withdrawals? They are less to do with ESG's perceived limited impact – "nations backpedalling on green pledges, say, or fresh holes in corporate governance" – than financial performance. ESG has lost out to the AI-driven tech rally: Nasdaq has generated 50% more gains than the MSCI ESG Leaders' index over the past two years. Renewable energy paled in comparison with, say, BP and Shell, after the Ukraine War inflated oil prices.

Controversy ESG has suffered from becoming "politicised". The giant fund manager BlackRock still has \$800bn under management in its sustainable investment platform, but has ditched the ESG label, which chair Larry Fink said had become "weaponised". There are many quibbles over the terminology. Weapons are shunned by some funds; others view "defence" as beneficial.

Hone your bets All this doesn't mean shunning the sector. One strategy is "to go more granular". Choosing "a specific theme", such as clean energy or health tech, "avoids the anomalies". There's a lot of choice. MSCI offers nearly 4,000 equity and fixed-income ESG Indices.

Inflation: we're not out of the woods

Chris Dorrell

City AM

Doubles all round at the Bank of England, says Chris Dorrell. For the first time since July 2021, inflation is back at its “target” 2%. But while the move may give a much-needed boost to Rishi Sunak’s election campaign, it doesn’t mean we’re out of the woods yet – or that an imminent interest rate cut is on the cards. Services inflation, seen as “a more accurate gauge of domestic inflationary dynamics”, is still sticky at 5.7% and will continue to spook rate-setters. There are also lingering worries about annual wage growth, which is currently running at 5.8% in the private sector – “nearly twice the level consistent” with 2% inflation. The Bank is also expecting “a slight uptick in inflation” later in the year, as “the downward drag from falling energy prices starts to wane”. Without “a watertight case” for lowering rates, the Monetary Policy Committee will be very cautious about changing policy. Its members are prevented from making speeches during the election campaign, making it more difficult for markets to discern how they are interpreting incoming data. But it seems the prospect of a summer rate cut “seems to be slipping further and further away”.

France faces a “Liz Truss moment”

Matthew Lynn

The Daily Telegraph

No doubt France’s “famously wily” president, Emmanuel Macron, thought through his decision to call a snap election, says Matthew Lynn. But his plan has backfired spectacularly. French bonds and equities immediately tumbled dramatically and kept falling. The spread between French and German ten-year government bonds (a key measure of the country’s risk) showed its biggest weekly spike since the start of the euro crisis in 2011, underscoring a “debt crisis [that] has been simmering for years”. With its debt burden now standing at 112% of GDP, France’s credit rating has been downgraded twice in the last six months. The market steadied this week after assurances from Marine Le Pen that she would work with Macron if her hard-right National Rally (RN) party triumphs. But the situation remains volatile. Analysts have warned of a “Liz Truss moment”, referring to the UK bond market crisis after the 2022 mini-Budget. “It could be a lot worse than that.” While Truss was “quickly replaced”, a freshly elected RN government “may not be so easy to remove”. No one is hitting the panic button yet, “but investors are starting to get out”.

Is social media the new tobacco?

DealBook

The New York Times

The US surgeon general, Vivek Murthy, has called for “a warning label” – similar to those on cigarettes and alcohol – to be placed on social media platforms to tackle a spiralling “mental health crisis” among teens. In a strongly worded essay, he asked why policymakers have failed to respond to a threat that is “no less urgent or widespread than those posed by unsafe cars, planes or food”. The harms caused by social media, he wrote, “are not a failure of willpower and parenting” but “the consequence of unleashing powerful technology without adequate safety measures”. Scrutiny of social media’s effects on teens has grown in recent years: the social psychologist Jonathan Haidt describes the 2007 release of the iPhone as “an inflection point”, with suicidal behaviour and depression among adolescents rising sharply since. Other experts have questioned the link; but pressure is mounting on Big Tech. Meta has said platforms “should be given time” to work with watchdogs to create “age-appropriate” standards. The message from Murthy is that patience is wearing thin.

Failing to get the joke in Cannes

Daniel Thomas

Financial Times

Everyone who’s anyone in advertising has been in the South of France this week at the Cannes Lions festival. And there’s a brand new category of prizes, says Daniel Thomas. For the first time, the festival – which showcases the best campaigns of the past year – will be awarding a gong for “humour”. The drive to celebrate “wit and satire”, and what organisers call “laughter-inducing connections with audiences”, reflects the gnawing “insecurities” of an industry rapidly adopting AI tools and worrying about their effects on creativity. As Rory Sutherland, vice-chair of Ogilvy UK, points out, irreverence and silliness are distinctly human qualities. “AI can produce jokes, but they aren’t yet very funny.” There could be pitfalls. Some executives warn that, given national differences, it’s hard for a campaign to be “globally funny”. Humour can also be “divisive”, given how subjective it is. A test case: a short film released by Publicis about the “AI hype” at Cannes lampooned many of the world’s top ad and AI executives. Some of those featured reportedly “failed to see the funny side”.

City profiles

Andrew Rees

“Countless fashion brands have been on a boom-to-bust journey,” said Jim Armitage in *The Sunday Times*. “But few have gone from boom to bust to boom again like Crocs.” When the current CEO, Carlisle-raised Andrew Rees, took over in 2014, the US ugly shoe firm was “a profit warning-riddled basket case” on its (plastic) uppers. He has built it back to a \$9bn company, selling more than 120 million pairs a year and striking deals with designers such as Balenciaga. Crocs is the ultimate “brand tension” shoe – like Marmite, “lovers and haters” enjoy arguing about the product. “If you wear these and she still goes out with you, she really loves you,” ran one internet meme. “Crocs – the world’s most efficient birth control,” went another. For Rees, it’s all grist to the mill.

Richard Branson



Sir Richard Branson has been celebrating the 40th birthday of his airline, Virgin Atlantic, in typical style, said *The Daily Telegraph*. He recently jumped “fully clothed into a swimming pool at a Las Vegas party”; Sin City is home to a Virgin hotel and casino. Branson is doubling down on his drive into “high-end leisure” by integrating Virgin’s hotel, cruise and airline operations more tightly. Helping him out is the Culture Club star Boy George, who, says Branson, makes “the most wonderful DJ” on Virgin Voyages cruises. “George and I go right back to the beginning,” he says. “I remember seeing him at the 100 Club in London”; he later signed the band to Virgin Records. These days, they’re a slick double-act. “We’re going to do all three cruise ships in about three or four days.”

Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

Coca-Cola Company

The Daily Telegraph
Having seen off arch-rival Pepsi, Coke diversified into coffee, water and energy drinks: sales are up by 34% to \$45.8bn over five years. Still the "real thing" for big investors, the current price is an attractive entry point. Buy. \$62.55.

Eckoh

Investors' Chronicle
Eckoh's software secures customer payment details so companies don't have to worry – the data is stored in the cloud. Contracted business rose by 52% to £52.6m last year. Looks cheap, given exposure to the US market. Buy. 41.9p.

GlaxoSmithKline

The Times
A US legal battle connected to its heartburn drug Zantac wiped billions off GSK's market value, but litigation costs are now priced in. A strong drug pipeline, rising profitability and a newly "chunky" dividend. Buy. £16.14.

Oxford Instruments

The Mail on Sunday
Spun out of Oxford University in the 1960s, this provider of hi-tech tools and systems majors on imaging, analytics, cryogenics and semiconductors. Recently opened a huge chip factory in Bristol. Great long-term potential. Buy. £26.25.

Speedy Hire

The Sunday Times
This tool- and plant-rental group has suffered alongside the UK's stagnant construction sector: shares are a fraction of their pre-pandemic price. A five-year recovery plan will bear fruit when the diggers rev up again. Buy. 28p.

Time to Act

The Mail on Sunday
This Teesside-based "tiddler" is at the forefront of renewable energy, with expertise in wind turbines and kit used in hydrogen and nuclear plants. Already profitable and expected to double sales to £2.4m this year. Buy. 50p.

Directors' dealings

Entain



Shares in the betting company have been sliding steeply and there's been a shake-up at the top. Interim CEO Stella David spent almost £1m on shares – a sum dwarfed by the £50m purchase made by Ricky Sandler, founder of the activist investor Eminence Capital.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

FirstGroup

Investors' Chronicle
The travel group has boosted its full-year dividend by 45% amid "progressive growth" at First Bus and rising train passenger journeys. But there's a growing risk rail contracts will be renationalised under Labour. Hold. 154p.

Ocado

The Times
Ocado's online grocery arm is performing well, but the big investment bet is the growth of its proprietary technology and customer fulfilment centres (CFCs) for partners, which has disappointed. Too risky at this price. Avoid. 351.3p.

RWS Holdings

Investors' Chronicle
Shares in this Aim-listed translation group jumped by 15% after two of its four divisions returned to growth. But AI looks set to transform translation services. What this means for RWS remains unclear. Sell. 196.6p.

Seraphim Space Investment Trust

The Times
This £157m trust backs private space technology businesses, and shares have almost doubled this year after a sometimes rocky life on the market. Given the speed of returns, caution is advised. Hold. 65.50p.

SSP Group

Sharecast
Goldman Sachs has downgraded the catering concessions company, which operates food and beverage outlets in airports and railway stations. Despite long-term growth opportunity, the bank predicts underperformance this year. Sell. 163.4p.

Standard Chartered

The Daily Telegraph
Facing fresh allegations concerning sanctions-busting, money laundering and poor internal controls. Still, the bank is well-capitalised and should benefit from rate cuts across emerging markets. Hold. 750p.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip

Softcat
The Sunday Times
up 18.29% to £17.66

Worst tip

Beeks Financial Cloud Gp.
The Mail on Sunday
down 2.89% to 168p

Market view

"The September BoE meeting looks like the earliest opportunity for a cut."

Tim Graf, of State Street Global Markets, on changing bets following the latest inflation figures. Quoted on Bloomberg

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

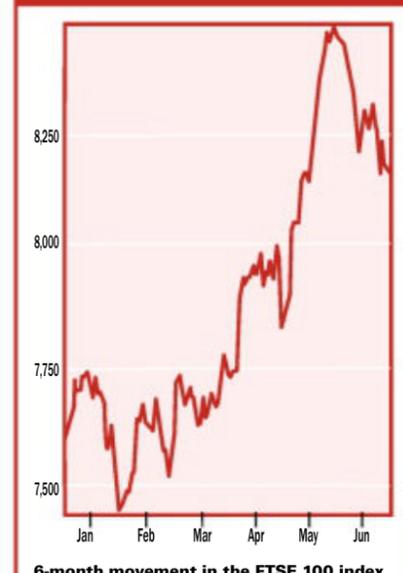
	18 June 2024	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	8191.29	8147.81	0.53%
FTSE All-share UK	4467.95	4444.07	0.54%
Dow Jones	38791.56	38642.76	0.39%
NASDAQ	17849.89	17181.18	3.89%
Nikkei 225	38482.11	39134.79	-1.67%
Hang Seng	17915.55	18176.34	-1.43%
Gold	2319.90	2304.40	0.67%
Brent Crude Oil	84.86	82.07	3.40%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.62%	3.62%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.14	4.37	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.23	4.45	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	2.0% (May)	2.3% (Apr)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	3.0% (May)	3.3% (Apr)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	1.5% (May)	1.1% (Apr)	
£1 STERLING:	\$1.273 €1.186 ¥200.953	Bitcoin \$65,211.60	

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS		
RISES	Price	% change
Halma	2656.00	+16.80
BT Group	141.10	+10.23
Rentokil Initial	455.40	+9.68
St. James's Place Ord.	545.50	+7.38
Hargreaves Lansdown	1130.00	+6.70
FALLS		
Melrose Industries	580.00	-6.81
Legal & General	226.80	-6.71
JD Sports Fashion	117.85	-4.65
Ashtead Group	5400.00	-3.50
Entain	665.40	-3.48
FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER		
Molten Ventures	411.00	+22.00
Mobico Group	46.28	-8.50

Source: Refinitiv/FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 18 June (pm)

Following the Footsie





THE WEEK Junior

UK General Election 2024 What do kids want to know?

Across the country, families are discussing the ins and outs of the election — who they might vote for and what the outcome could mean for the future. It's a lot for children to take in, and it's their future we are all shaping.

They're likely to have lots of questions about what's happening. So, over the coming weeks, *The Week Junior* will help explain it. We'll take the complex and confusing bits and make them clear, accessible and interesting.

Jargon will be busted, tricky parts of the process will be simplified and the key players introduced.

A general election is a chance to inspire young people and show them that coming together, debating topics, and campaigning for what you believe in really can make a difference.

The magazine will also help children develop essential life skills such as debating and expressing their views, as well as giving readers a chance to share the issues that are most important to them. Make sure the children in your life don't miss out.



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The king of PR who represented David Bowie and the Spice Girls

Alan Edwards has been named the No. 1 entertainment PR by the industry bible PR Week for the past ten years running. Now, he's written a book looking back over his extraordinary career. Mick Brown meets him

In 1976, Alan Edwards, then 21 years old and working as a PR looking after rock bands, organised a trip to Birmingham for music journalists to see the heavy metal group Uriah Heep. It was a time when the gravy train in the music business was running at full steam. In this case, quite literally. A private train had been hired to ferry the party to the concert. By the time it arrived in Birmingham, much drink had been taken and a food fight had broken out, leaving Edwards with the remnants of a ham sandwich in his hair and ketchup all over his T-shirt. By the end of the evening one journalist had been arrested. Edwards remembers that he was ticked off by his boss "for not disciplining the journalists".



Bowie and Edwards worked together for 35 years

Writing for a music paper, I had been on the train, although sadly I have no recollection of the concert or filing a review of it. Recently, I met Alan Edwards again, for lunch in an expensive restaurant in London's West End (no food fights here). A trim, boyish figure, with a thick head of grey hair, he orders salmon and a salad and declines the offer of a glass of wine. He looks after himself. He does not own a car, preferring to take public transport and making sure he walks ten miles a day.

"The music business in those days, he remembers, was 'the Wild West': dodgy managers, drink and drugs flowing freely"

Edwards is now 68, and by some distance the most successful PR man in British entertainment. He has been named the No. 1 entertainment PR by the industry bible PR Week for the past ten years running. You're only as good as your list of contacts, and Edwards has more than 10,000 names in his book. Over the years he has represented the Rolling Stones, David Bowie and The Who. In the celebrity era he worked with the Spice Girls, the Beckhams, Robbie Williams, a gamut of other pop acts, and in reality TV, as well as with a host of clients who prefer to keep their names, and their problems, out of the papers. The present client list of his company, The Outside Organisation, includes Janet Jackson, Blondie and Naomi Campbell. He has now written a book looking back over his career and it is, as you might expect, full of good stories about life on the road with the Rolling Stones, signing a million-pound contract for the Beckhams and playing football with Bob Marley.

Edwards grew up in Worthing, the adopted son of a solicitor and a teacher. At 16, he left school with three O levels and set off alone on the hippie trail, contracting dysentery and typhoid along the way. When he returned to England seven months later barely recognisable, he recalls, his father greeted him with the words,

"Hello! What have you been up to?" Music had always been his passion, and he went on to work as a messenger boy for an advertising agency while trying his hand at writing reviews for the music press, before taking a job with Keith Altham, then the leading rock PR, with clients including The Who, the Rolling Stones, Marc Bolan – and Uriah Heep.

Edwards answered the phone, arranged interviews and concert tickets, and got to know everyone who was anyone in the British music press and beyond. In 1977 he set up on his own, working out of a single room, representing the ultimate hippie group, Hawkwind, and the coming generation of punk bands, including Generation X, The Stranglers and Blondie. The music business in those days, he says, was "the Wild West"; dodgy managers, and drink and drugs flowing freely. One publicist, now dead, would have lines of cocaine ready on the desks before the staff came in. He was imprisoned for dealing. Edwards recalls an interview with the reggae singer Gregory Isaacs. High after freebasing cocaine, he passed out when asked a question. Edwards and the journalist carried on chatting, wondering what to do. After 45 minutes, Isaacs suddenly opened his eyes and answered the question.

In the early 1980s, Edwards was hired by the Rolling Stones to handle the media duties for a European tour. Mick Jagger demanded that he should provide a press briefing the morning after each show. At midnight, Edwards would be outside the railway station of whichever city they were in, waiting for the newspapers to be dropped off, then he would rush back to the hotel, cut out the reviews and bribe the receptionist with tickets to translate them into English, go back to the room to prepare a programme for the next day's promotional events, make 30 or 40 copies on the hotel photocopier, staple them together and have them under the doors of everybody in the touring party by 6:30am. "At times I was hardly going to bed."

Jagger had a thing for dossiers. Edwards once took him on a promotional jaunt around Europe, visiting two or three cities a day. "He'd want a dossier on all the journalists he was meeting, how the local football team was doing, the politicians, and how the new album was doing in the shops. And after each show he'd want to know what songs the journalists had liked. He'd look at the set list and say, 'So they don't like *Under My Thumb*? We'll drop that.' Or, 'Move *Get Off of My Cloud* to later in the set.'"

David Bowie, with whom Edwards started working in 1982, was equally meticulous. “They’d both want to know where the journalists at a show were sitting – David would want them in the best seats so they got the best acoustics. And if they weren’t, there might be an inquisition... Same thing with the photographers. David would always come at things from a more creative side. With Mick it was, we could sell more tickets. They were two sides of the same coin. But both were 100% across everything.” Working with Bowie for 35 years was, he says, an education. Performers on tour usually like to be left alone before going on stage. “But I’d be hauled in – ‘David would like a word’ – and he wouldn’t talk about the show. He’d talk about books.”



Edwards helped build “Brand Beckham”

Everybody wanted a piece of Bowie. Tony Blair was an enormous fan; and in 1995, the year after Blair became leader of the Labour Party, Edwards arranged for him to meet Bowie backstage after a gig. The following year, Blair, courting the youth vote, presented Bowie with an award at the Brits. Edwards was tasked with helping Alastair Campbell write Blair’s speech, scribbled together, he remembers, on the back of a fag packet, and designed to reassure the audience of well-heeled record-industry executives that they had nothing to fear from a Labour government. It was greeted with boos. In 2006, Edwards was representing Shakira, the Colombian pop singer. Her records were selling in their millions, but she wanted to be seen as a more serious artist. Edwards arranged a paparazzi picture of her coming out of the Dorchester hotel. Sticking out of her handbag was a copy of *The Economist*. “It went everywhere.”

Eventually, in 2002, the demands of the job put paid to Edwards’s relationship, which had lasted more than 20 years. He has four children and 11 grandchildren. “You look back and think, I wish I’d gone to more piano lessons [with the kids] and all the rest of it. But I’d be gone for months and you couldn’t be thinking, I wish I was at home.” Shortly after meeting his current partner Chandrima, an NHS doctor, in 2012, he took her to a big showbiz event. “It was a bit of a revelation to her. She said, ‘Really you’re just staff aren’t you?’” He laughs. “And that’s exactly it. It’s upstairs downstairs. At these beautiful events, fabulous dinners, you’re on call, drinking Diet Coke and, if you’re lucky, getting a cheese roll afterwards.”

Just as all political lives end in failure, so do most PR-client relationships. He was fired by Elton John after a disobliging concert review appeared in a national newspaper, on the grounds he “should have taken more time choosing the reviewer”. “He called me in to give me a pasting,” Edwards remembers. “At the end of it, he gave me a hug, and I thought I was OK.” The next day, calamitously, the review was printed again by mistake. “I got a call from his manager saying, ‘We’re going to let you go.’” He shrugs. “I didn’t feel it was unfair.” His relationship with the Stones ended in 1986. Relations between Jagger and Keith Richards were at such a low ebb that they would rarely be in the studio at the same time; Edwards was caught in the crossfire. He was also fired by Michael Flatley, co-creator of *Riverdance*, “two or three times”. The golfer Nick Faldo fired him via voicemail.

The fabled record executive Joe Smith, the man behind artists such as the Eagles, Queen and Mötley Crüe, once likened the human brain to a computer with microchips that govern its behaviour. Artists can write and record songs that please millions. “They’ve got chips we don’t have. But to make room for those chips, out falls sanity, reason, logic, gratitude...” “That’s pretty spot-on,” Edwards says. “If you’re working with them, you have

to accept that from the beginning. But the biggest idiots are always the smaller acts. Fame goes to their heads. You can spot the signs. They get a new manager every half-an-hour. If an album doesn’t work, they can’t fire the publisher, because the publisher owns their songs; they can’t fire the record company, so they fire the PR.”

In 1997, Edwards was asked to come to a meeting with the Spice Girls. More than a PR, he became the group’s de facto strategist. “I was almost like a father figure... And it worked pretty brilliantly, to be honest.” In no time at all, he says, he was representing every major pop group of the day – Boyzone, Westlife, Atomic Kitten, All Saints... In a way, he says, the Spice Girls were a bit like the Sex Pistols. “They were so tabloid, so British and so irreverent. I kinda loved it. They were all very nice, and they all had lovely families, which I liked. You’d go on a photo shoot and there’d be mums and dads and uncles. There might be 50 relatives there.” Edwards was instrumental in building “Brand Beckham” – “brand” not being a word, he says, you’d ever hear from Bowie or The Who. “It would have been anathema. Although Mick Jagger might have gone with it. But the Beckhams weren’t embarrassed by it; they owned it.”

One evening in 1999, Richard Desmond, the publisher of *OK!* magazine, brought Edwards in a chauffeur-driven car to his offices in Docklands to discuss a deal. He was offering £1m for exclusive world rights to the Beckhams’ wedding. Edwards took the risk of agreeing on the couple’s behalf – and the Beckham wedding issue of *OK!* sold 1.5 million copies.

“David and Victoria with the thrones were almost like the unofficial king and queen. Beckingham Palace...” He laughs. “We had a complaint from Buckingham Palace that they were getting loads of letters for David and Victoria. They enjoyed it. They were very clever. They’d grown up in normal households where tabloid newspapers were on the breakfast table. It was part of the game... and they liked the cat and mouse of it.”

He was taken on to look after PR for a new reality show, *Big Brother*, and recalls a woman who’d come second being “very unhappy” to be offered “only” a quarter-of-a-million for an exclusive interview. “She was a hairdresser...” He pauses. “Nothing wrong with hairdressers, of course.”

Eventually, the circus got out of hand and collapsed on itself. “It was partly to do with technology. Everybody had a mobile phone and could take a picture of somebody coming out of a restaurant. People started to have stories on their own websites or social media. I was a bit like the gatekeeper without a fence.” We walk back to his office in Soho. Behind his desk is a collage of blown-up photos and posters of punk acts. On the wall are pictures of Amy Winehouse, Edwards with Marc Bolan and David Bowie – the client he never let go, and who never let go of him. When he started out, his life revolved around the one square mile where we’re sitting, in pubs and clubs. The wannabe stars, the hustlers and chancers. All the colourful characters. “No one would say today is colourful. It’s all more disparate; there’s the internet, influencers. Everything’s more controlled...” He shrugs. “I don’t feel nostalgic, not often. I would if I spent more time sitting around, but there’s always something I need to get on with.” The telephone is still ringing. And he’s still answering it.

A longer version of this article appeared in The Telegraph © Telegraph Media Group Limited 2024. I Was There: Dispatches from a Life in Rock and Roll, by Alan Edwards (Simon & Schuster £25), is out now





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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 1 July. Send it to The Week Crossword 1419, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**



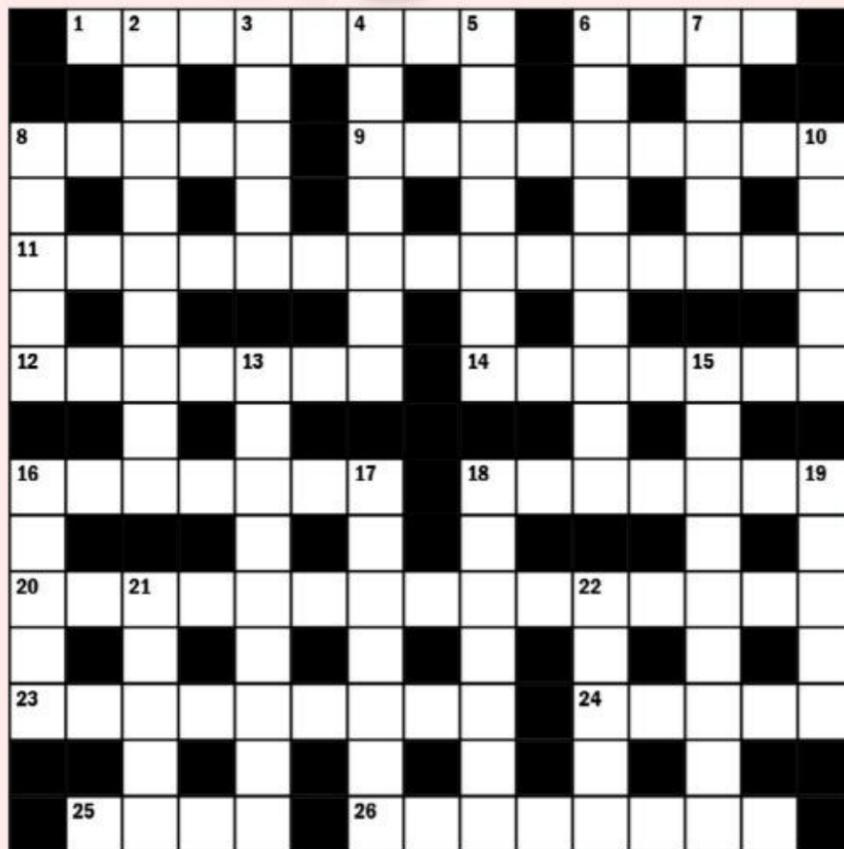
This week's winner will receive Week-branded items including a notebook, coffee mug and tote bag, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

ACROSS

- 1 Mike enters design for a light meal (5,3)
- 6 Labour starts to turn off its loyalists (4)
- 8 Strict on cast this evening (5)
- 9 Who could target man roughly? (9)
- 11 Announcement about leave in Washington office (5,10)
- 12 Bats cross about team half out for ducks (7)
- 14 Walks in street in front of car (7)
- 16 Detective hurt and it doesn't look good (7)
- 18 Street in theatreland not showing top of the bill (7)
- 20 Diplomat accused, having flings around Spain (6,9)
- 23 Fanlight maybe on long at this time (9)
- 24 Religious leaders seen in Muslim Amsterdam (5)
- 25 Lives repeatedly taken by terrorist group (4)
- 26 Colonnades in European designs (8)

DOWN

- 2 Fiddle part covers cellist Yo-Yo in performance (9)
- 3 Guy had a good time out of bounds (5)
- 4 Headgear designed by outfitters losing out (7)
- 5 Safety features broadcast a great deal (3,4)
- 6 First-class rhubarb flan served up here? (9)
- 7 Astonished by outrageous Edwina rejecting Democrat (2,3)
- 8 Time to question the leadership of Steve Jobs (5)
- 10 Very short skirts – amounts to 4 by the sound of it! (5)
- 13 Two US billionaires in stretches (9)
- 15 Type of hearing unsuitable for High Court? (5,4)
- 16 Lord Archer's one on two counts (2-3)
- 17 Aim to get grouse in final stage (3-4)
- 18 Money raisers for famous eastern hotel (7)
- 19 Those in favour of goodbye sessions? (5)
- 21 Cattle no good in Australia (5)
- 22 Good relations may get involved with it (5)



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

Clue of the week: Even in prison, Donald's heading for president (9)
Filbert, The Independent

Solution to Crossword 1417

ACROSS: 1 Object ball 6 Limb 9 Capital 10 Rag-bags 12 Earth 13 Editorial 14 Test matches 16 Aim 18 Air 19 Show-jumpers 22 Haymakers 23 Rough 25 Plaudit 26 No-trump 27 Tosh 28 Drawing pin

DOWN: 1 Orchestra 2 Japer 3 Cut the mustard 4 Boldest 5 Largish 7 Inanimate 8 Basil 11 Good Samaritan 15 Spray cans 17 Misshapen 20 One-star 21 Just now 22 Hop it 24 Usurp

Clue of the week: Lamb possibly? Try it without sauce initially (8, first letter E) **Solution:** ESSAYIST ((Charles) Lamb S inside TRY= ESSAY IT)

The winner of 1417 is Erica McCullough from New Bilton

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Sudoku 961 (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 960

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



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