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# THE WEEK

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THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

## The vaccine wars An embarrassment for the EU?

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## What happened

## Vaccine wars

Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, defended the slow roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines across the EU this week, and suggested that nations which had moved faster had compromised on “safety and efficacy”. The Commission, which negotiated the bloc’s vaccine purchases, has been greatly criticised over delays to delivery. By midweek, the EU had administered just three doses per 100 people, compared to ten in the US, and 15 in the UK. Jens Spahn, the German health minister, said it would be “at least another ten tough weeks” before vaccine shortages eased.

Last week, the Commission became embroiled in a row with Anglo-Swedish drug maker AstraZeneca, which had announced that it could supply only 31 million of the 80 million doses of the Oxford vaccine ordered by the EU for the first quarter. The EU imposed restrictions on vaccine exports to other nations, including the UK – a decision criticised by the WHO. The Commission also tried to impose controls at the Irish border, by triggering a clause in the Brexit agreement. Both Boris Johnson and the Irish Taoiseach Micheál Martin expressed “deep unhappiness”, and the decision was abruptly reversed.



Von der Leyen: under pressure

## What the editorials said

The Commission’s vaccine programme has provided “the best possible advertisement for Brexit”, said Die Zeit (Hamburg).

“It is acting slowly, bureaucratically and in a protectionist manner. And if something goes wrong, it’s everyone else’s fault.” Its blunders are causing serious damage not just to the EU’s citizens – by delaying the vaccine roll-out – but also to its image in the world. The decision to invoke Article 16 of the Northern Ireland protocol, overriding Brexit arrangements, was a “serious misjudgement”, said The Irish Times. It’s extraordinary that von der Leyen should have waded into this ultra-sensitive area without even consulting Dublin.

The vaccine programme has shown Britain at its best (*see page 24*), and the EU “at its worst”, said The Observer. “In order to demonstrate EU ‘solidarity’ and the power of the single market”, all 27 member states were involved in the acquisition process. Inevitably, this slowed it up: an EU contract with AstraZeneca, ready in June, wasn’t signed until August (three months after the UK’s). Other orders were held up amid haggling over price and liability issues – mere details in a pandemic. Europe’s medicines regulator has also “dithered”, too: the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was only approved last week. The EU must “get its house in order”.

## What happened

## The coup in Myanmar

Myanmar’s armed forces staged a dramatic early morning coup this week, returning the fledgling democracy to military rule. Min Aung Hlaing, an army general, assumed control of the country and declared a one-year state of emergency on Monday, hours after Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party she leads had been detained in pre-dawn raids. In November, the NLD had trounced a rival, army-backed party in a general election which military and opposition figures claimed was rigged.

The coup – in a country which had been ruled by the military for 50 years until 2011 – was swiftly condemned by foreign leaders, including Boris Johnson. Neither Suu Kyi nor her loyal ally, President Win Myint, have been seen since the military took control; they both face criminal charges widely condemned as trumped-up.



Suu Kyi: “trumped-up” charges

## What the editorials said

This was “not a coup d’état in the conventional sense”, said The Times. The military already pulled the strings in Myanmar. Its generals drafted the 2008 constitution by which the country is governed; the army is guaranteed a quarter of seats in parliament and controls three of the most powerful ministries. But the military had failed to grasp how unpopular it has become, in the wake of Suu Kyi’s triumph in the country’s first democratic election in 2015. And even though observers deemed November’s elections fair, said the South China Morning Post, the generals cried foul. Alas, the depressing turn of events that has followed “rolls back the clock” on years of hard-won political reforms.

But much has changed since the army first took power in Myanmar in 1962, said the FT. The West is better able to put pressure on rogue regimes with targeted sanctions, and the nation is now steeped in pro-democracy activism. “The flame of Myanmar’s democracy burnt in darkness for years. Even now, it may not have been entirely extinguished.”

## It wasn’t all bad

The number of people diagnosed with the flu has plunged by 95% in England this year, to levels not seen for 130 years. In the second week of January – usually the season’s peak – GPs reported a flu rate of 1.1 per 100,000, compared with a five-year average of 27. In the same week, at a time when there are usually thousands of serious cases, zero flu patients were admitted to hospital. Experts credited better hygiene, good flu jab uptake and social distancing for the drop.

**A Swedish nurse has been selected to be the sole attendee at Scandinavia’s biggest film festival this year. The Gothenburg film festival has chosen to go ahead despite the pandemic, and selected Lisa Enroth from 12,000 applicants to spend a week on the remote island of Pater Noster watching every film. “In healthcare, I seem to have spent ages listening, testing and consoling. I feel like I’m drained of energy,” she said. “The wind, the sea, the possibility of being part of a totally different kind of reality for a week – all this is really attractive.” She will keep a daily video diary that will appear on the festival’s website.**



A Jewish man has bequeathed a sizeable chunk of his fortune to the French village whose residents hid him and his family during the Second World War, despite the risk to their own lives. Eric Schwam, who died aged 90 on Christmas Day, is believed to have left €2m to the remote mountain village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, which gave shelter to 3,500 Jews during the war. Schwam and his family arrived in 1943 and stayed until 1950. In his will, he said the gift was an expression of his gratitude, and suggested it be spent on youth services.

COVER CARTOON: NEIL DAVIES

## What the commentators said

The EU's target of vaccinating 70% of all adults across the bloc by the summer looks "remote", said Ido Vock in the *New Statesman*. AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Moderna are all reporting delays to Europe's supply. One French vaccine, from Sanofi, has been delayed; another has failed. So the continent's hopes increasingly rest on the one-jab vaccine produced by Johnson & Johnson, which may be ready by April. But even so, Brussels "still has a strong argument in favour of its vaccine procurement strategy": without the EU's joint scheme, the vaccine warfare playing out between the EU and UK might now be playing out between all 27 member states. "Going it alone" would have been a disaster, particularly for the smaller, poorer nations.

That doesn't excuse its behaviour, said Robert Taylor in *The Daily Telegraph*. "The EU was so disgusted that Britain was zooming along in the vaccine fast lane" that it threatened the Northern Ireland settlement it had "spent the last four years preaching about". European leaders have also irresponsibly promoted baseless rumours about the efficacy of the AstraZeneca jab, while simultaneously demanding more of it from British factories, said Tom Chivers on *UnHerd*. Nevertheless, it's crucial that "we keep the EU sweet", rather than starting a real war. "Vials, reagents, nucleotide bases and so on are all made in different places, and if countries stop cooperating, it suddenly gets much worse for everyone." Hence, presumably, the complete absence of "crowing" or angry rhetoric from the British Government, said Dominic Lawson in *The Sunday Times*. No one is saying, "we told you so", or "hands off our vaccine".

"The last year has shown that even in this globalised age, the nation state trumps the market," said James Forsyth in *The Times*. In the past, it was often assumed that the location of your manufacturing didn't matter. The recent scramble for vaccines and PPE has shown otherwise. There are only a few dozen large-scale vaccine bioreactors in the world. Six are based here, which is why vaccines can be made at such pace. Around two-thirds of our PPE is now being made in the UK. But in the long run, these new trends pose potential risks for Brexit Britain, a nation stuck between the EU and the US, "two large economies with protectionist tendencies".

## What the commentators said

"Few reputations in history have moved between such extremes as that of Aung San Suu Kyi," said Richard Lloyd Parry in *The Times*. The 15 years of house arrest she endured under military rule saw her celebrated as a "paragon of peaceful resistance"; her party's landslide election win in 2015 was cheered around the world. Yet two years later, she was virtually a pariah. The murderous ethnic cleansing of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim population – and her defence of the army responsible for it – appalled many of her former admirers. But it shouldn't have come as a surprise, said Salil Tripathi in *Foreign Policy*. Suu Kyi, 75, always tried to keep the military on side: she even picked a Burmese martial song on *Desert Island Discs*, reminding us that her father founded the Burmese army and that soldiers are "part of my family". The generals, though, saw it differently. Having seen their chosen party trounced in November's election, they feared the balance of power had tipped decisively in Suu Kyi's favour – and made their move.

Suu Kyi's appeasement of the military was a failure from which her reputation may never recover, said Adam Simpson in *The Conversation*. Yet her arrest is nonetheless bad news for her country, where poverty is entrenched and deep ethnic and religious divisions persist. "It is the ordinary people of Myanmar who will suffer the consequences," agreed Mark Almond in *The Daily Mail*. And the chances of neighbouring countries stepping in to help them look slim. Cambodia and Thailand turned a blind eye to events, while China is a willing guarantor of dictatorships. Like it or not, hopes of restoring democracy now rest on a deal being struck between the army and Suu Kyi, said Vasuki Shastry in *The Guardian*. If that doesn't happen, Myanmar is likely to face prolonged unrest. After all, if November's elections proved anything, it's that "ordinary Burmese have enjoyed the democratic dividend and are not about to give it up".

## What next?

AstraZeneca has promised to supply an extra nine million vaccine doses to the EU by March, says BBC News – still only about half of the initial target. It says it was only ever obliged to make its "best reasonable efforts" to supply the jab.

Both France and Germany have said they won't give the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine to over-65s, citing a lack of data for the age group. Belgium has restricted it to under-55s, and Switzerland has declined to approve it for now. However, new trial evidence published in *The Lancet* suggests the vaccine provides 76% protection after just one jab, and 82% after a second shot 12 weeks later. The results also show that it has a "substantial" effect on transmission.

## What next?

Suu Kyi has been charged with possessing illegally imported walkie-talkies, and could face two years in jail, while President Win Myint has been charged with breaching coronavirus laws by meeting people on the campaign trail. Health workers in 70 hospitals have warned they will not work under the military regime – a sign of growing discontent over the coup. Military chiefs say elections will be held in a year. But that hasn't satisfied the international community: Britain has threatened to withdraw aid, and the US to impose sanctions on the coup's leaders.

## THE WEEK

What was it about Tom Moore that so captivated the nation back in April? His cheerful resolve, as he walked 100 lengths of his garden before his 100th birthday to raise money for the NHS, was admirable; but no one could have predicted the outpouring of affection for him that followed. Having set himself a target of £1,000, he raised £33m; he released a No. 1 single, and wrote a memoir. He was promoted, and he was knighted. For months, he was rarely out of the news: he even posed, elegantly, for the cover of *GQ*. That interview was conducted by Stuart McGurk, who this week tried to define the centenarian's particular appeal. In person, Captain Tom was modest, funny and thoughtful, he wrote, but "most of all, I was struck by the kind of indomitable sunny spirit that's easy to claim, but hard to fake". It was not bravado, or a stiff upper lip, but a "character trait, one he was blessed to be blessed with and one he blessed everyone else with too". During the warm, sunny days of the first lockdown, we were encouraged by the sight of the slender, smartly dressed war veteran, hunched determinedly over his walking frame. His death with Covid, during the cold and rain of the third lockdown, is likely to have an equivalently demoralising effect on a weary nation. But the spirit of this good man, whose long life ended with a truly remarkable year, should continue to inspire. "I've always believed things will get better," he said in December. "The Sun will shine again, the birds will sing and we'll all have a lovely day tomorrow." **Caroline Law**

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## Controversy of the week

## Wild times on Wall Street

The trading frenzy over shares in the ailing US video games retailer GameStop has to be the most sensational business story of our age, said Rana Foroohar in the FT (*see page 46*). It's a David and Goliath tale in which the big beasts of Wall Street were humbled by a "flash mob" of amateur day traders – a group of people who, rather like the rioters who stormed the US capitol, felt powerless in the face of "a system of American oligopoly" and so rose up to strike a blow against it.

GameStop was a company that looked set to die, said Kenan Malik in *The Observer*. It has had to close 450 outlets because its core business is selling games on disc, whereas gamers prefer increasingly to download them online. And sensing blood, the big hedge funds have for some years been "shorting" the company – selling GameStop shares that they've borrowed but don't actually own, waiting for the price to fall, then buying the same quantity of shares at far lower cost and returning them to the lender. As a result, the company's stock nosedived from \$56 a share in 2013 to between \$3 and \$10 a share for much of last year. But two weeks ago something extraordinary happened, said Tom Leonard in the *Daily Mail*. The struggling video game seller's stock price skyrocketed. By the end of January, it had hit a high of \$483 and the company was valued at about \$10bn – more than American Airlines. And as the price soared various hedge funds found themselves in deep trouble: instead of buying back the shares they'd borrowed at a lower price, they now had to do so at a massively higher one. In total, short sellers are believed to have lost \$19bn on GameStop.

So "a raging mob of angry small-time retail investors" brought down the "short-selling money bags", said Jeremy Warner in *The Daily Telegraph*. And one should raise a cheer for them: it is a victory for the small guy. These day traders do most of their trades on a commission-free online platform called Robinhood and compare notes on WallStreetBets, a message board on Reddit. A band of them, led by a trader whose YouTube name is "Roaring Kitty", had been cooking up ways of putting the squeeze on short sellers for months, said Derek Thompson in *The Atlantic*. But their detailed plan to buy up GameStop's stock and push up the price wasn't just an act of high-minded revenge; they saw it as "a tasty investment". And for some it certainly was, said Jack Rivlin in *The Spectator*: the user who first pitched GameStop on Reddit has seen his investment of \$50,000 peak at \$50m. So let's not get too sentimental about the WallStreetBets crowd. They're mostly bored young men addicted to risky bets. As this one turned out to be, said Joseph Rachman on *Reaction*. This week the stock price crashed, after Robinhood, fearful it couldn't meet its obligations, had to put a halt to trading in GameStop shares. And so we end up with the familiar story where the few who buy early and sell early "make fortunes at the expense of the laggards", said Ross Clark in *The Spectator*. What we've here is not a noble populist crusade, but "a Ponzi scheme in moral clothing".



"Roaring Kitty": not just idealism

## Testing for new variant

Ministers have ordered door-to-door testing in eight postcode areas of England, where cases of the more infectious South African variant of the coronavirus have been detected in people with no travel link to the country. Residents of those areas have been urged to only leave their homes when it is essential to do so. The "surge" testing, of 80,000 people, which also involves mobile clinics and home kits, is taking place in parts of Merseyside, three London boroughs, Kent, Surrey, Hertfordshire and the West Midlands. Tests are also being conducted in parts of Bristol and Liverpool where mutations have been found in the original and Kent strain of the virus.

## Visa scheme launches

A scheme that offers visas to live and work in the UK to the five million residents of Hong Kong who hold a British National Overseas passport (BNO) went live this week. The scheme, which offers a pathway to citizenship, was unveiled last year following Beijing's imposition of new national security laws on the territory. Last week, the Hong Kong authorities retaliated by declaring that BNOs were no longer regarded as valid travel documents for entering or leaving the city.

## Spirit of the age

Online giants such as Amazon have so increased their deliveries in the pandemic that small retailers are struggling to buy enough cardboard boxes. Jawbone Brewing, a craft brewery in southwest London, told the BBC that they'd had to ask customers to bring their own boxes.

Ealing Council's attempt to "decolonise" its streets has not proved simple. In Southall, Havelock Avenue – named for Sir Henry Havelock, who led the relief of Lucknow – was recently renamed after Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. There had been a consultation in the largely Punjabi community, but some Sikh leaders accused the council of cultural appropriation, for naming a street after a figure who is regarded as a "manifestation of God".

## Good week for:

**HMRC**, with reports that five top music acts have contributed more than £50m to the public finances in a year. According to *The Sunday Times Tax List*, Ed Sheeran is the largest pop star taxpayer: he paid £28.2m. Adele, Queen, Robbie Williams and The Beatles were the other big contributors.

**George Osborne**, who is simplifying his professional life by giving up some of his many part-time jobs to become a full-time banker. The ex-chancellor has been made a partner at boutique firm Robey Warshaw. He will leave the *London Evening Standard* and the US investment manager BlackRock next month.

**Contagion**, the 2011 film about a global pandemic, with reports that it helped inspire Matt Hancock's response to the current crisis. Apparently, the Health Secretary often referenced the film in meetings, citing in particular a scene illustrating the importance of having not just a vaccine, but adequate supplies of it.

**Jared Kushner**, Donald Trump's son-in-law, who was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for his work in the Middle East. His name was put forward by Alan Dershowitz, in his capacity as emeritus professor at Harvard Law School. Thousands of people have the right to submit nominations, and being nominated does not imply the endorsement of the Nobel Committee.

## Bad week for:

**Foreign holidays**, after Downing Street insiders warned that there was little prospect of Britons being able to travel overseas this summer. "Internally the view is that UK holidays may be possible, but going abroad is very unlikely," said a source.

## Poll watch

**17%** of Britons believe the country will be able to open up as normal by the spring. **67%** of men and **58%** of women say they would like life to return to exactly how it was before the pandemic. **23%** of men and **31%** of women say they would not. *BritainThinks/Sunday Times*

**40%** of Britons say they are doing less exercise during this lockdown than the first one, and only **13%** are exercising more. **19%** are watching more TV; **13%** are watching less. A third are working more, but time spent on volunteering and hobbies has decreased. *UCL/BBC*

If the coronavirus vaccine became available to them for free, only **41%** of Americans said they'd get it as soon as possible. *KFF/Times*

### Edinburgh

**Back to school:** Nicola Sturgeon has announced a phased reopening of schools for Scotland's youngest schoolchildren. The First Minister told MSPs on Tuesday that nursery-age children, and those in primary years 1-3 would return from 22 February – assuming coronavirus rates continue to fall. She added that there would also be a very limited return for senior pupils to allow for the practical work necessary for some courses. But she warned adults would have to live with restrictions for longer: the current lockdown will remain in place at least until the end of the month, while travellers arriving from outside the UK will be subject to a “managed quarantine” system to prevent new strains of the virus from reaching Scotland. Sturgeon also confirmed 610,778 Scots had so far received their first dose of a Covid vaccine, and that the country was on track to vaccinate all over-70s by mid-February.

### Whitehaven, Cumbria

**Mine objection:** The Government has been rebuked by its own climate change advisers for allowing the construction of the UK's first deep coal mine in 30 years. The colliery, near Whitehaven, is scheduled to extract 2.78 million tonnes of coking coal a year for use in steel production. Its advocates point out that it will create 500 jobs directly, and 2,000 more in the supply chain; and that the UK cannot produce steel without coking coal. Cumbria County Council approved it last year, and Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick declined to intervene. But last Saturday, Lord Deben, chair of the Climate Change Committee, said that Jenrick's failure to call in the plan for further scrutiny gave a “negative impression of the UK's climate priorities”.

### Manchester

**Racist abuse:** Manchester police have launched an investigation into the online racist abuse that was levelled at several black footballers last week. Man United's Marcus Rashford (right) described the abuse he had received, following his match against Arsenal on 30 January, as “humanity and social media at its worst”, but declined to make it public, saying “I have beautiful children of all colours following me and they don't need to read it”. Chelsea's Reece James and West Brom's Romaine Sawyers were also targeted. Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden has vowed to do more to tackle the problem.



### Belfast

**Post-Brexit threats:** Inspections of animals and animal-based food products at Larne and Belfast ports were suspended on Monday amid concerns for the safety of the officials carrying out the post-Brexit checks. The Police Service of Northern Ireland had previously warned that the terms of the Northern Ireland protocol – which keeps the province within the single market – were causing discontent in loyalist communities in particular. It said the “signals” included comments on social media, but also the appearance of new graffiti referring to the Irish Sea border, and describing port staff as “targets”. Staff had also reported seeing “suspicious activity” around the ports, including people apparently taking down their car number plates.

### Stansted, Essex

**“No case to answer”:** Fifteen human rights activists who broke into Stansted Airport in 2017 to stop a deportation flight have won an appeal against their convictions. In a non-violent protest, the “Stansted 15” locked themselves together on the runway to prevent the repatriation of 57 detainees to Ghana and Nigeria. They were convicted the following year of endangering the safety of an aerodrome – a terror-related offence that carries a maximum term of life in prison. However, in a judgment handed down last Friday, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Burnett of Maldon, said the protesters should not have been charged with that offence, because their conduct “did not satisfy” its various elements. “In truth,” he added, they had “no case to answer.”



### Coventry

**Urban airport:** The world's first urban airport specifically for cargo drones and “flying cars” (vertical take-off and landing vehicles) is to open in Coventry later this year, as part of its UK City of Culture celebrations. The airport, known as Air One, is only temporary: it will

be used to demonstrate how air-taxis and the like would function in built-up environments; but the firm behind it hopes eventually to create a permanent facility in Coventry – and to roll out the concept to cities worldwide. The project was awarded a £1.2m government grant, and is also being backed by Hyundai.



### London

**Digging in:** The veteran eco-warrior Dan Hooper (aka Swampy) and his 16-year-old son were among nine activists holed up in a tunnel outside Euston Station this week, as part of a campaign to highlight the number of woodlands that will be destroyed during the construction of HS2. Activists had been camped out in Euston Square Gardens, near the planned terminus, for months, during which time they secretly dug a 100ft tunnel network. A group occupied it last week, and said they were ready to stay there for the “long haul” – despite attempts by HS2's bailiffs to evict them. There have been a number of collapses, and they have been warned they could suffocate or drown. Hooper said he'd tried to dissuade his son from joining him in the tunnel, to no avail.

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### Brussels

**Restive continent:** Thousands of people took to the streets of cities across Europe last week, to vent their frustration at ongoing lockdown restrictions. Police arrested hundreds of people in Brussels, Vienna and Budapest; there were also protests in Amsterdam – but no repeat of the anti-curfew riots that spread across ten cities in the Netherlands last week (*see page 16*). In Budapest, a demonstration was led by workers in the hospitality sector, who are angry that pubs, clubs and restaurants remain closed, although some shops have been allowed to open. Hungary has been subject to a lockdown since 11 November, and the government says that mass vaccination will be the only route out. Hospitality workers also protested in Bulgaria. In Vienna, around 5,000 people defied lockdown rules to attend a “walk” organised by the far-right Freedom Party. Austria’s lockdown has been extended to 7 February. In Slovenia, protesters demanded the reopening of schools.

### Paris

**Macron under pressure:** President Macron resisted calls to impose a new national lockdown last weekend, and instead further closed French borders. Non-essential travel from outside the EU is now prohibited, and travellers from within the EU must present a negative PCR test to be admitted. He also ordered the closure of large shopping centres; however, schools remain open. France is currently recording around 447 Covid deaths a day, far fewer than in the UK and Germany. However, only 36% of voters have confidence in Macron’s handling of the pandemic; and last week, a poll of voting intentions in the second round of presidential elections due next year put him only four points ahead of Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Rally party. This week, she said his border closures had come too late, saying she had been calling for a shutdown “since the beginning”.

### Lisbon

**Covid surge:** Portugal’s health service has been overwhelmed by a dramatic surge in Covid-19 cases, blamed by the country’s leaders on the rapid spread of the more contagious “British” variant and the relaxation of restrictions over the Christmas holiday. Hospitals in Austria have agreed to take some critically ill Portuguese patients, and Germany is sending military medics and equipment to help ease the crisis. Portugal fared relatively well in the first wave last spring, but the rates of infection, hospitalisation and death have risen dramatically this year. Some 45% of all the deaths recorded in Portugal since the pandemic began were recorded in January. And at the start of this week, the country, which has a population of ten million, had the highest number of cases and deaths in the world, per capita. PM António Costa said Portugal had entered a “terrible” stage.

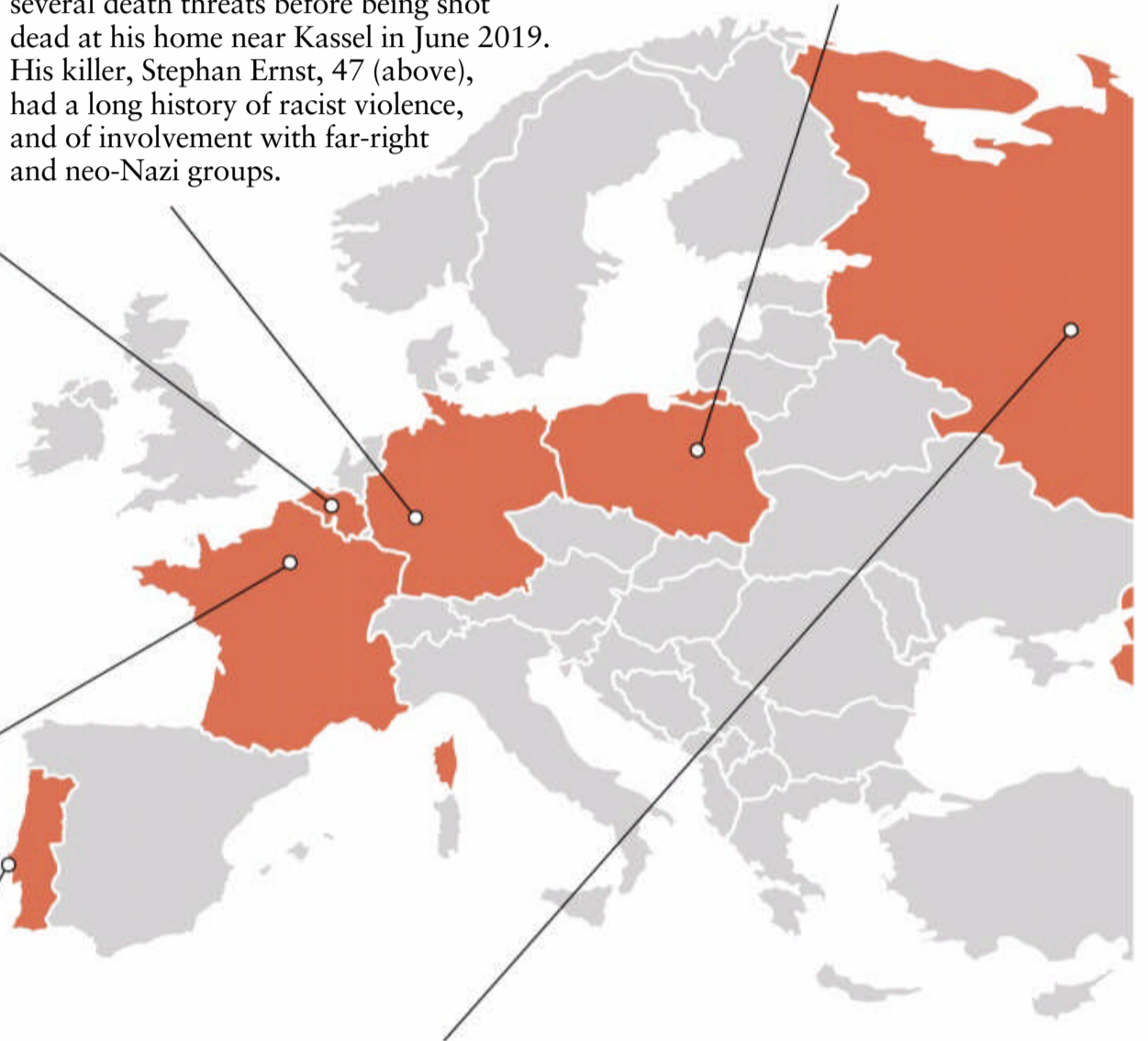


### Frankfurt, Germany

**Assassin jailed:** A German neo-Nazi has been sentenced to life in prison for the assassination of Walter Lübcke, a centre-right politician who backed Angela Merkel’s welcome to refugees. In a speech in 2015, Lübcke – the head of a regional council, and a member of the CDU – had said that giving refuge to the vulnerable was a German value, and that anyone who did not share such values could leave. He received several death threats before being shot dead at his home near Kassel in June 2019. His killer, Stephan Ernst, 47 (above), had a long history of racist violence, and of involvement with far-right and neo-Nazi groups.

### Warsaw

**Abortion law:** Poland’s right-wing government has implemented a court ruling that imposes a near-total ban on abortion, prompting renewed protests across the country. The ruling was made in October, but the government held off formalising it then, in the face of mass pro-choice demonstrations that morphed into a broader anti-government protest. It had signalled a willingness to compromise, but last week it went ahead with implementing the law, which bans abortion except in cases of rape, incest or where the woman’s life is in danger. The mainly Catholic nation already had some of Europe’s strictest abortion laws. Only around 2,000 legal terminations are carried out there each year.



### Moscow

**Navalny jailed:** The Russian anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny was jailed for three-and-a-half years this week, for violating parole conditions by failing to report to the police last autumn. His lawyers said the charge was ridiculous: he could not have reported to the police because at that time, he was in Germany being treated for nerve agent poisoning widely believed to have been carried out by Russian security services. The parole conditions related to his conviction for fraud in 2014 on charges he insists were fabricated. In a combative address to the court, Navalny said that the Putin regime was putting “one person behind bars to scare millions”, and mocked the president as “Vladimir the Poisoner of Underpants”.

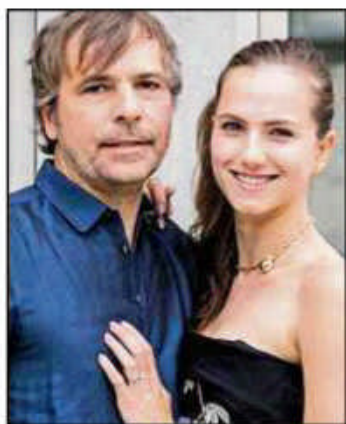
More than 1,400 Navalny supporters were arrested by security forces in Moscow and St Petersburg following the court verdict, to add to the 5,600 or so detained during protests in cities across Russia at the weekend. Navalny was arrested last month, on his arrival back in Russia. At that point, he released a video purporting to show Putin’s \$1bn mansion on the Black Sea. This week, a billionaire friend of the president came forward to claim the sprawling property belonged to him.



**Beaver Creek, Yukon**

**Vaccine cheats:** A multimillionaire couple who travelled from their home in Vancouver to an isolated community in Yukon province, for the sole purpose of having Covid jabs intended for vulnerable and elderly indigenous locals have become hate figures in Canada.

Casino boss Rodney Baker and his actress wife Ekaterina chartered a plane to fly them to Beaver Creek, where they posed as local motel workers and got their shots at a mobile clinic. Swiftly rumbled, they were fined C\$2,300 – but critics said it was insufficient punishment for such a wealthy couple, and called for them to be jailed.

**Washington DC**

**Green agenda:** President Biden has ordered the Pentagon to class climate change as a national security issue, as part of a new whole-government approach. “This is a case where conscience and convenience cross paths,” said Biden last week. “When I think of climate change and the answers to it, I think of jobs.” Since taking office, Biden has directed the US to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord; scrapped the giant Keystone XL oil pipeline; ordered a ban on new oil and gas leases on federal land; set a goal for a third of all federal lands to be reserved for conservation; pledged to replace the government fleet of 650,000 vehicles with electric models; and ordered federal agencies to fast-track new renewables projects.

**Los Angeles, California**

**Abuse claims:** The Hollywood actress Evan Rachel Wood has publicly accused her former fiancé, the rock star Marilyn Manson, of years of “horrific” abuse. Two years ago, Wood, 33, testified to Congress about her experience of sexual and physical violence, but without identifying a perpetrator. This week, however, she named Manson, 52, as the man who “started grooming me when I was a teenager”. Four other women have since made similar allegations, including

ones of rape. Manson (real name Brian Warner), whose record label immediately dropped him, has denied wrongdoing.

**Washington DC**

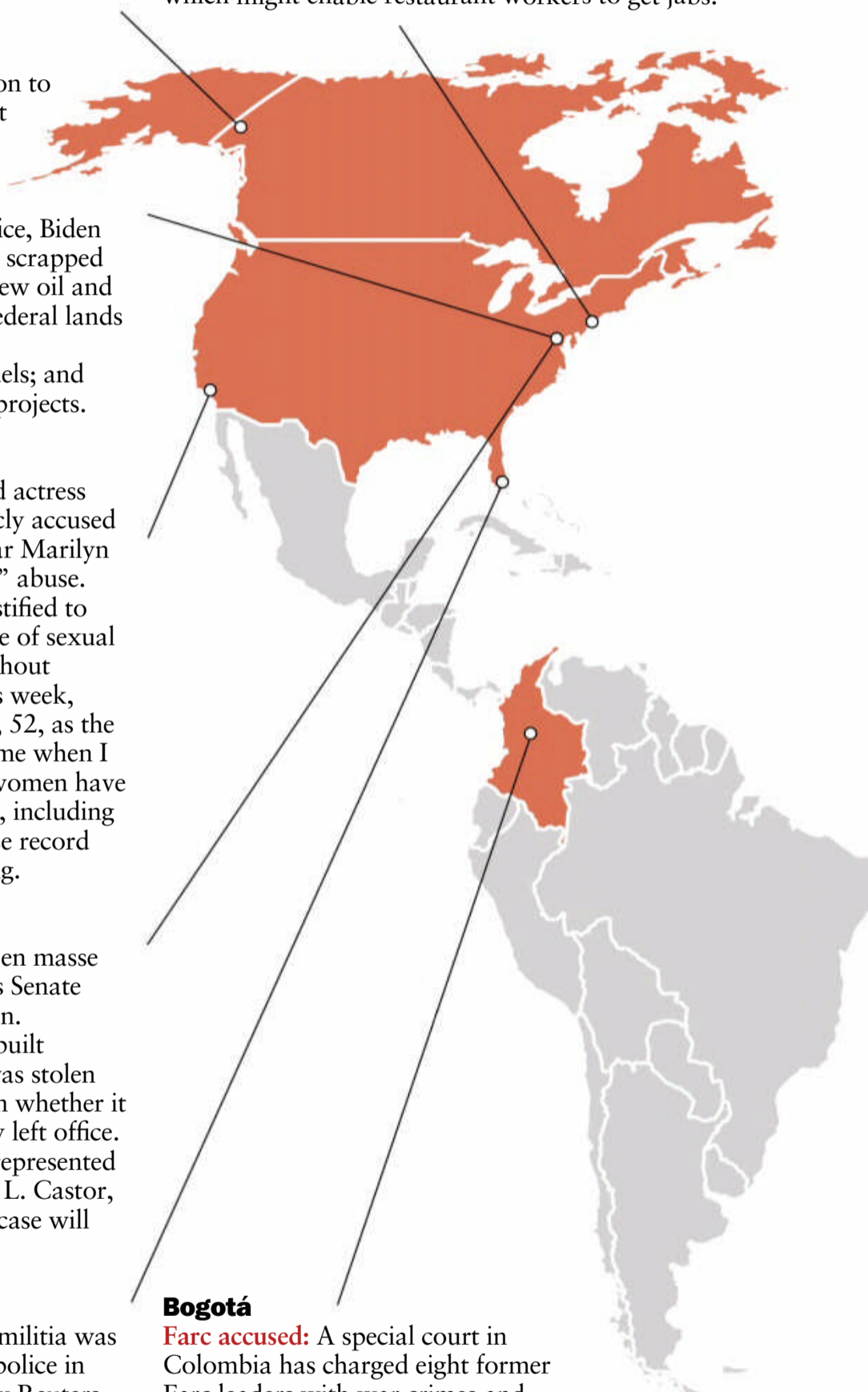
**Lawyer walkout:** Donald Trump’s legal team resigned en masse on Sunday, following a disagreement over tactics at his Senate trial next week, on charges of incitement of insurrection. According to US media, Trump wanted his case to be built around his unproven claim that the 2020 election was stolen from him. But his lawyers insisted they should focus on whether it is constitutional to convict a president who has already left office. Trump’s new legal team is led by David Schoen, who represented the convicted “dirty trickster” Roger Stone, and Bruce L. Castor, a former acting attorney general of Pennsylvania. The case will begin on Tuesday, unless they can secure a delay.

**Miami, Florida**

**FBI informer:** The head of the far-right “Proud Boys” militia was once a “prolific” informer, for both the FBI and local police in Miami, according to old court transcripts uncovered by Reuters. These show that Enrique Tarrío was given a reduced sentence in a fraud case in 2014, after an FBI agent and a federal prosecutor testified that he had supplied them with information that had led to the prosecution of more than a dozen people in cases involving drugs, gambling and people-trafficking. The Proud Boys were among the mob that stormed the Capitol on 6 January. However, Tarrío was not present, having been arrested two days earlier on charges including burning a Black Lives Matter banner that had been stolen from a church. The FBI later said they’d arrested him in an effort to prevent the Washington attack.

**New York**

**Deaths “undercounted”:** The death toll from Covid-19 among nursing home residents in the state of New York may have been far more than the official count of 8,700, according to a new report. Attorney General Letitia James re-examined data from homes, and found that officials had “severely undercounted” deaths, in part because they’d excluded residents who died after being transferred to hospitals. Separately, New York governor Andrew Cuomo has been coming under increasing pressure over the slow pace of the vaccine roll-out in the state. This week, he sought to blame it on the federal government. “We have 7.1 million people who are eligible. We have 300,000 doses that we get a week. Do the math,” he said. “There’s nothing we can do about that.” However, he said the supply was being increased, which might enable restaurant workers to get jobs.

**Bogotá**

**Farc accused:** A special court in Colombia has charged eight former Farc leaders with war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the leftist guerilla group’s decades-long insurgency. They are the first major charges brought by the court, since it was instituted in 2016, as part of the peace deal between Farc and the Colombian state. Those charged include Farc’s former top commander, Rodrigo Londoño (aka Timochenko), and two others who are now members of Congress. According to the indictment, the group abducted 21,396 people between 1990 and 2016, almost 2,000 of whom were never seen again. Under the terms of the deal, the leaders can avoid jail sentences if they accept the charges within 30 days.



## Jerusalem

**Job hopes:** Israel's rapid roll-out of the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid vaccine has had promising early results, boosting hopes that mass inoculation will curb the pandemic. By this week, almost one in three people in Israel had been vaccinated, including 70% of over-60s. Vaccinations are now being offered to everyone aged over 35, and students aged 16 to 18. Last week, the first data from the roll-out showed that only 317 people out of 715,425 – four in every 10,000 – had become infected within a week of their second dose. Separately, Israel said it would transfer 5,000 doses to the occupied West Bank and Gaza, so that front-line health workers can start getting the jab. Until then, Israel was only offering it to Palestinians living in occupied East Jerusalem, or working in hospitals there.

## New Delhi

**Pandemic “contained”:** India has “contained the pandemic” and “flattened its Covid-19 graph”, the country's health minister announced last week. India has had the second biggest Covid outbreak in the world (after the US) with 10.8 million cases. But the number of new infections has been trending downward since September – falling from over 90,000 a day to around 12,000. The number of daily deaths has also fallen sharply from a peak of 1,290 in September, to 125 this week (on a seven-day average). In total, around 155,000 people have died with Covid-19 in India, out of a population of 1.37 billion, giving it a relatively low per capita death rate. This week, some of the last remaining Covid restrictions were lifted: swimming pools, cinemas, theatres and exhibition halls are all now fully open.

## Tianjin, China

**Banker executed:** A senior Chinese banker was executed last week, following his conviction on corruption charges. Lai Xiaomin, 58, a former head of the state-controlled China Huarong Asset Management, was sentenced to death in January for accepting \$280m in bribes. He stashed the cash in a flat he called his “supermarket”, but was apparently too scared to spend it. The severity of the sentence, and the rapidity of its deployment, reflect Beijing's increasingly tough stance on corporate corruption.



## Bangui

**City besieged:** Around 200,000 people have been forced from their homes by the renewed fighting in Central African Republic, according to the UN. Around 92,000 of these refugees have crossed the border into DR Congo. Although rich in resources, including diamonds and uranium, the CAR is one of Africa's poorest and most unstable countries. Fighting broke out in December, when a rebel group called the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) launched an assault on the capital, Bangui, in protest at the exclusion of ex-president François Bozizé from elections. It now controls two-thirds of the country, and is laying siege to Bangui in an attempt to oust the re-elected president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra. Conditions in Bangui are said to be “dire”.

## Hanoi

**Hardliner re-elected:** Vietnam's Communist Party has re-elected Nguyen Phú Trọng as its general secretary, after a week of closed-door talks at its once-every-five-years Congress. This gives the 76-year-old, who is the country's de facto leader, an unprecedented third term. Under party rules, general secretaries are limited to two terms, and must retire at 65. Trọng, a hard-line Marxist-Leninist, has led an anti-corruption drive that has been popular in Vietnam; he has also cracked down on dissent. Analysts say he may have been reappointed because the party could not agree on his successor.



## Taipei

**War threat:** China has warned Taiwan that any attempt to seek independence “means war”, amid a sharp escalation in tensions between Beijing and the island, which China regards as a renegade territory. Taiwan, which has growing strategic importance as the world's main site for the manufacture of microchips, regards itself as a sovereign state. China has ramped up military drills near the island this year. Last month it twice sent 15 fighter jets into Taiwanese airspace.

## Perth, Australia

**Snap lockdown:** The residents of Perth were sent into lockdown this week after the discovery of a single case of Covid-19. A man who works as a security guard at a Covid quarantine hotel tested positive on Saturday, and the tight, five-day lockdown was imposed 24 hours later. Before that, there hadn't been a locally acquired case in Western Australia for ten months. Under the lockdown, schools, restaurants, bars, cinemas and gyms were all ordered to close, and people were required to stay at home except for essential work, shopping and exercise.

**My father the Nazi**

As a child in the early 1940s, Niklas Frank spent summers at his family's castle in southern Poland. "I knew Poland as our private property," he says. "This, I thought, was quite normal." As he grew older he came to understand the long shadow his father cast over Europe, said Luke Mintz in *The Sunday Telegraph*: as Nazi Governor-General of Poland, Hans Frank – aka the Butcher of Poland – was responsible for the murders of three million Jews. Tried at Nuremberg, he was hanged in 1946. For years, Niklas kept his family history a secret. Then, in 1987, he wrote a book renouncing his father. It shocked Germany, a country that, he says, was still not fully confronting its past. "Never in Germany came an urge from the people to build memorials for Holocaust victims. It was always from politicians. The silent majority was never happy. I'm the only descendant of a big shot Nazi who opened up."

**Evaristo on her OBE**

Bernardine Evaristo is proud of her roots in a working-class, mixed-race family in London. But today, the novelist – who became in 2019 the first black woman to win the Booker Prize – thinks of herself, sometimes amusedly, as part of the establishment: she's a fellow at St Anne's College, Oxford; a vice-president of the Royal Society of Literature; and, last year, she was awarded an OBE. Did she feel conflicted about accepting an award linked to empire?

"They are old-fashioned names and they need to change them," she told Patricia Nicol in the *London Evening Standard*. "[But] my argument is, what does it look like if we don't accept them? If black and Asian authors don't, then they become white honours for white British people [which] goes right up to people becoming Dames and entering the House of Lords. We continue our exclusion from certain levels of participation in society, and I think that would be sad."

**Capturing criminals in 2D**

Tony Barnes is a police officer – but he doesn't investigate crime. His job is to create computer-aided e-fit images of suspects' faces to help his colleagues in the Met catch criminals. In his 11 years on the job, he has made 2,000 such images – and he reckons one in four of them have led officers to a suspect. So what's the secret to a winning image? "In my experience, ladies are better e-fit witnesses than men," he told John Simpson in *The Times*. "They seem to pay more attention to faces." He follows what the witness tells him, whether the suspect has a "beard of bees" or a Cheshire Cat smile – which has sometimes led to his images being ridiculed on social media. But Barnes isn't fazed by that. "Some of the weirdest ones I've done over the years are the ones that have got a result," he says. "There was one that looked like a cat, and they actually found someone that looked like him."



Dressed in a leather jump suit, and riffing on a bass guitar, Suzi Quatro took the world by storm in the 1970s and, in so doing, paved the way for a new generation of female rock stars. Yet the Detroit-born singer-songwriter, now 70, never meant to be a pioneer. "All I wanted to do was play," she told Dave Simpson in *The Guardian*. "I blew the door down but, to be honest, I didn't see the door. I was just doing what I do." Having started performing at 14, she thought of herself as a musician – not as a female one; and any men who took liberties with her paid the price. At one early gig, a man came up to the front, and made a "rude gesture with his tongue, and I just went – bang. With a Fender Precision. That's gonna hurt." Sometimes, though, she had no choice but to let it go. In 1982, during an appearance on his ITV chat show, Russell Harty slapped her hard on the bottom. "He picked his moment," she says. "If you watch [the clip], I slowly turn round and in that moment I'm thinking: do I hit him? Do I kick him in the balls? No, I'm on live television. I sat down, but if he had done that backstage, he'd have been singing soprano for the rest of his life." People sometimes excuse such behaviour on the grounds that things were different then – but Quatro disagrees. "It never was acceptable. You don't touch somebody you're not invited to touch. You just don't do it."

**Castaway of the week**

*This week's edition of Radio 4's Desert Island Discs featured chef and restaurateur Monica Galetti*

- 1\* *Three Little Birds* by Bob Marley, performed by Bob Marley & The Wailers
- 2 *Samoa Matalasi (My Beautiful Samoa)*, written and performed by The Five Stars
- 3 *You Oughta Be in Love* by Dave Dobbyn, performed by Dave Dobbyn (ft. Ardijah)
- 4 *Hotel California* by Don Felder, Don Henley and Glenn Frey, performed by The Eagles
- 5 *La Vie en rose* by Édith Piaf, Louiguy and Marguerite Monnot, performed by Louis Armstrong
- 6 *My Girl* by Smokey Robinson and Ronald White, performed by The Temptations
- 7 *Purple Rain*, written and performed by Prince
- 8 *Feeling Good* by Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse, performed by Nina Simone

**Book:** *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*

**Luxury:** scuba diving gear

\* Choice if allowed only one record

**Viewpoint:****A knockout jab**

"The next problem we'll have is vaccine snobbery. Some people will hold out for the Oxford/AstraZeneca version. 'Not saying there's anything wrong with the others. Just, you know, Oxford is Oxford, if you get my meaning. I got a 2:1 in classics from Magdalen and I can tell you they're bloody rigorous.' The remoaners, meanwhile, will be hankering after the Pfizer jab: 'I trust German technology.' Me? I want Novavax. Made in Stockton-on-Tees. I suspect it will pack more of a punch. A bloke I met in a pub on Teesside told me that if the virus came anywhere near him, he'd 'flatten the bastard'. That's the sort of no-nonsense approach we need in these difficult times."

Rod Liddle in *The Sunday Times*

**Farewell**

**Rémy Julienne**, stunt driver who worked on *The Italian Job* and many *James Bond* films, died 21 January, aged 90.

**Cloris Leachman**, Oscar- and Emmy-winning actress, died 27 January, aged 94.

**Captain Sir Tom Moore**, war veteran and charity fundraiser, died 2 February, aged 100.

**Hilton Valentine**, guitarist with The Animals, died 29 January, aged 77.



# Working together is more important than ever in the fight against COVID-19

At Facebook, we're working with nearly 100 governments and organisations globally, including the World Health Organization and European Centre for Disease Control, to distribute authoritative COVID-19 information on our platforms. Together, we're building real-time resources to provide accurate information and fight the pandemic.

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- French and Italian epidemiologists and health experts are using Facebook technology to anticipate the viral spread of COVID-19 and identify the most at-risk communities.
- We've worked with governments across Europe to build WhatsApp chatbots that answer questions about COVID-19 quickly and accurately.

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# Our disappearing soil

*The earth beneath our feet is the source of a great deal of the life on this planet – but it's under threat*

## How was the Earth's soil formed?

Although our planet is 4.54 billion years old, what we think of as soil today didn't form until about 450 million years ago, thanks to the combined action of percolating water and living organisms. Essentially, soil consists of a mix of materials that have been broken up from rocks and minerals, combined with more or less decomposed organic matter and water. It's also filled with living things: tiny micro-organisms such as bacteria, archaea and fungi; larger fauna such as insects and earthworms; and the mammals and reptiles that make their homes in it. One gram of soil is estimated to hold anything between 4,000 and 50,000 species of micro-organisms, while the ground beneath our feet is home to a quarter of all animal species on Earth.



*Home to a quarter of all animal species on Earth*

## Why is it so important?

The complex food webs in soil recycle nutrients from the organic material in it, and fix nitrogen from the air. Soil is central to life on Earth: obviously, all human life depends on it – soil contains the nutrients for crops and vegetation to grow, and provides the foothold for their roots. But soil does plenty more besides. It is home to bacteria and fungi which are used in the production of foods ranging from cheese to wine and even soy sauce, and which are crucial to the development of drugs and vaccines, from well-known antibiotics like penicillin to bleomycin (used for treating cancer) to amphotericin for fungal infections. Soil also imparts huge environmental benefits. It filters rainwater and stores it, regulating the discharge of moisture to prevent flooding. And it acts as a vast and crucially important store of carbon.

## How does it store carbon?

The world's soils contain an estimated 2,500 gigatons of carbon – more than three times the amount in the atmosphere and four times what is stored in all living plants and animals. Scientists estimate that soil removes some 25% of fossil fuel emissions from the Earth's atmosphere each year, making it an essential component in the fight against global warming. In fact, it's such an effective carbon sink that if we could increase the amount it can store by just 0.4%, we could halt the build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air. But the ability of soil to effectively store carbon depends on it both remaining intact and in a healthy state. And, unfortunately, that hasn't been happening for a long time.

## How fast is soil disappearing?

Very fast: the world is losing about 30 football pitches of fertile soil every minute, according to the Soil Association. Since the industrial revolution, about 135 billion tonnes of soil is estimated to have been lost from farmland, according to soil scientist Professor Rattan Lal. In Iowa's fertile farmland, for instance, the average topsoil depth decreased from 14-18 inches at the start of the 20th century to 6-8 inches by its end. And it's not just the speed at which soil is disappearing that's the

problem; it's the quality of the soil that remains. "Many types of soil degradation are invisible," says Ronald Vargas, of the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation. "You just don't see the loss of organic carbon from soils or pollution building up in it until you try to plant crops there." The ability of soil to support plant life is being reduced by erosion, compaction, nutrient imbalances, acidification and water-logging around the world.

## Why is that happening?

Several of the most significant causes are climate-related. Some 29 million acres of land are lost every year to desertification, the loss of vegetation often brought about by shifts in climate and by over-grazing. Rising temperatures

also increase the frequency of droughts and wildfires, which degrade the quality of soil. Other causes are still more directly linked with human behaviour. One is urbanisation, as the growth of towns, cities and road networks seals soil beneath layers of asphalt and concrete. And another is deforestation: vegetation is being removed on a mass scale around the world, exposing soil to erosion from wind and rain and meaning that it cannot be replenished by organic matter. But perhaps the most immediate threat to the world's soil comes from agriculture.

## How does farming harm soil?

It isn't farming per se that's the problem; it's the way in which agriculture has evolved in recent history. Farms have increasingly come to rely on heavy tilling, multiple harvests and large-scale use of agrochemicals in order to increase yields and maximise profits. In the past 20 years, the world's agricultural production has increased threefold and the amount of irrigated land has doubled, according to the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. But that has come at a cost: the JRC has warned that productivity has decreased on 20% of the world's cropland, 16% of forest land, 19% of grassland, and 27% of rangeland. Heavy ploughing not only disrupts soil ecosystems; it also releases carbon into the atmosphere, hindering the fight against climate change.

## How to feed the ten billion

The world's population – now about 7.8 billion – is expected to hit ten billion in 2050. Food production will have to rise vastly to feed humanity; so agriculture will have to be made much more sustainable if the soil is to be protected. There are any number of ways of doing this: from taking modest steps that prevent erosion – planting hedges, terracing slopes – to replacing monocultures with crop rotation; to adopting systems that preserve soil quality, such as organic farming, permaculture (the creation of self-sufficient farming eco-systems) or "no-till" agriculture, where farmers plant new crops over the remains of the last, instead of ploughing over their land, keeping soil intact. Each of these systems has advantages and disadvantages: yields in organic farming, for instance, tend to be lower.

But there is one step that could be taken, globally, to preserve the Earth's soil, according to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: to eat less meat. Around 80% of the world's farmland is used to raise livestock or to grow plants to feed animals – but that land produces just 18% of food calories. If meat and dairy consumption were cut out entirely, global farmland could be reduced by more than 75%. Even modest cuts would reduce pressure on the land.

## What can be done about this?

There is a growing awareness of the need to start looking after the Earth's soil. In 2017, then-Environment Secretary Michael Gove warned that intensive farming had left the UK 30 to 40 years away from the "fundamental eradication of soil fertility" in parts of the country. "Countries can withstand coups d'état, wars and conflict, even leaving the EU," he said, "but no country can withstand the loss of its soil and fertility." It's clear that drastic changes in land use will be required, but the question is how to reduce pressure on the soil while feeding a growing world population (see box). On present trends, the future looks "bleak", warned a lead author of a UN Food and Agriculture Organisation report in December – but they added that "it's not too late to introduce measures now".

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## It takes more than bricks to build a hospital

**Susanna Rustin**

*The Guardian*

So much for the celebrated Nightingale hospitals, says Susanna Rustin. We spent more than half a billion pounds on the seven pop-up centres in England, yet they've barely been used: those in Birmingham and Sunderland haven't treated a single patient. Why? Not enough skilled staff. Creating thousands of intensive care beds isn't much use if you don't have people to operate them. "The doctors and nurses who work in hospital ICUs are professionals with years of experience... in institutions with distinct cultures and approaches." You can't magic them out of thin air. Some 10% of nurse positions are vacant as it is – a situation bound to get worse after the past traumatic year. The lesson of the empty hospitals is simple: politicians need to place more value on preserving and developing the human capital within the NHS, rather than trying to win headlines with shiny new buildings. Ultimately it's people that make a hospital work. "The mantra of 'Build back better' is empty without a parallel commitment to 'Train for tomorrow'."

## High streets are dying, long live the high street

**Harry Wallop**

*The Times*

"Volcano erupts under the high street." That's just one of many headlines warning of a dark future for town centres. And for the 25,000 workers in the 118 Debenhams and 444 Arcadia-owned stores that are shutting up shop that's bad news, says Harry Wallop. The rest of us, however, shouldn't be too concerned. For the past decade people have foretold the death of the high street, yet in that time the number of retail outlets in the UK has actually increased by 7%. Basically, there are now too many shops; and with the huge rise in the share of goods bought online (under 7% a decade ago; 30% today), change is inevitable. Yet the high street will adapt; it always has. When my penniless Lithuanian great-grandfather set up Burton Menswear – one of the disappearing Arcadia brands – more than a century ago, he opened billiards halls on the first floors of his shops to induce young men to buy a suit while waiting for a game. The high street was always "a place to be entertained, meet friends, mingle, dance and flirt as much as to buy stuff. Fingers crossed, those days will soon return."

## The rainbow in the Tory firmament

**Bagehot**

*The Economist*

Boris Johnson is "such a vivid embodiment of white privilege", says Bagehot, it's easy to forget how ethnically diverse his party is these days. In 2005, the Conservatives had just two minority MPs. Today, black and minority ethnic (Bame) Tories hold many top positions. The Treasury is run by Rishi Sunak, who replaced Sajid Javid; the Home Office is run by Priti Patel; Kwasi Kwarteng has succeeded Alok Sharma as Secretary of State for Business; talents such as Kemi Badenoch, Claire Coutinho and Bim Afolami are rising up the ranks. On this front the party is doing far better than the rest of the establishment. There are precious few minority candidates in top roles in the Army, civil service and business (corporate Britain's idea of diversity, says a leading Bame Tory, is giving "posh women jobs"). The same is true of Republicans in the US: in sharp contrast to the Tories, they have only a handful of prominent Bame politicians and are increasingly becoming "a party of white reaction" against America's rising multicultural majority. That the British Right is quietly following a quite different path is something "worth both noticing and celebrating".

## Playing politics with a life-and-death issue

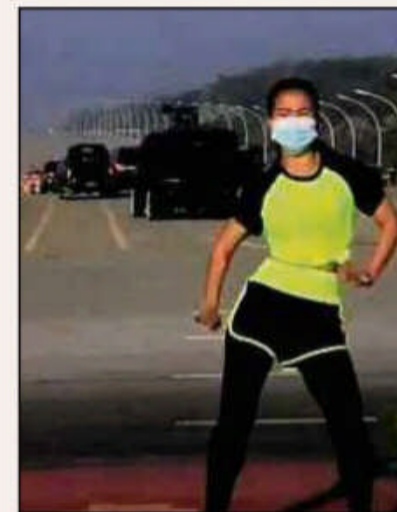
**Sonia Sodha**

*The Observer*

At a time when officials should be doing their utmost to preserve public confidence in the vaccine programme, says Sonia Sodha, it's shocking to see some people shredding it for their own cynical ends. Labour leader Keir Starmer for one. His call for teachers to be moved up the vaccination queue and given a job in half-term may have populist appeal, but it flies in the face of advice given by the experts on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, who have devised an order of priorities they think will save the most lives. On what basis is Starmer rejecting their calculus? Then there's the British Medical Association, which has slammed the Government for allowing the gap between the Pfizer vaccine's two doses to be extended from three to 12 weeks. Again, the Government did so on expert advice, so where is the BMA's compelling evidence this is the wrong path? The worst offender, though, is France's President Macron, who falsely claimed that the AstraZeneca vaccine was "quasi-ineffective" for the over-65s. "This is nothing less than the president of the most vaccine-sceptical nation in Europe spreading disinformation." These people should know better than to play politics with this issue.

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

A binman has been sacked after kung fu-kicking the head off a snowman. Herefordshire Council said it was "disappointed" in Callum Woodhouse, after he was caught on CCTV attacking a 6ft snowman built by three-year-old Joseph Taylor, who burst into tears. Thousands later signed a petition calling for the expectant father to be reinstated. Woodhouse, 19, explained that the snowman had been "obstructing my pathway", adding: "It was going to melt anyway."



A fitness instructor unwittingly captured the early stages of Myanmar's military coup as she filmed an exercise class in front of the country's parliament this week. Khing Hnin Wai gyrated to the sound of an upbeat dance track on a roundabout in the capital, Naypyidaw, as a series of black armoured cars pushed through a barricade behind her, en route to detaining a number of MPs and seizing control of the country. The footage was likened to the dystopian TV show *Black Mirror* – but Hnin Wai herself said that the "background scenery" made for an "unforgettable" workout.

A woman has written to *The Sun's* agony aunt, Dear Deidre, to complain about her boyfriend's worrying obsession with pandemic-related news. The unnamed 24-year-old said that her partner had started to put on the *BBC News At Ten* music to get in the mood for sex. "I went along with it once, hoping it would be a passing phase," she wrote. "But now he has suggested I introduce myself as Fiona Bruce. I'm no prude but I'm not keen on dressing up as Fiona."

## Raging against the curfew: the riots in the Netherlands

The Netherlands' image as "a bucolic country of bridges and bikes" took a hit last week, as the country faced its worst riots in 40 years, said Elena DeBre on [Slate \(New York\)](#). Anti-lockdown protests, which began in the small, historically rebellious fishing village of Urk in the country's north, quickly spread to ten cities across Holland. A pedestrian bridge was blown up in Amsterdam; cars were torched in Den Bosch; and police came under attack in cities including Rotterdam. Some rioters even set fire to a Covid testing centre and threw rocks at hospitals and police. The unrest began when, in order to combat the rapidly spreading UK coronavirus variant, the Dutch government introduced a night-time curfew, said Johan van Heerde and Joris Belgers in [Trouw \(Amsterdam\)](#) – the nation's first since Nazi occupation in the Second World War. Over the following three nights, hundreds of people were arrested as police were forced to defend themselves with water cannon and dogs. Cities were left looking like war zones.

The protests were started by those with "legitimate concerns" about their civil liberties being curtailed, said Daniel Steinvoth in [Neue Zürcher Zeitung \(Zurich\)](#). But they were quickly hijacked by a motley crew of anti-vaxxers, virus deniers, and



A protester in Amsterdam: "pent-up aggression"?

football hooligans who seized on the chance to let out "pent-up aggression". By the third night, the vast majority of rioters were simply "aggressive vandals" who were spoiling for a fight, said [De Telegraaf \(Amsterdam\)](#). Many came from the far-right. Now they must face the full force of the law. "Chaos must not be allowed to reign."

Actually, the causes of this unrest were deep-rooted, said Herman van de Werfhorst in [De Volkskrant \(Amsterdam\)](#). Spending cuts over the past decade have taken a heavy toll on public services. Young people are finding it increasingly difficult to get on the housing ladder; jobs are precarious. Big businesses have enjoyed tax breaks and inequality has worsened. Recent events have added to a sense of dissatisfaction, said David Walsh on [Euronews.com \(Brussels\)](#). With a general election due to be held in March, the Dutch government resigned last month in a scandal over child benefit payments. It has faced criticism from the populist Right for tightening Holland's once relaxed lockdown rules, while the country's vaccine roll-out has been the second slowest in the EU. Most Dutch people remain broadly supportive of the government's pandemic response. "But that is not to say they agree with the direction the country is taking in general."

### CHINA

## Left behind in a cash-free world

[CaixinGlobal.com](#)  
(Beijing)

Chinese people now pay for almost everything with their smartphones, say Guo Yingzhe and Hu Yue – and that's a serious problem for elderly people who aren't tech-savvy. Financial apps and digital services have grown fast in China: the two leading payment platforms, Alipay and WeChat Pay, are now ubiquitous. But the disappearance of banknotes carries a price. In a recent viral video, an elderly woman was shown trying to pay for her health insurance in person using cash. The impatient clerk snaps, "No cash is accepted here: either tell your relatives or pay on your mobile phone". It caused an instant backlash, and the following month the People's Bank of China issued a diktat requiring public institutions, financial firms and small businesses to accept cash. It has so far penalised 15 companies and one public body, as well as individual employees who refused to take cash, with fines from \$77 to \$77,000. The rule is meant as a stopgap, and the broader strategy is to help older people master new technology and bridge a growing divide between generations. And rightly so. As technological advances continue apace, we must not leave the elderly behind.

### ISRAEL

## The army has no business playing politics

[Haaretz](#)  
(Tel Aviv)

Israel's military chief Aviv Kochavi is "way out of line", says Haaretz. The new US president Joe Biden urgently wants to restore the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement negotiated by the Obama administration, which Donald Trump repudiated three years ago. But Kochavi has other ideas: last week he not only declared that restoring the nuclear deal would be "a strategic mistake", which would allow Iran to "hurtle towards a bomb". He said this "must not be allowed", so he was preparing new plans to attack the country's nuclear facilities. Kochavi is wrong about the agreement, which includes "precise and detailed" clauses on inspections, as well as provisions for restricting uranium enrichment for up to 30 years. Until 2019 – a year after US withdrawal – Iran had met all of its obligations under the deal. More importantly, Kochavi is acting way beyond his authority by issuing such a public challenge to Biden. It's up to ministers to decide how Israel should work with allies to combat the threat posed by Iran; not to unelected military personnel. The situation calls for "judgement, diplomatic wisdom and military caution" – all of which were lacking in Kochavi's intervention. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should put him firmly "in his place".

### ITALY

## Betraying the nation's interest for Saudi gold

[Wired Italia](#)  
(Rome)

What on earth was Matteo Renzi thinking, asks Simone Cosimi. A few weeks ago, Italy's former PM triggered a political crisis by withdrawing his Italia Viva party from the country's governing coalition. But that didn't stop him jetting off to Saudi Arabia last week to give a lecture at the country's annual Future Investment Initiative conference, a Middle Eastern rival to Davos. It turns out Renzi has a lucrative role on the conference's advisory board. Now, Renzi has long had an opportunistic streak. But even he should have seen that flying halfway around the world for his own personal enrichment days after precipitating the collapse of Italy's government in the middle of a pandemic would look unethical at the best of times – let alone when everyone else is stuck at home. To make matters worse, Renzi was filmed fawning over Saudi ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, praising Saudi Arabia as the centre of a "new renaissance". This is the man who is widely believed to have ordered the brutal murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018, and who rules "one of the most ferocious and suffocating regimes in the world". If voters turn against Renzi and his party at the next regional elections, he'll have only himself to blame.





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## Trump's impeachment: Republicans circle the wagons

The much-anticipated “Republican civil war is over before it even began”, said Jonathan Chait on [NYMag.com](#). After the 6 January Capitol riot, it seemed possible that Senate Republicans might actually join Democrats in voting to convict Donald Trump of “incitement of insurrection” at his impeachment trial, which begins next week. Even loyalists expressed their disgust with the outgoing president. But after the damage was cleared up, Trump’s grip on the GOP was soon re-established. State Republican parties rushed to censure the ten House Republicans who voted to impeach – its Oregon wing even claimed the Capitol riot was a “false flag” operation by “leftist forces”. In the Senate last week, 45 of the 50 GOP senators voted to dismiss the charges against Trump, on the basis that he’d already left office.



Marjorie Taylor Greene: a “dangerous loon”?

The sad reality is that the party no longer recognises the line between “what is and isn’t acceptable”, said Karen Tumulty in [The Washington Post](#). That’s how it ended up with a “dangerous loon” like Marjorie Taylor Greene as one of its Congress members. Before her election last year, she was already known for spreading crazy QAnon conspiracy theories about an elite of Satan-worshipping paedophiles. It has now emerged that Greene also endorsed a social media post in 2019 that suggested getting rid of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with “a bullet to the head”.

The Republicans have good reasons for not wanting to pursue Trump’s conviction, said Jim Geraghty in the [National Review](#). They’re “terrified” that supporting it will turn the base against them and, frankly, they’ve got better things to do. Now Trump is out of office and no longer even “rage-tweeting”, impeachment seems “like a solution to a problem that already resolved itself”.

Greene isn’t representative of most Republicans, said Nicholas Kristof in [The New York Times](#), but her presence is a bad sign. The GOP needs to escape the “malign influence” of the “charlatans” who peddle paranoia. America would benefit from a responsible party that stood up for conservative values and challenged liberal assumptions. “Half a century ago we didn’t need the racist George Wallace wing of the Democratic Party, and today we don’t need the wing of the Republican Party that embraces conspiracy theories and winks at violence.” The big question is: “Without that wing of today’s GOP, what’s left?”

## A nation dazed by “rule stupor”

**George F. Will**

*The Washington Post*

The Covid-19 tragedy has proved “a brutal, and hence effective, tutor”, says George F. Will. It has taught us this: “government is more apt to achieve adequacy when it does not try to achieve purity”. Analysis of the wildly varying success rate of different US states in administering vaccines shows that the top performers were all “rule-breakers”. Unlike other states that stuck doggedly to overly prescriptive federal guidance about who gets what when – resulting in doses of vaccine being wasted – these states used their initiative and just got on with it. Alas, that approach has become all too rare in recent years. As the lawyer and writer Philip K. Howard recently lamented in [The Yale Law Journal](#), modern government is “structured to pre-empt the active intelligence of people on the ground”. Its operating philosophy is that ideal governance can be achieved through rules that replace fallible human judgement. In practice, though, the steady accretion of laws has merely led to what Howard calls “rule stupor”, and a “sense of powerlessness” within public institutions. By prompting some overstretched public officials to throw the rule book aside and use their own wits again, the Covid emergency has usefully reminded us of the folly of seeking “a government better than people”.

## Online trolls should be unmasked

**Andy Kessler**

*The Wall Street Journal*

The “siren calls” for the regulation of social media are gaining in volume in the wake of Donald Trump’s banishment from Twitter, Facebook and other sites, says Andy Kessler. Most would-be reformers want to rewrite Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which largely exempts social media companies from legal liability for what users post on their sites. But attempts to “fix” Section 230 could massively backfire by prompting these platforms to start censoring every controversial post for fear of being sued into oblivion. We often forget, however, that nothing in this law prevents legal action against *users* of social media. The real problem today is anonymity: the nastiest and most irresponsible posters hide behind fake names and handles. The solution is to oblige users to register with, say, a credit card or other ID, and use their real names. Those who posted threats or libellous attacks could then be held to account. True, such a policy might lead to fewer people using these sites, but it would also limit the need for “tens of thousands of content moderators”. In Wall Street it’s called KYC, or “know your customer”. It works against money laundering. Maybe it can work for “rhetoric laundering” too.

## Why Trump won’t get his library

**Anthony Clark**

*Politico*

What will Donald Trump’s presidential library be like? Pundits have variously predicted that it will be a “shrine to his ego”, a theme park, or a “full MAGA” exercise in rebranding his presidency, says Anthony Clark, but here’s a more likely possibility: there won’t be a library. This isn’t because Trump left office under a cloud – so did Richard Nixon, and he has a library. No, it’s because it’s “nearly impossible to imagine” Trump overcoming the complex challenges involved in creating one. These libraries – part archive, part museum – are a hugely expensive undertaking. You have to raise hundreds of millions of dollars from donors to build and equip one. And if you want the federal government to recognise it as an official facility and commit to looking after it, you have to donate all or part of it to the government and stump up an additional 60% of the full project costs as an endowment. Finding a site is also a real headache, even for popular presidents. Barack Obama’s efforts to break ground on his “Obama Centre” have been delayed for years by community opposition in his home city of Chicago. His experience shows just how hard it would be for Trump – a man who, while certainly hungry for validation, is “not known for focus or persistence”.

# loaf



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## What the scientists are saying...

### Growing wood in the laboratory

For years, scientists have been developing lab-grown meats, so that people can eat steak without the need for cattle. Now a team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is growing wood in the lab, so that people can have wooden furniture without the need to chop down trees. Although it is in its early stages, researchers hope their work will eventually help slow deforestation, and make it possible for wood to be produced rapidly, anywhere in the world. That would reduce the amount of energy that is currently used to harvest and transport timber; and, in theory, give manufacturers access to limitless supplies of a material that is both versatile and biodegradable. Using live cells extracted from the leaves of the zinnia plant, and a gel infused with plant hormones, the team has so far managed to produce tiny wood-like structures, indoors and without soil or sunlight. The hormones in the gel encourage the cells to produce lignin – the substance that gives wood its firmness; and the gel is formed into a scaffold, which the wood grows in. This scaffold can be created in any shape. “So yes, you could theoretically grow a table directly – fully assembled,” mechanical engineer and lead author Ashley Beckwith told *The Times*.

### Pollution linked to sight loss

People who live in areas with high levels of air pollution are more likely to suffer age-related macular degeneration (AMD) – a common form of sight loss that is progressive and irreversible – a study has shown. “Even relatively low exposure appears to impact the risk of AMD, suggesting that air pollution is an important modifiable factor for a very large number of people,” said Prof Paul Foster, who led the research at University College London. His team



1.3 trillion tonnes of ice disappeared in 2017

looked at data on almost 116,000 people in the UK Biobank, who were aged from 40 to 69, and who had no eye problems in 2006. They were followed for 11 years, and asked to report on any diagnoses of AMD; some also had their eyes examined. The researchers then looked at separate data sets to work out the average pollution levels around their homes. They found that a 1.07mcg increase in average concentrations of particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) was associated with an 8% greater risk of a person having AMD. AMD is the leading cause of irreversible blindness among the over-50s in high-income countries; around the world, some 200 million people have the condition.

### Ice melting is accelerating

Earth lost 28 trillion tonnes of ice between 1994 and 2017 – and the rate of melting is accelerating, according to a new study. It found that ice was melting at a rate of

0.8 trillion tonnes per year at the start of that period; whereas in 2017, 1.3 trillion tonnes disappeared. The total amount of ice lost is equivalent to a sheet 100 metres thick, covering the whole of the UK; and the rate of loss is in line with the worst-case scenarios envisaged by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, says the paper in the journal *The Cryosphere*. The impact of the melt will be felt all over the world – and soon, according to lead author Dr Thomas Slater of Leeds University. “Sea-level rise on this scale will have very serious impacts on coastal communities this century,” he said. The paper notes that the greatest losses were of floating ice in the polar regions – which risks creating a feedback loop: white ice reflects solar radiation back into space, but when it melts, it opens up dark water which absorbs heat, speeding up warming. The next biggest losses came from glaciers.

### The beneficial effect of a nap

Napping in the afternoon – even for as little as five minutes – may boost mental agility and improve the memory, a study published in the *BMJ* has found. The research, by a team in China, found that people who regularly had a rest after lunch (defined as sleeping for a minimum of five minutes and a maximum of two hours) tended to have better verbal fluency than those that did not; they also had better working memories, and better location awareness. The study was based on 2,214 people aged over 60, who lived in various Chinese cities. Around 1,500 of them regularly napped; the rest did not. In both groups, they slept, on average, for 6.5 hours per night. But the ones in the napping group performed “significantly better” in cognitive assessments, say the study’s authors.

## Sharks and rays are disappearing fast

Populations of sharks and rays are disappearing from the world’s oceans at an “alarming” rate, a new report has warned. Since 1970, numbers have fallen by more than 70%, a decline that has left three-quarters of shark species facing extinction. “For every ten sharks you had in the open ocean in the 1970s, you would have three today, across these species, on average,” Dr Richard Sherley of the University of Exeter told the BBC. The international study – based on previous studies and catch data – concluded that overfishing was the principal cause of the decline; and its authors noted that had they had records going back further than 1970, the decline would probably have looked even steeper, as it was in the 1950s that mass industrialised fishing began in earnest.

The report also noted that, owing to differing policies on fishing management, the declines are worse in some areas than others: in the Atlantic, for instance, populations started to stabilise in the 2000s, thanks to conservation efforts; but numbers of sharks and rays continue to plummet in the Indian Ocean.



Many species of shark face extinction

### Covid tongue warning

Changes to the tongue’s appearance could be another symptom of the coronavirus, it was reported last week. A British researcher who is tracking Covid-19 warning signs recently reported more cases of people complaining of unusual changes to their tongues. And Prof Tim Spector’s tweet about “Covid tongue” has since been backed by a study in Spain: it found that more than a tenth of the 666 Covid patients it examined had had “oral cavity” issues, including the inflammation of the small bumps on the surface of the tongue, “patchy” areas and ulcers. However, the Spanish researchers found that an even more prevalent apparent symptom related to the hands and feet: 18% of patients had experienced burning, hives, skin peeling or redness on the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet, according the report, in the *British Journal of Dermatology*.

Not  
for  
sale





## **Red Roses, it's over**

**Valentine's Day.**

**It's one of the biggest days of the year if you're a florist.**

**But this year we've decided against selling red roses.**

**We don't believe that Valentine's Day is something to be tick boxed with a generic dozen.**

**Showing you care isn't about holding a single red rose in your teeth.**

**Or sprinkling red petals on perfect silk bed sheets.**

**As much as the movies might sell it to us.**

**At least, that's not the care we know from the thousands of notes that people send across the world with us every single day. It's taught us that care isn't the soft and cheesy cliché that it's been wrapped up to be.**

**Care isn't just sappy.**

**It's the fierce strength to carry people around you when they're most down.**

**Care isn't just big romantic gestures.**

**It's the little things we do for people, when nobody else is even looking.**

**Care isn't just celebrating birthdays or anniversaries.**

**It's the note sent without any need for an occasion.**

**Our relationships aren't all perfect red roses, so why pretend that they are?**

**They're messier and more complicated than that.**

**But that's what makes them beautiful.**

**It's because you don't buy into these clichés,**

**that we're making a stand not to sell them.**

**This Valentine's Day, don't just send a dozen red roses,  
show somebody that you care wildly.**

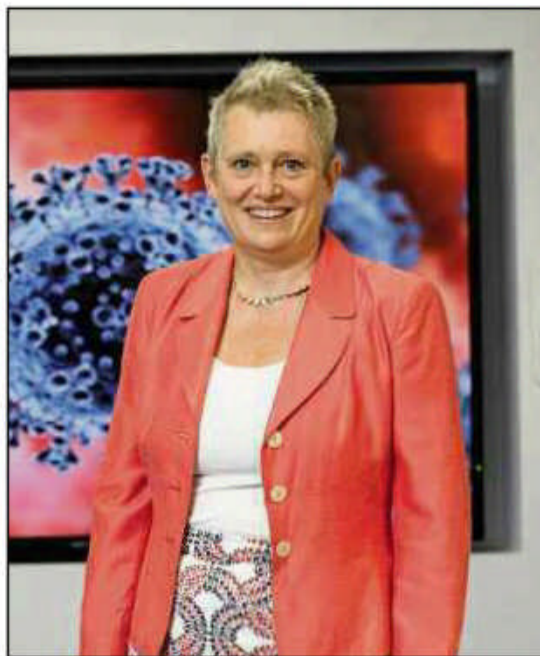
**Love,**

**BLOOM  
& WILD**

**Show us how you #CareWildly this Valentine's Day**

## Vaccines: where did it all go so right?

“More than 100,000 people have died in Britain of Covid-19,” said Tom McTague in *The Atlantic*. That is more than in any country in Europe, and is almost twice the number in Germany. On a per capita measure, Britain is the “worst-hit G7 nation” – and that reflects a “catastrophic failure of governance”. Back in March 2020, Boris Johnson’s Chief Scientific Adviser told MPs that a “good” outcome would be if deaths were kept below 20,000. Owing to a series of missteps, they’re five times that number, and still rising. “And yet, Britain has also shown wisdom.” Its vaccination programme has “raced ahead of every other country in Europe”. Around 14% of the population has had at least one jab, and if all goes to plan, it has been suggested that everyone over the age of 50 could have had one (or at least been offered one) by the end of March.



Kate Bingham: the vaccine tsar

“Success has many fathers,” said Glen Owen in *The Mail* on Sunday, and “ministers and scientists” have jostled for praise for “the UK’s nimble, world-beating strategy”. Near the front of the queue was Health Secretary Matt Hancock – who in a vaccine planning meeting last April posed this question: “In a year’s time, what decisions will we wish we had taken now?” His conclusion was that while the UK’s vaccine expertise was among the best in the world, it had insufficient capability to manufacture vaccines, with just one specialist plant, in Liverpool. Presciently, he warned that it was risky to rely on imports – and the decision was made to ramp up domestic production capacity. It was for this same reason that when the developers of the Oxford vaccine proposed teaming up with the US pharma giant Merck, Hancock vetoed the deal. Merck had considerable expertise in the field, but Hancock was concerned that President Trump might try to stop the export of vaccines, and Merck said it could not guarantee supply.

“Enter the Anglo-Swedish firm AstraZeneca,” said Daniel Boffey and Dan Sabbagh in *The Guardian*, “whose French chief executive Pascal Soriot was a trusted figure in political circles”. AstraZeneca was not considered a vaccine specialist, but Soriot was prepared to give the Government the guarantees it wanted, and to sell the vaccine at no profit during the pandemic, “which was what Oxford’s scientists wanted”. It was signed as Oxford’s partner on 30 April – just three months after the Oxford team had first convened, on 30 January, to discuss how to combat the

crisis unfolding in Wuhan. And just a fortnight after that, AstraZeneca signed a deal to deliver 100 million doses to the UK. Ministers agreed to pay a few million up front, allowing the company to build a manufacturing system – and the UK to demand that its citizens be vaccinated first. Britain’s speed in all this proved to be of the essence: as Soriot explained last week, the “brewing process” for the vaccine takes three months, and the yield is uncertain. AstraZeneca experienced glitches, but had time to fix them, and still obtain regulatory approval in December.

If we’re handing out plaudits for the success of the Government’s vaccine procurement, credit must go to Kate Bingham, said Sean O’Neill in *The Times*. In April, the venture capitalist (and competitive bog snorkeller) got a call from Boris Johnson. “I want you to stop

people dying,” he told her. Her appointment, as head of the UK’s Vaccine Taskforce, was not universally welcomed. To many, it looked like cronyism: she is a friend of the PM’s sister, and is married to Tory MP Jesse Norman. Moreover, she had, as she admitted, no experience in vaccines. But she is a biochemistry graduate with an MBA from Harvard who runs a biotech fund.

She assembled a team of private sector experts, in science, technology and logistics; and within a fortnight, they’d recommended a shortlist of projects for investment. Negotiating advance purchase contracts for vaccines that might never come to fruition was not

simple. “The 40 million doses from Pfizer and the 100 million from AstraZeneca are the programme’s workhorses.” But this week, two more firms – Janssen and Novavax – reported positive trial results, potentially adding 90 million doses to UK stocks.

The roll-out is going well, said Jonathan Kitson on CapX. But there remain threats to the system: supplies could be disrupted; and the virus could keep mutating. Having factories in Britain reduces the risk of the former; but no UK plant produces mRNA vaccines – the type made by Pfizer/BioNTech. And it is these vaccines that are most quickly modified, to combat new variants. Happily, “a solution is on its way”: the Vaccines Manufacturing & Innovation Centre is a facility that will be able to respond fast to mutations, as it promises to produce tens of millions of vaccines a year. Accelerating its construction would not be cheap, but it would be well worth the money if it saved us from another economically crippling lockdown while we await a new vaccine.

*“Ministers and scientists have jostled for praise for the UK’s nimble, world-beating strategy”*

### Pick of the week’s Gossip

Elizabeth Hurley caused a furore when she tweeted a racy photo of herself outside in last week’s snow, wearing nothing but bikini bottoms and an unbuttoned fluffy jacket. Speculating that the photos had been taken by her 18-year-old son, Piers Morgan said it was a bit “creepy” (as well as “thirsty” – for attention). But Hurley was happy to set the record straight. “These pics were in fact taken by my



80-year-old mother,” she tweeted. “Not entirely sure if that puts minds at rest or not.”

Filming sex scenes has never been a straightforward business, says actor Simon Williams in *The Oldie*. He was once in bed with Jan Harvey when the sound technician heard a rustling noise. “The director peeled back the duvet to reveal that we both had our scripts tucked down our knickers.” On a cold morning in 1976, he had a love scene with Glenda Jackson, which didn’t go well for different reasons. “We weren’t really each other’s cup of tea, and I was reminded of the old cartoon: a middle-aged couple, becalmed mid-coitus, and she’s saying, ‘Can’t you

think of anyone either?’” On another job, his love interest was Joan Collins. She was mainly concerned about her make-up, he recalls. “Joan would whisper passionately in my ear, ‘Mind my lipstick, darling.’”

For a scene in the new film of *Blithe Spirit*, in which she plays Madame Arcati, Judi Dench had to be winched above a stage. A bit old to have a hook between her shoulderblades, she was hoisted up in a large sack. “All I could hear was the crew shouting ‘Watch the bag!’,” she told *Woman’s Own*. “I thought: ‘Charming!’”



## Scotland: can Johnson save the Union?

When Boris Johnson ventured into Scotland last week, the SNP tweeted a photo of the Prime Minister stepping out of the plane with the caption: “Stay at home. Protect the NHS. Save Lives.” The message was clear, said Euan McColl in *The Scotsman*: Johnson is not welcome; Scotland is not his home. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon went so far as to suggest that his visit was not “essential” under Covid-19 rules. But, of course, the SNP was actually delighted by it. The sight of Johnson “shambling about” in a Covid testing lab in Glasgow “reminded us that the UK Government is led by a caricature of the sort of Conservative who helped the party to near-extinction in Scotland”.



*The PM on his visit to Glasgow*

The issue of the disintegrating Union is one that Johnson has to face, said Libby Brooks and Severin Carrell in *The Guardian*. Polls are consistently showing support for independence at around 55%. Last month, the SNP published its roadmap for a second independence referendum, which will likely be a central plank of its manifesto for May’s Holyrood elections. If the party wins a majority, as it almost certainly will, but Johnson still refuses to authorise another referendum, Holyrood will nevertheless legislate to hold another vote. UK ministers admit privately that Johnson will not be able

to “just say no” indefinitely, said Andrew Grice in *The Independent*. There’s “an intense behind-the-scenes debate” in his Government on whether to try to turn the tide with an offer of more powers for Holyrood, including perhaps a wider review of the UK constitution. (Gordon Brown has proposed that the House of Lords be replaced by a “senate of the nations and regions” based in the North.) Some Johnson allies, however, favour a “more aggressive defence of the Union”.

Johnson does have “a decent story to tell”, said Alan Cochrane in *The Daily Telegraph*. As he pointed out, the UK Treasury has not only funded a world-beating vaccine programme, but has spent billions propping up Scottish businesses and jobs. Given that the PM’s poll ratings “can’t fall any further, he has absolutely nothing to lose and a 314-year-old Union to save”. But the Union cannot be “saved” by “folk rushing up from London on a mission to ‘save the Union’”, said Alex Massie in *The Spectator*. Talking up the glories of the United Kingdom, as Johnson likes to do, doesn’t play well up here: “Cheer-up Jocko, and count your blessings” is a “bold gambit” after the year Britain has had. The PM urgently “needs a crash-course in language skills. Someone, somewhere, must be capable of teaching him how to speak to Scotland.”

## The cladding scandal: a festering injustice

“It is now more than 3½ years since the avoidable tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire”, which killed 72 people in the most horrific of circumstances on the night of 14 June 2017, said *The Sunday Times*. But, unforgivably, the underlying cause of the disaster has not been dealt with. The blaze was started by an electrical fault in the 24-storey block of flats in west London – but the “primary reason” it spread so quickly, according to the first report of the inquiry led by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, was the combustible nature of the Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding that had been added to the building’s exterior. Today, millions of people are still living in flats with unsafe cladding: according to the Labour Party’s analysis, 11 million residents in 4.6 million properties across Britain are still living with either ACM cladding or other dangerous materials that must be removed to meet fire safety standards.

Through no fault of their own, said *The Independent*, many of these people find themselves facing bills of tens of thousands of pounds for remedial work, and having to pay hundreds of pounds per month for “waking watch” fire safety patrols. In some cases, homes bought several years ago in good faith are now worthless: they can no longer be sold because

it is impossible to take out a mortgage on them. Last week, said *The Observer*, it was revealed that Hayley Tillotson, a 28-year-old first-time buyer from Leeds, had become the “first person to declare herself bankrupt” as a result of this ongoing “cladding scandal”. “Without government action, there will be many, many more like her in the years to come.”

On Monday, MPs passed a non-binding Labour-led motion calling on ministers to introduce a national cladding taskforce, to get to grips with the crisis. There is an “unanswerable moral case” for taking action, said Philip Collins in the *London Evening Standard*. The problem, of course, is money. Last year, the Government launched a £1.6bn scheme to help fund the repair work needed – but this is only available to people who live in buildings taller than 59 feet, when the majority of affected residents do not, in fact, live in high-rise blocks. Besides, the total bill is likely to be closer to £15bn. Who will pay? Successive governments have allowed building and renewal work to be done on the cheap, said Tom Harris in *The Daily Telegraph*. The private sector contractors who made fortunes by selling shoddy work to consumers must now foot the bill. If the Tories don’t act quickly to end this injustice, they risk losing their status as “the party of home ownership”.

## Wit & Wisdom

“Remember that as a teenager, you are in the last stage of your life when you will be happy to hear the phone is for you.”  
*Fran Lebowitz, quoted in The Times*

“Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem which it was intended to solve.”  
*Karl Popper, quoted in The Sunday Times*

“I understand your desire for disruption, but I am tired of picking up the pieces. Over and over, I have to glue together the cups you have broken so that we can sit down and take tea together.”  
*Angela Merkel to Emmanuel Macron, quoted in The Daily Telegraph*

“Most real relationships are involuntary.”  
*Iris Murdoch, quoted on The Browser*

“It is better to waste one’s youth than do nothing with it at all.”  
*Georges Courteline, quoted in The Times*

“Friends are God’s apology for relations.”  
*Hugh Kingsmill, quoted in Forbes*

“The first man who compared woman to a rose was a poet; the second, an imbecile.”  
*Gérard de Nerval, quoted in The Sunday Times*

“The best way out is always through.”  
*Robert Frost, quoted on GoodReads.com*

### Statistics of the week

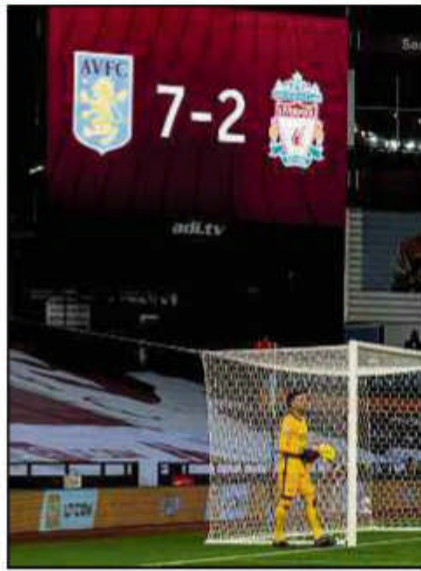
A record one in three UK graduates gained a first-class degree last year, as universities took steps to ensure students were not penalised by the pandemic.  
**HESA/The Guardian**

42% of UK electricity came from renewable sources in 2020.  
**The Times**

## Football: is this the strangest season ever?

If there is one word that sums up the Premiership season in the era of Covid-19 it would have to be “unpredictable”, said Peter Smith on Sky Sports. The chief talking point at the start was the sheer number of goals flying in. On the second weekend, 44 were scored – the most in a single round of matches since the Premier League was reduced to 20 teams in 1995; and Manchester United equalled a league record with their 9-0 win over Southampton this week. Among the goal-fests were some “jaw-dropping shocks” – including Aston Villa’s 7-2 thrashing of Liverpool, and Manchester City’s 5-2 drubbing by Leicester. Scoring levels have become more normal since then, said Harry Symeou on 90min.com, but the season has continued to confound expectations in other ways. Most striking has been the lack of consistency by the top teams. Form has yo-yoed to such an extent that several sides have gone “from the highs of a title challenge to the lows of a full-blown crisis” within just a few weeks. At various points, nine separate teams have headed the table. Seldom has a campaign had such an open feel.

Yet 2020/21 may ultimately be best remembered for something even more surprising, said Joe Ridge in the Daily Mail: the “total wiping out of home advantage”. It was always assumed home advantage would be attenuated as a result of playing in spectator-



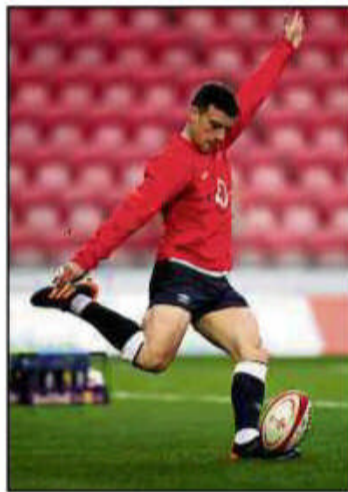
Liverpool’s humiliating loss

less stadiums, but no one predicted the effect would be as dramatic as it has turned out so far in the Premier League. As things stand, 205 matches have been played this season – out of a total of 380. And of these, 81 (or 45%) have been won by away teams, and only 76 (40%) by home sides. A further 48 matches have been draws. Figures such as these are truly abnormal: every previous top-flight season in history has finished with home victories far outnumbering away wins. The disappearance of home advantage is a staggering outcome – and conclusive proof that spectators make even more difference to sport than anyone quite appreciated before the Covid-19 era.

With the Premier League proving so unpredictable, there has naturally been much speculation that an underdog might win the title, said Michael Emons on BBC Sport. Could Leicester pull off another “miracle”? Could this be Aston Villa’s year? Don’t count on it, said Andy Dillon in The Sun. The signs are that the season is finally starting to conform to expectation. Manchester City, having recovered from their abysmal start, have won their last eight matches, and now top the table. Liverpool have seemingly recovered from their dramatic recent dip, and have moved into third place, behind Manchester United. Having looked unrecognisable for so long, the table is “starting to take a familiar shape again”.

## Rugby union: will England give Scotland a kicking?

The last time Twickenham staged the Calcutta Cup – the annual Six Nations contest between England and Scotland, it “brought us an 11-try thriller that saw England throw away a 31-point lead and ended with them scraping a 38-all draw”, said Brian Moore in The Daily Telegraph. And with the two teams kicking off this year’s competition at Twickenham on Saturday, hopes are riding high for a similarly entertaining contest. But don’t count on it: opening-round Six Nations matches tend to be cagey affairs, with teams sacrificing “style and substance” to the goal of getting off to a winning start. Besides, England these days aren’t exactly a team associated with free-flowing rugby, said Gerard Meagher in The Guardian. They ended up having a rather successful 2020, securing the Six Nations in October before adding the Autumn Nations Cup title five weeks later. But all along, Eddie Jones and his men were criticised for their “tendency to kick possession away rather than adopting a more entertaining” approach. They certainly didn’t welcome the



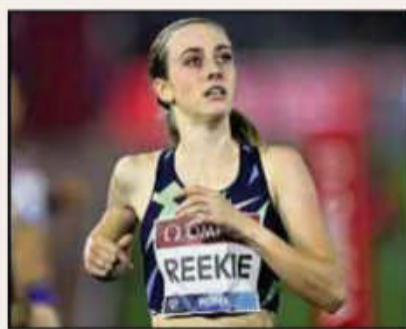
Ford: a secret weapon

criticism – but then again, they’re unlikely to abandon what proved to be a winning strategy.

Yet even if England reverts to their familiar habits, that doesn’t mean they won’t have a new weapon in their armoury, said Alex Lowe in The Times. George Ford, their fly-half, has recently been experimenting with a new type of kick known as the “spiral bomb”: he deployed it with great success for Leicester Tigers last month and says he plans to use it at Twickenham. Actually, the spiral bomb isn’t new at all, said Daniel Schofield in The Daily Telegraph. In the 1970s, it was the “go-to option for many fly-halves”, but gradually it fell out of favour and was “displaced by the more reliable end-over-end bomb”. But as modern full backs get ever more adept at catching, teams have been searching for more dangerous types of kick – and the spiral bomb, with its “wickedly unpredictable trajectory”, could give a team an edge. It will certainly give this year’s Calcutta Cup an intriguing edge if it is unveiled this Saturday.

## Athletics: looking into the middle distance

Britain hasn’t been a major force in men’s middle-distance running since the 1980s heyday of Sebastian Coe and Steve Ovett, said Rick Broadbent in The Times. But now a “genuine resurgence” is taking place: for the first time in decades, the country has several 800m and 1500m runners who are “medal prospects” at this year’s Olympics. Leading the way on the men’s side is 26-year-old Jamie Webb, a former science teacher from Liverpool who has spent the past year out of action with a broken thigh. Last Saturday in Vienna, he made a victorious return to the track, winning the 800m, his first for 16 months, in 1min 46.95 seconds.



Reekie: “phenomenal”

His next goal, he says, is breaking the 1min 44sec barrier: no British man has achieved that since 2005.

On the women’s side, too, things are looking promising, said Danielle Desouza on The Focus. Here, the revival is being led by former flatmates and training partners Laura Muir and Jemma Reekie, both of whom are “phenomenal” athletes.

Reekie, 22, set British indoor records at both 800m and the mile last year, while Muir, 27, is one of the world’s best 1,500m runners. All three athletes offer hope that Brits will “once again steal the limelight” in middle-distance events and “dominate the podium” at the Olympics.

## Sporting headlines

**Football** Chelsea’s new manager, Thomas Tuchel, saw his team beat Burnley 2-0 in his first match in charge. Leeds beat Leicester 3-1. In the Women’s Super League, Chelsea beat Aston Villa 4-0 to move top.

**Golf** Paul Casey won the Dubai Desert Classic by four strokes. It is the Englishman’s 15th European Tour victory.

**Tennis** Britain’s Katie Boulter, the world No. 371, beat 48th-ranked Coco Gauff 3-6 7-5 6-2 in the second round of the Gippsland Trophy in Melbourne.



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# Pick of the week's correspondence

## It's still "their" marbles

To *The Daily Telegraph*

Simon Heffer ("The Armada maps belong in Britain, along with the Elgin Marbles") praises Lord Elgin's "desire to conserve" the Parthenon marbles, which might otherwise have been "smashed up" by the Turks. "Would the marbles still exist today," he asks, "if Elgin hadn't 'looted' them. Quite possibly not – which means he did culture a service, as Britain has done by keeping them safe ever since."

Say I walk past Mr Heffer's house and see oiks smashing up his furniture. Impelled by a "desire to conserve", I help myself to two-thirds of Mr Heffer's best Wedgwood tea set. A week later, the oiks are in custody, and Mr Heffer asks for his plates back. Shouldn't he be grateful that I am keeping them safe?

*Prof Peter Thonemann, Wadham College, Oxford*

## Never enough nurses

To *The Guardian*

The failure of Nightingale hospitals came as no surprise. I was a senior manager in nursing education in the 1990s, when training moved from "apprenticeship-style training" to a university-based education. The battle to achieve this had been long and bitter, with the Conservatives being against this transition as student nurses had been such a cheap way of staffing hospitals. The change was agreed, and the then Government cut training numbers overnight by up to a third.

We are still living with the consequences. Combined with a reduction of thousands of hospital beds over three decades, the effect on the NHS is plain to see. No time for recovery, no time for reflection and fewer opportunities for ongoing development. Successive governments, mainly Conservative, have tried and failed to convince the public that the NHS is a drain on the public purse and have quickly learnt that any threat to it could cost them the next election. That hasn't stopped them significantly reducing the service and carrying out a planned programme of asset stripping. With every change in government, the

## Exchange of the week

### Love of nation

To *The Times*

It's about time that Wales and England should have the opportunity to have a say in what we want our relationship with Scotland and Northern Ireland to be.

The attachment to Scotland is mostly a sentimental one, but it seems to me that the smug grandstanding of the Nationalists, and the barely concealed Anglophobia, have so alienated us that we would be glad to see the back of them. The scrapping of the Barnett formula would leave us about 3% better off, and the two main problems would be theirs: they would have to leave the sterling zone while not in the eurozone; there would have to be a border or tariff arrangement between us.

Scotland is not well run by comparison with England, if the statistics are to be believed, and the rest of us would stand to benefit from a brain drain further down the line.

*Louis de Bernières, Denton, Norfolk*

To *The Times*

Louis de Bernières says that an attachment to Scotland is sentimental. My father, from Fraserburgh, was a Spitfire pilot during the War. He defended English cities from Nazi bombers and fought in north Africa, Malta, Italy and Germany. That was not sentimental. My wife and I have stayed in every county in England; all of our family live and work in England or Wales. I love the English, even those like Louis de Bernières.

*David Fraser, Edinburgh*

To *The Times*

One reason for the increase in support for independence is that the history of Scotland within the Scottish curriculum has been rewritten by the Scottish government and its quango, the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Negativity of the Union is portrayed throughout and in exam questions. Allegedly, the Scots have been "downtrodden" for 800 years. There is never any mention of the many Scottish inventors or philanthropists.

*Maggie Cunningham, Banchory, Aberdeenshire*

overstretched staff must wonder what is coming next.  
*Karen Jacob, retired nurse, Devon*

## In a flutter over Twitter

To *The Daily Telegraph*

The storm in a teacup over skiers attempting to travel from St Pancras highlights the exaggeration by politicians of Twitter's significance.

There are around 15 million Twitter accounts in Britain. How many belong to actual people? In 2018, Twitter deleted more than 70 million accounts for being fake – run by bots – or offensive. How many are duplicates? A user may have two accounts and a single business may have several. A study in 2019 by the Pew Research Centre found that 80% of tweets came from just 10% of users. A minority of the country uses Twitter, a minority of users read it often, and a smaller minority uses it politically.

The reporting of "Twitter storms" is an inflation of the Westminster bubble. Twitter emphatically does not have its finger on the national pulse.  
*Robert Frazer, Salford, Lancashire*

## A loss of self-discipline

To *The Times*

In Daniel Finkelstein's account of the "Singapore economic miracle", he refers to Lee Kuan Yew's change of heart from Fabian socialist to an advocate of self-discipline before democracy. When I interviewed Lee, he told me that he had changed his view after coming out of the Tube at Piccadilly Circus and observing that the evening newspapers on an unattended stand were disappearing, but that the pile of coins people had paid for them were untouched.

Marvelling that a people could police themselves so effectively, there and then he resolved that this was the Singapore he

wanted to create. I wonder what he would make of British self-restraint today.

*Trevor Phillips, London*

## The rights of refuseniks

To *The Guardian*

The news that a small, but increasing number of health workers are choosing to avoid vaccination against Covid-19 comes as no great surprise to many of us in healthcare.

That every person has the right to self-determination, which would include refusing a vaccination, is a given. However, this stance of refusing vaccination is supported by union policy. Might I suggest a compromise that accepts health workers' rights and protects patients at the same time? Any health worker who refuses a vaccination should take unpaid leave until either the coronavirus pandemic is deemed to no longer pose a threat or they chose another line of work. The US, which doesn't usually have much in the way of public health to emulate, already has the ability to dismiss health workers who refuse seasonal flu vaccinations.

The medical aphorism holds: "First do no harm." Perhaps it is time for health workers to remember this.

*Dr W.J. Cunliffe, MD, FRCS, Bedlington, Northumberland*

## The empire strikes back

To *The Guardian*

So Imperial College London has stopped using its Latin motto because it refers to "the empire". I wonder whether they have spotted any irony there?

*Rosemary Waugh, York*



"I was worried that he might have historic links to the slave trade"

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## Review of reviews: Books

## Book of the week

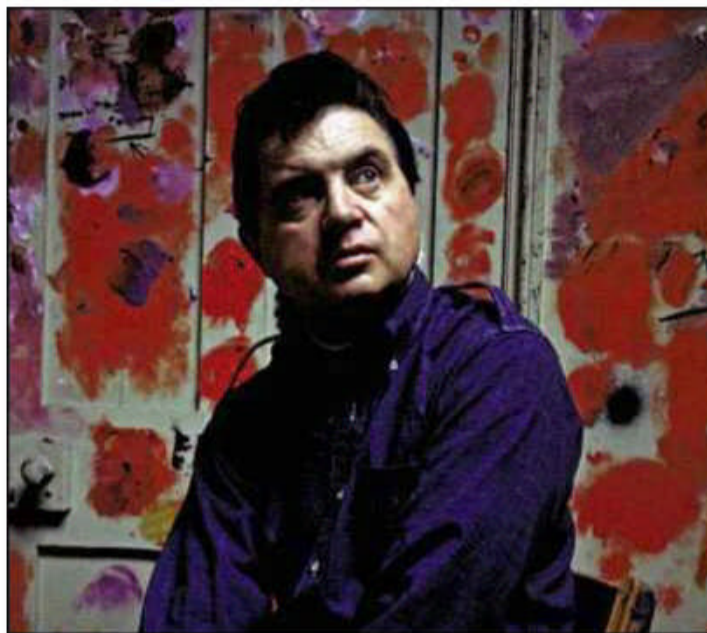
**Francis Bacon: Revelations**

by Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan

*William Collins 880pp £30***The Week Bookshop £23.99 (incl. p&p)**

Francis Bacon is “quite possibly the single most written about artist that Britain has produced”, said Rachel Campbell-Johnston in *The Times*. Since his death in 1992, numerous biographies and memoirs have appeared, most focused on his exploits in the “sleazy demi-monde of Soho in London”. We know all about the all-night drinking sessions, and the often-repeated anecdotes: the time he booed Princess Margaret’s cabaret singing; the time he offered Ronnie Kray a painting, to which the gangster replied: “I wouldn’t have one of those f\*\*\*ing things.” Less well-known is the complex, elusive, often anguished character who concealed himself behind his public persona. In their “thunking” new biography, Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan “analyse what lay beneath the mask”. The result is a work that, though extremely long and based on “mountains of research”, also achieves a rare “sense of intimacy”.

Bacon was born in Dublin, in 1909, into a “semi-grand Anglo-Irish family”, said Christian House in the *FT*. His parents viewed



their asthmatic, weedy-voiced son as “the runt of the litter”; Bacon, for his part, detested his father. His early years as an artist included spells in Berlin and Paris, during which he discovered the European modernists, and passed an “improbable period as an interior designer, arranging rugs and calfskin pouffes”. The War changed his fortunes. Spared service on health grounds, he spent it painting in Hampshire. His pictures from this time – of “screaming popes, tormented businessmen and crucifixions” – suddenly had an “awful relevance”, and catapulted him to fame.

While this biography is a compelling portrait of Bacon the artist, it is most triumphant in its handling of his love life, said Rachel Cooke in *The Observer*. As a young man, Bacon went for “semi-paternal, establishment types” who could pay off his gambling debts. But from the 1950s on, his boyfriends became ever more disreputable: they included Peter Lacy, a former RAF officer who “beat and raped him”; a petty burglar named George Dyer; and, in Tangier, a “legless Moroccan who pushed himself along on a board with wheels”. Stevens and Swan provide convincing explanations for these relationships, suggesting they were expressions of a taste for “deformity” that also manifested itself in his art, said Michael Prodger in *The Sunday Times*. Theirs is a work that “brings the carousing, the paintings and the public and private lives together to form a convincing and often touching whole”.

**Frostquake**

by Juliet Nicolson

*Chatto & Windus 368pp £18.99***The Week Bookshop £14.99**

Juliet Nicolson’s new book, an “engagingly written mixture of social history and memoir”, is an account of the “Big Freeze” of 1962-3, said Trevor Phillips in *The Sunday Times*. In what remains the coldest winter since 1895, Britain was buffeted for ten straight weeks by brutal Siberian winds, which “froze the sea for a mile off Herne Bay” and caused 20ft of snow to pile up on Exmoor. Much of the country came to a standstill, and millions were forced to go without electricity and running water thanks to a combination of power cuts and frozen pipes. Nicolson, nine at the time, sat out the cold snap at Sissinghurst Castle, her family’s grand home in Kent. Although she was insulated from the worst material hardships, the atmosphere felt chilly for other reasons: her grandmother, Vita Sackville-West, had died the previous June, leaving her grandfather, Harold Nicolson, distraught with grief; and her parents’ marriage was starting to unravel.

Nicolson provides an array of grim details, said O. “On Dartmoor, no fewer than 2,000 ponies perished under snow drift.” In Essex, a “heroically determined” milkman was found frozen to death at the wheel of his float. Yet she also advances a “striking thesis”, which is that Britain emerged from the “frostquake” a more liberal and enlightened society. She charts cultural shifts, such as the growing unacceptability of casual racism, and suggests that the savage winter may have kickstarted the Swinging Sixties. “I don’t quite buy Nicolson’s notion that a single winter, however harsh, changed everything”: wouldn’t the cultural shifts have happened anyway? All the same, *Frostquake* offers an “entertaining panorama” of life in the early 1960s – and seems an especially suitable book to read in “our own winter of mass distress”.

*Milk deliveries on skis in 1962***Novel of the week****The Mermaid of Black Conch**

by Monique Roffey

*Peepal Tree Press 190pp £9.99***The Week Bookshop £7.99**

Monique Roffey’s latest novel, which won this year’s Costa Prize, is an entertaining, “shape-shifting” work that “drags mermaids into the modern day”, said Jade Cuttle in *The Times*. On a fictional Caribbean island, a dark-skinned mermaid named Aycayia is fished out of the sea by a group of drunken holiday-makers, who proceed to string her upside down, “stub cigarettes on her stomach and tweak her nipples”. But a sly-smoking local fisherman named David comes to her rescue: he carts her back to his house in a wheelbarrow, and the pair begin an unlikely romance.

What makes this “bittersweet” novel really sing is the inclusion of “pin-sharp detail from the real world”, said Anthony Cummins in *The Observer*. Aycayia finds her tail rotting – and so learns to walk in a pair of David’s old Adidas. Her nostrils bleed “all kind of molluscs and tiny crabs”. In the end, behind the “magic-realist shenanigans”, this is an “archetypal story” of a “disruptive outsider” in a small community. It’s a story that shows, as one character puts it, that womanhood is a “dangerous business”.

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## Podcasts... the chilling, the scary and the fearful

With the arts world “largely in hibernation”, the launch of a major podcast is “as close as we get to a big cultural event these days”, said Robert Jackman in *The Spectator*. **The Apology Line**, from Amazon-owned Wondery, was released last week and shot straight to the top of the “most downloaded” charts. It is about a conceptual artist named Allan Bridge, who in the 1980s invited New York’s criminal classes to record anonymous confessions on an unmanned phone line. The idea was to shed voyeuristic light on the city’s darkest corners. It is narrated by Marissa Bridge, Allan’s widow. She has a slightly “wooden”

delivery, said Fiona Sturges in the FT, but that doesn’t matter: this is a gripping tale, grippingly told – and the recordings alone make for “remarkable” listening. “Some are tinged with sadness and shame; others carry the sound of a weight being lifted. A handful are downright chilling.”

If it’s chills you like, the **The Battersea Poltergeist** is a “hugely entertaining” telling of a 1950s mystery, said Miranda Sawyer in *The Observer*. Written and hosted by *Haunted* presenter Danny Robins, the BBC podcast skilfully interweaves three elements. First, there’s the real-life cold case: a “poltergeist haunting” that continued for several years in a family home in south London.



*The Apology Line’s Marissa and Allan Bridge: “remarkable”*

Robins looks at contemporary newspaper accounts; explores the notes of a “paranormal investigator” involved at the time; and speaks to the girl whose home was affected – the now 80-year-old Shirley. Then there are dramatic re-enactments, with Toby Jones as the investigator. At first I found these stagey, but I soon started to relish “their Gothic campery, the sudden noises, the screams and palaver”. And under it all there’s fantastically “strange music” that heightens the atmosphere of “mad theatrics”. It’s “fabulous” stuff: enjoy it on headphones in the dark.

The long-established American serial **10 Things That Scare Me**

calls itself “a tiny podcast about our biggest fears”. It is certainly “bite-size”, said Madeleine Finlay in *The Guardian*. Each episode, in which guests (some celebrities, some not) discuss their private fears, is just five to ten minutes long. “Some fears are given no more than a few seconds to hang in the air before the guest moves on.” But the format works brilliantly, with each fear – from spiders, to climate change, to falling off a cliff – uncovering a slice of someone’s personality and life. A common theme is that many of us are scared of both “serious and silly” things. “In fact, pushing the big and small together is one of the things that makes the podcast so enjoyable (and reassuring during a time when it feels like there’s a lot to be scared of).”

## Albums of the week: three new releases

**Arlo Parks:**  
**Collapsed in Sunbeams**  
*Transgressive*  
£10



Arlo Parks is a “hotly tipped” 20-year-old from west London, said Dan Cairns in *The Sunday Times*. On this, her captivating “woozy, bluesy pop-soul” debut album, she more than justifies the hype. Her songwriting is lyrically sophisticated – mixing “societal reportage with intimate diarising” – while her “melodic lilt, conversational vocals and innate empathy ensnare you from the start”. This is music full of “compassion and wisdom”; it “gets under your skin and stays there”.

Parks may be the “voice of Gen Z”, said Georgia Evans on *NME*, but she is far more than that. *Collapsed in Sunbeams* is a “universal collection of stories that’ll provide solace for listeners of all ages and backgrounds for decades to come”. This is music that offers a “warm hug” of reassurance in dark times. But soothing as the sound is – with that soft neo-soul, the use of acoustic guitar, and Parks’s honeyed voice – it is also “quietly subversive”. The album plays with received ideas around sexuality and mental health; and it marks the arrival of a major talent.

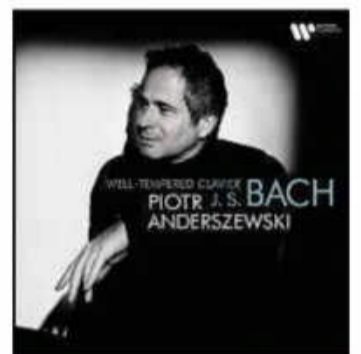
**James Yorkston and the Second Hand Orchestra:**  
**The Wide, Wide River**  
*Domino*  
£11



For his tenth solo album, the “soulfully voiced, folk-tinged” Fife songwriter James Yorkston took a big creative risk, said Will Hodgkinson in *The Times*. Having travelled to Sweden to work with producer Karl-Jonas Winqvist, he adopted a semi-improvised approach, and invited a loose collective of instrumentalists (the “Second Hand Orchestra”) to accompany his songs after only one or two listens. But wonderfully, it works – from the unexpected instruments popping up on *We Test The Beams* to the harmonising chorus on *Choices, Like Wide Rivers*. “Ringing out with warmth and humanity, this is an album whose appeal lies in its imperfections and chance moments.”

Yorkston’s last album took him five years to make; on this one he finished four songs on the first day, said David Smyth in the *London Evening Standard*. He calls this approach “castings of the net”, and it creates the “warm, relaxed feel” of an improv session in a cosy pub. Even when the subject matter is bleak, “everyone sounds like they’re enjoying themselves”.

**Piotr Anderszewski:**  
**J.S. Bach – Well-Tempered Clavier**  
*Warner Classics*  
£15



There’s “joyous” news for Bach devotees, said Andrew Clements in *The Guardian*: the great Polish pianist Piotr Anderszewski has turned his attention to *The Well-Tempered Clavier* for the first time – with “compelling and hugely rewarding” results. Yet rather than record all 48 preludes and fugues in Bach’s two books, Anderszewski has picked just 12, all from Book II. Purists may balk at hearing the music presented in what might seem a disruptively wilful order. But they “ought to be convinced by the sheer intelligence and lucidity of the playing, its immaculate phrasing and minutely graduated range of tone”.

Anderszewski knows exactly what he’s doing, agreed Harriet Smith in *Gramophone*. His selection of pieces is “less of a box of Quality Street to be consumed slumped on the sofa and more of an invitation to a cocktail party of great sophistication”. His chosen sequence is both “natural-sounding and innately refreshing”, and his phrasing is full of lightness, playfulness and “irresistible positivity”. This is a glorious recital, “as compelling as it is beautifully recorded”.



## Films to stream

From *Lassie Come Home* and *Old Yeller* to 2019's *Togo*, there are plenty of beloved family films and adventure movies about dogs. But canine-human relations are at the heart of some complex grown-up dramas, too:

**Umberto D.** Vittorio De Sica's 1952 drama stars the non-professional actor Carlo Battisti (a university lecturer) as an elderly man facing penury and homelessness in Rome, with only his faithful Jack Russell terrier for company. Heartbreaking but simple and unsentimental, it is perhaps the strongest of the Italian neo-realist films.

**White Dog** Indie film pioneer Samuel Fuller left the US when Paramount suppressed his film before it was due to be released in 1982. A provocative exploration of the nature of hatred, *White Dog* is a chilling story about a dog, which has been conditioned by racists to attack black people, and the African American trainer hired to "de-programme" it.

**Amores perros** Linked by a car crash in Mexico City, the three stories in Alejandro González Iñárritu's 2000 debut all have canine themes. It is a bravura masterpiece, violent (including some realistic – but not real – dog fights), cleverly plotted and charged with intense emotion.

**Best in Show** Made by Christopher Guest, the master of the mockumentary, and starring Eugene Levy and Catherine O'Hara, this deadpan 2000 comedy is about a dog show, its canine entrants – and their wildly eccentric owners.

**Wiener-Dog** Danny DeVito, Greta Gerwig and Julie Delpy among others play the consecutive owners of the dachshund at the heart of Todd Solondz's jet-black comedy. It's partly a sequel to his teen drama *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, and similarly packed with acid observations of human misery and cruelty – not one for everyone, then.

## New releases

### Quo Vadis, Aida?

Dir: Jasmila Žbanić (1hr 41mins) (15)

★★★★★

Serbian director Jasmila Žbanić's "incendiary" new film is about the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 – the worst civilian atrocity in Europe since the end of the Second World War, said Kevin Maher in *The Times*. We see it through the eyes of Aida (Jasna Đurđević), a local teacher-turned-translator who scurries frantically between the representatives of the 20,000 terrified Bosnian Muslims who are gathered in and around the UN's supposed "safe area" (a disused factory), and the commanders of the UN's Dutch peacekeeping forces – "eviscerated here as weak and spineless" – while the Bosnian Serb leader Ratko Mladic (Boris Isakovic) and his paramilitary thugs "await the green light for mass extermination".

More than 8,000 civilians were killed that July, but the massacre has been "intensely politicised, to the point of genocide denial in some quarters", said Jessica Kiang in *Variety*. Žbanić's film seeks to "un-revise" history, refocusing attention on the victims and on the "broader evils of institutional failure and international indifference". Mladic himself was sentenced to life in jail at The Hague in 2017, but the film's "moving" epilogue reminds us that survivors still live alongside perpetrators who were never brought to justice. All this may create an impression of a film that is just too tough to watch, said Mark Kermode in *The Observer*; but owing to Žbanić's skilled direction, and Đurđević's brilliant performance as Aida, it has a "profoundly human heart". The drama unfolds slowly, and with mounting dread – and yet we want to keep watching, "a notable achievement for a movie that is centrally concerned with the spectre of looking away". Available on *Curzon Home Cinema*.

### Assassins

Dir: Ryan White (1hr 44mins) (12)

★★★★★

This documentary about the 2017 assassination of Kim Jong Nam – the half-brother of the



Jasna Đurđević in *Quo Vadis, Aida?*: brilliant

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un – is a "low-key" account of an astonishing story, said Dave Calhoun in *Time Out*. A persistent critic of the regime who lived in exile, Kim Jong Nam died after having VX nerve agent smeared on him by two young women from Indonesia and Vietnam, who'd approached him in the departure lounge of Kuala Lumpur airport. Malaysian prosecutors sought the death sentence for the pair, but they claimed North Korean agents had duped them into believing they were participating in a hidden-camera prank for YouTube. In this gripping documentary, director Ryan White makes their "bizarre" story credible, while also exposing the incompetence of the Malaysian authorities, and the ruthless political machinations in Kim's closed nation.

The prankster ruse was "satanically clever" and "dripping with contemporary media irony", said Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*. One wonders who – in a country "supposedly marooned" in its Soviet past – could have dreamed up such a plot. The film does not answer that question. But it does show, in chilling detail, how the two women – poor, uneducated, and led on by dreams of social media glory – were apparently "groomed and gaslit" into carrying out the attack. It amounts to an "extraordinary story of sexism, violence, diplomatic bad faith and dishonesty on an international scale". Available on *Dogwoof On Demand* and other digital platforms.

## Lupin: the French series taking Netflix by storm

Created by the British writer George Kay, *Lupin* is "good, stupid fun", and is predicted to become one of Netflix's biggest hits, said Hugo Rifkind in *The Times*. Omar Sy stars as Assane, a young French man who sees himself as a modern-day Arsène Lupin – the gentleman thief and master of disguise created by the French writer Maurice Leblanc more than 100 years ago.

The books are old, but Assane is a new kind of French hero, said Sophie Gilbert in *The Atlantic*. He is the son of an immigrant from Senegal who came to France in search of a better life. Instead, his father was falsely



Sy: brims with charisma

accused of theft by his wealthy employer, and hanged himself in jail. Inspired by Leblanc's books, Assane devises a series of devilishly clever schemes to avenge his father's death, schemes that often rely on his tendency, as a black man in France, to either blend in or stand out in different contexts. Sy brims with charisma, in a series that offers a "refreshing twist" on two familiar stereotypes – the "uncatchable master of deception" and the "con man with a heart of gold", said Adrian Horton in *The Guardian*. It's good, slick escapism, and, being made up of just five episodes, it is easily binged in a day.

## Artist of the week: Raphael's sublime masterpieces

Had it not been for Covid-19, the 500th anniversary of Raphael's death would have been commemorated in remarkable style, said Michael Collins in *The Irish Times*. Alas, the pandemic scuppered Italy's plans for a year-long celebration, while in London a huge retrospective at the National Gallery has been pushed back to 2022. Looking on the bright side, it gives art lovers much to look forward to, when this crisis is finally over. Along with Leonardo, who was 31 years older than him, and his bitter rival Michelangelo, who was nearer his own age, Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino (1483-1520) was "one of the most celebrated artists of the Italian Renaissance". Known to his contemporaries as "the divine Raphael", he was a sublime draughtsman and painter. His distinctive visual style – gentle, fluid and infused with compassion for its subjects – has influenced generations of artists from Pontormo to Reynolds, and his observations of principally female models have set a benchmark for depictions of the human form.

Much of what we know about Raphael's relatively short life (he died when he was 37) comes courtesy of Giorgio Vasari, the 16th century artist and historian who wrote the landmark book *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. And some of what he tells us is dubious at best, said Alastair Sooke in *The Daily Telegraph*. Vasari would have us believe that the artist was a compulsive womaniser whose untimely death was the result of "too much sex". The truth "is probably more prosaic": it is more likely that Raphael expired from "exhaustion". Small wonder: in the 12 years following being summoned from Florence to Rome by Pope Julius II in 1508, Raphael had worked almost



*The Miraculous Draught of Fishes: one of Raphael's celebrated cartoons*

non-stop on grand projects for the Church. One of the most spectacular was a set of preparatory drawings – known as cartoons – for a series of "vast" tapestries ordered by Julius's successor, Leo X, who wanted a work of art for the walls of the Sistine Chapel to rival Michelangelo's on the ceiling. Depicting scenes from the New Testament, the cartoons are "monumental" in scale: each made up of around 200 pieces of paper, they are up to five metres long and three-and-a-half metres tall. The tapestries remain in the Vatican, but the seven surviving cartoons were acquired by Charles II and shipped to

Britain in the 17th century. Then, in 1865, these astonishingly important pieces were loaned by Queen Victoria to the V&A, and hung in a poorly lit gallery, where they have remained ever since – "if not underappreciated, then insufficiently loved".

But all that is changing, said Rachel Campbell-Johnston in *The Times*. The gallery's lighting is being improved as part of a refurbishment, and to celebrate the anniversary, the museum has also created microscopically precise digital images of the cartoons, which allow us to examine them in unprecedented detail. Using a viewer on the V&A website, you can "zoom in closer and closer" on the paintings until you can see, in incredible focus, every mark – "every feather stroke of the cranes that wait greedily for the apostles to haul in their miraculous draught of fishes; every carved adornment of the temple pillars" that form the backdrop to Jesus healing the lame. Use your imagination and "you can almost hear the sound of the artist's charcoal as it sweeps across paper". It may not have the same impact as seeing these works in real life, but it will leave you in no doubt as to Raphael's genius.

## Photographer who created enduring images of postwar Britain

Grace Robertson, who has died aged 90, was hailed in late life as a "forgotten star of the golden age of photojournalism", said *The Daily Telegraph*. In the 1950s, she had documented the "drab routine of postwar life" with an unflinching gaze, and created some of the most enduring images of that period. Born in 1930, she'd inherited an interest in photography from her father, Fyfe Robertson, who worked at *Picture Post*. And when she was in her late teens and stuck at home, caring for her seriously ill mother, she persuaded him to buy her a second-hand Leica 35mm camera. She improvised a dark room in the guest bathroom, and – despite her mother's urging that she pursue more "ladylike" interests – she started venturing out onto the streets, to take pictures of ordinary women going about their daily lives in that grey 1950s world. She even submitted some to *Picture Post* itself, under the pseudonym "Dick Muir"; they were returned, but with the message: "Persevere, young man."

Robertson's work was well suited to a magazine known for its "celebration of working-class culture and of the welfare state",



*Conga Line, London Women's Pub Outing 1956*

said Amanda Hopkinson in *The Guardian*. And her "quiet determination" eventually paid off. Although she never made it onto the staff, she became a "respected member of the *Picture Post* team" as a freelancer. Some of her most memorable images include *Mother's Day Off*, a series showing a group of Battersea "charladies" on a charabanc trip to Margate in 1954; and *Shearing Time in Snowdonia*, evocative photographs of shepherds gathering their flocks. As with all her work, they were unsentimental, but they depicted their subjects with rare empathy.

Her photographic career, however, proved short-lived: *Picture Post* folded in 1957, and soon after, she retrained as a teacher. It was not until the 1980s that her work was rediscovered. Articulate, and striking-looking, she started appearing in the media, and gave lectures on the academic circuit. She was no nostalgic, but she did lament the sensationalism of much contemporary photojournalism, and a lost spirit of gentleness. "Gentle pictures are probably dead as a dodo today," she said, in 2010, "but back then it was different."



## Best books... Sam Lee

The folk singer and conservationist chooses his favourite books. He will perform a live-stream concert as part of the Kings Place Nature Unwrapped series on 13 February ([kingsplace.co.uk](http://kingsplace.co.uk)). His book, *The Nightingale*, is coming out in March

**Braiding Sweetgrass** by Robin Wall Kimmerer, 2020 (Penguin £9.99). With a gentle lyricism, the ethnobotanist and Native American author sets forth her modern yet ancient, indigenous yet scientific, explorations into senses of place and relationships to the plant world.

**In Search of Duende** by Federico García Lorca, 1933 (OOP). Lorca's essays delve into the roots of *cante jondo* (deep song) and ancient verse among the Spanish gypsies. A declaration of the disappearing power of the *duende* – the idea of a spirit, central to Lorca's thinking – to connect us to nature and our ancient past.

**Entangled Life** by Merlin Sheldrake, 2020 (Bodley Head £20). I've been a fungus obsessive since childhood, and reading Sheldrake's book brought to vivid detail something I'd suspected all my life: that this kingdom is utterly mystical, totally misunderstood, likely world-saving and very, very queer.

**One River** by Wade Davis, 1996 (Vintage £12.99). Accompanying me as a 21-year-old journeying into the Amazon, this book introduced me to the wisdom of the Amazonian tribespeople, the pioneering explorations of ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes, and the medicinal powers of rainforest flora.

**Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature** by Jon Young, Ellen Haas and Evan McGown, 2010 (Owlink Media £22.50 ebook). Simply put, this is the bible and manual for anyone questing for a closer relationship with nature, developing the senses, a spirit of curiosity and "seeing nature through the eyes of the child".

**The Book of Trespass** by Nick Hayes, 2020 (Bloomsbury £20). In this lambasting of English land-ownership, Hayes ploughs up uncomfortable truths about a legacy of socio-ecological exclusion, destruction and colonial pillaging resulting in today's ravaged and inaccessible countryside.

Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop on 020-3176 3835. For out-of-print books visit [biblio.co.uk](http://biblio.co.uk)

## The Week's guide to what's worth watching

### Programmes

**Billion Pound Cruise** A look at the goings-on above and below deck on the world's largest cruise ship, *Symphony of the Seas* – which boasts a water park, ice-rink and minigolf course, and a 2,200-strong crew. Sun 7 Feb, C4 19:00 (60mins).

**Deliver Us** The latest Scandi noir offering from Walter Presents: in a small Danish town, an anguished father seeks the truth about his son's death in a road accident. Sun 7 Feb, C4 23:05 (75mins; full, eight-part series available on All4).

**Imagine...** Alan Yentob explores the pandemic's impact on the UK's performing arts sector, and looks at how the creative industries have worked to keep it alive. Footage from throughout 2020 captures everything from drive-in opera to plays live-streamed from empty theatres. Tue 9 Feb, BBC1 22:45 (60mins).

### Films

**The Pink Panther** (1963) Peter Sellers introduced the world to the bumbling Inspector Jacques Clouseau in what proved to be the first of ten *Pink Panther* films. David Niven is the suave thief in pursuit of the eponymous diamond. Sat 6 Feb, Film4 16:35 (135mins).

**In Fabric** (2018) Pitched somewhere between psychological horror and dark comedy, director Peter Strickland's film follows the fate of a woman after she buys a menacing red dress. Sat 6 Feb, BBC2 23:20 (110mins).

**Snowden** (2016) Oliver Stone's tense biopic of the NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden weaves together different narratives, moving between the events that led to his



*ZeroZeroZero: Dane DeHaan joins the family firm*

disillusionment, and his explosive revelations to journalists in 2013. Joseph Gordon-Levitt stars. Tue 9 Feb, Film4 23:15 (160mins).

**Ex Machina** (2014) Writer Alex Garland's directorial debut is a brooding sci-fi drama starring Domhnall Gleeson as the gifted programmer at a giant tech company, whose reclusive boss tasks him with testing the AI capabilities of a captivating humanoid robot. Fri 12 Feb, Film4 23:45 (130mins).

### New to subscription TV

**Snowpiercer** The second series of the sci-fi drama about the inhabitants of a giant train circling the frozen Earth, adapted from Bong Joon-ho's satirical 2013 film of the same name. Sean Bean joins the cast as the villainous and vengeful Mr Wilford. On Netflix.

**ZeroZeroZero** Gritty drama about the cocaine industry, tracking a shipment of the drug across continents. Gabriel Byrne stars as the patriarch of a shipping company whose children (Dane DeHaan and Andrea Riseborough) become involved in the trade. On Sky Atlantic.

## The Archers: what happened last week

Pip tells Ruth she's quitting the rewilders, and wonders if they should withdraw the use of Oakey Bank; Ruth thinks it would scupper the project. At a wine tasting for her wedding, Stephanie Casey chats to Elizabeth and flirts with Freddie. Phoebe and Rex contemplate the future of rewilding without Pip. Natasha urges Tom to reach out to Kirsty, who asks him to help her track down Philip's workers. Shula tells Elizabeth about her prison visit to Philip; Elizabeth is furious and says it's a betrayal after Philip's crimes almost killed Freddie. A shaken Shula confides in Alistair. Brian, Justin and Phoebe have a fraught meeting: Justin is pulling out of the barns project but Phoebe says the rewilders are glad to cut ties with him after his links to slavery. Phoebe tells Brian that losing the barns won't affect business and that an eco-office will suit them better anyway – Brian thinks she's being blasé. Shula and Elizabeth make up after Freddie intercedes, but it's made Shula unsure about pursuing ordination. Steph keeps sending Freddie suggestive texts, and flirts outrageously when they meet to discuss his DJing at the wedding. Tom is reluctant to go out on the streets with Kirsty. Natasha is outraged he'd let Kirsty down and goes herself. After a near miss, Kirsty realises she's putting Natasha at risk. Natasha says if Kirsty needs her help again, she need only ask.

## Dance online

The biggest names in British dance – from Akram Khan to Carlos Acosta's Birmingham Royal Ballet – take part in **Dancing Nation**, a festival of new work from Sadler's Wells and BBC Arts. Three hour-long programmes feature contemporary, ballet and hip-hop from around the country; available online or on BBC iPlayer until 28 February ([sadlerswells.com](http://sadlerswells.com)). **The Royal Opera House** continues its online programme with Frederick Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée*. Natalia Osipova dances the title role in this 2015 production, "a joyous, life-enhancing experience" ([culturewhisper.com](http://culturewhisper.com)). Streaming until 28 February, £3 ([roh.org.uk](http://roh.org.uk)).

## European getaways



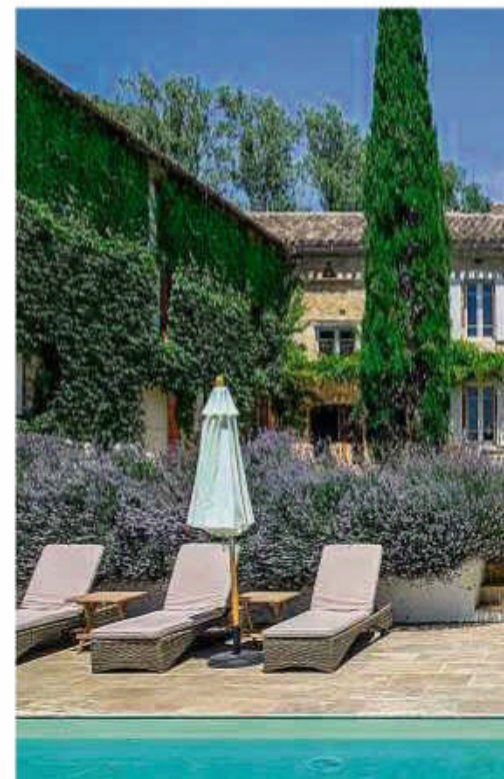
◀ **Italy:** Spoleto, Umbria. A classic-style, newly built country home surrounded by hills, olive groves and vineyards. The two-story house has a dining room with murals and a basement that includes a garage and ancillary rooms, which haven't yet been completed. Main suite with dressing room and terrace, 2 further suites (1 with a terrace), 1 further bed, family bath, eat-in kitchen, 2 receps, laundry room, terrace, porch, grounds. £717,000; Hamptons International (020-3151 6841).



▲ **France:** Coux-et-bigaroque, Dordogne. A beautiful 18th century water mill at the edge of a charming medieval village on the Dordogne river, in the heart of the Périgord Noir. The garden is planted with various unusual species and has a pergola overlooking the mill pond. 5 beds, 3 baths, outbuildings, garage. £497,000; Hamptons International (020-3151 6841).



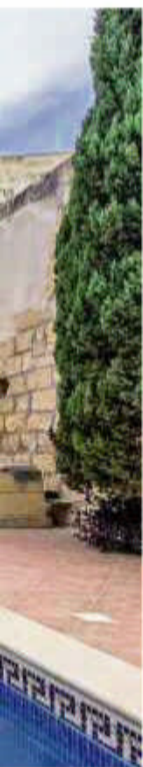
◀ **Italy:** Villa, Carovigno, Apulia. Built around a traditional trullo, the conical-roofed buildings typical of this part of Apulia, this unique conversion comes with a private pool and garden. The property is accessed via a lovely driveway crossing the 1.1-acre garden, with centuries-old olive trees and lots of typical plants. 1 bed, 2 baths, kitchen, 1 recep, garden, parking. €447,000; Oikos Immobiliare (+39 328 225 2086).





▲ **France:** Château Le Briou d'Autry, Sologne, Cher. A late 19th century neo-Gothic chateau, fully restored and set in a 12.9-acre enclosed park. 10 beds, 9 baths, 4/5 receps, kitchen, outbuildings, stables, dovecote. €997,500; Groupe Mercure (+33 6 63 17 41 27).

◀ **Spain:** Pollença, Mallorca. A striking house in an exclusive and elevated spot on the outskirts of the village, providing the best views over the Bay of Pollença. 6 suites, open-plan kitchen, wine cellar, swimming pool, gardens, gym, large garage, self-contained staff quarters, approx. 13 acres of land, 4-acre vineyard plantation. £6.155m, Hamptons International (020-3151 6841).



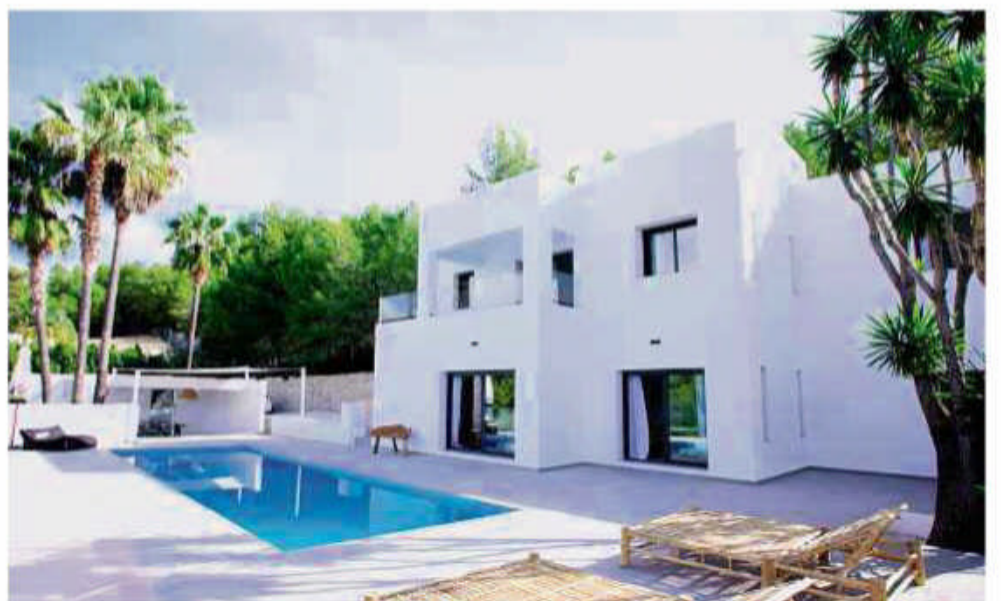
◀ **Malta:** Gharb, Gozo. A prestigious double-fronted traditional house that is full of character. It is situated in a tranquil village at the westernmost point of the island of Gozo among peaceful surroundings. The property boasts an impressive facade and retains numerous original features, while the spacious terrace enjoys views of both the Gordon lighthouse and the Ta'Pinu Basilica. 4 double beds (all en suite), kitchen, breakfast room, terrace, study/library, washroom, cloakroom, Jacuzzi, swimming pool, garden, garage, a large mill room which is ideal for entertaining. €690,000; Cluttons (020-7408 1010).



◀ **France:** Saintes, Charente-Maritime. Previously an old water mill, this has been turned into a beautifully restored home. Hiking trails, tennis court and a municipal swimming pool can all be found nearby. 4 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, recep, cellar, office, studio, attic (that can be converted into two beds), garage, barns/outbuildings, wooded park with a river. £444,000; Hamptons International (020-3151 6841).



◀ **France:** Farm House, Cestayrols, Tarn. A charming rustic farmhouse with modern facilities – which has been featured in interior design magazines – that sits within a vineyard near Albi. Main suite, 3 guest suites, 3 further beds, family bath, large dining kitchen, 5 receps, workshop, summer kitchen for al fresco dining, garage, wood store, open games room, heated swimming pool, large garden, enclosed vegetable garden. £822,000; Hamptons International (020-3151 6841).



▲ **Spain:** El Portet, Moraira, Alicante. Enjoying a quiet location with unobstructed views of the valley, the property has been renovated into a high-end villa. Main suite with lounge area and terrace, 3 further beds, 3 baths, kitchen, 2 receps, summer kitchen/bbq area, swimming pool, parking, gardens. €995,000; Fine & Country (+34 966 675768).

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fig.1

fig.2

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### Six of the best restaurant meal kits

Home delivery meal kits have been one of the hits of the pandemic: they have enabled diners to carry on getting a taste of restaurant-quality food, while helping restaurants to stay afloat. Here are six of the best offering nationwide delivery:

**Berenjak** ([berenjakkbazaar.com](http://berenjakkbazaar.com))

The kabab kits and mازه boxes from this London-based Iranian restaurant – which range in price from £25 to £45 – are a “class act”, says Jay Rayner in *The Observer*. My kit even included a pair of plastic gloves for me to wear “while spearing the meat onto the flat metal skewers”. This is the best kind of meal kit – the cooking is fun, and provides “unobtrusive education”, and the finished product is utterly delicious.

**Gujarati Rasoi** ([gujaratirasoi.co.uk](http://gujaratirasoi.co.uk))

I love this vegetarian restaurant, says Marina O’Loughlin in *The Sunday Times*. And its meal boxes are “electrifyingly good” too. Family boxes for four cost £65, and I love the *papdi chaat* starter (£15.50) – crunchy ribbons of gram-flour snacks layered with chickpeas, raita, date and tamarind. The dishes were elaborate, yet a “doddle” to assemble.

**Stein’s at Home** ([shop.rickstein.com](http://shop.rickstein.com))

Overseen by Jack Stein (son of Rick), this



Smokestak: “you certainly won’t be disappointed”

“make away” service offers a range of enticing, mainly fish-based menus, says Sudi Pigott in *The Daily Mail*. I opted for the Indonesian curry menu, which costs £55 for two, and consists of moules marinière, a seafood curry and passion fruit Eton mess. The “sparklingly fresh” fish combined with the carefully thought-out dishes meant a “perfect fish supper”.

**Smokestak** ([smokestak.co.uk](http://smokestak.co.uk))

David Carter, the owner of Smokestak, can do things with meat that are “practically indecent”, says Paul Henderson in *GQ*. His at-home boxes highlight what he can achieve with an “old-school smoker”, shipped from Texas – from 15-hour beef brisket

to fabulously unctuous pulled pork. Smokestak also sells a range of pickles and sauces, along with various pre-mixed cocktails. Order a kit, and “you certainly won’t be disappointed”.

**Lyle’s** ([lylesprovisions.com](http://lylesprovisions.com))

This Michelin-starred London restaurant delivers its “exquisitely delicious” menu boxes each Friday, says Xanthe Clay in *The Daily Telegraph*. At £140 for two, they aren’t cheap, and with multiple courses, they do take a bit of work and concentration to assemble.

However, what you end up with is the “full fine dining experience (sans the service, alas)”, as well as a “fascinating glimpse into how restaurant dishes are finished and plated up”.

**Santo Remedio** ([santoremedio.co.uk](http://santoremedio.co.uk))

Order a “Remedy kit” from Santo Remedio and what you will get is an “incredibly generous, sharing-style Mexican feast” for two, says Anna Lawson on *BBC Good Food*. The kits come with a choice of slow-cooked meat, accompanied by all the ingredients to build your own tacos. Preparation is simple, thanks to a colour-coded instruction manual: expect to spend about 25 minutes on it. They will set you back £45; pay £15 more and you’ll get a margarita each.

### Recipe of the week: Salmon, pink grapefruit and avocado salad

This salad would make a perfect weekday lunch, says Nicola Graimes – it’s simple, reviving, vibrant and nutritious. If time is not on your side, use hot-smoked salmon or trout, which is already cooked.

Serves 4

4 lightly smoked wild salmon fillets    75g of mixed coloured quinoa, rinsed    1 large pink grapefruit  
 115g rocket leaves    1 Little Gem lettuce, shredded    ½ a small red onion, diced    2 tbsp toasted pumpkin seeds  
 1 handful coriander leaves    for the dressing: 3 tbsp hemp seed oil or extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling  
 juice of 1 large lime    sea salt and black pepper

- Preheat the oven to 180°C fan/200°C/gas mark 6.
- Line a baking tray with baking paper. Arrange the salmon on the tray, drizzle with a little oil and season with salt and pepper.
- Cook for 10 minutes, or until cooked but slightly pink in the middle.
- Meanwhile, cook the quinoa following the packet instructions, then drain and spread out on a large serving plate to cool.
- To make the dressing, mix together the hemp seed oil or olive oil and lime juice, then season.



- Next, prepare the grapefruit. Slice off the base and stand the fruit on a plate to collect any juices. Working your way around the fruit, cut away the skin and any white pith, then insert the knife between each membrane to remove the segments. Pour any juice left on the plate into the dressing.
- When ready to serve, top the quinoa with the rocket, lettuce, grapefruit segments and red onion. Flake the salmon into pieces, discarding the skin, and arrange on top.
- Spoon over the dressing and finish with the pumpkin seeds and coriander leaves.

Taken from *The Right Fat: How to enjoy fat with over 50 simple, nutritious recipes for good health* by Nicola Graimes, published by Pavilion Books at £9.99.

To buy from *The Week Bookshop* for £7.99, call 020-3176 3835 or visit [theweekbookshop.co.uk](http://theweekbookshop.co.uk).

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## New cars: what the critics say



**Mercedes S-Class**  
from £78,705

### The Daily Telegraph

Often labelled “the best car in the world”, the Mercedes S-Class is an example of “mass production as art”. There has been much anticipation of this seventh-generation model’s tech in particular, and while it is not able to drive itself, it does have highly advanced “level 3” autonomy: it can assist with braking and steering simultaneously, and even park itself – provided your garage has sensors.

### Top Gear

With the S-Class, you get cutting-edge tech mixed with old-school luxury. The interface on the huge central screen and digital dashboard is easy to use, and the navigation relies on five cameras, radar, and ultrasonic sensors to give a real-time overhead view of the car on the road. There’s a voice assistant – just say “Hey Mercedes” – and seats with ten different massage programmes.

### What Car?

The current engine options are a turbocharged 3.0-litre, 429bhp petrol with a mild hybrid boost, and a 2.9-litre turbodiesel with either 282bhp or 325bhp. A plug-in hybrid with an electric range of 62 miles is due later this year. The S-Class builds up pace “effortlessly”, manoeuvres precisely, and though emissions could be better, it “offers all the performance, space and gadgets you could want”.

## The best... pet gadgets



▶ **Animate Walking Mate LED Flashing Loop** Put this rechargeable LED ring, which comes in four colours and has a flashing mode, around your dog’s neck to make it visible on dark roads (£8.67; [animedirect.co.uk](http://animedirect.co.uk)).



### ▶ Furbo Dog Camera

With crisp 1080p video and a 160-degree field of view, the Furbo can show most of what is going on in a room while you’re out. It can send “bark alerts” to your phone, and can even spit out treats (£189; [shopuk.furbo.com](http://shopuk.furbo.com)).



### ▶ SureFlap SureFeed Microchip Cat and Small Dog Feeder

Perfect for making sure the right pet gets their food in busy households, this feeder only opens when it senses its rightful owner’s microchip (£80; [petsathome.com](http://petsathome.com)).



### ▼ Tractive GPS Cat Tracker

This smartest of collars tells you your cat’s location every three seconds via an app. It can also display a heatmap of where they spend most of their time, and monitor their activity, their calories burned and their naps (£45; [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)).

### ▲ Soneer Dog Paw Cleaner

Simple but effective, this tube filled with silicone bristles is great for getting dirt out of paws after a muddy walk. Just pour a little water inside, stick a paw in and twist around (£19; [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)).

## Tips of the week... prepare your garden for spring

- Don’t worry if you didn’t plant any bulbs in the autumn – garden centres have a great selection of potted bulbs for spring displays.
- Look for shrubs with spring blossoms. If your soil is acidic, try *Corylopsis pauciflora*. *Ribes x beatonii* and Japanese quince also bring a burst of colour from March to May.
- Try growing pea shoots or micro-leaves – cress, coriander, spinach – on a windowsill.
- Alpines, which start to flower in March/early April, are great for limited spaces, or containers with drainage. For beginners, try *Saxifraga Peter Pan* and *Pulsatilla vulgaris*.
- There is still time in February to plant bare-root trees and roses, which come without soil, because they tend to establish quicker as they have a wider root system.
- Most seeds are sown in spring, but hardy plants like sweet peas and broad beans can be sown now in pots. Heat-loving tomatoes, chillies and exotic flowers such as *Cobaea scandens* need a long growing season, so can be sown now in a heated propagator.

SOURCE: THE SUNDAY TIMES

## And for those who have everything...



Keep your dog warm in style with Moncler’s line of “dog couture”, in collaboration with the pet clothing brand Poldo. The collection includes the polyester Mondog gilet (which comes in several colours, including a camouflage print), rain cloaks, and a £235 leash.  
**from £305; [moncler.com](http://moncler.com)**

SOURCE: THE SUNDAY TIMES

## Where to find... stylish homeware online

With a mix of design-led accessories and made-to-order furniture, **Rose and Grey** is a great place for spotting design trends before they take off ([roseandgrey.co.uk](http://roseandgrey.co.uk)).

The French company **Maisons du Monde** offers everything from chic sofas to tableware. They say Brexit hasn’t changed their charges ([maisonsdumonde.com](http://maisonsdumonde.com)).

**Lisa Valentine** specialises in making utility items – like a dustpan and brush or drying rack – beautiful ([lisavalentinehome.co.uk](http://lisavalentinehome.co.uk)).

**Swoon** has an in-house design team in order to cut out middlemen and make stylish storage, tables, desks and chairs more affordable ([swooneditions.com](http://swooneditions.com)).

Launched by Jane Rickett and Lucy St George in 2007, **Rockett St George** is loved by interior designers for its “eclectic edge” ([rockettstgeorge.co.uk](http://rockettstgeorge.co.uk)).

The family-run **Persora**, which has a store in a Grade II-listed Georgian building in the Cotswolds, is particularly good for gifts and home accessories ([persora.com](http://persora.com)).

SOURCE: THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

SOURCES: T3/ITV

## Actress and model whose career spanned seven decades

**Cicely Tyson**  
1924-2021

Cicely Tyson, who has died aged 96, was a pioneering black actress whose seven-decade-long career encompassed film, theatre and television. Refusing to take any role that she felt demeaned black people, even if that meant not working, she won three Emmys, a Tony, an honorary Oscar and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and she was cited as an inspiration by countless younger actors. One of them was Viola Davis, who recalled that growing up in poverty in Rhode Island, in the only black family in her town, she had seen Tyson on TV – “a dark-skinned, thick-lipped woman who truly mirrored me” – and it had given her “permission to dream”. Tyson had a long, on-off relationship with the jazz legend Miles Davis, and was a leading figure in the Black is Beautiful movement. By refusing to wear her hair straightened for a role as an African woman trying to preserve her heritage in America, in the early 1960s, she also helped start the natural hair movement. But while she was regarded as a role model, it wasn’t something she’d sought. “It pleases me to be a symbol and to be recognised as such,” she said, “but I hope some day to be simply Cicely Tyson, actress.”

Cicely Tyson was born in 1924, and brought up in Harlem. Her mother, Frederica, was a domestic worker; her father, William, worked as a carpenter and painter. Her parents separated when she was ten. But her most vivid memory was of being nine, and seeing her mother lining up with other black women outside a Manhattan department store, while a rich white woman decided whether to employ them as cleaners. Her mother, she recalled in her autobiography, was a proud, morally upright, church-going woman; she was shocked to see her undergoing this indignity. “I never expected my mother would be standing in line like slaves were in the years of slavery,” she told Janice Turner in *The Times*.

After graduating high school, she worked briefly for the American Red Cross, in the typing pool. Then, walking down Fifth Avenue one day, a man stopped her and told her that if she wasn’t a model, she should become one. So she started distributing her



Tyson: wouldn't play negative roles

photograph. From modelling, she made the leap to acting. In the 1960s, she appeared opposite Maya Angelou and James Earl Jones in an off-Broadway production of Jean Genet’s *The Blacks*. She was in the film *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* in 1968, and in 1972 she was nominated for an Oscar for her role as a sharecropper in 1930s Louisiana, in *Sounder*. She didn’t win, but it made her a star.

Although she had mixed with political activists in the 1960s, she had not been one. That changed when, at a press conference for *Sounder*, a white journalist told the cast that he’d been amazed to hear the sharecropper’s son call his father Daddy, “because that’s what my son calls me”. In her autobiography, she wrote: “I don’t know what stunned me more, that the man believed what he did or that he had the audacity to say it aloud.” White Americans, she realised, did not see their black fellow citizens as entirely human. Tyson sought to change this,

by playing only positive, fully rounded characters. She took the lead role in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, a hit TV drama from 1974 about the life of a 100-year-old woman who was born into slavery; and played the mother of Kunta Kinte in the seminal TV miniseries *Roots*, in 1977. But she declined to appear in Blaxploitation movies. With their plots about drugs, guns, pimps and prostitutes, it was “committing a narrative assassination of ourselves”, she said. Later, she played Sipseey in the film *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991); she had a recurring role as a congresswoman in Netflix’s *House of Cards*; and from 2015, she was Viola Davis’s mother in the TV show *How to Get Away with Murder*. In 2018, she won an honorary Oscar – the first black woman to do so.

She first met Miles Davis in 1965. They became a couple (she is pictured on the cover of his 1967 album *Sorcerer*); but he was serially unfaithful, and she left him. Then, in the 1970s, when they were both in their 50s, and his drug habit had almost killed him, she came to his rescue. He credited her with saving his life, and begged her to marry him. She agreed, in 1981; but he went back to his old ways, and in 1988, she filed for divorce.

## The last surviving widow of the American Civil War

**Helen Jackson**  
1919-2020

Helen Jackson, who has died aged 101, was known as “Miss Jackson” in the small town in Missouri where she had spent most of her adult life. A stern and slightly intimidating woman, a stalwart of her Methodist church and a member of various local committees, she was assumed to be a spinster, said *The Times*; but in 2017, while discussing her funeral arrangements with her pastor and friend, Nicholas Inman, she confessed to him that she had once been married – to a man who had fought in the Civil War. It made no sense: that bloody war had ended 152 years earlier. But her claim – to be the last Civil War widow – turned out to be true.




Jackson: kept a secret for 81 years

She was born in Missouri in 1919, one of ten children of a poor farmer, and brought up during the Great Depression. Her father had a widowed friend, an old man named James Bolin, who had fought for the Union with the 14th Missouri Cavalry. When Helen was in her teens, her father asked her to help Bolin with his chores each day, on her way home from school. One day, in


return for her kindness, Bolin suggested to her that they get married: that way, he said, she could claim his war pension after his death. “He said that it might be my only way of leaving the farm,” she recalled. They tied the knot in 1936, when she was 17 and he was 93. But, as agreed, it was kept secret: she stayed with her parents on the farm, and there was no intimacy between them. Three years later, he died, but she never did claim the pension: one of his daughters had warned her that if it came out that she’d married an old man for his money, it would destroy her reputation, and she wanted to protect his too. So she kept her secret, for 81 years – though it was “eating her alive”, Inman said.

He investigated her story – and her status, as a Civil War widow, was officially recognised. Having spent years hiding her history, she embraced it, said *The Guardian* – and in the process, found a new peace. When Bolin’s descendants heard about her place in his life, they came to visit her at her nursing home, and gave her a framed photo of him. She cried when she saw it, Inman recalled. “She kept touching the frame and said, ‘This is the only man who ever loved me’.”



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



## Seven days in the Square Mile

Global markets were roiled by the clash between day traders and hedge funds over heavily shorted US video game retailer **GameStop**, whose shares leapt 400% in a week as buyers piled in (see p46), galvanised by Reddit's investment community, WallStreetBets. The ensuing "short squeeze" on hedge funds betting against the stock took a big toll: one fund, **Melvin**, sustained a 53% loss.

Trading platforms **Robinhood** and **Interactive** stopped trading in GameStop and other hotly followed stocks. But as attention switched to the silver market – prompting the biggest daily rise in the metal's price in eight years – fears of systemic damage from extreme market speculation grew. In another sign of Wall Street's frothy markets, **Goldman Sachs** reported that so-called "Spacs" (special purpose acquisition companies) raised \$16bn in the first three weeks of 2021 – compared to \$13bn in the whole of 2019.

The **oil price** hit a 12-month high and kept rising, with Brent Crude above \$58/barrel. **Moonpig**, the e-greetings card company, floated in London at 350p; shares ended the day at 410p, valuing the company at £1.4bn. **GlaxoSmithKline** announced a €150m collaboration with Nasdaq-listed **CureVac** to develop a new generation of vaccines targeted at Covid variants. Ex-chancellor George Osborne took a new job as a banker – in an M&A role with boutique firm **Robey Warshaw**. **Centrica's** boss, Chris O'Shea, reported his family had been posted excrement following a pay row at the firm.

## BP/Exxon/Chevron: oil spoiler

After what it described as a "brutal" year, BP plunged £13.2bn into the red in 2020, marking its "first full-year loss in a decade", said Simon Foy in The Daily Telegraph. The FTSE 100 oil giant was hit badly by plunging demand and prices during the pandemic, though CEO Bernard Looney said he expected "better days ahead" in 2021. Looney has pinned his colours to BP's new "net zero ambition", and its strategy of becoming "an integrated energy company", but he faces "scepticism from investors". At least BP isn't alone in its travails, said Derek Brower and Justin Jacobs in the FT. America's biggest oil producer, ExxonMobil, also registered its first annual loss, citing "the most challenging market conditions" it had ever experienced. The situation seemed so dire in early 2020 that the company even discussed a defensive merger with Chevron, to create an all-American champion. Had that gone ahead, it would have been "the biggest merger of all time", creating a behemoth second only in size to the \$1.78trn Saudi Aramco, said Mike Spector on Reuters. Could it yet happen? A mighty US oil combo might succeed in neutering Aramco, which has previously "pushed many US drillers to the financial brink by flooding the market with oil". But given the Democrats' historic lack of sympathy for such deals, "the window might be all but closed" under the new Biden administration.

## Foresight Group: the Fink doctrine

The renewables-focused venture capitalist Foresight Group is preparing to launch "the next big green IPO" in London, said Tom Braithwaite in the FT. What an "exquisite time" to go public – just as environmental, social and governance (ESG) preoccupations reach "new levels of hype". Last week, Larry Fink – head of BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager – reiterated his call for higher standards, observing that "climate transition presents a historic investment opportunity". Foresight, whose assets under management have surged to £6.8bn since it embraced "ESG-oriented strategies", can count on support from a wave of investors "desperate to follow the Fink doctrine" when it lists later this month. The group's expected valuation is £500m – a "hefty premium to revenues of only £57.3m, and net profits of £6.5m". There are also questions about the "social" credentials of a financial group registered offshore in Guernsey. Foresight illustrates the current "yawning chasm" on the stock market. Anything with a "green gloss" is highly prized; by contrast, "reliable cash cows" are spurned as "dirty dead-enders".

## Marston's: independence day

Shares in the pub chain Marston's were trading at almost 130p in 2019 before the pandemic hit, said Mark Sweney in The Guardian. The ensuing slump has now made it a "takeover target" – perhaps the first of many to come in "the embattled hospitality sector". Marston's, whose 1,400 outlets include the Pitcher & Piano chain, last week received an offer of 105p a share from the US private equity group Platinum. "Raise a glass" to the directors, said Alistair Osborne in The Times: "unlike too many rollover boards", they turned it down – claiming the £690m bid "very significantly undervalues" the business, which recently merged with Carlsberg's UK arm, and assumed responsibility for running 156 pubs attached to the family-owned Welsh brewer SA Brain. "Platinum's portfolio includes a provider of portable toilets. Bog off seems doubly appropriate."

## Arcadia/Asos/Boohoo: carving up a retail empire

So farewell, Sir Philip "Effing" Green, said Alistair Osborne in The Times. The erstwhile king of the high street has been "trying to get shot of Arcadia for years". Now, helped by Covid, he has achieved it – selling the group's Topshop, Topman and Miss Selfridge brands to Asos for £330m, and reportedly offloading Burton, Dorothy Perkins and Wallis to Boohoo for £25m. "Administrator Deloitte has done its job in getting the highest price" from the online retailers – but at the cost of almost 13,000 jobs and 444 shops. And a "day of reckoning" still looms over a giant hole in the pension fund. "Barring a miracle", Arcadia's 9,500 pensioners are heading for the Government's pensions lifeboat: "a bit of a contrast to a Green yacht".



Green: a "retail showman"

from selling Topshop clothes on its site. The online firm, now worth £4.7bn, has since become Topshop's biggest online partner; this deal will secure more of the profits. It also raises the stakes in the "platform wars" now shaping UK fashion, as the dominant players – Next, Asos and Boohoo – rush to aggregate brands. Even M&S has "cottoned on", snatching the once-elegant Jaeger from the ruins of Edinburgh Woollen Mill Group.

The revolution has meant "carnage" on the physical high street as "jobs and business rate revenues vanish", said The Sunday Times. But Green's own negative contribution shouldn't be overlooked, said Alex Brummer in the Daily Mail. Ultimately, he was more interested in living the high life than running his empire. This "self-righteous retail showman for whom apology is a foreign language" has left behind him a "trail of destruction".

A long-standing tech sceptic, Green assumed a Canute-like position as the internet upstarts advanced, said Laura Onita in The Sunday Telegraph. Until two years ago, Asos was banned

living the high life than running his empire. This "self-righteous retail showman for whom apology is a foreign language" has left behind him a "trail of destruction".

## Issue of the week: Going global?

*The Government is talking up the UK's new role in global trade – but frustrations on the ground are mounting*

Donald Trump may be gone, but the Scotch whisky industry is still suffering from his policies, said Radio Clyde News. Exports of single malts have fallen by more than a third since the US imposed a 25% tariff in 2019 – initially, as part of a wider range of measures in retaliation for EU support given to the European aviator Airbus. Distillers are “continuing to pay the price for an aerospace dispute that has nothing to do with them”, according to the Scotch Whisky Association. So far it has cost them £500m. Not surprisingly they want action. Ministers say they are listening and have embarked on “intensive talks” to get these “unfair tariffs” removed. But the situation remains in stalemate.



Liz Truss: “turbo-charging trade”

Much the same might be said of Britain’s wider trade talks with the US, said George Parker and Aime Williams in the FT. “Hopes of an early trade deal between London and Washington” have faded. The new US president, Joe Biden, “has vowed to improve his own country’s economy before signing new trade deals” – and a “UK-US agreement” isn’t seen as a high priority. Forced onto the back foot, the PM and his Trade Secretary Liz Truss instead chose to mark the first anniversary of Britain leaving the EU by applying to join a “Pacific bloc” of 11 countries. The hope is that if America is also persuaded to sign up to the Comprehensive and

Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) – whose members include fast-growing economies such as Malaysia and Mexico, as well as established players like Japan, Australia and Canada – it could kick-start global trade, with Britain at the top table. But, again, Biden looks in no hurry to move. Critics say Britain’s CPTPP membership will bring “limited economic benefit” to the UK because “distance remains a crucial factor”. Indeed, Britain’s application to join CPTPP, while ending frictionless trade with the huge bloc on its own doorstep, is one of the “paradoxes of UK trade policy”.

Nonsense, wrote Liz Truss herself in The Daily Telegraph. It is a feather in our cap that “Britain is poised to become a Pacific player”. The move is evidence that, after a year as an independent trading nation, Britain is picking up speed. “Turbo-charging trade with these economies, which cover nearly £9trn of world GDP, will be key to fuelling our economic recovery.” Plenty closer to home would beg to differ, said Toby Helm in The Observer. “In what is threatening to become a dramatic exodus of investment and jobs”, hundreds of UK companies are making inquiries about switching operations to countries within the EU to avoid crippling costs. For them, the Government’s talk of a “newly nimble Global Britain” has a decidedly hollow ring.

## Making money: what the experts think

### ● Silver squeeze

Has calm returned to markets following last week’s GameStop mania? By Wednesday this week, it looked that way, said Patrick Hosking and Ben Martin in The Times. Shares in the US gaming-shop chain have more than halved in value since amateur traders on Reddit pushed them into the stratosphere (see page 4) – and the ensuing “silver buying spree” that “stunned global financial markets” has also shown “signs of fizzling out”. After hitting an eight-year high of \$30/oz, as they became “an alternative focus in the battle between small traders and Wall Street hedge funds”, spot silver prices fell by more than 5%. But many have been left pondering the ramifications of the mighty “silver squeeze”.



Silver “always lets you down”

made gains. Silver is “a very different target” to unloved individual shares, said Mohamed El-Erian of Allianz on CNBC. “The fact that you can move silver, such a large market, is an indication to everyone that they have to take these new technicals seriously.”

### ● Dramatic results

Why did the Reddit “mob” alight on silver, asked Dominic Frisby on MoneyWeek.com. Because many believe the explanation for its perennially disappointing price performance is “manipulation”. The story that a large investment bank is suppressing the supply of silver “has been around for as long as I have”. Last week, it “caught hold once more” with dramatic results. Since silver has “a plethora of industrial uses”, especially in new technologies, some maintain it should be priced at “well over \$100 an ounce”. “And yet never has a commodity disappointed its investors so consistently” – the precious metal trades at the same price now as it did 40 years ago. If it can clear \$30, there’s a good chance silver could run to \$50 – the all-time high, set in 1980. But remember, “it’s the metal that always lets you down” – as a new group of traders may be about to find out.

### ● Moving markets

At the height of the fervour, retail investors piled into silver, noted Markets.com analyst Neil Wilson – with the aim of forcing hedge-fund managers shorting the commodity to become buyers. The upshot was a roller-coaster ride for precious metal miners in the UK as well as the US, said Michelle McGagh on Citywire. Shares in London-listed Fresnillo jumped 16.5% to hit £11.50. Mining investment trusts also

## Not so merry...

These are “surreal times” for Robinhood, the online stockbroker at the centre of the GameStop storm, said The New York Times. At the end of last week, the commission-free outfit “faced pressure on its business model, rumour-mongering about its allegiance to hedge funds, and sabre-rattling from Washington”, not to mention the anger of investors restricted from trading in shares and options of GameStop and seven other companies. None of those challenges have gone away.

Still, at least Robinhood has accessed new funds, said The Economist. Forced to suspend trading after the frenzy “depleted” its required capital, it raised \$1bn. Now it has “tapped its not-so-merry band of shareholders” for a further \$2.4bn. Founded seven years ago by Vladimir Tenev and Baiju Bhatt, as part of a mission to “democratise finance for all”, the start-up was the first to offer retail investors unfettered (i.e. no-fee) access to the stock market. But the GameStop drama has presented Robinhood, “once a beneficiary of the wave of retail investing”, with “existential threats”. Questions are being asked about its financial dealings with the hedge fund Citadel, which last week rode to the rescue of fellow fund Melvin Capital even as the latter was being squeezed by Robinhood traders. Worse, regulators are now on the case. The GameStop saga has “created pain” for a handful of financial institutions, Robinhood may be another “to suffer”.

# Navigating business ethics in China

Why vigilance and transparency are key to operating successfully in the world's second-largest economy



**C**hina's unique history, culture and political system make it a different prospect to the Western markets that many companies will be more used to operating within. The relationship between government, business and military is sometimes blurred, and the UK government has raised serious concerns about China's reported human rights violations.

Organisations operating in China need to be particularly vigilant in the area of business ethics to avoid infringing UK or international law and the serious reputational damage caused to companies connected to human rights abuses.

**Organisations operating in China need to be particularly vigilant in the area of business ethics to avoid infringing UK or international law and serious reputational damage**

## Military-Civil Fusion

The Chinese authorities operate a Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) policy that seeks to modernise the military and enhance its technology by blurring the lines between civil and military research. Under MCF, products a foreign company develops or shares in collaboration with a Chinese partner could theoretically be repurposed for military use without the foreign partner's consent, which can lead to legal issues and reputational damage.

To avoid falling foul of the MCF, you need a comprehensive understanding of your technology, particularly its 'dual-use' potential. Apply for the appropriate export licenses and consult the UK export authorities if a product seems likely to be subjected to UK Strategic Export Controls. You should also investigate the record and policies of potential Chinese partners – networks like the China-Britain Business Council ([cbbc.org](http://cbbc.org)) and techUK ([techuk.org](http://techuk.org)) can help put you in touch with reliable China-based contacts. Visit the UK government's Digital and Tech China website ([gov.uk/digitalandtechchina](http://gov.uk/digitalandtechchina)) for more guidance.

## Human rights

You are likely to be aware of some of the concerns regarding China's record on human rights. Due to the complexity and occasional opacity of the Chinese system and supply chains, it might not always be immediately obvious when your operations in China are intersecting with these issues.

Your ability to recognise these risks will be bolstered by an awareness and understanding of UK and international human rights laws and guidelines such as the UK's Modern Slavery Act

and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). These policies offer a structure around which your organisation can begin to build a robust framework for due diligence in business ethics.

## Mitigation

The complexity of human rights issues in China is such that standard due diligence practices are unlikely to be enough in this area. Keeping up with current affairs and political policy will help you identify which areas of the Chinese market and business may be a risk to you. Be prepared to react swiftly to emerging issues that may impact your operations, while being aware that organisations that speak out publicly against human rights risk censure from the Chinese authorities.

One of your best defences is to be transparent about all the steps you are taking to maintain ethical practices so that, if issues arise, you can demonstrate that you have been acting in good faith.

Business ethics may be one of the most complicated areas when it comes to due diligence, but this should not put you off at the outset. With a dedication to transparency and a thorough understanding of your product and partners, many businesses will be able to successfully and ethically navigate the Chinese market.

To read an expanded version of this article, visit [china.theweek.co.uk](http://china.theweek.co.uk)

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## Britain's stuttering recovery

**David Smith**

*The Sunday Times*

How is the UK economy doing in the international growth stakes, asks David Smith. Not so well. According to the IMF, last year's 10% contraction was much worse than the performance of the US, which lost 3.4%, and Japan and Germany, which declined by 5%. Perhaps the "safest thing to say is that the UK was among a clutch of poorly performing European countries, along with France, Italy and Spain". Some favour the "trampoline theory of economic recoveries". But the disappointing news is that Britain's projected recovery – 4.5% this year and 5% next – is behind that of Spain and France, in spite of the EU's "vaccination imbroglio". Why? One reason is that our own successful programme isn't yet "delivering liberty". Another is the "serious" trade friction caused by Brexit. But a third is that having spent a staggering £280bn fighting Covid, there is "little official talk of providing a post-pandemic fiscal boost". The Chancellor might say the best stimulus is simply lifting restrictions, but "other countries are adopting a belt-and-braces approach". Time will tell which works best.

## Rough justice for Libor's "fall guy"

**Alistair Osborne**

*The Times*

"Rough justice comes in many forms," says Alistair Osborne. Was Tom Hayes a victim of it? The former UBS and Citigroup trader has been released from jail more than five years after being convicted of "rigging" the benchmark interest rate, Libor. Given that Hayes appeared to acknowledge his crimes on tape, "many think he got his just deserts". But dig deeper and "it's hard to escape the conclusion" that Hayes was a "fall guy" – a casualty of the Serious Fraud Office's "sprayshot approach to prosecutions". The SFO dubbed Hayes the "ringmaster" of a scam but, as he observes, "everybody" – including his bosses – "knew what I was doing. There was no subterfuge." Moreover, whom exactly was he conspiring with? "The SFO tried to answer that by prosecuting six brokers from Icap, RP Martin and Tullett Prebon. But they were all acquitted." UBS ended up paying \$1.5bn of fines; Hayes was handed a 14-year sentence, "the same for sexually assaulting a child". This "ludicrous" sentence was eventually cut, but he's now fighting to have his conviction quashed. "Whatever the outcome of that, his case is no triumph for British justice."

## A pandemic publishing boom

**Lex**

*Financial Times*

Lockdown began last year with a craze for the Netflix series *Tiger King*, says Lex. But, clearly, "the old-world joy of reading" has reasserted itself. Bloomsbury Publishing reports it now expects annual profits to be "well ahead" of expectations. The British publisher, known for the *Harry Potter* series, has an "eye for the zeitgeist". Its recent hits – such as Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* and Dishoom's Indian cookbook – "afford an illuminating snapshot of life in 2020". Other bestseller lists also "show a world in search of social awareness and feelgood schmaltz", though the continued popularity of Orwell's *1984* hints that "darker fears remain". All told, Nielsen BookScan reckons 202 million print books, worth £1.76bn, were sold in the UK last year. Such numbers fade beside the past "heavy-hitters" such as *Harry Potter* (500 million in global sales), 1972's *The Joy of Sex* or the Bible. But the "upward trajectory" articulates a comforting truth: in chaotic times, the best shelter is to be found "between the covers of a good book".

## The future belongs to engineers

**Harry de Quetteville**

*The Daily Telegraph*

"As digital technologies come to dominate every industry, engineers are rising from the workbench to the boardroom in record numbers," says Harry de Quetteville. According to a report from headhunters Crist Kolder, a whopping 28% of chief executives at S&P 500 and Fortune 500 companies in 2020 had an engineering degree – "beaten only by business degrees (34%) and more than the entire liberal arts put together". What's more, they appear to be effective. In 2018, 34 of Harvard Business Review's "best-performing CEOs in the world" were engineers, overtaking those with MBAs for the first time. Members of the profession say it's no surprise that their "fusion of technical expertise and pragmatic problem-solving" is in demand at a time when "real-world delivery" counts. Indeed, today's "entrepreneur-engineers", like Tesla's Elon Musk, are the Brunels of the age. Sadly, in the UK we have baggage. We don't celebrate engineers, or back them, as they do in America – perhaps because Britain was home to the original industrial revolution and all our templates refer to 150 years ago. Instead of harking back to a glorious past, "we need to update it".

## City profile

**Jeff Bezos**

Few companies have thrived like Amazon during the pandemic. The online giant, started in a garage by Jeff Bezos in 1994, has just delivered record quarterly sales, breaking the \$100bn barrier for the first time, said Callum Jones in *The Times*. A good moment, reckons Bezos, to step down as CEO. "Invention is the root of our success," he wrote to his "fellow Amazonians" this week, as he ran through its greatest hits on the journey from online book-seller to global dominance. "If you get it right, a few years after a surprising invention, the new thing has become normal."



Bezos, 57, who will remain executive chair, is handing the reins to Andy Jassy – boss of the company's cloud computing arm, Amazon Web Services – who has long been his heir apparent. Still, the change comes at a "strange time for Amazon", said Dominic Rushe in *The Guardian*. Its stock rose more than 75% last year, taking Bezos's private fortune to \$185bn. Yet it faces pressure from workers complaining of "mistreatment" during the pandemic, and "increasing political scrutiny of the size and power of its business". What's next for Bezos himself, asked *The Daily Telegraph*. The options are endless for one of the world's richest men. Stepping down will allow more time to focus on his space exploration firm (Blue Origin), his climate change initiative (The Earth Fund), and his newspaper (*The Washington Post*). But former execs are "sceptical" about how much power the founder and largest shareholder will actually relinquish. As they observe, "Jeff Bezos likes control".

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## Who's tipping what

### The week's best shares

#### Asos

*The Times*

The online fashion store has beefed up its board and seen profits quadruple thanks to improved warehouse logistics. The Topshop acquisition should accelerate growth. A winner of the retail shake-out. Buy. £47.

#### Ceres Power

*The Daily Telegraph*

Ceres is a pioneer of world-leading fuel cell technology – one of the greatest hopes for clean power – and licences to other firms for production, thus keeping its own costs down. Among the UK's "best tech hopes". Buy. £15.88.

#### Fever-Tree Drinks

*The Times*

The mixer-maker's stellar growth since 2013 has moderated, but it's still a "quality" business. Overseas growth and market share gains in the UK saw revenues fall by just 3% in 2020. Set to fizz when pubs reopen. Buy. £24.97.

#### PZ Cussons

*Investors Chronicle*

Soaring demand for hygiene products in the pandemic has been a boon for the owner of Carex and Cussons Baby brands. A speculative bet on continuing post-crisis momentum – if the turnaround proves successful. Buy. 240p.

#### Totally

*The Daily Telegraph*

Services provided for the NHS include operating the 111 phone line in some areas, out-of-hours GPs and physiotherapy. With net cash for acquisitions, there's "huge scope" for growth, and profits should improve. Buy. 26.75p.

#### Vodafone Group

*The Sunday Telegraph*

The mobile phone company is active across Europe and looking fitter. Cut costs, and proceeds from the float of its mast business, will lower debt; churn rates are falling, and the regulatory outlook is improving. Yields 6.3%. Buy. 124.8p.

### Directors' dealings

#### Babcock International



Shares in the defence contractor tumbled on warnings of "negative impacts" on its finances. Profits plunged in the pandemic, and recovery prospects are dwindling. Three directors have bought £178,860 of shares to restore confidence.

SOURCE: INVESTORS CHRONICLE

### ...and some to hold, avoid or sell

#### Cineworld Group

*The Times*

The cinema operator may survive the threat from home-streaming, but it faces headwinds. A withdrawn offer for Canada's Cineplex has triggered legal action, and its tone-deaf executive incentive scheme continues to draw fire. Avoid. 69p.

#### Crest Nicholson

*Investors Chronicle*

The housebuilder struggled to execute a turnaround strategy amid lockdown disruption. But the stamp duty break has aided recovery: profits and cash were ahead of guidance. Hold. 318p.

#### Glencore

*The Sunday Times*

The miner is shifting towards green energy by investing in "future facing" metals like zinc and cobalt – it is a key supplier to Tesla. But unresolved investigations continue, and debt remains high. Hold. 246.4p.

#### Indivior

*The Times*

Shares rallied on news that the pharma has settled a probe into the marketing of its anti-opioid drug Suboxone Film, clearing the way to focus on Sublocade – a next-generation injectable treatment. Hold. 144.7p.

#### Keystone Law Group

*The Daily Telegraph*

The law firm enjoyed a strong finish to 2020 thanks to continuing demand and high levels of client service. Shares have gained more than 50% since the March low, and dividends are set to resume. Hold. 565p.

#### Wizz Air

*The Times*

Current trading is "awful", but the short-haul budget carrier, originally focused on Eastern Europe, is now the disrupter Ryanair once was. A healthy balance sheet should ensure it emerges from the crisis in prime position. Hold. £44.02.

### Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

#### Best tip

**Volusion Group**  
*The Daily Telegraph*  
up 57.36% to 310p

#### Worst tip

**Hikma Pharmaceuticals**  
*Investors Chronicle*  
down 9.35% to £24.34

### Market view

"When you see what's happening with GameStop, you ask: is this manipulation, is this mass psychosis, or is there something wrong in our market structure?"

**Prof James Angel of Georgetown University.**  
Quoted in *The New York Times*

## Market summary

### Key numbers for investors

	2 Feb 2021	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	6516.65	6654.01	-2.06%
FTSE All-share UK	3707.20	3761.64	-1.45%
Dow Jones	30812.23	30943.90	-0.43%
NASDAQ	13620.55	13603.83	0.12%
Nikkei 225	28362.17	28546.18	-0.64%
Hang Seng	29248.70	29391.26	-0.49%
Gold	1862.95	1856.85	0.33%
Brent Crude Oil	57.50	55.94	2.79%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	2.94%	2.92%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	0.35	0.26	
US 10-year Treasuries	1.11	1.03	
<b>UK ECONOMIC DATA</b>			
Latest CPI (yoy)	0.6% (Dec)	0.3% (Nov)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	1.2% (Dec)	0.9% (Nov)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	6.0% (Dec)	7.6% (Nov)	

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### Best and worst performing shares

#### WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

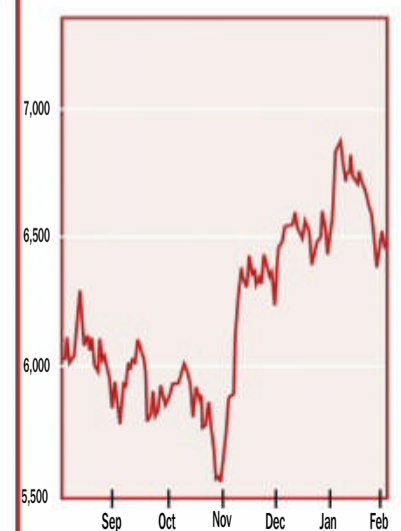
RISES	Price	% change
Intl. Cons. Airl. Gp.	149.95	+7.15
Melrose Industries	178.15	+6.61
Icml. Htls. Gp.	4876.00	+6.42
B&M European Value	558.00	+5.12
Diageo	3044.00	+4.52
<b>FALLS</b>		
Prudential	1197.50	-12.75
Imperial Brands	1456.50	-10.40
BP	255.00	-9.69
Astrazeneca	7380.00	-7.19
Royal Dutch Shell B	1250.20	-6.06

#### BEST AND WORST UK STOCKS OVERALL

Fragrant Prosperity	5.8	+169.77
Iconic Labs	0.003	-57.12

Source: Datastream (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 2 Feb (pm)

### Following the Footsie



6-month movement in the FTSE 100 index

# How did Covid-19 start?

## The search for patient zero

*As the World Health Organisation team begins its investigation in Wuhan, Tom Whipple examines the vexed attempts to solve the mystery of the coronavirus's origins*

In the beginning there was a sick bat. Here is one story of what happened next, the story that you are probably most familiar with. In November 2019, this bat was infected with a virus that for aeons had spread from bat to bat. Now though, ever so subtly, it had changed and it was ready to live elsewhere. In the late Chinese autumnal air, the virus, a coronavirus, found its way into a pangolin, a strange, scaly mammal that curls up in a tough keratinous ball when threatened. Here the virus again mutated to adapt to a new host. The pangolin then met a human who believed its scales could cure illness. It was taken to a market in the city of Wuhan where, rather than stopping disease, it started the most devastating disease of the 21st century.

But here is another story, one that perhaps you are less familiar with. The bat was still sick, but perhaps not in November, and perhaps not even in China. The virus found its way into humans and spread for weeks, possibly months, possibly years – even, some disputed studies suggest, via other countries – until, one day, one of those humans decided to visit a market. Wuhan was still the site of the superspreading event; just not ground zero.

And here is a third story, which you are probably aware of but may have dismissed out of hand. The virus started in bats, and was taken into Wuhan by a human, but not in a human. A researcher from the Wuhan Institute of Virology collected the virus to study. Then years later, perhaps after tweaking its genome, there was a mistake. A freezer was left open, a laboratory protocol ignored, and the virus escaped.

Which is true? “Right now, we can’t rule out any hypotheses,” says Peter Daszak, president of the EcoHealth Alliance. An expert on when and how diseases spill over from animal populations, he has been tasked by a Lancet Commission with solving the greatest and most intractable murder mystery in the world. Where did our pandemic coronavirus originate? When? And what happened next? Rather than Colonel Mustard in the conservatory with the candlestick, was it the bat in the market with the pangolin? The scientist in the lab with the defrosting freezer? “Between the bats and Wuhan seafood market there’s a gap in our knowledge,” says Dr Daszak, who is, for his part, highly sceptical of the laboratory theory. “That gap needs to be worked on.”

On 31 December 2019, China announced it was investigating pneumonia cases of “unknown aetiology”. For the coronavirus,



*A wet market in Wuhan: ground zero or just a superspreading event?*

that is when recorded history began, albeit against resistance. The first whistleblowers were silenced, the first Chinese scientists to publish the genome had their laboratory investigated. Even so, after that point we know with increasing certainty what happened next. Before that, we have only a hazy picture. And of all the stories it is the first, the Wuhan wet market patient zero, that is becoming less and less likely.

The earliest case to be identified, Chinese scientists now claim, predates the Wuhan market outbreak.

Sharpening that hazy picture to see where that case came from would be, in the best of times, unimaginably hard. A coronavirus is small. Put a million in a ball and they would fill this full stop. For us, the bit that matters – a string of nucleic acid – is smaller still, and is itself made up of 30,000 chemical “bases”. One day, while copying itself, a handful of those changed. This is the true start of the pandemic. How can we possibly find out the natural history of a virus we cannot see and did not notice until it was too

late? And how can we do so when the answer is so freighted?

*“Here is a third theory: the virus was taken to Wuhan to study. Then there was a mistake, and the virus escaped from the laboratory”*

Because these are not the best of times. The question of where our coronavirus started life is not just a virological issue, it is

a geopolitical one. For scientists, it has become impossible to separate their work from politics, from accusation and counter-accusation. “It has become extremely toxic,” says François Balloux, director of the UCL Genetics Institute. Linfa Wang, director of the Programme in Emerging Infectious Diseases at Duke-NUS Medical School, Singapore, says it has caused schisms in scientific collaborations. “I am an ethnic Chinese with a very strong connection to China,” he says. “I have zero collaboration from Chinese scientists dealing with Covid-19. The sensitivity is so much that they are scared, and I’m scared.”

Dr Daszak says the atmosphere has, for all of them, made a difficult job far harder. “If you had no politics at all, no conspiracy theories, no previous US State Department heads who said, ‘China’s to blame for this outbreak and there need to be reparations,’ it would be straightforward to find a lot more out,” he says. They could track early cases to source, they could survey wildlife for similar viruses, they could trawl blood banks for signs of antibodies. “It would still take a couple of years – but scientists working together can do a lot to get closer to the origins.”

For Dr Daszak, patient zero will still most likely be found at the point where bats meet humans. And, he says, there are no shortage of such places. He sees no need for a pangolin. “In rural

China people hunt bats, they eat bats. They take bats out of nets with their hands, they get bitten... Some go into caves with sticks and spike them. People get bat faeces out of caves and spread it on the vegetable gardens. We have even heard of eyedrops that use bat faeces in them.” This is now the mainstream hypothesis. Sometime in autumn someone ate, breathed, or even eye-dropped a bit of coronavirus-infected bat into their body. It changed hosts, and it was only a matter of time before these mysterious pneumonia cases appeared.



*Bats: the one uncontested piece of the puzzle*

How can we prove it, though? How can we interview the first cases when the origins of the virus have ceased to be a mere scientific question, and where the truth has sometimes had serious consequences? Can we ever sample enough bats and sequence enough viruses to locate the one that made the leap? Many clues that could help us retrace the steps of the virus from before last New Year’s Eve have been lost. But one clue can never be lost – that contained in the genome itself.

Each time the virus copies itself, there is a chance of a mutation. Mutations can be bad – if, for instance, they let a bat virus pass into humans. Most of the time, though, they do nothing for the virus. But for scientists, they are a time signature – they become a clock that ages the virus. Take all of the many strains now in existence, count back through the mutations, and you find the point where they branched, their common ancestor: a virus that replicated itself in late 2019, in China. “We can be pretty confident that it was a simple jump. It happened just once; there is no diversity,” says Professor Balloux. “There are good reasons to presume this was the original host jump – the point where it came from animals.”

Case closed? Not quite. There is an annoying wrinkle in the Covid timeline. In September 2019, a lung cancer screening trial took place in Italy. Blood samples from the 959 patients were frozen and stored. In late 2020, scientists went back and analysed the blood. In it, six months before coronavirus would overwhelm Italy’s health service, four months before it was meant to be in Europe, they found antibodies specific to the virus. Most scientists have dismissed this as an outlier – a freak result best ignored on the basis that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. They say the findings must be false positives. But not Professor Wang, from Duke-NUS Medical School, Singapore.

Imagine, he says, if when the coronavirus explored its first human host, it was not so well adapted, and not so deadly. There are many coronaviruses in the world, in many animals. There are four that have been humanity’s constant seasonal companions long before this crisis. You could conceive of this version of the virus going unnoticed. What’s another bad case of flu here and there? Then one day, perhaps years later, close to a Chinese seafood market, this coronavirus mutated into the scarier version we see today, the single ancestor seen by Professor Balloux. “The question is: is Covid-19 a brand new virus with no relatives, that just jumped into humans in Wuhan in December,” asks Professor Wang. “Or is it actually a variant of one or more close cousins, which are not as transmissible, but to which humans have been exposed in unspecified locations, including Italy?”

This is more than merely an alternative hypothesis, more than an explanation for the Italian findings. In fact, having had the virus circulating unknown would answer another mystery puzzling scientists – why coronavirus is so good at what it does. When, last

autumn, the virus jumped into mink in Denmark, it did what viruses do when they jump, evolved, improving its ability to exist in mink. For the first six months the coronavirus was spotted in humans, it didn’t do that: not until the autumn did it gain mutations that gave it an advantage. It was as if it dropped from the sky, already tuned to infect us.

“One scenario is that it was just apparently very lucky,” says Alina Chan, from the Broad Institute. “Somehow the virus that recently spilled over from animals was really super-good at infecting humans.”

Relying on sheer chance feels unsatisfactory. “A lot of experts don’t like that hypothesis.” Along with her colleague Shing Zhan, from the University of British Columbia, she was one of the first to research this oddity. She was also one of the first – publicly at least – to propose another explanation that cut right through the geopolitics and science. Yes, it could be that the virus was lucky. Yes, it could be that it had spread unnoticed. Or it could be that we did the adaptation ourselves, that it escaped from a laboratory.

In the centre of Wuhan, between the scenic East Lake and the Yangtze River, you will find the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Here, they study and store bat coronaviruses. We now know that one of the bat coronaviruses they have, called RaTG13, is the closest known relative to the pandemic strain. From the start of the pandemic, often in seedier parts of the internet, people have questioned whether this is coincidence. They have been dismissed as conspiracy theorists. It’s not that Dr Chan thinks the virus definitely came from the laboratory. It’s just, she says, that she

doesn’t understand why others are so sure it didn’t. Mistakes happen. So do cover-ups. “No country wants to admit they have covert human pathogen research, ongoing, that is causing mass death around the world,”

she says. “It’s easier to tell the public that this happened because we trafficked too many pangolins or that it came on frozen food imported from another country.”

Publicly, many extremely senior scientists have opposed this idea. “We stand together to strongly condemn conspiracy theories suggesting that Covid-19 does not have a natural origin,” wrote one group in the *Lancet* last February. Privately, some told *The Times* it was not so absurd. Released documents show that figures advising the US government seriously entertained the idea in February. Professor Balloux said there was no evidence in the virus’s genome to support the idea it had been engineered. “There is nothing notable to distinguish this from other natural coronaviruses circulating in humans,” he said. But, “I cannot dismiss it. I cannot disprove it is the work of some nefarious boffin.”

Sometimes, when we want to explain how small events have momentous consequences, we say a butterfly flapping its wings could cause a storm on the other side of the Atlantic. This pandemic was started by something so small that a butterfly’s flap would itself be a storm. And its consequences were far greater than the most ferocious hurricane. The answers the scientists seek, if they exist, come in this smallest of events, a single virus particle finding its way into a single human. Will we ever identify it? “The tricky thing about this topic is that we dance around uncertainty,” says Dr Zhan. “And I see no end of uncertainty.”

*A longer version of this article appeared in the The Times.*  
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## THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1246

An **Ettinger travel pass case** and two **Connell Guides** will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 15 February. Email the answers as a scan of a completed grid or a list, with the subject line The Week crossword 1246, to [crossword@theweek.co.uk](mailto:crossword@theweek.co.uk). **Tim Moorey** ([timmoorey.com](http://timmoorey.com))



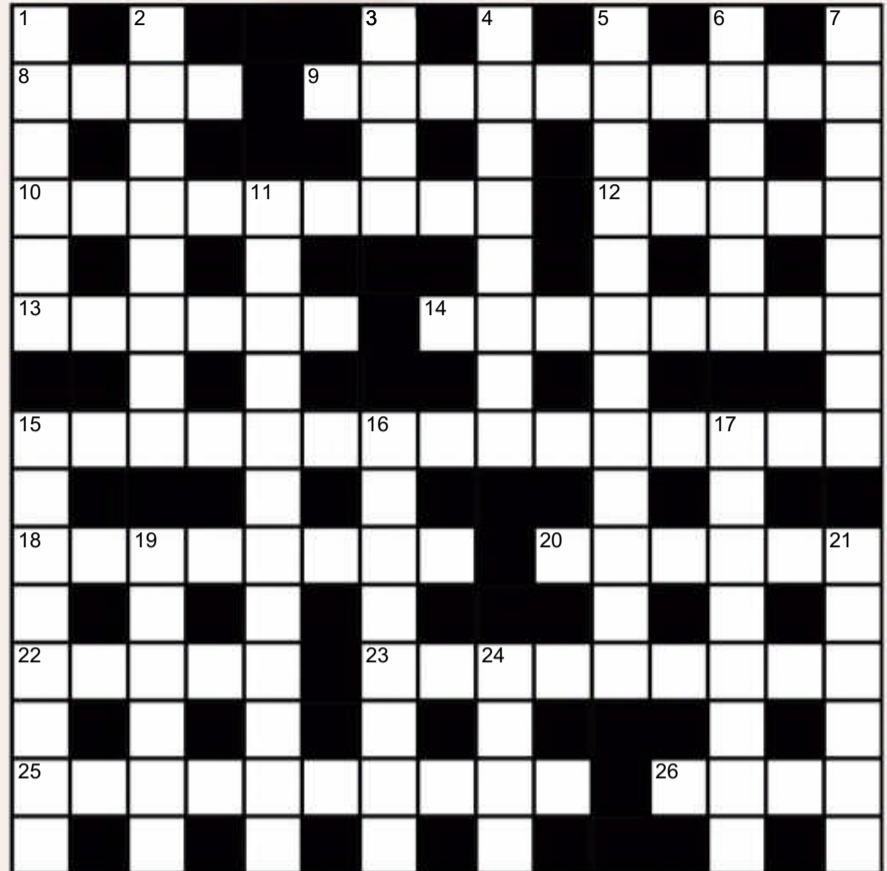
This week's winner will receive an **Ettinger** ([ettinger.co.uk](http://ettinger.co.uk)) travel pass case (assorted colours), which retails at £105, and two **Connell Guides** ([connellguides.com](http://connellguides.com)).

### ACROSS

- 8 Damn strikes, time for the introduction of police (4)
- 9 Country that's OK? No, rather suffering (5,5)
- 10 Defender sacked having gone wrong (9)
- 12 The French flat's gone up quickly (5)
- 13 Leeds very shortly to arrange digs (6)
- 14 Autocratic boss working with his secretary? (8)
- 15 Top broadcaster (a centre grid role!) (8-7)
- 18 Stories about origin of party snacks (4-4)
- 20 Little money in India for sentimental movie (6)
- 22 Machinist willingly in part makes woven fabric (5)
- 23 Whitish street in eastern state (9)
- 25 Cut of pork adheres to cutlery (10)
- 26 C Clay changed to this African country (4)

### DOWN

- 1 Did research in favour of sex? (6)
- 2 Perfectionist has second difficult problem (8)
- 3 French for "serve tea"? (4)
- 4 Boss deceitful long ignored in education (8)
- 5 They'll open many doors for you (8,4)
- 6 Disheartened trainer exercising is wayward (6)
- 7 Previous examination of a symphony (8)
- 11 Shine like Chopin? (6,6)
- 15 Rod's an idiot (3-5)
- 16 Prove foreign assistance given too much money (8)
- 17 A losing capital city in genuine revenge (8)
- 19 Is horn misused? Could be from these (6)
- 21 Quote by yours truly taken up? It's what makes one sick (6)
- 24 Liberal former president gets Facebook approval (4)



Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Tel no \_\_\_\_\_  
 Clue of the week answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue of the week:** Out-of-time president of America might create this (6, first letter R) *The Sunday Times Crossword, David Maclean*

### Solution to Crossword 1244

**ACROSS:** 1 Afro 4 Allhallows 9 Locale 10 Saratoga 11 Across-the-board 15 Reade 17 Brasserie 20 Doorsteps 22 Midas 24 Chelsea tractor 29 Obligant 30 Turban 31 Supersonic 32 Hale

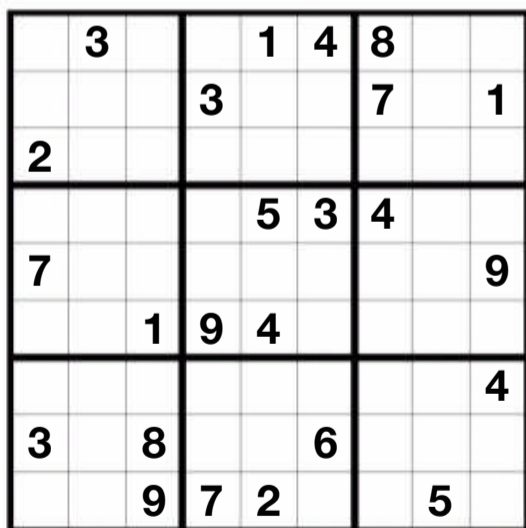
**DOWN:** 2 Footage 3 On air 4 Ayers 5 Liszt 6 Air beds 7 Lotto 8 St Andrews 12 Overs 13 Sabre 14 Aired 15 Redactors 16 Alone 18 Aesir 19 Sumac 21 Toerags 23 Air mail 25 Loire 26 Tatin 27 Antic 28 Torch

**Clue of the week:** Needing breaks? Maybe Amazon job on the line (6,6 first letters E&D)

**Solution:** ENGINE DRIVER (needing anag + River = Amazon)

**The winner of 1244 is Jenny Allen from Newton Abbot**

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### Sudoku 788 (medium)

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 787

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



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### Charity of the week



Surfers Against Sewage is one of the UK's most active and successful environmental charities. From humble beginnings in Porthtowan Village Hall, Cornwall, their grass-roots movement is no longer just for surfers, nor is it solely focused on sewage. As dedicated ocean activists, they rally individuals and communities across the country to protect our blue spaces, putting pressure on the Government and big business to incite change.

The UN has declared 2021-30 the decade of ocean action, and with the UK hosting COP26, Surfers Against Sewage are petitioning for the ocean to be put at the forefront of climate negotiations. With only ten years left to save our planet's biggest life-force, time is running out. **To learn how you can support this latest campaign and why SAS has declared an Ocean and Climate Emergency, go to [sas.org.uk/ocean-and-climate-crisis](http://sas.org.uk/ocean-and-climate-crisis).**

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