

The turbulent  
life of a  
Sixties icon

OBITUARIES P36



How war  
returned to  
DR Congo

BEST INTERNATIONAL  
ARTICLES P14



Bill Gates's  
troubled  
childhood

PEOPLE P8



# THE WEEK

8 FEBRUARY 2025 | ISSUE 1526

THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

## Trump's trade wars Will his brinkmanship backfire?

*Page 2*



**What happened****Trump's new trade war**

President Trump fired the first salvo in a trade war on Tuesday by imposing a blanket 10% tariff on all goods imported from China. Beijing responded by announcing tariffs on a range of US products, including coal, liquefied natural gas and farm equipment. Trump had threatened to impose a 25% border tax on imports from two of America's other top trade partners, Mexico and Canada, at the same time; he complained that they, like China, hadn't done enough to stop the flow of the illicit drug fentanyl into the US. But he paused that move for 30 days after the two countries pledged to reinforce their respective borders with the US, to help curb irregular migration and drug smuggling.

The last-minute agreement relieved pressure on the Canadian dollar and Mexican peso, and led to a rally in financial markets. Trump also threatened to introduce "very substantial" tariffs on the EU, describing its large trade surplus with the US as an "atrocity". He complained that the UK was also "way out of line", but added, "I think that one can be worked out." Separately, Trump caused alarm by announcing plans for a US "takeover" of the Gaza Strip (*see page 6*).

*"Legitimate grievances"?***What the editorials said**

This is not the first time Trump has wielded the tariff weapon, said *The Washington Post*. He did so in his first term, too, levying them on around \$380bn worth of annual imports from China and other countries. Today's tariffs could have a bigger impact, however, as "they're much larger, covering an estimated \$1.3trn-worth of goods". Their inflationary effect will quickly be felt in America's current cost-of-living crisis. Trump has some legitimate grievances, said *The Daily Telegraph*: EU cars carry a tariff of 2.5% in the US, while Europe charges US carmakers 10%; China "uses massive subsidies to make its exports more competitive". But history shows that nobody wins from trade wars.

The tariffs on Canada and Mexico – thankfully paused for a month – are particularly nonsensical, said *The Wall Street Journal*.

The US auto industry is highly integrated with both those countries: vehicles made on the continent go "back and forth across borders a half-dozen times or more". By threatening the nations with tariffs, Trump is ignoring the trade agreement he negotiated with them in his first term, which will make others think twice before making deals with the US. If the tariffs go ahead, it will be "the dumbest trade war in history".

**What happened****The EU reset**

Keir Starmer launched a charm offensive in Brussels this week as he sought to "reset" Britain's relations with the EU. On Monday, he became the first British PM since Brexit to address the European Council of EU leaders, whom he urged to re-engage with the UK. He also said Britain wouldn't choose between the US and the EU, which Washington is threatening with tariffs. "Both of these relationships are very important to us," he insisted.

The Government is seeking a revised Brexit deal to ease checks on food exports to the EU, and to promote cooperation in areas such as defence and energy. Nick Thomas-Symonds, Britain's lead negotiator, said this week that he'll be guided by "ruthless pragmatism" during the scheduled talks. Sticking points are expected to include EU demands for access to UK fishing waters, and for a youth mobility deal that would reinstate freedom of movement for EU citizens under the age of 30.

*Germany's Olaf Scholz with the PM***What the editorials said**

If there is a thought to strike fear into the hearts of voters, said *The Daily Telegraph*, it is surely that of Starmer entering complex negotiations with the EU. The PM's most notable foreign policy "success" to date has been trying to pay Mauritius billions to take the strategically vital Chagos Islands off our hands. Now, he's set to "turn his talents" to the issue of EU-UK migration. Brussels will try to make a new trade deal contingent on a youth mobility scheme, but the PM must resist: free movement was a "red line" during Brexit talks, and must remain so now.

Some Brexiteers will see this renegotiation as a "sell-out", said *The Times*. But Starmer has always insisted that he won't take the UK back into the single market or customs union. He is simply seeking "moderate, sensible reforms" to improve cross-Channel trade, and to strengthen ties in a few vital areas. A revised deal is in both sides' interests, said *The Independent*. Britain can offer security guarantees as the EU navigates an uncertain few years for Nato; Brussels can facilitate smoother trade to help the UK achieve its quest for economic growth.

**It wasn't all bad**

People from all over the country travelled to the Isle of Skye last week, to rescue a young humpback whale that had got tangled in some rope. The whale was spotted in a salmon farm by a member of the public, who raised the alarm with British Divers Marine Life Rescue. It gathered a team from across the UK, who worked with locals and the emergency services to cut the rope away in a set sequence using knives attached to poles, until the whale was able to swim away.

**A 21-year-old from Cambridge is believed to have become the first woman and youngest person to have rowed solo from mainland Europe to South America. Zara Lachlan, who is due to join the Army in September, set off from Lagos on Portugal's Algarve on 27 October, and reached French Guiana last Saturday, completing the 3,600 nautical-mile journey in 97 days. Along the way, she overcame a cut leg, an injured arm, a broken finger, a capsizing incident and broken equipment. "Nobody knew I was coming in, but I got clapped in by lots of fishermen," she said. "I think everybody was just a little bit confused about what I was doing."**



Scientists have developed a "self-healing" asphalt that could help tackle the UK's pothole crisis. The international team used AI to work out why asphalt becomes vulnerable to cracking. Armed with its insights, they then found a way to reverse the process. This involves mixing asphalt with tiny plant spores filled with recycled cooking oil. When traffic starts to cause micro-cracks in the asphalt, the oil is released, filling them and preventing the oxidation that makes the bitumen in the asphalt brittle, and so allows larger cracks to form.

## What the commentators said

Trump has been making the case for tariffs ever since he railed against Japanese trade practices in the 1980s, said Freddie Hayward in *The New Statesman*. “If he has any consistent beliefs, this is one of them.” He thinks other countries are taking advantage of the US (he’s apparently obsessed with the number of German cars in Manhattan). It’s nevertheless unclear how serious his threats are. Is he just using tariffs as a bargaining tool, or does he “really want to entrench an era of protectionism in order to reshore manufacturing and secure American supply chains”?

So far, Trump is following the pattern of his first term, said Heather Long in *The Washington Post*. Which is to say: issuing dire threats and then calling tariffs off at the last minute, except in the case of China. Trump’s tariff drive has “accomplished next to nothing beyond political theatre”, said Rogé Karma in *The Atlantic*. The concessions he extracted from Canada and Mexico were modest, which suggests he has little intention of following through on his more aggressive rhetoric. The 10% tariff he imposed on China likewise falls far short of the 60% rate he promised on the campaign trail. For some Trump loyalists, such as his senior trade adviser, Peter Navarro, tariffs are an article of economic faith. They subscribe to the “heterodox” theory that border taxes can deliver prosperity to Middle America and partially replace income taxes. But Trump’s tariffs “don’t even pretend to further that vision. Trump voters were promised a manufacturing revival, and what they got was a Canadian fentanyl tsar”.

Given the reprieves for Mexico and Canada, and China’s low-key response to Trump’s tariffs, is the worst of this crisis already over? Investors seem to think so, said Matthew Lynn in *The Spectator*, but they’re celebrating too soon. Having won concessions through “tariff diplomacy”, Trump is sure to keep using this tactic. The Germans are going to be pressured “to buy Chryslers and Mustangs, the French to drink bourbon... and the British to eat chlorinated chicken”. Global commerce is set to be disrupted by an endless succession of stand-offs and last-minute deals. “Over time that will be almost as bad as an all-out trade war.”

## What the commentators said

This must have been a humiliating experience for the PM, said Stephen Glover in *The Daily Mail*. “Appearing at the margins of this EU get-together, with his briefcase bulging with requests, he was inevitably seen as a supplicant.” Many of the items on his wishlist, such as a deal to stop food exports being held up by “over-zealous bureaucrats”, were “commonsensical”. But instead of responding with “humility and realism”, Brussels has demanded unreasonable concessions such as reinstating free movement, and giving EU trawlers “untrammelled access” to our fishing waters. No sensible British PM could agree to these; still less would they be seen trying to “engineer a rapprochement with the EU” in the very week that Trump indicated that he might exempt the UK from the “blizzard of tariffs” he’s about to unleash on Brussels. Alas, Starmer clearly isn’t sensible. The timing of this trip was indeed “awkward”, said Eleni Courea in *The Guardian*. A new deal with Brussels is a key part of the PM’s pro-growth agenda; but “if he is seen to be cosying up to the EU too much, he risks angering the capricious US president”.

Maybe so, said Andrew Grice in *The Independent*, but Starmer should have “the courage of his pro-EU convictions” and seek a bold deal. Smoothing trade relations with the EU would boost growth faster than any other measure that Labour has set out so far; and the sooner a reset is negotiated, the less likely it is that accusations of a Brexit “betrayal” will hurt Starmer at the next election. These talks have “strong tailwinds”, said Matthew Holehouse in *The Economist*. The war in Ukraine, coupled with a second Trump presidency, create “a new geopolitical logic” for closer EU-UK security ties. And Labour’s electorate affords it “room for manoeuvre”: 78% of its voters in 2024 would support rejoining the EU, according to YouGov. Any reset in the next few months won’t lead to the “transformative” changes demanded by some rejoinders; but it should smooth the way for more complex and rewarding negotiations in years to come.

## THE WEEK

In Australia, the opposition leader tipped to win this year’s election has called time on the “woke brigade” and vowed not to stand next to the Aboriginal flag. In Germany, the centre-right frontrunner to become chancellor has felt the need to team up with the far-right AfD (*see p14*); in France, ministers who used to be regularly woken up in the middle of the night by calls from their hyperactive centrist leader now enjoy uninterrupted sleep; squeezed by the hard-right and hard-left, President Macron has fallen silent. And we need no reminder as to the nature of the administration in the US. Yet in Britain, when we had our chance to upend the system, we opted instead for a man who – according to a new book by Patrick Maguire and Gabriel Pogrund – has no thirst for a political fight and no ideology, just an ill-defined faith in progressive policies. Keir Starmer won’t rip up the rule book; he loves rules. Polls indicate that voters are experiencing buyers’ remorse: support for Reform UK keeps growing. Starmer’s ministers seem now to be making belated efforts to cater to the new mood. Wes Streeting has criticised “daft things” done in the name of equality and diversity in the NHS. Rachel Reeves has discovered boosterism and trumpets Growth! Growth! Growth! at all costs – or as some have summed up her message: “F\*\*k the bats and newts.” But will this bold talk convince Reform voters to put the revolution on hold? Or will it just alienate constituencies that Labour could have relied on – such as those who care about bats and newts?

Caroline Law

## What next?

The EU has voted to “respond firmly” if Trump follows through with his threat to levy tariffs on the bloc, reports *The Daily Telegraph*. It has drawn up a list of “iconic” US products, such as motorcycles and bourbon, for retaliatory tariffs. It will particularly target products made in Republican-run states identified as vulnerable in the 2026 midterm elections, counting on Republicans to apply pressure on Trump.

China has called fentanyl “America’s problem” and says it will challenge US tariffs at the World Trade Organisation. In the hope of securing leverage in talks with Trump, it has also revived competition investigations into Google and Nvidia.

## What next?

Starmer is due to host EU leaders at a summit in the UK on 19 May. In the lead-up to that, British and EU officials have been given the go-ahead to begin formal negotiations, reports *The Times*. No final deal is expected by May; but the two sides are likely to agree to a “political declaration” that would be a stepping stone to a “legal trade and cooperation agreement”.

Sources have told *The Daily Telegraph* that No. 10 is willing to make concessions to the EU such as rejoining the Erasmus student exchange programme, and introducing a revamped visa scheme for under-30s.

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## Controversy of the week

## The third runway

"I can scarcely believe I'm writing this," said George Monbiot in The Guardian, "but on green issues, this government is worse than the Tories." Last week, Chancellor Rachel Reeves officially gave her backing to a long-contested third runway at Heathrow. The project is an act of "environmental vandalism" that will produce millions of tons of extra carbon emissions. But growth, the Chancellor insists, "trumps other things". Labour's net zero strategy is now utterly incoherent, said Helen Coffey in The Independent. "At a time when every other industry has been forced to slash emissions", Reeves wants to expand one of our heaviest polluters. Aviation "is fiendishly difficult" to decarbonise, and Reeves's "cunning plan" – to replace traditional kerosene with sustainable aviation fuels, or SAFs, made from recycled cooking oil or, say, crop by-products – is a mere figleaf. SAFs are expensive and too difficult to produce at scale. "As Ryanair's own Michael O'Leary put it in 2023, 'There isn't enough cooking oil in the world to power more than one day's aviation.'"

A third runway raises huge "obstacles", said The London Standard – not just environmental issues, but also the disruption it would involve: demolishing 750 homes, diverting rivers, and rerouting the M25 through a new tunnel. But over the decades spent debating this issue, the status quo has become unsustainable. Heathrow "is bursting at the seams"; the 473,965 flights it handled last year represented 98.7% of its legal allowable maximum. While incoming flights circle over the Home Counties "waiting for a landing slot", rivals such as Amsterdam's six-runway Schiphol Airport have more than caught up on flight numbers. Meanwhile, the arguments against a third runway – notably noise and air pollution – have weakened over time, said The Economist. "Newer engines are cleaner", while the noisiest planes, "like Boeing's 747, are on the way out". There's even a climate case for a third runway: "by opening up more direct long-haul routes" from Heathrow, "fewer passengers will need to take stopping flights with fuel-burning diversions".

That's if a third runway ever happens, said Adam Vaughan in The Times. Labour now faces a wall of opposition from an alliance of "Swampies and Middle England". Even if it cleared the many legal hurdles, Heathrow bosses predict it would take until 2040 to build the runway. Which is why many Labour people are "scratching their heads" over Reeves's decision, said Andrew Rawnsley in The Observer. Why "burn political capital on a hugely contentious project" that won't bring any benefits until "long after she's done at the Treasury"? In the end, "this isn't really about near-term growth at all", said Nathalie Thomas in the FT. It's about "the perception of growth". With businesses gloomy over the Budget, "the Chancellor is grasping for any levers she can to get the endorphins going".

## Spirit of the age

Only 44% of parents of children in reception at primary school (aged four or five) believe that children should know how to use a book – by turning its pages, not swiping them – before starting school, the charity Kindred<sup>2</sup> has found. 24% do not think it's essential for children to be toilet trained before they start school. 90% believe their own child was ready to start school – though a survey of teachers indicates that one in three pupils were not deemed ready.

More than 10% of 16- to 24-year-olds in the UK identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual in 2023, up from 4.4% in 2018, according to the Office for National Statistics. The growth is mainly due to more people identifying as bisexual, the ONS says.

## Good week for:

**Overtourism**, after 260 buses carrying 10,000 day-trippers suddenly descended on an Italian ski resort, overwhelming the town of Roccaserio, in the Abruzzo mountains. The visitors had been lured by clips on TikTok, and cheap package deals.

**Beyoncé**, who won her first album of the year Grammy for her country-inspired album. Last year, the Country Music Association Awards failed to give *Cowboy Carter* a single nomination.

**Supersonic flight**, with news that a Denver-based startup is designing a passenger plane capable of flying at Mach 1.7 – faster than the speed of sound. The plane has been dubbed "Son of Concorde", and several major airlines have already put in orders.

## Bad week for:

**John Swinney**, Scotland's First Minister, who was forced to deny reports that the SNP was planning to ban cat ownership. In fact, a report had advised that the Government consider "containing" cat ownership in rural areas that are home to red-listed bird species.

**Earth**, after the sighting of a 100-metre-wide asteroid heading this way triggered global planetary defence procedures. Currently, it is estimated that the asteroid, 2024 YR4, has a 1.3% chance of smashing into Earth on 22 December 2032. It could do serious local damage, but it wouldn't trigger a mass extinction event: the asteroid that killed the dinosaurs was 10km to 15km across.

**Keir Starmer**, who was accused of breaking lockdown rules by having a session with his voice coach at Labour HQ on 24 December 2020. Allegedly, the actress Leonie Mellinger had been viewed as a "key worker". He has denied any breaches.



Heathrow: 473,965 flights per year

## Letby case challenge

Lucy Letby's lawyers have submitted an application for her case to be examined by the Criminal Cases Review Commission – the body that looks into potential miscarriages of justice. On Tuesday, they held a press conference at which a panel of neonatal experts presented what they called an "impartial, evidence-based report" challenging the medical evidence used to convict Letby of the murder of seven babies and the attempted murder of seven more at the Countess of Chester Hospital. The chairman of the review, Dr Shoo Lee, co-authored a 1989 paper on air embolisms, which the prosecution had used to back up its case. He said his work had been "misinterpreted". The view of the panel, he said, was that the babies had died as a result of natural causes or "bad medical care".

## Ofsted proposals

Ofsted has unveiled plans to replace the system by which schools in England are given an overall one-word rating ("inadequate", "satisfactory", etc.) with a detailed "report card". This will evaluate schools in eight or more individual areas, with each given one of five ratings, with "exemplary" at the top. The proposals will now be subject to a consultation.

## Poll watch

Nigel Farage's Reform UK has overtaken Labour and the Tories in a major opinion poll for the first time. According to YouGov, public support for Reform stands at 25%. Labour is on 24% and the Conservatives 21%.

Donald Trump's net approval rating is the lowest for any newly elected president since the Second World War, apart from him, according to the poll aggregator FiveThirtyEight. His rating is currently 7%. At the start of his first term, it was 3.2%.

37% of British shoppers admit that they've deliberately omitted to scan an item at a self-service checkout. 32.5% of shoppers have deliberately misweighed loose items, and 38% have passed off an item as cheaper than it actually is. *The Grocer/Daily Mail*

### Paris

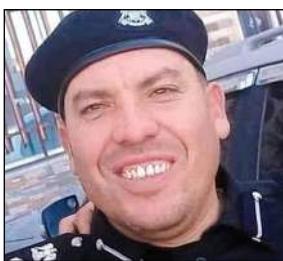
**Budget wars:** France's centrist PM, François Bayrou – who this week rammed the 2025 budget through parliament by invoking an emergency clause in the constitution enabling him to dispense with the need for a vote – looks set to survive a motion of no-confidence brought by Leftist MPs. Like his centrist predecessor, Michel Barnier, who had to resign in December after losing a no-confidence vote, Bayrou has had to contend with a parliament split into three rival blocs – Left, Right and centre, the outcome of the snap election called by President Macron. But unlike Barnier, Bayrou has the temporary backing of one major left-wing party, the Socialists, having made compromises on his budget's €53bn package of tax rises and spending cuts aimed at shrinking the vast deficit. Hoping to appeal to centre-right voters by prioritising stability, the far-right National Rally has also hinted it may refrain from backing the no-confidence motion.

### Nanterre, France

**Pelicot questioned:** Dominique Pelicot, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison in December for repeatedly sedating and raping his wife, Gisèle, and inviting dozens of strangers to rape her, is being questioned by a judge over two unsolved cases from the 1990s. The first relates to the rape and murder in Paris in 1991 of Sophie Narme, a 23-year-old estate agent; the second to the attempted rape of another young woman, also an estate agent, in 1999. In 2022, while on remand for the crimes against his wife, Pelicot confessed to the attempted rape after his DNA was found on the victim's shoe, though he has since partially retracted his confession. Police are also investigating five other unsolved assaults of female estate agents with a similar modus operandi, and one murder. The 72-year-old Pelicot is also suspected of an assault on a 12-year-old girl in 1995.



**Rubiales trial:** The former president of Spain's football federation, Luis Rubiales, went on trial in Madrid this week accused of sexually assaulting footballer Jenni Hermoso by kissing her on the lips as she collected her Women's World Cup winner's medal in 2023. Hermoso has become a global symbol in the fight against sexism in sport. Rubiales dismissed it as a "peck between friends"; but prosecutors are now calling for him to be given a one-year jail term for sexual assault, and another 18 months for coercion by trying to pressure Hermoso into saying that the kiss was consensual. He denies the charges.



### Rome

**Libya scandal:** Italy's PM, Giorgia Meloni, has been placed under judicial investigation

over the release from custody of a Libyan police chief wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court. Osama Najim (pictured), director of a notorious detention centre near Tripoli, was arrested on an ICC warrant in Turin on 21 January, but was freed on a legal technicality and flown home, to a hero's welcome. "So as not to let him go free on Italian territory we decided to expel him," said Meloni. But opposition politicians accuse her of pandering to Libya, on whose cooperation she relies for her flagship anti-migration policy.

### Örebro, Sweden

**Gun massacre:** A gunman attacked an adult education centre in the Swedish city of Örebro this week, killing ten people in what Sweden's PM has called the worst mass shooting in his country's history. The gunman opened fire at Risbergska school, a centre for students over 20 that offers Swedish-language courses for immigrants, vocational training and classes for people with intellectual disabilities. After his killing spree, he then appears to have shot himself: his identity has yet to be revealed and police are still unclear about his motive, though they insist that "everything indicates" it was not ideological. Across the country flags on government buildings and royal palaces have been flown at half-mast to commemorate the victims.



### Fira, Greece

**Quake fears:** The threat of a major earthquake on Santorini, which has been hit by hundreds of tremors in the past several days, has triggered an exodus from the popular holiday island. Greece's national carrier, Aegean Airlines, has doubled the number of departures for Athens, and new flights have sold out in seconds as tourists and residents alike scramble to leave. The biggest tremor early in the week reached 5 on the Richter scale, but the main quake is likely still to come. Emergency medical crews have been dispatched to the island along with special forces and rescue teams, and authorities have warned people to avoid the shoreline, in case of a tsunami. The Earth's crust under the seas in the area is known to be a highly active seismic zone; 53 people died in 1956 when a 7.7 magnitude earthquake hit off the neighbouring island of Amorgos, triggering a tsunami.

### Kursk, Russia

**Korean exit:** North Korean troops fighting for Russia have been pulled back from the front line after suffering heavy losses during their first three months of combat. Western intelligence estimates that up to 1,000 of the 11,000 troops sent by Pyongyang in November to help Russia drive Ukrainian forces out of the occupied Kursk region had perished by mid-January; many are said to have chosen suicide over surrender, after being hampered by unfamiliar terrain, outdated equipment and poor tactics. And on Saturday – also in Ukraine-occupied Kursk – at least four people were killed and dozens injured in a missile strike on a boarding school in the town of Sudzha, which was being used as a shelter for elderly civilians. Moscow and Kyiv each blamed the other for the strike; President Zelensky accused Moscow of bombing its own people in a cynical ploy to frame Ukraine for the atrocity.



**Washington DC**  
**Aid pulled:** America's main foreign aid agency was effectively shuttered this week and its future thrown into jeopardy. The US Agency for International Development (USAID), set up in 1961, employs 10,000 people and is the world's largest foreign aid donor: it disbursed \$40bn in 2023. However, Donald Trump has claimed that it is run by "radical lunatics", and he has tasked Elon Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency (Doge) with scaling it back. On Monday, staff were turned away from USAID's Washington HQ and senior officials were put on leave, reportedly for trying to stop Musk's team from accessing secure areas owing to their lack of security clearance. Musk said USAID was being "shut down"; Trump suggested it was being merged with the State Department. With payments frozen, aid workers said the repercussions were already being felt in Sudan, DR Congo and elsewhere.

On Saturday, it was reported that Musk's Doge team had been granted access to a Treasury payment system that contains confidential data on millions of US citizens. The Bureau of the Fiscal Service distributes \$5trn of federal money a year, in social security and Medicare as well as to government contractors – some of which compete with Musk's businesses.

#### Washington DC

**Shock Gaza plan:** Donald Trump declared this week that the US should "take control" of Gaza and "resettle" its entire population. At a press conference with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in the White House, he said the Strip was an uninhabitable "demolition site", and that a "fresh, beautiful piece of land" would be found for Gazans elsewhere. He did not specify where, but said it could be in Jordan or Egypt – two countries that have repeatedly rejected the idea of hosting more Palestinian refugees – or in "other places". The US, he said, would then take ownership of Gaza and lead the rebuilding, which would turn it into the "Riviera of the Middle East". His plans, which appear to be in clear breach of international law, were roundly condemned by Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Australia and France, and Russia and China, among others. Hamas branded it an "absurd" idea, stating that such "expulsion from their land" would ignite tensions across the region.

#### Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Plane crash:** Two days after an inbound flight from Kansas collided with a US military helicopter over Washington DC last week, a medical jet crashed into a suburban neighbourhood in Philadelphia, killing all six people on board and one person on the ground. The Learjet 55, which had taken off a minute earlier, was transporting an 11-year-old girl, following life-saving treatment at a hospital in the city, back to her home in Tijuana, Mexico. She was killed, along with her mother, a doctor, a paramedic and the plane's two pilots. The seventh victim was a person whose car was hit by debris. The crash created a large fireball, which engulfed several homes and injured at least 24 people on the ground.



#### Guantánamo Bay, Cuba

**Migrant plan:** Flights carrying undocumented migrants to Guantánamo Bay started this week (pictured), hours after Donald Trump signed an executive order to build a huge new detention camp for undocumented immigrants at the US navy base. This, he said, would be separate from the military jail there, and could house 30,000 of "the worst criminal illegal aliens threatening the American people". Also this week, the White House welcomed a "generous offer" from the government of El Salvador to house deportees from the US (including US citizens) in its notorious mega-prison.

#### Toronto, Canada

**"Buy Canadian":** Donald Trump's decision to postpone tariffs on Canadian imports may have been too little, too late to stem a retaliatory "Buy Canadian" campaign. In the hours after Trump said he was imposing the 25% tariffs, retailers across the country started promoting Canadian rye instead of Kentucky bourbon; Californian wines disappeared from shelves; and hats emblazoned with the slogan "Canada is not for sale" sold in their thousands. Canadians cancelled trips across the border and, at sporting events, the US anthem was booed. Trump's 30-day pause led to some retaliatory moves being revoked: Ontario's premier, Doug Ford, said that he'd put on hold his threat to start "ripping up" his province's \$100m contract with Elon Musk's Starlink internet firm. But many Canadians, still reeling from the shock of the threatened trade war, said that given the uncertainty about Trump's intentions, they planned to carry on boycotting US goods.

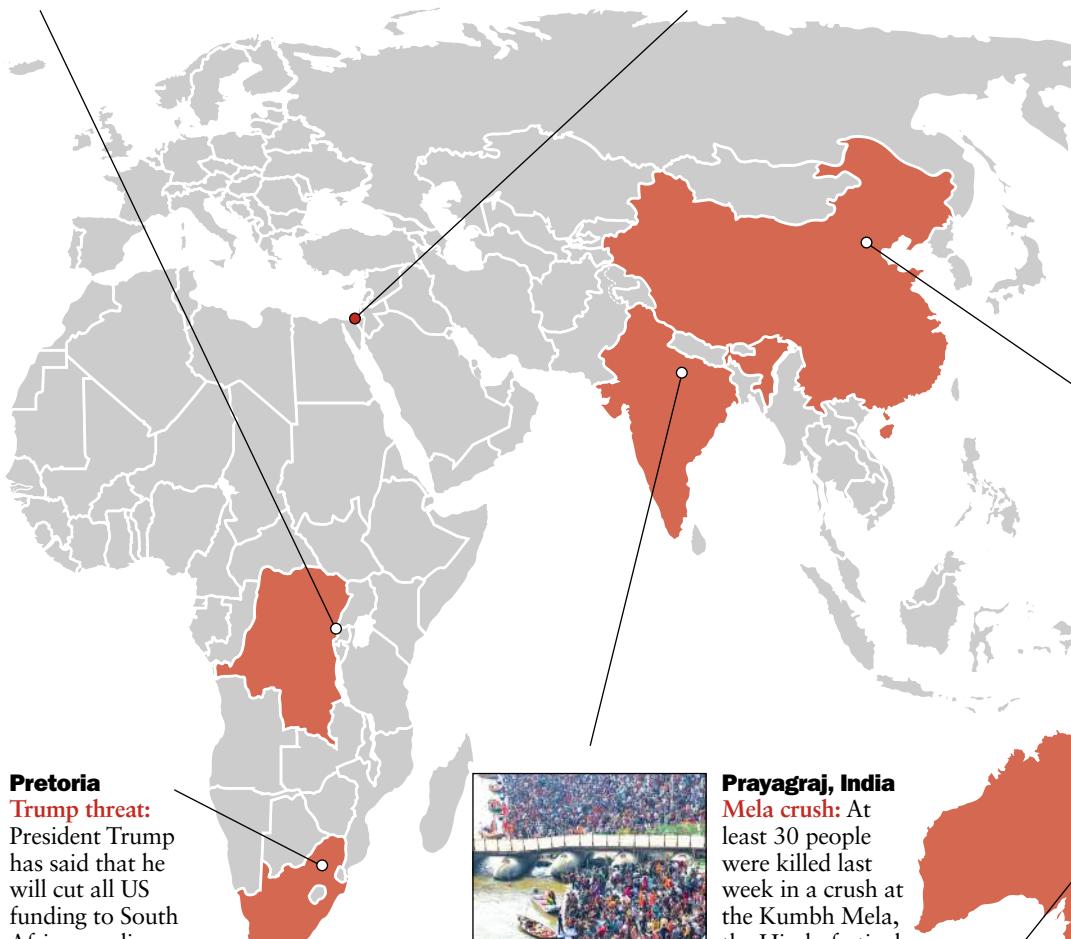


#### Buenos Aires

**Femicide abolition:** Argentina's president, Javier Milei, has vowed to remove femicide from the nation's legal code. Defined as the killing of a woman by a man "in the context of gender violence", it was introduced as an "aggravated" form of homicide in 2012. Its defenders say it provides vital protection for women in a country where male-on-female violence is unacceptably high. But Milei has long decried the concept, and has made the drive to abolish it part of his campaign against "wokeism". At the World Economic Forum in Davos last month, he claimed that femicide undermines the concept of equality before the law, by making "a woman's life be worth more than that of a man". Last year, about 267 femicides were recorded in Argentina.

### Goma, DR Congo

**Truce:** The Rwanda-backed M23 rebels in DR Congo announced a unilateral ceasefire on Monday, days after their capture of the eastern city of Goma. The rebels said they had called the truce for “humanitarian reasons”: aid agencies had been calling for safe corridors for the delivery of urgent supplies to the city of more than a million people, which had been cut off for days by the fighting. On Tuesday, it emerged that 2,000 bodies were awaiting burial in Goma. It was also reported that, in the chaos of the rebel advance, 165 female inmates had been raped and possibly burned alive during a mass breakout from a prison in the city. There had been fears that the rebels would next try to seize control of the major city of Bukavu, but they’ve denied having any such plan (*see page 14*).



### Pretoria

**Trump threat:** President Trump has said that he will cut all US funding to South Africa pending an investigation of new land laws, which allow for land seizures without compensation in some circumstances. On his Truth Social platform, Trump said South Africa was “treating certain classes of people VERY BADLY” – an apparent reference to the country’s white minority, which owns 72% of its land. Trump may be voicing the concerns of Maga allies Peter Thiel and Elon Musk, who both have roots in South Africa. Musk has previously accused its government of “pushing for a genocide” of whites. This week, President Cyril Ramaphosa said that his government was “rooted in the rule of law” and had “not confiscated any land”.

### Khan Younis, Palestinian Territories

**Exchanges continue:** Israel and Hamas have conducted two more of the hostage-for-prisoner exchanges that were agreed as part of their ceasefire deal. Last week, Hamas escorted two Israelis and five Thai citizens (pictured) through a crowd of gunmen and onlookers in Khan Younis, before handing them over to the Red Cross in front of the home of Yahya Sinwar, the mastermind of the 7 October atrocities, killed by Israeli forces last October. During the ceremony, the hostages were given Hamas gift bags and framed certificates. In total, the two releases involved 11 hostages. In exchange, Israel released more than 100 Palestinians, including Zakaria Zubeidi, prominent former leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

Israel’s ban on the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (Unrwa) operating in Israel finally came into force this week, and is expected effectively to prevent the agency delivering aid to Gaza. Unrwa has argued that its 5,000-strong force in Gaza and its logistical network make it irreplaceable, and that without it Israel will be unable to make good on its pledge, as part of the ceasefire deal, to deliver at least 600 trucks of humanitarian relief per day. Israel accuses Unrwa of having close links to Hamas.



### Beijing

**Command centre:** China is building the world’s largest command centre – ten times the size of the Pentagon – in western Beijing, US intelligence sources have said. Satellite images of the 1,500-acre site show deep holes, suggesting the inclusion of bunkers for use in the event of a nuclear war. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is known to be rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal, and the US says that President Xi has ordered it to be ready to attack Taiwan by 2027, the year of the PLA’s centenary.



### Prayagraj, India

**Mela crush:** At least 30 people were killed last week in a crush at the Kumbh Mela, the Hindu festival that is the largest human gathering in the world. Roughly 400 million people are expected to attend the event, which is held every 12 years and lasts 45 days. The crush took place on one of the holiest days of the festival, when a sacred bathing site, at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, became alarmingly overcrowded in the early hours, leading many to panic. Critics of India’s Hindu nationalist BJP government has blamed its poor management for the disaster.

### Townsville, Australia

**Flood disaster:** More than six feet of rain fell on parts of Queensland in three days this week, leading to the state’s worst floods in 60 years. Thousands of homes and businesses were inundated; a bridge on a critical highway collapsed; and at least two people were killed as rivers burst their banks and reservoirs overflowed. In the coastal city of Townsville, people were starting to return to their homes on Tuesday, but the regional premier, David Crisafulli, described the damage elsewhere as “incredible”, and warned that some communities were cut off.

**Bill Gates's childhood**

Bill Gates was a billionaire by the age of 31, but when he was growing up in Seattle, no one would have predicted a glittering future for him. Quite the contrary. His parents were loving and ambitious for their children; but he was "tricky", he told Alice Thomson in *The Times*: disorganised, fidgety and obstructive. At school he messed around, and got Bs and Cs. Today, he'd perhaps have been diagnosed as autistic, but his parents "had no guideposts or textbooks to help them grasp why their son became so obsessed with certain projects, missed social cues and could be rude or inappropriate". It was even suggested that he might be "retarded". Things started to improve when he got the top mark in a regional maths exam and his school got a computer. Having not cared less, he started to mind what people thought of him. "I realised I was being paired up with kids I thought weren't very intelligent and I thought, 'Holy shit, they actually think I'm stupid.'" Crucially, he also found a friend: Kent Evans, a boy as nerdy as he was. Fifty years on, he still remembers Kent's phone number – and the moment he heard that Kent, then 17, had been killed in a climbing accident. "When Kent died, I didn't know who to sit next to at lunch any more," he says. "He was my best friend. We spent hours writing code, working out whether we wanted to be an ambassador, a general or a scientist. We used to scour the

biographies of famous men and later CEOs and wonder what it would be like to have \$15m... We'd read *Fortune* magazine to get tips on how to succeed. He helped give me direction. Then, suddenly, he was gone. I thought, 'I am alone now,' which was hard. I wasn't thinking I needed to live for the two of us. But why was I the one who got to go forward?"

**Against introspection**

Joanna Lumley was a model before she went into acting, and credits it with instilling her with "strict self-control", she told Mick Brown in *The Daily Telegraph*. "You've got to get up, drag your stuff there and arrive at work fully made up. If you're one minute late, they will cut your pay by half. So you learn to be absolutely disciplined, disciplined, disciplined." Now 78, she abhors sloth, and is not at all keen on introspection, either. "I can't see the point. I'm as shallow as a puddle. So when people ask what have you discovered about yourself, I think 'Nothing', because I've just been me all the time. I don't understand that question, because I like reading books, looking at paintings, talking to people and hearing new ideas and things. I think we're all here as little travellers together. And if, as a traveller, you spend all your time trying to find out who you are and thinking about yourself – you're a crashing bore. That narcissism is a very short journey, and at the end of it you haven't nourished yourself much."



Having been acting for most of her adult life, Harriet Walter has, in her 70s, become something of a household name, owing to her roles in hit TV series including *Succession* and *Killing Eve*. She tends to be cast as elegant women who are tough, chilly, abrasive. But in person, says Janice Turner in *The Times*, she's warm, frank and disarmingly self-critical. "I know that my face can come over as quite hard and tough, snooty, bad-tempered," she says, "but inside I'm absolutely not feeling that." As a child, she was a tomboy who loved racing around outside, playing vividly imagined games in which she was fighting Nazis in Occupied France. She never felt as if she were a "real girl", and was horrified when she reached adolescence and realised that she was now expected to behave like an adult woman. She remembers her best friend telling her to cross her legs daintily, rather than sit with them apart. "At the same time, she stopped wanting to play our imaginative games. I was still pretending we were in the French Resistance, climbing trees and shooting at passing trains. I think part of growing up and being an actual woman in the world took me a very long time." It was at boarding school that she found that she could channel her talent for make-believe into acting. It was her salvation. "I call it 'the nameless aspiration', this desire to express myself. I still have it."

**Castaway of the week**

*This week's edition of Radio 4's Desert Island Discs featured the lawyer and writer Nemone Lethbridge*

- 1 *Go Down, Moses*, traditional (arranged by H.T. Burleigh), performed by Paul Robeson
- 2 *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, traditional (translated by John Mason Neale), performed by Choir of King's College, Cambridge
- 3 *Scarborough Fair*, traditional, performed by Simon & Garfunkel
- 4 *I Wanna Go Back to Dixie*, written and performed by Tom Lehrer
- 5\* "Duettino" Sull'Aria (from *The Marriage of Figaro*) by Mozart, performed by Edith Mathis, Gundula Janowitz and the Deutsche Oper Berlin (conducted by Karl Böhm)
- 6 *Strose To Stroms Sou*, traditional and Mikis Theodorakis, performed by Mikis Theodorakis
- 7 *September Song* by Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson, performed by Gracie Fields
- 8 *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* by Bach, performed by Ylang Ylang

**Book:** *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (trans. by Edward FitzGerald)

**Luxury:** my doll, Sarah Jane

\* Choice if allowed only one record

**Viewpoint:****Moving the Mona Lisa**

"Excellent news that the *Mona Lisa* is being removed from the Louvre and placed in a separate facility away from the main collection. Anyone who has seen it in real life will only remember a) it's teeny, and b) the crazy throng of tourists with selfie sticks frantically trying to take their own snap of a picture printed on mugs and tea towels in the gift shop. The *Mona*-only gallery is like putting a blob of jam on a plate to attract wasps away from your picnic. (I suggest the Louvre builds a travelator like that for the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London.) That way the bucket-list morons get to tick off an item and everyone else can enjoy the art."

*Janice Turner in The Times*

**Farewell**

**The Aga Khan**, leader of Ismaili Muslims and philanthropist, died 4 February, aged 88.

**Tony Martin**, farmer jailed for shooting a teenage burglar, died 2 February, aged 80.

**Diana Melly**, writer and bohemian, died 2 February, aged 87.

**Brian Murphy**, star of sitcom *George and Mildred*, died 2 February, aged 92.

**Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson**, publisher and agent, died 20 January, aged 85.

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# **Earthy**





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# The “spy cops” scandal

*A public inquiry is laying bare decades’ worth of dubious tactics by undercover police officers*

## What are the police accused of?

Of conducting intrusive surveillance operations targeting political activists over a period of at least 40 years, using highly questionable tactics. Some 139 officers from at least two units – the National Public Order Intelligence Unit and the Metropolitan Police’s Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) – were given fake identities to help them monitor the inner workings of more than 1,000 predominantly left-wing political groups, from 1968 on. Some lived with, and even had sexual relationships with, members of the groups they had infiltrated. Four undercover officers are known (or alleged) to have fathered children while living under aliases. These abuses are now the subject of a public inquiry, the Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI).

## Why was the SDS formed?

To gather intelligence about anti-Vietnam War protests. In the late 1960s there were violent clashes between police and protesters; on one occasion, in 1968, protesters had almost gained entry to the US embassy in Grosvenor Square, London. Plans for further campaigns by hard-left activists had sparked concern at the highest levels of government. The only way to gather intelligence on these demonstrations, the police concluded, was to attend preparatory meetings undercover, posing as supporters of the protests. In the event, subsequent protests passed relatively peacefully. But in the following decades, undercover officers infiltrated political groups ranging from the Socialist Workers Party to hunt saboteurs and animal rights groups, to anti-racist activists. Few were planning to commit serious crimes.

## How did they infiltrate these groups?

Officers adopted fake identities – including those of about 80 dead children – and were issued with fake passports. They fabricated cover stories and immersed themselves in the groups, claiming to be sympathetic to their causes. Some moved into shared houses, living side-by-side with their targets. Tactics varied according to the group they were targeting, but some of the methods used can be found in a 1995 “Tradecraft Manual”, which was written by former undercover officer Andy Coles (brother of the broadcaster and priest Richard Coles). It suggests techniques for blending in with activists, whom it refers to disdainfully as “wearies”: that officers should grow their hair long and wear “big sloppy jumpers”, for instance. “Being a little untidy, smelly and rumpled is a natural state for many of [them]”, it states, adding that “the smell of fresh clothing from the suburban washing line” could arouse suspicion. The manual suggests that officers should “try to avoid” sexual relationships, and gives detailed instructions about how to go about adopting a dead child’s identity.

## How was all this exposed?

Initially, through a chance discovery during a holiday in Italy. Lisa Jones (a pseudonym) found a passport belonging to her boyfriend of six



Mark “Stone”, 2009: his cover was blown a year later

years, who went by the name Mark Stone. Inside it, she saw her boyfriend’s photo beside a stranger’s name: Mark Kennedy. She discovered that Mark wasn’t the environmental activist he had been posing as for seven years, but an undercover police officer with two children. The discovery set in motion a chain of events that led to the collapse of a major trial of environmental activists accused of conspiring to break into a power station; and to further revelations about such relationships. In 2015, the then-home secretary, Theresa May, ordered a public inquiry, following revelations that Scotland Yard had infiltrated the family of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence.

## What has the inquiry revealed?

The UCPI is one of the most complicated, often-delayed and expensive public inquiries in British legal history. Chaired by Sir John Mitting, it finally got under way in 2020. Three years later, it published an interim report, covering the period from 1968 to 1982, that was highly critical of the police. Mitting said that undercover operations to infiltrate left-wing groups, though carried out with government approval, were unjustified, and should have been rapidly shut down. The report found that police infiltration was legally justified on grounds of public safety in the case of only three groups – (Provisional) Sinn Féin and two unidentified organisations – out of hundreds targeted. It also revealed the human costs of the undercover operations.

## What sort of human costs?

Officers collected a “striking” and “extensive” amount of information about the personal lives of political activists, ranging from their body size and holiday plans to their bank details. Police targeted trade unionists, some of whom suffered years of unemployment as a result. And at least six undercover officers had sexual relationships with women while on deployment between 1968 and 1982. Since then, the inquiry has heard evidence covering the 1980s and 1990s, including testimony from multiple further women who said they had been deceived into relationships with officers. It has also heard claims that crimes were committed or incited by serving undercover officers.

## Bob Lambert, undercover father

Bob Lambert was a member of the SDS who posed as Bob Robinson, a radical left-winger, as part of a five-year mission to infiltrate environmental groups in the 1980s. In 1984, he met a woman known only as Jacqui. She was 22, and fell in love with him; she’d found him to be “very charming and charismatic”. Their son was born in 1985; Lambert was at first a devoted, hands-on father, but he vanished two years later, claiming he had to flee abroad to escape prosecution for his animal rights activism. In fact, he had been married all along, with two children. Jacqui only discovered the deception in 2012, when she saw his photo in the press because of the police spying scandal. It has since transpired that Lambert deceived four women into sexual relationships during his time undercover. Even so, afterwards he was given a commendation and enjoyed a distinguished career. Jacqui has said that she feels as if she was “raped by the state”. In 2014, she received £425,000 from the Met in an out-of-court settlement. At the UCPI, Lambert said he was “deeply sorry” to all four women, but said his superiors never told him to avoid such relationships. He was also accused of masterminding an animal rights plot to bomb Debenhams for stocking fur; he has denied this.

## Is this still going on?

The police have sought to paint the scandal as largely historical: barristers acting for the Met Police apologised for the “indefensible” use of undercover officers to infiltrate political groups in the past. Police guidelines have been rewritten to ensure that undercover officers stay within the law: intrusion must be proportionate to the perceived crime or harm; it is “never acceptable” to have sexual relationships while undercover. Since 2016 there has been an oversight body. But when Mitting asked, in 2020, whether police are still infiltrating political groups, he received no answer. He made clear that he expects the questions to be answered before the inquiry ends; it is expected to report by late 2026.

## Why Britain can't dig its way into a hole

**Robert Colvile**

*The Sunday Times*

## AI and all the news it's not fit to print

**Archie Bland**

*The Guardian*

## The millions we lose in the numbers game

**Sam Bidwell**

*The Spectator*

## A police force unfit for the 21st century

**Jenni Russell**

*The Times*



Rachel Reeves is a brave woman, says Robert Colvile. In her pro-growth speech last week, the Chancellor vowed to build no fewer than nine new reservoirs – quite some pledge, seeing as the UK hasn't managed to build even one of these increasingly vital pieces of infrastructure since 1992. To see why, you need only consider the saga of the proposed Abingdon reservoir. Thames Water has been trying to build this since "about 1991" to save London from drought, yet has been foiled by a relentless campaign of "attritional warfare" by Nimbyists, using every trick and legal ruse in the book. The reservoir isn't necessary, Thames Water should just cut leaks; more impact assessments are needed; we need a public inquiry; what about the carbon emissions? Some 15 million people would benefit from the reservoir: the petition against it has just 5,358 signatures; on its website, Thames Water's response to the online objections is 6,398 pages long. All this for a single reservoir. Faced with the "edifice of consultation and legislation and obstruction we have erected", how on earth does Reeves hope to build nine of them? At every step she takes, the lawyers will be waiting.

Artificial intelligence is a powerful tool for enhancing journalism, no denying that, says Archie Bland. It can help journalists detect patterns in vast amounts of financial data, for example. But as iPhone users have discovered, AI can also corrupt journalism in deeply worrying ways. In December, Apple rolled out a new AI feature on its phones – automated summaries of news items from the BBC and other organisations sent out in a single headline alert. One said that Benjamin Netanyahu had been arrested; another that the tennis star Rafael Nadal had come out as gay. The scary thing is that these and other glaring "howlers" only came to light because journalists happened to receive the alerts in question. But many people will believe these inaccuracies, or, just as bad, lose faith in the news outlets to which they're attributed. After the BBC kicked up a stink, Apple grudgingly paused the AI feature. But it's sure to bring it back. And in the absence of any serious supervision of the machine, it won't be any more reliable.

How many people live in Britain? The truth is no one really knows, says Sam Bidwell. Unlike countries such as Sweden, which keep population registers, we don't count people in and out. Our figures are based on estimates, and given how often they conflict with real-world data, not very reliable ones. Thus nearly 64 million patients are registered with GP practices in England, yet the Office for National Statistics (ONS) puts England's population at about 58 million. The huge rise in post-Brexit migration – the so-called "Boriswave" – has left us increasingly in the dark about the true state of affairs. The ONS's estimate for net migration in 2022 alone has been revised upwards three times, from 606,000 to 872,000. The latest figures suggest Britain is home to up to 745,000 illegal immigrants – more than any other country in Europe; yet an official suggested the real figure is more than a million. The lack of reliable data is partly down to the ONS's stretched resources, but the root of the problem is that politicians prefer not to have accurate figures because they're embarrassing. How they expect to manage public services efficiently on that basis is anyone's guess.

Knife crime – up; sexual assaults – up; robberies – up; shoplifting going through the roof, with over 20 million incidents a year. The worse crime gets in Britain, says Jenni Russell, the clearer become the shortcomings of our police. Detection rates keep falling. This failure has a lot to do with underfunding, of course: "we spend 50% less per head on police in London than Sydney and New York". And the inevitable result is stress, low morale and high staff turnover ("a third of the Met have served for less than four years"). But there's a bigger problem: the "insane mismatch between what we expect of the police in 2025 and their archaic organisation". They're set up to be old-fashioned bobbies on the beat. Incredibly, Met officers only got mobiles and laptops in 2022, yet have to deal with everything from burglaries to computer frauds, human trafficking, images of abuse, and mass protests. A radical reorganisation is essential. We must reduce the burden by passing tasks such as tech crimes and phone and CCTV searches to specialists, allowing regular officers, properly funded, to focus on everyday policing. If we don't, the crimewave will keep rising.

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

An Instagram account that reviews sticks has exploded in popularity. "Official Stick Reviews" was started by two American stick aficionados, Boone Hogg and Logan Jugler, after they found a particularly pleasing specimen while hiking in Utah in 2023. Their inaugural video praised the stick's "nice grip" and "excellent grain"; since then, their account has amassed nearly three million followers, who rate sticks according to factors such as appearance, rarity and "aura". "We just want to share sticks," Hogg explained.



*The Wallace and Gromit villain Feathers McGraw is proving a hit at tattoo parlours around the country. Faith Garvie, a tattoo artist based in Liverpool, told the BBC that she'd done "six Feathers" over the course of a single week. Pictures of the tattoos on social media show the penguin in a variety of scenarios, including glowering out of a "Wanted" poster and drinking from a "World's Best Boss" mug.*

**A Malaysian man is offering his services as a "villain for hire" – for men who want to act like heroes by fighting him off in front of their girlfriends. Shazali Sulaiman, 28, says he was inspired to start his business after being told that his unkempt hair and biker clothing made him look like a gang member. "Are you tired of your partner thinking you are weak? For a reasonable fee, I can help you prove them wrong," promises the social media advert for his services. Clients who hire him can decide the precise time and place for the confrontation, it adds. "It is all just an act, like WWE," Sulaiman said. "No one gets hurt, I am the only 'loser'."**

### Mission aborted: Trump's federal spending freeze

The Trump administration has done many foolish things since coming into office, said David Brooks in *The New York Times*. But for sheer stupidity, nothing matches the memo it issued last week announcing an arbitrary freeze on more than \$3trn-worth of federal grants and loans. It justified the move by citing the need to root out the malign influence of “Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies” from government. But the memo unleashed chaos as countless municipal bodies and charities across the US were left wondering how they'd pay for police forces, women's shelters, cancer trials, highway repairs and a host of other basic services. The measure was “like trying to cure acne with decapitation”. As confusion spread, a federal judge temporarily blocked the memo from taking effect, and the White House subsequently rescinded it.

The funding freeze was supposed to be part of a “well-planned, shock-and-awe takeover”, said Matt Ford in *The New Republic*. Trump and his allies have had lots of time to prepare for office, and they were keen to avoid the “self-inflicted legal and procedural wounds that hamstrung” his presidency last



A protest against the freeze in Washington DC last week

time around. But the sloppily worded memo suggests those “first-term flaws remain inherent to the Trumpian system of rule”. Some have suggested that there's method to the madness. Trump wants to provoke a court challenge on this issue, they say, because he's out to overturn the law that forbids presidents from refusing to spend funding authorised by Congress. But if this fiasco was part of some devious plan, the White House looked “woefully unprepared for it”.

Count this as a “misfire”, said Nicole Russell in *USA Today*. Trump used a sledgehammer when he should have used a scalpel. He's right, though, about the need to cut spending. The federal deficit hit an “unsustainable” \$1.8trn in the last fiscal year – this in peacetime, when the economy is doing pretty well. Americans paid \$882bn in interest in 2024 on the national debt, which has “topped a mind-boggling \$36trn”. Washington just can't keep growing the way it is now. A recent poll found that more than 60% of US adults support “downsizing the federal government”. “Trump may be the agent of current chaos, but it's nothing compared with what's coming in the years ahead if the nation can't get its finances in order.”

### Bring on the “Iron Dome for America”

**Editorial**

*National Review*

### The crucial role of jailed firefighters

**Shaanth Kodialam Nanguneri**

*The New Republic*

### Spare us the Donald Trump Highway

**Jeff Jacoby**

*The Boston Globe*

Ronald Reagan got a lot of flak in 1983 when he proposed the idea of a space-based missile defence system to protect America from nuclear attack, says National Review. Critics accused him of provoking the Soviets and mocked his “Star Wars” plan. Then-senator Joe Biden called it “one of the most reckless and irresponsible acts in the history of modern statecraft”. In the event, the plan, while not coming to fruition, arguably helped end the Cold War by making Moscow realise it couldn't compete with the US. There were similar jibes last week when Trump called for a “next-generation missile defence shield”. Because the executive order was titled “Iron Dome for America”, critics rushed to point out that Israel's version was only effective against relatively short-range missiles, and protected a country 400 times smaller than the US. But Trump isn't seeking to emulate Israel's model, just the concept. Apart from 40 ground-based interceptors in Alaska and four in California, the US currently relies for deterrence on its second-strike nuclear capability. But in an era when people are contemplating manned missions to Mars, and when launch costs are drastically declining, it makes sense for the US to try to develop “a transformative system of space-based sensors and interceptors”.

Firefighters earn a decent wage in California, says Shaanth Kodialam Nanguneri. The basic pay of those in the Los Angeles area, after a year of training, is about \$100,000; with overtime, many go on to make much more than that. Unless, that is, they're part of the incarcerated firefighters programme. Almost a third of the state's total firefighting force is made up of prisoners on special release – and these individuals are typically paid less than a dollar an hour. The state's dependence on this stock of “practically free labour” has long presented an ethical dilemma. Firefighting is dangerous, and prisoners tend to be given the more perilous assignments: a 2018 report found that they were four times more likely to be injured on the job than professionals. Many critics want to ban the century-old programme altogether, arguing that it is “not only part of the legacy of American slavery, but a form of slavery itself”. On the other hand, the programme offers inmates an escape from grim prison conditions, and often leads to reduced sentences and a good job after release. So it's not a straightforward issue. But given the “pivotal role” incarcerated firefighters played in containing the recent blazes around LA, there's surely a good case for paying them fairly.

His name already adorns golf clubs and casinos, but that's not enough for his fans in Congress. They're lobbying for the Washington Dulles International Airport to be rechristened “Donald J. Trump International Airport”. In several red states, meanwhile, lawmakers are seeking to designate roads as the “Donald J. Trump Highway”. These are “lamentable proposals”, says Jeff Jacoby – *not* because of Trump's politics, but because the whole idea of naming public facilities, paid for with our taxes, after people who didn't fund them is wrong. When it comes to dead politicians, I accept that the tradition is too deeply entrenched to challenge. The US navy named a warship *George Washington* back in 1798; the first transcontinental motor route was christened the Lincoln Highway in 1913. But honouring living people in this way is worse. First off, it's a hostage to fortune. Just ask Central State University, which had to rename its Bill Cosby building after he was charged with sexual assault. It's also “unseemly” in a democratic republic where all citizens are meant to be equal before the law. The US already prohibits postage stamps from commemorating living people. The same should apply to infrastructure. “Public landmarks should honour enduring values, not fleeting egos.”

## The catastrophic conflict looming in the heart of Africa

Is it too late, asked [Le Pays \(Ouagadougou\)](#): have we “reached the point of no return” for another catastrophic conflict in Africa? Last week, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda were on the brink of all-out war, the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group having just seized the city of Goma in eastern DRC – a lightning assault that left the streets littered with dead bodies. The region has endured three decades of bloodshed, but now, as M23 advances “with guns blazing” and Rwanda and DRC’s presidents trade barbs, a hideous collision looms. France and the UK have waded in, demanding that Rwandan forces leave the DRC

“immediately”; South Africa, which has seen 13 of its soldiers on a UN peacekeeping mission killed in the M23 offensive, said that further Rwandan attacks would be seen as a “declaration of war”.

Two things are fuelling this crisis, said Pierre Haski on [France Inter \(Paris\)](#): rare minerals, and the “ghosts” of the Rwandan genocide. Rwanda claims that Hutu extremists who helped kill hundreds of thousands of Tutsis in the 1994 genocide are still sheltering in eastern Congo; the DRC accuses Rwanda of orchestrating the offensive to loot the DRC of rare minerals such as coltan and cobalt, which are used in almost all digital devices, via M23, its Tutsi-led proxy. But the international community is wrong to pick sides and round on Rwanda, said Sanny Ntayombya in [The New Times \(Kigali\)](#). “Notably absent” in their selective outrage is any mention of the way DRC’s notoriously corrupt president, Félix Tshisekedi, years ago rejected M23’s offer to negotiate a peace



Félix Tshisekedi: a “naked king” mired in scandal

deal. In short, he opted for conflict. The result? Two years of “humiliating” losses, culminating in the fall of Goma. Back home, Tshisekedi – his country’s “naked king” – is embroiled in scandal, said Colette Braeckman in [Le Soir \(Brussels\)](#). It’s no mystery why his forces failed to hold up last week. Many of the regular recruits, paid just \$100 a month, are demoralised by the government’s failure “to root out the corruption that has long plagued the army”. They’ve had to look on as the “Romeos” (Romanian mercenaries) by their side, who enjoy salaries of up to \$5,000 a month, surrendered to the M23 at the first sign of danger.

“All this adds to Congo’s horrific turmoil,” said [The Economist \(London\)](#). “Its various conflicts have driven 8 million people from their homes” – 400,000 in the past month alone. “In much of the east, men with guns rape and plunder with impunity.” And today, Rwanda is seeking to redraw the map of Africa by grabbing “a big chunk of Congolese territory while pretending not to”. Until now, many Western governments had “a soft spot for Rwanda”: a haven of order in a sea of chaos, it has been rewarded with aid and development projects. But under “dictator” Paul Kagame, it has become a “predator”: and it may not stop at Goma. Some fear that Kagame’s ultimate aim is “to topple the Congolese government”. On Monday, as international pressure mounted, a ceasefire was agreed between M23 and the DRC, said Dale Pankhurst on [The Conversation](#). It’s something, but it’s “not enough”. What is needed is a “durable solution that addresses the root causes and fears that are driving the armed conflict”.

## Allying with Germany’s far-right: the breaking of a taboo

Since the fall of Nazism, said Samira El Ouassil in [Der Spiegel \(Hamburg\)](#), Germany’s main political parties have been united in an iron consensus: “Never again should the world be set on fire by right-wing extremist forces.” In practical terms, that has meant rejecting “even the smallest cooperation” with far-right parties in the Bundestag. But last week that 80-year “firewall” was shattered with “astonishing momentum” by Friedrich Merz, leader of the conservative CDU, when he teamed up with Alice Weidel of the far-right AfD to pass a motion for stricter immigration laws. The motion was ultimately rejected 48 hours later by 350 to 338, but the

breaking of a national taboo by a man widely seen as the chancellor-in-waiting sparked a wave of outrage, prompting rare interventions from the Protestant and Catholic Churches, and from Merz’s predecessor as CDU leader, Angela Merkel, while 160,000 marched in Berlin in protest.

Rightly so, said Stephan Detjen in [Deutschlandfunk \(Cologne\)](#). Thanks to Merz’s Faustian pact, a toxic, extremist party guilty of antisemitic, anti-Muslim and anti-democratic statements has been allowed to enter the “bourgeois middle”. But what else could Merz do, asked Philip Fabian in [Bild \(Berlin\)](#). Unlike his opponents, the CDU leader understands that if there’s one issue that “drives voters into the arms of the AfD”, it’s immigration. With only weeks until a general election, it has surged to second



Flirting with extremism? An AI protest placard featuring Weidel and Merz

in the polls on the back of widespread discontent over migration levels, the anger reaching boiling point when a two-year-old was stabbed to death by a failed Afghan asylum seeker in Aschaffenburg two weeks ago. Parties such as the SPD and the Greens may prefer to hide behind “firewall hysteria”, and portray themselves “as the last bastion of resistance before an impending seizure of power of the sort that occurred in 1933”, but Merz is the only mainstream politician with a “concrete plan” to tackle migration and shrink the AfD. And it was the terror attack in Aschaffenburg that gave him the opportunity to act.

“Ancient Greeks had a word for what Merz spotted,” said Georg Anastasiadis in the [Münchner Merkur \(Munich\)](#): “*Kairos*” – the moment that must be seized. A known risk taker, Merz went “all-in” with his immigration manoeuvre, hoping it would ultimately push the AfD onto the defensive.

But will Merz’s gamble pay off, asked Hannah Bethke in [Die Welt \(Berlin\)](#). A small, snapshot poll this week put the AfD only two points behind Merz’s CDU, though it was likely taken before last week’s immigration showdown had had time to influence public opinion. The election on 23 February looks closer than ever. By flirting with extremism, Merz may have alienated future coalition partners in the SPD and the Greens, and jeopardised any hope “of forming a stable government”.

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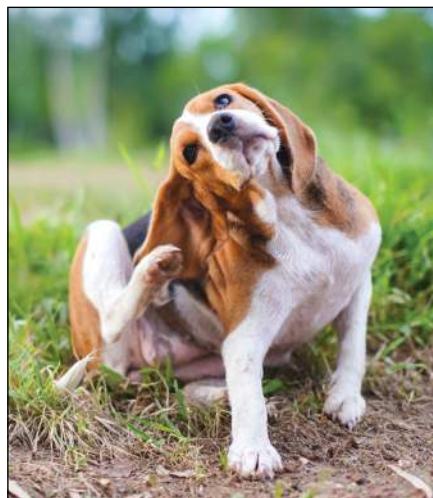
# What the scientists are saying...

## Dementia hits graduates faster

People who graduated from university die more quickly following a dementia diagnosis than their less-educated peers, new research has found. Scientists at the Erasmus University Medical Centre, in Amsterdam, analysed the results of 261 studies into the survival of people with dementia, 36 of which contained information about the participants' education. They found that, on average, patients lived ten-and-a-half years after diagnosis – but that each additional year of studies cut the survival time by two or three months. This would mean that someone who completed an undergraduate degree at 21 would live about a year less after diagnosis than someone who left school after GCSEs/O levels. It is not, the scientists say, that education harms the brain; on the contrary, it likely builds cognitive reserve – making it better able to withstand the dementia. The result more likely shows that patients with more years in education are able to function longer before they show signs of having the disease, and so it is more advanced by the time it is diagnosed.

## Heat-related deaths to surge

Scientists have warned that European cities could see a steep rise in heat-related deaths as the world warms – and this is liable to far outweigh the fall in cold-related ones. A team at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine used projections of temperatures, population data and death rates to model heat- and cold-related deaths in 854 cities, in 30 countries, from 2015 to 2099. In a worst-case scenario, in which there is little effort to combat climate change or adapt cities, there would be about 5.8 million heat-related deaths in Europe by 2099. More than three million cold-weather deaths would be avoided,



*Scratching can activate the immune system*

however, giving a net toll of 2.3 million excess deaths. However, if urgent action is taken to curb emissions and adapt living conditions, this number would fall by 70%. Southern European countries would be worst hit. More northerly ones, including the UK, where more people currently die from the cold, could see a net reduction in temperature-related deaths.

## Blood tests for Alzheimer's

Getting a diagnosis of dementia can involve multiple tests and take months, even years. But now, in what has been described as a "seminal moment", the NHS is trialling a range of simple blood tests for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. Such tests, which look for biomarkers associated with dementia, have been found to work in smaller studies. The aim of the trial is to find out if their use at scale would lead to improved rates of diagnosis in patients with early-stage dementia, and

in those with mild progressive memory problems. Some 3,000 patients will take part in the Blood Biomarker Challenge. The team behind the project – from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge – say that earlier diagnosis is vital to ensure that patients benefit from dementia drugs when they become available.

## Why it may be good to itch

It feels so good to scratch an itch, few of us can resist doing so – but chances are, it will damage the skin, and the itch will soon come back. So why have we, and most other mammal species, evolved to do it? Some scientists have suggested it's to get rid of parasites, but usually they've gone by the time the itching begins. Now, researchers in the US have come up with another possible solution to the "itch paradox". They created mice with itchy ears, then put some of them in tiny collars to stop them scratching the itch. Their tests indicated that scratching worsened bacterial inflammation in the uncollared mice. But it also reduced levels of a harmful bacteria on their skin seemingly by activating their immune system. So scratching may have a benefit – unless you do it too much and damage the skin, leaving it more vulnerable to bacteria.

## Medical file

Prostate cancer is now the most common form of the disease in England. NHS data shows that prostate cancer pushed breast cancer into second place in 2022, when there were 50,751 diagnoses, compared with 48,531 of breast cancer. It remained in the lead in 2023, with a record 55,033 diagnoses, 25% more than in 2019. The rise has been attributed to greater awareness, men living longer and a surge in testing after the Covid lockdowns.

## Penguins at risk from a "megaberg"

Scientists are anxiously monitoring the progress of the world's largest iceberg, amid concern that it is on a collision course with the ecologically important island of South Georgia, in the South Atlantic. A23a, which is roughly twice the size of Greater London at 1,400sq miles, calved from the Antarctic ice shelf in 1986, but then lodged on the seabed and remained immobile for decades. It only started drifting northwards in 2020, carried by the wind and the ocean currents.

Oceanographers have been plotting its slow and unpredictable course ever since.

Now, the trillion-tonne "megaberg" is getting ever closer to South Georgia. Some 280 metres thick, with a 30-metre cliff face, this vast slab could become grounded there, blocking routes to feeding grounds for the island's penguins, seals and other mammals. On the flip side, in the warmer air and water, it is melting – and if this accelerates, it will release nutrients that will boost populations of phytoplankton, attracting the krill that penguins feast on. And it remains possible that it will bypass South Georgia, and break up in the open sea – posing a threat to shipping instead.



*A23a: about twice the size of Greater London*

## Pesticide ban

UK farmers have been banned from using a neonicotinoid pesticide that has been shown to be highly toxic to bees. Thiamethoxam (brand name Cruiser SB) is used to kill an aphid that spreads the yellows virus to sugar beet, reducing sugar content and lowering yields. In 2020, a quarter of the country's crop was lost to the disease at a cost of £67m. However, just one teaspoon is enough to kill 1.25 billion honeybees – that's enough to fill four lorries – and even a non-lethal dose can affect bees' cognition, making it harder for them to forage for nectar. The neonicotinoid was banned in the EU in 2018, but the UK then granted several emergency authorisations for its use. Rejecting this year's application from British Sugar and the National Farmers' Union (NFU), the Government said it would support industry to develop other ways to protect sugar beet.

## Pick of the week's Gossip

On the day of John Prescott's funeral in Hull last week – where his cortège was led by two Jaguars – Andrew Marr recalled meeting the Labour bruiser at a party conference years ago. Prezza marched towards him, waving his arms “like a demented crop sprayer”, then jabbed his finger into Marr's chest. “You f\*\*\*ing bastard, I will f\*\*\*king ‘av you,” he thundered, before storming off. Thirty seconds later, Prescott was back. “Sorry,” he said. “Wrong bloke.”



**Karla Sofía Gascón**, the transgender star of the Oscar-nominated film *Emilia Pérez*, was forced to apologise last week, after old tweets surfaced in which she'd called George Floyd a “drug addict and a hustler”, and said that Islam should be banned. We've seen a lot of celebrity apologies, said Charlotte Ivers in *The Sunday Times*, but hers is a masterclass in the form. “As someone in a marginalised community, I know this suffering all too well and I am deeply sorry to those I have caused pain,” wrote Gascón. “All my life I have fought for a better world. I believe light will always triumph over darkness.”

**Denis Thatcher** was such a prodigious drinker that he had different names for each of the G&Ts he consumed over the course of the day, the Daily Mail reports. He'd start with “an opener”, before moving on to “a brightener”, “a lifter”, then “a shortener”. “A tincture” – just gin – was then followed by a “snifter, a snort, a snorter and, finally, a snorterino”. There were even rumours of a “snorterino deluxe”.

## Disaster in DC: politicising a tragedy

There were no survivors of last Wednesday's mid-air collision between a Black Hawk army helicopter and a passenger jet heading into Washington DC's Reagan National airport, said Benjamin Wallace-Wells in *The New Yorker*. In total, 67 people, including several young figure skaters, died when the two aircraft plunged into the Potomac River. The next day, President Trump called a press conference. Reading from a prepared script, he referred gravely to “a tragedy of terrible proportions”, and a nation “overcome with grief”. Then his tone changed as he started to ad-lib his own thoughts: that the crash was likely the fault of his predecessors, Joe Biden and Barack Obama, and their efforts to boost diversity in the Federal Aviation Administration. This, he said, had led to “lower” standards and meant people with “psychiatric disabilities” may have been hired as air traffic controllers (ATCs).

His claim was baseless, said Philip Bump in *The Washington Post*. Yes, federal agencies have sought to recruit more employees from minority groups, but ATCs must still go through rigorous testing and training, and the cohort is similar to when Trump left office in 2019: 84% are men; 75% are white. The truth, however, doesn't matter to Trump: for him, this tragedy was just another opportunity to blast his enemies and air



Recovering aircraft from the Potomac

a grievance that plays well with his base – that diversity policies have harmed the US by denying jobs to white men.

This tragedy should not be politicised, said Elizabeth McCormick, a former military pilot, in *The Times*. Instead, we need an impartial inquiry focused on three questions. First, why did the helicopter have only three crew? Training for a crisis in which officials have to be evacuated from DC, the crew were relying on visual cues to navigate. It's safer in such situations to have four crew. Second, were they too

high? It seems that the helicopter had left its “corridor”, and entered one used by commercial jets. Third, was the ATC precise enough? The crew had been asked to confirm visual contact with the plane, but there was another nearby taking off, which could mean that they may have been looking at the wrong one. The airspace above DC is challenging for pilots, said ABC News. They must navigate around scores of commercial and military aircraft and various restricted flight zones. But the once-small Reagan National, which is ten minutes from the Capitol, is now very busy: it serves destinations all over the US, thanks in part to lobbying by Congress members who prefer it to Dulles International, which is 25 miles away. Arguably, “this was a disaster waiting to happen”.

## DeepSeek: the battle for AI dominance

The launch of a new AI chatbot from the Chinese startup DeepSeek last month caused widespread panic, said *The Economist*. About a trillion dollars was wiped off the value of the US tech giants, as it became clear that DeepSeek had made an AI model nearly as good as OpenAI's or Google's, for a fraction of the cost – even though it had been barred from using cutting-edge chips by US export controls. Policymakers in Washington fretted that the US's lead in AI technology seemed under threat. But for the world at large, DeepSeek's success “should be a cause for optimism”. It shows how “competition and innovation will make AI cheaper and therefore more useful”. Before DeepSeek, it seemed likely that AI would be dominated by a handful of firms charging “vast, monopoly-like” prices. The future now looks very different. DeepSeek is an open-source product: anyone is free to use, adapt or commercialise it.

It's ironic, said Sam Leith in *The Spectator*. The big AI companies have been “stealing copyright material in unimaginable quantities” for years to train their models, without asking the owners, let alone paying them. Yet as soon as DeepSeek turned up, OpenAI's Sam Altman was “whining” that its Chinese rival had “cheated, and that it had trained its model on OpenAI's work without permission”. There's a “pleasing piquancy” to it.

There are more serious issues at stake here, said Matt Sheehan and Scott Singer in *Foreign Policy*. AI systems “have the potential to redraw global power in ways we've scarcely begun to imagine. Whichever country builds the best and most widely used models will reap the rewards for its economy, national security and global influence.” The US government now has to pursue various extraordinarily challenging objectives simultaneously. It must ensure that the US races ahead of China in AI capabilities, while also preparing for a world in which China has extremely powerful AI systems. At the same time, it must defend against the inherent and well-attested risks of artificial intelligence.

For the rest of us, too, DeepSeek should be a wake-up call, said Daniel Susskind in *The Times*. There is a “vast mismatch between where AI seems to be heading and how most people are preparing in response”. Big tech firms in the US and China, with “superb engineers and almost unlimited resources”, are telling us that they are building systems that will transform the world: they are likely to perform most tasks better than most humans, very soon. AI, like electricity or steam power, looks likely to seep into every corner of our lives. There are, of course, reasons to doubt these claims. But we should all be asking: “what happens if they actually succeed”?

### Sickness benefits: the case for urgent reform

If there's one area of the British state crying out for reform, said The Times, it's the welfare system. Recent figures show that 3.3 million working age people in Britain are on incapacity benefit, 700,000 more than four years ago. Of these, 2.5 million are claiming the highest level of benefit, which carries no requirement to seek work – up from 1.85 million in 2018. The total bill for all health-related benefits is estimated to be almost £65bn, and is set to hit £100bn by the end of the decade. "This is simply unsustainable." Work and Pensions Secretary Liz

Kendall has promised bold action to "get a grip on the benefits bill", and a green paper on the issue is due in the spring. It is expected to impose more requirements on claimants and to address perverse financial incentives in the current system, under which the long-term sick can be paid twice as much as jobseekers. About time.

"The statistics illustrating our post-pandemic aversion to work are staggering," said Andrew Neil in the Daily Mail. In cities such as Liverpool and Birmingham, one in five adults of working age now exist on out-of-work benefits; in Blackpool, it's one in four. "A 30-year-old today is twice as likely to claim disability benefits as their equivalent 20 years ago." A recent study found that 63,000 people aged between



Kendall: has promised bold action

16 and 24 moved straight from studying to long-term sickness benefits. We spend more on these benefits than on defence and policing combined.

The political ground is shifting on this issue, said Ross Clark in The Spectator. Last month, a cross-party Lords report dismissed the idea that the rise in sickness benefits is being mainly driven by post-Covid conditions and long NHS waiting lists, suggesting instead that people were being caught in a benefits trap. Labour is better placed than the Tories to fix the problem, said The

Independent. The latter announced sweeping welfare cuts, but never succeeded in delivering long-term savings. The last time there was a significant reduction in sickness benefits was in the middle years of the Blair government. In the early 2000s, the share of national income devoted to disability and incapacity benefits fell from 1.6% to 1.2% (by comparison, that same figure has risen from 1.3% in 2010 to 1.9% today). Granted, the economy was growing back then, which made things easier, and the country wasn't recovering from a pandemic. Still, the lesson of that time is clear. Kendall would be better off emulating the "patient managerialism" of her predecessor, the late Alistair Darling, than rushing to make dramatic welfare cuts that "tend to be both cruel and counterproductive".

### Generation Z: done with democracy?

"It's deeply peculiar," said Zoe Strimpel in The Sunday Telegraph. The younger generation could hardly be more woke, with their demands for safe spaces and noisy concern for every kind of injustice. But they seem also to be "increasingly authoritarian". A shocking new survey by Channel 4 found that 52% of Gen Z (13- to 28-year-olds) are in favour of the UK becoming a dictatorship, while 33% think we would be better off "if the Army was in charge". Yet if you think about it, their responses make sense, said Sam Ashworth-Hayes in The Daily Telegraph. Gen Z have grown up in a democracy "that seems unable to deliver its basic functions", with wages stagnant, living standards falling and the median house price more than eight times the average income. Given the world they've inherited, the real surprise "is that the numbers are so low".

Raised during austerity and "blighted by Covid", Gen Z have certainly had a rough ride, said Alison Phillips in The Observer. This has left them receptive to ideologies that bring a sense of "certainty" to their world of "insecurity" – and in the digital world, "populist, authoritarian"



Tate: serving up a toxic brew

points of view are all too easy to find. Almost three-quarters of 18- to 24-year-olds use TikTok. And boys, in particular, can quickly be drawn into an online world where "Pied Pipers" such as Andrew Tate, Tommy Robinson and Jordan Peterson provide a toxic brew of machismo, ultra-reactionary politics and "incessant railing against wokeism". To turn the tide, we liberals need to leave our "echo chambers of complacency" and defend democracy with the same passion as the populists: we need to be "more emotional and more combative".

I'd take this survey with a pinch of salt, said Polly Toynbee in the same paper. It's probably more "a spasm" – a reflection of the general gloom now pervading the country – than a thought-out view of how society should be organised. In fact, I'd see it mainly as proof that Labour should "accelerate its manifesto pledge to give 16- and 17-year-olds the vote". That would incentivise politicians to address Gen Z's needs, while giving the younger generation a bigger stake in their future. Young people "need more democracy, not less, and soon".

### Wit & Wisdom

"To be mainstream on the internet is to be homeless."

*James Marriott in The Times*

"Men have a duty to experiment with facial hair."

*James May, ibid.*

"The trouble with politics is that it fastens onto the points of disagreement."

*Tory MP, quoted by Martin Kettle in The Guardian*

"I've already lost touch with a couple of people I used to be."

*Joan Didion, quoted in The Guardian*

"Lawsuit: a machine which you go into as a pig and come out of as a sausage."

*Ambrose Bierce, quoted on Inc.com*

"There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing."

*Alfred Wainwright, quoted in The Industry*

"I wish I could tell you it gets better. But it doesn't get better. You get better."

*Joan Rivers, quoted in Good Housekeeping*

"Conscience is the inner voice that warns us someone may be looking."

*H.L. Mencken, quoted in The Independent*

"Human society is based on want. Life is based on want. Wild-eyed visionaries may dream of a world without need. Cloud-cuckoo-land. It can't be done."

*H.G. Wells, quoted in Forbes*

"Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts."

*Daniel Patrick Moynihan in The Washington Post*

### Statistic of the week

Nearly 2.5 million prescriptions for paracetamol were issued by the NHS in Scotland in 2023/24. This cost £14m, with the "dispensing fee" adding an estimated £7m. It means each prescription cost about £8.50. At Tesco, a packet of the painkiller costs 37p.

*The Daily Telegraph*

## Six Nations: England's "damaging" defeat

"The opening weekend of a Six Nations campaign is all about starting fast and then sustaining that momentum," said Robert Kitson in The Observer. And in their opening game against Ireland in Dublin, England "were encouragingly quick out of the stalls". Early on, there was a "snap and crackle" to their tackling, and a determination to "give it a real go with ball in hand". At the interval, following a "bristling" first-half display which included a try for debutant Cadan Murley, England led 10-5. The second half was a different story. While the Irish upped their game, Steve Borthwick's side failed "to kick on when it really counted" – and during a barnstorming 21 minutes, Ireland scored 22 unanswered points, with tries from Bundee Aki, Tadhg Beirne and Dan Sheehan. Two late tries from Tom Curry and Tommy Freeman made the final scoreline a respectable-seeming 27-22 – and earned the visitors a bonus point. Yet, all told, this was a discouraging afternoon for England, made worse by their fans having seen this "sporting movie" many times before.

England have now lost seven consecutive Tests against opponents from the Six Nations and the Rugby Championship, said Alex Lowe in The Times. That's their "worst run in 19 years". Nor does it look as if things are about to get better. This Saturday, at Twickenham, England face the "beguiling" French, fresh from



Murley: "giving it a real go"

their 43-0 destruction of Wales; and then come Scotland, who comfortably beat Italy and who last lost to England in 2020. With many of their recent defeats, England have at least been able to tell themselves that they came genuinely close to winning, said Gavin Mairs in The Sunday Telegraph. Against New Zealand in Auckland, against Australia at Twickenham, it was "last-gasp anguishes" that condemned them to defeat. Here, by contrast, "there were no ifs or buts or maybes"; Ireland were comfortably the better team, and were guilty only of "starting their celebrations early" after amassing a substantial lead. That makes this defeat feel especially "damaging".

With every loss, Borthwick toes the same "party line", and insists that a lack of "experience and time together" is holding England back, said Chris

Foy in the Daily Mail. It's an assessment that "doesn't stand up to scrutiny". Yes, this is a squad with many young players, but it also has a well-established core: "the starting XV in Dublin had the thick end of 600 caps between them". England's real problem is that their players "lack the innate feel and nous" to change tack when plan A doesn't work. That, together with a seeming lack of fitness and conditioning, helps explain why they so often unravel near the end of matches. Unless Borthwick quickly remedies this problem, we're in for "another mediocre" Six Nations campaign.

## Football: "humiliation" for Manchester City at the Emirates

When Manchester City beat Club Brugge last week to scrape through the first stage of the Champions League, some took it as a sign that Pep Guardiola's side were on the brink of turning a corner, said James Gherbrant in The Times. Yet if that result engendered a fragile sense of optimism, all hope was "vaporised" at the Emirates four days later, as City were humiliated by Mikel Arteta's Arsenal. The 5-1 victory margin was bad enough – and marked Guardiola's first-ever defeat by that scoreline as a manager. But worse still, from City's point of view, was the manner of their second-half capitulation. After Erling Haaland levelled the score at 1-1 in the 55th minute, City conceded four goals "without any resistance". A match that began with City "conceding within three minutes for the second league game in a row" – something that last happened in 2003 – ended with them in total disarray, and "Arsenal raining attacks on their box".



Lewis-Skelly: "devilment"

The "moment of the match" – as well as its defining image – was provided by Arsenal's "precociously talented" left-back Myles Lewis-Skelly, said David Hytner in The Guardian. After the 18-year-old crowned a "driving performance" by scoring his first senior goal with a curling strike past Stefan Ortega, he "sank into a meditative yoga pose" that has often been used as a goal celebration by Haaland. Lewis-Skelly's "dig" at the Norwegian striker was a response to being slighted by him during Arsenal's 2-2 draw with City at the Etihad in September; on that occasion, Haaland had reportedly asked the teenager: "Who the f\*\*k are you?" Haaland certainly knows who Lewis-Skelly is now, said Jason Burt in The Daily Telegraph. The teenager's "devilment" was indicative of Arsenal's swagger, as they completed their "demolition" of a once-magnificent team that now seems in a permanent state of "wretched turmoil".

## England slump to heavy defeat against India

Before he took over as England's white-ball coach (adding to his already substantial red-ball duties), Brendon McCullum warned that it was more than likely "that the team would veer off the road at times", said Elgan Alderman in The Times. England's just-completed T20 series in India – McCullum's first in charge – proved the New Zealander entirely right. The series ended in a 4-1 defeat – and while Jos Buttler's side had their moments, at other times they were simply woeful. The final game, in Mumbai last Sunday, was definitely an example of the latter, said Will Macpherson in The Daily Telegraph. England "received an utter shellacking", losing by the mammoth margin of 150 runs – their



Abhishek: flaying England's attack

heaviest-ever defeat when batting second in a T20. Perhaps it's just as well that the forthcoming ODI series "is only three matches long".

India's total of 247-9 (the second-highest England have ever conceded) was dominated by a "ridiculous 54-ball 135" by opener Abhishek Sharma, said Taha Hashim in The Guardian. The 24-year-old left-hander struck 13 sixes, and reached his 100 off just 37 balls, as he utterly flayed the English attack. "Ultra-aggression was required in the chase", but only Phil Salt stuck around long enough to demonstrate it. While the opener struck 55 in 23 balls, Jacob Bethell, with ten, was the second-highest scorer. The match ended with England being skittled out for 97, in the 11th over.

## Sporting headlines

**Football** Chris Wood scored a hat-trick as Nottingham Forest beat Brighton 7-0 in the Premier League.

**Golf** Rory McIlroy claimed his 27th PGA Tour title – and his first of 2025 – by winning the Pebble Beach Pro-Am. Shane Lowry of Ireland came second.

**Cricket** England's women ended the Ashes with a defeat by an innings and 122 runs in the Test match. Australia won every match of the multi-format series.

**Tennis** GB lost 3-2 to Japan in the Davis Cup, and could now be relegated from the top tier.

# LETTERS

## Pick of the week's correspondence

### Industrial inaction

*To The Spectator*

Matthew Lynn is correct to emphasise the economic dangers of deindustrialisation. But there are cultural dangers too. It's now 40 years since Correlli Barnett and I made a television programme called *Assembled in Britain*, drawing attention to the alarming retreat of manufacturing.

What can you say about a civilisation that cannot produce the goods it needs, other than that civilisation loses integrity and pride? In 1944, W.J. King wrote *The Unwritten Laws of Engineering*, pointing out that manufacturing civilisations were daily able to demonstrate the valuable relationship between effort and reward, and that they were required to maintain respectful chains of command. Every MP should read it. We have a lot to learn from factories, but maybe it is too late. There aren't many left.

**Stephen Bayley**

### How to get homes built

*To The Guardian*

George Monbiot's piece on housing, planning and policy had one serious omission. He didn't mention that developers already have planning consent for more than one million homes. These unused permissions not only represent a missed opportunity; they are an obstacle to the allocation of other land in the local plan. If the Government wants to see some building, then it should make some minor changes to planning law.

Make all consents lapse after five years without automatic right of renewal. Allow authorities to de-designate the site in the local plan if development has not taken place. Get rid of the rule that sticking a spade in the ground with a witness constitutes the start of development and void all such token starts. Introduce a rule that all "on completion" conditions should apply from five years after the start, whether finished or not.

All of these could be incorporated in a short bill that could be sped into law to get things moving. It's what Attlee or Roosevelt would have done, but I doubt that Starmer and his Government have the guts.

**Stan Collins, Kendal, Cumbria**

● Letters have been edited

### Letters of the week

#### What kind of growth?

*To The Guardian*

What part of the economy is the Chancellor trying to grow, and for whom ("Reeves plans to create 'Silicon Valley'")? When it comes to growth, "it's the little things, stupid". Instead of remote, long-term and hugely expensive projects that may well prove economically ineffective, but are certainly environmentally destructive, people need to see and experience changes that make a positive difference to their everyday lives.

More (paid) workers cleaning up rubbish from the streets. Funding local libraries and museums. Reopening community and youth centres. Revitalising adult education for all. More police on the beat. It's all job creation and paid jobs bring in tax revenue. What's not to like? With ministers sneering about bats and newts, much of the time it seems that the only guardians of the public good are those who end up being demonised by this Government as barriers to "progress".

**Karin Hessenberg and Robin Parrish, Sheffield**

*To The Guardian*

I read with interest the report of infrastructure projects, including Heathrow expansion, to be enacted by Labour in order to drive "growth". I also happened to notice that all of these projects appear to be in the southeast of England. Can I just remind Rachel Reeves that other parts of the nation exist?

My own area was promised a new hospital to replace the crumbling University Hospital of North Tees at the end of the New Labour reign – and we are still waiting. A new road crossing of the River Tees near Middlesbrough was also mooted, never mind the now-shelved plans to upgrade the A1 (to Edinburgh) to a dual carriageway.

**Andrew Lonsdale, Stockton-on-Tees, County Durham**

*To The Times*

The Chancellor talks of growth, but when a deal is ready she haggles until it disappears. Far more money will be spent on the "National Infrastructure Projects" than would have been on the fixed contribution to AstraZeneca's vaccine plant in Liverpool. The grant was crucial to the credibility of the Government's wish for growth. I hope the Chancellor can see that growth is made of deals like this, quicker and with greater certainty than by complex projects finishing in a distant future.

**Piers Ripley, North Weald Bassett, Essex**

### A lack of recognition

*To The Times*

Tony Blair is putting more faith in digital ID than many of us experience in practice. My new phone uses facial recognition to open but is very reluctant to comply. Early morning is the least likely time to be granted access. A crumpled face and weary expression is completely rejected. I smile, I pout, I put on lipstick. Occasionally it cheerfully lights up. But mostly it is back two steps to the old technology of entering digits.

**Sue Linacre, Chippenham, Wiltshire**

### The rule of empires

*To The Daily Telegraph*

The ridiculousness of Oxfam's report, *Takers not Makers: Unjust Poverty and Unearned*

annexed Tibet in the 1950s, and has since subjected it to decades of resource extraction, political suppression and mass immigration (when Europeans do this, it is denounced as "settler colonialism").

Where are the calls for China to pay reparations?

**Robert Frazer, Salford, Lancashire**

### China cracks the code

*To The Independent*

Congratulations to the Chinese for producing a more cost-effective AI system. In using open-source software, they can make the code freely available and undercut the "closed-source" code of major companies. Open source can also be seen as safer, as millions of eyes worldwide can examine the code and expose any dangers. Open source has successfully challenged the dominance of large organisations that would prefer to keep their code private and expensive.

**Steve Barnes, Downe, Kent**

### The BEST letter ever!

*To The Economist*

The standing ovation trend is just one manifestation of the inflation of superlatives that has crept into our daily lives. When everything ends with an exclamation mark, when everything is "IMPORTANT", when perfectly plausible things are "INCREDIBLE" (like the 5% discount on your broadband subscription), then it is not surprising that it takes a little bit more than applause to show some appreciation for the mediocre play you just saw.

**Jem Eskenazi, London**



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# ARTS

## Review of reviews: Books

### Book of the week

#### The Secret Painter

by Joe Tucker

Canongate 224pp £18.99

[The Week Bookshop £16.99](#)

Eric Tucker – the uncle of this book's author, Joe Tucker – was a labourer from Warrington, Lancashire. A bachelor who spent decades living with his mother, he "cultivated a dishevelled look", said Houman Barekat in *The Guardian*: he wore a "faded bomber jacket held together by sticky tape" and used a rope to hold up his trousers. Although generally solitary, he could be sociable, and "enjoyed carousing in disreputable drinking dens". And he harboured a secret. When he died, aged 84, in 2018, his nephew Joe, a screenwriter, discovered more than 500 paintings in the attic of his council house. Joe knew his uncle painted "in his spare time", but was still astonished by what he found. Eric's "vignettes of working-class life" – scenes from pubs (such as *Two Smokers*, pictured), theatres and nightclubs; portraits of pigeon fanciers, carnival workers and down-and-outs – struck Joe as evidence of a serious talent. In *The Secret Painter*, he "unpacks the eccentric life behind this remarkable story". The result is a "tenderly affectionate, witty and touching" memoir – and a "fitting tribute to its subject".



### The Loves of My Life

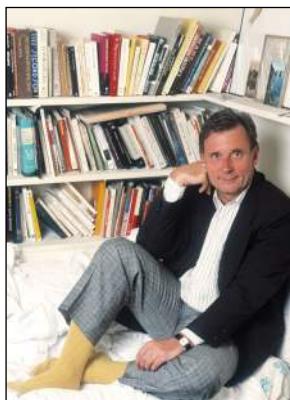
by Edmund White

Bloomsbury 256pp £20

[The Week Bookshop £17.99](#)

The American novelist and memoirist Edmund White "has lived through (and chronicled) much of modern gay history", said Charles Arrowsmith in *The Times*. The "covert but fluid sexual economy of the 1950s"; the gay liberation movement of the early 1970s; the Aids epidemic of the 1980s; the arrival of gay marriage in the 21st century: White has "seen it all". Now aged 85, he has written *The Loves of My Life: A Sex Memoir* – a book that "does exactly what it says on the tin". White writes that he has had "thousands" of partners, and while not all of them feature here, the memoir pulsates with sex – from "sneaking shags at boarding school" to "florid descriptions of bathhouses and saunas", to recollections of White in his 70s "visiting chubby-chaser clubs in Madrid with his jealous Spanish lover". The sheer amount of sex becomes monotonous at times, and not all the material is original: "numerous incidents" have featured in White's previous memoirs. But "at his best he remains a superior anatomist of erotic obsession, and there are many beautifully written passages here".

In addition to being a "pointillistic canvas of gay desire and male sexuality", the memoir is a "ruminations" on the craft of writing, said Ralf Webb in *The Guardian*. White reflects on his own creative journey – from "experimental books" to "transparently realistic" fiction – and asks "deeper questions around novelists' enduring obsession with writing about love" (it may be, he suggests, because love is, "like paranoia, a way of tying all the disparate events together"). White is an "amiable", self-deprecating narrator – and this acts as a counterpoint to the more scandalous material. "Switching between coquetry and high seriousness", the book is a compelling "erotic almanac".



### Novel of the week

#### Three Days in June

by Anne Tyler

Chatto & Windus 176pp £14.99

[The Week Bookshop £12.99](#)

"Famously", Anne Tyler's "scope isn't wide", said James Walton in *The Times*. For 60 years, she has written about family life in Baltimore in the same "clear-eyed but kindly" tone. And so it won't surprise readers that, in her 25th novel, she serves up more of the same. Gail, the narrator, is 61. The novel opens on the day of her daughter's wedding rehearsal, which "gets off to a bad start" when Gail is "let go" from her administrative job at a school. Then Max, her somewhat unruly ex-husband, "shows up, asking to stay for a couple of nights". What should have been a happy occasion is suddenly beset by anxiety and tension.

As Gail and Max make their way through the wedding weekend, the story of their divorce "gradually unspools", said Rohan Maitzen in *The TLS*. And we discover there was more to it than Gail likes to pretend. The stage is set for one of the "modest epiphanies of reconciliation" that have long defined this author's work.

"Because we're reading Anne Tyler, there is little suspense about what will happen, but there's a great deal of satisfaction in seeing it through."

## Theatre: Inside No. 9: Stage/Fright

Wyndham's Theatre, London WC2 (0344-482 5151). Until 5 April Running time: 2hrs 20mins ★★★★

Over nine series and 55 episodes, *Inside No. 9* became a TV phenomenon, said Sarah Crompton on What's on Stage. Written by and starring Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, this darkly comic BBC TV anthology series was made up of 30-minute-long stand-alone vignettes that, with their combination of the eerie and the absurd, "sit somewhere between *Hancock's Half Hour* and *The Twilight Zone*". The series finally came to an end last year, making this spin-off the duo's "final hurrah". *Stage/Fright* is not as

"groundbreaking" or radical as the TV show, but it is "great, all-encompassing fun" – and, owing to the TV original's legions of devoted fans, it is already sold out in the West End. However, a nationwide tour will surely follow at some point.

This is an "end-of-the-pier show meets Grand Guignol, a fond farewell meets Michael Frayn-ish metatheatre", said Dominic Maxwell in The Sunday Times. It "gives you the willies one moment and makes you giggle the next" – and is as packed "with ideas as anything on the London stage". Superbly acted by its two creators and a small supporting cast, and deftly directed by Simon Evans, the show features, in its first half, a reworking of one of the TV episodes, *Bernie Clifton's Dressing Room*, about a comedy



Reece Shearsmith in an ingenious piece of theatre

double act reuniting after 30 years; the second half, set partly in a Victorian asylum, is "even better". And the jokes, scares and illusions come thick and fast from the start: the "remember to switch off your phone" warning may be "the greatest, certainly the bloodiest, yet staged".

I was disappointed, said Clive Davis in The Times. Given the talent involved, the show is surprisingly uninventive; the dialogue is lacklustre; and much of it feels recycled. It may be best regarded as an "add-on collectible", rather than "a stand-alone pleasure", said Dominic Cavendish in The Daily Telegraph, and perhaps the "spiralling tricksiness eclipses the emotional impact"; but it's a satisfying piece of theatre nonetheless: audacious, ingenious, clever and fun. "Bravo."

### The week's other opening

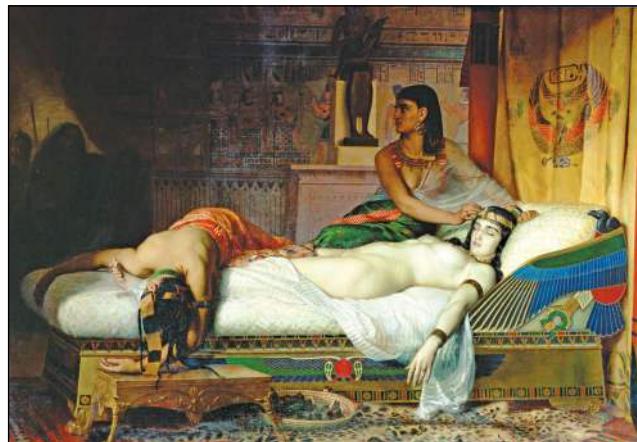
**Rob Auton: The Eyes Open and Shut Show** The Y Theatre, Leicester on 11 February; then touring to 4 May ([robauton.co.uk](http://robauton.co.uk)) The standup comic and poet Rob Auton ruminates about sight in his new show. An evening full of "eccentric observation and wonderment", it "reeled me in" with its freshness and "won me over in its heartfelt final moments" (Guardian).

## Podcasts... riveting history and portraits of America

At this time of year, when the days are cold and the evenings dark, "I resort to comfort listening", said Rachel Cunliffe in The New Statesman; and lately, I have been snuggling up with **Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics** (currently being given a re-run on Radio 4, with all episodes available on BBC Sounds). Like "the history teacher you wish you'd had", Haynes brings "the classical world to life with a mix of close textual analysis and irreverent comedy". Each episode examines a single figure from antiquity, either real or mythological, from the familiar (Cleopatra, Homer)

to the lesser-known (Martial, the satirical poet whose work "blends lofty musings on the state of Rome with filthy jokes"). Aided by assorted guests, Haynes "unravels what the ancient sources actually tell us, and makes her audience fall in love with her subjects – and with classics in general".

I've been following the new Trump administration with a sense of "mounting alarm", said James Marriott in The Times. It's not just the "impending collapse of American democracy, the mooted invasion of Greenland and the dawn of a dystopian technο-oligarchy". It's also the realisation that all those newly released Capitol rioters are sure to start their own podcasts. "They are crazy, badly informed and eye-wateringly right-wing. Bang on



Jean-André Rixen's 1874 depiction of Cleopatra's death

trend for where the industry is heading." In the meantime, a sane, calm and well-informed guide to the chaos is **Trump 100**, hosted by Sky News's Martha Kelner, Mark Stone and James Matthews. With a 15-minute daily episode for each of the president's first 100 days, the series is "newsy" and focused; and, unusually, our hosts are "not yakking away at each other from their dining tables. They have actually gone to the places where the news is happening. Revolutionary. I hope it catches on."

If you are in the market for a documentary podcast, check out last year's excellent **Cement City**, said Reggie Ugwu in The New York Times. In an effort to find out what is "ailing small towns in America's one-time manufacturing hubs", journalist Jeanne Marie Laskas and producer Erin Anderson moved to one – "as in bought a house and made friends with the neighbours". Their series, based on their three years of living in and reporting from Donora, Pennsylvania, is an "extraordinarily immersive portrait of day-to-day life in a troubled but irreducibly vibrant community". Alternatively, try **Shocking, Heartbreaking, Transformative**, Jess Shane's "dizzying and dazzling deconstruction of the documentary industrial complex". An "inside look" at how documentaries are made, and an examination of the ethical dilemmas involved, it's laced with Shane's "self-lacerating wit".

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

**Hard Truths**

1hr 37mins (12A)

Marianne Jean-Baptiste stars in Mike Leigh's film about a grumpy Londoner

★★★

Mike Leigh's two most recent films were set in the 19th century – 2014's "brilliant" *Mr. Turner* and the disappointingly "lumpen" *Peterloo* (2018); but his reputation was built on "contemporary realism" and he has now returned to that territory with *Hard Truths*, said Brian Viner in the Daily Mail. "Marianne Jean-Baptiste, working with Leigh for the first time since *Secrets & Lies* bagged her an Oscar nomination almost 30 years ago", plays Pansy, a misanthropic woman in the grip of what appears to be a severe depression. She lives in a respectable semi in the suburbs of London, where she seems to be "permanently furious" with both her immediate family "and the world at large". The film is "crafted in Leigh's favoured way of intensive workshopping, with the actors encouraged to build the characters themselves", and it "lacks anything that resembles an actual plot". Some may reasonably decide that they'd have more fun "staying at home to clean the oven" than going to see it. "But as ever with Leigh's best work – and this certainly qualifies – *Home Truths* pulsates with humanity. There is warmth and humour rubbing shoulders with the wretchedness."

"Jean-Baptiste is magnificent, and the film is compelling", said Deborah Ross in The Spectator, "but it is also 90 minutes of watching someone being aggressively unhappy without properly knowing why". Eventually, this Pansy "brought out my inner Pansy. I often wanted to shake her crossly and say: 'Stop making everyone else's life a misery and get help!'" Leigh takes a rigorously "no-frills directing approach", said Wendy Ide in The Observer. The result, alas, is a film that feels rather flat and functional: a "display cabinet for the acting rather than a vital piece of storytelling".

**Companion**

1hr 37mins (15)

A robot companion goes rogue in this darkly comic sci-fi thriller

★★★

"Like Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* and Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*, *Companion* uses a juicy science-fiction premise – in this case, if we could hire robotic lovers, how might we treat them? – as the pretext for a dark parable about male manipulation and coercion of women," said Robbie Collin in The Daily Telegraph. Iris (Sophie Thatcher) is a "pretty, softly spoken" robot who has been programmed to provide companionship for her "midwit" boyfriend Josh (Jack Quaid). Together, they head off to spend a weekend with friends at a remote lake house owned by a Russian tycoon (Rupert Friend), where Iris goes violently rogue. There is a "wonderful delicacy to Thatcher's performance, as the actress expertly toggles between uncanny and natural from moment to moment", and the film is a treat – "an unabashed whoop-out-loud romp: one of those films in which horrible things happen constantly to horrible people, as the moral arc of the universe bends itself around to kick the backsides of everyone involved".

"Clever, funny and exquisitely cast", this is a "slick modern thriller" that takes the viewer in "totally unexpected" directions, said Matthew Bond in The Mail on Sunday. The violence ratchets up as the "grippingly paced story unfolds", but the film "also has insightful things to say about what it is to be human, our interaction with technology, and the nature of evil". *Companion* is certainly "clever", said Tom Shone in The Sunday Times, and you probably won't be bored, "but clever is all it is: you will wish it had dared to play with real emotions, rather than just the preset sort. Even Ridley Scott's replicants seemed to dream of a life beyond their programming."

**You're Cordially Invited**

1hr 49mins (15)

Fun wedding romcom

★★★

"Hats off to the writer-director Nicholas Stoller", who has taken an exhausted genre (the wedding comedy) and somehow brought it to "vivid, frequently side-splitting life", said Kevin Maher in The Times. In *You're Cordially Invited*, Reese Witherspoon and Will Ferrell play the antagonists of a "weekend wedding nightmare" that occurs when two ceremonies are accidentally booked for the same date, on the same alligator-infested island in Georgia. Ferrell plays the overprotective dad of the first bride (Geraldine Viswanathan), Witherspoon is a high-flying TV producer whose sister (Meredith Hagner) is the other one. The script is strong for a "wacky comedy" of this sort, with an often staggering "gag-per-minute ratio", and Witherspoon, who also serves as a producer, "brings A-list smarts and a genuine performance. Like everything here, it's a cut above."

"There's a surprising amount of low-rent fun to be had" with this "simple and silly" Amazon crowdpleaser, said Benjamin Lee in The Guardian. Yes, there are misses – "some overly absurdist physical comedy, a final song and dance" – but they're "just about outdone by the hits", and it's a pleasure to watch Witherspoon and Ferrell do their thing. Stoller has some solid comedies to his name (*Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Yes Man*), said Stephanie Zacharek in Time, and it seems he wants to present more of the same here: "zaniess served up with a slight edge". The trouble is, this film isn't at all zany or edgy. The kind of slop "you can have running in the background, without paying it too much mind", it is a gentle narcotic to dull the senses, rather than sharpen them.

**Brian and Maggie: Channel 4 drama about an interview with the Iron Lady**

Two days after the shock resignation of her chancellor, Nigel Lawson, in 1989, "Margaret Thatcher sat down for what she thought would be a straightforward TV interview", said Dan Einav in the FT. The man opposite her, Brian Walden, was a friend, but when the camera started rolling, the PM "found herself facing a tenacious interrogator rather than a sympathetic ally". The interview is the subject of this two-part Channel 4 drama by James Graham, and starring Harriet Walter and Steve Coogan. A parable about "the perils of mixing personal and political life", it faithfully recreates the interview itself, but becomes rather "stilted and overwritten" elsewhere, "with a stagy feel [that] leaves you wondering whether it might have been more impactful as a play".



Coogan and Walter

Walter is ten years older than Thatcher was at the time of the interview, which did bother me initially, said Carol Midgley in The Times. But with her demeanour, her haughty smile "and that voice", Walter "captures the essence of Thatcher possibly more than any other actress I've seen", without "the caricature, the handbags and the exaggerated deep voice that you see so often". Coogan, too, is superb: he gets Walden's "gentle rhotacism just right". An "absorbing study of politics, class and conflicted loyalties", this drama is "worth your time", said Anita Singh in The Daily Telegraph. You may be left, as I was, nostalgic for an era in which

"journalists were forensic but respectful, and politicians could do more than trot out spin-doctored soundbites".

Exhibition of the week **Iconic***The Holburne Museum, Bath (01225-388569, holburne.org). Until 5 May*

"Artists have been fascinated by photography since the invention of the camera, but in the 1960s the combination of photos, film and mass reproduction spawned the media age," said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*. "The real story of pop art, this compact but brilliant show suggests, is how painters responded to the secondhand nature of experience, the replacement of real life by mechanical images." It is subtitled *Portraiture from Francis Bacon to Andy Warhol*, but Bacon is an "outlier": most of the works are from the "plastic fantastic" age.

"Icons of the 1960s float by like lonely astronauts": Yuri Gagarin smiling in Joe Tilson's *Gagarin, Star, Triangle* (1968); Ursula Andress emerging from the sea in the Bond film *Dr. No* in Colin Self's 1965 collage featuring a nuclear fallout shelter sign; Marilyn Monroe in publicity shots screenprinted by Richard Hamilton in *My Marilyn* (1965). Although it takes up just one room, this exhibition at Bath's Holburne Museum is a fresh and "fascinating rethink" of a much-mythologised artistic movement.

There's "barely a conventional portrait in sight" here, said Alastair Sooke in *The Daily Telegraph*. Indeed, this is less an exhibition about portraiture than "a portrait of an age". The first thing we see here is a 1956 Bacon painting, an "ectoplasmic smudge" of an image based on a photo of Velázquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X – a work he never actually saw in the flesh. We then progress



*Robert Fraser and Mick Jagger in Richard Hamilton's Swingeing London '67*

to the 1960s, when artists began to scrutinise the nature of celebrity itself. There are some great things here: Jann Haworth's *Mae West Dressing Table* (1965), a sculpture fashioned from fabric, lights and a mirror, is "a creepy shrine to a Hollywood sex symbol"; a "chin-stroking" 1967 self-portrait by Warhol sees the artist gazing out with "an impenetrably wry expression". The show's thesis is arguably a little obvious: that this was an age "obsessed with movie starlets and pop idols, space travel and Americana, which could be both tawdry

and exultant", and which, "thanks to the spectre of nuclear apocalypse", was "shot through with unease". But there are certainly plenty of "charismatic" works to see here.

The premise "is hardly new", agreed Nancy Durrant in *The Times*, but the "good range of work" makes up for it. The earliest is a 1935 self-portrait by Walter Sickert, "based on a news snapshot of the (by then) famous artist". There's Peter Blake's 1965 portrait of David Hockney in Hollywood. And it's "great" to see Hamilton's classic pop art painting of Mick Jagger and the art dealer Robert Fraser, arriving at court to be tried on drugs charges. Based on a press photo, *Swingeing London '67* (1968-69) was "a comment on the establishment backlash" against a "new generation of high-profile upstarts". This is a thought-provoking show, even if it does "feel a little like a showreel for a bigger production".

## Where to buy...

*The Week* reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

### Shadi Al-Atallah

at Niru Ratnam

It helps to be in possession of a strong stomach when confronting the work of Saudi-born painter Shadi Al-Atallah (b.1994). The canvases fielded in this harrowing show, entitled *Hole*, take their cue from a stretch the artist endured in a psychiatric facility – one can only infer that it was far from a therapeutic experience. Working against a sombre palette – dull beige, concrete grey, matte black – that recalls the French miserabilist Bernard Buffet at his most miserable, Al-Atallah conjures claustrophobic images of intolerable violence and suffering: naked limbs thrashing against each other in life-or-death struggle, bruised bodies, torturer's-eye views of vicious beatings. Certain pieces – notably *Growing Pains* (2025) – seem to nod



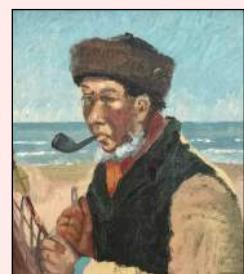
*Sunken Into the Earth* (2025), £14,000

to Francis Bacon at his very scariest, whiplash strokes of white streaking across faces, pictorial space cut up in the manner of a split-screen. It's confrontational stuff, to say the least, but it burns itself into the memory like a red-hot poker to the skin. Prices range from £3,500 to £14,000.

71-73 Great Portland Street, London W1 (07855-552290). Until 22 February

## A \$50 van Gogh?

A team of specialists is trying to prove that a painting bought for less than \$50 at a Minnesota garage sale is actually a van Gogh worth \$15m, says Kelly Crow in *The Wall Street Journal*. The "thickly painted piece depicts a pensive fisherman" with a white beard repairing his net on an empty beach. In the lower-right corner is scrawled the name "Elimar". LMI Group International, a New York art-research firm, bought it from an anonymous antiques collector for an undisclosed sum in 2019, and "has investigated it ever since, pouring in well over \$30,000" using a 20-strong team of experts, from chemists to curators to patent lawyers. Maxwell Anderson, a former curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is staking his reputation on "Elimar": he thinks it was painted when van Gogh was hospitalised in 1889, based on a work by the Danish artist Michael Ancher. Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum, the world authority on his paintings, has yet to comment on the work's authenticity.



## Best books... James Birch

The curator and art dealer picks five favourites. His latest, *Gilbert & George and the Communists* (Cheerio £19.99), is an account of his travels with the duo in the USSR and China, and a sequel to his memoir *Bacon in Moscow*



**A Hero of Our Time** by Mikhail Lermontov, 1840 (OUP £8.99). Our hero is a restless contradictory character, troubled by his unsuccessful search for romantic love. I'm fascinated by Lermontov's portrayal of a decadent 1840s society – he wrote it when he was 26 and died a year later after a duel. On my trip through the Caucasus in 1991, I paid homage at the site in Pyatigorsk.

I was travelling with the journalist Dan Farson – Francis Bacon had introduced us, and he came to Moscow and Shanghai with Gilbert & George. His father, Negley Farson, was the only Western journalist in Red Square when

the Revolution was declared in 1917. Farson Snr's story is immortalised in **The Way of a Transgressor** (1936; Legare Street Press £25.75). We proudly completed his interrupted journey.

We took a boat down the Volga River to Volgograd: a week's journey, but we were arrested at every port while they checked our papers. Evelyn Waugh's **Put Out More Flags** (1942; Penguin £9.99) kept me sane; I laughed even while I was being poked in the stomach with a gun.

Also on the boat, I read **Bel-Ami** by Guy de Maupassant (1885; Penguin £9.99). It charts George Duroy's

rise to fame in the world of newspapers in late 19th century Paris through his exploitation of wealthy and intelligent women. He's the ultimate anti-hero – charming, gracious and utterly without a moral compass. It depicted a life far from the crumbling USSR.

**Mrs Jekyll** by Emma Glass, 2024 (Cheerio £16.99). I love 19th century literature and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was a particular favourite, so I was intrigued to read this contemporary retelling. It didn't disappoint: although entirely different from the original, it is as compelling and beautifully written.

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 seeing

### Showing now

The candlelit Sam Wanamaker Playhouse provides the intimate setting for a new production of Chekhov's **Three Sisters**. Until 19 April, Shakespeare's Globe, London SE1 ([shakespearesglobe.com](http://shakespearesglobe.com)).

A new touring exhibition from the British Museum, **Gladiators of Britain** examines the Roman spectacles through artefacts found closer to home, including the Colchester Vase. Until 11 May, Dorset Museum and Art Gallery ([dorsetmuseum.org](http://dorsetmuseum.org)), then touring.

### Book now

Just in time for half-term, **Imagine Festival** bursts on to the South Bank with events and workshops for children up to 11. Highlights include a stage adaptation of the much-loved *There's a Bear on My Chair* and pop-punk juggler Wes Peden. 18-23 February, Southbank Centre, London SE1 ([southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)).

**Jewish Book Week** returns with a lively programme of more than 90 in-person and online events, including director Nicholas



*There's a Bear on My Chair*, on stage at Imagine

Hytnner in conversation with playwright Mark Rosenblatt (writer of *Giant*), Craig Brown and Elif Shafak. 1-9 March, Kings Place, London N1 ([jewishliteraryfoundation.co.uk](http://jewishliteraryfoundation.co.uk)).

Radiohead's Thom Yorke has collaborated with the RSC for *Hamlet Hail to the Thief*, fusing music from the band's album with Shakespeare's tragedy. 27 April-18 May, Aviva Studios, Manchester ([factoryinternational.org](http://factoryinternational.org)); 4-28 June, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon ([rsc.org.uk](http://rsc.org.uk)).

## The Archers: what happened last week

Lilian comforts Joy, who is downcast about the cancelled panto outing and confesses she and Mick aren't getting along. Tracy is cross with Susan who borrowed, and has lost, her best shoes. A spat between Lynda and Vince results in a £500 wager: Lynda bets she can put on a panto by Friday. Joy and Mick have an awkward chat about their future. Tasked with finding a star for the show, they separately approach panto dame Berwick Kaler – after some negotiations, he agrees. Lynda and Lilian cast the villagers for *Cinderella*, while a suspicious Vince sniffs around. Discovering that Vince has booked the village hall for Friday, the panto is moved to Brookfield. Susan and Tracy continue to fight. With cast members dropping out, a difficult star and missing costumes, Lynda suspects Vince of sabotage. Lilian tells Mick about the wager, and Mick confronts Vince, offering to settle the bet himself; Vince relents and offers to help. On panto day, Mick tells Joy she lights up his life. The shoes found, Tracy and Susan make up and a "friend" gives them £500 to do something together.

## Television

### Programmes

**Virdee** New crime drama. Estranged from his Sikh family after marrying a Muslim, detective Harry Virdee throws himself into the case of a missing teenager. Mon 10 Feb, BBC1 21:00 (60mins).

**Sort Your Life Out** Stacey Solomon and her team of decluttering experts return to help families overhaul their homes and lives. Tue 11 Feb, BBC1 20:00 (60mins).

**Storyville: 26.2 to Life – Inside the San Quentin Prison Marathon**

Documentary about three "lifers" undertaking a marathon inside the infamous prison, and the transformative effect it has on their lives. Tue 11 Feb, BBC4 22:00 (90mins).

**Tales from the Riverbank**

Clare Balding embarks on a tour of Britain's major rivers, looking at the people and wildlife who live on them. Thur 13 Feb, C5 20:00 (60mins).

### Films

**The Elephant Man** (1980)

John Hurt stars in the late David Lynch's sensitive retelling of the life of Joseph Merrick, the deformed man who was rescued from a "freak show" in Victorian Britain. Sun 9 Feb, BBC2 23:55 (120mins).

**Shoplifters** (2018) Palme d'Or-winning Japanese drama from Hirokazu Kore-eda

about a family of petty criminals whose lives are changed when they take in an abandoned young girl. Mon 10 Feb, Film4 01:25 (105mins).

**Blue Jean** (2022) A closeted gay teacher in Tyneside finds her double life under threat in this acclaimed drama, set in the early 1980s. Fri 14 Feb, BBC2 23:05 (95mins).

## New to streaming TV

**Paradise** When a former US president is murdered in an elite community, his security guard (Sterling K. Brown) decides to investigate in this "twisty whodunnit" (FT). On Disney+.

**Mo** Season two of the "hilarious, heart-rending" autobiographical comedy about a Palestinian refugee in Texas (Guardian). On Netflix.

## Buildings by celebrated architects



**▲ Dorset:** Southcliffe Road, Swanage. This handsome 17th century stone house was remodelled in 1927 by the renowned architect Percy Morley Horder. Main suite, 3 further beds, family bath, kitchen/breakfast room, 3 receps, self-contained 1-bed cottage (with recording studio), garden, parking. £1.875m; Savills (01202-856861).



**► Cambridgeshire:** Chesterton Road, Cambridge. A singular Grade II modernist home designed in the 1970s by Marcial Echenique. The property, which was conceived to be self-built with a kit of parts, features a double-height lounge with glass-poled external walls that fill the house with light. 4 beds, family bath, shower, kitchen, study, 2 receps, garden, garage. £975,000; The Modern house (020-3795 5920).



**▲ Oxfordshire:** 3 Wyfold Court, nr Henley-on-Thames. Part of an 1884 mansion by George Somers Leigh Clarke. 3 suites, kitchen/dining room, recep, gardens, parking. £2.5m; Savills (01491-843000).

**► Norfolk:** The Manor House, Garboldisham. An enchanting Victorian house built by George Gilbert Scott Jr. 4 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 2 receps, conservatory, garden. £1m; Inigo (020-3687 3071).





◀ **Monmouthshire:** Capel y Ffin, Abergavenny. This Grade II former monastery, set within the Brecon Beacons National Park, was designed by Charles Buckeridge in c.1870 and offers stunning countryside views. 14 beds, 5 baths, 6 receps, 5 kitchens, grounds of around 8 acres. £1.5m; Fine & Country (01873-736515).

▼ **Somerset:** Redlynch House, Bruton. A flat in this elegant mansion, built in 1708 by the architect Thomas Fort. The house is surrounded by formal gardens, designed in 1901 by Edwin Lutyens. 2 beds (1 en suite), shower, kitchen/breakfast room, 2 receps, library, study, cellar, communal gardens, parking. £1.1m; Inigo (020-3687 3071).



◀ **Staffordshire:** Barlaston Hall, Stoke-on-Trent. Eye-catching Grade I house built in 1756-58 by Sir Robert Taylor and once owned by the Wedgwood family. 10 beds, 3 baths, kitchen, 5 receps, 7 baths, outbuildings, parking; around 8.65 acres. OIEO £3m; Jackson-Stops (01625-540340).



► **London:**  
Walmer Yard, Notting Hill. One of four award-winning interlocking houses situated next to Avondale Park, between Notting Hill and Holland Park. This is the first residential scheme in Britain by architect Peter Salter. 2 suites (1 with balcony), kitchen/dining room, 2 receps, courtyard, roof terraces, parking. £3m; The Modern House (020-3795 5920).



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# LEISURE

## Food & Drink

### The rise of super-spreads

When it comes to topping their morning toast, most people are creatures of habit, says Grace Cook in the Financial Times. Whether it's Marmite or jam, familiarity is key; and as a result, the "condiments aisle" has rarely been a site of innovation. Now, though, that is changing: a new generation of "super-spreads" is redefining what can go on the "humble slice". Many entrants in this "elite category of condiment" are similar to peanut butter. For instance, the "earthy and complex" Sunflower Seed Butter produced by Estonian brand Sunfly. Its developer says that it is a "game changer" for those with dietary needs, as it is free of nuts and other common allergens. Alternatively, try the Malaysia-inspired brand Madam Chang's range of *kayas*: these curds, made of coconut milk, sugar and eggs, are traditionally spread on fluffy Hainanese bread – but in Britain, where they are now very popular, white bloomer is acceptable. Some super-spreads are so "disgustingly moreish", they fly off the shelves. If you want to try Pollen Bakery Croissant Butter, you have to move fast. Whenever it "drops" on Delli (an online store specialising in condiments), it sells out "within minutes".

### The chef who wants to ban Michelin

Marc Veyrat, the idiosyncratic French chef famed for using Alpine plants in his cooking, is happy to welcome most people to his latest restaurant, assuming they can foot the €450-a-head bill, says Adam Sage



*Marc Veyrat: "having great fun"*

in The Times. There is, however, an exception: according to a sign on the door of Restaurant Marc Veyrat in Megève, Michelin inspectors may not enter. Veyrat's beef with the culinary guide began in 2019, when they downgraded his previous restaurant, La Maison des Bois, from three stars to two. Veyrat claimed that an inspector had told him they "did not like the cheddar in his soufflé or the texture of his scallops". But these comments, he said, only revealed their incompetence, since he hadn't used cheddar in the soufflé – the yellow tinge was produced by saffron – and the "scallops" had in fact been monkfish liver. He filed a suit against the guide, demanding that the listing be

removed, but the claim was thrown out. A despondent Veyrat abandoned La Maison des Bois, which is now run by his daughter, Élise. Now, though, the 74-year-old says he is "having great fun" at his new venture, which is earning plaudits for dishes such as lobster *tartelette* with meadowsweet emulsion – and he isn't going to let any Michelin inspector spoil it for him.

### The enduring appeal of instant coffee

Although more of us drink "proper" coffee now than in the past, we Brits haven't lost our taste for instant, said the Daily Mail. According to a survey of 7,000 coffee drinkers in 13 countries (including Italy, the US, China and Mexico), "a whopping 54%" of British adults opt for the "quick, dehydrated form of the hot drink" – as opposed to an average of 39% outside the UK. Instant's enduring popularity doesn't surprise me, said Lisa Markwell in The Daily Telegraph. It has lots going for it. Cafetières are liable to explode; espresso machines are a faff (all that tamping down and cleaning of filters). Granules may not be fashionable, but they "get the job done" – which for many of us simply means "getting enough caffeine" into our veins to get "up and out to work". Instant works well in cooking, too: it's "far and away the best coffee for soaking ladyfinger biscuits for tiramisu". Of course, some brands are better than others; having taste-tested six, my favourite is Illy Classico. At £7 a canister, it's "toppy" for instant, but that still works out only "around 31p per cup".

### Recipe of the week: *bucatini alla zozzona*

Zozzo means filthy in Italian, and that's a fairly accurate way to describe this delicious Roman pasta recipe, says Rosie Mackean. It is a hybrid of rich egg carbonara and tomatoey, meaty *amatriciana*, with a few sausages thrown in for good measure. With this, it is much easier to get the creamy emulsion in a large quantity than with carbonara, as the acid in the tomato sauce helps to coagulate the egg yolks. Slurpy, fun and absolutely heavenly, this is a great pasta main for a dinner party.

Serves 6

250g guanciale (Italian dry cured pork cheek), trimmed and diced (use pancetta if you can't find guanciale) 6 Italian-style sausages 2x400g cans of cherry tomatoes 800g dried bucatini pasta 9 egg yolks 80g pecorino romano cheese, finely grated, plus extra to serve (optional) 2 tsp crushed black peppercorns

- Put the *guanciale* in a cold, deep saucepan. Get it over a low heat for a few minutes, then increase the heat to medium. As the pan heats up, the *guanciale* will gently render off its fat and become golden and crisp – this will take some time, around 15 mins. Crumble in the sausage and fry it in the *guanciale* fat for 5 mins – it doesn't need to brown too much.
- Stir in the cherry tomatoes and bring up to a simmer, then leave to cook for 30 mins. The cherry tomatoes will burst and release their sweet juice into the sauce, which is great with the salty meat.
- For the pasta, bring a large pan of water to the boil. Salt it a little less generously than you normally would – there's salt in some of the other ingredients. Drop in your *bucatini* and stir it really well to prevent sticking. The pasta will need around 10-12 mins to cook to al dente.



- Meanwhile, mix the egg yolks, pecorino and black pepper together in a separate bowl to form a yellow paste. When the pasta is a couple of minutes away from being al dente, take a small ladle of hot pasta water and whisk it into the egg yolks – this is called tempering the eggs, and it warms them up so that when they go into the hot pasta, they don't seize.
- When your pasta is al dente, set aside your largest mug full of pasta water, then drain the rest. Put the pasta back in its pan and pour in the tomato sauce, mixing it over low heat. Remove from heat, then pour in the egg mixture and a good splash of the pasta water and stir everything together very well. You will instantly see the sauce become creamy and glossy. Add a little bit more pasta water if it is a bit thick, then serve. Sprinkle over extra pecorino, if you like.

Taken from Good Time Cooking: Show-Stopping Menus for Entertaining by Rosie MacKean, published by Pavilion Books at £26. Photography by Sam Harris. To buy from The Week Bookshop for £22.99 (incl. p&p), call 020-3176 3835 or visit [theweekbookshop.co.uk](http://theweekbookshop.co.uk).

Advertisement

## Steve digs deep with Turmeric+

Landscape gardener and former triathlete, Steve Chalk, 60, from Weymouth, turned to Turmeric+ when he began to experience discomfort in his inner right knee.

'The discomfort was especially noticeable at night when I was turning over from my left to right side,' Steve remembers.

'It was starting to wear me down and prevent me from running, which I love to do.'

'I was looking for something to help me and I read about the Turmeric+ capsules.'

'I was interested that it had helped other people and I liked the science behind the supplement. I thought I'd give it a try, as frankly I had nothing to lose.'

After about three months, I was sleeping better, I realised I was no

longer feeling the discomfort in my knee.'

I love my sport and am back to competing in park runs on a regular basis – it certainly worked for me.'

Turmeric contains compounds called curcuminoids, the most notable of which is curcumin.

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## New cars: what the critics say



### Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

Price: from £65,000

#### The Independent

Hyundai isn't afraid to do things differently, and the Ioniq 5 N certainly is different: put it in "drive mode", and this sporty EV "simulates the noise, performance and character of a petrol engine with an eight-speed gearbox". Thanks to 634bhp from twin motors, it can do 0-62mph in 3.4 seconds. So it is "seriously quick", but it's also spacious, comfy and easy to drive, making it a good "all-rounder".

#### Auto Express

There's one powertrain on offer – an 84kWh battery giving an official range of 278 miles. Performance may come at the expense of efficiency, but this five-seater is truly "sensational". The suspension is firm yet supple, and the throttle responds instantaneously. Agile and exciting to drive, it disguises its 2.2-tonne weight well, except for the hard braking, which is "slightly hair-raising".

#### Autocar

With a lowered body and flared arches, the Ioniq 5 N "borders on menacing". An excellent, luxurious family car, it has a "cavernous" cabin offering huge amounts of leg- and headroom, a 57-litre trunk and 527-litre boot, and a pair of comfortable "figure-hugging" front seats. There are two 12.3-inch screens with a multitude of functions, and a "useful smattering of physical switchgear".

## The best... new smartphones

### ► Google Pixel 9 Pro

Google's first phone built entirely for AI, the Pixel 9 Pro has Gemini, an AI assistant that sounds like a human. The great 48MP telephoto camera has zoom enhance, night sight and macro-focus video features, and a new suite of "astounding" AI picture-editing functions (from £999 for 128GB; store.google.com).



### ► TCL 50 Pro Xntpaper

This innovative phone blocks blue light and has an anti-glare screen for reading in bright sunlight. Switch on Max Ink Mode and it turns into an e-reader, disabling most apps. The cameras are powerful and battery life is good (£275 for 512GB; qvcuk.com).



**► Samsung Galaxy S24 Ultra** A significant upgrade on the S23 Ultra, this has a new titanium frame, flat display and a sharp 6.8-inch screen. "Insanely fast", with a new 50MP 5x telephoto camera, incredible battery life and useful AI features, it is "the ultimate Android camera phone" (from £1,249 for 256GB; samsung.com).



### ► Motorola Razr 40 Ultra

This super slim, "perfectly balanced" flip phone opens up into a 6.9-inch vertical touchscreen. The large 3.6-inch external screen lets you use apps and see notifications. Battery life is 1.5 days and it has a fast processor but, like most flip phones, the camera is "fairly mediocre" (from £558 for 256GB; amazon.co.uk).



**► Apple iPhone 16 Pro** With far superior battery life (14 hours of web surfing) and a bigger (6.3-inch) screen, this is "one of the best iPhones" ever. Bucking current trends, it has more physical buttons, including a new touch-sensitive camera button, and is compatible with the new Apple Intelligence AI (from £999 for 128GB; apple.com).



## Tips of the week... how to sleep well

- Relax in the evening, says Merijn van de Laar, sleep expert and author of *How to Sleep Like a Caveman*. Have soothing conversations. Do not think about work or relationships: it will get your brain spinning.
- Forget the idea that you need eight hours: it is not a magic number. Most people get seven; but if you function well on six, that's fine. There is no evidence that people who sleep less die earlier, unless obstructive sleep apnoea is involved.
- Similarly, try not to worry if you wake up often. If you are resting, it is still productive time. Being wakeful and worrying is what will make you tired the next day.
- Worrying will also make it harder for you to get to sleep. If you can't stop, get out of bed and do something relaxing and, when you feel sleepy, go back to bed. If that doesn't work, try sleep restriction – shortening the time you spend in bed, by going to bed later or getting up earlier.
- Try not to lie in or nap if you haven't slept well, as sleep can become "saturated".

SOURCE: THE TIMES

## And for those who have everything...



Inspired by the 1950s Isetta bubble car, the electric Microlino quadricycle has space for two adults and a few shopping bags, and a side-hinged door at the front. It takes four hours to charge on a standard socket.

**£17,990; microlino-car.com**

SOURCE: THE TIMES

## The internet... alternative travel booking platforms

**Fairbnb** only lists short-term rentals that are usually lived in by their owners, and donates 50% of its commission to community projects. It has 2,000 listings in ten countries across Europe (fairbnb.coop).

**Socialbnb** connects travellers with hundreds of social and ecological projects worldwide, many with rooms to rent (socialbnb.org). Formerly a green travel blog, **Ecobnb** now lists about 3,000 sustainable places to stay in more than 55 countries (ecobnb.com).

**Kindred** is a house-swapping platform, with 80,000 homes available. All members have to make their own homes available, and everyone is vetted (livekindred.com).

Launched by former Airbnb colleagues, **Landfolk** aims to get people into nature. It operates in six countries, mostly in Scandinavia (landfolk.com).

**Sawday's** (which owns the glamping site **Canopy & Stars**) is one of the highest-scoring B Corp travel companies in the UK (sawdays.co.uk).

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN



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## This week's dream: Java's ancient city of culture

Think of Java, and chances are that the megacity of Jakarta – the capital of Indonesia – will spring to mind. But for those interested in the island's traditional culture, a smaller city beckons, says Scott Mowbray in *The New York Times*. Set in jungled hills 250 miles east of Jakarta, Yogyakarta is close to Java's greatest ancient sites – Borobudur (the world's largest Buddhist temple), and Prambanan (a Hindu temple complex), both dating from the 9th century. But the city is now "a place of intellectual and cultural ferment", with several universities and a vibrant contemporary art scene. And nowhere are Java's "intricate" classical arts – including

gamelan music, puppetry and dance – still so lovingly practised.

On arrival, Yogyakarta may seem much like any other hectic Indonesian city, with its "swarms" of scooters and countless *warungs*, or street food stalls. But you'll notice a "slower, more communal" rhythm in its *kampongs*, which are "villages within the city" – clusters of homes set amid quiet, winding streets



*Each of Borobudur's 72 stupas contains a statue of the Buddha*

decked with "songbirds in delicate cages, walls and doors of lovely hues, and countless potted plants". And in the heart of it all is the sultan's palace, the Kraton, with its many 18th century buildings set in leafy grounds. Around the Kraton are other sites – a mosque, bath houses, gardens – all built according to a unique symbolic scheme – "a syncretic mix of animist, Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim beliefs that put Yogyakarta at the centre of the universe". Known as the Cosmological Axis, this area was designated last year as a Unesco World Heritage site.

During my time in the city, I went to museums, art galleries, "barista-style" coffee shops, a classical dance performance based on the *Ramayana* (an ancient Hindu epic), and a drag show in a batik emporium that was "a joyful blast of pure pop camp". And I visited Prambanan and Borobudur, climbing to the top of the latter – a giant, stepped pyramid that is almost 400 feet wide and crowned with 72 hollow stupas, each sheltering a statue of the Buddha.

## Getting the flavour of...



### A phone-free holiday in France

Life with my screen-addicted teenage daughter is sometimes blighted by "battles over technology" – but an outdoorsy holiday in the French Alps proved the perfect antidote, says David Byers in *The Sunday Times*. We chose a two-day trip with the tour operator Summer France, staying in Vaujany, a village perched at an altitude of 1,250 metres near the Alpe d'Huez ski area. There, a crowing cockerel (mistaken by my slumbering daughter for Alexa) woke us up each morning, leaving plenty of time for our programme of activities. Grace hadn't much liked the look of these, but ended up enjoying them all hugely. First came a hike around the Alpette (a lake-strewn plateau with "Edenic" scenery), then a three-hour e-bike lesson. But it was the whitewater rafting we enjoyed the most, along with the river swimming – "an electric physical experience to cure a racing mind". A seven-night trip costs from £541pp ([summerfrance.co.uk](http://summerfrance.co.uk)).

### The "boho" Miami the locals know

Locals will tell you that Miami's best-known beachfront neighbourhoods are now overpriced and, in parts, alarmingly "tacky". So my advice is to stay in Coconut Grove instead, says Susan d'Arcy in *The Times*. The city's oldest district, this "boho backwater" is where "people who actually live in Miami spend their free time". With its Gilded Age mansions and its boardwalks around Biscayne Bay, it has plenty of "yesteryear charm", as well as a farmers' market, "laid-back" cafés, "friendly" dive bars, good restaurants (I can recommend Los Félix), and a large and very noisy population of free-roaming peafowl. There are Roman statues, Renaissance tapestries and more to enjoy at the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens (a good picnic spot), and a fabulous hotel – Mayfair House – that is one of only four in Miami to have garnered Michelin's "coveted" two-key rating.

### A charming holiday let in Somerset

The Craftsman's Cabin (pictured) is so called for a reason, says Jane Dunford in *The Guardian*. Set in its own peaceful meadow near the village of Kingsbury Episcopi, on the edge of the Somerset Levels, this attractive two-bedroom wooden house is a great place to unwind, with a wood-burner, an outdoor fire pit and a wide verandah with rocking chairs and a roll-top bath. It's also a showcase for the area's "makers", as it is entirely furnished with their creations, from the tables and ceramics to the soap. Its owner and creator, interior designer Decca Lang, can arrange studio visits and classes in stone carving, pottery, and so on – and there's plenty to do nearby, including visits to local RSPB sites known for starling murmurations. From £170 per night ([craftsmanscabin.co.uk](http://craftsmanscabin.co.uk)).

## Hotel of the week



### andBeyond Mnemba Island Tanzania

A tiny "blob" of sand in the Zanzibar archipelago, Mnemba is Tanzania's most "glam" private island resort, says Lisa Grainger in *Condé Nast Traveller*. Opened in 1996 but rebuilt last year, it's "the antithesis of bling", with just 12 "Crusoe-esque" villas – "curvaceous" structures made from wood and palm, into which "sea air (and an occasional bird, crab, or bat) can waft". The bar and restaurant are shaded by casuarina trees and sit beside a blindingly white beach. Trips to Zanzibar's main island are easy, and there's a spa with a "breezy" yoga deck, and a watersports centre manned by friendly local instructors.

Doubles from £620; [andbeyond.com](http://andbeyond.com).

## Sixties icon who became a symbol of female resilience

**Marianne  
Faithfull  
1946-2025**

“A blonde-haired, blue-eyed convent girl with aristocratic forebears and a heart awash with romantic decadence,” Marianne Faithfull was just 17 years old when she was spotted by the Rolling Stones’ manager Andrew Loog Oldham at a party for the band in London, said The Daily Telegraph. It was 1964, and the Stones were still mainly covering old blues numbers. Oldham had recently ordered Mick Jagger and Keith Richards to write a song of their own – and supposedly locked them in a kitchen until they came up with the goods. The result was a wan and wistful ballad called *As Time Goes By* (the title ripped off from the song in *Casablanca*). Richards called it a “terrible piece of tripe”; and it was, as Faithfull observed, an odd song for a pair of 20-year-old R&B stars to have written. So Oldham gave it to his new protégée to record. Renamed *As Tears Go By*, and performed in her quavering, folk-inflected voice, it entered the Top Ten in September 1964, and the following year she had three more Top Ten singles.

Before long, Faithfull had had an affair with Richards and a one-night stand with Brian Jones; then, in 1966, she began a four-year relationship with Jagger. They became one of the most photographed couples of the day, said The New York Times – louche fashion icons, impossibly cool. Faithfull released five albums in the 1960s, and also acted: she starred alongside Glenda Jackson in a production of Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* in 1967, and with Alain Delon in

the film *The Girl on a Motorcycle*; and she played Ophelia opposite Nicol Williamson in Tony Richardson’s *Hamlet* (1969). But Swinging London was a party from which few emerged unscathed. In 1967, she hit the headlines when police raided Redlands, Richards’ country house in Sussex, and arrested her naked save for a fur rug. The salacious coverage of the drugs bust – including a fabricated claim about an intimate act with a Mars bar – caused her considerable anguish, and contributed to her mental decline. She was angry, too, that while she was branded a slut and a bad mother (she’d had a son, Nicholas, in 1965, during her short-lived first marriage to the artist John Dunbar), Jagger and Richards emerged “with an enhanced bad-boy varnish”.

Decades later, she confessed that the whole period had been intensely difficult for her, as she had such an aversion to sex that she had not been able to sleep with any men without being drunk or on drugs until she was in her 50s. This, she said, was something she had inherited from her mother: in Vienna towards the end of the War, her mother and grandmother had been raped by Red Army soldiers. “It was a big problem for me in the 1960s, especially as I had to pretend that everything was so wonderful, wild and sexual,” Faithfull said.

Her influence over the Stones was considerable, said The New York Times. She inspired some of their biggest hits, including *You Can’t Always Get What You Want*, and she introduced Jagger to Bulgakov’s novel *The Master and Margarita*, which led him to write *Sympathy for the Devil*. But she was frustrated by Jagger’s snobbery (the way he’d accept invitations from “any silly thing with a title and a castle”) and, later, she’d describe him as overly fastidious, tight-fisted and secretly in love with Richards. Neither



Faithfull: four Top Ten hits in the 1960s

*“For two years she was homeless. The people she met on the streets were kinder than her glamorous 1960s crowd had ever been”*

of them was faithful. Nevertheless, they moved in together, and when she miscarried their baby at seven months in 1968, she was plunged into despair. In 1969, within days of Jones being found dead in his swimming pool, she attempted suicide by swallowing barbiturates. It is said that her first words on coming round from a coma were “Wild horses wouldn’t drag me away”. This supposedly inspired the Stones’ song – but Faithfull and Jagger’s relationship was over. She was 23.

She had never tried heroin when she co-wrote *Sister Morphine* (for which she finally received a credit on the reissue of the Stones’ *Sticky Fingers*, in 1994), but by the early 1970s, she was sliding into serious drug addiction. She temporarily lost custody of Nicholas, and for two years she was homeless: living in squats and spending her days “sitting on a wall” in Soho. The people she met on the streets were kinder than her glamorous 1960s crowd had ever been: local stall holders gave her cups of tea; the meth drinkers looked out for her. She realised, she said, that humans could be good. Her weight slumped to seven stone; her teeth rotted. Then, in 1979, aided by Island Records’ supremo Chris Blackwell, she made an extraordinary comeback with the post-punk album *Broken English*, said Will Hodgkinson in The Times. Sung in a rasping, cracked voice ravaged by years of hardship and drug addiction, and featuring the tracks *Why D’Ya Do It?* and *The Ballad of Lucy Jordan*, it made the Stones look old and out of touch.

Marianne Faithfull was born in Hampstead in 1946. Her father, Glynn Faithfull, was a former British intelligence officer and the son of a sexologist; her mother was an Austrian baroness and dancer. She had performed on stage in Weimar Berlin, and was the great-niece of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, whose novella *Venus in Furs* gave rise to the word masochism. The couple had married in haste, and when Marianne was six, her father left the family. Marianne grew up with her mother and grandmother in a terraced house in Reading. But her parents’ colourful backgrounds had rubbed off on her, and at her convent school she read volumes of writing by Huysmans, Genet and Baudelaire, disguised as religious texts. By the age of 17, she had left school and was singing in folk clubs.

She didn’t manage to conquer her addictions until 1986, said The Times. There followed a period of remarkable creativity, in which she performed Kurt Weill songs at Salzburg, starred in *The Threepenny Opera* at the Gate Theatre in Dublin, and made several more albums. She collaborated with a range of other artists, including PJ Harvey, Nick Cave, Brian Eno and Damon Albarn, and came to be seen by a younger generation of women as a symbol of female resilience in a sexist industry. She had surgery for breast cancer in 2006, was hospitalised with Covid in 2020, and then contracted pneumonia. Eventually, she moved into Denville Hall, the actors’ retirement home. She didn’t feel cursed, she said in one of her final interviews: “I just feel f\*\*\*ing human.” It bothered her that more than 60 years later, she was still associated with Jagger and the Swinging Sixties, said the Daily Mail. But she was philosophical about the way her life had turned out. “I could have made better choices,” she said. “But when I first came to London, walking down the street, I just got this feeling that I was in the right place at the right moment.”



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# Companies in the news

## ...and how they were assessed

### Unilever: ice cream wars

"As the largest ice cream company in the world, we have over 100 years of experience in spreading joy and happiness," boasts Unilever, home to brands such as Magnum, Ben & Jerry's and Viennetta. Now the joy is due to be spread further, said The Sunday Times, with contentious plans to demerge and float the £13bn ice cream division. Unilever boss Hein Schumacher "finds himself caught in a tussle between London, New York and Amsterdam". Nelson Peltz, the activist investor on Unilever's board, is pushing for a New York spin-off on grounds it will fetch a higher valuation. Meanwhile, the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, has personally urged executives to choose London. That, however, "could revive Anglo-Dutch tensions that surfaced in 2018 when Unilever reversed on a plan to shift its headquarters from London to Rotterdam". Indeed, "the Dutch are confident they can win the highly sought-after listing" after "assurances" given by Unilever in 2020 that it would choose Amsterdam for any spin-off, said Emily Hawkins on This is Money. So the firm is now weighing "a dual or even triple listing" for its "frozen assets". Analysts at Barclays reckon Unilever should renege on its Dutch pledge – arguing that a dual listing in London and New York would be "the best balance" to maximise the new company's valuation. A decision is expected in March. The situation may yet get stickier.

### OpenAI/SoftBank: intelligent alliance

US markets have swooned over the challenge to OpenAI posed by China's DeepSeek. Yet SoftBank's boss, Masayoshi Son, has no such qualms, said George Hammond in the FT. The Japanese tech investor is leading "a massive new funding round" that would value the ChatGPT maker at over \$300bn – not far off the valuation commanded by Elon Musk's \$350bn SpaceX, "the most valuable startup in the world". San Francisco-based OpenAI has "morphed from a research-focused startup to a commercial juggernaut" since it released ChatGPT in late 2022. "SoftBank wants a piece of the AI pie." The two companies are also collaborating on Stargate – a major new data centre project, committed to building up to \$500bn of new AI infrastructure. And now they have a new plan for Japan, said Kosaku Narioka in The Wall Street Journal. The aim is to develop AI services for Japanese companies "to lay the groundwork for potential expansion worldwide". Just months ago, Son predicted that artificial general intelligence – in which computers gain human-level cognitive abilities – would be achieved within two to three years. He now thinks it will arrive much sooner – with big corporations leading the way.

### Trafigura: bribery ruling

In a "landmark case" in Switzerland that "will send a chill through commodity brokers worldwide", the trading giant Trafigura and one of its top executives have been convicted of bribery over payments made by the firm to gain access to Angola's oil market, said Imogen Foulkes on BBC News. In a rare conviction, former COO Mike Wainwright has been sentenced to 32 months in prison. "The case against Trafigura has had all the elements of a financial thriller" – "millions of dollars, shady middlemen and a chain of shell companies". The company was found to have secretly paid an official in Angola's state oil company almost \$5m between 2009 and 2011, leading to contracts worth almost \$144m. Both Trafigura and Wainwright – a British former racing driver – plan to appeal.

### AstraZeneca: vaccines spat highlights investment tensions

It was hardly what you would call a shot in the arm for the Government. Days after the Chancellor highlighted life sciences as a key sector in a speech about growth, Britain's flagship pharma has "abruptly cancelled" plans for a £450m vaccine manufacturing plant on Merseyside – blaming Labour for whittling down the support previously offered by the Conservatives, said the FT. The dispute appears to boil down to a few million pounds. While the Tories offered £90m (comprising a £70m grant for the factory in Speke and £20m for R&D), the new

Government knocked that down to £78m after doing its own due diligence, claiming that Astra – the UK's most valuable listed company – had "changed some of its proposals".

"Call it the over-a-barrel economic model," said Oliver Shah in The Times. Companies know that ministers in "a state of constant



An "over-the-barrel economic model"?

agitation about low growth" are often "fertile ground for special pleading". Indeed, Astra has had "similar fits of pique" when it didn't get its way in the past. In 2023, it placed a "state-of-the-art" manufacturing plant in Ireland, rather than the North West of England, in protest at UK tax rates and NHS pricing. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the current case, this kind of corporate "barrelism" is unsustainable.

It might seem outrageous that a £175bn company "should expect a bung from the taxpayer", but the reality "in global pharma-land" is that "countries fall over themselves to offer incentives", said Nils Pratley in The Guardian. This Speke U-turn is terrible advertising for a supposedly pro-growth government. It seems "spectacularly stupid" to wreck this deal just "to save a few million quid", agreed Alistair Osborne in The Times. "Judge this government by what it does for growth, not what it says."



### Seven days in the Square Mile

Global equity markets were rattled by President Trump's tariff announcements, but the greatest impact was felt in currency markets. The Canadian dollar briefly hit its lowest point against the US dollar in more than two decades; the Mexican peso fell by 3% before recovering. China's central bank shored up the yuan by setting a stronger than expected daily fixing rate against the US dollar. The US postal service temporarily stopped accepting parcels from China and Hong Kong after Trump imposed an additional 10% tariff on Chinese imports and scrapped "de minimis" rules exempting shipments under \$800 from duties. The crackdown is likely to hurt Chinese e-commerce giants Temu and Shein, and benefit Amazon.

In Britain, Keir Starmer was expected to back the development of the Rosebank oil field in the North Sea – despite fierce opposition from Energy Secretary Ed Miliband – having reportedly given assurances to Equinor, Rosebank's lead developer. Chancellor Rachel Reeves was reported to be considering slashing the tax relief on cash Isas to encourage savers to invest in equity markets.

Drinks giant Diageo returned to sales growth thanks to strong performances of Guinness and tequila. Shares in Google-owner Alphabet plunged by 9% amid worries over its AI spend. Shares in Palantir, the software company known for its national security work and AI products, shot up 24% following a robust forecast.

## Issue of the week: interesting times

*Pressure is mounting on central bankers as the interest rate debate gets political*

Financial markets considered it all but certain that the Bank of England would cut interest rates this week – by a quarter point to 4.5%, said Chris Dorrell in City AM. Although there are still worries about “stubborn inflationary pressures”, these are outweighed by “concerns about the UK’s sluggish economy”. Growth has “flatlined over the past six months”, said Jack Barnett in The Times, and the UK is in need of a stimulus. But these decisions aren’t getting any easier. Although Britain might avoid the worst of President Trump’s threat “to upend the global economy with tariffs”, economists warn “the country will still suffer” from the “indirect” inflationary effects of a trade war. Some analysts have speculated that the US Federal Reserve, which kept rates on hold last week, might even consider new interest rate rises, to mitigate the spiralling impact of Trump’s trade policies on prices.

Were that to happen, expect all hell to break loose, said Phillip Inman in The Observer. Although the BoE governor Andrew Bailey “is no stranger to political pressure” – the former PM Liz Truss would have sacked him if she could – his travails are as nothing compared with those of his US counterpart, Fed chair Jerome Powell. The latter’s announcement that US rates would be kept on hold provoked a presidential tirade on Truth Social last



Jerome Powell: feeling Trump's ire

week, said Kevin Breuninger on CNBC. Trump, who had earlier observed that he would “demand that interest rates drop immediately”, accused the Fed and Powell of “creating” inflation. “If the Fed had spent less time on DEI, gender ideology, ‘green’ energy, and fake climate change, Inflation would never have been a problem,” he wrote. “Instead, we suffered from the worst Inflation in the History of our Country!”

The big fear, said DealBook in The New York Times, is that the growing “Trump-Powell divide” could “spill over” into bond markets, which have stabilised in recent weeks. There could be trouble if markets start to sense that the Fed is

going easy on interest rates to satisfy Trump, or if its independence comes under question. “Meddling with the Fed” could backfire on the president in another way too, the UBS economist Paul Donovan noted. “Overt criticism of the Fed by Trump risks tilting the Fed toward hawkishness in any close-call decision” – the better “to prove” its independence. Certainly, Trump appears to have had second thoughts about alienating his central bank, said CNBC. In a reverse ferret this week, he “commended” the Fed for its decision. “Holding the rates at this point was the right thing to do.” Markets don’t expect lower rates until at least June. But it’s an open question whether Trump’s patience will hold that long.

## Tariffs: the market fallout

### ● Mexican appetiser

The biggest problem for traders reacting to Donald Trump’s tariff onslaught was the frenetic pace of the action, said Neil Wilson in Investors’ Chronicle. “It was a case of trying to keep up with events.” Shares that were sold off on the tariff news staged “a bit of a comeback”



Trade with China: under pressure

after Mexico and Canada “got a one-month stay of execution”. But then traders had to “react to the reaction”, as China struck back with a slew of tariffs on US goods and an antitrust probe into Google. Meanwhile, currencies and commodities “whipsawed”. The Mexican peso rallied sharply, having fallen heavily; oil futures that had rallied on the tariffs reversed course. “It was one of those days where you were probably better off ignoring all the noise.” Still, investors are right to be watchful. “A tit-for-tat trade war” with China and the EU is “still the base case”. Mexico and Canada were “just test runs for the main course”.

### ● Complacency risk

Investors tend to flock to US assets in times of chaos – “even when Uncle Sam is the cause of the disarray”, said Lex in the Financial Times. Shares in carmakers, and

consumer companies buying goods from China, predictably fell. But the 1% fall in the broader S&P 500 index didn’t “even make it into the 20 worst trading days of the past year”. The market’s general “shrug” is itself a risk. Had shares slumped, “it would have sent a message to the president that

slapping on tariffs isn’t as straightforward as it sounds”. As it is, the “relative inaction” of investors “gives him little reason to show restraint”.

### ● Gold and crypto

“The US president wants lower interest rates, a higher stock market, a dollar that helps the nation’s exporters and some sort of nirvana for his crypto chums,” said Alistair Osborne in The Times. But with his tariffs, he has given the world “a policy that would deliver the precise opposite”. Bitcoin sank by 7%, while many other cryptos and digital tokens suffered double-digit falls, said the Financial Times. Petr Kozyakov of Mercuryo described “a tidal wave of fear, uncertainty and doubt”. By contrast, gold fulfilled its function as the safe haven of last resort – rising to a new record above \$2,830, said Valerio Baselli on Morningstar. Next stop: \$3,000.

## Indian IPOs

*In a historic first, India surged to the top of the global IPO rankings in 2024 – hosting a record-breaking 336 IPOs. Can the momentum continue?*

**Listings torrent** Although India dramatically outpaced the US in terms of IPO volume – there were 183 new American listings last year – it still trails in terms of value. The EY Global IPO Trends survey calculates that \$19.9bn was raised last year, compared with \$32.8bn in the US. But a further “torrent of mega listings” means equity fund-raising could surpass \$23bn in 2025.

**Local bedrock** Last year’s strong debuts were driven by millions of households increasingly investing their savings in local markets, said the FT. The number of Indians with access to mutual funds has more than quadrupled since 2020 to around 180 million. India’s stock markets are relatively expensive, prompting foreign investors to pull out more than \$30bn since October. Local capital has “become the bedrock”, said Kunal Vora of BNP Paribas.

**Headwinds** India’s weakening economy, and the pressure on the rupee from the strong dollar, could have a dampening effect: the Nifty 100 index of top Indian stocks has fallen by 12% since its September peak. Many founders are playing wait and see, hoping prices will edge up before taking the plunge, said Nitin Bhasin of Mumbai’s Ambit Capital. “It’s an emotional cycle right now.”

# Commentators

## The global war on red tape

**Editorial**

*The Economist*

## A DEI backlash in the City

**Lucy Burton and Louis Goss**

*The Sunday Telegraph*

## How Oxbridge spinouts could boost growth

**Lex**

*Financial Times*

## Pacesetters often become also-rans

**Nils Pratley**

*The Guardian*

Donald Trump is not the only one taking a “wrecking ball” to rules and regulations, says *The Economist*. He is “part of a global trend”: from Buenos Aires and Delhi, to Brussels and London, “an anti-red-tape revolution is under way”. A big overhaul is certainly needed; in the rich world, “getting anything built has become a daunting task”. Americans are reckoned to spend 12 billion hours a year complying with federal rules; filling in “sustainability disclosures” in Denmark costs a typical firm €300,000. History shows that deregulation can be “a magic potion which peps up the animal spirits”. Thatcher’s Britain, India in the early 1990s, and southern Europe in the 2020s all sped ahead following pro-market reforms. In Argentina, disciplined and carefully thought-out deregulation under Javier Milei has got the country growing again. The “conundrum” that Trump has failed to grasp in America “is how to be bold without being reckless”: safety rules are essential in any society. In slow-growth Europe, by contrast, “the problem is timidity”. The war against red-tape could kick-start economic growth. The danger is that neither side gets it right.

When it comes to regulatory “overreach”, look no further than the City of London, say Burton and Goss – and the Financial Conduct Authority’s obsession with “diversity and inclusion”. A policy statement expected this year will require firms to draw up and publish official DEI plans overseen by the board. The FCA argues this will “help to reduce groupthink, support healthy work cultures, improve understanding of and provision for diverse consumers and tap into wider talent”. The fear among many City bosses is that it is, at best, “a box-ticking exercise”. Indeed, a backlash is growing. A poll of 500 executives by research company JLP showed that one in three bosses believe DEI has “gone too far” and may indeed have become “exclusionary” itself. Although plenty of Wall Street banks – including Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan – are standing by their diversity policies, the US cultural shift under Trump is already being felt in the City, amid concerns that the diversity drive could lead companies to overlook the best talent. Should the regulator accommodate this or ignore it? “The next 12 months could be difficult to navigate.”

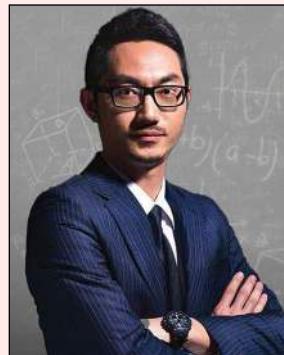
Running trains between Oxford and Cambridge to create a bigger research and development hub – as the Government hopes to do – is one way to foster economic growth, says Lex. “Easing the path for universities to spin out their innovations into business opportunities would be even smarter.” Britain beats its European peers when it comes to commercialising research from university labs: our universities have spawned more than 2,000 spinouts since 2011, according to the Royal Academy of Engineering, including “stars” such as the industrial AI company Carbon Re. “But the path from ivory towers to commercialisation is fraught”, with frequent clashes between universities, founders and investors. Where exactly the intellectual property resides is often a knotty issue. Cash-strapped UK universities “are reluctant to cede” their babies; one case, involving the University of Oxford, wound up in court. Nonetheless, innovation is flourishing in our seats of learning. Add in “clearer ground rules” and better trains, “and the UK just might have found a recipe for growth”.

Many people draw parallels between the current AI boom and the late-1990s dotcom bubble, says Nils Pratley – “for understandable reasons”. The level of market concentration within a handful of stocks is even more extreme than it was then. “And the whole show is infused with the same belief in first-mover advantage” – that the early leaders will scoop all the financial prizes. Real life is rarely so simple. Last year, fund manager Terry Smith assembled “a strikingly long list of tech pacesetters that ended up as also-rans”. Intel in chips, AOL in internet provision, Nokia in mobile phones, Yahoo in search engines, Myspace in social media, and so on. It would be “a break with tradition”, he argued, if the market had discovered an ability to spot winners at the outset. The truth is that markets have been generally terrible at valuing technology revolutions, from the beginnings of powered flight to the dotcom bubble. Similarly, “the wider economics of the AI revolution remain guesswork”. The main significance of DeepSeek is that “investors didn’t see it coming”.

## City profile

### Liang Wenfeng

When the DeepSeek founder returned to his home village deep in rural China for the Lunar New Year holiday, he received a hero’s welcome, said the FT – as “a digital David fighting America’s Big Tech Goliath”. Yet Liang – a hedge fund “quant” turned startup founder – is the first to admit his main early influence was a US trader. He drew inspiration from Jim Simons, a pioneer in quantitative investment (using mathematical models to determine opportunities) whose Renaissance Technologies fund had been using “machine-learning techniques” since the 1980s, said *The Wall Street Journal*. Liang’s own pivot to AI, with the formation of DeepSeek in 2023, followed on. He once likened acquiring sought-after Nvidia chips “to buying a piano”. You do it “because you can afford it” and “because you have a group of people who are eager to play music on it”.



Raised in the village of Mililing in the southern province of Guangdong, Liang, 40, comes from a family of teachers, said the FT. A maths whizz, he studied computer science at Zhejiang University and, after graduating, “parlayed his computing skills into automated stock trading” – forming his own hedge fund, High-Flyer, in 2015. It swiftly made him a billionaire. By all accounts, “the mysterious man who sparked an existential panic in Silicon Valley” is a “reluctant celebrity”. Who can blame him, asked Connie Loizos on TechCrunch. Liang is currently the toast of Beijing but, given the fate of other high-flying Chinese CEOs who gained “a little too much” visibility, “don’t be surprised if he chooses to stay in the background”.

## Who's tipping what

## The week's best shares

**Andrade Mining***The Mail on Sunday*

Problems have resolved and production is rising at this Namibia-based miner, focused on tin, tantalum and lithium – all vital to electronics production. Should benefit from geopolitical tensions constraining supply. Buy. 2p.

**Diploma***The Daily Telegraph*

The gasket and seal supplier's performance has been sound, backed by an ambitious M&A strategy. Given its strong market position, solid balance sheet and exposure to fast-growing economies, there's further to run. Buy. £44.08.

**IG Group Holdings***Investors' Chronicle*

The spread-betting and contracts for difference trading platform has extended its buyback programme after double-digit revenue and profit growth. Increasing its UK presence via the acquisition of trading app, Freetrade. Yields 4.5%. Buy. £10.34.

**Marshalls***The Daily Telegraph*

The landscaping, building and roofing products supplier is set for profit recovery, thanks to cost-efficiency programmes and resilient higher-margin roofing ops. Debt is down and sales have improved. Buy. 247.5p.

**Meta Platforms***The Times*

The tech titan generates \$160bn in annual revenue from ad sales. Investment in data centres, language models and chatbot tech is yielding results and should support long-term growth. Buy. \$676.

**Ryanair Holdings***The Daily Telegraph*

Headwinds are easing at Europe's leading budget airline. The "game-changer" arrival of Boeing 737s – carrying more passengers while consuming less fuel – is on track for 2026. Management is the best in the industry. Expanding. Buy. €20.35.

## Directors' dealings

**Liontrust Asset Management**

This specialist investment manager has suffered outflows since 2022. Shares have fallen almost 70% in five years. CEO John Ions and his wife made the most of weakness, spending £200,000. CFO Vinay Abrol bought £99,000-worth.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

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

**AJ Bell***The Times*

The investment broker has grown its market value by half since April 2024: reporting record profits and launching a £30m buyback programme. A high-quality business with strong brand power and chunky margins. Hold. 449.5p.

**Craneware***The Daily Telegraph*

Revenues and profits are up at the US-focused hospital software specialist, while debt is down. Strong economic growth prospects in the US bode well for future performance. Hold. £19.55.

**Inditex***The Times*

Best known for Zara, the fast-fashion owner majors on stylish and affordable clothes. A recent update "did not quite match expectations", but profits are still rising. Investing in logistics to keep ahead of rivals. Hold. €51.30.

**Savannah Resources***The Mail on Sunday*

Europe is keen to build a homegrown lithium market, and Portugal-based Savannah has a large, high-quality deposit. Backed by a Dutch refiner and set to become a key supplier when it moves into production. Hold. 4.3p.

**Young & Co's Brewery***The Daily Telegraph*

Following last year's acquisition of City Pub, the pub group is "making encouraging progress" with 7.9% sales growth. Solid finances should see it through current economic uncertainty. Hold. 774p.

## Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

## Best tip

**IMI***The Times*  
up 6.93% to £19.45

## Worst tip

**S&U***The Daily Telegraph*  
down 15.18% to £15.65

## Market view

"Trump has made an end to the self-delusion in markets, the media and in politics that his tariff threats should be taken with a grain of salt."

**Philip Marey of Rabobank.**  
**Quoted in the FT**

## Market summary

## Key numbers for investors

	4 Feb 2025	Week before	Change (%)
<b>FTSE 100</b>	8570.77	8533.87	0.43%
<b>FTSE All-share UK</b>	4653.17	4634.83	0.40%
<b>Dow Jones</b>	44484.70	44813.98	-0.73%
<b>NASDAQ</b>	19628.96	19601.27	0.14%
<b>Nikkei 225</b>	38798.37	39016.87	-0.56%
<b>Hang Seng</b>	20789.96	20225.11	2.79%
<b>Gold</b>	2826.10	2742.40	3.05%
<b>Brent Crude Oil</b>	76.37	76.95	-0.75%
<b>DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)</b>	3.50%	3.53%	
<b>UK 10-year gilts yield</b>	4.64	4.71	
<b>US 10-year Treasuries</b>	4.53	4.57	
<b>UK ECONOMIC DATA</b>			
<b>Latest CPI (yoy)</b>	2.5% (Dec)	2.6% (Nov)	
<b>Latest RPI (yoy)</b>	3.5% (Dec)	3.6% (Nov)	
<b>Halifax house price (yoy)</b>	3.3% (Dec)	4.8% (Nov)	
<b>£1 STERLING:</b>	\$1.250	€1.202	¥191,348
		Bitcoin \$99,763.73	

## Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS		
<b>RISES</b>	<b>Price</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>St. James's Place</b>	1053.00	+11.20
<b>Airtel Africa</b>	146.30	+10.70
<b>Smiths</b>	2034.00	+10.20
<b>Endeavour Mining</b>	1665.00	+8.70
<b>Fresnillo</b>	713.50	+8.60
<b>FALLS</b>		
<b>Diageo</b>	2327.50	-6.70
<b>Vodafone</b>	65.10	-4.80
<b>Whitbread</b>	2770.00	-4.60
<b>Cruda International</b>	3213.00	-4.60
<b>Convatec</b>	238.80	-4.60
<b>FTSE 250 RISER &amp; FALLER</b>		
<b>Berry</b>	1211.00	+8.80
<b>Ferrexpo</b>	80.00	-23.80

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 4 Feb (pm)

## Following the Footsie



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# Cocaine galore: how a remote island was inundated with drugs

*When residents of São Miguel, the largest of the Azores islands, found half-a-tonne of drugs washed up on the beach, they had no idea how much their lives were about to change. By Olivia Acland*

Telmo Mineiro, a fisherman from São Miguel, takes a heavy drag on his cigarette and points to where he found a brick of uncut cocaine on the shore. “We were hunting for sea urchins,” he says. “We saw the pack and went to get it out of curiosity.” Mineiro, who was 13 at the time, had bunked off school with two friends. Together, they were scrambling over the black volcanic rocks that fringe the Atlantic island’s northwestern coast. He spotted the package in a crevice, wrapped in dark green plastic, and tore through its casing with his teeth. A trail of white powder streamed out. The boys, whose football pitch consisted of just two piles of pebbles as goalposts, were delighted. “We thought it was chalk,” says Mineiro. “We used it to mark out the lines around the goal.”

Many of the tales surrounding the events of 2001 in São Miguel, the largest of the Portuguese-owned Azores islands, have taken on fantastical twists – perhaps this one too. Another man told me that there was so much cocaine on the island that summer that teenagers were walking through the streets carrying shopping bags full of the powder. Whether or not these accounts are entirely accurate, the unembellished truth is just as astonishing: in June 2001, hundreds of packages filled with extraordinarily pure cocaine washed up on São Miguel’s shores. People reported finding packets bobbing in the shallow surf. Others were strewn on beaches, leaking their contents into the sand.

On the morning of 7 June, policemen discovered 271 packets by some rocks on the beach. This marked the first of 11 seizures and, in the space of just two weeks, police had collected around half-a-tonne of cocaine, worth around £40m today. While some locals reported packages as they washed up, others quietly collected them and began dealing cocaine at bargain prices. “Beer glasses of cocaine were going for €5 each,” says Inspector José Lopes, a judicial police inspector who worked on the case. “It was a nightmare. Some kids who had never even touched a cigarette started using cocaine.”

The man behind an event that not only wrought short-term chaos, but also left behind a legacy of addiction that decimated a generation, was an Italian by the name of Antonino Quinci. The thick-set 44-year-old would later tell port officials in São Miguel that he was a hobby sailor traversing the Atlantic for a bit of fun. In fact, he was a smuggler ferrying uncut cocaine from Venezuela to Spain on behalf of a Spanish criminal syndicate.



Rabo de Peixe: around half-a-tonne of cocaine turned up on the coastline

He had already done a stint in prison in Italy on drug charges, and had crossed the Atlantic at least twice that year on other smuggling operations.

Quinci had diverted to São Miguel because his yacht had been battered by a storm, and the rudder was damaged. He needed to fix it but did not want to appear at a shipyard laden with cocaine. He decided to hide his cargo in a cave on the island’s north coast. After throwing down the anchor, Quinci began ferrying

bundles to the shore in his dinghy. But the bulk of his freight required multiple trips and he had only stashed a fraction of the drugs when he spotted a fisherman’s boat bobbing towards him.

Quinci hurriedly made off around the island again. He decided to sink his remaining cargo and wrapped the bundles in plastic before submerging them with chains, rocks and an anchor. Yet as he made for the harbour, a gale began whipping up the sea. A storm surge battered the cliffs and currents tugged at the chains, dislodging the anchor. Gradually, bricks of cocaine began drifting to the surface.

*“Life on the island descended into chaos. Women dusted raw fish in cocaine instead of flour; old men spooned it into their espressos”*

São Miguel has just 140,000 inhabitants and is about half the size of Berkshire. Friesian cows graze on grassy hillsides and volcanic craters are fringed with pine trees. While young residents grumble that there are few opportunities on the island, many of them still struggle to tear themselves away, proudly identifying first as Azoreans, and then as Portuguese. But it is true that jobs are scarce: the nine Azores islands represent some of the poorest parts of western Europe, with around 26% of residents at risk of poverty. Rabo de Peixe, the town on the stretch of coastline where Quinci’s drugs washed up, means “fishtail” in English. Locals say it got its name because fishermen were so poor that they would sell the bodies of their catch and survive by eating the tails.

In the summer of 2001, life on the island – and especially in Rabo de Peixe – descended into chaos. Children as young as 12 sampled cocaine in back alleys. Novice dealers drove around offering cocaine out of their car windows at cut-throat prices. Rabo de Peixe’s one nightclub, Opera, was crammed with teeth-grinding partygoers who revelled until dawn. “The town used to shut down at 7pm,” says Mineiro, “but after that the night scene changed completely.” According to island folklore, women dusted raw fish in cocaine, instead of flour, and old men spooned it into their espressos like sugar. Within a month, 20 people had died from overdoses. The hospital in Ponta Delgada, the capital, was

overwhelmed. Staff working on the normally half-empty detox wards were suddenly putting up extra beds for drug-addled fishermen and farmers. One patient, desperate for help but unable to suppress his cravings, smuggled cocaine into the hospital inside a toothpaste tube.

When Quinci's supply eventually dried up, islanders struggled to return to their old routines. Some took downers, such as hash and even heroin, to get to sleep. Others chased highs, in whatever shape they could find them. "My friend's older sister got hooked around that time alongside her whole friendship group," says Ivo Dias, referring to girls who were 14 when it happened. "Pretty much a whole generation got tossed down the drain."

When I visited São Miguel last October, everyone I spoke to knew of "the Italian" – as Quinci is known. Some had sampled his eye-wateringly strong cocaine ("It was the best stuff I'd tasted in my life," one drug user told me); others had spotted him hanging around the harbour that summer. But most of all, people complained about the island's enduring drug problems and blamed them, at least in part, on the smuggler.

Despite his enduring notoriety, Quinci only spent six weeks on the island. For 12 days in June 2001, he slept on his boat at the shipyard, waiting for his rudder to be fixed. He grew increasingly anxious when he heard from fishermen that police had seized packets of cocaine and that even more was circulating around the

island. While it would have been wiser to disappear, Quinci was optimistic he could recover some of his cargo before setting sail again. Every day, he made futile trips around the island in his dinghy, searching for the lost bundles. Policemen kept an eye on him. So much cocaine had flooded the island that they knew it must have come in by boat and Quinci was their key suspect. On 20 June at 9.30am, Lopes, armed with a warrant to search Quinci's boat, climbed through the hatch to find Quinci sipping a coffee in a tracksuit. Lopes immediately sensed there was cocaine onboard.

"I closed my eyes and smelled maturing fruits, diesel oil, but then there was something else too – a smell like kerosene," he told me on the phone last month. "It was unmistakable." Seemingly unfazed by the intrusion, the smuggler handed over an Italian passport that showed a photo of him with a thick moustache and short hair. Lopes scoured the boat, and soon discovered a Spanish passport under a different name, this time showing a clean-shaven Quinci with long, slicked-back hair. "At this point, he was starting to get nervous," Lopes recalls. Finally, in a small compartment at the front of the boat, the policeman found a shopping bag with scores of cocaine bundles inside, wrapped in the same dark green plastic as the others that had been found on the island.

Quinci confessed immediately. According to a court document he even "expressed concern" about the lost drugs and the "introduction of such a quantity of narcotics into the local market". He was cooperative as Lopes led him off the boat into a waiting police car. His relationship with the law is like "a game of cat and mouse", Lopes explains – and he knew the game was up. He was sent to await trial at a prison in Ponta Delgada, an imposing white building surrounded by a brick wall topped with coils of wire. But at 11.25am on 1 July 2001, the day he was due to be transferred to a high-security prison on the mainland, Quinci scaled the wall. According to one report, he had wrapped torn-up bedsheets around his arms to stop the wire from slicing his wrists. As the prisoners were exercising in the yard, he made



*Andre Vieira: "70% of my friends are addicts"*

a running jump at the wall and hoisted himself up over the top. A guard in a watchtower fired a warning shot in the air as he tumbled onto a grassy verge on the far side and rushed to a waiting Vespa. An accomplice, likely lined up by a fellow inmate, whisked him away.

Following the escape, Lopes and his team shut down ports and stationed policemen at the airport. Meanwhile, Quinci camped out at the house of Rui Couto, a local fisherman. "My friend dropped him off at my place," says Couto, a skinny man with fading tattoos up his lanky arms. "Good guy, great guy! He spent every night with me. We smoked, did some cocaine, he tried heroin for the first time. We had fun."

Police would never have found Quinci had they not raided Couto's house in connection to an unrelated offence. At 7am on 16 July 2001, six armed policemen, including Lopes, filed through Couto's front door. Couto flew into a rage, yelling that they had no right to be there and should get off his property at once. "Now I think back to it, I think he was screaming to warn Quinci to go away," says Lopes. Couto had a potato field in front of his house, flanked by a cement shed. As Lopes searched the shallow soil for signs of hidden drugs, he heard a crashing noise inside the barn. There, barefoot and bedraggled, lay Quinci. He extended his arms and shouted at the policeman not to shoot, before recognising who he was. "*Sei tu, Lopes, tu sei il mio diavolo*," he groaned: "It's you, Lopes, you are my devil." This time, he served ten years, first in Portugal and then in Italy after applying for extradition.

While prison might have kept him out of trouble, it did not reform him. In 2021, he was caught smuggling hashish into Brazil and sentenced to another eight years in prison.

*"One patient, desperate for help but unable to suppress his cravings, smuggled cocaine into the hospital inside a toothpaste tube"*

Today, most men over 40 in Rabo de Peixe will tell you they have lost friends to addiction. "70% of my friends are addicts," says fisherman Andre Vieira, sipping a beer at a bar on the high street. "They were not addicts before they got hooked on that coke." It is hard to travel far without spotting a drug user. Gaunt men huddle around crack pipes in the park, and twentysomethings pass joints on street corners. In the fish-storage hangars that line the harbour in Rabo de Peixe, dealers slip pills into their customers' hands in exchange for euro bills. The island is now grappling with a new drug type known as "synthetics". These crystals are often mixed with bleach or fertilisers in home laboratories. They can trigger paranoia and hallucinations. You can tell when someone is on them, my fixer told me, because you might see them ranting in the street or picking a fight with an inanimate object.

Families have been torn apart. One woman's three sons all succumbed to addiction. Her youngest died of an overdose and the middle one still drifts around the island, sleeping rough, high on whatever he can find. But it wasn't bad for everyone. Islanders gripe that some people got rich off the incident by burying cocaine in their gardens, only to dig it up when the supply dwindled and they could sell it at high prices. Some of the fancier bars in Rabo de Peixe are said to have been built with drug money.

Lopes heaps the blame on Quinci, whose drugs, he says, set a generation on the path to addiction. When I ask him what he'd say to the smuggler today, given the chance, he answers without hesitation. "I would ask him if he has no regrets, no remorse for causing such devastation on the island," says Lopes. "He was responsible for a lot of destruction to São Miguel's society."

*A longer version of this article appeared in The Daily Telegraph  
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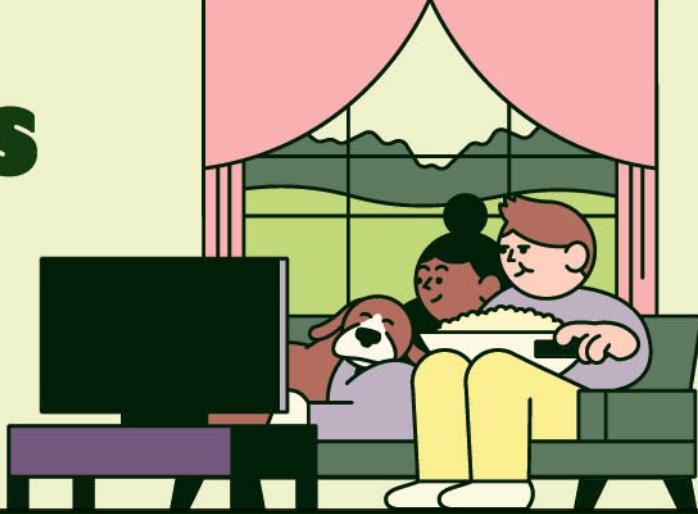


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**Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items** will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 17 February. Send it to The Week Crossword 1451, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. By Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)



This week's winner will receive Week-branded items, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

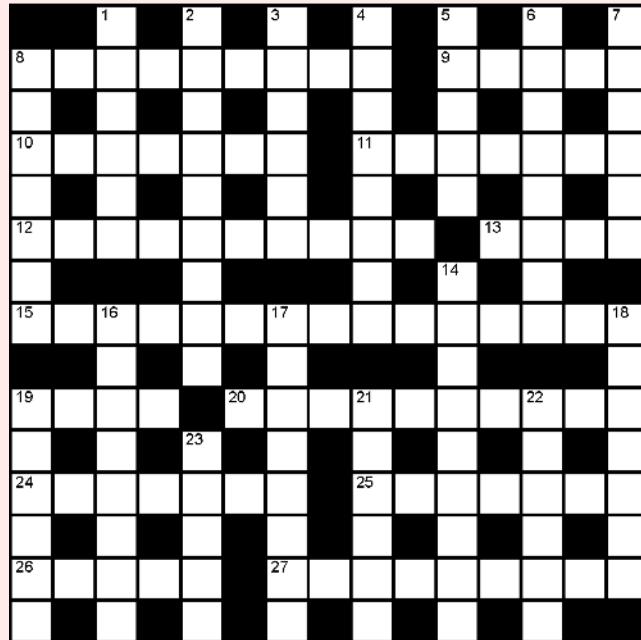
### ACROSS

- 8 Advertise widely what sounds like the correct entrance (9)
- 9 Ideas disguised in casual remark (5)
- 10 Since more certain, one convinces another person (7)
- 11 Try set dinner with first and last in nutrition ignored? Not for these (7)
- 12 In a lazy way, gully sighs when hit (10)
- 13 Century for fellow on quick pitch (4)
- 15 Period in US when a puritan monk cut loose (11,4)
- 19 Hairstyle seen in seafront (4)
- 20 Final record of meeting just in time (4-6)
- 24 Bent Copenhagen policeman bypassed the underworld (7)
- 25 Sticks present inside a document signed briefly (7)
- 26 Stranger in large car touring most of region (5)
- 27 Cheers much reduced parking in the end (6-3)

### DOWN

- 1 Strange hush on large eastern island (6)
- 2 Hospital to claim loudly for town in Yorkshire (9)
- 3 Dramas all over the place in this city (6)
- 4 Modern food shop spoken of in Indian city (3,5)
- 5 Roll on a barrel going around (5)
- 6 American flicks (8)
- 7 Kid on time in China? (3,3)
- 8 A supply disrupted gives trouble (5,2)
- 14 Awfully inane intro to Lennie Henry almost everybody's seen in a movie (5,4)
- 16 Two directions given to Royal Navy – that's the line in London (8)
- 17 Menu with a first-class claret ordered (1,2,5)
- 18 Unusually keen to drink? Do! (5-2)
- 19 Former French capital arouses strong feelings (6)
- 21 Nipper keeping each penny in container (3,3)
- 22 Green juniper lopped crudely (6)
- 23 Ravel trio including new opening (5)

**Clue of the week:** Casual firing range warning? (7) *The Times*



Name .....

Address .....

Tel no .....

Clue of the week answer: .....

### Solution to Crossword 1449

**ACROSS:** 7 Dosages 8 Halogen 10 Used to 11 Reasoned 12 Lie 13 Saluki 14 Erasures 16 Ploughman's lunch 19 Episodic 21 Robert 23 Ike 24 Bread bin 26 Scrimp 27 Mislaid 28 Rebound

**DOWN:** 1 Codswallop 2 Landau 3 Demolish 4 Panama 5 Honolulu 6 Were 9 Freelancing 15 Escarpment 17 Unstable 18 Stressed 20 Debris 22 Bartok 25 Raid

**Clue of the week:** Very tricky cryptic finished (8, first letter F)  
**Solution:** FIENDISH (anag.)

**The winners of 1449 are Chris and Claire Thomas from Swindon**

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Sudoku 993 (difficult)

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

**Solution to Sudoku 992**

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

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