Nonfiction reviews Fiction reviews The books ofmy life Families at the beach…. Be body confident By those who are P57 Blind date This is how we do it You be the judge AskAnnalisa Style & Body. Gardens Tim Dowling. Travel Unsung France Perigueux and beyond P72 Books ‘Was I starstruck? Yeah!’ Keanu Reeves and China Mieville on their literary bromance P43 Puzzles 78 SATURDAY The Guardian Kings Place 90 York Way London Nl 9GU Byline illustrations： Delphine Lee LIFESTYLE Thebigidea Edith Pritchett A week in V enn diagrams Horrifying yet gripping Breakaway causing irritation Dramatically more than was budgeted for Cost of 2030 offshore wind targets Tories who defect to Reform A hongnail Watching q pimple popper video Time taken for your partner to get ready Presidential andidates X debating Smart shot The best pictures taken on phones Chang Nianzu Playground, 2023 Shot on Xiaomi 13 Pro Shanghai native Chang Nianzu and his wife were visiting their local children’s playground with their four-year- old daughter, Chang Yuning, when he took this photograph. “The park is in Xuhui district, near the main football stadium. Shanghai is very colourful and clean, but for a hobbyist street photographer like me, it’s difficult to capture that. Sometimes there are other elements that interfere, like trees and parked bikes.” As Nianzu watched his daughter explore, he realised the light and colours would lend themselves to a good photograph. His composition was inspired by American photographer Lee Friedlander： “In some of his work he intentionally includes his shadow, so I imitated this with my own shadow in the yellow triangle.” Nianzu then waited patiently with his Xiaomi 13 Pro for someone to walk up the stairs and complete his shot. Suddenly, another little girl, about six or seven, dressed all in purple, appeared. “It suited the scene perfectly/' Nianzu says. He made minimal adjustments to the photo using the phone’s editing tools, leaving the colours untouched. “I think the set-up gives the viewer room for their imagination to wander, but I imagine the stairs representing the process of a child growing up. This little girl grows up in a colourful childhood and we adults are watching from behind the scenes. Happy moments like these deserve to be captured.” Grace Holliday Sign up for our Inside Saturday newsletter CUTTINGS Q&A5 Experience7 Dining across the divide...9 Flashback10 FEATURES How I fell back in love with food Meera Sodha on her breakdown and recovery P12 Search party Has Google gone bad? P16 In the shadow of a plant Living with nuclear power in France P20 A Jew like me By Tom Lamont P26 CULTURE ‘You have to be do-or-die’ Festival organisers on why they keep doing it P31 Honest playlist35 Stage36 Music.38 What to do this week....40 This product is made from sustainable managedforest and controlled sources. Printed by Walstead Group, Bicester The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 3 CONTENTS 20.07.24 ISSUE Ne 147 46 49 .52 .5S 60 61 62 63 64 66 69 s a y < M < 0 1 oh d LU —ll m o ^ ® H LlJ c)< d sihi Nvlayvno LdH l / z Ldn o z < > —1 LL1 ZDN V S 土山 > 0 0 - 7 s . / U Q Q UJJ S £ / p a ^ Hl/d LU

CUTTINGS Interview： Rosanna Greenstreet Iron Maiden's singer on surviving a plane engine fire over the Atlantic, doing a gig in wartime Sarajevo, and a scary pair oflips Qm Bruce Dickinson B orn in Nottinghamshire, Dickinson, 65, became lead singer of the band Iron Maiden in 1981. In 1982, The Number of the Beast became the first of their five albums to top the UK charts. In 2009, they won the best British live act Brit award and in 2011 they took the Grammy for best metal performance with their song El Dorado. This autumn Iron Maiden continue their 23rd world tour. Dickinson has released his seventh solo album, The Mandrake Project, and is currently touring Europe. He has three children and lives in London and Paris with his third wife. What is your greatest fear? Well, I’m not too happy about snakes. I also hate sand. It’s very inconvenient. What is your earliest memory? A pair of giant gelatinous red lips glistening with lipstick and smelling faintly of gin leaning over my pram. Fve been told I was so scared by the sight that I peed straight into my auntie’s mouth in sheer terror. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself? Procrastination. What was your most embarrassing moment? I once threw up on the shoes of one of my vocal heroes, the Deep Purple singer Ian Gillan. He sent me home in a taxi with a towel. Describe yourself in three words Hairy quantum hobbit. What makes you unhappy? Anyone unable to change their beliefs or opinions in the face of new facts. What do you most dislike about your appearance? I am quite resigned to it. I always thought I was a fat, ugly kid, but looking at old photos I realise I was not too bad looking after all. If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose? Integrity in public life. What is your most unappealing habit? I am untidy, I procrastinate, and I am reliably late. What scares you about getting older? I always work five years in advance - that way I am never surprised. Right now, for example, I am 70. Every year for the next five years will therefore be a cause for celebration. What is the worst thing anyone’s said to you? “What makes you think you are so special?” Would you choose fame or anonymity? Fame is a byproduct of my job, in much the same way that you could argue excrement is a byproduct of a Michelin-starred restaurant. Aside from a property, whafs the most expensive thing you’ve bought? A Cessna Golden Eagle eight-seater aircraft. I flew it across the Atlantic both ways and did two US tours and two European tours in it. I finally sold it and got a job as an airline pilot in which I was paid to fly, rather than the other way round. I threw up on the shoes of one of my heroes, Deep Purple's Ian Gillan. He sent me home in a taxi with a towel What was the best kiss of your life? It happens to me every day. What is the closest you’ve come to death? I’ve been asleep at the wheel on the Mil, had an engine fire over the Atlantic in a light aircraft, driven unprotected through an enemy firing zone to do a gig in wartime Sarajevo - the list goes on and on. But I did have stage 3 throat cancer and was cured by some fantastic UK medics. What keeps you awake at night? Runway 27R at Heathrow. What happens when we die? Death. If it’s happened already, I don’t remember it，but I must have been OK in a previous life because I didn’t come back as a prawn or, God forbid, a salmon in Scandinavia. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 5 LXJl y i d n ^ D S NHO「

CUTTINGS Experience I'm an 8lyear-old crash-test dummy As told to Heather Main I ’ve always enjoyed new experiences -1 suppose you could say Fm the adventurous type. In my younger days in London, I worked for a travel agent and was posted to Cape Town. I found the evenings alone there quite dull, so I signed up for a first-aid course. The instructor said I wouldn’t have to pay if I played the role of patient and let him demonstrate bandaging techniques on me. I agreed - I’m a fan of amateur dramatics. Back home in London, I put my skills to good use and volunteered for St John Ambulance. I attended its big first-aid competition and met the volunteers acting as patients. I discovered they were also involved in training for the emergency services, pretending to be casualties in mocked-up disasters. They were strategically positioned in car wrecks, derailed trains and various other emergency scenarios, and pretended to have sustained injuries. I thought it sounded thrilling, and signed up immediately. Forty years on, at 8l, Fve had more pretend life-threatening injuries than I care to remember. I’ve been shot, stabbed, run over, airlifted from a burning ship, and rescued from more than a thousand mangled vehicles by firefighters using cutting equipment. It’s incredibly rewarding work. The exercises are designed to be as real as possible without putting anyone in danger - we may have to pretend a ship is sinking, or a plane is on fire, but the cars we are rescued from are real wrecks from the scrapyard. We’re not officially called real-life crash-test dummies, but it’s a way to describe our work to the uninitiated. The Casualties Union charity, which I volunteer for, was founded to train the civil defence when they were pulling people from rubble during the blitz. Now the scenarios are very different, but the job is just as important. It’s vital for emergency services to train in as near-realistic scenarios as possible. If they practise using their skills on actors, rather than Why go to a bingo hall when I could be hoisted into a helicopter instead? mannequins, it’s easier for them when they’re thrown into chaos for real. Some of my fellow volunteers have medical backgrounds and have helped me understand how patients may look or act with different injuries. New recruits can feel self-conscious, but I’ve always enjoyed throwing myself into a part. The physical injuries also have to look convincing. My more experienced colleagues taught me how to perfect some realistic-looking injuries with makeup. Even though I know I’m never in any danger, the scenarios can get the adrenaline pumping. Recently I was on a boat as part of a counter-terrorism training exercise. Suddenly the military climbed onboard, masked and dripping with guns. It got my heart rate going, and drove home how terrifying it must be to be caught up in an actual emergency. I’m able to give important feedback, too. Once, I was playing the victim of a knifeman on a rampage inside the Channel tunnel, and had a convincing abdominal prosthetic - it looked as though my guts were hanging out. The paramedics used a drag-along stretcher to transport me to the tunneFs entrance. I could feel the friction, so I suggested they put a blanket between the person and the stretcher. The most rewarding exercise Fve done was on a basic first-aid course. I had a young man who had to treat me for a simulated heart attack. Three weeks later, he tracked me down to thank me - incredibly, his grandfather had suffered a cardiac arrest, and he was able to save him. That was a very special moment. I’m a senior instructor for the Casualties Union now. I love being able to pass my years of experience on to new recruits. I don’t think my age is any reason for me to slow down. If anything, my hobby keeps me young. I look after my health because I’m planning on doing this until I’m at least 100.1 recently went to a school reunion, and I told my old school friends I train firefighters in my spare time. “You lucky devil，” one of them laughed. Fll keep being cut out of cars as long as I’m physically able to climb into them. I may be nearly 82, but I don’t see why I should spend my evenings in a bingo hall when I could be being hoisted into a rescue helicopter. This is much more fun. Caroline Thomas Do you have an experience to share? Email experience@theguardian.com Portrait： Mark Chilvers The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 7

CUTTINGS Stephen, 61 - supports the energy/ transition and is against all private cars Dining across the divide Can breaking bread bridge political differences? Interview by Zoe Williams • Stuart，61，Staffordshire Occupation Works in a car dealership Voting record Labour in every election Amuse bouche Is a vinyl collector whose prize possessions are two original copies of Queen's A Day at the Races -one to listen to, one to keep pristine • Stephen，6l, Birmingham Occupation Retired drama teacher Voting record Normally tactically and left of centre. Really wants a change to everything about our electoral system Amuse bouche Has a podcast called Vita Anima in which his alter ego, Emanuel leBrocq, interviews people For starters Stephen My first impression of Stuart was really good. Not that it would have been bad if it had been somebody at the opposite end of the spectrum, but he wasn’t like that at all. Stuart We actually bumped into one another at the bar. He was a very sociable person and I enjoyed his company. Stephen Stuart didn’t drink and I don’t really drink. I mostly don’t eat any dead things either, though I occasionally eat fish. Stuart We both had fish and chips - it wasn’t an exciting choice, but we saw someone have some delivered to another table and it looked stunning. The big beef Stuart On sustainability, Stephen’s all for major pushing forward, trying to get everything right now, whereas I think we’re all being pushed too quickly. I think the electric car is going to be the most enormous white elephant. You look at where all the minerals come from to produce the batteries： that is a hidden scar on the landscape. The amount of poisons that are being thrown back into the ground is unbelievable. Stephen He came up with some very valid points why he was against electric cars： the costs； the extraction of the metals that are used in battery manufacture； and the fact that the companies making them are screwing working people and putting the price up and so on. Stuart I look at life logically. You consider the infrastructure, especially in London where you’ve got families living in high-rises - how the hell will they all charge their cars? My belief is that people at the top have vested interests in those electric vehicles. They’re benefiting from it financially. Stephen Fm a great advocate for mass Portrait： Andrew Fox Stuart, 61 - works in the motor industry and thinks we are being pushed too quickly on electric vehicles Want to dine across the divide? Scan here to apply transport, and I’m against all cars, really. Whether it’s electric or petrol or diesel, Fm just not a fan. So he’s against the transition and I believe in the transition, but not like this. It’s a wider issue about capitalism. I’m against this whole reliance on replacing something with something else that’s more or less the same. I’m against private car ownership. Why don’t we have a system where you can rent a car in a community hub? Sharing plate Stuart Stephen is of a similar age to me, and we talked about the 80s. A lot of my friends were gay, and we discussed how the Conservatives went so huge on homophobia and their advertising campaigns about Aids. I think they did exactly the same with Covid： they created this huge spectre when they should have channelled money into looking after vulnerable people and let reasonably fit people get on with life. Stephen I grew up through the Aids period and lost a lot of my friends. That brought us together； he was really horrified by how people were treated. You couldn’t really grieve. If you said you were going to a funeral, people would back off. I was lucky in that my parents were very supportive. That was the one silver lining in a pretty dire time. I think there’s a lot of guys my age who have PTSD from that. For afters Stuart We were in agreement about the Tories. Stephen is from a socialist background； he supports the Greens because Labour backtracked on its £28bn green efficiency plan. Stephen I’m not a diehard socialist, I’m probably a Marxist. Fll just take anything that challenges the Tory hegemony. I’d vote Lib Dem - it really depends who’s going to win the support of the people. Takeaways Stuart I wouldn’t say Stephen changed my views, but he got me to look at things from a different angle. My dial is still pretty much where it was. Stephen I’m performing in the play Charley’s Aunt and we’re doing a mini-tour of the Midlands. Stupidly I forgot the flyers, otherwise I would have liked to get Stuart to come along. Stephen and Stuart ate at The Old Joint Stock in Birmingham； oldjointstock.co.uk. Want to meet someone from across the divide? Go to theguardian.com/different-views The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 9 3 乂 < 0:0 >11 乂 M o z l y o d LLJd -IV N O i aav

CUTTINGS Flashback Zandra Rhodes： 'Freddie Mercury was wonderful but dressing Zsa Zsa Gabor was awful' Interview： Harriet Gib sone Main portrait： Pal Hansen Styling： Andie Redman 1976 In London, I didn't have a social lifee But 1970s New York was wild B orn in Chatham, Kent in 1940, Zandra Rhodes is a fashion and textile designer and founder of the Fashion and Textile Museum in London. Known for her bold, outlandish use of colours and prints, she has dressed royalty and pop culture’s most famous, from Princess Diana to Debbie Harry. Rhodes has appeared in Absolutely Fabulous, and won a Daytime Emmy award for costume design in 1979. Her memoir, Iconic, has just been published. Makeup artists are good at making you blossom, and my good friend Richard Sharah was wonderful at this. I am in a dress I designed after a trip I took across America in 1974 in a Volkswagen camper. It was gorgeous； and inspired my Cactus Cowboy collection. A wonderful period of my life. I first started dyeing my hair in 1973. When Vidal Sassoon brought out coloured wigs I gave them a try, but they pinched my head. Instead I realised I could colour it myself： it’s been green - like the colour of dried grass - pink and blue. I dyed it brown just once but it lasted two weeks as I found the experience so horribly embarrassing. Pink doesn’t require too much maintenance, so that’s why it’s stayed that colour. My mum, Beatrice, didn’t dress like anyone else. She had a passion for style and once worked as a pattern cutter for the couture brand, House ofWorth. She would collect me from school dressed to the nines. I’d say： “Please don’t come looking different from all the other mothers.” She always did. Once she sprayed her hair silver and then got a lacquer to set it. We were on a train and she kept saying： “My head keeps stinging.” It turns out she’d covered her head in fly spray. She was a lecturer at the Medway College of Art, so Fd get to try on dramatic clothes there, but wouldn’t dare wearing them in front of the other children at my school. I didn’t have many friends when I was young -1 was a very boring child； always hard at work. Everyone in our house was like that； always busy, in a rush. We weren’t a family who relaxed. Being called Zandra was always an embarrassment. Teachers thought it was a mistake in their register. They’d say： “There’s no such name!” Nevertheless, I loved school. Even when I was at home I was always painting or illustrating something. 10 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian While Mum was at her sewing machine, I’d be upstairs designing clothes for my doll, Jacqueline. The first was a multicoloured dress, hand stitched with striped bias binding. It was important that Jacqueline was always nicely presented. In the early 1960s, I studied at the Royal College of Art, and had been encouraged by my lecturers to try to sell my designs. The feedback I got from buyers was that my style was too bold compared with everything else at the time. I was making bright, colourful designs, an early print interpretation of pop art. I didn’t take the setbacks personally. My amazing mother always told me I would make it. The turning point in my life was when I went to America with my collection and showed it to [fashion editor] Diana Vreeland at American Vogue. She raved about it； the tide was turning in a new direction. After that, my whole life changed. Much of the 1970s were spent in New York, promoting my designs. I didn’t have a social life in London -1 was always in my studio - so to be suddenly part of this wild social scene was totally new. Where once I’d been so disciplined, I was at all-night raves or mad discos. I’d probably get in at lam, but that was still quite late for me, especially when I was up early working. It was an amazing experience to be at the Factory. Andy Warhol would be in his office, filled with Karl Lagerfeld’s extravagant furniture, and poets and artists were always milling around. I’d wear very dramatic makeup and had streaked hair with feathers tied on to the ends； a scarfaround my head. It was around this time when Richard took me to his friend, the interior designer Angelo Donghia’s studio. He saw me and said： “Well if you dress this exotically, I’d love to see your work.” He bought my textile designs, which I hadn’t been selling in the UK. It was like riding high on a wave. I must have been in my mid-30s when Diana Ross threatened to crush me under her garage door. I had been introduced to her previously while in London, and wearing my best clothes. A year later I was in LA, and driving along with a friend, when she said： “Look，thafs Diana Ross getting out of a car into her house. You know her! Go and say hello!” Diana took one look at this vision of a woman with green hair, like some kind of hippy, and said： “If you come one step nearer I will shut this door down on you.” I rushed back

i | j I I have treatment for cancer every few weeks. Other than that, 乙I nothing has changed. I've still got a touch of exotic into the car. Friends woke me up the next day to tell me that Diana had realised it was me, found out where I was staying, and had rung in the middle of the night to say she wanted to come over for breakfast. She arrived and had coffee and a snack. It was a very funny experience. My meeting with Freddie Mercury was quite wonderful. It was 1974, and he and Brian May were due to visit me in my studio. Fd never heard of Queen, but Freddie was very shy and lovely； not like an unapproachable rock god. He told me he wanted to look like a showman, and I picked out a white pleated bridal top that I thought may suit him. It was made in heavy ivory silk and had giant butterfly sleeves. I went on to make a custom design of the top and he wore it when Queen performed later that year. While I was never intimidated by any star, I did have the awful experience of dressing Zsa Zsa Gabor. She was like a kitten when you put the clothes on her, but once the men disappeared out of the room she’d say： “I hate this dress.” I met her many years later and asked if she’d given all my dresses away to her daughter and she said： “No, darling, I love them so much.” I thought： “What about what you put me through? You had my staff in tears.” It was all very strange. Right at the beginning of Covid, my great friend, the artist Andrew Logan was in my home. He said： “Zandy， you never do yoga. Why don’t you try?” We lay on the floor and he told me to breathe deeply. I did as he said, and felt as if my stomach was full, even though I hadn’t eaten all day. It turned out I had a 13.5cm growth in my bile duct and I was given six months to live. I told three people about my cancer； my main concern was that I wouldn’t be able to get all of my work done. About nine months later, the growth disappeared. I still have treatment every few weeks； and I don’t breathe as well as I used to. Other than that, nothing has changed. I like to think Fve still got a touch of exotic about me，although I don’t wear my own dress designs often. When I am in the studio I am in a pair of old trousers, an old T-shirt, maybe a brooch. I don’t want distractions； to rip or get paint on something beautif ul. I just want to get back to work. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 11 LdH u Ld Ldm NAgoa h lajo v s i lija i h o a v •d L£J NNI>ls o i n i s o qi n LlJ> l v s 一 NOSSN VHO「SCINI— I M CX:I V H

I fell out oflove with food. I didn’t want to shop, I didn’t want to cook. I ate for necessity, not pleasure. The ends ofa loafofbread. An apple. A glass ofoat milk. Whatever leftovers were in the fridge. It wasn’t just food； everything around me had transformed into shades of monochrome. I couldn’t get out of bed most days, yet I couldn’t sleep. I was wired, tired and scrolling. I didn’t care much for whether the morning turned to night. This loss left me feeling empty. Food was how I spent my time and paid my bills. It was the language I spoke fluently. Food was how I navigated my emotions and memory, and how I tapped into my past, bringing to life a family historythat had existed in countries beyond England； in India and Africa before I was born. I willed the emptiness to go away, but it refused to budge. It went on for weeks and then months. A year later, I realised that I needed to find a wayback and fast - for myself, and for the people around me. I’d like to say there was a single, neat reason for my breakdown but, like life, the truth is messy. Its origin canbe traced back decades； to the start of my existence. But it reached a climax during the pandemic, after various stresses had accumulated. Like so many working parents, I was overwhelmed by deadlines and motherhood. I was looking after my six-month-old baby and my parents, who were both very vulnerable, and my cousin had died unexpectedly, aged 30. I was constantly lethargic. But who wasn’t tired in 2021? I kept on going, telling no one and ignoring my body’s pleas to slow down. Even as a child, I never stopped. Neither did my parents, or theirs. They worked hard： as political refugees from Uganda, they had experienced poverty first-hand. By the time I arrived, my parents5 mission 14 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian was to show me ambition and opportunity. They made me feel as ifl could do anything with my life； the most prized gift you could ever give to a child, apart from love. My parents had lofty ambitions for me, but being a cook was never one of them - even if Mum was an exceptional one. After school, she would kick me out of the kitchen. “Go and do your homework，” she would say. “There’ll be plenty of time to worry about cooking later.” Mum created beautiful food for us day in, day out - like her freshly made chapatis. The stone-ground wholewheat flour charring on the tawa remains one of my favourite smells, as is the aroma of her daily dal. I could eat her spinach and paneer or her aubergine curry by the bucket-load. She showed her love through food and how simple ingredients can be transformed into magic. Education was paramount in our family, and the learning didn’t stop once I had left the school gates： instead of a chocolate egg at Easter, I was more likely to be given a copy of The Children’s Encyclopaedia Britannica. After school, my parents would send me across the road to our neighbour’s house, where Raymond, a retired English teacher, would explain to me about syntax and semantics. During the holidays, I was told to pursue projects on subjects I found interesting, such as astronomy, so that I could submit them to school independently. I don’t begrudge my parents for this at all： they wanted me to be safe and secure because ofthe trauma and hardship they had endured. As I got older, there was a lot of pressure to become a lawyer or a doctor - a success, so that I wouldn’t need to worry about money like the previous generation had. When my grandfather, a successful Indian businessman, arrived in Scunthorpe in 1972, he refused government handouts and took a job as a lorry driver at the steelworks. With one suitcase between my grandparents, mother and her two brothers, they had arrived in Lincolnshire with £50 to start a new life. They didn’t see this as a problem： the whole Gujarati community is very entrepreneurial. They brushed themselves down and just got on with life and work. And so did I. After graduating, I worked voraciously. My plan to become a management consultant didn’t work out, so I tried my hand at a few different things. I founded one ofthe first online dating agencies, called Fancy An Indian. To facilitate that, I was doing shifts in a cocktail bar and at a call centre, I helped to set up an arts organisation called Sing London, where we put ping-pong tables and pianos on the streets in a bid to make them friendlier places. Then I went to work at Innocent Drinks, when they were a team of just 50. There were no boundaries when it came to work, and I threw myself into every profession； working late and hard, eager to make a success of everything I turned my hand to. I was known as the person who could pull anything out ofthe bag； so I took it personally when I got made redundant from Innocent. I fell into a depression and stopped socialising. It was impossible for me to separate my identity from my career. What would I say if someone asked what I did for a living? Who was I without my work? Thankfully, my new venture as a food writer took off. It all started with a collection of my family's recipes, Made in India. I created that book so I could keep a record of recipes that had been passed down from woman to woman for generations in our family kitchen. It was a beautif ul experience that helped me navigate beingbiculturaL The book was so successful that I wrote another, then was offered a column, then anotherbook. It was thrilling to do well, and I loved experimenting and learning about how ingredients behaved. I travelled to India, and discovered that behind every recipe was another family’s story. Food wasn?t just food. It is not just how we nourish ourselves - it’s economics, geography, memory, tradition and history. Soon, I was going to sleep dreaming about recipes. Fd wake up at 6am to get started for the day，and Hugh, my husband, would come home and ask if Fd moved from the kitchen since he left for work. It was an unhealthy way to live, but the harder I drove myself, the more I could see it paying off. The formula worked. A decade later，things started to change. The recipes I was writing weren’t ones written out of love，or for my family. Food became work, work was achievement. I would start each day with an intense desire to create something. Until one morning, it stopped. About six months after my second child, Yogi, was born，I woke up and couldn’t get out of bed. I was so tired that I struggled to get down the stairs. It felt as though my mind and body were malfunctioning and I was in shutdown mode. Then there were panic attacks. One happened at a restaurant, something I initially put down to post- Covid anxiety. Whenever I went somewhere, I’d have to suddenly leave. I felt discombobulated and was prone to dissociative episodes. My short-term memory was shot； I couldn’t remember a conversation I’d just had. I kept adiaryduringthistime. One entry reads： aI am desperate to feel joy and life coursing through my veins again.” I longed for the variety of human emotion, as my capacity to feel anything had narrowed completely. That worried me because I am a very sensory person； my work - and life - depends on it. At no point did I feel as if I wanted to end it all, but my identity had shifted into something unrecognisable. I cried a lot. I wasn’t talking to friends about it as I didn’t know how to explain what I was going through. I was the woman who could pull anything out of the bag. What was happening? The sleeplessness was agonising, so I went to the doctors. They prescribed melatonin and said I was experiencing chronic stress. Hugh suggested that what

Clockwise from above： Meera Sodhars parents Raj and Nita； Meera on her sixth birthday； with her father I was going through might be a little deeper than just exhaustion, so I started seeing a therapist. Sometimes after the sessions, Hugh would find me shaking on the sofa. I couldn’t cope. I couldn’t do normal things. I was trying to fend off work and doing the bare minimum, but even then, I was doing it really badly. Food just wasn’t a priority in my life any more. If Hugh didn’t cook, I wouldn5t eat, or I’d have just enough to keep mybodyticking over. In my experience, Indians don’t tend to express their emotions with words, and, just like my mum, I articulated my love through food. What message was I sending to my children ifl couldn5t cook for them? One day, Hugh, who had been keeping our two young daughters and me afloat while somehow doing his own high-pressure job, admitted that he was starting to crack under the weight of it all. “I would just really love it if you could cook a meal for me，” he said. It was a simple request； but the emotional equivalent ofhim saying： “Help me, love me, take care of me.” Hearing someone I love admit that they were struggling caused an automatic shift. As a kneejerk reaction, I stepped back into the kitchen, grabbing a pan and looking in the store cupboard. I intuitively picked up the red lentils. I found an onion, some coconut milk, and lemongrass and lime leaves in the freezer. Hugh ran out to a local Pakistani shop to pick up fresh naans, and I began to cook again； a simple Malaysian dal, similar to one we had eaten together in the markets in Singapore. We ate this dal in relative silence, but we both knew it was a special moment. I could see how much it meant to him, just doing this one thing. He had been starved of everything - love, care, attention and food. By this simple gesture, I was beginning to resurface. The next day，I started to cook with one new rule： I would only make food for pleasure, not work. I wanted to become more aware of my mood and feelings, and to figure out what I wanted to eat, to be led by my stomach alone. Slowly but surely，like kindling catching, I started to feel the fire in my belly again. If the food was good, I’d record it in an old orange notebook, and next to each recipe Fd write the date and what had happened that day. The book filled up fast, and as it did I realised I was drawn to one meal above the others： dinner. Unlike breakfast, which was usually toast at the kitchen counter, or lunch, constrained within the working day, our evening meal became the most important of our family life. I found that just thinking HEARING SOMEONE I LOVE ADMIT THEY WERE STRUGGLING CAUSED A SHIFT. I STEPPED BACK INTO THE KITCHEN AND GRABBED A PAH about that meal and planning it had the power to ground me and pick me up after a bad day. IfHugh, the girls and I had been apart, dinner was a chance for us to come together again. Whether it was my eldest daughter, Arya, shouting about how someone had farted in maths class or about a plot twist in Unicorn Academy, or just a chance to reflect and celebrate the day, dinner became a comforting, profound event. The making of the meals, step by step, from A to B, seemed to be a button I could push. Cooking was something I felt entirely in control of - it was meditative and still； unlike the chaos of that previous year. I didn't want to be creative initially, so I made foods that I found uncomplicated, comfortingand delicious, like koshari, an Egyptian rice and pasta dish. I made my mum’s aubergine curry, slow-cooked sweetcorn and spinach saag. There was a thick homely stew of borlotti beans, chopped salad and tahini. I made a lot of eggs. Omelettes and egg fried rice. One-pot dishes, too, like “Ben Benton strikes again”，a braised aubergine and celery dish named after the cook and writer friend who devised it. Being able to throw ingredients into a pot, one after another, and stare at it until it alchemised into something new was a gentle and magical process. A lot of these were meals I could make with my eyes closed, meals that would allow me to disengage so I could focus on the kids when they came back from school and listen to them talk. It kickstarted a period of understanding who I was and what I wanted. This is really how the story ends. I did fall out of love with food, but I have fallen back in love with it by following my stomach, by taking the pressure off，by cooking for friends and family, not for work or social media, or incremental gains, but for pleasure, and realising how muchjoyand togetherness simply cooking for loved ones can bring. This is the reason I fell in love with food and cooking in the first place. Because of the sacrifice my parents made for me, I had imposed on myself a sense that I needed to repay them, to be a success. As a result, I have very rarely asked myself what I really want. What do I need now? That has been one of the biggest learnings I have taken from this breakdown. Now, instead of immersing myself in deadlines, I see my friends. I used to think I had to prove myself as a good cook and I’d try to make fancy food for guests. I don’t serve starters now, I just get out my favourite crisps - sweet chilli with a sour cream dip - or bung some frozen dumplings in a frying pan. It’s no longer this horrible rush where I tidy the entire house and sanitise everything. I can focus on the people rather than the job ahead. Exercise is also an amazing tool for my mental stability. Before, I didn’t have time to do yoga or go for a run； now I make sure those things are permanent fixtures ofmy calendar. Hugh and I go out once a week. We walk and talk, and share a bottle ofwine. I used to write a one-year plan and organise my life around goals and achievements, but I no longer do that. Fm comfortable with having no plan or milestones. No one on their deathbed wishes that they worked more. But everyone, I bet, wishes that they had travelled more； that they’d had more dinners with loved ones. In many ways I am happy that I reached breaking point. Ifl hadn’t, I would have kept going； never in the present, never able to galvanise myself to change, to put myselfback together, one dinner at a time 參 As told to Harriet Gibsone Dinner： 120 Vegan and Vegetarian Recipes for the Most Important Meal of the Day by Meera Sodha ispublished by Fig Tree on l August at £27. To order a copy for £23-76go toguardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply. Read recipes from Dinner in Feast next week，with exclusive extra recipes in the new app. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 15 vhqos v d LXJ LXJ^ d o A S LLJi Qrn o 〕 LLD v d S Hl NoiAV— I 〕 o r = d n Ld> < ^ a N < d < H a o o M N LLJ LLJ QrD < a \_Jl < s \ L 5 —l> >-5 H Lds : S LXJ9 V 0Ls z)o A lxld d

life Google... » ... IS why is Google so rubbish these days? why is Google too big to fail? why is Google often wrong? why is Google so dominant? r It Search I’m Feelinq Luckv W H U 4 J M '/3 t ‘ a h w H H J r • a h w H H J r • •• ・丨 I ・ V I I V \*l <lr : j »■• ■ • I • b : -- ■ . ・ A n v H H tii t l tf ■■ ■ mt \* ・ I ■ a - h r I t • ♦ 豢 » • 黐 \_ 費 • 齣 \* • • • ♦ ♦ - 曾 • 麵 • • • • e • r ” ：：n r: H M U : “ n - »•4 B F X < J J 4 Ut f B C F — i —frul \_ - — • • \* < T 4 4 i f t -y t ■ ■ W B B B C T r — -- 1 1 • - I J H M m f t l . 4 4 d u n t t p F • — i u • 1 4 4 善 o w 吻 J M ‘蘑 • 參 1 > I i A M W ^ L d r 4 J n v B U F L E r F T 4 4 W M W M K 鱭 h \_ • 1 K M — , 1 1 — t W M M R P i 备 I — — . B U V B m p t 1 1 1 — I n B f l f l s r — w u t r u rn jMf i • \* 4 4 4 • 皺 z lr J 4 M : J I 彳嫌纊 > 艚 • 一 \_ \_ ■ I »<4 - III 曇 it, i 驀曇碱 a • i n I J 3 • 1 » ->T - • ■ ■ , \_ - — UM I 疆 Iql ll TB | 墨響 ■ \_ > l a 黷碧 ma ■ \_ ■ ■4 - g h 2 16 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian

I DIDN’T KNOW I WAS DEAD until I saw it on Google. When I searched my name, there it was： a picture of my smiling face next to the text “Tom Faber was a physicist and publisher, and he was a university lecturer at Cambridge for 35 years”. Apparently I died on 27 July 2004, aged 77. This was news to me. The problem was the picture. When you search the name of a notable person, Google may create what it calls a "knowledge panel”，a little box with basic information taken from Wikipedia. Somewhere along the way， the algorithm had confused pictures of my face with the biography of another man who shared my name. According to his obituary, he was “a distinguished physicist with a literary hinterland”. Google provides a feedback form to resolve this type ofbug. I filled it in several times, but it made no difference. I’m not the only one who has been struggling with Google recently. Many users are saying its principal product, its search engine, isn’t working as well as it should. They claim the ingenious vehicle that has enabled us to navigate the internet’s infinite scroll of information is beginning to rust and decay. Thafs not to mention the company’s endless court battles with rival companies and world governments, or the rise of ChatGPT, which many tout as a search engine killer； even Bill Gates said last year that once a company perfects the Al assistant or “personal agent”，“you will never go to a search site again”. Yet it’s hard to imagine anything taking Google’s place. Last year it turned 25, and Alphabet, its parent company, currently ranks as the fourth most valuable in the world, worth more than $2tn (£l.5tn). Google has a whopping 90% share of the global search market. More than a tool, it’s practically infrastructure； the connective tissue that is fundamental to how we find information online. This gives the company enormous power over politics, social attitudes and the fortunes of countless businesses - anyone and anything, in fact, that relies on the eyeballs of the internet to operate. Some say Google is too big to fail. It doesn’t take a distinguished physicist with a literary hinterland to see that right now Google search looks both deeply vulnerable and totally unstoppable. How can we be sure the company really has our interests at heart? And can we still trust it to tell us the truth? THE STORY OF GOOGLE reads like the stereotypical tech company origin myth. A couple of computergeeks, Sergey Brin and Larry Page, started a business in a garage in the late 90s and built it into one of the world’s richest companies. At the time the web was growing fast and a few early search engines were trying to organise the chaos. Page and Brin’s bright idea was to sort webpages not just by their relevance to a search query, but also by the qualityof their information. This system, PageRank, prioritised webpages based on how many other pages linked to them. The underlying concept, borrowed from academia, was that if many people linked to a specific source, then it must have high-quality information. It worked. Coupled with Google’s clean, simple interface ofa text box and a handful ofblue links, the site felt like magic. ''Everybody could see then that Google's results were far better than the others5. That was the basis of every thing，’’ says Dirk Lewandowski, interim professor ofdata science at the University of Duisburg- Essen, who has studied search engines for 20 years. Google quickly garnered a great deal of trust and goodwill. Its mission to “organise the world’s information” was inspiring. If you wanted to know something, you’d ask Google. Most ofthe time, it would deliver the answer you sought. Gradually, the other search engines died off. Search became synonymous with Google, and “Google” became a verb, and began to expand beyond text to images and video, even mapping the physical world with Google Maps and Street View. Success generated more success, and Google captured vast amounts of data on its users that it employed to improve search algorithms. The company realised that this data could be valuable. With its search engine, it was capturing users5 thoughts, desires, their innermost questions. Google used this information to reinvent the advertising industry. Cory Doctorow, an author, activist and mordant critic of big tech, explains the company’s ad system like this： “Say I have an 18- to 34-year-old manchild in central London who’s got an Xbox and has been searching for information about gonorrhoea. Who will pay to advertise to this person? Advertisers or bots bid for placement - and the winners serve an ad to you.” Many of Google’s products besides search, from YouTube to Maps, collect data on users, which enables personalisation of your ads - this model is the foundational example ofwhat technology commentator Shoshana Zuboffhas called "surveillance capitalism”. Ads became big business for Google. Last year its parent company, Alphabet, earned 77% of its revenue from them - thafs $237.85bn. Along the way, the company accrued not just economic power, but also social and political power. Rosie Graham, a lecturer in contemporary literature and the digital at the University of Birmingham, says we don’t just ask Google for information, but also for “ways to live our lives”. When we look for answers to social, religious or political questions, Google judges who are the trusted voices, and who we should not hear from. “Google has the power to change the way we think about things，” Graham says. “It acts like it’s just another company, but it’s not. It influences countries' elections. It has a huge stake in whafs profitable, what jobs can exist ... in many ways it’s more powerful than governments. Gone are the times when it can be this small company that’s all cutesy and shoestring.” Somewhere along its path to success, Google lost the public goodwill it earned in its early days. Once, its playful motto, “Don't be evil”，featured prominently in its code of conduct. In 2018, it was quietly downgraded. Has Google search got worse? And if so, what does that look like? Imagine you used to go to your local library and, when you asked fora book, it was produced immediately. Now, when you ask for that same book, the librarian tries to sell you a magazine subscription, waves about some different books they say other people like, then finally produces a big stack of tomes with your desired book wedged awkwardly in the middle. You might have an opinion about this change in service. This is the portrait detractors paint of the current state ofGoogle search. Doctorow, for one, calls the most recent results “garbage”. Former Google employees have posted scathing articles arguing that the company is floundering. Yet every day, billions ofpeople use the search engine, and it’s a safe bet that many of them think it works just fine. How is it that some people believe this essential internet infrastructure is circling the drain while others haven’t noticed any change? It can be hard to say anything definitive about search result quality, because each person’s experience is so different. If two people Google the same sentence, they will get For decades now, all across the world, anyone who's wanted to know everything about anything has asked Google. But is its ubiquitous search engine losing its edge - and, as Al steers the online economy into uncharted waters, can we still trust it to tell us the truth? Tom Faber investigates Illustrations： Justin Metz The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 17

different results based on all manner of variables. Meanwhile, Google constantly tweaks the algorithm. Still, critics do have specific reasons for saying the service is going downhill. Google search is good only as long as it can serve up high-quality information, and many claim it no longer does so reliably. They often blame this on Google’s inability to combat spammers and the much-maligned search engine optimisation (SEO) industry. SEO companies aim to make websites appear more highly in Google search rankings to help their businesses. But this can lead to degradation in site quality, as if content is tailored only to please Google's algorithms. Take recipe pages. When searching for cooking instructions, you’d probably want to see them displayed concisely at the top of the page, yet most food blogs bury recipes beneath a long anecdote. Food writers do this because they believe Google ranks this format highly. But readers resent it. On the spammier fringes is what’s known as “black hat” SEO, bad actors whouse techniques with fabulously evil names such as “domain squatting”，''reputation abuse’’，“obituary spam”，"keyword swarming” or “parasite hosting” to bring their content to the top of Google’s search results and turn a quick buck. Spam pages usually have little meaningful content and are aggressively monetised, hosting intrusive ads to profit from each visitor’s click. A recent study claims that Google does indeed have a big spam problem, but adds that other search engines face the same issues. Google and the spammers are locked in a never-ending battle. The spammers come up with a new technique, Google tweaks the algorithm to stop it working, then the spammers come up with something else. Google’s vice- president of search, Pandu Nayak, describes the dynamic as a “spy v spy situation”. Today the internet is facing the looming threat of a new wave of Al-generated spam, which threatens to overwhelm search engines. EVEN WHEN THE LINKS returned by a Google search are of high quality, the other criticism is that it’s hard to find them among the clutter. Where the company once sought to send users onwards to relevant links as quickly as possible, in recent years it has started answering more questions within the Google search interface itself-so if you're trying to find out something about sports scores, the weather or film showtimes, solve a mathematical equation, or perhaps find out the key publications of a certain distinguished physicist, Google will provide that information in a little box for you, without you needing to click any links. Sometimes all these little boxes get in the way of the answer you’re trying to find. I just typed in “best smartphone 2024” and was shown, at the top, a carousel of shopping opportunities, followed by four links, then a panel of questions that “people also ask” with vaguely related queries (“Which phones last the longest years?”)， then some YouTube videos, five more links, then more related queries and a further shopping carousel. The links I was actually seeking were buried by clutter. It’s a far cry from the sleek, minimal interface of early Google. Sometimes, Google will populate boxes with information gleaned from the internet that turns out to be incorrect. Besides calling me a dead physicist, these info boxes have claimed that Barack Obama was the king of America, and asserted that Kannada, the official language of the Indian state ofKarnataka, was the ugliest language in the country - Google had to issue an official apology for that one. It didn’t take me long to find an inaccurate response. On the third random 18 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian question I typed in, “How long is Waterloo Bridge?”，a box came up with the confident answer “2,456ft” (748 metres). It was only when I clicked through to Wikipedia that I saw this figure was in fact the length of the first Waterloo Bridge, which was demolished in the 1930s. The current bridge is just 1,230ft (370 metres) long. Google says users find the additional panels useful. Critics argue that it is trying to extract as much revenue as possible from users by keeping them within the Google ecosystem to the detriment of the user experience. Early on, Google’s founders realised that commercial incentives might compromise the integrity of search results. In a 1998 student paper, Brin and Page wrote that ad-funded search engines would be ''inherently biased towards the advertisers and away from the needs of consumers”. Yet Google started displaying ads anyway because, as one academic told me，this is the only good way to monetise search. I spoke with representatives of the competing search and answer engines Kagi, DuckDuckGo and Perplexity, all ofwhom frame this issue as a misalignment in Google’s company incentives. They say Google makes design and business choices to earn revenue for advertisers and shareholders at the cost of search user experience. When I put this critique to Google’s Nayak, he dismisses it as “an easy narrative” and continues, “Since the beginning of Google, there has been a clear separation between organic search [eg regular results] and ads... we make sure that the ad side of the house does not affect search? When Iask whether Google search results are getting worse, he repeatedly makes the same point： the fact that Google has a 90% market share in search shows its product works well. “If the search experience was not good, I have every confidence people would not use it.” Is there a reason people might use Google search even if it weren't a great experience? The US Department of Justice (DoJ) recently gave its closing statements in a historic legal case against Google, which the Financial Times called “the most significant antitrust trial in 25 years”. The DoJ’s argument is that Google uses its wealth to operate anti-competitively as an illegal monopoly, principally by paying other tech companies to be the default search engine on their devices. Naturally, Google argues that people use its search engine because it’s the best. But if thafs the case, why did it need to pay Apple $20bn in 2022 alone to be the default search engine across its phones and computers? The case is likely to conclude before the end of the year. Google’s biggest competitor, Microsoffs Bing, has only about 3% ofthe global search market. A number of other startups scrape fractions ofi%, many with their own spin on the search engine formula： Perplexity offers written-through answers to questions, Kagi operates a paid subscription model with no ads, DuckDuckGo focuses on protecting data privacy. All three say it’s impossible to truly compete with Google right now. Aravind Srinivas, chiefexecutive of Perplexity, says, ''Competing with Google is a no-fly zone. They’re just too big，they dominate, have all the best technology and a lot of money. They can just scorch you to death by offering whatever you’re offering for free.” Does it really matter whether there is competition to Google’s search engine? Doctorow believes it does. He coined the memorable term “enshittification” to explain the state ofbig tech companies in the modern age： “Here is how platforms die： first, they are good to their users； then they abuse their users to make things better for their business customers； finally, they abuse those business customers to claw back all the value for themselves. Then, they die.” He calls Google “the poster-child for enshittification”. Doctorow says algorithmic systems are particularly vulnerable to this, because their workings are opaque to users and easy to quietly tweak. Who knows why you see what you see at the top of your Google search results, Instagram feed or TikTok For You page? Is it because it?s judged tobethebest content for you, or because it?s what the platform thinks will make it the most money? “That’s why it’s so tempting for companies to enshittify them/^ Doctorow says. “They’rejustyoloing it and saying, 'Well, fuck it, we’re just going to make all the things at the top of your feed garbage, because we’re too big to care.’” Referencing a comment made by Lina Khan, chair of the US Federal Trade Commission, he adds, ''Companies become too big to fail, then too big tojail, then too big to care. Google is too big to care.” The last stage of the enshittification doctrine is that a platform dies. Is this going to happen to Google? Rosie Graham thinks it’s inevitable, at some point. She points out howX, formerlyTwitter, faded in relevance practically overnight after Elon Musk took over. aNo company lasts for ever,” she says. “There are all sorts of organisations that had huge global influence and power that we don’t have any more - think about the East India Company. It’s not a matter of (fGoogle will be influential for ever, it’s a question of when Google will be replaced?" Not everyone agrees the search engine is getting worse. Of the dozen academics and industry professionals I interviewed for this piece, half said they didn’t think search quality was declining. Several pointed out people have been eagerly predicting Google’s death for years -there’s even a Wikipedia page called "Predictions of the end of Google” with examples dating back to 2007. Lewandowski says/'Therehavealwaysbeen complaints about low-quality results and the interface getting more cluttered. But in the end, it’s basically the same.” Perhaps what is really bothering people is that the internet as a whole feels, in 2024, like a worse place to be. Those who grew up on the web of the late 90s and early 00s might remember openness, community and free thinking. Today, we’re probably more likely to associate the internet with anxiety, loneliness and stress. Maybe we miss the time when the internet felt more human. This may explain why many people searching for information look to Reddit rather than Google. That huge, chaotic forum feels like one of the last truly human places on the internet, where you can get somebody else’s honest opinion in all its weirdness, untainted by murkybrand associations or affiliate links. Yet even if it?s true that the internet has declined, that doesn’t let Google totally off the hook. Its search engine doesn’t just organise information on the web, it actively shapes it. If the web is a worse place today, if it’s over-commercialised and full of low-quality content, if journalism platforms struggle to make money from good writing and are reduced to clickbait and affiliate links, that’s partly Google’s fault. aGooglehasneverreallyunderstoodthe responsibility it’s got to ensure publishers can continue to publish content without needing to over-commercialise in horrifying ways，” says Simon Schnieders, chief executive of the SEO company Blue Array. “They really need to point the finger at themselves and why they created this beast in the first place.” AS IF THE SEARCH QUESTION wasn’t tricky enough, today many people are predicting that the arrival ofnew Al technologies is going to change everything. Since

IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION HOW MANY ROCKS SHOULD I EAT?' GOOGLE PRESENTED THIS Al OVERVIEW: IATNG AT LEAST ONE SMALL ROCK PER DAY IS RECOMMENDED BECAUSE ROCKS CONTAIN MINERALS 删 VITAMINS' the launch of ChatGPT, technologists have wondered whether Al assistants will one day take the place of search engines. ChatGPT is a product of OpenAI, which is in partnership with Microsoft, operator ofBing. Last year Microsoft announced it would integrate Al answers into its search engine results, with its chief executive, Satya Nadella, calling it “a new day in search”. At its latest conference, Google seemed to be rushing to respond to this threat when it announced a suite of new Al tools. The company has been using Al behind the scenes to improve its search and algorithms for years, but with the launch of the new “Al Overviews” feature, which it has already started rolling out and plans to make available to more than l billion users by the end of the year, it will put the technology front and centre. With this feature, Google search will respond to certain queries with a text box above the usual links, providing a written-through summary of information from various websites. The slogan the company keeps repeating around this is “Let Google do the Googling for you”. Responses have been mixed. Google says in internal tests people found the feature useful. They claim it’s good for queries that require a number of specific variables - say you’re trying to find a place your family can eat in Paris that does vegan food, is open at 7am and is within walking distance of a Metro station. Such questions, which might previously have required io minutes of clicking around on numerous searches, canbe done in seconds by Al (ChatGPT is also pretty good on this stuff). But, of course, the internet immediately seized on the feature and found that, in response to certain queries, it produced hilarious, inaccurate and sometimes dangerous answers. In response to the question “How many rocks should I eat?”，Google presented this Al Overview： "According to UC Berkeley geologists, eating at least one small rockper day is recommended because rocks contain minerals and vitamins that are important for digestive health.” Meanwhile, someone who asked about “cheese not sticking to pizza” was recommended to “add about 1/8 cup of non-toxic glue to the sauce to give it more tackiness”. Naturally, it didn't take long for somebody to make and eat the glue pizza. The erroneous information came from obviously dubious sources. Eating rocks was suggested by an article on satirical site the Onion, while the glue pizza idea was a post by “Fucksmith” on Reddit ll years ago. Google was roundly mocked online and responded with a blog post essentially saying that these were growing pains and that the product would improve. The new direction heralded by ChatGPT and Al Overviews is to a world in which we no longer search for answers ourselves, but rather receive a single, supposedly balanced answer that has been pre­ chewed by an algorithm. "Summarisation, or the dumbing down of search, is a bad thing for society in general，” Schnieders argues. “It’s important to get a range of diverse perspectives from search, from your own trusted or new sources, practise critical thinking and form your own opinions. Al Overviews claims to do this but it’s too much of a black box to be trusted.” Yet the biggest concern around Al Overviews came not from users who had cheese sliding off their pizzas, but from writers and publishers online. They're worried that if Google summarises the information from their websites and delivers it to users, then those users will have no reasons to visit the sites, depriving them of the traffic necessary to fund more content creation. This question has sent the media into a tailspin. Nilay Patel, editor-in-chief of American technology news website the Verge, said Al Overviews would “change the web as we know it”，while the influential tech reporter Casey Newton said Google had ''essentially put the web into a state of managed decline”. Reports have predicted that publishers could see their search traffic fall anywhere between 25% and 60% as a result of AI. If even a fraction of this is true, it could have enormous consequences for the already squeezed media landscape. Various small publishers have accused Google ofkilling their businesses. When I ask Hema Budaraju, Google’s senior director ofproduct management for search, whether Google has a responsibility to ensure a healthy web ecosystem, she answers with''a very direct, strong yes?\ She emphasises Google’s ''commitment to the web” and “ensuring we have a thriving ecosystem”. “As we introduce our generative capabilities, connecting people to the web is central to our approach，’’ she says. I’m inclined to believe this is Google’s intention. It’s not in its long-term interest for the internet's information economy to collapse. Ifmedia platforms can no longer afford to produce high-quality content, then Google’s AI Overviews will have nothing left to summarise. Eventually, people would stop using Google search. DURING A VISIT TO one of Google?s London offices, I told a member of the communications team that I had been inspired to look into the state of Google search by the broken knowledge panel saying I was a dead physicist. When I later spoke to Nayak, I decided to ask him how I could detach my face from the other Tom Faber. Before I’d finished my sentence, the communications person pinged into the chat, saying the issue had been fixed. I adjusted my question： maybe it’s been fixed for me because ofhaving a direct line to Google, but how would someone resolve this if they didn’t have strings to pull? Nayak apologised, saying the panels were created automatically using algorithms and sometimes they messed up： “These are the kinds of things we’re constantly improving.” He went on to insist that, on issues like this, Google’s “honest results policy puts everyone on the same playing field’’，so it had nothing to do with me having contacts at Google. Immediately after, the call was ended abruptly for going over time. When I followed up, I was told someone from the team had submitted a feedback form using the public channels, just like anyone else might, and this resulted in it getting fixed. This was perplexing. It seemed more than a coincidence that, after years of trying to fix the problemmyselfbysubmitting feedback forms Jt would finally change weeks after mentioning it to a Google employee, and that this change would be unrelated to that conversation. But at least the issue was fixed. For now, search engines aren’t going anywhere. “I think search is inevitable，” Doctorow says, but adds that we’ll always want human voices to cut through the noise and deliver curated sources of information. “We’re still going to have experts, reviewers and tastemakers, adventurous spelunkers in information space, andjust the terminally curious - that one friend you have who can’t stop holding forth about something, whether it’s a new gamer mouse or a band or a new, extremely hoppy IPA. We’re going to have all of those things, but they’re all going to need search engines.” It seems search is going to remain broadly the same 一 ChatGPT isn’t about to displace Google search, and AI Overviews are not about to fundamentally change the search experience. But there remains the larger question of what the rest of the internet will look like. As AI steers the online economy into uncharted waters, the fate of the media is hanging in the balance. And whatever the future of the web looks like, it’s sure Google is going to play an enormous role in shaping it. As I was editing this story, I double-checked to see if my knowledge panel was still fixed and discovered, confoundingly, that the problem had returned. The next time I checked, it was fixed again. I began to regularly Google myself in incognito mode, on different browsers and devices. Sometimes my face popped up as a dead physicist； sometimes it didn’t. The ever-changing, algorithmic nature ofit made it feel like Schrodinger^ knowledge panel, both correct and incorrect at all times. The frustration of trying to resolve the knowledge panel issue echoed the process of trying to get a solid read on the state of Google's search engine. The company is too opaque, and its system has too many shifting parts, to make a clear pronouncement. It is many things to many people, constantly succeeding and failing its billions of users. Sometimes, as much as you search and search, there is no single answer to be found 參 The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 19

RAIN OR SHINE, CHRISTIANE LAMIRAUD, 63, likes to swim in the Channel from the beach near her home in the village of Saint-Martin-en-Campagne, north-east of Dieppe. From the water, it is hard to miss the Penly nuclear power stationjust 700 metres up the coast at the foot ofthe chalk cliffs, sucking in seawater to cool its two reactors, then pumping it back out to sea a few degrees warmer. But ignore it she does. Reports of incidents do not deter the teacher from her daily swim.''Questions are quickly stifled here. Where there is a nuclear industry, it’s a non-subject. It is hidden behind the cliff and we don’t talk about it，” she says. Like many villages and towns in close proximity to France's nuclear plants, St Martin-en-Campagne in the Petit-Caux district is close enough that it could be evacuated in case of an accident. But most residents prefer not to dwell on that, says villager Pierre Pouliquen, 45- “There is a real need for clean energy. The problems of nuclear power aren’t hidden, but we don’t even think about them. Even when we go to the beach, we don’t look at the power station.” France’s enthusiastic relationship with nuclear power - it has the most plants out of any European country - and people’s ambivalent attitudes to life in the shadow of the plants themselves are the subject of a project by British photographer Ed Alcock. He spent six months capturing the lives ofpeople living within 5km of five nuclear power stations in France, for an exhibition sponsored by the country's culture ministry. Alcock, who moved to France in his 20s, was struck by what he saw as people’s “head-in-the-sand” attitudes towards nuclear power, which marked a contrast to his experience growing up in Norwich in the dying days of the cold war. He remembers being sent home from school and hiding inside to escape radiation from the 1986 Chornobyl disaster. “We spent 24 hours sitting in the house with the doors and windows closed hoping nuclear particles weren’t coming down the chimney，” Alcock says. "Growing up, nuclear was the thing that kept me awake at night. I used to go to bed wondering if we’d be here in the morning. “Then I moved to France in 2000 and DIGGING IN 1 am the last of the Mohicans of Belleville/ says Christian Gaudin (left), the last farmer in Belleville-sur-Loire. Some of his fields are just a few metres from the power station. Other farmers have been bought out by the French multinational electric utility company EDFf which is acquiring the land for future projects that are not yet public knowledge. IN AT THE DEEP END Bathers in the swimming pool in Belleville-sur-Loire (below, far left). The village has a population of only lf000f but taxes paid by EDF fund Leisure facilities that are usually only found in towns of 100,000 inhabitants or more. ON THE FARM Jean Grelier (above, centre) lives on a farm 300 metres from the Blayais nuclear power station on the Gironde estuary. A storm in 1999 flooded the region, and his family were stranded for nearly 24 hours, watching, terrified, as steam spewed from the flooded station. The deluge disabled some, but fortunately not all, of the cooling pumps. A nuclear accident was narrowly avoided. 'Fortunately, EDF engineers have learned the Lessons of that storm/ he says. TAKING THE PLUNGE Christiane Lamiraud (above) lives in Saint-Martin-en-Campagne in Normandy, about 700 meters from the Penly nuclear plant. She swims in the English Channel every day, despite the proximity to the power station. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 23

talked to people my age about Chornobyl. They told me that when it happened, French television showed maps of the radioactive cloud spread across Europe and it stopped at Belgium and reappeared across the Channel. “You would imagine it’s a subject that would worry most people, but not here. Almost nobody questions it, which always surprises me. And whenever you talk about the dangers, everyone looks at you as if you?re mad to be worried about it.” Nuclear power has been the principal source of electricity in France since 1973, when an embargo by Middle Eastern oil producers led to soaring prices and new concerns for energy security. The country now has 56 reactors across 19 sites all run by the state-owned Electricite de France (EDF)，which produce up to 76% of the country’s electricity. No other European Union country comes near； the Czech Republic and Spain have six each, Sweden has three, while Germany, Poland and Lithuania have none. (Britain has nine nuclear reactors across five sites.) “These French communities depend on nuclear power，” Alcock says. “People either work at the power station or a company that supplies it, so it’s hard to find anyone who is critical. “The power stations pay huge local taxes so, if you can ignore cooling towers and mile-high vapour plumes on your doorstep, you have a fantastic municipal swimming pool，skating rink, boxing club and pay less council tax. For locals, these are attractive places to live. “There’s a kind of fatalism, the idea that the day it goes wrong we won’t know about it. The authorities provide iodine tablets to those living within a 20km radius. People jokingly say if a nuclear accident happens they’ll just pop a couple of iodine pills.” The Penly site, where teacher Lamiraud swims, has been selected by the French government and EDF as the location for the construction of two new reactors, despite sitting only a few metres above the current sea level. In January last year, shortly after Alcock took Lamiraud’s picture, she learned the local authority had banned swimmingandfishingfromthebeachafteranunspecified “incident” at the plant. Lamiraud fears it will not be the last time she is prevented from taking her daily swim 參 STRIKE ONCE Lightning hits the cooling towers of the Tricastin plant (above left). TESTING THE WATER Fran^oise Pouzet (top, on left) and Bernadette Moreau are members of the Sortir du Nucleaire network. They are taking water samples from the river Loire, near the Belleville plant, to measure radioactivity levels. •THE PLANT MAKES THINGS POSSIBLE9 'There are not many inhabitants here, but the power station makes many things possible/ says Olivier Martin (above). He is a French adapted- boxing champion and member of the Bellevillois boxing club in Belleville-sur-Loire - one of the many sporting clubs financed by EDF. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 25 ・ ( A £rv o:a l — I —l VNOlivN H U N Ld arJ ) LdU N V a LL. LlJa Ld —IV N O P V N LLJn D 3 Hionalm lljh iAm Q Ld l-Q — l l Q.Q z v Lda n i — l n o JO AaisINIS LdH i A m Q LLI3 Z V N I LL. Nolilml h x lij s LLJA Ld arl LLI 工 >- Ldy o J LlJm LdD N V arJ LdH i ^ 0 i a^v d s < a LAJD n a o ard SVM l u Ld

Portrait： Ben Quinton ♦ •会 T HE OTHER DAY a stranger approached me in the road and asked whether I was Jewish. In 42 years oflife, the question had never been posed to me by someone I didn?t already know. My first wild instinct was to offer congratulations in reply, perhaps a prize for observational skill. I don’t look the part. My father was Scottish, gingery and freckled, and my mother is the stuff of Hitler’s nightmares： a blond, blue-eyed Jew. “I thought so，” said the stranger, their hunch confirmed. We went on to have a confused, uneasy exchange. It was late. The stranger was smoking something vibeyand I was suddenly sober, a bit drained, trying to gather my wits to equivocate and bring the conversation to a close. The whole thing lasted a couple of minutes and afterwards I felt as ifsomething overdue had happened, the end of an easy ride. It is a complicated time to be a British Jew, or a Jew of the global diaspora, shaped by different cultures with allegiances and affections that lately have been pulled wider apart. Fm not describing all Jews or even most Jews. But there are lots of us, I know, who hover on margins, whose adherences are not quickly definable, even in this time ofdisorderwhen the natural tendency is to try to neaten positions and make pigeonholes for beliefs. There have always been agnostic kosher- keepers. There have always been observers of the Sabbath who’ll sneak away after synagogue to watch It's a complicated time to be Jewish - even more so if your heritage is not instantly obvious to others. Sometimes Tom Lamont has used it as the punchline to a joke he's in on； occasionally it's felt safer to stay quiet. He reflects on the complexities and contradictions of life as a 'stealth Jew, Saturday football. (Hi, Grandpa Bernard.) There are loads of Jews like me who can go for weeks at a time in a sort of nondenominational trance. There are Jews who slip beneath notice, who defy the general understanding of what a Jew is. I remember first noticing a difference between the Catholicism in my father’s background and the Judaism in my mother’s. Whereas missionary zeal was high among Christians, it was absent in Judaism, a non-proselytising religion. (Join us? Are you crazy? Fine： here’s a stack ofhomeworkj At my primary school, the two coolest boys in the playground were Jewish. Keen to establish a shared credential, I tried to persuade them I was Jewish as well. These boys were confident and gobby with the teachers, musical, dark-haired. I had none ofthese attributes and because my surname was so obviously that of a non-Jew, they dismissed my claim. I remember the day when my mum volunteered as one of the parents on a school trip. By the coat pegs, the more confident of the two boys sidled up to her for a chat - grownup to grownup. She must have said something to persuade him because suddenly I was admitted to the gang. Still, I was capable of some atrocious errors of etiquette. I got mixed up in my thinking about two major figures in the Torah and for years I had a vivid image in my mind ofGod wearing the elaborate golden headdress ofan Egyptian pharaoh. The synagogue we attended was liberal. They let my Catholic dad join in. On the day of my barmitzvah, the synagogue filled with my non-Jewish friends who, confused by the rules around head coverings, appeared wearing tweedy flat caps. Although translation remained beyond me， I got quite good at reading the lovely, ancient, sonorous Hebrew language aloud. Looking back, this was the apex of my academic Jewishness. Unlike some ofmy peers at Hebrew school (miniature men with the beginnings of genuine beards)， I was not by appearances or temperament an adult at the age of 13, whatever our rabbi said. I had years of messy puberty to get through, and my Judaism fell into abeyance as I got older, superseded in the order of priorities by computer games, glimpsed cleavage and pretending to bloody love beer. By the time I was 17, my Jewishness was a biographical titbit I liked to play up to in poker games. I was part of a mixed bunch of boundary- testing sixth-formers, too clever for our own good. We found it interestingand dangerous to play with the stereotypes of our different ethnicities. I was the Jew at the table, accumulative, sly, to be applied to for loans, etc. I would have hated my maternal grandparents to see mejoin in with this； but, at the same time, in the context of an outrageous teenaged hang, we often laughed until we wept. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 27

ways an old culture shapes my soul： Grandpa’s jokes, Grandma’s puddings, the warmth, the humour, the grand demonstrations of generosity or affection, as well as the unbroken and unstemmable streams of worry that are passed down through generations. A paradoxical sense of feeling both supported and fearful lives deep in the interior of the culture as Fve experienced it. This is not an easy feeling to excavate and show to people. It’s a chord sequence that, however clear to the inner ear，is impossible to put lyrics to. A few weeks ago, at a gathering of journalists, I was chatting in a group that included a veteran war correspondent. The correspondent described some difficulties of reporting on the war in Gaza - trying to get into Gaza to report at all - making observations about IsraeFs army that were thoughtful, measured, alarming, and so interesting to me that I burned with a million questions. I found myself staying quiet. Much earlier than I would have liked to, I drifted away from the conversation, convinced by a fidgety and overwrought paranoia that my presence as a Jew must be making these people hesitate or pick their words with extra care. I didn’t want that, not for the correspondent, who by the sounds of it had faced censorship enough. These slivers of anxious overreaction are nothing - dust - in the larger picture of displacement, suffering, death. I record them only for completeness, to try to explain one more tiny byproduct in all of this： that as a Jew of the diaspora, you can go around feeling like an involuntary queller offrank discussion. You watch people you love stumble, trying to describe passions honestly felt, positions honestly taken. I was deeply shaken by the atrocities of 7 October and the ongoing suffering offamilies in Israel. The months ofslaughter in Gaza, overseen by IsraeFs government and carried out by its military, continue to fill me with visceral horror. These aren’t uncommon views. But as a Jew of the diaspora you can feel the need to state them, early and often, as something pre-emptive, mollifying even. I’ve been among friends or peers and felt sure there’s a phantom conversation, less restrained, that would be taking place if I wasn’t present. Meanwhile, in the company of Jews who are a little or a lot like me, there tends to be a gluey fatalism. Looking crushed, we inch into discussion about the region, alert to sensitivities, shared lines, questions of whose relatives live where，who’s protesting, who might, who wants to but can’t，who won’t. Thoughts flit from the distant to the local and back again. You might be trying to wrap your head around a generation­ deforming disaster on another continent, then you’re THE OLD CULTURE HAS SHAPED MY SOUL: GRANDMA'S PUDDINGS, GRANDPA'S JOKES, THE WARMTH, THE HUMOUR 'Looking back, this was the apex of my academic Jewishness1： Tom Lamont in 1995, reading from the Torah on the day of his barmitzvah right away worrying about an individual grandparent’s panic levels, that unguarded expression on their face as they read the latest news and interpret some long- feared nightmare starting to unfold. I T MIGHT BE OBVIOUS that Fve been writing this in a state of fanatical caution, inching forward one sentence at a time. As I go, I feel my grandma’s fear ofupsetting people or attracting negative attention. I answer to another inheritance, from my grandpa, invisiblyguiding me to soften serious matters with jokes or with pain-masking anecdote. This article came about when I mentioned to an editor friend (also Jewish) that I had once interviewed a famous person who was trying to explain to me the power structure in Hollywood. At a certain point they pulled a face - what Fd describe as a “fill in the gaps yourself” face - that I took to mean they were referring unfavourablytoJews.lt was a momentary thing, fleeting, impossible to prove, a little event that I was mentally deleting from the record for their sake and mine as soon as it happened. It was an exchange, I sensed, that would never have happened if I looked more identifiably Jewish. When I told my editor friend about it, she said, “Oh，sure, thafs because you’re a stealth Jew.” It sounded an interesting premise, or anyway an interesting phrase, and we agreed I’d try to write about this peculiar state ofbeing. I wasn’t going to mention the violence in the Middle East at all, on the principle that being a Jewish writer and discussing a personal experience of Judaism need not mean addressing another government’s war. That version of the piece wouldn’t come out of my fingers. I couldn’t write it, not without reference to terrible events happening thousands of miles away. This is something shared by many diaspora Jews Fve spoken to, who carry the crisis, who lose sleep to it, whether they feel a strong connection to Israel or not. So here I am，trying to choose my words carefully, with respect for every type of reader： equivocating again, as I did with the stranger who approached me on the road and tagged me as a Jew. “I thought so.” That was a moment ofrealising how lucky I’d been, to be able to control the terms of my engagement with race. Control of that order is rare and almost never afforded to people of colour, nor to Muslim women who wear hijabs, nor indeed to Jewish men who wear kippahs. I have written a novel, Going Home, that is set in a London suburb similar to the one I was raised in. It’s about secular Jews who have one toe in religion, nine toes out. Copies have begun to be read by people I know, a surprising number of whom have been in touch to say they didn’t realise that Judaism formed any part of my life at all. One friend forwarded me a WhatsApp, sent to them by someone who’d heard about the book： “I didn't realise Tom is Jewish as well.” That phrasing made me nod in recognition, with its suggestion of an underground experience shared； also, that our Judaism was only a piece ofa larger human puzzle. Like me, the characters in my novel wouldn’t ever stop to think： “I am Jewish.” But they might think： “I am Jewish as well.” None of us are the one simple thing, easily answered to. And I suppose this piece of writing has become the response I would have liked to have given to that stoned stranger on the road. When he asked, was I Jewish, I might have started by describing myself in a playground, desperately petitioning for inclusion ina gang. I might have explained the student years when I hardly thought of my religious or cultural inheritance at all. I might have described the occasions of mentally censoring other people’s slurs, the times Fve used such slurs myself in self-deprecating jest, the paranoia of late, all the old and new feelings without names. I wish I’d answered： “Am I Jewish? How long have you got?” 參 Tom Lamont's debut novel Going Home is out now (Sceptre, £16.99)- To order a copy for £14-95 go to guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 29 W HERE DID I first cotton on to these stereotypes about Jews? Books. Overheard odds and ends of conversation. Football chants. Sitcoms. In a pub I got talking to an old geezer who, unaware that I was Jewish, explained his theory of the kippah. These skullcaps are shaped like bowls, he told me in confidence, because Jews like to whip them off their heads and right away have a means to beg for money. So watch out. I was reading a lot of spiky, mannered English literature at the time. The Bloomsbury set. Evelyn Waugh. Of course, I noticed the casual antisemitism of that era, from Virginia WoolPs pen portraits to Louis MacNeice’s reflexively vicious description of Jewish refugees (on page two of his memoirs!). There is a very good joke at the end of EM Forster’s A Passage to India. After hundreds of pages of intricate realism about an English-made scandal in the Ganges, the focus always tight on Anglo-Indian administrators and the frustrated indigenous civilians theybedevil, a character sums up his final thoughts： “My personal opinion is, it’s the Jews.” In my 20s and my 30s，workingas a journalist, I was sometimes put in mind of that Forster quote. People tested to extremes have it in them to reach for wrong- headed explanations, anything to make sense of the inexplicable. Reporting on tragedies, I would now and then be offered an alternative explanation of events, the blame put on mysterious forces, Jewish forces. I can see myself(notebook out, listening with genuine sympathy) as someone in distress passes on a rumour or a theory. I can see the hurried calculations I’m making. I haven’t been figured for a Jew myself. But is it worth the potential argument and the certain awkwardness to interject? I can see myself deciding to stay quiet, to consign the quotes to the bin, to carry on with the job as if nothing has been said. Prejudice is weird like this. You're tricked into doing so much of the hard work yourself. Let’s say you once went down a certain conversational path and regretted it. Next time, recognising the beginnings of a similar path, you might try to alter course. You might awkwardly pre-empt someone, worried that a stereotype or a slur is brewing. Whafs left is an unsolvable mystery, subtle in the moment and vinegary afterwards. It’s a middle state, not one thing or another. It leaves room for so many outward and inward misunderstandings. At some point, I know, I stopped thinking about being Jewish as Hebrew school, the clean-carpet smell outside the rabbi5s office, the tang of the grape juice they handed out on festivals. Instead, I started to thinkof the INOnv— I z o l LL.0 AS LLJ idnoD

CULTURE ---- r wo PRESENTS parklife You're battling rising costs to source enough essentials for a small city and are in competition to secure the best acts. So why would anyone run a festival? We speak to the organisers of Green Man, Parklife and Krankenhaus to find out Words： Dorian Lynskey IONA STEWART, the owner and managing director of Green Man festival in Wales, compares launching a festival to opening your own restaurant. You love eating out. You have superb taste. All your friends say you’re a great chef. How hard could it be? Harder than you could possibly imagine. “I have lost all the money I had in the world at least three times，” she says. Sitting in Green Man's airy London office, surrounded by posters and awards, she recounts the catastrophes. The first crisis came in 2008, a year after Stewart became MD. The company underwriting the ticket sales went under in the recession, taking all of Green Man’s money with it. Stewart cleaned out her savings, remortgaged her flat and borrowed money from family members and it still wasn’t enough. She was advised to sell Green Man to Festival Republic, owned by Live Nation, but “they wouldn’t touch it with a bargepole”. Two months out, a group of contractors held a summit at Glastonbury and agreed to work on credit. Green Man survived. In 2012, after Stewart bought out Green Man’s founders, the nightmare was appalling weather. Situated in Glanusk Park in Bannau Brycheiniog, formerly known as the Brecon Beacons, the festival is susceptible to freak downpours. It rained so hard that the bubble stall flooded and turned into a giant mass ofbubbles. Green Man didn’t sell out that year, or the next. Rebranded and expanded, it thrived for a few years until the wrecking ball of the pandemic. “When we cancelled, there was a tsunami of sadness，” Stewart says. Green Man had sold out that year, but lost most of the money it had already spent on deposits because contractors either couldn’t roll it over to another year or went out of business. Regular crew members lost their livelihoods. “We became like a helpdesk,” Stewart recalls. “It was wonderful that people could come to us but we were out of our depth.” In June 2021, with lockdown set to end, Stewart had to decide whether to risk announcingthefestivalfor August, withnoinsurance in case ofa fresh Covid surge. “It would normally take a year，” she says. “We had two months. It was a tremendous risk. As a company we would have been destroyed if it hadn’t gone ahead. I puked virtually every morning.” On the morning the festival opened its gates, Stewart soothed nerves by booking Welsh drag artists in PPE to greet festival-goers before they took Covid tests. When the welcome tent was full, Anita Westmorland, working at the box office, stood up and cried： “Where have you been?” A number ofpeople, Stewart included, burst into tears. Running a festival is not for the faint of heart. John Rostron, CEO of the Association of Independent Festivals, compares it to owning a shop that you open for just four days a year. “There’s no rehearsal for a festival，” says Stewart. “It’s an enormous project that has to work.” The industry is in an especially precarious state due to the triple whammy of Covid, Brexit and inflation. Many suppliers sold off stock during the pandemic or folded altogether, making equipment more expensive and harder to procure. Staging, fencing, security and so on all cost more, while the cost of touring, particularly for international artists, has risen so sharply that artist fees have doubled since 2019. For festivals that rolled over tickets until after the pandemic, 2019 budgets collided with 2022 costs, meaning that some lost money even if they sold out. According to a 2021 House of Commons select committee report, there were more than 900 festivals in the UK in 2019, attracting 5.2 million people and adding £l.76bn to the economy. The AIF has calculated that 96 did not return in 2022, 36 closed or went on hiatus in 2023 and 43 have already shut up shop this year, bringing the overall number down to about 750. The vast majority are independent, although the top end of the market, bar Green Man, Glastonbury and Womad, is dominated by the corporate giants： Live Nation (Reading/Leeds, Download, Latitude, Wireless) and AEG Presents (BST Hyde Park, All Points East，Eden Sessions). These behemoths have the clout IIBMIIII s ® > l o o l s cx: Ldi l n H S/Ayy<d N I > LLJ> I 32 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian

Urban planning (Left) This year’s Parklife； and (above and right) scenes from 2O23rs Green Man to cut better deals with artists and contractors than the indies and the resilience to absorb losses. Rostron dubs Live Nation “the school bully”. Last November, I spoke to the organisers of three very different festivals - Green Man, Manchester’s 80,000-capacity dance and pop weekender Parklife and Krankenhaus, a 1,500-capacity “micro-festival” in Cumbria - to find out what it takes. The first thing to know is that it is a year-round job. It would be nice to think that after the last reveller has gone home, the last stage dismantled, the last piece of litter cleared away, festival organisers can congratulate themselves on a job well done and take a few weeks off to decompress. But that is not how it works at all. “There’s not really any time off，” says Parklife’s co-founder Sam Kandel. (Launched as the Mad Ferret festival in 2007, it was renamed in 2010 and is now majority owned by Live Nation.) The team spend weeks sorting out bills, taxes and the return of equipment. Come the autumn, festivals reserve the next year's equipment, commissionbespoke structures and wrangle the lineup into place. Parklife’s team began investigating possible 2025 headliners back in 2022. “Artists are booking tours two, three years ahead，” says Kandel. “Then you get into the offering process, which takes a long time. It’s not just about money. It’s more to do with scheduling. They don’t want to commit to something they might have to unpick. A lot of it is a waiting game.” Festivals across Europe have a double-sided relationship, collaborating to bring over international artists for multiple appearances but then competing over specific dates. “Sometimes it’s absolute torture and sometimes it’s slightly less painful. You never get everything you want.” This year’s Parklife headliners, on 8 and 9 June, were Disclosure (for the third time) and Doja Cat, with the likes of Peggy Gou, Four Tet and Becky Hill filling out the bill. With a core demographic of 18- to 25-year-olds and no camping, Parklife is many people’s gateway festival. “You’re building a little world，” says Kandel. “If people buy into it and you create an emotional connection, it becomes something of cultural importance rather than just a day in a park.” 1 have lost all the money I had in the world at least three times' Krankenhaus, launched by the rock band Sea Power and their manager David Taylor five years ago, also builds its own little world. Staged at Muncaster Castle in Cumbria, it plays to the band’s love of history and nature, with a literary tent, steam train, bird of prey displays and fell-walking. “This is not a normal festival/ says Taylor. “People say it’s almost like a fantastic family wedding weekend.” The lineup also cleaves to a certain aesthetic. “Most people are coming to see Sea Power. Short of me getting the spoons out and doing the hopscotch, people will come. We’ve never gone down the big-name route.” The first Krankenhaus, in 2019, was put together in just four months as a “glorified Sea Power gig” with 400 fans and a lineup consisting of the band’s friends, including the poet Simon Armitage and the snooker star turned DJ Steve Davis. That lost money, as did its 2022 comeback. “Basically，it cost more than we thought，” says Taylor. “We were a bit like： 'Oh, it’ll be fine on the night!’ Maybe in hindsight we were a bit too cocky.” But the performers and fans seemed to love its remoteness, intimacy and beauty so much that Krankenhaus kept going. With tighter organisation, larger capacity and an Arts Council grant, it finally made a profit last year. While Taylor is relatively new to the game, Stewart is a three-decade festival veteran who remembers when the The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 33 Nvs N Ld LLId 9 / l —ln v 9 lljn n v s 一 9NINNCI9 >!3l a: ivd -Iry LLIg LLI0 1 2:

CULTURE rA festival should beafeastof delight. If its not, then you're not delivering' set of cards. What Fm trying to do is give them a better hand and the rest is up to them. Without intervention it will get worse before it gets better.” Even in those final weeks when lineups have been set, tickets have been sold and staff have been hired, a lot can go wrong. As the weekend draws near, so does the possibility of a headliner dropping out at the last minute for health reasons, technology failing or the rain falling with a vengeance, which can damage equipment, suppress bar sales and shake morale. Krankenhaus has already experienced all three. “You’re in the realm of anything can happen，” says Taylor, though he remains upbeat. “Sea Power fans are fairly outdoorsy types so it would have to be force-eight gales and monsoons.” On the eve of the festival, the whole team sit down for a meal in Muncaster’s sheep barn, "knowing we’ve done everything we can. It’s the calm before the storm.” It is reasonable to wonder why so many people continue to be drawn to running festivals. The job requires not just a passion for music and a brain for organisation but an ironclad stomach for risk and stress. “You have to go into it with a do-or-die mentality，” says Kandel. “It’s a bit of a crazy endeavour. Like with anything you do for 20 years, you have moments when you question why you’re doing it, but I can’t actually imagine doing something else.” Next year, Stewart will have been in the business for 30 years. What drives her? “There is a moment before the festival opens when it’s like the whole world is holding its breath，” she says. "Everything's done, everything's beautiful, everyone’s ready. It’s such a magical moment. Fll never, ever get bored of it.” Green Man takes place 15-18 August, and Krankenhaus 23-25 August. Parklife will return in 2025. Keep it up Muncaster Castle gets ready for the Krankenhaus festival 'M J ACH FESTIVAL has its own distinct challenges, shaped by size, location and audience. Krankenhaus can make use of existing facilities at Muncaster Castle, which is a popular year- round tourist attraction, whereas Green Man, says Stewart, is “a city for 25,000 people which we literally build from grass and then have to dismantle at the end. We’re sourcing what you source to build a city： plumbing, tents, lighting, generators, cleaning, recycling...” Its remoteness means that it doesn’t have a curfew, while Parklife’s urban setting, Heaton Park, requires constant negotiations with the council, police, transport providers and local residents. “You’re setting up shop in a residential neighbourhood，” says Kandel. “Managing that disruption is a huge part of what we do. Obviously, anytime you have 80,000 people in one place it’s never going to be perfect. They’re human beings, not robots. But we do everything we can to be good neighbours.” He says proudly that Parklife has only crashed its 11pm curfew once, and only briefly, when Frank Ocean overran in 2017. Licences are delicate things. So, too, are budgets, now that the pandemic has squeezed festivals5 financial headroom. In 2019, according to the AIF’s John Rostron, a festival could survive by selling 85% of its tickets； now the benchmark is more like 98%. Festivals are forced to do less or charge more. In 2019, a Green Man ticket would set you back £189 and Krankenhaus cost £125； now they are £260 and £190 respectively. Compared to the cost of going to see several bands individually, festivals are still tremendous value, but organisers worry about excluding less well-off fans. This year, Parklife chose to streamline the bill rather than jack up prices. “We’ve set a ticket price and worked backwards from there，” says Kandel. The AIF is lobbying the government for a temporary reduction in VAT on tickets from 20% to 5% until budgets stabilise. Festival owners are all gamblers, says Rostron. “Post-Covid，they ?re holding a really bad average festival was “a shitty auditorium in a field”. She started working at Glastonbury in 1995, when she was in her mid-30s, and moved on to the boutique alternative and dance festival The Big Chill in 2000, at the very start of the festival boom. When she was preparing to move the festival to Lulworth Castle, Dorset, in 2001, the local residents behaved “like the Vikings were coming. They chased me across the common saying： 'We don’t want your syringes on our land!”’ Still rooted in the old carnival trade, the business was an overwhelmingly male concern. “There were literally no women I could talk to，” says Stewart. She remembers meeting a regular supplier in the pub and pretending to call her male boss at the payphone in order to seal the deal. Gruellingly long hours were not just expected but celebrated. “I didn’t get any sleep at all. The security used to give me tips to keep awake： don’t eat carbs, don’t rest. Now I don’t think it’s cool to be up all night. I think it’s a sign of bad management.” She is still an early riser, though： “I’ve had so many years of waking up to a crisis that I can’t sleep in any more.” As the first boutique festival, The Big Chill became a font of advice for newcomers like Green Man, which began in 2003 as a 300-person one-day event at Craig- y-Nos Castle. Stewart was already co-running Green Man when she left The Big Chill in 2007. “I developed something that I didn’t own and then I lost control of it and it wasn’t working，” she says. “I was watching a festival die.” The Big Chill was bought by Festival Republic in 2009 and closed two years later. Stewart brought to Green Man a more horizontal, collegiate, progressive way of working, and a broader offering. In addition to the music, it has a children’s area, a book tent and a science and wellness space called Einstein’s Garden, evolving each year in response to audience feedback. This year’s festival sold out in two hours last September, six months before the lineup was announced, with 42,000 people still waiting in the queue. “The lineup is very important but people love the other bits as well，” she says. “It’s one of the last places in a polarised world where you can get everyone together, different ages and backgrounds, to have a mutual experience. A festival should be a feast of delight. If’it’s not, then you’re not delivering.” I reconnected with Stewart and Taylor in the spring, after the lineups had been announced. Green Man’s headliners are Big Thief, Sampha, Jon Hopkins and Sleaford Mods, while the Krankenhaus bill is topped by BC Camplight, Nadine Shah and (of course) Sea Power. Assembling a lineup is a fiendish, ever-shifting puzzle, which has to take into account budget, availabilityand crowdflow throughout months of uncertainty. While waiting for last-minute confirmations, Taylor was juggling seven or eight alternative running orders. “It was all by the skin of our teeth，” he says. “We’re battling other festivals who are offering more money but at the llth hour it fell into place.” Spring is the time for finalising the running order， recruiting bar staff, security and volunteers, booking accommodation, liaising with the local council and making deals for food, beer and additional infrastructure. In April, Stewart holds a managers5 day in Camden Town in London, where 70 core team members meet to discuss logistical issues and new ideas before retiring to her flat for a party. Green Man hires 5,000 workers, 600 stewards and 500 litter-pickers. 34 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian NosanH —l nvd

HONEST PLAYLIST James Martin The TV chef loves to perform Don't Stop Believin' on his live cook-along tour and enjoys a certain 'proper riff； but what soundtracked his 90s singalongs? The first song I remember hearing I grew up in a farmhouse in Welburn, a little village in North Yorkshire. My mother had an old record player, and I remember her playing Johnny Mathis and Barry Manilow. The first single I bought She Sells Sanctuary by the Cult, from Woolworths in York, rd get pick’n’mix on a Saturday with my mum for a treat ifl was good. The song I do at karaoke Last tour, the guys at the promoters Live Nation said： “We need a strong ending to the show.” I remember Lee Evans playing the piano at Wembley Arena. So I learned to play the guitar so we could play Don’t Stop Believin’ by Journey. Thousands of people stand up with their mobile phone torches on, which is very rock’n’roll. Now it’s our signature. We do it every night. The song I inexplicably know every lyric to I know the lyrics to plenty of Oasis songs including Wonderwall, from singing them too many times in the pub when I was in my 20s. The best song to play at a party It depends on the age bracket. But these days, I’d say Watermelon Sugar by Harry Styles. The song I can no longer listen to Gravity by John Mayer got embedded into my brain because it was the song that was used to soundcheck every night on the last tour. Never again. The song I wish I had written Jumpin, Jack Flash by the Rolling Stones. The lyrics are amazing. Obviously Keith Richards and Mick Jagger had their fallouts back in the day, so to come up with this is amazing. The song that changed my life I used to listen to Money’s Too Tight (to Mention) by Simply Red when I was a head chef way back in my 20s, mainly because money was too tight to mention. I was living in a rented flat that cost £60 a week and was only earning about £100. The song that gets me up in the morning Sympathy for the Devil by the Rolling Stones has got what I call a proper guitar riff. The song I want played at my funeral All my mates know that I’m obsessed with tractors. So The Combine Harvester (Brand New Key) by the Wurzels. They’re about £750,000 these days, so I can’t afford one. But I could afford a tractor. As told to Rich Pelley James Martin is touring 19 February to 15 March； tour starts Leicester. Friends of the RA go free OI. A tounng eihrbrtion by Muaeo Nackxvtf Pyssen-Borremisa. Madhd wlh the Royal Academy of Arts. London, n ooteboraton with Museums for IMowne. Meto. SMch of the lor Brontstova School K声,derail. 1919 Watercubur on caicbaarti 60 x 43 cm. MjMum of Theatre. Muse and Cinena of Ukram. Photo Johannes Stol / Manna CVMym Meier. c 29 June- 13 October2024 In the Eye of the Storm s llin a < h k llin

daydreamed about being a drummer but because I’m so shy I could never do it”). But the idea lingered. For Horton and her character Leah, forming a band felt cathartic： “She’s getting some of her power back.” While Horton wants to highlight what coercive control can look like, "because I think it’s important that people understand it”，she hopes the play’s tone is empowering. “It’s about how you find hope after abuse. I’m not interested in highlighting a powerful person and their psychology. I want to look at how people are affected by narcissists. How do you find resilience and hope and joy after you’ve been in a relationship like that?” The play balances the heavier subjects with comedy. The band will be dressed in part-Lynn, part-punk get-ups. Horton has been scouring charity shops for the perfect outfits, mixing typical Lynn cardigans and blouses with fishnets and denim. Their songs are “really bad”，Horton says. “One of them is just screaming Tat cow’ [a classic Lynn quote]. None of them can play instruments. It’s leaning into awkward, embarrassing, British humour.” Horton will be making her acting debut as a “grumpy drummer” who has responded to an ad and tentatively reveals her own toxic relationship with a woman. Horton drew inspiration from Carmen Maria Machado’s memoir, which tracks the slow escalation of her ex-girlfriend’s abuse, plus a situation Horton found herself in. “I had to report something a woman had done to me and I wasn’t taken as seriously. I found that very interesting.” CULTURE Alan Partridge's downtrodden PA is the unlikely inspiration for a woman's pivot into punk in a new play by Laura Horton that's more personal and cathartic than it sounds Blurred Lynns Words： Rachael Healy L ynn Benfield, the downtrodden PA to Steve Coogan’s unbearable broadcaster Alan Partridge, doesn’t always get the recognition she deserves. Most people only know Lynn by her first name. On TV, she is always by Alan’s side, quietly tolerating his egocentric behaviour. The Plymouth-based playwright Laura Horton’s new show, Lynn Faces, finally puts her centre stage. While Lynn rarely voices dissent, her face betrays her true feelings： disgust, bewilderment, discomfort. Horton, a big Partridge fan, always felt an affinity with Lynn and loved these expressions. “You get moments like there’s something in her waiting to burst out. But she’s so controlled, she never lets it out，” Horton says. “I identify with that enormously, that sort ofmasking and being afraid to be silly.” She and a friend would pull their best “Lynn faces” to greet each other, and in her 20s she even started a photography project to capture different interpretations of the Lynn face on camera. In Horton’s play, the main character, Leah，decides to form a punk band before her approaching 40th birthday, with Lynn as her muse. Set at the band’s first gig，the story unfolds in real time. As the friends chat and rehearse together, Leah reveals more about a relationship she has just escaped from. Her friends always thought this partner was charming, but the details that trickle out paint a darker scene. The story apparently draws on Horton’s own experiences. Years ago, she wound up chatting to the feminist punk great Viv Albertine after watching the Slits frontwoman on a panel. When Horton mentioned a couple of details about her then partner, “[Albertine] was like： ‘This doesn’t sound good, you should read my book，it’s about me getting out of an abusive relationship.’” Horton was confused. “He was so impressive to me, so charismatic, and I was so in awe of him.” But she says a pattern emerged. “I knew I felt bad, I knew I was unhappy. But I couldn’t see what was happening.” Coercive and controlling behaviour only became a criminal offence in 2015. While the term “gaslighting” has become part of our lexicon, the reality of what these relationships look like can be cloudier. For Horton, the change from dazzling romance with a magnetic man to a situation where she was full of doubt, in fear of his sudden aggression, her confidence shattered, happened slowly. “I felt worthless by the time I got out of that relationship，” she says. “It’s taken years and years to fully understand ... I’m still making discoveries.” The play’s musical element was inspired by another moment in Horton’s life when, commiserating over a breakup, she decided to start the Felicity Montagu Band, named after the actor who plays Lynn. Nerves scuppered the project (“I’ve always 36 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian

'I want to look at how people are affected by narcissists - how do you find hope and joy after?" Rocking the boat Laura Horton (second left) with other cast members of Lynn Faces Getting on stage is Horton’s challenge to herself. “In primary school, I was so shy and quiet. If you’re not extroverted, people don’t see your value.” Shyness also obstructed Horton’s writing aspirations. “I had a little plastic theatre and would put on plays for my mum and dad. So I loved writing. But I didn’t have the confidence to do it.” She tried creative writing at university, but couldn’t see a path into the industry and instead got a job in her home town as an usher at Plymouth Theatre Royal. That led her into the theatre’s marketing team, and from there she became a publicist working across London’s cultural scene. But, still, “I’d look at writers and think： I want to do that.” By her mid-30s, she had done a play writing course and was writing things in secret. During the pandemic, she finally got serious. In a full-circle moment, in 2021, she put on three short plays for her old employer Plymouth Theatre Royal - one of which became Breathless, a semi- autobiographical show about a woman struggling with hoarding disorder. On her return to Plymouth, Horton had to face the fact she had been compulsively collecting clothing. After years in PR, she carefully considered how much of herself to put into the play and its promotion. “They say write from the scar, not from the wound. With Breathless, I didn’t feel I was putting myself in a vulnerable position，” she says. “I wanted to draw the shame out of hoarding. A lot of people were like： I hoard and I didn’t realise. So it was the right thing to do. But it was very intense.” With the fallout from Richard Gadd’s Baby Reindeer, where his alleged stalker was identified and is now suing Netflix, Horton thought even more carefully about weaving her experiences into Lynn Faces. “You should be able to tell your own story，” she says. “It’s figuring out： am I putting anyone else in an uncomfortable state?” She is also conscious of the personal toll of retreading traumatic memories： “I’ve seen people have breakdowns in Edinburgh.” Horton took Breathless to the Edinburgh fringe in 2022. It won the Scotsman’s fringe first and BBC Popcorn awards, gaining Horton an agent and a tour. “I love Edinburgh, but there’s two sides，” Horton says. While there’s opportunity, it’s hard to experiment when there’s so much money on the line. “I worked on projects as a publicist, and you’d be aware their parents had given them 30 grand to take their play to Edinburgh. People shouldn’t be vilified for that, but the issue is that there is no demystification，” she says. “People then feel useless when they can’t get stuff off the ground ... I’m not from a wealthy background. I can’t financially ruin myself.” Nevertheless, last year, she finally quit PR and with fortuitous timing became artistic consultant at Barbican theatre, Plymouth. “Sometimes you just have to leap into the black hole and think： something’s going to catch me，” she says. As with Breathless, where Horton made a companion podcast to spread knowledge of hoarding disorder beyond the theatre, she hopes to raise awareness of coercive control beyond Lynn Faces. Witnessing friends extricating themselves from their own controlling relationships underscored the power of knowledge. “For anyone who has been in a situation like I have, they might feel seen - and hopeful，” she says. “It will stay with you, but you can heal.” Lynn Faces is at the New Diorama theatre, London, 28 July, then Summerhall, Edinburgh, 1 to 26 August. 3 •MB LLI tro o s soa The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 37

Wild art-rockers Limbo District influenced REM, but burned out without making it big. As old recordings resurface, ex-members and Michael mu Stipe recall the 'greatest band on Earth' Circus Words： Stevie Chick “I waved at them. They waved back.” That trio - Jeremy Ayers, Davey Stevenson and Dominique Amet - later became Limbo District, the most radical group of an Athens underground scene that gave the world the B-52S, Pylon and, of course, REM. But while those bands went on to enjoy global recognition, Limbo District are forgotten. They existed for only two years, Leaving limbo (This page, from top) Dominque Amet； Kelly Crow； Craig Woodall； Michael imploding messily before releasing any music. For decades, the only evidence they ever existed was several minutes5 footage in 1987 documentary Athens, GA： Inside/Out. Stipe and Davey Stevenson； Jeremy Ayers thought I’d landed in a hippy cowtown，’’ says Michael Stipe, of his first months as an art student in Athens, Georgia. “I was an urban punk rocker, and Athens seemed beige and granola； it took me a while to find my 'people’.’’ But, in 1979, at the only coffee joint still open after Stipe’s nightshift at the local steakhouse, he saw “this unbelievable, almost-cartoonish trio who looked like they’d stepped out of the Weimar Republic”，he says. Life's rich pageant Limbo District in 1982 (left to right) Ayers, Crow, Amet and Stevenson “They were one of the greatest bands on Earth,” says Stipe. Now a new album of rediscovered live recordings illuminates a group whose fusion of art, furious rhythms and punk sensibility proved an indelible inspiration to Athens5 future stars. Limbo District were led by Athens- native Ayers, the son of a professor of religion and philosophy at the University of Georgia. “Jeremy Ayers inspired almost every musician in Athens，” adds Keith Strickland of the B-52S. “His early-7Os parties were like art happenings - walls covered with black plastic； floors thick with popcorn； Beefheart and Velvets records playing. He opened doors to creative possibilities. Plus, Jeremy and his boyfriend Chris [Coker] were gay - so were Ricky [Wilson, future B-52S guitarist] and I, but we weren’t out yet. It was inspiring to see Jeremy walk around Athens in tight velvet pants and a little fur coat.” Ayers loved recording himself reciting poetry and playing percussion while Chris improvised on recorder. Strickland says： “It was a cacophony, and it was the introduction to writing and recording for Ricky and me. We continued that method of songwriting.” In 1972 Ayers escaped to New York, joining Andy WarhoPs Factory studio, writing for Interview magazine as Sylva Thinn and befriending superstars such as actors Holly Woodlawn and Jackie Curtis. “Andy loved Jeremy,” says Stipe, 38 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian

The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 39 A mesmensing tapestry of pure imagination, with a sexy Fellini esque quality" “and Andy was hard to impress.” But within two years, Ayers returned. “There was a cynicism to that scene, a hard edge，” says Strickland. “Jeremy wanted a different life.” Athens was certainly different： it had no clubs, no “real” music scene. Bands played house parties to entertain their friends； careerism wasn’t Industries label (with more to follow)； he is now organising screenings of Carnival across the world. For years, Crow had been Limbo District’s archivist. “I carried all the studio recordings, live tapes, flyers and posters from home to home, for decades，” he says. “We’d always wanted to release our music, but could never afford to. I was about to give up on it. Then Henry reached out. Henry cared. Our music’s on streaming now. I can drive my car and listen to Limbo District on the stereo.” Stipe is “just happy that a shred of their influence still exists”. For Bilbao, it’s the memories of the people who made Limbo District that matter most. “The music was just an accessory - the important thing was the people，” she says. “I think about Dominique, Davey and Jeremy all the time. They were incredible. Fve always kept them in my heart.” Live Limbo is available now via Chunklet Industries. Carnival will be screened in the UK later this month. They rewrote where punk could go next, drawing on vaudeville and Edith Sitwell. They unsettled people, in a playful way.” Strickland remembers the band as “a mesmerising tapestry of pure imagination, with a sexy, surreal, Fellini-esque quality”. Athens loved Limbo District, but touring revealed them to be an acquired taste. “We’d clear the room，” says Crow. They recorded material with future REM producer Mitch Easter, but no one would release it. Bilbao grew anxious over her limited skills and fled to New Orleans, heartbroken. She was replaced by Tim Lacy, who was replaced, in 1983, by Crow. Around this time, Jim Herbert, a professor at the university, made Carnival, in collaboration with photographer Marlys Lens Cox. The remarkably surreal, dreamlike short film imagines Limbo District as “a 1920s existential travelling circus” pausing for respite by a lake and engaging in some nude wrestling. Stipe attempted to get MTV to screen Carnival. “But there’s butts and dicks and breasts in that thing,” Crow says. “They were never gonna play that.” The band was on borrowed time anyway. Woodall fell into heroin addiction and spent subsequent years homeless, struggling with alcoholism and mental health issues. Stevenson’s brother Gordon, of New York “no wave” band Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, was an early Aids casualty； his death in 1982 broke Davey’s heart. He and Ayers broke up in 1983, ending the band, and Stevenson moved to France, to study philosophy at the Sorbonne. Amet, who had been arrested for shoplifting groceries and was facing deportation, went with him. “Dominique had been in love with Davey since day one，” says Bilbao. “Davey was everything to her，” nods Crow. “They lived together in an apartment where you could see the Eiffel Tower from the balcony.” Stevenson died of Aids in the early 90s. Amet subsequently married, had a son, and died 20 or so years ago. “None of us know any more than that，” sighs Crow. “She’d always told me she wanted a kid. She didn’t make it out of her 40s.” Ayers, meanwhile, moved into painting and photography. “His paintings were quite beautiful - figurative and symbolic，’’ says Strickland. “He did a beautiful painting of Ricky, from memory, after Ricky’s death. Jeremy was always so open. You felt like you were seen when you spoke to him； you were being listened to and heard.” Before she fled Athens, Bilbao would visit Ayers： “If I felt mad and everything seemed wrong. I’d have a cup of tea in his garden and talk and we’d be happy. It was like an oasis of peace, his big garden of bamboo.” It was here that Ayers died of a seizure, on 24 October 2016. He was 68. “It was so tragic, but poetic，” says Herbert. “He died in that garden that he loved so much.” In the years following Limbo District’s split, the B-52S and REM enjoyed multi-platinum success and critical acclaim. But the avant garde experimentalists who’d proved such a key inspiration to both groups were “lost in time as an entity”，says Stipe. It took Henry Owings, unofficial historian of the Athens music scene, to rediscover their legacy, releasing three EPs of unheard studio material and live album Live Limbo on his Chunklet a prospect - although REM would, of course, go on to global stardom. Even here, Ayers’ influence was key. “Jeremy was a great friend and mentor，” Stipe says. “The person that I became, the public persona of Michael Stipe, I owe to him. He taught me how to dance, how to laugh at myself, how to dress. At the time I thought he was the first love of my life - although it turns out I was just infatuated with him，” Stipe laughs. Ayers formed Limbo District in 1981, playing percussion. His boyfriend, Stevenson - “a big, buff, beautiful redhead who loved to discuss Schopenhauer’’，says guitarist Kelly Crow, who went on to become a band member - played bass. Amet, who played organ, was from an upper-class French family and knew nothing of rock’n’roll. “At their first rehearsals Jeremy asked her to sing Johnny B Goode, and she sang like it was opera,” says Crow. “Jeremy loved that： he’d been hoping for someone who didn’t come from a [typical] western music background.” Amet was “Amy Winehouse levels of exotic”，adds Stipe. “She’d strike matches and use the ash as eyeliner, applied with a nine-penny nail.” Singer Craig Woodall was “a small, quiet guy from a place where you couldn’t be outwardly queer and not expect something to happen to you”， remembers Crow. “Craig had a very hard life，” adds guitarist Margarita Bilbao, an emigre from Basque Spain they discovered after hearing her rant against Athens on student radio. She’d never played guitar before, but the band loved her attitude, and that was more important. “I hadn’t had any friends in Athens，” Bilbao remembers. “Those guys became my saviours.” Even among the post-punk mavericks of early-8os Athens, Limbo District’s wild, perverse cabaret was “radical”，says Stipe. “They were intentionally abrasive, like Einstiirzende Neubauten or Psychic TV，but they had melody, humour. The school of Athens (From top) Tim Lacy； Craig Woodall； a gig at Georgia State University； Dominique, Davey and Kelly； the band in New Jersey M O arD A —l —l3 > ! JO N O I 1 3 3 —I —IO 3 3Hi s o ar LL. s a l o cx:< —lo d 一 xou Z N LLJ — I S A —I orv s 一 y Lds l Ld 工— l l g

CULTURE Art Liaqat Rasul Ty Pawb, Wrexham, to 2 November There’s more to Welsh town Wrexham than a Hollywood-tinged soccer team. Locally born Liaqat Rasul (work above) started out working on the market here when he was still at school, before becoming a fashion designer and artist. He looks back in this homecoming exhibition at the town’s innovative cultural space. Paris 1924 The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, to 3 November The last time the Olympics were in Paris, the French capital was the centre of modern art. That year, Andre Breton published the Surrealist Manifesto and Left Bank cafes were full of wild new ideas and artists. This exhibition includes Robert Delaunay’s kaleidoscopic celebrations oflight and modernity. Phantom Hymn Modern Art, London, to 14 September Eerie and troubling images of the human figure haunt this group exhibition by four American and European artists. Michelle Uckotter’s paintings depict women alone in mysterious and sinister settings. Joseph Yaeger specialises in implicitly violent hyperrealist canvases. Michael Ho and Michael E Smith add to the subtle sense of danger. Lina Iris Viktor Sir John Soane’s Museum, London, to19January If you’ve never visited this small yet mind-expanding museum then make it a summer treat, for no one leaves without being inspired. Viktor’s exhibition of glistening new works responds to the collection amassed by Soane that spans and summarises world myth. Her global treasures mirror his compendium of sculpture suspended over a crypt. Jonathan Jones Cinema out Twisters Out now A sequel to the fondly remembered 1996 action film Twister, this new film (above) also focuses on people who chase storms for kicks, and why not? Actually, the “why not” becomes clear pretty quickly, but you can’t make an action omelette without at least a few characters boldly going where they probably shouldn’t have gone. Thelma Out now Films starring characters over the age of 90 are few and far between, but step forward Thelma Post (June Squibb), the 93-year-old protagonist of writer­ director Josh Margolin’s indie comic caper, in which one woman sets out to retrieve $10,000 she’s been scammed into handing over to fraudsters. Madeleine Peyroux Barbican Hall, London, Sunday A great interpreter of poetic lyrics, whether her own or those of Leonard Cohen or Bob Dylan, singer-songwriter Peyroux (below) displays a rare mix ofhaunting vulnerability and quiet power. This gig highlights her latest album, Let’s Walk. John Fordham Blur： To the End Out now Damon Albarn, Graham Coxon, Alex James and Dave Rowntree formed one of the more successful acts to emerge from the UK’s 1990s Cool Britannia music scene, and have endured in a way that only a very small number of their contemporaries have managed. A new documentary explores why. BBC National Orchestra of Wales Royal Albert Hall, London, Monday In their first Prom of the summer, the Welsh orchestra and conductor Ryan Bancroft reunite Schoenberg’s early tone poem Pelleas und Melisande with Die Seejungfrau (The Mermaid), Alexander von Zemlinsky’s orchestral fantasy based on Hans Christian Andersen’s fairytale. Andrew Clements lgs Latitude Henham Park, Suffolk， Thursday to 28 July Famed for its multicoloured sheep, beautiful lakes and woods-based singsongs, Latitude festival regularly offers a stellar musical lineup. This year the headliners include Duran Duran, London Grammar and Kasabian. Michael Cragg A cultural primer for the week ahead, whether you’re swanning out or settling in... Bicep SWG3, Glasgow, Thursday Belfast’s Matt McBriar and Andy Ferguson, AKA Bicep, started the year by launching Chroma - a label, event series and hybrid live-DJ audiovisual show. The latter visual spectacular arrives in Glasgow. Expect a sensory overload unlike anything else. MC Janet Planet Out now This l990s-set mother-daughter drama wowed critics at festivals with its subtle take on a parent and child’s relationship in rural western Massachusetts, and announces debut director Annie Baker as a new voice to watch. Starring Julianne Nicholson and Zoe Ziegler. Catherine Bray 40 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian olanls — l n s v Qr 1VOVI— I LL.0 A S LLIi Qrn o o 一 zla\_ l I A n y a LLJ Jr LLIy n x o l d — lvsy LLI AINn/Noayoo Ixln s v a N I —l Ldk M

Streaming Time Bandits Apple TV+, Wednesday What We Do in the Shadows5 Taika Waititi and Jemaine Clement reunite (alongside The Inbetweeners writer Iain Morris) for this reboot of the 1981 Terry Gilliam fantasy film. Telling the story of a boy who embarks on a multi­ dimensional adventure with a gaggle of thieves, this TV version (above) boasts Lisa Kudrow as the gang’s leader. The Decameron Netflix, Thursday Boccaccio’s 14th-century story collection - whose framing device involves a group of hedonistic nobles sheltering from the Black Death near Florence - is the latest vintage material to get turned into an irreverently titillating series. Yet the cast for this one is a cut above, with Zosia Mamet, Tony Hale and Saoirse-Monica Jackson. Hell Jumper BBC Two & iPlayer, Wednesday, 9pm The conflict in Ukraine has been dubbed the first social media war； this documentary captures its confluence of technology and nightmarish reality. Games Kunitsu-Gami: Path of the Goddess PC, Xbox, PS4/5, out now Protect a dancing priestess (above) from hell-sent demons as she purifies a mountain in this strange but fascinating combination of Japanese action and tower-defence. Arranger： A Role- Puzzling Adventure PC, PS4/5, Nintendo Switch, out Thursday Whenever you move your cute little runaway character in this comic-book RPG, the Brain food Silenced Podcast Journalist Nicola Kelly’s humane and deeply informative podcast (above) returns for a second series, speaking to global reporters who have risked their liberties to document the truth. Featuring impassioned discussion with Gaza correspondents, Israeli photojournalists and others. MIT OpenCourseWare YouTube For 20 years, MIT course materials have been shared online through the Open Course Ware program. This YouTube channel collates some of the leading institution’s finest lectures on brain science, the blockchain and more. 75 Years ofNato: New Challenges and Chances PBS America, Monday, 8.35pm This sobering film takes a look at the cold war origins of international military alliance Nato and its current struggle for stability, as members pursue diverging policies and the threat of Russian aggression increases. Ammar Kalia Want more? For cultural picks direct to your inbox, sign up to the Guide newsletter 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 41 Albums Lava La Rue - Starface Out now The London-based singer-songwriter, rapper and activist (above) unleashes their long-awaited debut, a sci-fi concept album starring the titular character. Billed as a lesbian Ziggy Stardust, Starface has been sent to Earth to study, and save, humanity, as outlined on the elegantly scuffed-up pop ofHumanity. Childish Gambino - Bando Stone & the New World Out now Cultural polymath Donald Glover returns to his Childish Gambino moniker for the sixth and final time on an album that also acts as the soundtrack to his film of the same name. Bando Stone & the New World features production from Max Martin and Oscar winner Ludwig Goransson. Stray Kids - Ate Out now The follow-up to the K-pop boyband’s 2023 smash 5-Star arrives in the shape of this eight-track EP. Timed to add to the buzz around last week’s headline set at the BST Hyde Park festival, Ate builds on their discography of big, gloriously OTT pop bangers such as last year’s LALALALA. Glass Animals -1 Love You So Fucking Much Out now Looking to shake off their one-hit wonder tag - 2020’s US chart-topper Heat Waves has hit a staggering 3bn Spotify streams - the Oxford four- piece (below) return with this fourth studio album. Produced by frontman Dave Bayley, lead single A Tear in Space (Airlock) continues their penchant for earworm electropop. MC The Guardian Stage Hotbed festival Cambridge Junction, Saturday & Sunday This small but mighty festival of new writing offers a number of shows about to head on tour, exploring topics from homelessness to the politics of toys. One not to miss is Albatross, Martha Loader’s striking new play about motherhood in the age of climate catastrophe. Kate Wyver The Daughters ofRoisin Lyric theatre, Belfast, Tuesday to Friday A fallen woman. An archaic attitude. A rallying cry. Inspired by her great-grandmother, Aoibh Johnson’s one-woman play explores state- sanctioned abuse against Irish women who get pregnant out of wedlock. KW Northern Rascals Square Chapel Arts Centre, Halifax, Thursday to 28 July An exciting young dance-theatre company based in Yorkshire, Northern Rascals5 new show, Reviving Her, uses the real voices of young women to reflect on the journeys women today make through their lives. Lyndsey Winship Jessie Cave Dance City, Newcastle upon Tyne, Thursday Cave’s work epitomises the unboundaried, prolific, staunchly DIY art of the oversharing era. Her new show, An Ecstatic Display, sees her mine her private life in bracingly frank style yet again； topics include monogamy, anxiety and her addiction to giving birth. Rachel Aroesti Collated from the first-person footage, voice notes and texts ofvolunteer “evacuators”，it centres on 28-year-old Chris Parry from Cornwall, who lost his life attempting to rescue civilians. Linford BBC One & iPlayer, Thursday, 8.30pm Before 2024 Olympics coverage takes over the TV schedules, take a trip down memory lane with one of our most iconic athletes - thafs Linford Christie, for anyone under 30 - as he revisits the triumphs and the trials of his astonishing career. RA whole world moves with them, like a complex sliding-block puzzle. You have to think twice (or thrice) about how to get where you want to go. Keza MacDonald A g M Ld Dra 一 N0H3 N A oiv —JD 一 ODdVD 一 Ld —Jd d v LL.0 A S LLJl y n o D / LLJD v y o iivs https://www.theguardian.com/global/2022/sep/20/sign-up-for-the-guide-newsletter-our-free-pop-culture-email?utm\_source

50% off breakdown packages with the UK’s Nod Online exclusive Join today theAA.com oC5OBER 20^ 20^0 20>s 20T« Which2 \2 \2 \2 \2 Recommended ded ded ded ded ded Provider x ；r ；r ar iY ^down se^n se^n 咖气 N More members than any other major UK breakdown service- Source: AA Annual Report & Accounts 2024 (14.3m Roadside members) and RAC Annual Report & Financial Statements 2023 (12\*9m Roadside members). Verify at theAA-com/Best 50% off breakdown cover packages is only available when you take out a new Membership with At Home, National Recovery or Onward Travel on theAAxom The sale starts on 17 July 2024 and ends at 11.59 pm on 29 July 2024. This introductory offer: (1) is only available online at theAA.com; (2) is for new AA breakdown customers only who are UK residents, and not existing AA breakdown members or at renewal; (3) only applies to the first year of your membership; (4) does not apply when only Roadside Assistance is purchased, or to Parts & Garage Cover; (5) is not available in conjunction with any other offer, discount or promotion or in a breakdown situation; and (6) is not valid and prices are subject to change if you hold your Breakdown membership in relation to a vehicle used to carry items or people for money, or if you are in material breach of any other terms of your Roadside Assistance policy- You can choose how your policy renews when you set up your coven You'll receive notice beforehand of the price of membership after the first 12 months, so you'll have plenty of time to change or cancel your cover. There’s no cash alternative\* The AA reserves the right to withdraw or alter this promotion without prior notice at any time. All information correct at time of print July 2024.

CULTURE BOOKS EANU REEVES has a reputation to maintain as one ofthe nicest, humblest guys on the Hollywood A-list, and maintain it he does. Grizzled of beard, spiky of hair, in a V-neck T-shirt under a dark suit teamed, oddly, with chunkybrown hiking boots, it’s Reeves - rather than the anticipated team of flunkies - who sets about moving side tables and pouring everyone glasses of water as we begin our interview in a suite in a Fitzrovia hotel. He's here with the writer China Mieville to talk about their collaboration on Reeves’s first novel, The Book of Elsewhere，and he does the nice/humble guy thing againalmost immediately the interviewproperbegins. Very early on, he says categorically, “I didn’t want to write the book. I wanted another creator to take that journey. So, ultimately, China has written the novel. It’s not, like, we could look at page eight and say, 'Oh, I wrote this section.’ I didn’t write any of the novel.’” As Reeves describes it，the collaboration began when the two met face-to-face in Berlin in 2021 - “pure luck，” says Mieville, “that we happened to be in the same city at the time” - and it was the star courting the writer, rather than the other way round： “You brought your notebook，” Reeves says to Mieville, “and you had some ideas out of the gate. And basically, it was like, 'I have some questions for you. Before I decide to say yes or no to this, I have some questions.’” “I don’t think I sounded quite so grand!” protests Mieville, causing his collaborator to roar with laughter. “You did sound so grand，” Reeves says，mock-reverently. “You are so grand.” Were you starstruck? “Practically, yea hl" says the actor, who has reportedly been paid more per movie than anyone else in history. It is the superhero team-up nobody had on their bingo cards. But from the way the two men interact and speak about it, their creative collaboration seems to have turned into a full-blown bromance. Reeves was already a fan of Moville’s work - he had optioned one ofthe writer’s short stories some years back - and when the publishers of Reeves's comic-book series, BRZRKR, suggested a novel, “they asked me what would be my dream for who to write the novel? And I was, like： China Mieville.^ The project comes, though, with reputational risks forboth, doesn’t it? Reeves is a hugely well-loved movie actor - and when actors turn their hands to fiction the critics aren’t always kind. For every Sam Shepard, there’s a Sean Penn. (Mieville stifles a giggle.) And as for Mieville, as one ofthe best-regarded science fiction/ fantasy writers in the language, he’s hardly a hack for hire： wasn’t he worried that people would think he’d sold out by hitching his wagon to a Hollywood celebrity? That Berlin meeting was where they hit it off，each responding to the other's “generosity”: Reeves delighted by the ideas Mieville brought to the character； Mieville by the freedom Reeves would give him to develop those ideas in his own direction. “I feel like we have a kinda shared taste，” Reeves says. “To me，’’ says Mieville, “it felt like there’s no point doing a novel that isjust the telling of the comic that does the same thing. That’s just not very interesting. The whole project that Keanu has about collaboration is precisely about people who create in different forms. So, to me，one ofthe keythings was： do I have ideas that interest Keanu, and do those ideas honour the source material, but also do things with it that are specifically literary, specifically novelistic?” The meeting brought together two men at the top of their respective fields, but from rather different worlds. Reeves started his acting career at the age of nine, and has starred in a string of era-defining movies - from Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure to Point Break, the Matrix series and the John Wick films. He lives in the Hollywood Hills with his partner of five years, the visual artist Alexandra Grant, with whom he collaborated on two previous books，a “grown-up picture book” called Ode to Happiness in 2011, and an art book, Shadows (2016), to which Grant contributed photographs and Reeves text. In 2021, he branched out into comics with the bestselling BRZRKR series, co-written with Matt Kindt. Mieville lives in north-west London with his wife, the artistand writer Season Butler. The only person to have won the Arthur C Clarke award three times, he has written novellas, short stories, comics, children’s stories, RPG games and (building on his doctorate from LSE in international relations) a Marxist treatise on international law, in addition to his novels for adults - which include Perdido Street Station, The City & the City，and Embassytown. It has been more than a decade since he published a full-length novel, though, so The Book of Elsewhere will be a huge deal for his fans, as well as Reeves’s. The actor’s input to The Book of Elsewhere was the protagonist Unute - also known as B - the 80,000-year- old immortal warrior with a Wolverine-style healing power and glowing blue eyes who starred in the BRZRKR series. He’s been around the block a few times, has old Unute. On the rare occasions someone succeeds in killing him, he respawns like a video-game character, hatching from an egg，and in relatively short order resumes his vocation of pulling off people’s arms and legs. As we meet him in the comics, he works for，or rather with, aUS government black-ops team with the vague quid pro quo that if the scientists studying him come up with a way to make him mortal, he gets it. What Reeves calls “the acronyming ofthe name” - B for “berserker”，and the vowel-less title ofthe comic - comes from the government association. “In exchange for the "The germ of the idea was a character who could punch through chests and rip arms off. Tve played a bunch of action characters, and it just started to bloom in my imagination' 44 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian Photography： Manuel Vazquez violence he can provide, he allows them to study him. B felt like military shorthand. And for me，it’s very much about the duality of the character - there’s his human birth name, and there’s this other name he’s given.” Talking about the origins ofUnute, Reeves says： “The germ of the idea was just a character who could punch through chests and rip arms off. I wanted to do a pulpy, hyper-violent action idea. Fve played a bunch of different characters involved in action. Growing up I quite enjoyed those stories. I guess, from there, that kernel ofan idea, it’s like, well, who could do that? Then it just started to bloom in my imagination into this character.” He thought his way into the part as an actor would. “Who is it? Maybe it’s like this. And why is this character? Maybe it’s a tribe, thafs being attacked... And maybe it’s 80,000 years ago. And maybe he’s cursed with violence and can’t help it. And he’s half-god, half­ human, half-alien... and what does he want? Where’s he from? What caused this? How does that character love, and how do they live... ? “I didn't want to do a vampire story - you know, kind of fatigued and immortal，” he says, before adopting a languid upper-class British accent. ‘“I’m so tired. Fm so tired of life and drinking blaahd …’ I didn't want him to be a werewolf, like when the moon came out... I wanted something else.” The other thing that stands out about Unute, in the comics at least, is that he's drawn as, um, Keanu Reeves. “There’s a marvellous artist who does the illustrations in the comic book named Ron Garney，” Reeves says. “And his first question, he was like： [growls gruffly]： ‘OK，kid, what does he look like?’ And I was, like [flat voice]： ‘Me.’ And he was, like： 'OK.’ Then I went： 'But not me? And he went： 'OK.”’ Was that because he had an eye to playing Unute in a movie version? “I didn’t think that at the time when I was asked that question. I don’t know： maybe I was just narcissistic. I was, like： Tuck, yeah, I want to be Berserker!5 Yeah. Why not?” BRZRKR sold a ton, and it’s a very comic-booky sort of comic book： a lot of kinetic Frank Miller-style ultraviolence, with ripped-out spines and torn-off jaws and skulls punched into blobs of red mist studded with flying teeth. It’s a ride. But as Reeves and Mieville agreed, a novel could - and needed to - do something a little different. The book isn’t a prequel or sequel to the self- contained tale in the comics； more a separate storywith different versions of the same characters. “That’s a good way to think about it，” Mieville says, when I ask if it，s along the lines ofMichael Moorcock’s Eternal Champion idea - a different avatar ofthe same character. Being Mieville, the story is full of literary and historical in-jokes： an attempt, says the writer, to marry the “mythic element” of the character with something “quite grounded”. One of Unute?s marriages breaks up after the 1648 Peace of Munster, for instance, and when I say I think there’s something of Charles Maturing 1820 Melmoth the Wanderer in Moville’s version of the character he starts waggling his index finger up and down, which, he explains, “I picked up from my brother-in-law： it’s apparently what people in his area ofMexico do when they strongly agree with you.” In this novel, unlike Maturings gothic classic, though, the protagonist is being chased through time and space by a giant, angry，tusked deer-pig. That was Moville’s invention. (“I bet you wanted it to be a giant squid，” I say to the famously cephalopod-loving author. “I don’t want to become too much of a self-cliche/' he says.) But The Book ofElsewhere springs from a hint in the original comics. A one-panel easter egg about Sigmund Freud meeting Unute turns into a framing device for Mi合ville’s polyphonic novel, which is much more philosophical and ruminative than its source material.

That said, Mieville affirms, “I love an exciting, pulpy fight scene and it would be breach of promise not to have fun, pulpy, dramatic hyperviolence in this novel. But there’s also things you can do in the pace of a novel that are much harder to do with a comic.” If you were to read BRZRKR and The Book of Elsewhere through the prism of Reeves’s acting career, you could see it as falling somewhere between the exhilarating ultraviolence of the John Wick series and the secret worlds and existential paranoia of The Matrix. Also, as scholars will no doubt ponder, it chimes with Bill & Ted’s Bogus Journey - in which the protagonists get the better of Death by giving him a wedgie. Especially, but not uniquely, in this version of the character, Unute’s existential predicament is also emotional. Ifyou live for 8o,ooo years, how are you to relate to people who grow old and die in (for you) the blinking of an eye? Can an immortal be fully human? Can life, and the choices you make in life, be meaningful if it never ends? Unute doesn’t want to die, but he does - desperately -want to be mortal： “there’s a difference”. And Unute is sterile： every child he has is stillborn. (There’s a special torque to this in knowing that Reeves had a stillborn child with his former partner, the actor Jennifer Syme - who later went on to die in a car accident. For all his good fortune, Reeves is acquainted with grief.) When theywent back and forth on Mieville's first draft in a series ofZoom meetings, Mieville says： “What I felt he was particularly perspicacious about was questions of character - which shouldn’t be a surprise because of the acting. But the way we talk about things structurally, and in terms of character, isn't necessarily the same. We don’t come with the same vernacular. “So there was a process where I had to learn to understand what was being put to me. I remember a couple of times when you were saying things about B, and I was like，I know I’m not getting what he’s saying. Then after a couple of goes around - oh, OK, I get it. And every time that happened -1 can think of three times very particularly -1 was, like, oh： he's absolutely right.” What have been Reeves’s influences as a reader? He rubs his hair and groans a little： “I mean, Fve got some fuckin’ hobbits in my past，” he says. “In your cupboard，” interjects Mieville. “Yeah，I got some hobbits goin’ on there. I’m trying to remember some other ... I liked sci-fi. My early hormone years were kindalike： Frank Miller - Wolverine, Dark Knight. But then I also loved, like, Archies and so on. But when I first read Philip K Dick, or when I read William Gibson, or Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, you know, those were all like... and Nineteen Eighty- Four, Brave New World, Animal Farm. You know，those kinds of fantasy novel... I really liked that.” Mieville is well known not just as a fantasy and SF writer, but also for his political work. His last published book, A Spectre, Haunting, was an essay on the Communist Manifesto. Did he convert his co-author to Marxism while they were writing the book? “I think it would be deeply gauche and rude of me to start haranguing him，” he says. “We haven’t talked too much politically.” “I’m not someone to speak politics，’’ says Reeves decisively. “I’m just tenible.” What does Reeves make, I ask him nevertheless, of the way in which the metaphors of his Matrix movies have been co-opted by the “alt-right” with their talk of “red pills”？ He looks a little pained. “Aaah，” he says. “It doesn’t sound that great to me?” Then： “But I don’t know. It’s art, right? So I don’t know. I mean, it’s like... Clockwise from main： character in the film Reeves and Mieville； Reeves as the title John Wick (2014)； images from BRZRKR yeah. I guess people... yeah. Take it and run with it …” In no great expectation of a straight answer, I ask the intrusive question. Is this a flat fee for Mieville, or shared royalties? “Hopefully，” says Reeves, “there’s royalties to share. Hopefully - which would mean that people enjoyed the work, or they bought it for some other reason. But whatever it is, hopefully they get something positive.” If nothing else, Reeves himself got something positive. “I’m reading a BRZRKR China Mieville novel!” he says. aYeah\ What, what, what? And then like, why am I crying? Why am I feeling so much? And then what is that? And then? Wait, I need to like... what’s that fuckin’ word? Oh, yeah. Great." The Book of Elsewhere by Keanu Reeves and China Mieville is published by Del Rey. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 45 y v l s —l —lv / s LLIy niDid a v o Qid LLIa N n H i / Ld LLJl a l x Q IK olanls S O O OQ JNVIa ar <n9 LdH i/z Ld nozv> — J Lxln N V s

The devil you know A masterful guide to the new age of autocracy John Simpson POLITICS Autocracy, Inc. The Dictators Who Want to Run the World Anne Applebaum ALLEN LANE，£20 AUTOCRACY, INC. WAIfTTail VTIF 卯船I) ANNE APPLEBAUM NTIL AROUND 2015,1 tended to be moderately positive about the world. There were far more democracies than when I started at the BBC in 1966, I / would tell myself, and markedly fewer dictatorships. Africa and Latin America were now mostly run by elected leaders. The terrible threat ofnuclear war had receded. A billion people were being lifted out of poverty. Yes，what Vladimir Putin had done in Crimea in 2014 was worrying, and Xi Jinping was starting to make disturbing speeches about Muslims and Uyghurs； but given that I’d seen Soviet communism melt away across eastern Europe and in Russia itself, I still felt there was reason for optimism. That pretty much ended in 2016. Brexit damaged the European project, and Donald Trump shook the columns of American leadership. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s ruthless suppression of political freedom in Hong Kong have darkened the 2020s much as German, Italian and Japanese intervention darkened the 1930s. And the tide of democracy has turned. Elections have so often become shams. Corruption in government has turned into a major global industry. Well-intentioned but indigent governments welcome Chinese cash because no one else will supply it，and pretend not to notice the strings attached - or even welcome them. Populist movements well up in countries that have traditionally been moderate and calm. And so the kind of neo-Whig version ofhistory, which taught that trade would bring us all closer together and economics would make war impossible, has collapsed. China, you might have thought, would see peace as essential for its brand of capitalist-Marxism-Leninism to thrive. Yet you only have to read Bill Clinton, speaking in 2000, to realise how very unrealistic that idea has become： “Growing interdependence will have a liberating effect in China... Computers and the internet, fax machines and photocopiers, modems and satellites all increase the exposure to people, ideas and the world Vladimir Putin with Xi Jinping in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing beyond China’s borders.” It would be as hard for governments to control the internet, he famously added, as it would be to nail Jell-O to a wall. But instead ofthe technology masteringthe autocrats, the autocrats have learned to master the technology. In this new age of autocracy, men like Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Narendra Modi and Viktor Orban run entire countries according to their own personal political interest, recharged from time to time by carefully manipulated elections； though last month the voters oflndia unexpectedly refused to give Modi the majority he needed. Meanwhile the US, whose opinion used to matterjust about everywhere on Earth, suddenly seems as intimidating as a scarecrow in a beet field. Anne Applebaum is well-positioned to catalogue this new age of autocracy. Like her, Autocracy, Inc. is clear-sighted and fearless. Iremember disagreeing with her at editorial meetings in the early 1990s, when she was writing about the danger that Russia’s post­ communist implosion would one day present for the west. She talked even then about the need for Nato to build up its defences against the time when Russia would be resurgent； while I, having spent so much time in the economic devastation of Moscow and St Petersburg, thought the best way for the west to protect itself was by being far more generous towards Russia. Events have shown which ofus was right, and it wasn’t me. Autocracy, Inc. is deeply disturbing； it couldn’t be anything else. But Applebaum’s research is as always thoroughgoing, which makes it a lively pleasure to read. When she writes about Zimbabwe, for instance, she uncovers a weird and shocking cast of characters to explain the degree to which a potentially wealthy country has been devastated by unthinkably bad government； including the presidential envoy and ambassador-at-large Uebert Angel. Angel, a British- Zimbabwean and evangelical pastor, teaches “the fundamental aspects of becoming a millionaire”; his personal assistant, another Brit called Pastor Rikki, can allegedlyget you a face-to-face meeting with President Mnangagwa for a couple of hundred thou. Rikki was shown on camera promising this to an undercover reporter for Al Jazeera, though he states that the resulting documentary was “brutally edited to portray a false narrative”. Skilfully, Applebaum shows how important a financial entrepot like Dubai is in promoting the interests of governments such as Zimbabwe, and how it facilitates China's growing control over countries which, left alone by the west, are available for sale or hire. This is more in the nature of an extended essay about the way the world is going than a major study, but it is a masterclass in the marriage of dodgy government to international criminality. Applebaum is particularly good on information-laundering “typosquatters” which have the appearance of real, dependable outfits (Reuters.cfd instead ofReuters.com, Spiegel.pr not Spiegel.de). These pump out savagely pro-Russian material, which people read on social media and pass on： for instance the fake press release last year which announced that Nato was going to use Ukrainian troops in France to deal with pension protesters. Obviously false, but it still led to smashed windows and broken bones. The Jell-O is firmly stuck to the wall. It’s a disturbing world we live in, but understanding its ways and knowing who to trust have never been so important. Anne Applebaum, who 30 years ago foresaw the way we were going, is one of those we can trust. John Simpson is the BBC's world affairs editor. To buy Autocracy, Inc. far £17go toguardianbookshop.com 46 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian S LLJ9 V S I A 1 1 LL19

To the edge of reason A mother's grief at the loss of her son Blake Morrison MEMOIR Fi A Memoir of My Son Alexandra Fuller JONATHAN CAPE, £18.99 A lexandra Fuller was in a pickup truck in Wyoming with her girlfriend, Till, when her mobile beeped. The relationship was newish and fraught： Till was young, with “skin like alabaster”，but had issues - neediness, drugs, self-harm. Alexandra was still recovering from a broken relationship and didn’t feel cut out for intimacy. The dramas between them were intense but paled into insignificance as Fuller turned and saw missed calls from her ex-husband, Charlie. The news was terrible： their son Fi, just 21， had died in his sleep. “Fi died and everything that I’d believed in until then blinked out with him.” Fi had just come back from Argentina, where he’d had a seizure. On return to Wyoming he seemed fine， just a little tired. He’d always been sporty - tennis, lacrosse, hockey, mountain-climbing. He was smart and self-aware, too, and great company for his two sisters, “the perfect son”. The book’s subtitle is misleading： this is less the story of Fi than of his mother’s grief. She’d had more than her share already： in childhood, the deaths of three of her four siblings (one from meningitis, one at only a week old, the other a younger sister who drowned while in her care)，more recently the death of her father and divorce from Charlie. But losing Fi was on a Sally Challen, Left, with Harriet Wistrich outside court in 2010 different scale, “the worst thing I’d ever felt. Unimaginable”. Grief drives her to the edge of reason. She doesn’t want to know why Fi died -won’t read the autopsy report or look at his health records or meet doctors； won’t give a blood sample to see if she carries “the gene, the poison, the errorn that killed him. Instead she talks to the hummingbirds and eagles that appear in the days after his death, which her magical thinking tells her might carry messages to Fi. His presence lies not in what’s left behind but in the natural world： birds, storms, a double rainbow. Friends fly in to see her. They5re consolation for the non-appearance at Fi’s funeral of her mother and sister, who haven’t forgiven her for what she wrote about the family in her award winning 2002 memoir Don’t Let’s Go to the Dogs Tonight. But only the wild is conducive to her grief. On the first full moon after Fi’s death, she hikes to camp by a mountain lake. And on the second full moon, Till tows her “sheep wagon” to a high meadow so that Fuller can set up a “grief camp”， with eight hours ofwriting a day. The regime takes its toll： her weight drops from nine to seven stone and she’s plagued by guilt at the tiger mother she had been, often away on writing assignments on her children’s birthdays or school holidays. “Who’ll look after them?” she’d be asked. “Oh, they’ll be all right,” she’d reply, I “They’ve got assault rifles.” Life writers often want to be likable. Fuller’s not in that camp： rawly bereft, she doesn’t care how she comes across. Her exes have told her what a force of nature she is and she owns up to being, “a provocateur and know-it-all”. It’s no easy ride in her company, but that’s the point： she doesn’t spare us the pain inflicted by “the sharp knife of a short life”. Equally, she won’t react in the same way as her mother, whose loss of three children led to depression and alcoholism. There are several phases in Fuller’s recovery programme： massages from a naturopath； a beach holiday with her daughters； a week in a nonprofit grief sanctuary； 10 days at a meditation centre where speaking is forbidden. At one point she hears her daughters laugh, and after a farcical episode with an officious cop she and Till laugh too. At the end, she’s living in the Rockies surrounded by elks，bears, snakes and porcupines. It’s not that she has found Fi, but she has found “a settling place’’， an appeasement of sorts in the wilderness, “like being in the arms of a trusted old lover”. To buy a copy for £16.14 at guardianbookshop.com In defence of women A high-profile lawyer on her defining cases Fiona Sturges SOCIETY Sister in Law Fighting for Justice in a System Designed by Men Harriet Wistrich TORVA,£22 HWIllMtni 心 SISTER I wisraici! I n 2011, Harriet Wistrich got a call about Sally Challen, who had been convicted of the murder of her husband, Richard. Sally had bludgeoned him to death with a hammer at their Surrey home and driven to Beachy Head in Sussex with the aim of jumping off the cliff (she was talked down). Challen’s family felt her defence team had failed to highlight Richard’s abusive behaviour towards Sally. In court she had been painted as a jealous wife, enraged by her husband’s infidelities. At first, Wistrich, a lawyer specialising in human rights cases, struggled to see how she might help Challen, whose defence of diminished responsibility had already been rejected by a jury. Appealing against a criminal conviction without fresh evidence is no easy task. But Wistrich was able to build a detailed picture of Richard’s campaign of abuse, which included sexual violence, isolating his wife from friends and family and withholding money. At the time, parliament was debating legislation that would recognise coercive control, an insidious form of abuse where perpetrators exert their power over victims through intimidation, humiliation and punishment. Here, Wistrich realised, was “a new framework for interpreting the dynamics of an abusive relationship. It was like placing a powerful new lens in front of existing facts and everything suddenly becoming clear”. In Sister in Law, a series of essays detailing Wistrich’s most high-profile cases, she recalls the appeal which led to the quashing of’Challen’s murder conviction. After prosecutors accepted a manslaughter plea, she was freed from prison, having already served a nine-year sentence. It was a landmark victory that would lead to the Criminal Cases Review Commission looking at more than 3,000 murder cases to identify any unsafe convictions. While this book is not a memoir - we learn little of Wistrich’s interior life - it nonetheless reveals its author to be courageous in her quest for justice. She started out not as a lawyer but an activist and film-maker. In the early 1990s，she and her partner, the writer and campaigner Julie Bindel, were enraged by what they saw as the misogyny embedded within the criminal justice system. Back then, rape within marriage had only just been made a crime, the police favoured a non-interventionist approach to cases of "battered wives”，and harassment, stalking, forced marriage and so-called honour-based violence were not recognised as offences in law. It was the case of Sara Thornton, who in 1991 appealed against a life sentence for killing her violent, alcoholic husband, that prompted Wistrich’s change in career. Sara had stabbed Malcolm Thornton in the middle of a violent altercation and immediately called an ambulance. Days after Sara’s appeal was rejected, Joseph McGrail used the defence of provocation during his trial for the murder ofhis partner, Marion, whom he had kicked to death. He was given a two-year suspended sentence and was told by the judge that his partner “would have tested the patience of a saint”. And so Wistrich began training as a lawyer, marking the start of a career that would see her acting for the victims of the serial rapist John Worboys； the victims of “spy cops”，the undercover policemen who infiltrated leftwing groups and began sexual relationships with female activists； and the female detainees at YarFs Wood Immigration Removal Centre in Bedfordshire, many of whom escaped torture in their own countries only to be locked up and abused by UK immigration staff. In reflecting on these cases, Wistrich not only illustrates the ways in which the law fails women but the gruelling nature of litigation： it is slow, infernally complicated, and forces individuals to relive their worst experiences. Yet through these enraging and astonishing stories, Wistrich also shows us the best ofhumanity. These are the individuals who endure punishing legal processes because they want to make the system better and prevent others from going through what they did. Then there is Wistrich herself： empathetic, dogged, canny, always up for the fight. Her book might be short on introspection but her remarkable legal career speaks volumes about the person she is. To buy a copy for £19.36 go to guardianbookshop.com The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 47 A N V —IV

HISTORY Balzac’s Paris The City as Human Comedy Eric Hazan, translated by David Fernbach VERSO, £15.99 E ric Hazan, a lifelong Parisian who died in June, wrote several books about his hometown, with a particular focus on the class politics of the built environment. In Balzac’s Paris he revisits the 19th- century social geography of the French capital through the fiction of one of its most famous novelists. Honore de Balzac’s La Comedie humaine (Human Comedy) - a vast series of novels and stories depicting French society between 1814 and 1848 -is one of the canonical texts of literary realism. In these works, Hazan writes, the street is more than just a setting： “The places where the characters live and evolve are part of their personality； they define them in the same way as their physique, their dress or their psychology.” First published in France in 2018 and now available in English thanks to David Fernbach’s translation, Balzac’s Paris is a blend ofliterary criticism and historical psychogeography. Hazan narrates in the manner of a tour guide, hopping from location to location and offering up nuggets of commentary： pertinent quotes from the novels, or Balzac’s personal correspondence； etymological titbits； an apposite line from Baudelaire or Proust. One moment we’re amid the jumbled streets and medieval architecture of Old Paris, where Balzac’s characters can be found frequenting the gambling dens of the Palais-Royal, or schmoozing at the Street spirit A stroll through Paris with Honore de Balzac Houman Barekat Opera. The next we’re being led through New Paris, the area stretching from Montmartre to the city walls, which was built up during a flurry of construction under the July Monarchy (1830-48). Its residents range from the wealthy bankers of the fashionable Chaussee-d’Antin district to the sex workers, known as lorettes, associated with the neighbourhood around the church ofNotre-Dame-de-Lorette. (Hazan observes that Balzac portrays them sympathetically, “whereas the noble ladies of high society are either seductive, egotistical, and brutal... or else more or less virtuous dimwits”.) The less salubrious districts are home to a number of socially marginalised characters. In the Latin Quarter we meet an escaped convict, a mentally fragile marquis down on his luck, and the slimy title character of Gobseck (1830), a moneylender who brags： “I like to leave mud on a rich man’s carpet； it is not petty spite, I like to make them feel a touch of the claws of Necessity.” For the most part, however, Balzac - a staunch conservative and monarchist - was concerned with depicting the comings and goings of high society. Across the novels, we meet workers “only in passing... because Balzac’s characters, whether bourgeois or aristocratic, have no business in the working-class suburbs”. The political strife of the 1830s rarely featured： “nothing happened - at least nothing in the streets： neither riots nor uprisings, nor insurrections. It is just in the turn of a sentence, in a quick allusion, that we sometimes perceive the distant echo of battles.” Hazan’s peregrinations culminate in a thoughtful disquisition on literary realism, in which he suggests that the term itself is misleading. He points out that Balzac’s novels make no mention of the railways that were then proliferating in the city, or the new fortifications built in the 1840s； people with chestnut hair - the majority - are conspicuously under-represented in the Human Comedy, as Balzac preferred to populate his stories with characters who have either blond or jet-black hair. Were this any other writer, the appropriate response would be： so what? He was a novelist, not an archivist. But something about the panoramic breadth and descriptive detail of the Human Comedy, with its cast of about 2,500 characters, has tempted generations of readers and critics to view it as something akin to a factual chronicle. Of course, the novels were only intended as entertainment. “Balzac，” Hazan quips, “is no more of a realist than Scheherazade”. Even so, the mythos of great literature bleeds into our sense of history. To buy a copy go to guardianbookshop.com BOOKS NONFICTION the mainstay of la cuisine classique. Anchovies fell by the wayside, and were relegated to decorative cameos in hors d’oeuvres. They went viral in 18th-century Britain however, where they were used in ketchups. The word ke-tchup - of Javanese origin - is Hokkien for “fish sauce”. Anchovies were only dropped from the condiment in the 1850s, two decades before Heinz launched its famous version, swapping the umami of anchovy for the sweetness of molasses, transforming the savoury British ketchup of yesterday into the sweet American ketchup of today. An heir to the British ketchup of old, however, survives in the form of Worcestershire sauce. In Italy, the anchovy enjoyed a rather pedestrian reputation. In a 1690s cookbook, Antonio Latini called his anchovy sauce sfacciatella, the “little harlot” who could get on with anyone. That sense survives in spaghetti alia puttanesca, the Neapolitan uharlot- style” pasta with anchovies beloved of the time-starved budget cook. In America, a near-fatal blow to the anchovy’s fortunes was delivered in the 1960s by the TV chef Julia Child. Her recipes, in Beckman’s uncharitable description, were “little more than butter and dairy bombs residing on pastry dough”. I think he gives her too much credit. As he argues elsewhere, American taste buds had been frayed for ages. Here was a culture that, postwar, wholeheartedly took to CampbelFs soup, Tang, and mac and cheese. Sweet, mild, toddler­ friendlyflavours dominated. The anchovy never stood a chance. Beckman closes his book with a sales pitch. Anchovies, he tells us, are packed with calcium, iron, niacin, and vitamin D. What’s more, they lower the risk of cardiovascular diseases. I, for one, am sold. To buy a copy go to guardianbookshop.com Anchovies are 'umami bombs1 CULTURE Worth their salt How anchovies made a culinary splash PratinavAnil FOOD A Twist in the Tail How the Humble Anchovy Flavoured Western Cuisine Christopher Beckman HURST, £18.99 T he anchovy is the Marmite of the aquatic world. Love it or hate it, neutrality isn’t an option. Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, found them repulsive. Horace was pithier： “They stink.” But Christopher Beckman, horror film producer turned food historian, swears by them. A Twist in the Tail is his delightful tribute to this diminutive fish. The anchovy’s reputation, he argues, precedes it. Taste is another matter. Try incorporating some anchovies into an unsuspecting friend’s dinner, and the chances are they wouldn’t notice them. But they may well find the meal more delicious. For anchovies are exploding with umami, that moreish, flavourful “fifth taste”，in marked contrast to the common four： sweet, sour, salty, bitter. It all comes down to “free glutamates”. Most meats and vegetables contain around loomg of them per loog. Cured meats, such as prosciutto, and sun-dried tomatoes push that figure to 300-700. At 1,200, anchovies are “umami bombs” dropped on the tongue’s glutamate receptors. Small wonder ancient Romans were fond of garum, the fish sauce they used to enliven meat and fruit. The bulk of the garum amphorae found in Pompeii bore the brand of Aulus Umbricius Scaurus, “the ketchup king of Campania”，who built a McMansion on the proceeds of his cheap anchovy sauce, which he passed off as expensive and mackerel-based. The decline and fall of garum was coeval with that of the Roman empire, though these days, it can still be had in certain rarefied establishments, as I recently discovered in Puglia. Beckman charts the revolution in taste that followed the discarding of the notion that food could help keep the four humours in balance. So the quintessential supper in France in 1500, if you could afford it, was bland blancmange, in those days “a pudding­ like puree of rice, chicken, and almond milk”. Fast-forward a hundred years and appeals to the palate supplanted humoral theory, and anchovies secured their place on the plate. Still, a setback came when, in 1833, France’s leading patissier, Antonin Careme, codified the “mother sauces” - bechamel, espagnole, veloute, allemande - that subsequently became 48 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The S LLI9 V Z I A11 LU 9/SV1IN

What lies beneath A woman is haunted by her traumatic Australian childhood -and her boyfriend's ghost-ina dark but funny tale Melissa Harrison The Echoes Evie Wyld JONATHAN CAPE, £18.99 i EVIE WYLD M ax, a thirtysomething creative writing tutor, has died, and now haunts the second-floor flat in London’s Tulse Hill where he once lived with his Australian girlfriend, Hannah. This is inconvenient, as Max doesn’t believe in ghosts, and yet here he is, watching Hannah grieve, “floating about like a jellyfish, my tendrils... sweeping up the lint and hair from the floor. Sometimes when I come forth I take up the whole of a room, like a balloon slotted between ribs and blown up to make a space for breath.” Notice that funny, mysterious “come forth”，and the near­ violence of the simile that follows (“slotted between ribs”): thisis not going to be a quirky-sad love story, all poignant memories and hard-won insights. We are in Evie Wyld’s precise and unforgiving hands, and she knows exactly where she wants to take us. The narrativejumpslargelybetweenMax5s sections as a ghost trapped in the flat, titled “After”; Hannah’s chapters, set in the run-up to Max’s death, called “Before”； and “Then” - flashbacks to Hannah’s childhood in rural Australia. She grew up with her parents, her Uncle Tone and older sister Rachel on The Echoes, land on which a residential school for Indigenous and mixed-race children once stood. An old paddock concealed their small bones： victims of racist child removal policies that, until as recently as 1969, saw tens of thousands of kids taken from their families and either fostered with white families or sent to orph anages, missions or “training homes”. Few records were kept, but it’s known that many children died of neglect or from physical punishment, and their remains were secretly buried on site. The fact that the school was not somewhere children were kept safe from harm is both known to Hannah and her family, and somehow not known. She swims in the creek, idolises her sister and feeds the family goats, yet an unnameable horror lurks beneath it all. Small wonder her favourite book, one she returns to again and again, features vivid photographs of shark bites and dismemberment (Wyld was herself fascinated Ormiston Gorge in the West MacDonnell Ranges, in Australia's Nothern Territory by sharks as a child and in 2015 co-authored a graphic memoir with Joe Sumner called Everything Is Teeth). “What will you do when the shark follows us and tries to take the rest of me down?” she whispers to Rachel late one night. RacheFs offhand reply prefigures both girls’ fate. In London the adult Hannah self-harms in a variety of imaginative ways, sabotages a promising writing career, refuses to talk about her family or reply to her mother’s letters, and has an abortion she doesn’t tell Max about. She has also lost touch with her sister, and the two narrative engines of the book are provided firstly by Max’s need to find out how he died, and secondly through the slow, nightmarishly unfolding story ofHannah and RacheFs childhood, their mother and Uncle Tone’s past, and how their life at The Echoes came to what was clearly a shattering end. Wyld has always excelled at tension and pace, and the scattered puzzle pieces drop into place with both a feeling of horror and a strange kind of satisfaction： oh, that’s whose face she briefly thinks she sees in the bathroom mirror. That's why she makes lots of cups of coffee and doesn’t drink them. That's where the tiny cube of green glass on her bedside table came from. Nobody writes about trauma like Wyld. She does this largely by not writing directly about it, either transforming it into metaphor, or focusing only on its after effects, or both. From the creature that haunts the sugarcane fields in After the Fire, a Still Small Voice to whatever keeps killing Jake’s sheep in All the Birds, Singing and the shadowy “wolfman” in The Bass Rock, monsters stalk her pages. Her characters are circled by them, their psyches distorted by things only half1 visible, their pull as inescapable as a black hole. Families are not much better； they’re rarely safe places, but resemble more the mouths ofthe sharks that so fascinate Hannah, packed with vicious teeth. Yet as well as terror The Echoes is also suffusedwith love, from the deep bond between Hannah and Rachel to the consolingand celebratory love of female friends, and the imperfect, wavering but ultimately lasting love between Hannah and Max. It is also - and this is important - a deeply funny book： there’s Max, who “has recently decided that the thing about him is fermentation’’，burping a jar of homemade kimchi； Hannah’s brief liaison with a godawful friend, the whole thing watched by Max’s ghost, who is tersely surprised to observe that the friend is circumcised； Hannah’s chaotic pal Janey and her brilliantly serious daughter, who has a habit of upending adult conversations； a scabrously excruciating comic set piece ofa Christmas dinner； and Max’s ghostly war, and eventual entente, with the cat Hannah gets after his death. The monster Hannah is in flight from is eventually revealed, and with it comes a sense oflifting the stone, finally, and looking at the terrible thing that has been buried underneath, and hasn’t died. The adult Hannah makes sense to us at last, despite - or perhaps because of - having articulated so little ofher story to us directly： a “show, don’t tell” technique that closely mirrors the effects of trauma, in which so much is expressed but often so little can be said. We learn how Max died too, and when Hannah leaves the flat he persists there, with “the moths and the damp and the dust motes ... the last of our fingerprints cleaned away”. Time no longer exists for him； but eventually, miraculously, his persistence is rewarded. The last, lingering voices in the novel hint at healing - and at hope. To buy a copy far £16.71 go toguardianbookshop.com The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 49 Alls/AONSOd

CULTURE BOOKS FICTION Homecoming queen Biting satire of millennial privilege Caleb Klaces Banal Nightmare Halle Butler WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON, £20 H alle Butler is one of the funniest and most exacting novelists of millennial precarity. In her first two novels, 2015’s Jillian and 2019’s The New Me, she showed an extraordinarily sensitive eye for emotional and economic vulnerabilities. The protagonists, Megan (24) and Millie (30)， feel complex disdain for themselves, their unfulfilling jobs, their irritating older colleagues, as they maintain an anxiously agreeable veneer. Their efforts at work are not rewarded with professional advancement. Their punishing self-awareness does not make them any happier than the people whose lives they scorn - people such as Jillian, a mantra-reciting single parent in her mid-30s. Other gifted novelists of Butlefs generation, such as Patricia Lockwood, Ben Lerner and Sally Rooney，have leaned away from irony towards sincerity as they have travelled through their 30s. With her third novel, Butler moves definitively in the other direction. Her central character, Moddie, is Jillian’s age, but begins the novel having thrown off all the obligations she can. She has broken up with her artist boyfriend, Nick, after a brief fling with a colleague who “told her she had movie boobs”. She has left her potentially fulfilling job as a grant writer for a Chicago arts charity, and moved to X, the university town where she grew up. When a mysterious older visiting artist arrives in X, Moddie’s rediscovered friends, now working with varying degrees of self-satisfied angst at the university, are brought together for awkward chat. Banal Nightmare is worth reading just to experience Butler’s virtuosic prose, a high-wire combination of deadpan summary (“They sat on the couch for about an hour, going over current events and personal experiences”) and hyper­ articulate observation (“The building’s entrance looked like vagina dentata and the lobby looked like if a German Expressionist set designer had used the inside of a Norelco razor as inspiration for a new opera where all the characters were maybe supposed to be Hitler”). At social gatherings, Moddie gets drunk and goes off topic - expressing distaste for NPR； criticising Ruth Bader Ginsburg - which leads to a general consensus that she is “crazy”. This dynamic of a protagonist’s mild disobedience eliciting over-zealous opprobrium from those around them is familiar from much autofiction and what has been called the “sad girl” trope. In its early scenes, Banal Nightmare appears to set up a familiar dynamic, pitting Moddie’s urbane self-awareness against the fearful raised eyebrows of the suburban middlebrow crowd. Then the novel makes things more complicated. We learn that Moddie has recently been the victim of predatory behaviour from a man she considered a friend. Butler’s measured description of that event is more sober and quietly affecting than anything in Jillian or The New Me. For the first time, one of Butler’s characters manages to be straightforwardly honest about their feelings, as Moddie tells her friend Bethany what happened. Bethany is in a position of power at the university, where there are vacancies after a sexual abuse scandal, and offers Moddie a job. Moddie calls her mum to report that she “was no longer a liar, a reject, or a fuckup, and had finally been accepted into the bosom of sisterhood”. Banal Nightmare roams more freely between characters than Butler’s previous books. The excruciating private fantasies of peripheral figures provide some ofits most memorable moments. A biology professor, Craig, dreams about sex with his intern. A literature professor, Peter, gets high and fantasises about giving a lecture on the fascist origins of Hollywood narrative structure, his students “cheering and lifting him on a chair and carrying him out on to the quad”. The most airless, sexless character, Kimberly, fantasises about writing an amusingly terrible lyric essay in response to the arrival ofModdie, “a privileged interloping bitch who was being handed Kim’s spot in game night, just like she’d been handed everything else”. Virtuosic prose... Halle Butler Towards the end of the book, an email from Moddie’s father reveals something significant about her finances, casting her move to X in a different light. The true object of Butler’s sophisticated, ambivalent satire maybe millennial fiction’s tendency to celebrate the liberatory potential of sincere self-narration and downplay economic advantage. The final twist is that ridiculous, chippy Kimberly, with her insufferable sincerity, may actually have a point. To buy a copy for £16.71 go to guardianbookshop.com An ode to storytelling Travellers gather before a feast of the dead Sana Gqyal Funeral Nights Funeral Nighis ■ ■ Kynpham Sing A Nongkynrih I My n\*ew » Af 氧 a w.4t>d te(屬u&M fun-UMti il 1 mt hi MTlfS ibr rxfv«f at K rutwx iMiNTol And AND OTHER STORIES, £19.99 It l\* h • 1 fMh Kh«4» pn(Wkinc<<< i< 1 kM\* ihU tor wrc. be rmsf ul mr tMi fncsdi MI • r>ui Ih 11 li Itiil R kiw il WwadA he R ain time in Sohra was also story time，” we’re told early on in this seminal and shapeshifting novel about the north-eastern Indian Khasi community. “The perfect time to tell a tale is a rainy night.” A real-life journey the author made to the jungle village ofNongshyrkon, nestled in the West Khasi Hills of north-east India, inspired the book. It’s also a homage to the narrator’s home town, Sohra -changed to Cherrapunjee in colonial times - “the wettest desert on earth”. But through sheer determination and passion for storytelling, as the rain falls, stories grow. At the start, Ap Jutang lays out his intentions： “It is very much in the spirit ofHamlet that I would like to tell you the story of my people - to clear their wounded name.” In the 1990s, the 50 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian narrator found himself in Delhi, and discovered how the rest of India treats its citizens from the north-east. “I was just too different. I didn’t look like the rest of them； I didn’t speak like them. I didn’t act like them. Had they known me, they would have learnt that I didn’t eat like them.” Repeatedly stereotyped, mocked and marginalised - by his fellow citizens, by government policy, by history and also by literature - he is determined to correct the falsehoods about the religions and customs of the Khasi people. The novel follows a group of friends and strangers who journey from Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, to witness a rumoured ancient six-day funeral ceremony, Ka Phor Sorat, which is performed by the Khasi tribe, Lyngngam. The ceremony will conclude with the cremation of a beloved elder of the village, whose body has been preserved in a treehouse for nine months. This feast of the dead is a dying tradition - most Khasis have converted to Christianity - and the group is eager to experience it. Miscalculating the date, they arrive early. While they wait in the jungle, they spend their nights around a fire exchanging stories - “stories big and small, not so much about death, but about life, past, present and future, rural and urban, high and low” - and debating the ruptures between the old world and the new. Poetic prose is interspersed with poetry and history, fact is juxtaposed with anecdote, and the author has his inky fingers in many genres： memoir, myth, travelogue, reportage. An intensively researched and intricately rendered account of everything from the natural world to the sociopolitics of the Khasi tribe, the novel reflects a realm where “the real and the surreal get blurred, spirits and deities become part of what is human and the imaginary is ever in conversation with the everyday”. The narrator^ particular brand of cheeky humour spares no one, not even his own community. Funeral Nights is an enchanting and revealing epic ensemble, and reading it feels like being exposed to the warmth of the fire，listening in on an honest conversation between friends. Like any good journey, it has twists and turns, false starts and pit stops, the road not taken, and the tale not told. At 1,000 pages, it is a mighty endeavour. I found myself wholly submerged in its wet world, delighting in its many digressions. Readers looking to trace a straightforward plot will miss the book’s true purpose, which is to be an ode to oral storytelling in all its complexities. It requests - no, demands - full immersion. At the beginning, the narrator says： “I do believe that, in telling you about [Sohra], I will reveal myself, for everything that I am has been shaped and moulded by my home town - not only by the customs and manners of

Sohra’s people but also by the silent influence of the hills, rivers and woods that surround it and surround me still.” By the end of this transformative book, something shifts within us, and we, too, feel shaped and surrounded by the rain, the rivers, the stories. To buy a copy for £17.59 go to guardianbookshop.com Bumpy road to peace A Troubles tale with Tarantino-esque tension Jude Cook Cross Austin Duffy GRANTA, £14.99 E veryone knew Francie and Francie knew everyone. He was at the centre of everything and he knew everything.” So the long- serving IRA man Francie Begley is described by slippery politician Mairtin O’Cuilleanain in Austin Duffy’s riveting and gritty Troubles novel, Cross. Set in 1994, in the months before the provisional ceasefire, the book takes its title from the fictional northern Irish border town of Cross, an outpost in "so-called bandit country... this hotbed of republicanism”. Duffy dramatises the tortuous shift from violence to real political change in the front rooms and pubs of Cross, with the two wings of the republican cause embodied by Francie and O’Cuilleandin. It’s no accident that O’Cuilleanain is known as MOC by the paramilitaries, with its echo of “master of ceremonies”; he’s the one pulling the strings in Westminster and Stormont. With most recent Troubles novels, such as David Keenan’s For the Good Times, Anna Burns’s Milkman and Louise Kennedy’s Trespasses, set in the dark days of 1970s Belfast, it’s refreshing and instructive to read one that plays out during the peace process. In Milkman, nothing and no one is named. In Cross, everyone is named and reputations are crucial. There’s no escaping the town’s whisper network, a grapevine that Francie manipulates with virtuosic precision： “He’d practically know your business before you knew it yourself.” The novel begins with the murder of an RUC policeman in a pub urinal after his choir practice, an operation masterminded by Francie. Though he ordered the hit, Francie imagines the “grieving house with crying children and a hysterical wife. It was either a strength or a weakness that Francie could picture all of it.” This essential humanity serves him well later, though it doesn’t stop him attending the RUC man’s funeral in a chilling scene where he notes yet more names and number plates. When it becomes clear there’s an informer - “a tout” - in their midst, even Francie is unsure who the rat might be. It could be Handy Byrne, a psychopathic marksman, but his family’s republican credentials argue against it. The finger eventually points to Widow Donnelley’s missing son； a “bad article, pure lowlife scum’’，who is brought to heel by Casio, an “infamous inquisitor and tout catcher”. In another unnerving scene, the teenager is violently interrogated upstairs in a suburban house while Casio and his crew enjoy tea and morning rashers in the kitchen. Francie is stoical： “That’s life. You make your choices and it plays out. Same for everybody.You either risk all for an ideology or pay the price of betraying the cause. Yet the main tension is between those who will stop at nothing to end British colonial rule and those who have made violence a cause of its own. Duffy shows us IRA commanders and their hoodlums watching Chuck Norris videos and lounging about with takeaways while touts are gratuitously tortured. When Francie unexpectedly falls off the wagon, he rants： “Brits Out my arse. If we wanted that it would have been done by now... [we] settled instead for the chance ofbeing the Big Man.” For him, the ceasefire is a sellout： “Jobs for the boys in suits and that’s about it.” Francie’s spectacular unravelling becomes a metaphor for the divergence of the military and political wings of the IRA； a fissure O?Cuilleanain exploits ruthlessly. The politician knows he must rein in the paramilitaries, while keeping Cross as the “jewel in the crown of our resistance”. In the key scene where Francie is questioned by O?Cuilleanain in a car, he’s advised： “The Yanks are involved ... We can’t afford to look like goons.” The grilling is made edgier still by Duffy’s Tarantino-esque dialogue： “Are you a Wet Wet Wet fan?” O’Cuilleanain I asks, to soften Francie up as they listen to the radio. “This fella’s got some voice on him.” Francie eventually achieves a tragic pathos, haunted by his deeds； his “victims’ voices a banshee’s lure that kept him up at all hours”. The novel remains tense up until its shocking conclusion, where Handy Byrne and the Widow Donnelly settle old scores； a squalid full stop with no classical sense of justice, and one emblematic of the whole terrible saga of the fight for Irish independence. Duffy’s triumph is to remain agnostic throughout, simply allowing his characters to speak and act for themselves. To buy a copy for £13-49 go to guardianbookshop.com BOOKS OF THE MONTH Crime and thrillers A tour de force of friendship and loss； history repeats itself at summer camp； a con artist on the case； the maelstrom of postwar France. By Laura Wilson •A bttok Miliar 机 A IMF AUX htKMAtUlMS ALLTHE DARK CHRIS WHITAKER All the Colours of the Dark Chris Whitaker ORION, £20 Set in a small town in Missouri, the British author’s novel more than lives up to the promise of its award-winning predecessor, We Begin at the End. Outsiders Patch and Saint are childhood friends whose lives are irrevocably shaped by contact with a serial killer. Patch is abducted by the man, who imprisons him in darkness, where he is visited by a girl. Although he never sees her, an intensely strong bond is formed - but when he escapes, no trace of her is found. The general consensus is that she was a figment ofhis imagination, but Patch spends years searching for her, and Saint, who loves him, becomes a police officer in order to help. A coming-of-age story as well as a crime novel, the book spans the years from 1975 to 2001, an epic sweep that takes in themes of hope, loss and keeping faith. Ambitious, powerful and moving, this is a tour de force. The God of the Woods Liz Moore BOROUGH, £16.99 The Van Laar banking family own a chunk of land in New York state’s Adirondack Mountains, including a summer camp for teenagers. When their 13-year-old daughter Barbara goes missing from her cabin in August 1975, history seems to be repeating itself - her older brother Bear vanished without trace in 1961, aged eight. Speculation grows that Barbara has been taken by a recently escaped prisoner, serial killer Jacob “Slitter” Sluiter. Sluiter is thought by many to have been responsible for Bear’s disappearance, rather than the groundsman who was arrested and died in police custody. Told through multiple points of view, and shifting between the 1950s and the summer of Barbara’s disappearance, this is an intricate and emotionally engaging exploration of class and family dynamics, and a top-notch literary thriller. Imposter Syndrome Joseph Knox DOUBLEDAY, £18.99 Although more traditional in form than his previous book, True Crime Story, Knox’s latest is equally intriguing. A chance meeting between con artist Lynch and wealthy, troubled Bobbie, who tells him that he is the doppelganger of her missing brother Heydon, provides an entree into her family’s heavily guarded Chelsea home. Here the story departs from the standard impostor narrative as Lynch is immediately rumbled and put to work to discover what really happened to Heydon, whose car was found abandoned on Chelsea Bridge five years earlier. Although Lynch, like all good con artists, remains frustratingly opaque, the chicane-packed plot will repay the attention you’ll need to give it, and there’s some sharp dialogue and a surprising number of laughs along the way. Buckle up and enjoy. The Exile Patrick Worrall BANTAM, £16.99 The prequel to WorralFs excellent debut, The Partisan, begins in 1951, when Lithuanian freedom fighter Greta is tasked with escaping to France to find a partisan generaFs daughter, who was sent abroad, aged 12, during the second world war. She is supposed to have been kept safe by relatives, but nobody knows where she is. Meanwhile, soldier Lucien has been brought home from French Indochina to help keep tabs on the Corsican mafia in the shape ofhis cousin Paul. Worrall wonderfully conjures the maelstrom of postwar France as its empire begins to disintegrate, teeming with displaced people, former Nazis, Soviet spies, Algerian agitators, gangsters and spivs, in a dramatic account of loyalty, ideology and betrayal. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 51

Audiobook of the week Track Record George the Poet HODDER & STOUGHTON, 9HR20MIN T his memoir-cum-polemic by George the Poet, AKA George Mpanga, opens at a party attended by the author where a white man starts preaching about race to a group of Black guests and gets antsy when challenged on his opinions. The anecdote serves as a trigger for a reflection on the concept of white fragility and the perils of talking about things you don’t understand. It also prompts Mpanga - a British-Ugandan rapper, spoken-word artist and podcaster - to look at his own past choices and politics, noting that he “rose to fame with non-threatening poems that criticised my own community for the problems it faced. I presented a narrative that aligned with ruling-class interests. I made the system look good.” A heartfelt blend of the personal and political, Mpanga’s book goes on to paint a picture of contemporary Black life as inextricable from history. Drawing on his own interactions with white institutions, from Cambridge University to the music industry, he explores Black creativity, economics, geopolitics and the legacy of white imperialism and slavery. As narrator, Mpanga is lyrical, meditative, persuasive yet always serene. He confesses he was hesitant about writing an autobiography. “It feels like there are more important things to talk about than myself. But the truth is that nothing compares to a personal story... Yes, my work is autobiographical because Black culture has convinced me that all our lives are worth writing about.” Fiona Sturges Further listening Doppelganger A Trip into the Mirror World Naomi Klein PENGUIN AUDIO, 14HR47MIN The No Logo author narrates her Women’s prize-winning book in which she contrasts her political and social values with those of the writer Naomi Wolf, for whom she is often mistaken. Such a Fun Age Kiley Reid BLOOMSBURY, 9HR58MIN A young Black woman, Emira, is accused of kidnapping the white child she has been hired to babysit, setting off a disturbing chain of events. THE BOOKS OF MY LIFE Lorrie Moore The US author on the comfort of cookery books, and finding sympathy for Ted Hughes My earliest reading memory Probably The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, by L Frank Baum, read to me when I was perhaps three. It is very different from the movie and so was my first introduction to distortions and improvements in screen adaptations, and buried treasure in original texts. The mouse queen in the book completely enchanted me and of course is nowhere in the film. My favourite book growing up Nine Days to Christmas, by Marie Hall Ets and Aurora Labastida, a story of a star-shaped pinata that becomes an actual star in the sky. It’s about death and eternal life, and magic and grief. It felt so sad to me, though the end involves a kind of resurrection which perhaps I wasn’t buying. The book that changed me as a teenager Louise Meriwether’s Daddy Was a Number Runner. I read it when I was 13, so when it first came out. It was amazing and intimate, and took me into a world I knew nothing about yet by the end I felt very close to. Meriwether died less than a year ago, at the age of 100.1 hope she made some money from that book. If it reached me way up in the Adirondacks, it must have reached a lot of people. The writer who changed my mind Hmmmm. Not sure. Janet Malcolm’s book, The Silent Woman, about the Hughes estate and Sylvia Plath, offers much sympathy for Ted Hughes, which I didn’t have a lot of before. It doesn’t throw Plath under the bus but it almost perversely looks at Hughes through a sisterly eye. The book or author I came back to Alice Munro’s stories always reveal something additional that you’d forgotten or perhaps even missed the first time. Also all work that you read later is difFerent because you, the older reader, are different. ThebookI discovered later in life This doesn’t really answer your question since, of course, Fve yet to hit “later in life”. But there are sometimes books you have to take a couple of runs at in order for them to work their magic on you. Years ago Michael Ondaatje’s The English Patient was like that for me. And more recently, Jayne Anne Phillips’s The Night Watch. I The book I am currently reading I recently read Enter Ghost - an impressive novel by Isabella Hammad that uses a production of Hamlet to look at a few of the many things it means to be Palestinian. Shakespeare used in unorthodox ways is always interesting to me. Totally to one side of that is Miranda July’s arguably misogynistic sex comedy All Fours. The only appealing or admirable characters are the men! Yet most of the nutty drama is happening with the I flawed but interesting women： well, that’s what fiction is for - flawed but interesting women. My comfort read Cook books. I scarcely cook, but I love reading recipes and imagining the whole thing. I would never read literature for comfort. I would read literature for transport and for meeting a few people I would never want to meet in real life. I Am Homeless If This Is Not My Home by Lorrie Moore is published in paperback by Faber. Tom Gauld THE EXOSKtLtTON POlNEftSUIT THE ACT OF WRITING TRICKI&R)BUT THIS 撇S THftN OUTWEIGHED SY ITS CECITY TO INTINIIDME OUVllVS 麵LS》⑽隱S ANb ALLIES. 52 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian CULTURE BOOKS H Ldg < d / 3 —l< d o 3 O N 3 O <

Sand with everything Growing appetites and changing tastes - Catherine Newman on how summers at the beach capture the flavour of family life I t starts with a baby, as is the way with human life. He’s a breastfed little nursling, which means there is no lunch you need to pack. How convenient and unburdensome. You are free to saunter over the hot sand with only the umbrella and the shade tent and the foldable chairs and the tote bag full of towels and the nappy bag that has clean nappies in it, of course, and also a dirty nappy already wadded up damply in a plastic bag and wipes and a changing mat and two sets of clothes with all their many baffling zips and snaps and also the Special Blanket and the dummy and the sunglasses and the sunhat that makes your baby look like a miniature yachtsman. And don’t forget the baby himself, as fat and pink and snuffling as a hot, sandy piglet... Plan to spend the day admonishing your husband because the baby is getting sun in his eyes/sun on his face/ some sort of heat rash on his baby shoulders. The baby is eating a cigarette butt/a seashell/a handful of sand. The baby is hot/hungry/tired/ choking on the piece of string attached to someone’s abandoned and deflating balloon. Older parents smile at you in a way that, years later, you will understand to mean： “Go home and lie beneath the fan. There will be many better summers to bring this child to the beach.” Instead, you wedge yourself into a small patch of shade to nurse the baby down for his nap while you daydream about someone coming by with so much iced coffee they’ve had to carry it to you in a bucket. The baby seems incorrectly certain that pressing the full length of his body against you will be cooling. You push the sweaty wisp ofhair off his forehead and he reaches up a fat little hand to push the sweaty hair off your forehead. This is his favourite joke, and when he smiles at you from beneath your boob - you can actually see his eye crinkle up - your heart swells so burstingly that it presses against your ribs like an affliction. The years that come next are, if you’re honest, a bit of a blur. “What did we feed the kids on the beach when they were toddlers?” you ask your husband now, and he wrinkles his brow in a kind performative remembering way and says, “Crackers?” which is really all you need to know about who was in charge of lunch on the beach. In your memory, the children are like baby birds, heads tipped back, beaks open, clamouring for their lunch - even though the photos show only cheerful little tots wrapped in colourful towels and drinking from sippy cups in a perfectly reasonable way. Probably the lunch you bring involves many lidded containers of unchokeable items： halved grapes, tiny cubes of cheese, cooked apple slices, and those biscuits that dissolve into a safe paste on contact with a child’s tongue. Bananas, maybe? Avocado, browning in the heat? Of course, some days you barely make it to the beach because your tiny shoeless daughter squats right down in a patch of sand in the parking lot, and you cannot convince her that a better, broader expanse awaits just down the path. You carry her, weeping, to the shore and offer her a consoling juice box. When she pokes The filling melts out of the cookies, blit the kids don't care. They lick their fingers and tip their rosy faces to the sun in the straw, a stream of pink juice geysers up out of it into her own face and she laughs as long and hiccupingly as an actual maniac. On the measuring wall at home, the marks creep upwards as the children grow - chubby in their swimsuits one summer, stretched long and lean the next - and their taste in lunch changes like the weather. They eat sandwiches now, like regular beachgoers, but they’re not so sure about condiments. One year one of them wants dry turkey on dry bread, and you cringe to make it, reminding yourself that this is a victimless crime (lunch preferences, like hairstyles, clothing, and gender, are, you understand, benign forms of self-expression). One child picks out from his sandwich anything he identifies as salad, which includes lettuce, tomatoes, pickles and peppers. The other child seems to think of the beach itself as a crucial component of her lunch experience： she rolls up from the water like a sea lion breaded in sand, and everyone screams when she tries to stick a sandy hand in the chip bag； when she chews, you can hear the grains beneath her teeth and it gives you goosebumps. Both children are afraid of the insects that bite, and the seagulls and dogs, which loiter around eyeballing everybody’s cherries and snacks. The cream filling melts out of the cookies, but the kids don’t care. They lick their fingers and tip their rosy faces up to the sun, as spangled with sand as sugared pastry. “Just this, please，” you think - to yourself, because you know better than to share aloud your deranged thoughts about loss looming around every corner. “Only this.” As the years pass, you grow less worried about the children drowning - they can actually swim. Now the children have moods and spots and, in a certain slant oflight, the smudge of a moustache. They do all the fun beach things now： boogie-boarding and magazine reading and shell collecting and eavesdropping. Lunch improves. Some days you split open crusty bread, brush it with olive oil, and fill it with mozzarella, tomatoes, and basil (well, hold the tomatoes for one kid). Not only do these galumphing children no longer need to be carried, but they can actually carry things. It’s such a delightfully astonishing flip-flop that you could shout out in joy. One day they’ll be carrying you. OK, scratch that thought because it’s creepy and awkward. Now you lie on your towel on the beach and admire these capable, conversational, funny people. You think they’re fully grown, but you’re wrong. You don’t understand what’s still to come. That they will yet grow up and away. That they will become true adults, with homes and lives of their own but, by some special kind of magic, they will still join you here, at the beach, for one week every summer. And you’ll say to them, in the beach-town market： “What do you think you’ll want in your sandwiches?” And you will buy them every last thing - the fancy soft cheese and the pesto and the Italian cold cuts -because, despite the fact of your nipples pointing down towards Australia and your face as crumpled as a paper napkin, you are the luckiest person in the entire world. Because tomorrow you will tear off four pieces of aluminium foil while these beloved children sleep late. And you will make their sandwiches, pack up the lunch, and count your blessings, which are too many to count. Sandwich by Catherine Newman is published by Doubleday. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 53 S L1J9 V S A 1 1 L1J9

CULTURE BOOKS THE BIG IDEA Why we need to stop former prime ministers cashing in Ex-PMs once ran cricket clubs and bred cattle, but the role is now a trampoline to self enrichment. By Simon Kuper OW BRITAIN has made Rishi Sunak its latest ex-prime minister, it’s time to rethink the role. The antics of former PMs have helped send trust in politics to all-time lows. We’ve seen Tony Blair shilling for autocracies, David Cameron lobbying for Chinese interests and for the collapsed financial firm Greensill Capital, Boris Johnson meeting Venezuelan dictator Nicolas Maduro on behalf ofa hedge fund manager, and Liz Truss giving embarrassing but well paid speeches to rightwing American audiences. The sight of the country’s politicians renting themselves out to dubious clients is the most vivid possible symbol of ruling class corruption. Keir Starmer could buy himself initial goodwill and do Britain a favour by setting limits to his own future role. Former PMs seldom caused trouble before the 1970s. Backthen, most ofthem had family money. They would never do anything so vulgar as consult for Kazakhstan or speak at a Trumpist conference in Maryland, even had such opportunities existed in their day. As Private Eye summed things up in 2016： “Harold Macmillan became an active chancellor of Oxford University and bequeathed a six-volume autobiography to a grateful nation； Sir Anthony Eden took a similar post at Birmingham University and bred Hereford cattle, while Sir Alec Douglas-Home ran a cricket club and pottered around on the Scottish family estate... Clement Attlee retired to the Lords at 72, while Harold Wilson, cashing in on his supposed wit, tried his hand as a chatshow host with no joy.” The monetisation ofthe role took off with Ted Heath, who advised entities including a Chinese state-owned shipping company and a thinktank created by a Saudi sheikh - jobs he didn’t declare while remaining an MP. After her ousting, Margaret Thatcher consulted for the tobacco company Philip Morris, giving advice on how to lobby MPs. The problem worsened with the boom in foreign autocracies rich enough to buy a British ex-PM. Blair helped out multiple tyrants, including advising Kazakh dictator Nursultan Nazarbayev on how to spin the killing of anti-government protesters. (The message was that the protestors5 deaths, “tragic though they were... should not obscure the enormous progress that Kazakhstan has made”.) After Brexit, Cameron schemed to set up a UK-China fund that would raise $lbn to invest in projects in both countries. Fuelled by a dinner with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in 2018, he attempted to persuade the China Investment Corporation, the state’s sovereign wealth fund, to inject hundreds of millions ofpounds. In short, it seems he was trying to go into business with the Chinese government. Last year he was urging investors to put money into Colombo Port City, a project in Sri Lanka that was part of the Chinese state’s global infrastructure strategy, Further reading Three books for a deeper dive How They Broke Britain James O'Brien EBURY, £10.99 HOW THEY BROKE BRITAIN when, no doubt to Beijing’s delight, Rishi Sunak made him foreign secretary. The problem of what to do with former PMs has now reached crisis levels, especially because, as Gordon Brown recently noted： “the Conservative party seems to have found the magic formula for the mass production of ex-prime ministers”. Moreover, ex-PM s keep getting younger. Johnson, Truss and Sunak could be monetising the office for decades. American audiences in 2060 might still be hearing about how “trans activist” civil servants wrecked Truss’s brilliant premiership. Being PM has become a CV-burnishing temp role, a trampoline to seriously paid gigs. Each new entrant intoDowningStreetiseffectivelyhandedamultimillion- pound cheque they can start cashing the day they leave. Any system rots from the head. A nurse, civil servant or police officer reading about ex-PMs" self-enrichment could be forgiven for thinking： “Clearly we’re not all in it together. Fll neverbe able to buy a home, Fm struggling to feed my kids, I’m earning less than I did in 2010, Fd be a mug not to take anything myself.” It needn’t be like this. Not every politician is grasping. John Major, for instance, chose his post-power gigs using the test： “How would this look on the front page of a newspaper?” He and Theresa May showed it was possible for former prime ministers to enrich themselves in fairly innocuous ways. Major became European chairman ofthe Carlyle Group, a private equity firm. He and May also got rich giving boring but harmless talks on the speaking circuit. Brown appears not to have enriched himselfat all. His fees for advising the international fund­ management firm Pimco and a Swiss private equity firm were reportedly paid to the Office of Gordon and Sarah Brown, the organisation that supports the couple’s charitable work. These people provide a working model for how to be an ex-PM. Former prime ministers already receive generous state pensions, and can claim up to £115,000 a year for office and secretarial costs. Let them also write books, work for charities and media, and give paid speeches in approved countries. Beyond that, the state should constrain their activities. Ex-PMs should be made to wait a decade before they can do consulting work for companies - bearing in mind that “consulting” is often a euphemism for lobbying, or for identifying the right people to lobby in government. Each new PM would have to sign a legally binding contract accepting these terms. If that deterred grasping people from seeking the premiership, then fine. These free measures would instantly attract a better class of person to the job, reduce corruption, deflate populism, keep experience inside government, and do PMs a favour by preserving their reputations from their own greed. We should start treating our ex-prime ministers as national assets. They could act as a brains trust with the unmatched knowledge that comes from running a state. Once Major had returned to the backbenches, whenever he spoke in parliament on Northern Ireland, MPs actually listened. Blair’s network and his understanding of international politics could have been of particular benefit to Britain. What a pity it was sold to tyrants. Good Chaps： How Corrupt Politicians Broke Our Law and Institutions - And What We Can Do About It by Simon Kuper is published by Profile. The Impossible Office? Anthony Seldon with Jonathan Meakin and Illias Thoms OFFICE? IHt HlilQRr OFIH6 w 8tinSMFilMh ^ANTHONY ■Seldon y ■KF. ’he iE. OMtoSSIBL^ ft The Establishment Owen Jones PENGUIN, £10.99 CAMBRIDGE, £14.99 Illustration： Elia Barbieri The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 55

LIFESTYLE Spend time in nature! Dance more! Embrace your inner punk! We asked people to reveal the secret to feeling at home in their own skin (no diets required) Interviews： Isabelle Aron Photography： Amit Lennon and Jessica Chou The yoga teacher My tip is to notice the way you talk to yourself. Many of us say all kinds of critical things to ourselves： “I’m not good enough”，“I’m ugly”，“Look how disgusting my body is.” We often blame social media if we have a bad body image, but ultimately you "re saying those things. Think about the way you feel versus the way you look. If I ask myself uHow do I look?”，that points the direction outside me and says： “Do you think I’m good enough?” But when I ask myself “How do I feel?”, that should guide everything. If your answer is： I feel good, I feel confident, I feel beautiful, that’s enough. Jessamyn Stanley, founder of inclusive yoga and meditation app The Underbelly The go-go dancer Look in the mirror and give love to all the parts of you, especially the parts you find difficult to love. You can say things like “I love my thighs - they are strong” or “My belly is beautiful and I love the way it moves.” You can say them out loud, or in your head if out loud is too scary. Fve spent a long time disliking the body I’m in. Part of this is because of my trans-ness [Danni identifies as non-binary] and the other part was having an eating disorder. I started practising this technique in moments of desperation. I wanted to love myself but found it hard, so I had to be active with it. I use this technique every day. Even if I feel confident in my body, I still give myself love. Danni Spooner The body image advocate A technique that has always worked for me is buying cute lingerie and walking around my flat wearing it for a couple ofhours. Every now and then, I glance at myself in the mirror to take in how the underwear makes me feel. I find it incredibly empowering. Stephanie Yeboah The fashion model So many of us are scared to try something because we think： that’s not me. But how do you know unless you try? If you want to dye your hair a crazy colour or wear a dress that you might never normally wear, go for it. The other day, I wore this amazing dress made of hard silver yarn. It looked almost like armour. When I put it on, I felt like Joan of Arc. It turned me into a warrior and gave me the confidence I needed. The fashion industry profits from self-doubt. But there are people in it who care about inclusivity. I think it’s beautiful when a designer can make clothes that look good not just on a small body, but on bigger bodies, too. Emma Breschi The sex therapist Engaging in masturbation in an intentional way can benefit anyone’s body image. Many people who enjoy self-pleasure begin to see their bodies in a more forgiving, less critical and overall more pleasure-centric way. Gigi Engle，intimacy expert at dating app 3Fun The psychologist Research shows that people who spend time in nature tend to have more positive body image than those who spend no time in nature. Thafs because nature pulls you away from social contexts focused on aesthetics, such as adverts about physical appearance. Nature is not judging you or picking out your flaws. That helps to replenish our feelings of self-compassion. We’ve also found that blue spaces -any natural environment with a view of water - tends to be even better than green spaces. You could go for a walk or a swim but you don’t have to be mobile - you could just sit in a park. Viren Swami，professor of social psychology at Anglia Ruskin University The body language consultant Stand up straight. Non-symmetric or slouching poses encourage negative thoughts, while a strong upright pose creates positive thoughts and feelings. A proud pose will make you feel more confident, no matter your size. Carole Railton The life drawing model Remind yourself that you are more than just one thing. I have always believed myself to be a whole package. My body shape is just one part of me. My personality, intellect and humour are significant parts of me. Patch Gallagher 58 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian N LLIa M o m < a:< 5 :9NIS00il9/dn UJ >l<s Q z < VH UJX V 「a N V IXIN N V S O 〕 ・ A \_ J \_ l LLIg y LLIa N n LlJ 工 »- :ll LL. ino 。 > 山 \_ I9NV— 1 v ara n v : d n LLj> l < s Q z < < H Z A 2 V S S UJ f n o s n lxi q :9 H s i J LLJd v o — I a N O A LLJg : S h- Q: OHS ,S1NI<S -I —IV : i s LLl> J LLJ3 V — I -I VA09<>IIN<>I - s IHS , N < 2 < LlJa svs H9NI—lAls UJx v r

The naturist My advice would be to spend time naked alone at home, which will help you start to feel comfortable in your own skin. When you feel ready, consider joining like-minded people in a safe environment to do naked activities you enjoy. You could go to a naturist beach or naked sauna, or go skinny dipping. You’ll soon realise there is no such thing as the perfect body - everyone has lumps and bumps. Being with other naked people makes you realise that it really doesn’t matter. Anne Nisbet (pictured on previous page) The former Love Island contestant I suffered with eating disorders throughout my teens and early adult life, including when I went on Love Island. On a show like that, your body is out there for people to scrutinise. I was opening myself up to even more criticism, which fuelled the negative way I viewed myself. I had to rewire my brain. Last year, I started doing meditation and affirmations. When I feel as if Fm picking at myself for no reason, I repeat in my head： “I trust myself. I am safe. I am loved.” For beginners, guided meditation is great. It stills the mind. Malin Andersson The body double Having been in punk bands from the age of 14, my tip is to embrace the punk attitude. I was nearly 60 when I got my first body double job, as Jude Law’s bum in Firebrand. I’d been working in IT service management before. At first I wasn’t sure it was something I could do but I thought： why shouldn't I show my arse to the world? Who cares what other people think? Through playing in bands Fve found that an aura of self-belief and enjoyment ensures people concentrate on what you are doing and not the person doing it. Dale Farrow The psychotherapist Dance more! Using our body in a physical, creative, playful way can introduce us to a different way of experiencing it. Instead of looking at the body as an aesthetic object to be changed or perfected, we can bring attention to the sensations ofbeing “within” it； what it feels like to move, breathe and explore. Eloise Skinner The dominatrix Being in more sex-positive spaces has allowed me to realise how desired any shape and any aesthetic can be. Fve learned that there is always somebody out there who idolises a certain kind ofbody. There’s an incredible range of what turns people on and there will be somebody who desperately pines for your shape. It’s about finding a community that celebrates rather than denigrates. And, I’m a firm believer in the catsuit - they look striking on absolutely anybody. Eva Oh The kids’ body image educator I wrote a children’s book about a sparrow who learns to love the feathers she is in. She realises that her body is amazing for what it can do and that her beauty comes from within. My tip is to find one thing you like about your body. Then think of some non-aesthetic reasons why you like it. For example, I would say my smile because it allows me to show I’m happy and makes others around me happy, too. This technique helped me realise that my worth doesn’t lie in my appearance. Fve come to realise my body is my home - and Fve only got this one. Anupa Roper, author and editor of child body positivity site Sparrowlegs The personal stylist Remember that nobody else cares what size you’re wearing. If the number on the label bothers you, cut it out. Go for what’s comfortable and what fits you. Alex Standley, founder of Luxe Leopard Lifestyle The burlesque perftirmer Growing up I’d always been aware of my body shape： my hips were too big, my bum was too flat. As I got older I began to embrace my body and learn to appreciate what it has done for me. Breast cancer changed my outlook completely. After my operation, seeing my scars made me hate looking in the mirror. I was so sad that the body I had grown to appreciate had tried to kill me. It was a long, hard journey but I realised I needed to change the way I looked at myself again. I was introduced to burlesque by my stepdaughter. I was so nervous before the first performance but as soon as I started my solo I felt a wave of confidence I’d never experienced. Being around other women who are body-confident is contagious. Thafs the secret to feeling like a goddess. And I love a nice-smelling body lotion. It is a daily ritual： showing my body care and respect helps me maintain a healthy, loving relationship with it. Sharon Ridgway The plus-size model For me, body confidence comes with forgetting other people’s opinions. Often that means I picture myself showing off my body asifFm the most “in-shape” person, with toned abs and muscles, who you’d see exposing their body for all to be in awe of. I think to myself： would I worry about opinions in the same way if I had that body? So why should I now? I find this particularly useful on holiday when it looks like everyone around me has done their six-week summer shred while my body creases and jiggles. As someone who used to be a “fitfluencer” personal trainer, Fve been on quite a journey. How my body looked to others used to be everything to me. But Fve learned that it isn’t about altering my look for others； it’s about looking after myself and being the happiest version of me. I’m 10 times more confident now than when I had a six-pack and bulging biceps. Jake Kneeshaw A J It bul ^^K|cSimes mote confident now thanwhenlhad , .. .... Plus-size model Jake Kneeshaw The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 59

LIFESTYLE 60 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian Nina 25, research analyst (left) What were you hoping for? An interesting evening with someone new, or a funny bad date story. First impressions? She came across confident and chill. Also, she’s a good height and I liked her tattoos. What did you talk about? Women’s football. Beavertown slippers. Travelling. Meghan Markle. Politics. Crab fishing. Christmas tree farms. Weird names given to pets. Most awkward moment? She insisted on splitting the drinks bill in the pub, and I wasn’t sure if that was her subtle way of saying she wasn?t interested. Good table manners? Very, although I then started questioning how I was holding my fork. Best thing about Grace? She was open and gave good eye contact, which put me at ease. Would you introduce Grace to your friends? Yeah，for sure. Describe Grace in three words Engaged, authentic, kind. What do you think Grace made of you? I was a bit flustered for the first five minutes, but I’d say I redeemed myself later. Most importantly, I would like to think she had as good a time as I did. Did you go on somewhere? We went to a pub and ended up missing the last tube home. And ••• did you kiss? Yes, although in hindsight the middle of Oxford Circus might not have been the best location for it. If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be? The food was so good I wish I could’ve eaten more of it. Marks out of 10? 8. Would you meet again? She’s already messaged me, so quite possibly. Grace 23, production assistant What were you hoping for? A fun evening in good company. First impressions? Very friendly, which eased quickly into good conversation. And the eyelashes! What did you talk about? Travelling circuses. Dolphins. India, The cultural differences between Berlin and London. Meghan Markle. Most awkward moment? I ordered a Guinness at the pub (which only did table service) and they didn’t serve it. I thought it would be a safe option, but alas. Good table manners? Flawless. She topped up my wine and was appreciative to the waiting staff. Best thing about Nina? She told great stories and had lots of genuine interests. The evening flew by. Would you introduce Nina to your friends? With pleasure - she is very nice. Describe Nina in three words. Witty, informed, thoughtful. What do you think Nina made of you? She did say that me not liking coriander was a red flag, so I’m still unsure. Did you go on somewhere? Yes. She asked me if I wanted to go for a drink afterwards, so we did. And ••• did you kiss? We did. If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be? Perhaps not sitting at a 90-degree angle at dinner. I felt a bit skew-whiff. Marks out of 10? 8. Would you meet again? We’ve sent each other a few texts, so we’ll see. Nina and Grace ate at Gunpowder Soho, London Wl. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com MATCHMAKING GUARDIAN READERS SINCE 2009 'The middle of Oxford Circus might not have been the best place to kiss’ N V I Q Qrv n o 3H 1 / N 0 S 1 QT LLI8 0 比 LLIz LLJv d 9

TRUE STORIES OF OUR SEX LIVES This is how we do it 'After our child was born we didn't have satisfying sexfor seven years' Ruth, 51 I started trying to avoid sex and that fuelled Lawrence’s suspicions. He thought I was having an affair. But it stems from the fact that I had an episiotomy when I was in labour with my daughter, which means the doctor made an incision in my vagina to make it easier for me to give birth. When Lawrence and I started having tentative sex about 12 weeks after our baby was born, penetration caused me terrible pain. My midwife implied I was being hysterical and making the pain up. Lawrence is a deeply caring partner but as the months went on he started to worry I was making the pain up, too. The doctors were so insistent that I had healed perfectly that Lawrence started to suspect I didn’t desire him any more. It felt useless to keep talking about the pain when no one believed me, so I started trying to avoid sex. I would come home late from work, or say I was too tired. Lawrence might have doubted me, but he never stopped researching my symptoms online and about seven years after our daughter was born, he tracked down a specialist. She took one look at my scar and said I needed an operation called the Fenton’s procedure because the cut had not properly healed. It was the most incredible relief. The operation was successful but Fd be lying if I said our sex life has fully recovered. It’s been 15 years since I felt pain during sex, but I still tense up before penetration. Lawrence wants to have sex every day like we did before our daughter was born, but my libido is lower. Because sex has always been such a tense topic between us, it’s difficult for me to turn Lawrence down without hurting his feelings. Since menopause, my libido has dropped even lower. Part of our issue is that when Lawrence feels rejected he spends less time wooing me, so it’s a vicious cycle： I want sex less and less. On the upside, I feel stronger in myself since hitting my 50s and Fve got better at communicating about sex. I don’t want to say yes just to keep Lawrence happy. I want to be true to myself. 亘遍 rence, 51 We’ve become much more playful and relaxed about intimacy since Ruth’s operation. Before we had our daughter, Ruth and I had sex about five days a week. I wasn’t expecting our sex life to continue at that rate for ever but I wasn’t prepared for what happened； after our child was born we didn’t have connected, satisfying sex for seven years. After the episiotomy, any time Ruth and I tried to be intimate, she said it felt like an internal friction burn. We tried extensive foreplay and avoiding penetration, but often Ruth would want to stop in the middle of that because she feared pain. The doctors repeatedly told Ruth there was nothing physically the matter with her, so I did start to assume the problem was psychological. Ruth’s mother used to tell her that women aren’t really interested in sex： they only do it to have children. As the years wore on and Ruth kept avoiding sex, her mother’s words would circle around my mind. I felt Ruth had got what she wanted out of me and now I was no use to her. I also went through periods of losing trust in her. I thought she might be getting sex from someone else. Sex did improve after Ruth had the Fenton’s procedure. The psychological scars are still with her but sex is no longer a constant source of tension between us. My testosterone levels have also gone down a little. I often think sex works a bit like airbrushing in a relationship： if the sex is going well, other small irritations don’t bother you so much. If it?s not, they come to the surface. We are more playful and relaxed about intimacy again now. Ruth often reads erotica when we are in bed, and we talk about our desires freely. But because of what we went through, I sometimes think there’ll always be an issue with sex. As told to Kitty Drake Would you and your partner like to share the story, anonymously, of your sex life? Email sexlives@theguardian. com with a few words about what you get up to in the bedroom Illustration： Ryan Gillett The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 61

You be the judge My boyfriend funds my lifestyle should I have to work for him to pay him back? Interviews： Georgina Lawton The prosecution Tiger I want to pay offmy debt to Theo, but now I’m workingfor him he talks to me like I'm an idiot Theo, my boyfriend of seven years, has always earned a lot more than me and is really supportive. We have got into a rhythm in the past couple of years where he usually pays for most things, like our rent and bills, but I contribute and do more around the house in terms of the cooking and cleaning. It hasn’t necessarily been a problem but sometimes when we talk to our friends, they call me a “kept woman” or a "stay-at-home girlfriend”. There was a time in the past when I earned more, but at the moment Fm a freelance fashion designer, and things are really up and down. Theo doesn’t ask me for money, or keep track, but I do because I think it’s important to pay him back. I owe him for things like flights and my share of the rent when I was going through a bad work patch a while ago. Fve accumulated some debt to him, although he never calls it that. Theo asked me if I could work for his business as a means of paying him back. He works in online marketing and I was tasked with taking charge of some of his clients and writing website copy for him. It worked for a bit but then it started to put pressure on our relationship. If I did something wrong, it felt like I was being told off like a child. It was weird -1 didn’t feel like his equal. He’d say things like, “That’s not right - Fve told you，” as if I was an idiot. I have racked up a debt of thousands to Theo, so rd like to pay it offbut I don’t feel like this is the best way to do it. It’s also really hard to calculate how much I owe after a few days of work. He wants me to continue but I reckon we’re one ofthose couples who should never work together. I do feel silly sometimes, owing my boyfriend such a huge amount - before we met I was really self-sufficient. But in our partnership I put in more emotional labour and do more domestic chores, while he likes being the bread-winner. Maybe one day that will change. But for now Fd like to look at other options for repaying him. 62 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian

The defence Theo Tiger has never earned much money, but it doesn't bother me because I love her It was Tiger’s idea to work for me - Fve never tried to force that on her. She says she wants to feel less financially “powerless” in our relationship, and I support that notion. It hasn’t been going particularly well I must admit, but I think it keeps her busy while she’s not earning much from her own work. She says I talk to her like a child but I don’t mean to. I just try to explain that there’s a certain way of doing things for my clients and she doesn’t take direction very well. Tiger has got a bit down in the past when her clients haven’t paid her on time. She’s tried to source more regular work but it’s a challenge in the current financial climate. I tell her at least she’s doing something she loves, but she can get really depressed when she’s not working. In the time Fve known Tiger, she’s never earned loads of money. But when we met, as students, we were kind of struggling together. It’s good I now earn a fair bit，even if it makes the relationship unequal. What’s the point in both of us struggling? I pay the rent and Fll be putting money down on our first flat soon. Tiger won’t be paying the mortgage as she doesn’t have the money. I’m fine with that. It’s just how we work. I know some men would say， “Oh，she should pull her weight，” but if you love someone, you take on their finances as well as all their good and bad bits. I don’t think about it much. She also does a lot more domestic labour than me, so it balances out. Tiger wanted to work with me. While she’s looking for more regular work, Fm happy to hire her. But I probably need to keep track of how much work she’s doing for me so we know where we stand. We make a good team, but she finds it stressful so I won’t make her continue if she hates it. I don’t really mind how much she owes me -1 believe things should be equitable, not “equal”，in a relationship. We will spend the rest of our lives together, so who cares about a few thousand pounds when we love each other? Illustration： Igor Bastidas The jury ofGuardian readers Should Tiger pay Theo back? Theo shouldn't ignore the fact that the debt matters to Tiger，and they should work out a proper value for her work. This would create an end date to the debt， boundaries around the work itself and allow Tiger to feel more valued. Felix, 29 Tiger has let her friends’ views of her relationship cloud her judgment. There's no harm in Theo paying more if it allows them both to have a comfortable life. The debt should be wiped. Robyn, 35 They are both guilty ofnot being honest about their true feelings. Theo should not employ Tiger or calculate the value of her contribution to their relationship. He says he wants them to spend the rest of their lives together, but if it doesn't work out things could turn nasty over money. Miriam, 74 Fm saying Theo is innocent overall. Tiger needs to focus on her own career and stop fretting about paying her way. Theo seems relatively relaxed about paying the bills but needs to understand that having his girlfriend working for him makes their relationship a transactional one, which isn’t healthy. Adam，52 The problem here is communication, not money. Theo admits the working arrangement “hasn’t been going well", while Tiger says he makes her feel like an idiot. Whafsmore, she says “Theo asked me if I could work for his business’’，but he reckons “it was Tiger’s idea to work for me." Theo holds all the cards, so he needs sort this mess out. Melvyn, 41 THE VERDICT Guilty It’s payback time，Theo 3 Not guilty Love trumps money 2 Youfve heard the cases, now you decide... Scan to vote on this week's dispute, share your own, or be one of the jury I cant face getting on my bike after a serious accident - but rd love to ride again Ask Annalisa Barbieri Two and a half years ago, I had a serious accident on my bike. I shattered bones (the surgeon gave me a 10 on the scale of how badly Fd broken them) and had a procedure to put them back in place with plates. The A&E visit was horrific, with me overdosing on the gas and a nasty trip caused by ketamine sedation. I had a cast on longer than usual because of how bad it was，then I spent several months doing regular physio. I would love to be able to ride again and reduce my emissions as I live in a town with little public transport. But I cannot get near my bike without my heart racing. I can run and hike，but the bike brings horror with it. I have managed two short trips with my children, but I almost broke down afterwards. It is obvious I have psychological scars alongside the physical ones. What can I do to get back on my bike? I’m so sorry to hear this. I’m not surprised you feel as you do. I went to clinical psychologist Dr Justine Bush, who works in a traumatic stress clinic, North London Mental Health Partnership. She deals with situations like yours regularly, and although she stresses that she cannot diagnose you via letter, you might benefit from an assessment to see if you have PTSD. I wondered what the context of your accident was. It sounded very serious, given the breaks and the drugs used. Were you hit by a lorry or a car? Was it a “near-miss” experience? This is important as it may explain some of the layers of your fear. Did the feeling remind you of anything else? This may be a trauma that has triggered a deeper, earlier one. I’d also like you to think about what you are afraid of happening again. The obvious answer to this may be “hurting myself” and that will be part of it, but I’d like you to also think beyond that. Is it being out of action? Feeling trapped? Were you worried about not being able to earn money while injured? If you can unpack the stuff around the obvious, this will be a way to start to process what happened. Sometimes the “what ifs” and near misses in an accident can be almost as terrifying as what actually happened. With PTSD, our memory of a traumatic incident isn’t laid down in the same way a conventional memory is. So when we revisit a traumatic memory we relive the original horrors and fears - the panic, heart racing. This sounds like what is happening to you. “The fact is you did keep yourself safe and you did survive this accident so there’s evidence you are really resilient/' said Bush. “You may benefit from some psychological therapy.” You could try local services such as talking therapy, CBT or EMDR. Your GP can refer you, or you can self-refer via IAPT (just Google IAPT services). “One of the key features of PTSD，” said Bush, “is avoidance： avoidance of thinking about what happened, talking about it and anything to do with what happened.” You could also try graded exposure on your own if it’s not too upsetting. Take it very slowly and do something small every day： start by looking at your bike, taking it out of the garage, but not riding it. Then getting on and off it but not riding it, then riding it in a safe place for a short time. Build on that, but don’t overdo it. We get confidence by doing the same thing over and over again. However, when that confidence has gone we need to go back to the beginning. If you would like advice on a personal matter, email ask.annalisa@ theguardian.com. Seeguardian.com/ letters-terms for terms and conditions The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 63

A coordinating shirt and shorts is fun without being silly The key to nailing shorts at work is the right shirt Jess Cartner Morley On trends LIFESTYLE I 'm scared of shorts. They make me nervous. This is clearly a bit silly. I mean, it’s not like they are actually going to bite me on the bum. But then fear is seldom rational. If I see a spider in the sink, it doesn’t help at all to know that it isn’t going to hurt me. And Fm not alone in my borderline shorts-phobia. After all, it is perfectly normal to talk about being brave enough to wear shorts. This is not just about the brevity of a hemline. Shorts that end halfway up your thighs feels like a more radical choice than a dress that exposes the same amount of leg. Naked dressing has been increasingly normalised - see-through dresses, ab-baring crop tops - but shorts still feel daring in any context outside a holiday. But that is changing. I think this is partly because we are realising that dressing more sustainably is best served by having fewer, more versatile clothes. Instead of buying a new dress when you get invited to a wedding or filling a suitcase with jelly shoes and beach cover-ups that have zero utility outside your week on the beach, work towards a streamlined modern wardrobe whose pieces can be mixed and matched in different ways. The most important metric of sustainability is to make everything you own work hard, extracting maximum wear from it. There is a second reason why now is the right time for shorts to go mainstream. This has been the year of trousers. Proper, tailored trousers -not jeans, nothing stretchy - have been the biggest fashion story of 2024. And yes, I know cowboy boots have had more column inches, but the pivot from wearing longish skirts and dresses to wearing trousers matters more. This has been the key real-talk shift in women’s wardrobes recently. Getting the hang of wearing trousers that aren’t jeans has helped me to get my head around wearing shorts that aren’t jean shorts. We tend to imagine shorts as a cut-off version of whatever trousers we are used to wearing. This is why, for years and years, denim cut-offs were the only shorts game in town, because jeans were the dominant trousers in our wardrobe. The shift from jeans to trousers has brought cotton or linen shorts that have their own shape, rather than just hugging yours, back into play. I spent the first six months of this year wearing trousers with shirts most weekdays. I have found this to be a brilliant uniform： enough variation that getting dressed still feels like a choice, but with guardrails to keep choice from escalating into indecision and indecision spiralling into a fully fledged wardrobe crisis. But in high summer I don’t want to wear the same clothes I wore six months ago. Not just because they are too hot, but because I want to feel like it’s summer even when - actually, especially when - the content of my work day is not all that different from winter. Clothes are one of the ways we get to feel summery, and on those days when you are in the office with your inbox peppered with other people’s OOOs，you need to take your summer vibes wherever you can. Shorts and a shirt, then. Shorts and a T-shirt seems more suited to one of the Famous Five than to a woman in her fifties, and a shirt never fails to feel purposeful. A coordinating shirt and shorts is fun without being silly - you could wear it to the office, but you could also wear it as a travel outfit when you go on holiday, and then both pieces would be useful while you are away. To shop the look from your wardrobe, find the shorts first. Your basic sightseeing-on-a-hot-day linen shorts will do just fine. Then find a shirt that matches them in some way - it could be a straight-up shade match, or another linen piece but in a different colour, or it could be a striped shirt if your shorts are striped (to channel the French Connection look pictured). Add a chunky flat shoe and jewellery, and you are good to go. Are we brave enough? Deep breath. I will if you will. 64 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian Photography： David Newby. Styling： Melanie Wilkinson LLIZ V H —J vlsAy〕 M S LLJ 〕 < —l> l o LdN S I M LLI — J NHO「 M s —Iv a N VS N o l l o LLIN N O 〕 H o N Lxl Qrd u s l Qr OHS aNvdol LLI mo「V SIANQNV N V 2 V L1JC 1 svs MS1NV1SISSV 9NI\_JA1S LLIy < o N I > l s s-svs d Q a N < - < 0 0 9NISCI N0SNI99IH L1JI H Q.O S M d n LLl> l < s Q N V Qrl < H > I —JI S 1 < z)s A11IM J LLJQ O N

Sunbeds increase the risk of cancer -whatever TikTok may tell you Sali Hughes On beauty M y response to people telling me they’ve been “for a quick sunbed” is, I imagine, similar to the reaction one might get from Chris Packham for admitting to going on a quick foxhunt. I loathe the things and believe they should be banned here (as they are in Australia, Brazil and Iran). I assumed commercial sunbeds were becoming declasse, but a new survey commissioned by tanning brand Vita Liberata for its campaign Not the Way to Glow has shown there’s still a mountain to climb. One in three of the British women surveyed used indoor tanning beds, despite 91% of that third claiming to understand the risk of exposure to UV radiation, namely： a significant increase in the chance of developing skin cancer, including melanoma - the most lethal kind. The World Health Organization classifies indoor sunbeds as being as The World Health Organization classifies sunbeds as being as dangerous as asbestos and cigarettes dangerous as asbestos and cigarettes, with those who’ve used a sunbed just once having a 20% greater chance of developing melanoma than someone who hasn’t. Those using a sunbed for the first time before the age of 35 increases that figure to a shocking 59%. Sunbeds are also a known cause ofbasal cell and squamous cell carcinomas, both more common than melanoma, and capable of killing. Commercial sunbeds are deathbeds and their blithe presence in tanning salons on British high streets (there are an estimated 5,500 of them) legitimises them - especially to young people. Despite use of sunbeds having been restricted to over-i8s across the UK for 12 years, they’re a big draw on TikTok, with 65.5m views for the #tanningsalon hashtag alone. Kim Kardashian posts from her at-home solarium. And TikTok is rife with misinformation on the subject. In fact, sunbeds before a holiday do not help prepare your skin for the sun； use of sunbeds produces negligible vitamin D； they are a poor and risky way to treat conditions such as psoriasis and eczema (they can worsen it over time. The UV medical treatment used by dermatologists on these conditions is controlled), and covering moles with a plaster or pimple patch before getting on a sunbed is as about as effective as a chocolate fireguard. There are calls for TikTok to impose misinformation banners as social media platforms (eventually) did with Covid-19, but given the velocity, variety and amount of cobblers spoken about skin health on TikTok, one might not know where to begin or, indeed, end. Anita Bhagwandas Beauty Q&A Rosacea makes me selfconscious. What’s best for my skin? Erin，by email Because of rosacea’s unpredictability and visibility, it can feel incredibly frustrating. It’s usually diagnosed by facial redness, visible blood vessels and small pus-filled bumps often in the central area of the face. This may look difFerent on skin of colour and may appear as swelling, dryness, or darker brown discoloration. The cause of it is unknown. Dermatologist Dr Hiba Injibar, founder of Dermasurge Clinic, says： “It may involve a combination of genetic, environmental and inflammatory factors, and potential triggers include sun exposure, stress, hot or spicy foods, alcohol and certain skincare products.” To manage it, avoid known triggers, using gentle skincare products and a SPF daily to help reduce flare-ups. “We often treat rosacea with topical and oral antibiotics and a personalised skincare routine,” she adds. Dermatica, a monthly skincare subscription created by dermatology experts after an online consultation, has rosacea-specific formulas. Other treatments may involve types of microneedling. Although LED light therapy can help to reduce inflammation and redness, Injibar prefers laser. Makeup can irritate rosacea. “Look for non-comedogenic, hypoallergenic, alcohol- and fragrance-free makeup.” Try It Cosmetics, which was founded by a rosacea sufferer. Got a beauty question for Anita? Email her at beautyQandA@theguardian.com Photography： Kellie French. Illustration： Edith Pritchett The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 65

LIFESTYLE A： \* GARDENS a zi /I With more grasses to choose from every year, new and unusual varieties are the key to transforming sparse flower beds Words： Matt Collins M y first foray into ornamental grasses was a disaster： I made the wrong choices, put them in the wrong places, and snipped them back at the wrong time. The result, aside from the splodgy mess, was a confidence knock. But I have since developed a great affection for them, not least in creating my own garden, where slender clumps of Molinia caerulea, and the gentle sprays of Chasmanthium latifolium seed heads, have proved the most enchanting oflate-season perennials. Pennisetum 'Black Beauty’，with its broad abundance of dusky flower spikes, is hands-down the best plant Fve grown in years. The popularity and range of ornamental grasses available has never been greater. The stately pampas grass (Cortaderia selloana) used to be one of the very few representatives (and according to urban myth, one in the front garden was a not-so secret symbol that the residents were swingers). But then followed the “new perennial movement” of the 1990s and early 2000s， whose generous tussocky drifts lifted grasses into the mainstream. Now, thanks to the naturalistic aesthetic in gardens, there are grasses for all arenas and in every conceivable form, from low-growers such as fescue and melick to the shimmering fountains of deschampsia, panicum and calamagrostis, whose cultivars seem to double in number each year. There are many reasons for planting grasses, but there are three main benefits. Firstly, autumn colour -russet, gold and smoke-white eruptions just when you need them. Second, they are the great filler, tying together disparate plants (the flurry of wood melick Melica uniflora underpinning designer Ula Maria’s garden at Chelsea this year no doubt contributed to her winning best in show). And third, movement： a flutter of stems in the lightest breeze draws the eye. Perhaps loveliest of all, though, are their common names, each more bucolic than the last： feathergrass, quaking grass, gossamer grass, wood oats, little bluestem, foxtail barley. They don’t so much roll off the tongue as dangle from the mouth of a straw-hatted yeoman. So, what went wrong with my first attempt at clumps of stipa and pennisetum in the border? First, shade. There are fantastic grasses for shade, but the aforementioned, like so many, require a south- or west-facing position. The other mistake was to apply a heavy manure mulch in autumn, which ensured that moisture clung to the crowns and rotted their centres. The nail in the coffin was chopping them back too early in dank, dark winter. Most ornamental grasses prefer well-drained, only moderately rich soils. Beyond this, they require little maintenance or feeding： most can be cut back in one fell swoop in spring - after which fresh shoots will appear - or given a comb through with fingers or fork to remove dead debris. A watering can of diluted seaweed once or twice in early summer will generally suffice for feeding, and limiting crowding from neighbouring plants will aid fuller growth. And opt for lighter mulches such as straw rather than richer manures. If the plants get too chunky (as is common with, say, pennisetum or miscanthus), you can simply lift them in spring, crudely quarter or halve with a spade, and replant the divisions. The only question, then, is which to choose from the burgeoning options available. A i i LLJo H i o m / Ql Ldi s d s v HOiOHd a z v oNlaa Ld irNVI J7O 1 OHd d < 9 / s —l0 H3IN L1JA I -JU j ; llj9 < s i a —l doAA N 3 a Ql< 9 一 A z v —lv / N O S —ln g > < y :S39VZI d LLJH l o • s v d o N I NOSV 「 = 3 9 < s l zlvn 66 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian

(Jrasses for sun Golden oats (Celticagigantea) A stalwart of the sun-baked gravel garden, C. gigantea thrusts sparkling stems over a great mound of airy foliage. Plant individually for best effect. Buy from： knollgardens. co.uk Fountain grass (Pennisetum cv.) Pennisetums are excellent medium­ height, late-blooming grasses for sunny sites, smothered in softly bristled plumes. 'Black Beauty’，or its lighter alternate, P. alopecuroides ‘Hameln’，both act as middle-border statements. jacksonsnurseries.co.uk Quaking grass (Briza maxima) Grown as an annual, quaking grass offers brilliant cut stems, sprinting from tuft to delicate teardrop sprays in just a few months. Grow with for-the-vase flowers like orlaya and cornflower. sarahraven.com Blue fescue (Festuca glauca) Another lover of full sun，Festuca glauca has long been favoured for its shimmering blue, “glaucous” mounds, suitable for a container, window box or gravel scheme. The leaves of Festuca 'Elijah Blue’ verge on silver. crocus.co.uk Reed grass (Calamagrostis x acutiflora) A natural hybrid named after the German nurseryman who bred it, 'Karl Foerster5 is still the best-loved calamagrostis： a neat, robust, perennial with slender straw-coloured flowers. Looks great in a “run” or drift. macplants.co.uk Purple moor grass (Molinia caerulea) Another favourite in Ornamental grasses at the Paradise Garden at RHS Bridgewater in Manchester, main image, designed by Tom Stuart-Smith； foxtail barley, left, can be grown quickly from seed； wood melick, right, is a 'dream underplant'; fountain grass, below, is good for sunny sites my own garden, the UK native Molinia caerulea sends up incomparably delicate stems about 1.5m tall which float beautifully among the late-season perennials such as rudbeckia and aster. Copes with damper conditions. celticwildflowers.co.uk Switchgrass (Panicum virgatum) There are umpteen cultivars to choose from for this lofty, upright North American perennial. Panicum virgatum 'Heavy MetaF is a vertical eruption ofblue- green foliage topped with a purple haze of flowers. Plant in blocks for best effect. knollgardens.co.uk Silvergrass (Miscanthus sinensis 'Kleine Fontane5) Defined by its great height, white-lined leaves and abundant, glinting flowers (not to mention its rock-solid root base), miscanthus is the ultimate all-rounder grass, and the pink- tinged ‘Kleine Fontane5 its premier cultivar. ballyrobertgardens.com Foxtail barley (Hordeum jubatum) This is another hardy annual grass that can be grown quickly from seed to produce delightful, light­ catching heads of barley. Fve grown it with marigolds this spring and the effect is stunning. chilternseeds.co.uk Quaking grass, right, provides brilliant cut stems； Japanese forest grass, far right, is the garden designer's default ground cover Grasses ft)r semi-shade Tussock grass (Deschampsia cespitosa 'Schottland’) I pass a clump of deschampsia on my commute and it has never failed to impress： the popular cultivar (Schottland’ flares bronze throughout summer and autumn, tolerating damper soils and partial shade. Plant individually. bethchatto.co.uk Wood oats (Chasmanthium latifolium) The quintessential shade grass, this is medium height and airy, and brings gorgeous autumn colour and the most enchanting herringbone seed heads. Best planted in small clusters. barrettsbridge.co.uk Autumn moor grass (Sesleria autumnalis) With white, caterpillar­ like plumes in summer, this loosely formed moor grass makes a fantastic ground cover plant in dappled shade. macplants.co.uk Japanese forest grass (Hakonechloa macro) Hakonechloa remains the garden designer’s default ground cover, and understandably so. As an underplant for trees and shrubs, or drifted through perennial schemes, this low, spring­ lush and autumn-blazing grass is as hardworking as it is elegant. cowellsgc.co.uk Gossamer grass (Anemanthele lessoniana) Also known as wind grass, the tumbling New Zealander A. lessoniana morphs in the later months from light green to every shade of autumn -all oranges and ochres. Reaching a metre tall, it is best planted in drifts or dotted through a border. claireaustin- hardyplants.co.uk Wood melick (Melica uniflora) Much like hakonechloa, melick is a dream underplant. Its fine flower buds, appearing in early summer, are like raindrops in motion； its foliage is lushly clumped. Plant in groups. bethchatto.co.uk The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 67

LIFESTYLE < GARDENS How often should I water my plants? It’s the million-dollar question Claire Ratinon On vegetables A fter “What can I do about all these slugs?”， the question I get asked most is “How often should I water my plants?” I would love to say there is an easy answer, but unfortunately the most honest response is “it depends”. There are some rules of thumb, though, that will help you keep your crops hydrated now it’s peak watering season. Just like humans, plants need water for most of their biological processes, and different plants have different water requirements. Rosemary, for example, grows best in arid conditions (and needs little watering), whereas watercress can thrive even when partially submerged in the stuff. So your watering plan will depend on what you’re growing, the conditions they’re growing in and the weather. Obviously we should water less during rainy periods and more when it’s hot, but also watch out for the wind as it can be drying. My veg patch is exposed, so when it’s blowy I pay extra attention to the soiFs moisture level. You don’t need a fancy device to do this, just stick your finger in the soil. Even when the soiFs surface looks dry, there may be adequate moisture a little deeper down. The morning tends to be the best time of day to get to business, avoiding the middle of the day when water evaporates faster. The evening is also an option but can create the conditions for an overnight slug feast if you have as many molluscs in your garden as I do. Frequent, lighter sprinklings will cause your plants5 roots to develop close to the soil surface whereas generous drinks, provided less often, will encourage their roots to push The answer is： it depends. But there are some rules of thumb when it comes to watering deeper into the ground, which is what you should aim for. (But again, this approach should be varied depending on the plant and weather - at the height of summer lettuce or rocket may need more frequent watering to manage the heat stress they’re prone to.) A nifty way of getting water to where it needs to be is to bury plant pots in the ground next to the stems of your thirstiest plants, such as courgettes or tomatoes, and filling them with water. I use recycled plastic pots as I have plenty, but if you use porous terracotta pots (with plugged bases) the water seeps out slower - perfect for when you’re away for a few days. Think holistically about your garden’s water needs. Install water butts to collect rainwater, especially as your plants will prefer it to mains water. Mulch your veg beds and containers to help retain moisture. And when choosing which plants to introduce to your growing space, consider planting more perennials - such as rhubarb - which need less water once established. Gynelle Leon's Houseplant of the week Madagascar palm Why will I love it? The Madagascar palm (Pachypodium lamerei) is an extraordinary succulent. It’s not a true palm but features a thick, spiny trunk topped with a cluster of glossy green leaves, giving it a distinctive and dramatic appearance. When mature, it may even surprise you with small, fragrant white flowers. Light or shade? It thrives in bright light and can tolerate direct sunlight. Position it near a south- or west-facing window where it can bask in full sun. Where should I put it? On sunny windowsill and in a heavy pot to prevent toppling as it can become quite top-heavy with growth. How do I keep it alive? Water thoroughly in spring and summer, allowing the soil to dry out completely between waterings. In winter, water just enough to keep the soil from completely drying out. Use a well-draining cactus or succulent mix to prevent root rot. Keep in warm conditions - between 18C and 24C. Did you know? Native to Madagascar, it has evolved to survive in harsh, arid environments. Its trunk stores water, allowing it to withstand drought. It also has a toxic latex sap, so keep out of reach of pets and children. In its natural habitat, it can grow up to six metres tall. 68 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian > l o o i xhd LLIi l n H s / n o A n a v N UJ —lo 一 A Z V —IV / S 0 S S V 9 N s lljn v i

rm in Spain, lying with my legs in the air like a baby Tim Dowling On modern life I am lying on a mat in a triangle of shade, in Spain, pressing the small of my back earthward as commanded by a pilates instructor named Nicole. She is on her own mat, in front of a beach at sunset, in California or possibly Australia, on an iPad propped up against a shoe. “So now we’re really just pumping with our arms, nine, eight, seven, six,” says Nicole. “Ow，” I say. All around me I can hear the groans of the people Fm on holiday with. We do this every morning because soon it will be too hot to do anything at all. We have chosen this corner of the terrace because it’s the only place that affords both shade and sufficient wifi to summon Nicole. “And now we’re all gently moving into Happy Baby,” says Nicole. “Happy Baby?” I say. “What the hell is Happy Baby?” I look up to see everyone else lying on their backs, legs in the air, knees bent, clutching their insteps. I imitate them, eyes closed, exhaling slowly, feeling the last of my dignity slip away. At midday the temperature tops 40C. We lie under umbrellas, listlessly discussing the preoccupations of our age and stage - elderly parents and grown children. We posit futures of limitless adventure, but also ones where we move into homes that have no stairs. At 7pm it is still 39C. My wife wants to visit a shop in the nearby village she has heard about - an emporium selling peculiar items fashioned from straw. “Will you drive?” she says. “I don’t want to drive.” “Yes,” I say, even though I don’t want to drive either. My wife has put the address of the shop into the satnav, but we face a dilemma as soon as we reach the main road. The satnav is telling us to go right. “But the village is left，” I say. “I was there yesterday.” “Well，maybe the shop is in that other village，” my wife says. “The shop has the first village as part of its name，” I say. “What do you want me to tell you?” my wife says. “Which way to go，” I say. “It’s saying go right，” she says. “So go right.” I turn right. We follow the satnav’s highlighted route up into forested hills. Our small hire car comes equipped with technology that automatically keeps the vehicle between the white lines, but on the twisting roads this means the steering wheel is fighting me at every turn. It’s exhausting and dispiriting, and I don’t know how to turn it off. “I hate this，” I say. “Not long now，” my wife says. I wrestle with the car for another 10km, until we come to the outskirts of the other village. The satnav takes us through the centre of town and out the far side to a roundabout. Then it tells us to go all the way round, returning the way we came. We're on the terrace - the only place that affords both shade and enough wifi to summon the pilates teacher “What’s happening?” my wife says, as we pass through the town centre going the other way. “I don’t know，” I say. “But my guess is that we’re now going back to the first village?' “And then?” she says. “At the far end of that village there will be another roundabout，” I say, “which we will be directed to go all the way round in order to come back here.” “Just on and on, for ever?” she says. “I mean, we’ll probably have to stop for petrol at some point，’’ I say. I suddenly feel very old： tired, cross, bewildered by modern advances, dreaming only of a future circumscribed by dull routine, and all on the flat. “And the shop?” my wife says. “There is no shop，’’ I say. But there is a shop, back at the first village, right at the end of our absurd 26km trip, where my wife gets into an argument with the proprietor over a straw horse’s head with a missing ear, which the man insists is undamaged. “So it has no ear on purpose?” she says. He shrugs. We drive back to where we’re staying without guidance, a journey of just over 3km. The temperature is still above 35C, and my wife has a bag of weird straw objects to show off. We do not discuss the details of our excursion with our friends, largely because of its unpleasant implication： that we are all travelling in an incomprehensible foreign land called the present. Or maybe, I think, it’s just me. I find a beer and a hat and a sun lounger by the pool, where I lie back, legs in the air, like a Happy Baby. Sarah Akinterinwa On millennial life I’A\ A GRAPHIC ARTIST \*7ECHNICALLy TKUE BUT THEN SOMEONE A\IGHT ASk A\E FOK A LOGO OK SOMETHING A CARTOONIST 广 YES I DO LOVE A\y JOB cny NO. NOT ENOUGH TO 4 yOU FOR FREE I’M A DIGITAL CREATIVE \*7HIS MAKES ME SOUND MORE TECH-SAVVY THAN I ACTUALLY AM 心J VJHAI DO you DO FOR l/HAI SOUNDS MOKE PROFESSIONAL THAN •CARTOONIST?\* AND THEN ONE DAY I STOPPED CARING I USED TO DKEAD ANSV/EKING THIS QUESTION： Edith Pritchettt is away The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 69

ADVERTISEMENT The perennial question for homeowners is 'which home improvement should I choose?’ While extensions and new kitchens are traditionally popular projects, some research suggests the best added value in terms of home comfort and guaranteed return on investment comes from energy efficiency upgrades, such as insulation, double glazing, solar panels and electric heating. According to estate agents Knight Frank, homes moving from an E to a C on the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) scale can add as much as 8.8% to their value compared to similar homes with lower EPCs, with 20% of buyers saying they would pay more for an energy efficient home1. That makes perfect financial sense, as when people upgrade or 'retrofit’ their homes, they can reduce running costs, freeing up cash for higher mortgage payments- Ecofurb founder, Russell Smith, said: “Our clients typically spend around £10,000 on energy work，which, with the right targeting, canyield an average of £1,000 ayear in energy bill savings at today's prices. ” While home energy efficiency has become a priority for most homeowners since the energy crisis, many don’t act because they fear getting it wrong or have concerns around finding a knowledgeable and trustworthy installer Low- carbon home service Ecofurb address these dilemmas. Russell said: “Every home is unique, so the most appropriate measures may not be whatyou expect. Given the importance of the work involved and long-term impact on the home，getting a professionally produced plan is essential. ’’ Ecofurb combine a tailored and independent advice service with a trustworthy installer network. Each step is guided and overseen by a PAS-2035- qualified retrofit coordinator to give homeowners confidence. This will ensure not only that the right measures are invested in，but also that work can qualify for grants, where applicable, and new loans that reward investment in energy efficiency. Combining energy bills savings with solar income, the value added to its sale price and the comfort of a warm home means that retrofit is the only home upgrade which pays back financially, whether you are selling or staying. Vaughan is an owner of a 1990s detached house who says he saved around £1400 on energy in 2023. He installed new windows, insulation and an air-source heatpump with an Ecofurb Plan and installers recommended by Ecofurb. Vaughan said： “EcqfUrb…offers a de-riskingprocess... de-risking your investment. ” Like any substantial investment in a house, every project should start with getting the right advice. Russell said: uYou wouldn't build an extension without an architect's input, so don't startyour home retrofit without a retrofit coordinator's advice.” co The Low Carbon Home Service Homeowners turn to energy efficiency upgrades as a high-yield investment Win one of five Instant Cold Brewer and Iced Tea Makers Worth a total of £399! As summer heats up，it’s a good time to upgrade your daily essentials with innovations that simplify and enhance. Transform your morning routine and embrace the simplicity of great taste with the Instant Cold Brewer. Instant This innovative product - currently the only one in the UK market - eliminates the traditional 24-hour wait of cold brew coffee with unique FlashExtract™ technology for tme cold brew coffee in under 20 minutes, with maximum flavoui: Cold brew typically has a more mellow taste, less acidity and bolder flavours without the dilution from ice - and higher caffeine concentration. You can customise your brew strength with five-to-30-minute time options- It’s also easy to use and easy to clean with a dishwasher-safe glass pitcher, lid and brewing basket. Whether you’re a coflfee connoisseur or prefer your iced tea brewed to perfection, the Instant Pot Cold Brewer Coffee and Iced Tea Maker will allow you to make your drinks, your way Scan the QR code and use code INSTANTBREW30 to get 30% oflFat instantpotco.uk and follow 回 @instantpotuk for recipe inspiration. Visit checklists.co. ukjwinlcoldbrew to enter. Enter Willow & HalFs exclusive competition for your chance to win a beautiful, handmade footstool from their brand-new collection, worth up to £500. You will have a range of designs and fabrics to choose from when selecting your footstool, to complement any living room- The Willow & Hall summer sale is now on，with up to 20% off all their beautiful handmade furniture. Visit willowandhalLco.uk or call 020 8939 3800 for more information or to order free fabric samples- WILLOW & HALL BHAl TUI 1J.Y BRITISH 11 AX DM AIM： I URMTC RK Get £100 off an Ecofurb Plan at ecofurb. com I best24 1. Improving your EPC rating could increase vour home's value by up to 20%, bv Oliver Knight, Knight Frank. Visit checklistsxo. ukjwinlwillowhall to enter. The benefits of a granny annexe for elderly relatives Care-home costs can be astronomical, while homecare can also break budgets very quickly - and often，older relatives may not be ready for that level of support. Granny annexes provide a perfect solution. They offer a chance to remain close to family in the garden of their property- Garden Hideouts’ team advise families across the UK how to maximise space to meet their needs. Visitgardenhideouts.co.uk to find out more\* Storm strength from Shetland The Polycrub k is a polytunnel-greenhouse hybrid designed and proven to withstand the rigours of the Shetland climate. It’s a tremendously strong structure, built with a solid green ethos. The frame is made using redundant pipe from the aquaculture industry，which gives this material another new，long, useful purpose­ visit polycrub.co.uk to find out more- The Polycrub range includes a variety of lengths up to 12 metres: • Polycrub Classic - four metres wide • Polycrub Peerie Polly - three metres wide • Polycrub Opyl - ideal as a general purpose shed， or for livestock or poultry. These sturdy growing areas are perfect for individual growers, schools or community groups, or even a place to enjoy the hot tub and a G&T. The Polycrub company is a social enterprise, based in Northmavine, Shetland. Best of Homes & Gardens Here’s a variety of ideas for the home or garden - whether they’re to make better use of that space or to improve the lives of the family living in that space Win a British handmade footstool Worth a total of £500! Willow & Hall design and sell quality upholstered living room and bedroom furniture, handmade in Britain. Designs are available in over 150 fabrics, with a choice of seat fillings and, if personalising a sofa bed，three luxury mattress options- Willow & Hall offer nationwide delivery on all made-to-order furniture from four weeks. They also offer 14-day free returns, whatever your personalisation. Or save up to 50% off on their clearance collection - delivered in as a little as one to two weeks. Best of Homes & Gardens is an independent spread of advertorial from Hurst Media Company. While every care is taken in ensuring that the content is in compliance with the Advertising Standards Authority and The UK Code of Non-Broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing (CAP Codes), the publishers assume no responsibility in the effect rising therefrom, and readers are advised to seek professional advice before acting on any information. 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ADVERTISEMENT Steaming lifie into fashion and fobrics Since 1980, Propress have been supplying professional fabric steamers to Europe’s leading fashion houses. Their latest product, the Propress MINI, was created to help you achieve beautifully crease- free clothes, whether that's at home, the office, or on-the-go. This lightweight handheld steamer saves you time, effort, and the hassle of getting that bulky ironing board out. Designed to cleanse without the need for harsh chemicals, this steam-powered extraordinaire can be used on everything from upholstery and curtains, to suits, silks and even bed linen. To get swift and effortless crease- free clothing at the touch of a button, visit the websitepropress.co.uk Majestic makeovers with Lumber King Flooring As everyone embraces the summer season, it’s the perfect time to refresh your living spaces with the latest flooring trends. This year, there’s a surge in popularity for nude and natural flooring tones, which bring a timeless elegance and serene ambiance to any room\* Lumber King’s curated portfolio boats solid oak, engineered oak，laminate and luxury vinyl tile (LVT). The collection has been hand-selected for not only style but durability and ease of maintenance. Their commercial-grade laminate flooring offers a versatile and cost-eflfective solution, replicating the authentic appearance of real wood while being resistant to scratches and surface moisture. LVT is perfect for those seeking luxury and practicality - highly durable and 100% waterproof this flooring is perfect for the busiest of households. For those who crave the authenticity of natural wood, Lumber King’s solid-oak flooring delivers unmatched beauty and longevity. Each plank is crafted exclusively from white American oak，showcasing the rich textures and grains that only real wcx)d can offer. Their sustainable engineered wood, perhaps a more practical choice, delivers the best of both worlds. The solid-oak veneers showcase the artistry and sophistication of genuine wood while the plywood base offers stability and resilience in any environment. Lumber King offer a simple, straightforward approach and a personal touch to everything they do! Try their free，king-size sample service -pay on your terms and choose your preferred delivery- It couldn’t be easier to transform your property this summer Check out lumberkingflooring.co.uk and bring the showroom to your front room! Silent Luxury at The Sky Marbella real wood flooring, private infinity pools, entertainment rooms, wine cellars and Gunni & Trentino exterior kitchens will be conducive to a design that prioritises quality, precision and the highest standard of living - redefining the concept of luxury for its residents. In keeping with the region, the development’s design is contemporary, warm and fully integrated with the natural and coastal surroundings, which offers a level of comfort and tranquillity for its residents. In addition to the apartments, 16 luxury villas will be delivered as part of the development, designed to offer residents optimum privacy and security- Priced at between £5\*1 million (€6.5 million) and £7.6 million (€9 million), the villas are already under construction and are expected to be completed in the first half of 2026. Features such as Schuco aluminium double- glazing carpentry, Poliform Italian kitchens, A stunning new collection of 50 high-end apaitments and 16 luxury villas, just 10 minutes from the Puerto Banus marina，is leading the way in the new age of silent and sustainable luxury in Costa del Sol. Offering unparallelled levels of privacy and views of the Mediterranean Sea, The Sky Marbella is positioned on the highest hilltop point between the El Madronal and La Quinta neighbourhoods and located in the extremely coveted golden triangle of Marbella, Estepona and Benahavis. I hc apartments incoiporatc a signature contemporary7 style influenced by volume, innovative materials and sustainable practice. Each will be built to the highest specification, boasting a private pool and access to shared amenities including a social club, indoor pool, gym, spa and flexible workspaces. Construction of the 50 apartments is expected to be completed in the second of half 2026 and will be available to purchase for between £1.3 million (€1.5 million； and £5.9 million (€7 million). Marbella is becoming an attractive hub for international property investors and expats alike, owing to an exceptional Mediterranean climate and over 300 days of sunshine a year. The enclave offers a unique combination of coastal luxury and cultural authenticity, boasting the charm of the old town and the all the modern conveniences of a developed city, as well as beachside boutiques and leisure ports for yachts, sailing and scuba diving\* THE SKY Prospective buyers can enquire about the villas and apartments in The Sky Marbella development by emailing sales director Alfonso Lacruz at sales@theskymarbella.com 一 more information on the development can be found at theskymarbella.com Infuse your wedding with a unique and luxurious flair Experience the essence of modern luxury with lSW Events. They design and plan weddings globally, as well as private parties and corporate events. As event architects, they thrive on creativity, shaping unforgettable experiences tailored to your vision. Whether it's a large venue or an intimate space, their versatility knows no bounds. With their own inventory of decor and furniture rentals, and in-house floristry expertise, lSW Events infuse every event with a unique flair, setting them apart in the industry. From concept to execution, their process is meticulous, starting with mood boards and design renders to bring your dreams to life- And it’s not just weddings; lSW Events have crafted unforgettable moments for celebrity weddings like Jay Shetty’s sister’s extravagant affair, and events hosted by boxing sensation Amir Khan. Discover the limitless possibilities with lSW Events today. 1SW I EVENTS DECOR • PLANNING • DESIGN Visit iswevents.com or scan the QR code to find out more- https://www.propress.co.uk/clothing-steamers/ https://qrco.de/bfDc1G http://1swevents.com https://theskymarbella.com/

I t’s always good to be back in Perigueux. Though the administrative capital of the Dordogne lies in one of the French regions best known to British holidaymakers, it manages to remain relatively innocent of tourism. Yet this sleepy flaneur of a town, built on limestone quays above the River Isle, is full ofcharm. It is, after all, at the heart of a proudly gastronomic region. Tourism contributes almost a quarter of the departmenfs income. But call the area by its regional name, Perigord, and the lens shifts. This is the country of truffles and cepes, walnuts, poultry, confit duck and (like it or not) foie gras； of cheeses and sunflowers； figs and freshwater fish； buttery tartines and heady vin de noix. The particular joy of French regional cuisine is the way it remains married to its landscape, as a stroll through Perigueux confirms. In Place du Coderc, the market hall is open every morning except Monday. Twice a week, bright stalls cram the square outside. But the vendors tending displays of gleaming fruit, artisanal cheeses and charcuterie aren’t middle­ class hipsters but the local farmers who produce this food. Start to haggle and you’ll realise they’re speaking not only French but something earthier. This is Occitan, ancient language of the Midi (D'oc means of the south), the Pyrenees and parts of north-west Italy. It’s associated with troubadour culture, but also more recently with the transhumance, the annual movement of grazing livestock on the great border mountain ranges. Spoken particularly by older country people, who use it against the vergonha (shame) that French centralisation traditionally inflicted on native speakers, this language is no middle­ class fetish either. In Occitan a stroll, unapassejada, is close to the Italian passeggiata, and a reminder of what a public business it is to amble these streets. The object is see and be seen： passersby call morning greetings. Perigueux is an ancient city, rich in Gallo-Roman archaeological sites. Today, the narrow medieval lanes of its town centre are infilled with small-scale 18th- and 19th-century shops, all faced in gleaming limestone. Running the gamut oflocal needs, from smart jewellers to stationers in whose dusty windows a few magazines gently fade, they’re a joy to browse, so long as you remember the long afternoon pause, during which everything closes and these streets become as silent as a ghost ship. Nothing to do then but join everyone else for a long lunch, perhaps LIFESTYLE TRAVEL The Dordogne's capital, Perigueux, and its nearby market towns offer a taste of a lifestyle closely linked to ancient lands and rich culinary traditions Overleaf： more overlooked French destinations Limestone ana] lune Words： Fiona Sampson Limoges • Excideuil Hautefort Perigueux • Tourtoirac eaux Bergerac 72 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian > 飄一 ^4 A z v —Iv 工 l o g / Ql LLJa N n v s 山 > | —|| h q n v I N O S n LLJa VIINVQ

fortification would be a tourist honeypot. But most of the visitors taking in the rolling vistas of limestone country are French. French is also the language of the shops and cafes of nearby Excideuil. This confident little market town is built, like Hautefort, on a limestone bluff above a river. Its chateau rebuffed Richard the Lionheart three times； also among the town’s cobbled streets are traces of the Knights Templar, a parish church that dates back to the loth century, and many handsome The joy o cuisine is the way it remains married to its landscape, as a stroll through Perigueux confirms Fruit stalls in Perigueux market, above； the view from Hautefort castle, left； and a foodie shopping street, below, in Perigueux 16th-century houses built after the town was made tax-exempt by royal decree in 1482. But Excideuil is not a museum so much as Perigueux in miniature. Every Thursday the square at the top of town hosts a market where farm- raised pou/es are sold plucked or unplucked. The sellers might be our old neighbours JP “Pierrot” Journiac and sons, as they - and their dog Jazz - backchat through the hatch of their tiny, home-painted Citroen van. Or at least, as they used to： Pierrot died earlier this year. Today he lies in the village cemetery at Tourtoirac, surrounded by the fields his family have farmed for generations. Tourtoirac, quieter and smaller in turn than Excideuil, is where, sitting with our dogs outside one of the square’s two cafes, I first entered the world Pierrot came to personify for me. Faded blue window shutters below double-pitched lauze (stone-tiled) roofs, family farms deep in acres of sunflowers, and lost homesteads crumbling back into a landscape of wooded high causse (limestone plateaus), a chair under a fig tree, and dark, flyblown kitchens in which buttery miracles are conjured. This is where I glimpsed how deeply a shared reliance on countryside unites city, town, village and hamlet. I ended up writing a book about the deep influence such limestone landscapes exert. Like many of the region’s fortified churches, Tourtoirac’s displays Romanesque carving, a trace of its place on the Santiago pilgrimage route. Fourteen years ago the village installed a son-et-lumiere show in recently discovered caves. These historic excitements change local life, but not completely. In our hamlet by the River Auvezere the traditions of modest self-sufficiency remain： a house cow, a drying rack for maize, vegetable gardens, geese in the yard under the walnut trees. The drying, bottling and distilling all this demanded kept most of our neighbours busy into the light evenings of summer. In winter, we lived by kitchen table gossip, vin de noix and what the postman brought. It wasn’t the Algonquin Hotel. But it was a masterclass in human interdependence - to say nothing of the dogs. Limestone Country by Fiona Sampson is reissued in paperback this autumn by Little Toller (£12) St Front Cathedral and the market place in Perigueux, unsung capital of the Dordogne at one of the restaurants that line the Place de FAncien Hotel de Ville. In reality, this apparent somnolence bespeaks a pragmatism about quality of life, which here is shared by everyone, from postal workers to railway labourers, council office clerks to showroom assistants. Perigueux’s usual symbol is the distinctly unpragmatic silhouette of the Cathedral of St Front. This outsized 19th-century confection of domes and turrets dominates the skyline in much the way the Sacre Coeur does Montmartre. And with good reason： they share an architect, Paul Abadie. Towering above the slow-moving river，the cathedral is also what fills the rearview mirror when you set out into the deep countryside which starts at the edge of the city. Sitting 75 miles inland from Bordeaux, Perigueux can be reached by train from Paris in about four and a half hours. But there’s no high-speed TGV line to the city - travellers have to change at Limoges. The result is an unusual, old-fashioned urban-rural community and an interdependent sufficiency from which we might learn much as we face the stresses the climate crisis will put on food security and global supply chains. But perhaps I’m biased. Until Brexit I lived here myself, in a hamlet some 20 miles west of the city. Our home was in the region known as Perigord Noir, which takes its name from the celebrated black truffle, Tuber melanosporum, found locally. There are also Perigord Blanc, for limestone dazzle； Perigord Vert, for general verdure； and Perigord Pourpre, which has wine-growing Bergerac at its heart. In fact, though, greenery and pale limestone characterised our district too. This is life off the beaten track - not that it lacks either charm or awareness of that charm. For example, a half dozen miles from our old home, along winding roads marked with little white kilometre pegs, stands the chateau that gave the village of Hautefort its name. Behind ramparts above the main village street, named for the medieval baron-poet Bertran de Born, who founded the castle, is a spacious gravelled forecourt with, falling away on three sides, historic gardens and parkland that lead to a horizon of bright fields interspersed with wooded coverts. In the UK, this palatial monument with 17th-century round towers more fantasy than The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 73

LIFESTYLE I TRAVEL 二： :T"， 一 . •- j • •A -- Unsung France From the Basque coast to Brittany; four enchanted places off the tourist trail Guethary, liasque coast Between the glamour of Biarritz and the tuna boats and half-timbered houses of Saint-Jean-de-Luz lies a surprisingly peaceful stretch of the French Basque coast, with relatively few tourists even in high summer. “It’s the crashing waves of the Atlantic that save us from the invasions，” says Amaia Urruty, who has been coming to Guethary since she was a teenager. ''Everything is calm here except the sea.” Life in Guethary centres on the fronton, the huge court for games of Basque pelota in front of the village hall that is also a venue for markets, dances and fairs. Once a whaling centre, the port is remarkable today for the way its fishing boats are hauled on to dry land every day rather than left in the water. The buildings are beautifully kept and typically Basque - white facades with long, sloping roofs, dark-red shutters. “Once you start coming here, you return every year，” she says. “It’s great for families and people who love the Basque style.” The beaches are fantastic - long and sandy - and there are plenty of places to enjoy traditional piperade aux oeufs (omelette with tomatoes, peppers and ham from nearby Bayonne) or a panache de fruits de mer (seafood platter) overlooking the fishing boats in the tiny port. “It’s fun to watch the surfers and, beyond them, see the Spanish Basque coast，” says Urruty. At nearby Bidart, Plage d’Erretegia is a sandy bay accessed by a narrow path between the dunes and is the start of a coastal footpath to Hendaye -and the Spanish border -15 miles away. Further south, Plage de FUhabia is wider and good for swimming, while Plage de Parlementia is the big one for surfers and the only beach with lifeguards all summer long. Plage des Alcyons is the best one for families： at low tide, the rock pools become mini aquariums of sea urchins, crabs, prawns and tiny mussels. Two miles from Bidart is the Moulin de Bassilour, a bakery which specialises in gateau basque 一 a pie filled with rum-flavoured creme patissiere or black cherries. Here visitors can see the wheat being stone-ground, powered since 1741 Fishing boats in the port town of Guethary, above, and, left, chilli peppers drying on a house in Espelette by the creaking water wheel next door. There’s a cafe-restaurant but it’s better to stock up on picnic supplies and head for an excursion inland - Guethary’s hire agency, Velektrix, rents e-bikes from €21 for half a day. To the south-west is Espelette, known for its red chillies seen drying on house facades and balconies during the summer, while in neighbouring Cambo-les-Bains, Villa d’Arnaga，the Basque-style museum-house of Edmond Rostand, author of Cyrano de Bergerac, displays some ofhis sketches and poems. To finish the day, the honeypot village of Ainhoa is a 20-minute e-bike ride away. It can get busy by day, but on summer Mondays the village hall organises a night-time hike - La Nocturne d’Ainhoa - to its hilltop chapel. Stay Guethary’s old village school has been converted into the three-star Hotel Balea (doubles from €79， baleahotel.com), with 28 rooms and breakfast served in the interior garden. Jon Bryant Vienne, Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes The ruins of medieval Chateau de la Batie, looking like a holey cardboard cut-out on the skyline north of town, 74 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian A z v —Iv X 103/SI2 LLJ 工 Q z v < s i LLJl > l J S LLJO V ^ I A l l Ldo / o Qll LLJs — 1 0 0 V A LLJ Qrg — l LLIn N v z

is always the first thing that catches my eye in Vienne. It’s in such a state of disrepair that visitors would be forgiven for thinking it’s the oldest building in these parts, but they would be wrong： Vienne’s Roman architecture predates it by more than a thousand years. Think of the ancient Romans5 legacy in France and the spectacular Pont du Gard aqueduct will probably spring to mind, or perhaps the Maison Carree temple in Nimes or the spectacular amphitheatre at Arles. Sleepy Vienne, 20 miles south of Lyon, with a population today much the same as it was two millennia ago - a mere 30,000 - will barely get a look in. The ancient ruins are woven into the fabric of this town on the banks of the Rhone, once capital of the Gallic Allobroges tribe until it was turned into a Roman colony under Julius Caesar in 47BC. Dogs play around the arches of the Jardin de Cybele, the remains of the Roman forum. I sip coffee at Le Bar du Temple, overlooking the Temple of Augustus and Livia. Thomas Jefferson visited Vienne in 1787 and the temple is said to be the inspiration behind his design for the White House of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia. Built many centuries later, cylindrical towers sprouting like fat straws in the streets around the temple reveal the presence of traboules， covered passages similar to those found in Lyon, 20 miles to the north. The centuries slowly obscured much of the Roman heritage until vast mosaics were unearthed at Saint- Romain-en-Gal in 1891. Sections of the mosaic are on display at the Musee de Saint-Romain-en-Gal, including a newly renovated area depicting the agricultural seasons. The detail is minute, every stripe visible on Dionysus’s tiger in one square, every grape being trodden by harvest workers in the next. Jazz arrived in Vienne more than 2,000 years after the Romans, and now, for three weeks of the year, it transforms the town. When Jean-Paul Boutellier decided to establish an international jazz festival in 1981, he had originally planned to hold it in Parc de la Tete d’Or，a riverside garden on the northern edge of Lyon. The city council overruled him for fear of upsetting the resident zoo animals, and Vienne, quite by accident, became home to one of France’s best-known jazz festivals. Held in the Roman theatre antique, Jazz a Vienne (late Readers' travel tips France confidential Winning tip Artistry in Normandy The village of Saint-Ceneri-le-Gerei lies just west of Alencon and is classed as a Petite Cite de Caractere. Walk up to the church for stunning views, before heading down the path to the little chapel set amid dense woodland. The beauty of the village has attracted many painters, many of whom stayed in the Auberge des Soeurs Moisy, once an artists’ retreat and now a museum. Look out for hints of its artistic past everywhere. Lisa A Lot of medieval history About 25 miles south-east ofBergerac, Monflanquin in Lot-et-Garonne is a great place to visit. We timed our trip to coincide with the annual medieval festival on 15-16 August and enjoyed re-enactments, artisan markets, and traditional music, all set against the backdrop of Monflanquin?s beautiful stone and half-timbered buildings. Michael Fairytales and wine in the Alsace Eguisheim is a beautiful old fairytale village. Everywhere you look there is colour - every house has beautiful floral window boxes that transport you back to a childhood fairytale imagination. There are plenty of cafes for enjoying a mouthwatering crepes suzette. Hannah Ancient Roman mosaics in the Musee de Saint- Romain-en-GaL, above, and, left, the ruined Chateau de la Batie outside Vienne June to mid July) has hosted some of the biggest names in the industry, including Ella Fitzgerald, Norah Jones and Miles Davis. Outside festival time, the theatre is free to visit on the first Sunday of each month. Boutellier fused jazz and Vienne’s Roman history even further earlier this year when he opened a jazz club within the Musee de Saint-Romain-en- Gal, with views ofthe river and the castle. Concerts are held every other Sunday evening, increasing to weekly from September. The vines that run down the hillside are the Romans5 living legacy in Vienne, and Vitis Vienna is a collective of revived Roman vineyards (call any ofthe wineries directly to visit). I enjoy my own Crozes-Hermitage in modern surroundings, at the newly opened wine bar O BievVin. Stay La Peniche Bed & Bicycle (doubles from €149) is one of three self-catering barges on the Rhone overlooking Vienne and its vineyards, with a hot tub on deck. Anna Richards Mountain villages in Languedoc Inland from the popular seaside resort of Argeles-sur-Mer near Perpignan, unspoilt mountain villages await. From the charming castle village of Laroque des Alberes, climb the four-mile path to Le Chalet de PAlbere, where you’ll be rewarded with views of the Alberes mountains and classic French dishes served on the rustic terrace. Alice Joinel Lounge around in the Lauragais Revel, 30 miles from Toulouse in the Lauragais, has one of the best markets in France every Saturday morning in and around a 14th-century market hall. Nearby are beautiful small villages such as Soreze and Saint- Felix. The region boasts rolling hills and is largely unspoiled. Donna To enter our readers' tips competition and see the terms and conditions, visit theguardian.com/readers-travel-tips (you must be a UK resident to enter). The week’s best tip，chosen by Tom Hall of Lonely Planet, wins a £200 voucher to stay at a Coolstays property. This is a selection of tips： see more on our website (2) coolstays The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 75

The tiny beach at Calanque de I'Erevine, right； and, far right, the harbour in Martigues LIFESTYLE Cote Bleue, near Marseille “I’ve never been as happy as when I was in La Redonne，” wrote Blaise Cendrars in 1927. The words of the Marseille-based writer ring true as I hike red rocks between green pines and the azure sea. Like many marseillais before me，Fve come to the Cote Bleue to escape the city and explore the tiny villages ofthis enchanting coastline. The Cote Bleue unfurls along the Mediterranean north-west of Marseille. Stretching for 17 miles, it is on a more intimate scale than the vast 5,000-hectare Calanques national park to the south of city. Like the better-known area, the Cote Bleue also has a chain of calanques (rocky inlets), and villages that give a glimpse of simple southern living. They can now be toured on foot thanks to 18th- century smugglers and 20th-century railway engineers. The Sentier des Douaniers (customs officers5 trail) was built during the French Revolution for officials (douaniers) to patrol the coastal path checking for smugglers out at sea. Hikers using it today encounter a kaleidoscope of nature - verdant flora, the cerulean sea，and ochre and white rocks - and an epic panorama. Clinging to the cliffs, the jagged trail offers a good cardio workout. The Train de la Cote Bleue is a more leisurely option. Launched in 1915, it allows commuters and tourists to soak up breathtaking vistas while traversing 18 stone viaducts. It’s easy to hop on and off at the old tiled stations. I prefer to do this coast on a mix of trails and train. Wearing non-slip shoes, I board an 8am train at Marseille’s Saint-Charles station. Seats on the left side give the best view as we whiz past container ships and the red-tiled roofs that Cezanne painted in UEstaque neighbourhood. As we leave the city limits, the urban sprawl dissolves into the Mediterranean’s endless blue. I hop off at the tiny port of Niolon to hike to Ensues-La Redonne, a 4^2-mile walk that takes 214 hours (compared with the train’s six minutes). At Niolon station, the Train Inc Cafe sells picnic grub with a side of social impact. Beside the port, the vine-canopied terrace of seafood restaurant La Pergola is ideal for a lingering meal. But I’m on a mission to hike. With the train tracks on my left, I set off on the Sentier des Douaniers, weaving between fragrant pines and bursts of poppies. A stone viaduct soars above the Calanque du Jonquier, a tiny blue cove. Further along the I check out the baroque Saint Marie- Madeleine church, then take a stroll through Martigues, stopping off to taste poutargue - cured mullet roe, similar to Italian bottarga - whose briny punch smacks of the south. It’s on sale at the Domaines des Terroirs market or direct from the sea at Lou Calens, the last producer to use calens (traditional fishing nets). On the cinematic journey back to Marseille I am reminded of a quote I saw painted on rocks on the coastal trail. “There’s no direct path to The harbour and railway line, below, at Mejean, on the Cote Bleue trail, I take a refreshing dip at the bigger Calanque de FErevine. The limestone cliffs give way to rocks in 50 shades of ochre as I descend into Mejean via a natural staircase, passing people playing a game of Provencal petanque. Lined with old cabanons (fishers cottages), the tiny harbour is dwarfed by a towering viaduct. Beneath it, the casual Mange Tout restaurant fries up thousands of whitebait daily to the delight oflocals and tourists. The rest of the route to Ensues-la-Redonne is a paved road, which is less picturesque but easier on the feet. Back on the train, it is a quick ride to the popular seaside town of Sausset- les-Pins. Once a hub for tuna fishing, it now has a lovely harbour filled with pleasure boats, shops and restaurants, and a mix of sun-soaked beaches. I have arrived in time for the Sunday market, where local foodstuffs are sold beside inexpensive clothes and bric-a-brac. I pick up a Provencal olive-studded fougasse bread and head along the coastal boardwalk for a nap at Plage du Petit Nid. The last stop on the Cote Bleue is Martigues, which has earned the nickname of the “Venice of Provence” for its picturesque canals. They are at their photogenic peak in the Quartier de File, where pastel houses and traditional coloured wooden boats are reflected in the mirror-like water. 76 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I The Guardian S LLJO V S I A l i LLIo i A S V —lv

Pontusval lighthouse, right, near Brignogan- Plages； and, below, the market hall at Plouescat happiness. The happiness comes from taking the path.” Trains run every hour from Marseille- Saint-Charles until around 8pm. Journey time to Niolon 25 minutes, to Martigues 55 minutes Alexis Steinman Brignogan-Plages, Brittany There are many Francophiles to be found on the south coast of Brittany, where the golden sand beaches at Carnac and Benodet are popular for family camping and beach holidays. The region’s south coast is easy to reach after arriving at Saint-Malo or Roscoffby ferry and driving across the peninsula, yet with school holidays in August, it can get busy. To reach a more peaceful corner of Brittany, it’s wiser to head west from the ferry instead, to the north coast of Finistere. West of Roscoff, the sweeping blond beaches of the Cote des Sables (the sandy coast) are much less frequented than their southern counterparts, but equally alluring. We happened upon it a few years ago, when my curiosity for parts unknown saw us travel along the coast towards Le Conquet. We stayed a few nights at Hotel de la Mer in Brignogan-Plages, a resort on a gently looped coastline with many beaches to choose from. The hotel is by the water at Plage des Chardons Bleus, whose white sand is punctuated at low tide by silver-grey boulders. Elsewhere, sheltered Plage du Garo is overlooked by stately umbrella pines and the water that fills the bay at high tide is turquoise. Just around the corner, Plage du Phare sweeps around towards the whitewashed Pontusval lighthouse, perched on the rocks. Heading back east along the coast, we came to Plage des Amiets at Cleder - a wide, sweeping curve of golden sand backed by moorland and a windswept campsite. On a sunny Saturday in August, we shared the beach with just a few families； some were paddleboarding on the incoming tide while others played tennis or just lounged around. I stood in the shallows watching my two children paddle. Around me, wetsuit-clad foragers gathered edible seaweed from the rocks, and I was transfixed by the ribbons and frills that fluttered around my feet in the water like an octopus’s garden. We’d taken a picnic, as there are no shops or cafes for miles, but it made a perfect lunch as we basked in the sun. Afterwards, we parked in the village square in Plouescat，bought ice­ creams from the shop and marvelled at the huge 16th-century market hall, sorry that we’d missed that morning’s market. During another trip to the area, I discovered the beach at Keremma, near Plouescat. It had caught my eye from the window of La Butte, an eco-friendly hotel high on the hill at Plouider, where chef Nicolas Conraux’s cuisine draws on the area’s abundance of top-quality produce. With a slightly bleary head from a sensational meal the night before, I strolled on to the beach as the green-hued sea lapped gently to the shore, covering the patterns of seaweed. A murmuration of small seabirds twirled against a sky streaked with wisps of cloud. I had the beach entirely to myself. When there are quiet corners like this to be found, why follow the crowds? Stay Hotel de la Mer has doubles from €150 room-only (hotelde lamer.bzh)； La Butte has doubles from €135 room-only (labutte.fr). Carolyn Boyd Answers to quiz 9 Brands that are 14 Literary works Answers to Puzzle solutions by Thomas Eaton palindromes. inspired by dreams： Weekend 10 Uefa European Mary Shelley； Crossword 1 Beowulf (only Football Championship RL Stevenson； by Sy (puzzles on page 78) surviving copy). (number of teams). Coleridge； 2 Lithium. ll Fictional penguins. Stephen King； 3 Nightingales. 12 Pink hits： Stephenie Meyer. 4 In the mountains. Pink Floyd； 15 First emperors： Rome； 5 Phoenix (Arizona). Blackpink； India； 6 Diamonds are Forever. Pink； Persia； 7 Scotland (north coast). Kissing the Pink. Japan； 8 Sikhism. 13 RSPB reserves. China. The Guardian I 20.07.24 I SATURDAY I 77

Ohhk" I thought you'kept saying 'bumps in the road' as a metaphor for journey I am asking kjou to put bumps in mg road. I 1- People zoom down 'll it to the Tesco. 叫IlL lilUL 1 111 be honest though it was $ort helping Stephen Coilins coullo This quiz answers questions posed by children 一 will you get a better score than your parents? 1 Ben, 9, asks: when did humans first start making brick houses? A The 17th century B 7OOOBC C 1970s D AD700 2 Elodie, 8, asks： how far can elephants walk in a day? A Up to 2 kilometres - they are very big so they get tired quickly B Up to 20 kilometres C Up to 200 kilometres D Up to 2,000 kilometres - they drink a lot of water and it means they can walk a very long way 3 Lottie, 9, asks: why do bees buzz? A They buzz to warn humans that they mustn’t come too close B They buzz to communicate with other bees C Bees are just humming to themselves D The rapid beating of their wings makes the sound 4 Caden, 6, asks： what is the hardest naturally occurring material? A Titanium B Diamond CGold D Lapis lazuli 5 Mireia, 8, asks: when was the first pen invented? AAbout3000BC by the ancient Egyptians B AD300by the Romans C About 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII D1932 by George V The Guardian •5? Rishi sunak M.P I'm note therapist PQr Sunak. I'm your constituent and this is your HP Surgerg. U/orkir>q f Richmond Stephen Collins Like." so many of my friends didn't moke it..・ I shouldn't be here... I should be in California but that u/ould make me ^eel guilty too and 卜. Answers (no peeking!) 1 B. Humans have been building with bricks since about 7000BC. Very early bricks were found around the ancient city of Jericho, in southern Turkey. They were loaves of mud, baked dry in the sun, then stacked and bound together using more mud. 2 C. According to the conservation charity Elephants for Africa, African elephants have been known to walk up to 200 kilometres in one day. That is like walking farther than the distance from London to Bristol in the UK (185km). 3 0. The buzzing sound bees make is mostly produced by the rapid beating of their wings, which can beat up to 230 times a second! Some bees buzz when they visit a flower, to release its pollen. 4 B. Diamond is the Earth's hardest naturally occurring material, scoring 70-150 gigapascals on the Vickers hardness test - this test measures the force needed to make an indent with a specially designed tool on the material. 5 A. The first recorded pens were used in ancient Egypt， dating from about 3000BC. They were made out of reed， for writing on papyrus. Molly Oldfield hosts Everything Under the Sun， a weekly podcast (and book) answering children's questions. Does your child have a question? To submit one, scan the QR code above Rre you 0Kz Mr Sunak? Uell no, that's why I'm \ talking bo a therapist. 、 78 I SATURDAY I 20.07.24 I And have you thought any more about uhat we discussed last week? 1 In the British Library, what is Cotton MS Vitellius A XV，f. I32r? 2 Which metal is used in batteries and antidepressants? 3 What duetted with the cellist Beatrice Harrison for 12 years? 4 Where might you encounter a Brocken spectre? 5 What is the most populous US state capital? 6 Which Ian Fleming title pluralised a slogan used by De Beers? 7NC500 is a route around where? 8 Which Indian religion was founded in the late 15th century? What links： 9 Aviva； Elie； Maoam； Nissin； Oxo； Xanax? 101960-1976 ⑷；1980 (8); 1996 (16); 2016 (24)? 11 Oswald Cobblepot； Feathers McGraw； Mumble； Pingu? 12 Another Brick in the Wall; DDU-DU DDU-DU; Just Like a Pill； The Last Film? 13 Arne； Bempton Cliffs； Forsinard Flows； Minsmere； Snettisham? 14 Frankenstein； Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde； Kubla Khan； Misery； Twilight? 15 Augustus； Chandragupta； Cyrus； Jimmu； Qin Shi Huang? I meant about mg The kids’ quiz Molly Oldfield Scan the code to send Molly a question fora future quiz Quiz Thomas Eaton Weekend crossword Sy Across 6.......House, National Trust property once owned by the Rothschild family (6) 8 ......Nation, memoir by Elizabeth Wurtzel (6) 9 Joe England cricketer (4) 10 ........Obama, US attorney and former first lady (8) 11 Court jester and late friend of Hamlet? (6) 12 What it is, according to Dean Martin, when the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie? (5) 15 Brand of fine porcelain - or an antihero in the Jeeves and Wooster novels (5) 17 The largest of the Dodecanese islands (6) 20 Private Eye journalist in whose name an annual award for investigative reporting is made (4f4) 22 Jean .... CBE, designer (4) 23 Louisa May......., author of Little Women (6) 24 See 3 Down 1/19 The.................Department, album by 5 18(8,5) 2 它mile and Romain....... , father and son French rugby internationals (7) 3/24 David Bowie song released at the time of the first moon landings (5,6) 4/7 5 18 song from Fearless (4,5) 5 EastEnders family headed by Karen, played by Lorraine Stanley (6) 7 See 4 13 See 21 14 See 21 16 Alleged quality of the gates to heaven?(6) 18 River joining the Avon at Rugby (5) 19 See 1 21/14/13 5 18 song from Reputation (4,4,3,4,2,2) Solutions to Crossword and Thomas Eaton's quiz page 77 SATURDAY HidOAAVH 3 n n lliI : z o i v Q:l s n --J — J