

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
	Ratings: 1 Superb, 2 Great, 3+ above average, 3 average (might read again), 3- poor (wouldn't read again), 4 dire, 5 didn't finish / walked out				
	Books Read (reverse chronological order)				
	Stronger Than Death	Manda Scott			
May 24	MURDER ON THE OXFORD	Hillary Greene	4	(Hillary Greene == Faith Martin) - purchased 1 jul 2021 - black bastard, Tommy Lynch - police internal politicians and self examinations too hard to follow - ditto relationships between them all - and androgenous nicknames "Mellow", Mallow, "Mel", Philip, for same guy	K 2004
May 24	Happiness		4	Happiness 2019 - uneventful - seventeen year old returning to his small w Ireland village in 50's? And with later memories as retiree? - local labourers recruited as area bets electrified (1m poles) - 4- dull 7 may	K 2019
Apr 24	Cover the Bones	Chris Hammer	4	Outback thriller from the award-winning author of Scrublands (Detective Nell Buchanan). Dull complex multi generation tale of "7" wealthy families in e coast Oz Bones complex relationships over 2+generations	K 2024 2023
Mar 24		Laurie Lee		Stroud, shadd, laurie lee cider wr... Same low key dramatic view of start of Spanish civil war. Wed mar 24 2+	
Mar 24	Lewis trilogy	May	3	Lewis trilogy K 2011-2013 by 1 the blackhouse - detective Fin drafted back to his native Lewis, from Edinburgh - gannet chick (guga) harvest on remote island - several grim deaths and dreadful accidents from his past 2 the Lewis man - alzheimer men hard to follow place in families and plot - more childhood climbing dares and accidents 3 chessmen lots of of hormonal relationships, little action - funeral of one friend found years later in crashed plane - names and characters hard to follow	K 2011
Mar 24	Yea d the Locust			Locust - gratuitous jump to post story timeframe to puncture frequent over tense episodes - major baddie targeting decisions based on off the cuff hunches by CIA director	
Feb 24	Tin Man	Sarah Winman	5-	Oxford - two gay lads and relaxed girl one of them marries. - AIDS in the background - various other gay loves that I didn't get my head around - families and relationships too hard to follow	K 2017
Feb 24	Driving Over Lemons: An Optimist in Andalucia	Chris Stewart	3+	As good as on first read	K
Feb 24	We Are Bellingcat: An Intelligence Agency for the People	Eliot Higgins	2	Excellent bio of this tireless organisation from the humble founder	272 2021
Feb 24	Death on the Marais	Adrian Magson	3	First rocco.	K 2010
Feb 24	The Moose Paradox	Antti Tuomainen	3	2nd in trilogy. Rather complex shenanigans with adventure park potential take overs	K 2021
Feb 24	Bad News [ZW#4]	Linwood Barclay	3	Less humour or paranoia than earlier bad books. Last minute clincher as Zack is saved by airbag puching pencil into villain's eye and brain.	474 2007
Feb 24	The Detective [KR#3]	Ajay Chowdhury	4	Kamil now a rookie detective with the Met. Still living above the Indian Restaurant. Thin straggly plot with four senior bods at AI firm killed in days leading up to a putative sale by their Venture Capitalist. Weak and silly.	382 2023
Feb 24	The Lazarus Solution	Kjell Ola Dahl	5-	- date? post end of Soviet/Nazi pact - complicated Norwegian (quisling nazi friendly) Swedish (neutral?) relationships - and nazi / communist the angles Scrappy	K 380 2022
Feb 24	Fanatic Heart	Thomas Keneally	5	Too much bio of Irish 19th c misery	K 432 2023
Feb 24	The Rules of Prey	John Sandford	5	Dire. J not recommended I think	K 446 1989
Feb 24	Dead of Night [HS#2]	Simon Scarrow	3	Same old non-demanding read of German cop in Nazi Berlin	
Jan 24	Exiles [AF#3]	Jane Harper	4	Last Falk in series. To/fro a year chronology surprisingly hard to follow Very drawn out recounting of events around and since prior year's disappearance	422 2022
Jan 24	Citadel	AJ Cronin	3	Early career of young doctor, starting in 1920's idealistic and poorly paid in welsh mining village. As his career progresses he loses his ideals for chase for money and position. Then comes back to his senses after seeing the venality and incompetence of so many of the (long pre-NHS) medical world.	292 1937
Jan 24	Penance	Eliza Clark	5	Gave up v. quickly. Seemed to be going nowhere with zero interest	403 2023
Jan 24	The Covenant of Water	Abraham Verghese	5	Depressing read, quit at 66% - India 1900..., Digby Glasgow, mum's suicide 1920's - constant chain of tragedies thru the generations - misery of overstretched/ tested relationships - matriarch threaded thru	K 794 2023
Jan 24	The Night of the New Moon	Laurens van der Post	3	Pithy account of his final years in Japanese POW camp and explaining his firm view that the Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombs were the only way to get the Japs to surrender - their preference (and planning) for the war ending being to kill all their prisoners and then themselves. This due to their fatalism, brutality and belief that death is more important than life.	157 1970
Jan 24	The kandy-kolored tangerine-flake streamline baby	Tom Wolfe	5	Couldn't get into it	339 1963
Jan 24	Blackout [HS#1]	Simon Scarrow	3	Murders in 1939 Berlin. Carefully non-Nazi "Kripo" inspector (Horst Schenke) drafted to solve them, by direct order of v.senior Nazis who want to avoid scandal and/or accumulate power to blackmail each other. Decent thriller with HS treading fine line politically.	418 2021
Jan 24	Watching You	Lisa Jewell	4	Series of interlinked infatuations by school kids (mainly girls) on (mainly) older teacher whose wife is found murdered. Pretty silly	488 2018
Jan 24	Summerwater	Sarah Moss	5	Read 60% before realising from not long ago read it's an awful book!!	K 200 2020

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Jan 24	The Cruel Sea	Nicholas Monsarrat	2	Powerful tale of sailors manning convoy protection fleets during WW2. Descriptions of grisly aftermath of sinkings (on both sides) make one think NM was shipwrecked during his service (tho' I don't think he was).	416 1951
Jan 24	From the Ashes	Marion Kummerow	4	Filmsy tale in 1945/6 Berlin. German students in/of Soviet university objecting to Soviet indoctrination and variously falling in love with each other. Can't think why I read it all the way to the end.	K 246 2019
Dec 23	The White Russian	Tom Bradby	5	Murder in 1917 Set Petersburg. Turgid start.	478 2003
Dec 23	Shadow Dancer	Tom Bradby	3	Book the film we saw in 2012 was made from. Ugly messy secret servicer and terrorist groups in 1990's Belfast. The peace agreement is beginning to appear and rabid IRA group want to knock it off the rails with a dramatic murder in London. M15 use pretty conflicted young ex-terrorist woman for details from her two brothers who are at the heard of it. More cryptic and dangly than I remember from the film - particularly the girl's motivation.	K 418 1998
Dec 23	Broken Promise [PF#1]	Linwood Barclay	3	Complicated tale fronted by another (now out of work) journalist. His cousin, who in the past abducted a newborn from hospital where her Mum is the administrator, is found with a ~1-year old babe whose Mum is found brutally murdered. All very hard to follow with lots of high speed plot shifts towards the end, but leaving with the cliffhanger that the brutal murderer has not been caught, and the number 23 is somehow relevant. ... tbc in "Far from True".	483 2015
Dec 23	The Secret Hours	Mick Herron	3	Slough House prequel (mainly). Told through an aborted investigation into a 1994 episode in Berlin where Jackson Lamb (with a different name: Brinsley Miles) is trying to identify/bring down mole in Mix responsible for the death of one of his "joes". Super-smart new comer to Mix sent out to investigate gets her legs blown off, becoming the Molly Duran of SH books. As ever, ludicrously complex bureaucracy and internal politics too hard for me to follow, so one just skims along hoping to pick up the main gists.	391 2023
Dec 23	Harlot's Ghost	Norman Mailer	5	Over-wordy metro-centric start, due, I believe, to become powerful novel on US spookery, but not for me!	K 1170 1991
Dec 23	Dirt Town	Hayley Scrivenor	3	Young girl in small Aussie outback town disappears then found dead. Too many similar-ish families and names made it challenging to follow what was going on at times.	K 369 2022
Dec 23	That Eye the Sky	Tim Winton	3	12-year old lad dealing with Dad being severely injured in car accident, arrival of evangelical man who helps him and his Mum adjust, with some religion rubbing off. Not in same league as later TW's	150 1986
Dec 23	A Slow Fire Burning	Paula Hawkins	3	Young man murdered on his Islington houseboat. Found by slightly zany next door boat owner. One of these books that depends far too much on cryptic chronological changes and far too many hardish-to-distinguish-characters for it's drama. Very snippety exposing of back histories. Huge rush of plot changes in the finale.	319 2021
Dec 23	Bad Guys [ZW#2]	Linwood Barclay	3	Another light hearted Zack Walker books. He gets involved with drug dealing baddies after buying a car at auction that they thought had a stash of cocaine in it. As ever, lots of anguish and a high speed/adrenaline ending.	422 2005
Dec 23	Centennial	James Michener	4	Very tedious and uninspiring tale/history of small town Colorado over the millennia. Can't think why I ploughed all the way through! Particularly dull first section as "author" is commissioned to write the book, only as backup for an already written one. This conceit/structure let's JM throw in non plot commentary and detail at end of each chapter. Last chapter is ecological (not bad for 1974) on water use and responsible ranching.	K 1105 1974
Dec 23	The hidden girls	Rebecca Whitney	3	(over)tense thriller. Young Mum with 6-month babe suffering/ed post-partum depression and (to outsiders) is seeing things about young girls and local car wash, ex petrol station. Her long-suffering and supportive husband is being driven to re-incarcerating her in a clinic. This all drawn out too long, but in last 30+% she, in conjunction with next door neighbour, convinces husband as they uncover people smuggling gang run by another neighbour.	313 2020
Dec 23	The adventures of Maud West, lady detective	Susannah Stapleton	3	Laboured biography of discovery of massively self-promoting woman who started and ran her own detective agency ~1905-39. Interesting enough woman with cupboards full of enigmas (to the extent that the author was able to uncover them) but ultimately a pretty tedious read.	342 2019
Dec 23	The Rabbit Factor [HK#1]	Antti Tuomainen	3	40+-ish nerdish Finnish actuary Henri Koskinen is fired from his job and within days inherits an adventure park from his largely estranged brother who dies suddenly of a heart condition. HK finds the park is in hock to some violent criminals and ends up sorting it out - partly by luck and partly calculation, dodging various attempts to kill him. Pleasantly light-hearted tale.	337 2021
Nov 23	The Secret Life of Bees	Sue Monk Kidd	3	White 14-year old in 1964 S. Carolina living with abusive father and knowledge that she (accidentally) shot her mother when she was 4. She escapes with black maid (who is beaten up and imprisoned when registering to vote just after Johnson signed the Civil Rights bill). By almost pot luck they end up with a family of black beekeeping sisters, where over time the white girl learns of her history and to live with it.	374 2001
Nov 23	Madame Zero	Sarah Hall	4	Set of uninspiring short stories	176 2017
Nov 23	The Word Is Murder [DH#1]	Anthony Horowitz	3	First of the Daniel Hawthorne series with AH as the main character in his own book. 60-ish woman found strangled a few hours after organising her own funeral. Her son, of whom she is hugely proud, is a self-centred ex-RADA movie star who comes to the funeral and is then found brutally murdered. AH stumbles on the villain and narrowly misses being killed too.	387 2017
Nov 23	Bad Move [ZW#1]	Linwood Barclay	3+	First of the delightfully tongue-in-cheek Zack Walker books. A bit over-egged as he introduces ZW's paranoia and controlling tendencies, such as hiding wife's keys and car when she leaves them in the front door. Mayhem and rapid plot changes come from him doing it a second time, but taking another woman's bag from an unattended supermarket trolley, leading to him brushing with the deaths of several others.	419 2004
Nov 23	The Other Americans	Laila Lalami	3+	Modest plot line of old man being killed in (probably) accidental hit and run in US desert town. All teased out over many many 2-3 page chapters on each of a wide set of characters (a bit difficult to keep ones head round initially) - all (I think) US immigrants; main ones being Moroccan family.	301 2019
Nov 23	Please, Mister Postman	Alan Johnson	3	Next part of his memoirs. From leaving London and moving to Slough as a postman in ~1969 to becoming a TUC leader in ~1988. Delightfully written and his amazing sister well covered again. Got a bit tedious in the last 25% as he concentrated more on Union work and roles than his friends and family (as happened in real life; the book ends with him separating from his wife).	312 2014
Nov 23	The Paper Palace	Miranda Cowley Heller	5	Dull then and now life of horny woman, inter alia	K 385 2021
Nov 23	Central Park West	James Comey	3	Rather convoluted, US legal-centric tale of murders around Mafia leaders and top level politicians. Lots of hard to credit politics between FBI and NY district attorney.	K 348 2023
Nov 23	The Locked Room [RG#16]	Elly Griffiths	3	Another pretty uninspiring and stretched tale. Here someone's playing on ghostly things near Norwich cathedral and RG gets to discover an unknown sister and why she's chosen the cottage she lives in. Slight interest in it being set as first Covid lockdown starts.	361 2022
Nov 23	Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition	Robert Falcon Scott	3	Remarkably readable diary of the expedition from November 1910 to sometime near his death in late March 1912. Despite lots of heavy geologic and route progress detail that he would have expected to write a book or two from. Lots of British stiff upper lip with a paragraph or so on discovery that Amundsen had beaten them to the pole and only a sentence or two on the first two deaths (Evans Jan 17th, Oates Mar 17th). Grim reading and imagining the conditions with their primitive (by our standards) equipment and food.	422
Oct 23	The Whalebone Theatre	Joanna Quinn	3	Tight trio of upper-class step siblings from the first as 4-year old in early 1900's to all three through WW2 with a fair bit of SOE. In the absence of effective parents they make their own games, with lots of play-acting becoming more formalised with outdoor theatre embellished by the bones of a stranded whale. Not the most gripping read and went on a bit.	K 540 2022
Oct 23	The Maid	Nita Prose	3	OCD maid in fancy hotel finds dead guest guest and, having been used by many colleagues because of her condition is briefly suspect. Very laboured and over-egged but mildly engaging, and nice ambiguity at the end as to who really was the murderer.	340 2022
Oct 23	The Susan Effect	Peter Hoeg	5	Just didn't grab me	345 2014

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Oct 23	Bad Luck [ZW#3]	Linwood Barclay	3	Very easy fun read. Paranoid glass-always-half-empty journalist (Zack Walker) spends a week or so uncovering murder and mayhem in up-state lakeside small town somewhere. Summoned by report of body found more or less eaten by a bear and his father the only unaccounted for person around. Grumpy and secret-filled Dad appears soon after and another death is made to look like bear hit, whilst vile off-grid conspiracy-theorist family of misfits prepare to bomb a parade.	392 2006
Oct 23	The Fatal shore	Robert Hughes	3	Long overly detailed history of the Australian convict settlements 1787-1868. The grizzly, often sadistic, brutality described at length. Transportation being seen as the only option in an age before prisons, and the treatment of offenders aimed at punishment only, no thought of correction or rehabilitation. It's amazing how "few" actually died from the inhumane many-month sea voyage and the frequent floggings. Book structure not helped by overlapping chronology and characters.	603 1986
Oct 23	A Terrible Kindness	Jo Browning Wroe	3+	Sensitive emotional tale of young boy growing up in family undertakers, and becoming, an embalmer. Dad dies when he's 8 and he's sent to boarding school at 10 a chorister scholar. Very close and supportive relationship with Mum contributes to slightly confused relationships with other scholars (one of whom becomes best and true friend), but later turns to schism, triggered by Mum's rejection of Dad's twin brother and his male other half. Jumping chronology starts with the boy as just-qualified 19-year old who volunteers to help embalming the kids from the 1966 Aberfan disaster, which traumatises him. After filling in from early allusions to the split with Mum and a stopped marriage (due to Abefan nightmares), the book ends back in Aberfan 7 years later with relationships resolved. Josephine Salverda gets a mention in the credits, and book recommended by her now Faber colleague, Sara H.	K 377 2022
Oct 23	This Boy	Alan Johnson	3	First part of his memoirs, up to him getting married at 18. Brought up in miserable flats in Notting Hill by hard working Mum Lily with little help from violent and often and finally absent father. Also by his phenomenal 3-years-old sister Linda who managed to keep the household going as Mum's health deteriorated severely, and after her death in 1964, continuing to finance them from various part-time jobs and successfully fighting the system to let them (13 and 16 years old) have a flat of their own. Though he is amazingly dispassionate recounting the hardships and prejudice they all suffered, is was depressing hearing it.	284 2013
Oct 23	Bee Gees, Children of the World	Bob Stanley	5	Gave up about half way through. Had learnt a bit about the interregnum 'twixt 60's smashes (Massachusetts, New York Mining Disaster and Words) and the Saturday Night Fever / disco revival from mid-to-late '70s. At one point down to playing working men's clubs to audiences of 30!	342 2023
Oct 23	With a mind to kill	Anthony Horowitz	3	Post-Fleming James Bond tale. Russians have brainwashed Bond into killing M. Security just prevents it and he is then unprogrammed but sent back to Russia pretending to still be brainwashed to uncover some great secret. Skimpy story and pretty silly. Ends with cliffhanger where Bond is either about to be killed in a hail of bullets or get back to England where he has decided to resign from the Secret Service.	331 2022
Oct 23	Hell's Gorge	Matthew Parker	3	History of building the Panama canal. Starts ~1700 with a scheme by a Scot for which he raised a large amount of money, almost entirely from fellow Scots. Never got going and the company folded losing all the money, which, allegedly, was a reason for the Union with England a few years later. Next significant episode starts in ~1880 with a massively financed French scheme. Went on for ~20 years, but failed because of disease (yellow fever and malaria) and ran out of money. US then muscled in, supporting Panama's 1903 revolution and separation from Columbia inter alia. And, helped by intervening scientific improvement, yellow fever had been defeated and malaria tamed and eventually opened pretty much same day as WW1 started in August 1914. Great US shenanigans and politicking over and with new Panama Republic and Canal Zone and the cost of buyout of French failed project residue. For all the attempts, much less on actual engineering and construction than the politics (endless debates as to location, Nicaragua and Panama being final contenders, also on Sea Level vs lock and lakes approach), financing, fevers and worker recruitment (mainly Caribbean).	377 2007
Oct 23	The Bookbinder of Jericho	Pip Williams	5	Pair of girls living on boat in Jericho part of Oxford working as bookbinders in the Oxford Press. WW1 starting at same time and main one volunteers to help in local hospital for the damaged returnees therefrom. Dull.	K 433 2023
Oct 23	The Tennis Champion Who Escaped the Nazis: Liesl Herbst's Journey, from Vienna to Wimbledon	Felice Hardy	3	Well-written but only mildly interesting drama'd-up memoir of her Gran and Grandpa. She from middle class family, he of peasant farmers who moved to Vienna, worked hard and built a successful haberdashery. They escaped to England in 1939, where the rest of the immediate family didn't and were killed by the Nazis. She had been Viennese champion tennis player (4 years after starting playing!) and played Wimbledon a number of times.	K 320 2023
Oct 23	A Memory for Murder [SF#3]	Anne Holt	4	Dull, v scrappy and fragmented with partial incomplete info, set round unintelligible (tho' apparently based on fact) mis-behaviours in Norway's Child Welfare departments linked to three murders. Partial cryptic unsatisfactory back references and/or introduction to new characters.	421 2021
Oct 23	Beyond the Point [ND#9]	Damien Boyd	3	More Dixon-ery. Strangely awkward at beginning as book abruptly dives in to case with no intro, as if there were some earlier chapters omitted. Several threaded and not really that interesting bits of case: death of three climbers years back when rigging monorail under Severn bridge, suicide of boss in charge of contract, in current time death of his wife and daughter who are onto the perpetrators of the earlier events. Crooked cops in the middle one of whom poisons Dixon's dog Monty. Mixed in with Steiner villain, who follows on from previous book, tho' I don't remember him or his personal vendetta with Dixon.	K 361 2019
Sep 23	Paradise [DSW#2]	Patricia Wolf	3	DS Walker again mixed up in heavy duty drug gangery (this time in Queensland coast surf town). Slow drawn out start - some to enable link backs to previous book. Two interlinked plots - wealthy sports doctor found stabbed a bit, but his his wife is dead and step daughter almost so. Eventually turns out he was emotionally abusive to both. Same old drug dealing gang operating locally and glad to chance on Walker and try to kill him. Ludicrously fast and unrealistic ending where he triumphs over them from being more or less dead.	K 288 2023
Sep 23	Murder in the Family	Cara Hunter	5	Didn't read. Structured as pseudo real live murder story full of press cuttings, chat dialogues and script excerpts.	463 2023
Sep 23	The Wild Silence	Raynor Winn	3	Middle of her three books. She and Moth living in Cornish village post the Salt Path walk. She writes SP as a present to help him remember that walk; their daughter encourages her to publish. This book covers their youth and post SP success. This includes getting the tenancy on a neglected cider orchard farm to rewild (the owner having been so impressed by SP) - which they seem to do much of in a few months. They then do another (2 week) walk in Iceland. This book again full of her beautiful observations of, and caring for, wild life, all things of the natural world and her passion for the land. Intermixed with deep love for, and worrying about, Moth.	274 2020
Sep 23	Miss Iceland	Audur Ava Olafsdottir	4	Dull. Secretive authoress and best friend a gay man in 1963. Hard to take in Icelandic names and lots of references to Icelandic literature.	250 2018
Sep 23	The God Of Chaos	Tom Bradby	3	Cairo 1942, not long before Alamein. Quinn is a US-originated detective with British searching for German spy (probably based on same real events as Follett's The Key to Rebecca). Slightly awkward slow feed in of ancillary stuff, like hit and run death of Quinn's son but good number of plot switches. Some of Quinn's relationships don't ring true - including to the ultimate villain and to his close friend in the Egyptian police (other than by them both having traumatic troubles with their young sons). Two of the minor characters (Lewis and Macleod) were in his Shanghai book, The Master of Rain.	K 501 2005
Sep 23	Mercy [AP#4]	David Baldacci	3	End of the tale for Agent Pine finally finding her sister. Usual slew of wham-bam-thank-you-mam violence, with Pine assisted by her sister who is also a martial arts whizzo.	535 2021
Sep 23	The Butterfly House [KW#2]	Katrine Engberg	3	Convuluted and scrappy second Kømer/Werner murder thriller. Several folk connected to a now closed paediatric hospital found in fountains having been clinically bled to death using and antique blood letting tool.	307 2021
Sep 23	A History of Burning	Janika Oza	3	Long saga over 20th century of (Muslim) Indian diaspora and persecution. Starting in India and going to Kenya then Uganda. Then, on Amin expulsions, to Canada and England. Only passing reference to surrounding events, such as the brutal violence during India/Pakistan Partition and Mau Mau, and no decent explanation of key aspects such as Indian/African conflicts. I found it hard to follow who was of which race (being, all foreign-to-m sounding names) and I lost track of families and generations. Family trees would have helped! Would have been - 3+ if not so long winded.	K 389 2023

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Sep 23	Landlines	Raynor Winn	3+	Starts in early 2022 with husband Moth's brain disease well advanced and him falling over and having other physical problems. Somehow they decide this is the time for another big walk and start with Cape Wrath to Fort William. Despite loads of grim conditions, soaking clothes and skin-flayed feet they both make it, and then continue walking all the way back home to Cornwall (~1000 miles). Beautiful descriptions of the landscape and wildlife and lots of (maybe simplistic) eco-commentary. Back home for Moth's next brain scan and the disease is gone!!	303 2022
Sep 23	The Fair Botanists	Sara Sheridan	3+	Set round many real folk in Edinburgh 1822. Botanic gardens move; Agave Americana (century plant) with sought after seeds. Two women, one a courtesan the other a widow both keen on botany and encourage each other.	356 2021
Sep 23	Journey	James Michener	3	Four upper-class Englishmen and an Irish ghillie getting to Dawson City to chase the Klondike gold rush in 1897. Mainly the gruelling journey from Edmonton northwards and then up and across the Rockies. Led by Lord Luton who, though with some redeeming traits, stubbornly refuses to take the best route to avoid having to travel across American territory. As a result had to over-winter twice and lost two to scurvy and one a boat accident. Just him and ghillie made it and, after such trials, LL just headed straight home (ghillie stayed to prospect). Though it left a memorable impression, much of the prose was trite and vapid with far too much irrelevant stuff and no explanation of the more interesting bits (eg: red line on boat when they got further up downstream rivers and had to saw the boat in two somehow) Book inspired by old photo of young woman gold-seeker in Edmonton, Mrs Garner.	K 201 1988
Aug 23	A Prince and a Spy [TW#5]	Rory Clements	3	Tom Wilde tale spun round from events imagined around death of the Duke of Kent (King's youngest brother) in an air-plane crash in 1942. Book contends he was on way back from secret meeting with German royal close to Hitler to try and find out the Nazi's feelings about the war. An alleged MI5 female agent on the plane survived and helped bring back a Nazi to bear witness to Nazi murderings of Jews (which he, the Nazi) was involved with as a bureaucrat. Decent read with several abrupt plot shifts saving the reader's tensions! TW is Cambridge professor and American (with embryonic OSS), with unmarried (until last pages) girlfriend and 2-year old son. Slightly over-definitive angst/horror at the Nazi Jewish murderings. Book based on two folk who tried to expose the murders during the war: Jan Karski and Kurt Gerstein	K 482 2021
Aug 23	Rocco and the price of lies [LR#6]	Adrian Magson	3	Rocco still in in Amiens. Three prominent law-related men commit suicide after a blackmail note related to forged paintings each has bought. To-ing and fro-ing to Paris gangster world.	322 2019
Aug 23	There Is Nothing For You Here: Finding Opportunity in the Twenty-First Century	Fiona Hill	3	Very wordy memoir and often sounds like an anti-Trump rant and reinforces my opinion of him 1000%! But interesting life starting in poor Bishop Auckland suburb to miner (booted out during the shutdowns and then a hospital porter) and nurse Mum. - fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and then the collapse of the USSR in 1991 - collapse of UK mining compared to failure of Russia after USSR collapse - "non-viable" infrastructure and villages and towns shut down with no planning for what follows - she had many cases of good luck, uch as bumpin into a Russian professor on the street in St Andrews when going there for a butches when thinking of applying (as she then did) - similarities between US rust belt and Trump populism and UK decline and Farage, ad USSR collapse and Putin - But Putin wanted one Russia. Trump wanted many Americas, not one - Ludicrously exhaustive list of credited help over the years and for the book	K 443 2021
Aug 23	Close to Home [AF#1]	Cara Hunter	3	First DI Adam Fawley thriller. 8-year old girl goes missing from family party in Oxford suburb. But, turns out she was never there and she hates her parents. A number of twists including a reasonably predictable one on the last page.	376 2018
Aug 23	Snap	Belinda Bauer	3	Fun easy page-turning thriller with sassy 14-year old lad caring for his two younger sisters after Mum disappears going to phone when car breaks down on M5 three years earlier and Dad subsequently goes AWOL with grief. Lad solves the crime giving the bumbling police lots of support (he's been sort of arrested because he thieves for a living) and hunches.	434 2018
Aug 23	Apeirogon	Colum McCann	3+	Fascinating and uplifting story of two families (the men mainly) on either side of the Israel-Palestine conflict who, despite each losing a daughter to terrorism/violence, are prominent international campaigners for peace. Apeirogon is a polygon with an infinite number of sides. The two are Rami (wife Nurit, daughter Smadar) Elhanan and Bassam (wife Salwa, daughter Abir) Aramin. Strange style with hundreds of (not sequentially) fragmentary numbered snippets, some a phrase, some a page or two. Lots on (mainly migrating) birds, including the detail of Mitterrand eating roast Ortolan before 8 day fast to death. Mentioned events include Banksy's works on the Israel wall and his hotel there, and Philippe Petit's wire walk across the Hinnom valley (Gehenna, an ancient Judean child sacrifice site) which he imbued with loads of peace-hopeful symbolism. But, despite the positiveness of the great friendship and international work of the two men, the book keeps reiterating the endless indignities and daily hassles for Palestinians (strip searches, restricted access to areas and utilities).	457 2020
Aug 23	Requiem in La Rossa [DL#3]	Tom Benjamin	3	Series of murders of academics, mainly with classical music connections, in Bologna. Local (Brit) Private detective Daniel Leicester fronting the hunt. Awkward prose doesn't flow well. Feels in places as if random paragraphs have been removed. But the Brit-in-Italy ambience works OK. Might try another in the series.	K 352 2021
Aug 23	Take your breath away	Linwood Barclay	3+	Great whodunnit. Six years after his wife disappears, man and her family start seeing her reappear in the distance. Most characters shown to have some sort of motive for (presumably) killing her. Lots of good plot twists before everything gets explained.	449 2022
Aug 23	The Lockhart Plot	Jonathan Schneer	3-	Rather dull telling of plot organised by bright charismatic 30-year old Scot, Bruce Lockhart, to overthrow the Bolsheviks. Remarkable amount of activity in the less than 12 months between the Oct 2017 and the plot's failure in August 1918.	284 2020
Aug 23	Los Alamos	Joseph Kanon	3	Spy mystery set in and around the highly secret Los Alamos nuclear facility in 1945 New Mexico. Man found murdered in a pretty open spot with his trousers down, leading to initial assumptions he was gay. Because of sensitivity of the site (and the imminent Trinity test firing that the book ends with) big (and hard to credit, given he was a security officer, not a scientist or key man) operation mounted to find out why he was killed. Highly complex plot to-ing and fro-ing that I couldn't follow. Lots of passing mention of real folk (like Robert Oppenheimer) and the conflict about the horrors the bomb was planned to cause. This particularly after the European war is over and the scientists (largely European refugees who thought they were building something to smash the Nazis) think it shouldn't be built/used.	K 539 2015
Aug 23	Corrag	Susan Fletcher	3	Indirect telling of the 1692 Glencoe massacre through the eyes of a young (titular) woman imprisoned and waiting to be burnt as a witch for her involvement. Her tale amplified through visit and words of Charles Leslie a real Jacobite sympathizer who later helped expose the massacre. Catholic McDonalds (men women and children) murdered by the English at King William's direction with help from their ever-enemies the Protestant Campbell's Though "only" 30-ish were killed, the horror of the massacre was because the killers were, under traditional Highland hospitality, staying for some days (I think) before starting the slaughters at 5am one day.	351 2010
Aug 23	Rabbit Hole	Mark Billingham	3	Unusual story set in psychiatric hospital. Ex-policewoman in for severe PTSD-triggered behaviour. Two murders of fellow inmates. She tries to get involved with the police investigations, but is cold shouldered. Realistic-feeling presentation of the paranoia of herself and the others, where one's never sure what's real or not, with ending twists where one finds much less is that one thought.	448 2021
Jul 23	Blue Thread	Anne Tyler	3	Rather Elizabeth Strout-like nothing-really-happens American saga which is nevertheless readable. Three generations of family, to-ing and fro-ing over time. Death of matriarch Slow mentioning of her origins as 13-year old seducing and chasing a reluctant 26-year old until he marries her (that bit not explained). Secretly adopted youngest son of Mum who was neighbour friend who didn't want to take him back.	458 2015

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jul 23	The Night Hawks [RG#13]	Elly Griffiths	3	More Ruth Galloway, with lots on her and her colleagues complex relationships. Two deaths from botched illegal drug testing doctor near Blakeney, who is then murdered along with his wife. Lots of hatred from their two children and complicated threads with (titular) detectorists and ghosts of ghoulish black dog.	K 322 2021
Jul 23	Underland	Robert Macfarlane	5	Life and history of subterranean finds. Bit too cerebral for me.	425 2019
Jul 23	The Night Ship	Jess Kidd	3	Two separate stories - one set round the Batavia wreck, mutiny and butchery in 1628, the other on the islands it occurred on in 1989. Took a very long time to get interesting and, if one hadn't some knowledge of the Batavia would have made little sense. Both tales interwoven with supernatural eel thingy (Bullebak and Bunyip). 1989 oddball misunderstood lad, Gil, lived with dead mum for weeks. Now with grandpa on island with pet tortoise. 1628 set round young girl, Mayken, who 1989 regard as ghost on the islands.	368 2022
Jul 23	Old God's Time	Sebastian Barry	4	Might have been a good tale, but another hard to follow, almost stream of consciousness, SB. Acres of words, little story. Two local police come to consult retired detective and turn out to be revisiting a long-ago murder of a priest, when second priest (in present times) accuses the ex-detective in present time (why left so late is not explained). His dead wife (immolates herself 10 years ago) was an orphan brought up by vile nuns, raped by priest at six. He was also beaten and brutalised as child by a priest in an orphanage. They had two now dead children. Daughter after becoming druggie following Mum's suicide. Son, possibly gay, was a doctor in a Native Indian area of USA and shot by local pissed off that his young ill son went to Western hospital where he died, instead of being Shamam-treated. Actress neighbour's (Ms McNulty) daughter died of sex abuse by husband.	K 273 2023
Jul 23	The Escape Artist: The man who broke out of Auschwitz to warn the world	Jonathan Freedland	3	Remarkable story of Jewish teenager (Walter Rosenberg, later renamed Rudolf Vrba) who, after 2 years incarceration, escaped from Auschwitz in 1944 to tell the world what was happening there (cf. "the volunteer" who broke in). He and fellow-escapee wrote the (Vrba-Wetzler) report that made its way round the world. Disappointingly for him it didn't have as much impact as he had hoped. Rather repetitive and over-detailed narrative.	313 2022
Jul 23	Love Marriage	Monica Ali	3	Young female Indian doctor engaged to son of wealthy hippy feminist. Dad also doctor, from poor background secular married to middle class Muslim Indian woman. Fiancé turns out to be sex addict with unhealthy close relationship with his Mum. Started well, but laboured on to the end.	K 510 2022
Jul 23	Daylight [AP#3]	David Baldacci	3	Getting pretty formulaic thriller. Again, Pine gets involved in an unrelated ancillary violent murder/corruption thing while (blackmail for money amongst politicians and security services), finally, getting close to solving the abduction of her sister Mercy.	553 2020
Jul 23	Erebus: The Story of a Ship	Michael Palin	3	Story of Erebus and its sister Terror, both commissioned in 1820's as "bombs" - very sturdy sailing ships designed to carry large mortars to pump explosives over walls of coastal towns - but never used as such. They were first repurposed for their first main work - an Antarctic expedition in 1840's. Despite amazing pushing through 100's of miles of pack ice to find open water again, which they somehow knew/believed to be there. That expedition was aborted after 3+ years trying to find a way to approach the South Pole, when the two were refitted and used for the Franklin expedition to find the Northwest Passage in 1845. Both boats and all crew never seen (alive) afterwards. Later searchings found the boats (in 2000's), the graves of three crew who died within a year of leaving London and skeletons of others (possibly showing cannibalism and lead poisoning from poorly sealed tinned foods). Incredible the months of boat-bound no action on both expeditions.	387 2018
Jul 23	Unrelenting	Marion Kummerow	5	Trite 1930's Berlin rubbish.	K 214 2016
Jul 23	Ariadne	Jennifer Saint	5	Some fictionalised retelling of Ariadne helping Theseus kill the Minotaur (her brother).	K 322 2021
Jul 23	Thus Was Adonis Murdered [HT#1]	Sarah Caudwell	3+	Delightfully witty and wordy tale of one of a group of London barristers, a clumsy nymphomaniac, who falls for beautiful young man on art tour of Venice who is then found murdered. She is arrested for the murder and her colleagues (led by law professor, Hilary Tamar) via letters and a visit manage to solve the crime and get her freed. The twist at the end lost me - not sure if it was too complex to follow, or was flawed!	K 322 1981
Jul 23	Discomfort of Evening	Marieke Lucas Rijneveld	4	10-year old Dutch farmer's daughter after her older brother drowns in skating accident. Covers her next two years with random-ish fantasies - many scatological (she suffers from constipation) and prepubescent sex urges open from farmyard experience. Foot and mouth and hark backs to Jews hiding from Nazis also feature.	282 2018
Jul 23	In the Wars	Waheed Arian	3+	Remarkable memoir of lad who managed to leave Afghanistan and get the UK at age 14. Despite 2 weeks initial incarceration, he worked and studied super-hard. Got a place at Cambridge 4 years later, becoming a doctor and starting a successful and very well-respected International charity, Arian Teleheal. This used (initially at least) basic phone and WhatsApp services to connect volunteer medics round the world to those on active case in Afghanistan. In the wars 2021. Astounding enthusiasm and hard-work, and a great ability to swat and pass exams. Lucky with lawyers, supporting acquaintances and sixth form college tutors.	K 295 2021
Jul 23	The Stopping Places: A Journey Through Gypsy Britain	Damian Le Bas	4	Underwhelming recounting of travelling to various Gypsy focal points with some Romany history thrown in.	292 2018
Jul 23	A Minute to Midnight [AP#2]	David Baldacci	3	2nd pretty nonsense OTT Pine thriller. Loads of deaths with parallel set occurring as she goes on vacation with her trusty assistant to try (and get nowhere) to solve the abduction of her sister Mercy in small town USA.	586 2019
Jun 23	The People Vs Tech	Jamie Bartlett	5	Word heavy slightly academic arguments about "How the internet is killing democracy". Just to hard to get enthusiastic about!	224 2018
Jun 23	The Giver of Stars	Jojo Moyes	3+	Decent fiction set round a handful of dedicated women running a WPA packhorse library in coal mining Kentucky in the 1930's. Contending with all sorts of gender and colour prejudice. Leader is spunky unconventional woman aided by English rose who was weaned out there to marry a glamorous young coal mine owners son, who never consummated the marriage.	435 2019
Jun 23	Now We Shall Be Entirely Free	Andrew Miller	3+	Man hunt thriller triggered by the impugned brutality of an English Hussar officer at a village (Morales) during the Peninsular war after the battle of Corunna (early 1800's). The very ill officer is gets back to his home to be nursed back to health, before setting off for the Scottish islands to avoid re-call to Spain. To settle some arcane Spanish pride, an English high-up ("whose word could not be gainsaid") commissions an unpleasant English corporal to hunt down and kill the office. This ranges across the islands until he finds him at a house occupied by three siblings who are part of some alternative lifestyle movement. Officer becomes involved with one of the sisters who is going blind, helping get her to a pioneering operation in Glasgow before the two of them manage to nail the corporal and (almost literally) sail into the sunset.	K 406 2018
Jun 23	Lessons in Chemistry	Bonnie Garmus	3	Comic witty Feminist tale of woman in 1950's/1962 America. A clever and uncompromising Chemist falls for but refuses to marry another oddball Chemist. Lots of nice digs at female (and other) discrimination. Her partner dies in freak accident, having enthused her with rowing with. Human like dog, Six-thirty and engaging super smart (mainly 4-year old) daughter survive to uncover his history and (having been raised unhappily in an orphanage) parentage. On the way the woman, having suffered at least two rape threats/incidents from academic bosses morphs into afternoon TV show cooking host, where she infuriates everyone by preaching self-worth the her female audience, wrapping the cooking in science.	386 2022
Jun 23	Where My Heart Used to Beat	Sebastian Faulks	5	Deadly dull two-era thing on WW1 and WW2 through history of man in latter whose Dad died in former.	K 357 2015
Jun 23	Little Disasters	Sarah Vaughan	3	Hugely angled tale of middle-class parenting. Keyed round possible child abuse neglect. Very drawn out with more threads than was probably necessary; not only the main tale but the main character, part of a group of Mum's one of whom took her baby late to hospital with bad bash on head), a paediatric doctor with her own history of abuse as a child by troubled and reviled Mum.	K 428 2020

Books

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Jun 23	Shakespeare	Bill Bryson	3	Usual light stuff on himself. But, as with so many BB factual books, an awful lot of it is, as he says, conjecture and guesswork from aficionados.	195 2007
Jun 23	The Birdcage	Eve Chase	4	Hugely drawn-out then and now of three half sisters whose common, famous artist, Dad summons them to his Cornish getaway house, where something horrific happened 20 years before on the day of the 1999 eclipse. But, too many dull details as it drags on and, when ultimately revealed, the event wasn't all that horrific.	K 370 2022
Jun 23	How to kill your family	Bella Mackie	3+	Witty tale of woman in jail for killing her best (male) friend's fiancée (which she didn't do) but recounting into a notebook how she did kill much of her real blood-line family. She was product of brief fling between Mum and millionaire, who rapidly dumped Mum. The woman spent her life planning her revenge and got it with six highly planned and complex murders. Went on a tiny bit long else would have been a 21 Nice twist at the end prevents her laying hands on the estate of the wiped out family.	354 2021
Jun 23	The Woman Who Saved the Children: A Biography Of Eglantyne Jebb: Founder Of Save The Children	Clare Mulley	5	Turgid and dull - not sure whether EJ or CM was the reason!. Somehow ploughed 40% through getting only to 1914, with no sign of her founding of Save the Children (1919) or authorship of the UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Nothing like as engaging as Anne Chamberlain's one-woman show about her.	K 452 2009
Jun 23	My Father's House	Joseph O'Connor	3	Awkwardly told, based loosely on actual events and people, story of a Escape Line for allied personnel from Vatican City under the noses of the occupying Nazis in 1943/44. Threads of different anecdotes from the main players, but totally failed to explain the crucial event when the nasty Nazi boss was somehow wrong-footed but the Irish priest running the line (Hugh O'Flaherty).	274 2023
May 23	Winterkill [DI#6]	Ragnar Jonasson	3	Last in the Ari Thor Arason series, apparently. 19-year old girl appears to have killed herself jumping from the 2nd floor balcony of a house in his bitterly cold northern Iceland town. Modestly interesting plot but the personal side plots are better. Ari is now separated, but his wife and young son are back for the weekend of the death from where she now lives in Sweden. He's still holding a candle for her/them, but is also reunited with a girl friend from the town.	225 2020
May 23	The Master of Rain	Tom Bradby	3	Shanghai 1926 run by villains with massive corruption of police and lots of White Russian emigres in menial positions - the women mainly selling themselves. New-to-the-city young British detective tries to do the decent thing and solve brutal murder of a Russian girl, partly spurred on by becoming infatuated with another one, a potential victim. He and the girl both destabilised by poor relationships with suicided fathers. All-powerful Chinese mafia boss, who abuses young girls and boys, framed for much of the tale until a secretly disturbed very senior Brit is revealed as mafia-supported culprit. Uneven amounts of detail with many almost non sequiturs in a very cryptic and complex plot.	K 612 2002
May 23	Fate is the Hunter	Ernest Gann	2	Wonderful autobiographical telling of the development of commercial and cargo flying from mid/late 1930's to early 1950's from this US pilot. All pre jet engines and loads of interesting and intelligible detail about the vicissitudes of multi-engined (usually 2 or 4) lorries of the air. His writing is lyrical and engrossing, and his experiences (many near death) totally amazing. Sadly he was a lucky one and the book is peppered with references to pilots who died (and opens with a 4-5 page list of them). Two, of many, of his close shaves: - just missing the Taj Mahal because (as subsequently worked out) his plane had been massively overloaded with 1000's of gallons of fuel - having 3 of his 4 engines fail within minutes of take off from a newly opened La Guardia to find out (after a very hairy landing) that engineers had, without telling anyone, switched to new (and not fully tested) type of spark plugs, but hadn't had time to do the last engine - preventing his, and his passengers, deaths.	385 1961
May 23	Blood & Sugar	Laura Shepherd-Robinson	3-	Lightweight overly-dramatic tale set mainly in Deptford in 1781 of slaving horrors and murders. Lots of twists and turns with need for regular recaps on the current thread.	425 2019
May 23	And Where Were You, Adam	Heinrich Boll	4	1944 Germans on the Russian front in Romania/Slovakia?. Muddled confusion everywhere, too many similar sounding names and scrappy storyline, such as there is one.	156 1970
May 23	Outback [DSW#1]	Patricia Wolf	3	Abduction and murder in super isolated and hot Aussie outback. Tie ins with drug manufacturing and dealing. Sydney undercover cop back in his remote home-town on compassionate leave as his Gran is dying gets sucked in after a couple of German backpackers go missing and the girl's (cop) sister from Germany comes to help and gets involved. Rather too dramatic last 15%.	K 292 2022
May 23	The Passenger	Ulrich Alexander Boschwitz	3	Middle-class Jew on the run after Kristallnacht with briefcase full of money. Spends most of the time going from train to train and dithering as to where to go and what to do. Ends up losing the money and in prison assumedly on way to a camp.	255 1939
May 23	The Glass Hotel	Emily St John Mandel	5	Didn't grab me, and J found it a reasonable read but forever expecting some excitement that didn't happen! From Economist: This immersive novel's main character is a bartender who becomes the trophy wife of a con-man, then a cook on a container ship. Evoking the atmosphere of the financial crash of 2008, its real theme is the difficulty of outrunning the past. "There are so many ways to haunt a person," the author writes, "or a life."	301 2020
May 23	Suncatcher	Romesh Gunsekera	3	1964 Ceylon. Two young boys growing up. One 11-ish. Sparse references to politics in the background. Wealthy family of Jay - uncle Elvin - vs socialist one for narrator Kairo. Both boys relatively comfortable families. Jay has poorer acolyte he treats badly. Westerns cowboys. Jay into birds and fish and driving his uncles cars (ultimately fatally).	312 2019
May 23	The Crow Girl	Erik Axl Sund	5	Some gory scandi thing. Didn't grab	K 786 2010
May 23	Skyfaring: A Journey with a Pilot	Mark Vanhoenacker	3	Lyrical but too much of it overlong descriptions of flying and piloting. Inertial navigation Too many waypoint names in Place chapter Minus 40 (a temperature that requires no 'C' or 'F' to follow it; it is the intersection of the Celsius and Fahrenheit scales)	K 370 2015
May 23	Butler to the World: The book the oligarchs don't want you to read - how Britain became the servant of tycoons, tax dodgers, kleptocrats and criminals	Oliver Bullough	3	Rather heavy weather tirade about how the British financial and legal systems support corruption - mainly concentrating on offshore places like the Cayman Islands and British Virgin Islands, Gibraltar (gambling) and Scottish Limited Partnerships. He puts the origins of this on Suez (1956) when the of Empire triggered the entitled classes to find another calling. Alsoo the invention of Euro Dollars - dollars without US controls.	273 2022
Apr 23	Death and the Penguin	Andrey Kurkov	3-	Pretty weird and little-happens tale set in mid-1990's Ukraine. Obituary writer and his pet penguin. Something about deaths may be linked to the obits.	242 2011
Apr 23	The Last Party	Clare Mackintosh	4	Murder in fancy cabin development on shore of small lake separating Wales from England. Hoards of unpleasant characters. Complex truth unveiled by local lass, now a cop, with complicated back history including (because of childhood fling with the murder victim when she was 14) that she is Mum to her sister.	K 447 2022
Apr 23	Transit	Anna Seghers	3-	Pretty tedious book - unlike the film! A woman and two men (one dead who the other occasionally impersonates) in Marseilles in 1941 trying to escape the Nazis by getting on a boat almost anywhere. Kafka-esque process of getting visas - exit, transit, destination - all with different and limited expiry dates which keep messing things up.	252 1951
Apr 23	Yesterday's spy	Tom Bradby	3	Complex SIS/MI6 spyery set around the (CIA led) 1953 coup in Iran to replace the Prime Minister (Mossadegh) with the Shah - both US and UK wanting to keep total access to the oil. Hark-backs to 1935 when main man (Harry) is recruited by SIS, going on to be their top agent manager in Europe and blue-eyed boy of Churchill - despite disastrous 1946 mission to parachute men into Yugoslavia to try to stop Tito seizing power, and similar in 1952 Albania. 1953 timeline has Harry's virtually estranged 20-year old son, a keen budding journalist, disappear in Tehran, and Harry goes out to rescue him, calling in old favours. But one theory for the disappearance is that SIS, who are hunting a Soviet mole within their ranks, suspect Harry and have staged things to lure him out there so they can (maybe?) kill him (he's never fitted in well being not of the public school class). The plot becomes more ludicrous and overloaded with superman escapes and killings towards the ambiguous end.	K 375 2022
Apr 23	Leaving before the rains come	Alexandra Fuller	3	More of her autobiography. This mainly round her and her ultimately unsuccessful marriage to US husband Charlie Ross - though plenty about her wildly unconventional Africa-locked alcoholic parents. Lots of drama with her own and husband's serious injuries.	258 2015

Books

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Apr 23	Damascus Station	David McCloskey	3-	CIA spy (Sam) in Assad's Syria. Gruesome torture and murder by government thugs. Scrappy continuity and implausibly hard to credit relationship between Sam and Syrian regime official Mariam, who he falls for and turns as spy - though it's a bit unclear whether she's working for both sides. Also implausible wild woman boss Procter.	K 433 2021
Apr 23	Lean Fall Stand	Jon McGregor	3	Raw and depressing, but accurate-sounding and, I'm sure, meant to be encouraging telling of a stroke victim's slow and partial recovery from, and learning to live with, Aphasia (difficulty with language or speech). Interestingly bookended by vivid description of the wild and sudden Antarctic storm when he was affected and when one of his two younger colleagues died - with intimations that he might have been partly responsible.	278 2021
Apr 23	Panic Room	Robert Goddard	3	Rich pharma-king's Cornish home is put on market, causing an out-of-work London estate agent and young housekeeper woman with a back history to realise it has a secret room. Pharma-king is both under police watch (with electronic tag) and his money being hunted by thugs employed by an investor who has lost loads to him. The truth is very slowly uncovered and a well-twisted plot.	371 2018
Mar 23	Mercury Pictures presents	Anthony Marra	3	Hollywood in 1930's and 1940's. Though largely featuring recent immigrants/refugees from war in Europe, it was rather too full-of-itself clever clogs prose and not enough facts and plot. But interesting to hear how Italians (and, I think Chinese) were targetted and restricted by the paranoid Americans. Also an episode on the (real) building at Dugway (Utah) of painstakingly authentic Berlin and Japanese hamlets for the USAF to hone their firebombing techniques prior to Dresden and Tokyo.	408 2022
Mar 23	Dead Man's Creek [IL#2]	Chris Hammer	3+	Sprawling, convoluted murder mystery set in another small outback rural Aussie area (based in "Tulong", real life Mathoura). Newly-minted homicide detective Nell Buchanan sent there to investigate what turn out to be cold cases linked to her family and going back three-generations. Turgid first 25% but is then absorbing. Book has a family tree at the end which I was hankering for as the complexities unfold (uncle turning grandfather, etc) - though if seen too early would give away one of the surprises. Set on the Murray river, with lots about water management and wildlife. Sydney homicide cop Ivan Lucic is a minor character, and there are mentions of Martin Scarsden, but the book ends up feeling it's set for a NB follow-on!	K 448 2022
Mar 23	The Guardians	John Grisham	3	Small legal firm specialising in working for prisoners who have been incorrectly incarcerated - many for the death sentence. Main character, Cullen Post, was originally a lawyer, then quit to become a minister and is now back. Lots of supporting folk around him, including one who he got off an invalid committal. Two equally interesting (though it took a while to separate in my mind) plot lines. One a black man sentenced for rape 20+ years ago - eventually freed when CP forces authorities to DNA test pubic hairs found on the victim, which clears the prisoner (despite heavy fight from the originating state prosecutors). The other another black man in a small white town accused of killing a lawyer. He's also cleared after lengthy chase to find the evil state policeman behind the murder and drug cartel involvement	370 2019
Mar 23	Bad Actors [SH#8]	Mick Herron	3	Another ludicrously cryptic and jokily written complex tale with very similar structure to all the others. Some Russian infiltration of a Dominic Cummings character leads to temporary suspension of MI5 chief (now Diana Taverner). Slow Horses save the day at the end. Just about readable (to me) because of the continuing back-story of the remaining horses.	336 2022
Mar 23	Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art	James Nestor	3	Fascinating descriptions of how altering breathing patterns (which most of us breath "incorrectly") can improve many aspects of health. Includes Hindu mystics able to generate body heat with few clothes and in freezing conditions by managing their breathing. Also that techniques should, perversely, encourage generation of Carbon Dioxide (which he says is more important than oxygen for reasons I didn't follow). Sadly more orientated to improving the life of folk who can at least breathe relatively well (unlike me!), but his key points which help me a bit are: - breathe through nose, not mouth (which should be kept shut) - exhale for several seconds between breaths - eat things that involve chewing (or chew gum) to encourage better jaw growth (which over generations has degenerated due to cooked meals needing less chewing) Lots of online stuff. Hiw website is mrjamesnestor.com/breath. He worked with Anders Olsson who also does lots in the field.	230 2020
Mar 23	The Covenant	James Michener	3-	Typical JM sprawling South African tale from 42,000 BC Bushmen and their hunting and cave paintings to ANC anti-apartheid activism and repression. Surprising chunk of the book is about the Spice Islands (Java, etc) and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) who, along with the English, French and Portuguese went east without stopping at the desolate-looking SA. Each instead "spring-boarding" their long voyages via S. Atlantic islands (St Helena, Cape Verdes, etc) rather than using the Cape to re-victual. Being written in the late 1970's it predates Mandela (who's not mentioned) and ends with slightly rambling postulations as to how Apartheid will end (as, he is sure, it will); one extreme being like the generally peaceful one we got in the 1990's, the other being the Boers refusing to compromise and laagering down as a pariah nation. Often trite and laboured telling, but lots of, presumably, reasonably accurate history and information, including:	K 1250 1980
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ancient city of Zimbabwe (in what is now modern day Z) where Egyptian and other nations traded for the local gold. - Portuguese far east operations were a confused amalgam of patriotism, Catholicism and profit. - Dutch had no such scruples. Their charter was handed to businessmen who only wanted profit, and neither the government nor the church had the right to intrude. - The English East India Company (1600) intended it to be free of governmental interference. But if it behaved immorally the good name of the nation was impugned; thus there was constant vacillation between commercial freedom and moral control. - ~1650 (after 1641 fall of Portuguese Malacca to them) the Dutch land and start using Cape as staging port. - St Bartholomew's massacre triggers flow of Calvinist Huguenot's to SA. - Dutch (mutating to Dutch-disowned Boer) beliefs/dogmatism anchored in severely conservative Calvinist, old Testament only, religion. - VOC being solely business/profit-focussed only had highly restrictive controls that held back development, with absence of almost any education and no universities. JM contrasts this to freedom given to / taken by English, French, Spanish colonialisms. Spaniards, two years after conquering Mexico in 1521 opened a major university. They took Peru in 1533 and sponsored a university in 1551. The English, who landed at Plymouth Rock in 1619, had started Harvard in 1636. - Early 1800's England moving against slavery added to the animosity of Boers whose bigoted old Testament view thought non whites could only be slaves (being, at best, paternalistically managed by their white masters). - 1815 Slachter's (Slagter) Nek Boer rebellion against the English. Six sentenced to hanging, and four nooses broke, but they were re-hung (contrary to accepted procedure where the sentenced would be released). - 1838 Blood River - ~500 Boers slaughter 3000+ Zulus. Followed by the Covenant of the title, to remember the Boer's success/rescue. - 1857 weird Xhosa, Nongqawuse, whose "prophecy" of resulting success against the whites made Xhosa slaughter almost all their (crucial) cattle, killing tens of thousands from starvation. - Unpleasant Rhodes, diamonds-financed but determined to spread British colonialism. In later life, preyed on by amazing fraudster Princess Radziwill. 	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Second) Boer war (1899-1902). 1900 Spion Kop - total incompetence from both sides. Churchill, Ghandi and Louis Botha all fought or served there. - 1904: 60.000 Chinese brought in by English to work the mines after end of the war. This infuriated the Boers, particularly with inter-marrying with coloureds. But all the Chines were booted out in 1910. - 1910 Union government established. - 1922 poor white Afrikaans miners strike put down by government with 100+ white deaths around Johannesburg. - "Jan Christian Smuts using Afrikaner soldiers to fight Afrikaner workmen". - 1918 Broederbond secret band of brothers formed. Sided with Nazis and impeded Smuts helping allies. - 1930's Coloureds in middle between Whites and Blacks (ignoring the separately-considered Indians) not accepted by either Blacks or Afrikaners both of whom are angry at English dominance. - parallel between poor Afrikaners and poor blacks. - 1948 Malan's National party beat Smuts' pro-English government. - 1950 Segregationist laws start being passed. Classify to white, Indian and black, but what about coloureds? - 1956 Coloureds were to be thrown off the common roll. - 1961 SA breaks all relations with the English crown, soon after Sharpeville (1960), and declares a Republic, out of the Commonwealth. - Apartheid name for situation after successive restrictive laws from 1948. - Threat of Communism also drove SA behaviour as well as giving it more international support that it would otherwise have had. 	
Mar 23	The Romantic	William Boyd	3	Entertaining pseudo-biography of 19 th century man stretching from Waterloo (where he was a drummer boy) to post-civil war USA, Covers lots of the world with snippets of real people and events (including Shelly and Byron in Italy, Tudor ice in Massachusetts farm and Speke and Burton identifying source of the Nile). Starts with him as a child in Ireland, as an orphan and being looked after by his aunt. Turns out she's his Mum and Dad is the local squire. Fair amount of lustful sex across the decades - dominated by an affair with Italian Raphaella.	451 2022
Feb 23	A Ladder to the Sky	John Boyne	3	Vile successful writer, Maurice, using his good looks to worm his way into the confidence of both men and women. Kills his wife and child, separately, to prevent exposure that he's a serial plagiariser. Starts in the 80's when a well-known German author becomes besotted by him and reveals that he denounced a Jewish family to the Nazis in 1939 to prevent young man he was in love with going away with their daughter. Maurice makes a best seller out of this (his only real creation) and in doing so the German kills himself(?). Later episodes include overly writerly and homosexual stuff, one chunk using Gore Vidal, and Maurice's finaly comeuppance from relative of the German.	419 2018
Feb 23	A different drummer	William Melvin Kelley	3+	Good tale, set in fictional deep south state around 1960, when one day all the blacks up and leave the state. Though the author is black, all is told through white voices - many of whom are sympathetic or directly support the growing Civil Rights cause. Interestingly the flight is mentioned as being from from domineering black Churches as well as traditional black/white shackles.	294 1962
Feb 23	A Line to Kill [DH#3]	Anthony Horowitz	3	Light readable Agatha Christie-esque whodunnit. Set on tiny island of Alderney where two murders related to second-division literary festival make many involved suspects. Interesting book structure where AH is a character in the book, along with ex-cop and crime solver Daniel Hawthorne.	
Feb 23	Fifty Fifty [EF#5]	Steve Cavanagh	3	Two sisters who hate each other are both in the house where their multi-millionaire father is brutally murdered. Each calls 911 and blames the other for his murder (no one else is present or possible). Eddie Flynn (hot shot lawyer with a past and fixer female assistant, Harper) defends one of them and nice newbie female lawyer, Kate (who quits her job at high-\$ sexually harassing law firm to set up her own) defends the other, with sassy female assistant, Bloch. The plot cleverly done through the voices of these and other participants, but cleverly keeps the identity of the sisters hidden, until a very final (if predictable) twist. Slightly smart-Alec and clever-clever prose (would have been 3+ without it) but a good plot.	349 2020
Feb 23	The Volunteer	Salvatore Scibona	3-	Rambling disjointed tale of three generations of war-affected men. Hard to follow links between them. Starts with small boy from Latvia (Janis/Willy) left at airport 2010 (ending with him in 2029). Main character/story is of disturbed Vietnam vet (Vollie/Tilly), held prisoner in tunnel for 1.5 years then rescued/employed by shady/anonymous organisation who use him to locate, probably, a German WW2 villain who they kill. Tilly's adoptive son, Elroy, is in Afghanistan and Iraq. Highly cryptic, allusive, stream-of-consciousness style.	419 2019
Feb 23	Brothers in Arms	James Holland	5	Detailed blow-by-blow account of the Sherwood Rangers tank outfit from D-Day to the end of the war. Just too much of it!	434 2021
Feb 23	The Wonder	Emma Donoghue	3-	Tale of super religious 11-year old Irish girl in ~1860 who has allegedly not eaten anything for 4 months. Local worthies form a committee to check on this and hire an ex-Nightingale English nurse (and a local nun) to keep 24-hour watch on the girl for two weeks. During this time the girl deteriorates badly, the nurse figures out the deception but takes to the girl and in the end rescues her. Something of a diatribe against peasant and Catholic beliefs, but very strung out (though not a long book).	291 2016
Jan 23	Earthly Powers	Anthony Burgess	5	Verbally fizzy and clever. Starting with 80-year old famous author, living on Malta with his gay assistant, and local archbishop. Would have read on but for the massive number of very small type pages.	649 1980
Jan 23	The Mission House	Carys Davies	3-	~50 year old English man left/retired from job in library has extended stay with Padre in delightful hill town Ooty in southern India. He becomes besotted with much younger, handicapped, Indian girl who is padre's companion/servant. Readable, but not-much-happens as he settles into regime of doing little. But some very brief and cryptic hints to a dramatic finale - where, in the last very few pages, he is killed by (I assume) anti-western thugs.	246 2020
Jan 23	Scatter her Ashes	Heine Bakkeid	5	Norwegian cop thing; didn't start well.	467 2018
Jan 23	Windswept & Interesting	Billy Connolly	3-	Disappointing read - probably much better listened to on Audible. Sad to hear of his abuse by one the aunts he was left with as an infant when his Mum left and his Dad was long-term overseas (Dad also sexually abusing him later on for a few years). But overall rather too me-me-me and name-dropping.	398 2021
Jan 23	Edith and Kim	Charlotte Philby	3-	Fictionalised biography (of sorts - needed lots of Wikipedia-ing for clarity) of Austrian Jewess who was committed Communist and, amongst others, recruited Kim Philby (author's grandfather). But, scrappily written with many chronologically unclear threads (including regular punctuation with more or less unconnected Philby letters from Russia in later years) and repetition. Like several authors seems to think endless litany of London streets traversed makes for reality.	364 2022
Jan 23	The Devil's Bargain	Stella Rimington	3	Soviet "illegal" (long term undercover/sleeper agent) posted into the UK years ago, but subsequently disconnected/disowned since Soviet collapse, is now a new MP worming his way towards defence related positions. He got into the UK by subtly bribing a policeman who now stumbles on the Russian. Other people connected to him make up the plot. But, though a decent and fairly simplistic read, it holds none of the attraction of the Liz Carlyle books.	257 2022
Jan 23	I will die in a foreign land	Kalani Pickhart	3	Almost stream-of-consciousness novel set round characters in, mainly, 2013/14 Ukraine and Russian annexations giving a flavour of the horrors and conflicts of the Orange and Maidan episodes inter alia. Very fragmented, with snippets of Czechoslovakia 68, Chernobyl, and ancient history. Characters become more confusing/ed as book progresses, going back over their prior histories. Also, the Slavic/Russian predilection for multiple name variants doesn't help (eg: are Misha and Vera same as Milan and Véra?).	315 2021
Jan 23	Call for the Dead	John le Carre	3	First George Smiley book. Decent slim tale with gloomy foggy London setting. GS investigates murder of a one-time Communist sympathiser, followed on by someone trying to kill him.	157 1961
Jan 23	The Promise	Damon Galgut	4	Dull, massively underwhelming, tale of South African family over, roughly, 1980's to 2010's. The promise was from father to dying mother, made during Apartheid days, to gift their black servant the house she lives in - which is ducked until the last chapter.	293 2021
Jan 23	The Silent War	Andreas Norman	3-	Head of Swedish (AN is Swede) spies in Brussels is passed a USB with damning documents about British undercover folks use of torture in/near Syria in Abu Ghraib like "House" by Edward Snowden like MI6 agent who is killed shortly afterwards (made to look like suicide but clearly not). The Brits then honeytrap her husband to try to get the USB back. In parallel the Brussels-based Brit MI6 man goes back to the House for another interrogation/murder session of a suspected ISIS informer. Decent enough read, but the connections and flow very hard to follow at times.	299 2017

Books

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Jan 23	A Little White Death [IT#8]	John Lawton	3-	Last, chronologically, though written/published earlier than many others (interesting how he must have made pretty detailed plot plans early on to tie in so well). Set in swinging/sleazy 1963 with Philby- and Profumo-like and story lines. Lots of sex, with Troy (now almost 50 and top detective at the Met) bonking pretty much every female he saw (from teenagers up) when he wasn't being almost-killed a number of times. Very very complicated politics and cover ups.	K 480 1998
Dec 22	Blue Rondo [IT#7]	John Lawton	3	Yet more of the same. This time UK based, with Troy solving murders by east-end Kray-like twins (and then killing them).	K 505 2017
Dec 22	Grey Bees	Andrey Kurkov	3	Low key tale of apiarist in Donbas/Crimea in 2015/2016. He, and one other person (school days enemy now almost friend - though with Russian sympathies vs. the beekeeper who is more Ukrainian) live in otherwise deserted village between Ukrainian and (Russian backed) Separatist lines - with shells whizzing over from time to time. Embarrassing to not know that this Donbas war went on from the Russian annexation of Crimea until the full-blown 2022 invasion. The beekeeper is gentle and a bit naïve and the tale follows him moving his bees to Crimea for a few weeks, partly to link up with a fellow beekeeper he knew 20+ years ago. Lots of non-judgmental references to Russian-focussed folk in Donbas and Crimea.	343 2018
Dec 22	Still Life	Sarah Winman	3+	Delightful tale of collection of (mostly British) characters linked/focussed round Florence and its art over ~30 years. Starts in 1944 as East End squaddie, accompanying US officer at the front of the allied advance through Italy there to rescue art, meet up with older female art expert. Longish book, and took a long time to get going, but the characters are enchanting and there are "real" episodes linked in - particularly the massive Florence flood in 1966. Slightly zany and pretty fragmented plot. Interesting prose with, unusually, all the speechifying not in quote marks, but so well encapsulated that they were redundant.	K 449 2021
Dec 22	The House	Tom Watson	5	Tedious Westminster tribal nonsense. Too many characters and too little plot. I read more than I should hoping I'd learn something interesting or useful about British politics, to no avail!	371 2020
Dec 22	The Cat Sanctuary	Patrick Gale	3	As ever, thoroughly readable book with pretty little happening. Starts with 30-something-year-old woman's husband being blown up in an African-ish diplomatic posting. She returns to the UK to stay for a time with her (slightly estranged) sister, at the insistence of sister's female live-in lover, in Cornwall. The back history of the sisters comes out with both having been severely abused by their father and the lover having had a 5-day fling with the blown up ex-husband.	276 1990
Dec 22	City of Ghosts	Ben Creed	4-	Grisly and distasteful tale set in Stalin's 1951 Leningrad. Five bodies found very neatly laid out on railway track, faces, and other bits, cut off. Revol Rossel is cop who used to be a violinist until tortured for some reason and having fingers cut off or broken (in 1942) investigating. Eventually goes all the way back to fictional uber-composer, arch rival of Shostakovich and chum of Beria, who is also tangentially involved. Scrappy writing and gory detail of Soviet brutality and the craven parroting of party lines by all involved.	K 371 2020
Dec 22	Outside	Ragnar Jonasson	4	Filmsy, unpleasant, story of four "friends" getting trapped in hut by blizzard while on foolish trek into highlands of Iceland. Very similar feel to "Shiver", with all the characters back stories being slowly exposed with a series of snippet-like chapterettes.	324 2021
Dec 22	One of our ministers is missing	Alan Johnson	3	Above average murder mystery with, again, Louise Mangan. Tory peer and minister disappears on day walk on Crete (where lots of the action is). Derring-do by his wife, "best friend", and people- and drug-smuggling keep the plot humming along.	369 2022
Dec 22	The Checklist Manifesto	Atul Gawande	3	Well readable short book on how he created checklists and culture for surgical operations round the world. Taking influence from, inter alia, Airlines who started doing so in the 1930's and (big) Building firms.	193 2009
Dec 22	Canticle Creek	Adrian Hyland	3	Aussie whodunnit. 30-year old kick-boxing Northern Territory female detective takes leave of absence to spend time in rural city near Melbourne unofficially investigating the death of a young villain who she thought a lot of and for whom she arranged probationary placement with her artist Dad - from which he scarpered down to Victoria. Lots of shifts in potential perpetrators (death set to look like self-inflicted car crash but switches to murder as other deaths are uncovered). Good Oz feel to it, though nonsense firestorm survival at the end and a bit too much Aussie cryptic slang and TLAs. Also slightly smart-Alec'y style, which wasn't too irritating.	K 348 2021
Dec 22	SAS Rogue Heroes	Ben Macintyre	3+	The Authorised Wartime History of the David Stirling founded. First half is the formation and N. African activities, where wild non-conformism managed to trump both the Germans and the British Army establishment (particularly the highly volatile Paddy Mayne who went on to lead after Stirling captured in 1942). Amazing what they did with, initially, less than 100 troops. Also, how they expanded rapidly into a 2500+ organisation creating mayhem throughout Europe until the end of the war.	325 2016
Dec 22	Shiver	Allie Reynolds	4	Round-and-round thriller switching 10 years to and fro. Set of 7 (originally) and now 5 (one dead and one crippled) competition snow boarders in alpine resort. Endless who's sleeping with who and nonsense changes in suspicions as the actual original events are finally teased out.	K 390 2021
Nov 22	The Ink Black Heart [CS#6]	Robert Galbraith	5	Monster book centred round online abuse (I think) related to the creators of a dark cartoon (main character being the book's title). Internet chat transcripts very hard to read and, despite lots of potential Strike/Robin-ery frisson, made me not want to churn through the rest!	1012 2022
Nov 22	Free	Lea Ypi	3-	Memoir of Albania at end of Soviet era by woman who now lectures in Political Theory as the LSE. Rather academic/cerebral. Covers, roughly, her experiences as young girl, then teenager around 1990 as communism/socialism thrown out and on to 1997 with the chaos and civil war sparked by loads of collapsing pyramid schemes. Interesting to hear her youthful (maybe still!) whole hearted acceptance of the indoctrination that Albania was the best place in the world to live.	310 2021

Books

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Nov 22	Gorbachev: His Life and Times	William Taubman	3	<p>Lengthy biography of an amazing man.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peasant background. One grandpa implemented Stalin 1930's collectivisation nonsense, until himself imprisoned and brutally tortured, the other was free minded. - met and married Raisa when they were both students at Moscow uni in early 50's. Devoted to each other all their lives. She died of Leukaemia in 1999. - One of the terrible ironies of Stalin's purges was that they were genuinely popular among peasants who hated the local officials who had collectivized. - Very supportive father (a combine driver) with whom he had a very close relationship, less so with Mum who was strict. - from and later boss of Stavropol region (Privolnoe). Lots of important senior Soviets holidayed there which gave him opportunity to join them and have good private relationships with them. Eg: very powerful KGB chief Andropov (later short time soviet leader). - Very astute politician, hiding private discomfort with system behind clever and dutiful following party lines and dogma. - Russia's drunkenness partly because their failure to produce consumer goods meant alcohol was all they could spend money on. - General Secretary, in power then president 1985-1991 - Chernobyl big event in his presidency highlighting incompetence, lack of transparency and planning. - 1989 still dreadful industry only 11% of tracked consumer goods available in shops, despite Perestroika. - Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe would be held against Gorbachev for decades. - In Malta in 1989, Bush and G got on even better than G and Reagan. - Russia biggest of the USSR's fifteen republics, accounting for half of the union's population, two-thirds of its economy, and three-quarters of its territory. - 1990, people had less and less to buy. On any given day, only 23 of 211 basic food items were available in state stores. - 1990/91 G begging for massive western (USA, Bush) aid to fund switch to democracy and a form of free market. Though he didn't get as much as he wanted, he "traded" this for enabling German reunification and continuation in NATO. - Abortive coup by old style hard liners, August 22, 1991. Yeltsin (always hot and cold) supporting G. - June 1996 presidential bid in election. Pitiful 0.5% of vote. 	K 852 2017
Nov 22	The Cook [KR#2]	Ajay Chowdhury	3	Formulaic follow-on to first book. Same complex ever changing plot with hoards of unlikely coincidences. Kamil is now cook in his friends restaurant. But becomes unofficial detective solving murders of young Indian woman (he knows through friends) and (originally totally disconnected) many homeless men.	352 2022
Nov 22	Disgrace	J.M.Coetzee	3	Cape Town professor has affair with student, for which he's thrown out and goes to stay with his daughter on a remote smallholding. There they are attacked by three Africans who rape his daughter having locked him up. He subsequently fails to persuade her to leave, and she moves towards support from a local African instead of her Dad.	220 1999
Nov 22	Lazy Bones [TT#3]	Mark Billingham	4	Long complicated Tom Thorne detecting. Rapists released from prison being tortured and murdered. Turns out to be brother and sister of family where Mum was raped and Dad later went off the wall and killed her and himself. They then gratuitously target TT with her cosying up to him as potential girlfriend.	479 2003
Nov 22	Rizzio	Denise Mina	3	Slim readable book about the murder of David Rizzio - Mary Queen of Scots favourite in 16 th century Edinburgh. Reformists/Calvinists using her selfish husband (Lord Darnley) as front hope to trigger the miscarriage of Mary's 6-month old foetus, who becomes James 6 th of Scotland and 1 st of England.	118 2021
Nov 22	French Braid	Anne Tyler	3	Rather dull tale of American family starting in 1959 and running to Covid pandemic. Slight air of Elizabeth Strout, but not in the same league.	244 2022
Nov 22	The tourist [MW#1]	Olen Steinhauer	3	Decent thriller with out-on-a-limb CIA agent (Milo Weaver) trying to find out who has set him (and others) up. Works for super-secret "Travel" department where operatives are "tourists". Someone in CIA/travel is double-crossing (possibly for the Russians, but it's all pretty opaque). But the complexity of the rapidly changing plot and some poor interlinking let the book down.	455 2009
Nov 22	Rose Nicolson	Andrew Greig	4	Set in late 1500's Scotland with reformation (to Protestantism) with families and clans oftentimes fatally split between it and the existing Catholic church. Lots of real folk at the front of the story - particularly the poet William Fowler, a Walter Scott (ancestor of the author; many of whose ancestors were confusingly named Walter!) and the young, slightly enfeebled James VI of Scotland who went on to be James I of England. But, despite decent atmospheric descriptions of life in those times (particularly St. Andrews and Embra/Edinburgh) AG seemed to assume that the reader was 100% familiar with all the politicking and Christianity factions, which made it a very disappointing read.	439 2021
Oct 22	The Waiter [KR#1]	Ajay Chowdhury	3	Above average murder mystery. 30-year old Indian ex-detective, sacked from his job in Kolkata because his upstanding ways clash with corrupt policing when he was assigned a high profile Bollywood murder to solve (on the expectation he would fluff it, which he didn't). Now in Brick Lane illegally working as waiter for a friend gets involved in another murder of rich unpleasant Indian tycoon. He investigates this privately (it's mixed up with his family and friends), eventually solving it and handing to UK police. Though the intertwining of the two murders and personnel is a bit confusing it's a decent read.	324 2021
Oct 22	The Berlin Exchange	Joseph Kanon	3	Decent, but too cryptic and complex to follow properly spy swap fiction, set in 1963. American scientist who spied for USSR released from 10 years in British prison and swapped back to East Germany (very unclear throughout how USSR/DDR sides fitted in). Arranged by now-husband of his wife. Finds out wife is dying of cancer and decides to defect back to America.	304 2022
Oct 22	Pachinko	Min Jin Lee	3	Sprawling saga of several generations of Koreans starting in Japanese-controlled (1930's) times, and mainly set in Japan. Interesting on the (still apparently) discriminatory treatment of Koreans in Japan, particularly. The family generations were a bit hard to follow, but in a long book, reasonably well delineated. Pachinko is a pinball-like gambling game, usually (according to the book) run in Japan by Korean gangsters. Two brothers, neither a gangster, both end up running parlours (as does the son of one).	K 546 2017
Oct 22	The Doll [FH#5]	Yrsa Sigurdardottir	3	Murder mystery of initially disparate set of deaths with slight linkage to a creepy wreck of a doll. Mercifully the last 40 pages laid out the details of them all. But story heavy on the pretty mundane lives of the cops and Freyja.	450 2021
Oct 22	The Whistleblower	Robert Peston	3	Political whodunnit set in lead up to a 1997 election where an incompetent Tory government is about to be routed by Labour. Broadsheet political journalist at the centre; starts when his super smart sister is killed in slightly odd-sounding bike accident. She, a treasury high flier, had proposed some clever tax change to reap £5bn from pension funds without really hurting them. Just before white paper this is canned by her boss; she's furious, there's implication of pressure from Murdoch/Maxwell-like media mogul whose empire is secretly tottering, and a day or two later she's dead.	419 2021
Oct 22	Booth	Karen Joy Fowler	4	American history round family from which came Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth. Dreadful lot, mainly actors (who earned enormous salaries when things going well). But not really a very interesting lot.	464 2022
Oct 22	Peace [PH#2]	Garry Disher	3	Nothing of any interest at all in first 50%. Then series of thefts, horse and human murders gets reasonably interesting as Paul Hirsch ambles round his extensive out back police domain. Woman in witness protection being hunted by corrupt Sydney cop who killed her husband. Loony up-himself local killed the horses. Drunk/drugged families doing loads of minor crimes.	K 364 2019
Oct 22	July's People	Nadine Gordimer	4	Unintelligible tale of white South African family who have fled Joburg while some implied major disruptions being perpetrated by ANC/Frelimo against SA state. Now shackled up with their 15-year house boy in his family home miles away. Can't think why I finished it.	160 1981
Oct 22	Hostage	Clare Mackintosh	3	Deranged eco-nuts stage clever takeover of first non-stop London/Sidney flight. Flight attendant is coerced into letting them into the cockpit by threat to her young daughter's life. Daughter and (sort of separated) husband are kidnapped and imprisoned in their home. Very similar feel to "Falling" but somehow much more dragged out and less exciting.	381 2021
Sep 22	The House at Sea's End [RG#3]	Elly Griffiths	4	6 young male skeletons found buried in N Norfolk cliff. All shot. All German from WW2. Young German academic coming to investigate also killed. Pretty feeble, with poor relationship plots between single-Mum RG and the various police involved.	388 2011

Books

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Sep 22	The late train to Gipsy Hill	Alan Johnson	3	First fiction book, features detective Louise Mangan who may be in next one. Innocuous young man gets involved with Ukrainian girl who was at the hotel where two Russian ne'er-do-wells are separately killed by radioactive poison. Decent thriller as the pair keep on the run from the Russians and the (part corrupted) Met police, and the girl turns out to be more than she at first appeared.	339 2021
Sep 22	The Italian	Shukri Mabkhout	5	Novel set during Tunisian political upheavals in late 1980's. Didn't grab.	350 2014
Sep 22	Diary of a Man in Despair	Friedrich Reck	3	Nazi Diarist (Friedrich Reck-Malleceuren). Well connected, upper class, German aristocrat appalled at what Hitler and the Nazis are doing to his country. More a series of short essays than a diary per se. Hysterical adulation of Hitler by masses, particularly by women. Vitriolic lambasting of all Nazis and the herd that supported and encouraged them. Reference to Hitler's rise being, if I followed it, a consequence of behaviour of weak and vindictive Kaiser in 1914, not being challenged by sycophantic upper classes. Reck was clear-sighted enough to realize that the roots of Nazism lay in the arrogance, greed, and irresponsibility of the leaders of imperial Germany	K 248 1947
Sep 22	Friends and Traitors [IT#6]	John Lawton	3	More of the same. Heavily set round Guy Burgess, but only on his wild/gay personality and (fruitless) desperation to get out of Russia (neither they nor the Brits wanting him), nothing about the actual spying he and Donald Maclean did. As ever, Troy knows everyone and its mainly a litany of his family and friends.	K 558 2017
Sep 22	The Great Stink	Clare Clark	5	Revolting descriptions of surely much over-egged poverty and filth in London and Scutari (Crimean war). Allegedly due to be a murder story set amongst the building of Bazalgette's sewers, but just too vile to be of interest.	356 2005
Sep 22	Old Flames [IT#5]	John Lawton	3	Set round Krushchev/ Bulganin visit to UK 1956 and the inept (MI5/6-commissioned, allegedly, and publicly denied by Eden when it came out) ex-SOE frogman spy (Cockerell based on real Lionel Crabb) trying to eavesdrop through boat hull. Passing mention of Suez and Guy Burgess. But, as with Lily of the Field, much is long tedious back story. Far too many deaths as Troy chases mysterious death of Cockerell as frogman and Soviet money launderer.	K 444 1996
Sep 22	Misplaced Persons	Susan Beale	5	Divorced Brit/US couple in Brussels with child and other problems. Dull.	323 2021
Sep 22	Memory Man [AD#1]	David Baldacci	3	Amos Decker, cop with photographic memory (Hyperthymesia) since massive hit in US college football game (brutality of which emphasised) messed up/rewired his brain. Now struggling private detective (not sure why out of police and FBI) and slowly coming to terms with brutal murder of wife, kid and brother-in-law 18+ months ago. Gets involved in solving local high school mass murder which turns out to be by same perpetrator - an intersex androgynous man (originally girl) brutally raped which a) caused similar condition to AD and b) had them meet at a specialist institute years ago. Laboured reiterations on his back history and similarity to Jack Reacher with his superman insights and intuitions.	571 2015
Sep 22	A Lily of the field [IT#4]	John Lawton	3	1st 15% useless backfill padding and girl cellist in Vienna (who features more later). Slight reprise on Isle of Man internees. Then scientist to Canada then USA for Manhattan project with nuclear scientists betrayals. Viennese cellist persuaded in Auschwitz by Russians to be sleeper spy, I think, then much later scarper from London to Moscow after killing fellow sleeper, I think, and musical interludes with copper Troy.	K 401 2011
Aug 22	I Should Be Extremely Happy in Your Company	Brian Hall	5	Lewis and Clarke novel. Got for my Xmas. But far too cryptic/turgid prose, sadly.	411 2003
Aug 22	The Ends of the Earth [JM#3]	Robert Goddard	4	More boys own nonsense with Max and his chums in Japan in 1919.	494 2015
Aug 22	You don't know me	Imran Mahmood	3+	Rather too spun out and full of twists, but very cleverly sympathetic view of a drug/gang shooting death. Black defendant has chosen to ditch his brief and give his own, ten-day, final statement justifying the story behind it. He is from a disturbed family, with now gone abusive father who beat up both Mum and sister, but has managed to avoid joining a gang (though he is in their milieu and they often work as a family for kids without a functional one). The main story has hard to follow politics amongst gangs and main characters. After a brief rebuttal of defendants explanations by the prosecution, defendant has a short, but even more fantastical tale where MI5 instigated the murder leading one to wonder about the validity of "normal" judgements on typically typecast low life characters in our systems.	K 376 2017
Aug 22	Darkness at Noon	Arthur Koestler	3	Cerebral but OK fiction set in barely disguised late 1930's Soviet Union, with Number One as Stalin, and the main character, Rubashov, a one-time apparatchik now on death row because the party wants another scapegoat to help justify some latest twist in their ideology. Content said to be based on AK's own political death row imprisonment in Spain at end of Civil War and his in-depth meeting with Bukharin when the latter was on real death row in 1938 Moscow. All rather intellectual diatribes from all sides, with the party more important than people - making it perfectly reasonable to kill to uphold/reinforce party decisions, even if blatantly, to all, daft. Endless barking justifications of the inhuman tyranny of the state and ideologues, and reliance on confessions extracted by torture (physical or, in Rubashov's case, mental and sleep deprivation). Justifications include the need for simple explanations and scapegoats to help the peasants/masses accept "complicated connections that are difficult to understand".	293 1941
Aug 22	Orfeo	Richard Powers	5	Too cerebral / musicology for me.	369 2014
Aug 22	Smoke and Mirrors [ZB#4]	Mick Herron	3	Uninspiring tale of (slightly distant) friend of Zoe Boehm being asked to go north to identify her body, found in the Tyne. Mainly a chase for an elusive murderer that ZB has been on the tail of for ages. But seemed primarily a chance to extol Newcastle dialect and buildings. Vague interest kept going by having every character (and there are many of them) introduce a new twist. Though ZB barely figures in this one, can't say it inspires me to read the previous three ZB books.	277 2009
Aug 22	Falling	T. J. Newman	2	Cracking page turner of a terrorist incident. Captain of an LA to JFK flight finds out just after take off that his family have been kidnapped and unless he crashes into some building they will be killed. Reminiscent of dilemma in von Schirach's Terror. Endless plot twists and backup plans by the terrorists keep the tension going.	285 2021
Aug 22	A State of Freedom	Neel Mukherjee	4	Handful of (largely) separate and not very interesting Indian stories each centred on poor and low-caste folk: - Indian taking his entirely American son round sights in India, son dies of some mystery fever. - London-based food enthusiast back home in Bombay befriends his parents' poor cook, visits her rural village. - Man finds bear cub and, having broken its teeth and seared holes through its nose coaxes it to "dance", and travels trying to make money from it. - Friends from remote village; one becomes Marxist guerilla and is killed as a result, the other (whose brother has hand machetted off by the Marxists, I think, when he is about six) becomes maid serving various households, including the Bombay one earlier.	275 2017
Aug 22	Triple Cross [KH#3]	Tom Bradby	3	Next high adrenalin Kate Henderson yarn. She's now out of MI6 but tasked by the PM (who was suspected Russian agent) to run an enquiry to clear him which involves unearthing a super-traitor at the top of MI6. As before lots of tawdry sex lives, KH's over-complex private life and unintelligibly complex spook plottings, but one can still roll along with the story.	K 361 2021
Aug 22	This is what happened	Mick Herron	3+	Surprisingly engrossing thriller. Starts with young woman covertly plugging a USB stick into a laptop on the executive floor of a financial company she works for in the mail room. Despite a hicough, she escapes back to her (alleged) MI5 handler. But all is not as it appears. Two years later she's sort of imprisoned in a "safe house" because her handler (now lover) says MI5 have deserted her and the UK has been taken over by the Chinese. Various slightly creepy coincidences lead to a resolution. Interestingly totally different writing to MH's Slough House smart-Alec'y style.	241 2018

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Aug 22	Daughters of Night	Laura Shepherd-Robinson	4	Overlong strung out murder mystery set in 1782 London, with loads of twists and turns. Interesting emphasis on how small London was, being separate from the many surrounding villages that we now think of as part of the city. Starts with murder of young prostitute in (raunchy?) Vauxhall Gardens. Caro Corsham (is in prior book), who discovers her, employs a thief-taker to find the murderer amongst the Beau Monde wastrels involved. General life portrayed as being long debauched round of harlots (charging pennies for commoners and guineas for the rich - 100's of them for a virginity) and many folk in hock to, and terrified by, loan sharks of various levels of society. Fancifully set with painting of Greek mythology scenes requiring naked girls as sitters (and more). Ludicrously lucid and often self incriminating recollections from all characters. Surprisingly LS-R claims much of the ambience she portrays was realistic.	559 2021
Aug 22	Death in Oslo [VS#3]	Anne Holt	3+	Global terrorist-like thriller with newly elected female US president kidnapped in Oslo on her first overseas visit. The plot inevitably fails, ultimately, but was planned over (allegedly) decades by fiendishly clever Saudi businessman wanting to milk US funds (tho' this is poorly explained). As with the other Stubo/Vik (aka: Modus) books, the tale just outlines some key events, avoiding laborious explanation of each twist. Vik and Stubo less at the forefront, and Hanne Wilhelmsen playing a part. Remarkably different, and way better, than the first two Modus books which one doesn't need to have read.	K 446 2006
Aug 22	The Panopticon	Jenni Fagan	5	15-year old girl from rough part of Scotland being taken to some sort of care home after being found (maybe) near/with policeman now in coma. All the makings of grimy, druggy, hard hitting tale which didn't grab me.	324 2012
Aug 22	The Diary of a Young Girl	Anne Frank	3+	Remarkably up-beat and open descriptions and musings from this hugely bright, witty and mature 13-15 year old (ends 1-Aug-1944 three days before she and the eight of her family and friends in hiding were arrested, all but her Dad - who edited the book - being killed by the Nazis). It would be a great read without the added menacing power of knowing her ultimate fate.	424
Aug 22	The Final Murder [VS#2]	Anne Holt	3-	Similar to Punishment - fragmentary plot slowly, and mainly anonymously, drawing in all suspects for a series of (seemingly) unconnected grisly murders. I only kept reading because of the non-plot aspects of the relationships between Vik and Stubo and their extended backgrounds.	K 406 2006
Aug 22	The Mercies	Kiran Millwood Hargrave	3	Grim tale loosely set round real events in very northern Norway early 1600's. Freak storm killed all the men on an island leaving the women to carry on taking over the fishing inter alia. Vile Christian bigots who controlled the place then sent in to investigate and tame the women. Leads on to ghastly witch "trials" and burnings with the women accusing each other.	336 2020
Aug 22	Punishment [VS#1]	Anne Holt	3-	Scrappy complex and fragmented grisly plot with vile men kidnapping, raping (sometimes) and killing young children. Ludicrous coincidences. eg: two key characters turn out to be father and son (unbeknownst to each other) and are both killed in car smash at the end when one crashes into the other. First Johanne Vik (psychiatrist and lawyer, amicably separated and with mentally handicapped 6-year old daughter) and Adam Stubo (older detective - widowed in freak accident where his daughter and wife die in a freak accident) book. Only their developing relationship and back stories made the book worth reading.	K 408 2001
Jul 22	Commonwealth	Ann Patchett	3	Rambling saga of two intertwined American families from ~1964 to now. Two girls in one, two of each in the other. From the second, the oldest boy dies for a slowly unfolded reason (bee sting), and youngest (who the other five used to dose with pills when he was small to make him sleep and let them get up to mischief) is a wild firebrand (literally). Slow elaboration of the changing relationships (both parents split, one to marry the other half of the other pair), but I found it impossible to keep who was who in my head, so probably missed a lot!	322 2016
Jul 22	Critical Incidents [RL#1]	Lucie Whitehouse	3	Single Mum detective (Robin Lyons) sacked from Met for not following the rules and disobeying bosses directive to arrest clear villain for whom they did not have enough real evidence. Returns to Birmingham, and gets job with old friend who has a one-woman private detective agency (where she later falls foul of her for the same sort of insubordination). But she also is involved in (now, and off her own bat) three cases: 1. trying to get more detail on the villain in the Met case 2. her long-standing very best friend is found dead in arson attack on her house and her (thoroughly trusted and loved) husband has disappeared 3. a teenage girl has gone missing; too old for police to do much, but her now employer is hired by the Mum to find her 2&3 end up linked to villains and prostitution in B'ham. -starts with rush of ill-introduced characters/names - super cryptic/allusive references to background	K 401 2019
Jul 22	Oh William!	Elizabeth Strout	3	Lucy Barton looking back on her earlier life, mainly her first marriage to William, who she divorced many years earlier. They both subsequently married again and her 2 nd husband died recently, his (3 rd) wife left him and he and she get together (not romantically) to reminisce and pursue old history. As ever, thoroughly banal but strangely readable ES.	237 2021
Jul 22	The Dictionary of Lost Words	Pip Williams	3	Engaging, if thin, romantic-y fiction of girl growing up in and around the creation of the first OED (1880's - 1928). Her Dad is one of the wordsmiths and several real ones feature, including the main editor, James Murray. One story line hangs round the (inadvertent) omission of the word "bondmaid" and leads on to extensive linkage with the Women's suffrage movement. Also gentle plugs that Australia (PW is Ozzie) already had women's vote then.	402 2020
Jul 22	Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant	Anne Tyler	3+	Engrossing tale of Baltimore family over first 2/3rds of the 20 th century. Fierce and unmaternal Mum, married late, bringing up three kids after her feckless husband walks out in the 30's. Elder son, Cody, is mean and jealous of his fey brother, Ezra - to the point of methodically charming the latter's fiancée away from him to marry her himself. Youngest is slightly scatty daughter who becomes a doctor and acquires, on her third marriage, half a dozen additional children without a pause. Ezra works in the titular restaurant as a kid and ends up inheriting it from the single older lady that owned it.	K 338 1982
Jul 22	Empire of Pain	Patrick Radden Keefe	3	History of the Sackler family, its privately owned Purdue Pharma company and their growing blame for the (US mainly) opiates addiction. First 1/3 rd is largely background to the sprawling family, with three brothers (led by Arthur, the oldest) who from very modest beginnings in the 1930's became billionaires and well known (mainly art) philanthropists. Arthur having at least two full time jobs (one as medic running small pharma company, one as marketer getting more or less monopoly on drug company's PR). Their own wealth taking off with MS Contin, followed by OxyContin. But despite clear info that these were causing problems of addiction and abuse, the family aggressively pushed their sale and constantly refused to take any blame or make any apologies. The brothers (and much of family) were domineering, womanising, art and own name obsessed and managed for a very long time to keep the Sackler name separate from Purdue. This using barrages of highly charging lawyers, and managing to pervert the FDA and other authorities to their will. Rather wordy book; replacing acres of family background with a couple of family trees would have helped.	441 2021
Jul 22	Dohany Street [DB#3]	Adam LeBor	3	Third (and probably last) Balthazar Kovacs Budapest detective story. An Israeli historian goes missing after investigating the lost wealth of Hungarian Jews murdered in the Holocaust (and Roma/Gypsies in what they term their Poraymus) - with massive help from Hungarians (LeBor says they willingly deported more than any other Nazi-affiliated country). Reasonably complex plot made hard to follow by foreign names many slightly similar.	380 2021
Jul 22	The Absolution [FH#3]	Yrsa Sigurdardottir	3-	Another Freyja/Huldar Icelandic thriller. Their, and other, intra-police politicking/bitching/relationships are pretty juvenile for, supposedly, 30-ish year olds. Story is complicated tale about someone (or more - the ending is curiously unclear) brutally murdering two schoolkids for bullying of his/their kids.	391 2016

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Jul 22	A breed of Heroes [CT#1]	Alan Judd	3+	First Charles Thoroughgood book written 20 years before the next one. An almost documentary/reportage view of the army policing Belfast in ~1980. Tedium and mundanity of Army life well conveyed. Possibly slightly rose-tinted view of sensitive CO (behind his bluster and booziness) fretting about the damage the IRA are inflicting on, particularly, kids. Grim unattractive Belfast and Belfasters; fairly anti IRA, but showing Army nonsense too. Good on the conundrums and endless provocations that the Army had to handle/ignore. CT servers his term (mainly as Press Officer) and then buys his way out.	K 347 1981
Jul 22	The Searcher	Tana French	2	~50-year retired from Chicago Police Department to rural Irish hamlet doing up a ramshackle cottage he bought. Latched onto by troubled 13-year old (thought to be lad until half way through) desperate to find out what happened to his/her 19-year old brother who disappeared 6 months before. Ex cop slowly builds relationships with surrounding locals and starts digging into the disappearance. Eventually unearthing it amongst drug dealings and some brutality. Both main characters are hugely likeable and one wonders if TF can make a sequel.	392 2020
Jul 22	The Whole Truth	David Baldacci	3	Pretty silly pre Arab Spring mayhem from fake internet news purporting to show Russian killed by KGB. Turns out to be scam by billionaire arms dealer to boost sales, his scheme going on to make it look as if Chinese involved in the killings. All solved by ludicrous super-man working, under duress for some anonymous agency. But many interesting parallels with hugely distrusted Russia/Ukraine/World affairs at the time I read it.	545 2008
Jul 22	The Foot Soldiers	Gerald Seymour	5	Dreadful uber-cryptic jargonny super-laconic smart-Alec'y spy defector tale. Why can't he write proper prose?	422 2022
Jul 22	The Personal Librarian	Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray	3	Fiction spun round the real and remarkable career of Belle da Costa Greene, hired in 1905 in her 20's to work in, and then manage, JP Morgan's vast library of ancient texts and art. This she did with huge skill, becoming world renowned for her astute purchases and great knowledge and, as a hugely successful single female. an inspiration to many. But behind the public view, she had secrets. The key one being that she was born coloured, but had such a light skin passed herself off as white (with Portuguese heritage). She also had a long lasting affair with another art boffin, Bernard Berenson, 20 years older than her. This amongst other dalliances and a reputation for drinking and elaborate clothes. But, despite such an interesting subject, the book was pretty lightweight with heaps of invented scenarios (BdCG destroyed all her personal papers before she died; the book didn't even explain how her coloured origin was subsequently discovered).	338 2021
Jun 22	Crow Lake	Mary Lawson	3	Another low key (and slightly drawn out) tale from small a remote North Canadian hamlet. Couple killed in car accident leave four kids who get on with life by themselves: two late teenage sons, a feisty/fractious toddler girl and 7-year old Kate, whose voice narrates. Oldest brother was about to leave school and had just, slightly unwillingly, scraped into college. He decides to chuck that and stay at home to bring up the girls. Second one is super bright and a huge encourager and educator of Kate; he is set to get a scholarship to university. But, because of dramas with a neighbouring farmer ends up staying and taking over that farm.	K 331 2002
Jun 22	Tristram Shandy	Laurence Sterne	5	Sadly couldn't get into it at all. Very dated/verbose.	197 1760
Jun 22	The Saboteur	Simon Conway	4	Ludicrously violent - wide ranging action packed, but mostly simplistic/undemanding. Silly super evil psychopath with masses of money hijacks some Russian originated end of world destruction scheme.	372 2021
Jun 22	Room	Emma Donoghue	3	Book behind the play we saw in 2017. 19 year old US girl abducted and imprisoned for years in 11' sq room. Regularly raped, who produces a son. Story is told by him, as 5 year old. His super loving Ma keeps them sane by explaining that (the) Room is the only real place, and everything they see on TV is just TV. Eventually, with her planning and coaching they escape, and find the real world very hard to adjust to, but slowly do.	410 2010
Jun 22	Time on Rock	Anna Fleming	5	Climbing pean Nicely written but just didn't grab me.	254 2022
Jun 22	This is the night they come for you	Robert Goddard	3	Woven round recent Algerian history. Going through the FLN struggle and violence up to independence in 1962 (but only really starting in 1961, whereas the war of independence dates back to 1954), including the violent, deadly, repression in Paris 17 Oct 1961 by the French. Then the "dark decade" in 1990's (civil war and rise of Islamists), including the assassination on live TV of Mohamed Boudiaf in 1992. Book triggered in the internecine FLN violence in mid/late 60's and reprisals on French - with assassination in 1965 of de Gaulle right hand man by two FLN'ers with indirect/inadvertent assistance from one of the main characters, Nigel Dalby. The FLN'ers then keep him onside for the rest of his life by threatening to expose his role and move him to Algiers to run a bookshop. Another (confusingly similar) character, Stephen Gray, is brother of girlfriend of ND and is killed by the FLN'ers to stop her revealing the assassination culprits. Story strung together with two Algerian cops in 2020 chasing the two (now aged) FLN'ers - nice paring of smart young female and older experienced guy who's met ND and SG. Good trigger to find a bit about Algerian history, but often hard to follow. Would have benefited from a brief history outline and chart showing the main characters.	397 2022
Jun 22	BERLIN: Caught in the Mousetrap	Paul Grant	4	First Schultz family story, set in August 1961 as the wall goes up and bits of family on either side. Super complex web of shady Russian (mainly) and German characters. Many ludicrous coincidences (Gert finding Eva then both seeing Jack) and some super corny dialogue and smart-Alec'y prose. Lots of reference to earlier times (Stalingrad, Gulag) which, no doubt, the other books will cover.	K 302 2017
Jun 22	Conclave	Robert Harris	3	Good almost nail-biter on the election of a new Pope. Depressing being reminded of the insularity and not-of-this-worldliness of religious folk and, particularly, the Catholic church. But plenty of twists as the candidates are whittled down by exposure of past transgressions leading to a nicely surprising Habemus Papam.	
Jun 22	How to Make the World Add Up: Ten Rules for Thinking Differently About Numbers	Tim Harford	3	Pretty dense, but readable, details on statistics. Nicely filled with anecdotes of real events and people.	296 2020
Jun 22	Rocco and the Nightingale [LR#5]	Adrian Magson	3	Lucas Rocco, smart French detective (recently-ish?) moved from Paris to quieter Amiens has gangland contract out to kill him and has job to bodyguard a Gabonese political fugitive in nearby country house. The assassin duo have ridiculously complicated plan to kill him, but the plot is undemanding and I enjoyed it (J didn't!).	319 2017
Jun 22	No Good Deed	Manda Scott	5	Violent gory tale set in Glasgow and with Irish links. Her first book.	304 2000
Jun 22	Bitter Orange	Claire Fuller	3	1969 and ~40-year old spinster arrives at old country house that she has been commissioned to report on by an American who recently bought it. She joins a couple who are there for the same thing. They become slightly strained friends over a few months while their back stories are teased out, with the spinster's being part told from 20 years on where she is an end-of-life ward in what is revealed at the end to be a prison. She having fallen for the man of the couple and both them ending dead. But all smattered with para-normal events and claims of virgin birth.	K 279 2018
Jun 22	Storm of Steel	Ernst Junger	3+	Eloquent diary-like description of life on the German side of WW1 trench warfare. EJ started as private but rapidly promoted to officer. Clearly very brave and much respected by his men. He suffered a dozen pretty serious woundings, though often back to the front within a few weeks. The book is known as a classic, originally published in 1920, but revised many times afterwards (this version based on the 1961 version). Very laconic, British like dry humour and dispassionate descriptions. No angst or them and us. A (presumably) excellent translation by Michael Hofmann whose introduction lambasts an earlier translator!	289 1920
Jun 22	Palace of Treason [RS#2]	Jason Matthews	4	Mid book of trilogy. Far to drawn out, wordy, laboured, jargonny, acronym-laden and violent. Super-woman Dominika at the fore helping CIA find moles, send booby trapped machinery to Iran's nuclear bunkers and getting physical with Putin.	K 471 2015
Jun 22	The Wonga Coup	Adam Roberts	3	Tale of sordid failed 2004 attempt, organised by Simon Man, to take over Equatorial Guinea from its vile president, install an alternative and then get at the oil money. Mark Thatcher and, probably, Jeffrey Archer, amongst investors. Interesting parallels to another failed coup in 1973 (against an equally ghastly EG president) which AR implies Frederick Forsyth was behind and which he subsequently fictionalised in his "Dogs of War".	282 2006

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Jun 22	Rescue	Anita Shreve	3-	US Paramedic (hence title) falls for woman he rescues from (her, DUI) drunk driving crash. They marry, though he struggles with conflicting love and fury as she turns out to be serious alcoholic. She then does another DUI with their toddler on board and he boots her out. Years later toddler, now a smart teenager also shows signs of becoming alcoholic, and he re-finds his ex-wife in time for rather gooey reunion as daughter comes out of coma. The paramedic incidents (mostly incidental to the plot) give some interest, albeit with too much medical jargon, but the middle of the book is rather dully drawn out.	286 2010
May 22	Free Love	Tessa Hadley	4	Not very interesting tale set in late 1960's. 40-year old wife of Foreign Office mandarin falls for 20-something man, and moves from her suburban life to edgy Notting Hill to be with him. Her 16-year old daughter later following into this free/debauched life. Also turns out the younger lover is son of woman's husband from a youthful affair of his!	312 2022
May 22	The Other Side of the Bridge	Mary Lawson	3	Low key tale set in rural northern Canadian town about two brothers of small-time farmer. The older, taciturn, non-academic stays at home (rejected by the army in 1939 for flat feet) takes over from Dad when he is killed in accident. The younger (by 5 years) is idle rogue getting up to all sorts of trouble, but doted on by his Mum. One day a bit before the war he taunts his elder by crossing a bridge dangerously and falls almost killing himself. When the younger shouts for help just before losing his grip the elder assumes he's messing around and tells him he won't help. But he does, carting his badly injured brother home and creating a lasting guilt. A few years later, after recovering and causing mayhem with the local lassies, the elder skedaddles. In a parallel thread in late 1950's/1960 teenage son of local doctor works part time on the farm, lusting after elder's slightly younger wife. No sign of the other brother until late on when he turns up and one discovers, rather predictably, how the married his wife.	273 2006
May 22	Mother's Boy	Patrick Gale	3-	OK but rather uneventful and scrappy fiction based on the life of Cornish poet Charles Causley (1917-2003) until late 1940's. Bespectacled, bright, bullied country boy and his super-supportive and very close Mum. Left school at 16 but joined the Navy at ~18 as (cipher) coder, where he travelled more and discovered his homosexuality, leaving as petty officer to become school teacher and respected writer.	401 2022
May 22	The Pull of the Stars	Emma Donoghue	3+	Set in 3-bed maternity/fever ward in Dublin hospital over 3 days in Oct/Nov 1918. Over-stretched midwife dealing with heavily pregnant women, mainly poor, who also have the Spanish flu, losing Mum's and babe's. Extensive and graphic descriptions on the grisly gynaecological birthing processes (would have rated a 2 if fewer pages of this!). Also mixed in: - Republicanism and lingering anger/expectations from the 1916 rebellion - Includes the real Dr. Kathleen Lynn, enlightened gay doctor with some means and senior in Sinn Fein. - Frightful treatment and exploitation of unwed mums and poor women raised orphans by the ghastly Catholic church (all details from actual events from the end notes) - Women's suffrage - Shell shocked men	K 305 2020
May 22	Laidlaw	William McIlvanney	3-	Working class lass found brutally murdered in 1970's Glasgow. Rather complex set of underworld characters, as well as DI Laidlaw, involved in finding the killer, and I'm not 100% sure who he was in the end.	280 1977
May 22	Max Havelaar	Multatuli	4	Disappointing for the book that killed colonialism" (for 19 th c Dutch East India). Ragged patchwork of pretty separate pieces. Starts wittily enough with pompous coffee dealer in Holland. No real mention of MH or Java until half way through. Very very indirect criticisms no doubt, but unintelligible to this 21 st c reader. Cursory anecdotal description of corruption and coercion, often via fictionalised story within the story, where, apparently, MH is an ineffectual whistle blower amongst bogging levels of governance and paper/protocol pushing.	312 1860
May 22	While Paris Slept	Ruth Druart	5	Massively drawn out, lightweight tale of French couple (not yet married) given a newborn Jewish boy as parents shipped to Auschwitz in 1944. In 1953 a nonsense plot has man arrested for kidnapping the child once his real parents, who survived, managed to locate him. Can't think why I read over 50% of the drivel.	K 465 2021
May 22	Summerwater	Sarah Moss	4	Dull series of pretty separate essay-like pieces on various families/couples one wet day in Trossachs holiday chalet camp.	200 2020
May 22	The Architects Apprentice	Elif Shafak	3	Decent fiction set in 16 th century Istanbul weaving actual events and people. Central character is young Indian elephant boy (Mahout) who escapes bullying father to get to Istanbul with a white elephant for the Sultan. He becomes apprentice to the (real) royal architect Sinan and is involved in Ottoman wars and mosque building.	452 2014
May 22	The Plot	Jean Hanff Korelitz	5	Dull American book about writers.	K 337 2021
May 22	A killing in November [DIRW#1]	Simon Mason	3	Porn woman found dead in rooms in Oxford college where Provost is desperately trying to woo mid-Eastern money. Central cop is very young looking and irreverent 27-year-old single Dad (DI Ryan Wilkins) of very young son from Oxford trailer park, paired with slightly older suave black detective. Lots of prickles between them, and deliberate provocation from RW. Good, slightly ragged, irreverent stuff as RW's inspirations lead them to the villains.	K 373 2022
May 22	Expiry Date [AM#4]	Alex Walters	3	Fairly complex Alec McKay tale. Two older guys running illegal business. Importing dodgy goods and people trafficking women from e Europe. While waiting to sell them on they're held in hotels (possibly not operational). Series of young men who work for the operation are being killed, putting the wind up everyone else. Also, the fat finance part of the pair is into dating and groping women, including AM's boss, who he starts texting anonymously. He and others get their comeuppance from the pair of women who turn out to be behind everything.	K 370 2019
May 22	Agent in Berlin [WP#1]	Alex Gerlis	3-	British running agents in Berlin from 1936 as war comes, including gay men, disaffected wife of senior Nazi and US Sports journalist.. Bit Prince-like but wooden and over detailed.	K 410 2021
May 22	The Ninth Child	Sally Magnusson	3	Odd fictional stitching together of some real people and events in 1850's. Main character, Isabel, is wife of doctor based at the navy's camp where they are building the largest aqueduct/tunnels in the world (?) to bring fresh water from Loch Katrine to Glasgow. She has had 8 miscarriages, and ends producing her first child. Mixed up with respected Faery enthusiast from 160 years before, Robert Kirk who has supernaturally reappeared in 1856 looking for a newborn child to release his spirit. Also involving Victoria and Albert, who open the waterworks, and whose fecundity contrasts Isabel's. Some interesting history and engineering kept me reading!	321 2020
May 22	All Human Wisdom	Pierre Lemaitre	3	Good downfall and revenge tale of upper-class Parisian woman through the depression and rise of Nazism. Starts with the funeral of her arms-length banker husband at which her 7-year old son throws himself from a 2 nd floor window and becomes paraplegic. She is then poorly advised by her brother-in-law and loses her fortune, then takes complex and intriguing revenge on him and three others with various (blackmailed) accomplices.	423 2018
Apr 22	The Red Moth [IP#4]	Sam Eastland	3	Another Pekkala hunt, this inspired by the "8 th wonder of the world" Amber Room in the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo. Fabulously respected, with comment that, for instance, the Tsar would pay his weight in gold for a slab of Amber no larger than his hand. The whole thing disappeared in WW2 when the Germans arrived at St Petersburg. Book is set in that time (not covering the eventual discovery of the treasures first removed and then hidden by Germans). Very standard simplistic Pekkala structure, but a decent time-passer.	K 386 2013
Apr 22	Dark Side	Belinda Bauer	4	Local Exmoor cop, Jonas Holly partly involved as Taunton crime team, led by aggressive boss, investigate growing number of murders of old folk on Jonas' patch. First 80% decent and undemanding. Then a series of sillinesses and further murders make a poor ending with Jonas the Jekyll/Hyde perp.	435 2010
Apr 22	The Dickens boy	Thomas Keneally	3	Though using a novel to recount a couple of years in the life of Dickens' youngest (10th) child, Edward (known as Plorn) this is almost as much about his Dad - a philander who slept with his maids, ditched his wife and took up with an Irish actress. Plorn was shipped out to Australia at 16 to a remote (and massive) sheep farm where he starts what was to be a successful colonial life in the outback under the care of Fred Bonney the Aboriginal-friendly farm owner and photographer. Good atmospheric stuff about the fairly basic life in the outback, enlivened by inter-area cricket matches and plenty of libidinous frustrations amongst the male-dominated whites.	390 2020
Apr 22	1979	Val McDermid	3+	Sensibly-paced thriller featuring youngish female journalist on Glasgow paper in 1979 (end pages imply there will be a "1989" follow-on this year). Despite the typical misogyny everywhere she works with (gay) male colleague to expose first a tax dodge that colleague's step-brother is involved with and then a "Scots IRA" group buying Semtex from the IRA.	446 2021
Apr 22	Scabby Queen	Kirstin Innes	5	Dull starting book about Scots pop/folk singer who commits suicide at 50.	K 401 2020

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Apr 22	An Honorable Man	Paul Vidich	4	Very padded out hunt for CIA double agent, set in 1953 based, according to end notes on real person. But plot full of non sequiturs and giving the impression parts had been mis-cut-and-pasted in the wrong order.	K 289 2016
Apr 22	Nuclear Folly	Serhii Plokhly	3+	Fascinating telling of the intricacies of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev having inaccurate info on the other's situation, but both terrified of triggering a nuclear war. Kennedy also desperate not to do anything that would trigger Soviet takeover of Berlin. Khrushchev similarly desperate to stop US invading or bombing Cuba, but had wanted missiles there because Soviets didn't have ICBM's capable of going from Russia to US, whereas US did. Nail biting, tight time-lined, seat of pants negotiating, with chess-like constant consideration as to what each move might cause the other side to do. Kennedy prevaricating as all his initial advice (including from Bobby) was for strike and invasion options, which were only switched to blockade at last moment. Finalisation of the (kept secret) Turkish missile swap sadly not mentioned, but presumably happened. Interesting that Kennedy has guessed that this would be key, though Khrushchev seemed pretty ambivalent about it - only tossing the idea out late in day in one of two contradictory letters sent within 24 hours.	363 2021
Apr 22	Go set a Watchman	Harper Lee	3+	Witty pithy story written (in late 1950's) before Mockingbird and treated as draft for it (tho' there are theories that HL didn't write it at all) - the manuscript only being found in 2015. Same characters with feisty/tomboy Jean Louise (Scout) now 26 visiting her rural Alabama home from New York causing flashbacks to her earlier life - with only the briefest of mentions of the trial that dominated Mockingbird. Quite a furious and hard to follow ending with her at odds with (but possibly persuaded by) Atticus and her wonderfully wise and erudite uncle Jack after she discovers Atticus attending local whites-only meetings fretting about the (Negro) integration being foisted on them by Federal edicts. The argument being that the Negroes were a less developed race so it was not safe to hand them full emancipation (yet).	278 2015
Apr 22	A Grave for Two [SF#1]	Anne Holt	4	Complicated, disjointed tale of ski athletes doping and vengeance by a 30-year old for the death (accidental?) of his brother when he was 7. Fronted by one-time cross country ski star, now smart but gambling addict and lawyer, Selma Falck. Poorly written, nothing like her earlier writing.	K 362 2018
Apr 22	Cloud Cuckoo Land	Anthony Doerr	3	Strange three-plus-one-part paean to books and libraries. Linked by a fictional ancient text of Aethon, a man turned into a Donkey, Fish and Bird. 1. set round the 1453 siege of Constantinople with a poor Greek girl resident (who finds and learns to read an ancient copy of the Aethon tale) and a young farm lad conscripted into the Ottoman army with his two bullocks. The two escape together and in later life he takes the book to scholars in Urbino, who preserve it. 2. 1940's - 2020: US lad, after losing both Mum and Dad young, brought up by his Dad's girlfriend. Becomes book obsessed. Gruesomely imprisoned during Korean war, meets and falls for an erudite British soldier. Returns to the US, meets the Brit in later life and is encouraged by him to translate the Aethon story. When doing so he enthuses youngsters in his small town to put on a play of it in the local library - but, at 86, dies from: 3. 2020-2050: Disturbed young man in same town decides to bomb the library (to hit a next door real estate business) on the day of the Aethon play. The 86-year old saves the kids but takes the blast. 4. Some time in the future: a set of humans are in a space ship about 65 years into a 600-year journey to an Earth-like planet. A girl onboard (she was born there and expected to be a transient propagating the humans for the ultimate landing), who also finds the Aethon story, rebels and breaks out, to find that the encapsulation is an experiment and the ship never left earth.	622 2021
Apr 22	A Town called Solace	Mary Lawson	3	Delightful, super low-key story of relationships and history of characters in a very small rural Northern Canadian town. Old childless lady dying in hospital gives her house to man who used to be next-door kid (in a different town), unappreciated by his brusque Mum and four sisters. In the house next to the one he moves into a teenage girl has left some days ago after arguments with parents (her disappearance continues through the book) and her charmingly persistent 8-year old younger sister looks after the old woman's cat and resists the man's attempts to take over the house. Slight feel of Olive Kitteridge.	288 2021
Apr 22	Sheila: The Australian Ingenue Who Bewitched British Society	Robert Wainwright	5	Biography of Australian Sheila Chisholm from affluent NSW farming background who came to London in 1914 and got stuck there by the war, but then married (various times) into titled British society. Little or nothing on the surrounding real world events and endless little tattle about the over-privileged world she married into.	K 432 2014
Apr 22	The Katharina Code [CC#1]	Jorn Lier Horst	3	Wisting on Cold Cases. Disappearance 20+ year ago of first a teenage girl then, 2 years later, wife of a man responsible for road building around Norway. Gently slow plot focusses on the man, who Wisting has become friendly with, checking in each anniversary of his wife's death. Pleasantly undemanding and undramatic. Disappointing that the slightly flat denouement explains the girl's death, but not the wife's.	407 2018
Apr 22	Blood Money	Tom Bradby	5	Corrupt politicians, police, Wall St and gangsters in 1929 New York. might have been a decent book if not for dreadful wisecracks-y prose and assumptions that reader is familiar with baseball, boxing and US/NY politics. Amazing this book written by same man as the Kate Henderson ones!	K 392 2009
Apr 22	Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud and the Last Trial of Harper Lee	Casey Cep	3	Three separate books glued together back to back, linked by series of 1970's deaths/murders in Alabama. Part 1 is about "the Reverend", a black part-time preacher who took out life insurance on several family members, seven of whom were found dead soon afterwards (including 2 wives). Despite lots of suspicion, and allegations of voodoo, he was not arrested for any of them and prosecuted the various insurers (who were most suspicious) to get at hundreds of thousands of dollars in payouts. At the funeral of his last victim he was openly assassinated by a relative wanting justice. Part 2 is about the urbane white lawyer, one-time state senator, who first defended the Reverend in his cases against the insurers (partly driven by wanting to support a black man against the system), and then switched sides and won the defence of his killer on grounds of insanity. Part 3 is about Harper Lee; most of it her history (nothing to do with the Reverend), but a bit at the end covering her attempt to write a book about it all. Unclear whether she did, so most of this section was pretty useless!	276 2019
Apr 22	Three Daughters	Consuelo Saah Baehr	5	First 1/3rd (of long book) was a good mix of story set near and in Jerusalem and history of the decline of the Ottoman empire in what was still Palestine from late 1800's to 1920's. But then collapsed into gooeey tale of the (mainly female) characters, so gave up.	K 722 2014
Apr 22	Darkness Falls [KM#3]	Robert Bryndza	4	Another set of murders for Kate Marshall and Tristan. Various young gay men have disappeared over the years, and the investigation kicks off looking for young female journalist who may have been researching this and who also disappeared 12 years ago. But all rather distasteful and OTT.	356 2021
Mar 22	On the Narrow Road to the Deep North	Lesley Downer	3-	Slightly samey telling of LD (a 30-something-year old Japanophile in 1980's) following the path taken by a famous Japanese poet Matsuo Basho in 1689 described in his 1689 book "The Narrow Road to the Deep North". Basho's route following monasteries and events from 500-1000 earlier. Amazingly medieval and rural feel to her journey mainly staying with locals or in poor hostels, walking a fair bit (some bus and train) and lots of hitching and unsolicited but safe pick ups by drivers. Almost universal and generous hospitality (food and drink at every stop) with no mention of paying. Seemingly hoards of Japanese pilgrims doing bits of her route around her on an industrial scale. Lots of Haiku's - to my mind vastly overrated, most being unintelligible without a background paragraph explaining the allusions.	K 308 1989
Mar 22	The Marriage Mender	Linda Green	3	Relationships tale opens with counsellor woman starting counselling with her husband and develops into predictable but very readable tale. Her 16-year-old stepson leaves home after his birth mother comes back having left him at 6-months-old. This causes angst with her husband and their delightful feisty 8-year old daughter. An abandoned-at-birth story weaves into the plot before all is rosy at the end. Slightly odd structure with the main plot interweaving with detail from the counsellor's sessions with various clients - presumably partly as contrast, though one of the clients is crucial to the main plot. But then there's a third set of 1-page bits from counselling sessions thrown in every so often that have no bearing on the book at all.	441 2014
Mar 22	Judas 62 [B88#2]	Charles Cumming	3+	Follow on Lachlan (Lockie) Kite then-and-now story. First (best) half mainly about his second job as 22-year old in 1993 exfiltrating nerve agent scientist from Russia. Second half has him boss of Box 88 doing hands-on (ridiculously) vengeance set up of the FSB man who tortured and raped his 1993 girlfriend after he successfully escaped.	499 2021

Books

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Mar 22	Metropolis	Philip Kerr	3-	First chronologically, last written Bernie Gunther book. He's in 1928 Berlin chasing murderer and scalper of prostitutes and, linked, shooting of disabled WW1 veterans begging on streets. Same smart-Alec prose and lots of real (from the end notes) characters.	388 2019
Mar 22	Opal Country [IL#1]	Chris Hammer	3	Another good out-in-the-wilds-of-Australia thriller. Opal miner found crucified down his mine. Lots of (far too complex to follow properly) shenanigans with two competing big businessmen, and endless parentage complexity amongst many of those involved. Main character is Sydney homicide cop Ivan Lucic, who has some linkage with Hammer's earlier main man, Martin Scarsden.	483 2021
Mar 22	The Chalet	Catherine Cooper	4	Scrappy, wooden, before/after thriller set in Alpine resort and chalet. One of a pair of brothers was killed on macho off-piste trip; ski guides fuffed around before raising the alarm. 20 years later some of the same folk are back, but not knowing each other. Series equally unpleasant/unsympathetic/unendearing couples in each time frame.	K 391 2020
Mar 22	The Guest List	Lucy Foley	5	Slow starting wedding party of upper crusties on an Irish island.	375 2020
Mar 22	A Lover's Discourse	Xiaolu Guo	4	Rather dull recounting of aspects of love between Chinese girl doing PHD in UK and her landscape artist lover/husband. Read it through only because of familiar territory (NE London, Lea Valley, canal boats and also The Garden of Cosmic Speculation near Dumfries).	267 2020
Mar 22	The Secrets of Strangers	Charity Norman	3	Three folk held hostage by youngish farmer who came into stepfather's Balham cafe in fury with him, and, slightly inadvertently shot him dead. Full of long back stories of all four characters, and the police negotiator dragged out too much (and not all that interesting).	K 364 2020
Mar 22	Every last fear	Alex Finlay	3	Eldest son of family of six is in prison for killing a girl at a drunken schoolkids party in Nebraska. None of the family think he did it. A Netflix docudrama concurs, but the Supreme Court has just upheld the conviction. Then Mum, Dad and two younger kids, who have headed to Mexico on a lead, are found suspiciously dead. Someone tries to kill the remaining son twice. Before and after thriller with loads of twists; a little drawn out but readable.	359 2021
Mar 22	Find You First	Linwood Barclay	3+	Better than usual thriller, albeit with a slightly wild plot. Super rich, ~40-year old, founder of tech company discovers he has Huntingdon's (passed on by inheritance). Knowing he was a sperm donor in his impecunious youth, he finds out (with a bribe) he has nine children and starts trying to contact them planning to a) get them tested and b) leave his wealth to them. But as he does so they start being killed. Lots of good twists and innuendo's as to who might be behind this before those remaining get their deserts.	501 2021
Mar 22	End of Spies [RP#4]	Alex Gerlis	3	Prince and Hanne (now married) in mid/late 1945 on the track of vicious spoilt Nazi officer (instrumental in torturing and killing many SOE agents), his indulgent but clever senior Dad who grabbed lots of incriminating details on fellow Nazi's to mitigate things when the allies won, and an escape route to S. America or Africa. Usual simple linear plot, a bit repetitive and padded out at the beginning. Leaves things open for a follow on, despite the title and denouement	K 375 2021
Mar 22	Empireland	Sathnam Sanghera	5	Gave up after starting chapters were rambling, personal, anecdotal on India only	216 2021
Mar 22	The Gun, the Ship, and the Pen: Warfare, Constitutions and the Making of the Modern World	Linda Colley	5	Too earnest.	424 2021
Mar 22	A Vision of the World	John Cheever	4	Series of pretty dull stories mostly set in affluent rural/suburban commuter town near New York. Only slight exception being "The Swimmer" (made into film), largely because it had an ending, whereas the rest just petered out. Goodness knows why he had the reputation of a great writer.	1947 2020
Mar 22	Distant Star	Robert Bolano	5	Highly academic/literary tale of poets in Chile around 1973 coup time. Too abstruse, and crazy that I read nearly half way through this slim volume.	164
Mar 22	Out of Time	David Klass	3+	Above average thriller. "Green Man" is a super-clever and careful Climate Change activist who blows up a series of high profile carbon-related installations, avoiding as much collateral damage as possible, agonising over those who are killed, and issuing explanatory statements urging the world must stop using fossil fuels. The FBI make little progress finding him until a junior, but also super-smart, data analyst gets into Green Man's mentality and eventually traces him, with little or no help from his bosses. Lots of high adrenalin hunting and good conflicts as the FBI agent supports the Climate Change arguments. At times a bit laboured, but the position of the "baddy" doing what he does for good reason permeates the plot.	K 361 2020
Mar 22	Providence Lost: The Rise and Fall of Cromwell's Protectorate	Paul Lay	5	Decently written, but just didn't keep me interested.	283 2020
Mar 22	Black Gold: The History of How Coal Made Britain	Jeremy Paxman	3	Slightly rambling (particularly in the first half), collection of vignettes with no special connection, but a decent read. Britain's massive coal reserves enabled its industrial and world dominance (with obscene fortunes for those lucky enough to own the surface land that gave them the right to what was under it). But, it was always an awkward industry with geology meaning that the cost of extraction varied wildly from mine to mine; this marred industrial relations which always pined for a national wage rate that ignored this.	353 2020
Feb 22	Gull	Glenn Patterson	3-	Filmsy novel set round DeLorean Motor Corp's (DMC) brief life, but would, I think, be hard work if one didn't already know something of DMC's history. Packed with real characters, but set round two invented ones - a DeLorean right-hand man shipped to Belfast and a feisty Belfast woman working on the production line.	K 352 2016
Feb 22	10 Minutes 38 seconds in this Strange World	Elif Shafak	3	Grim tale of Turkish woman (and one male and four female friends, one trans), pretty much forced into prostitution in Istanbul to escape her rural misogynistic traditional family. Covers her life from child to being murdered at ~40. The title refers to the period after death when brain signals are still detected, and the book is structured round her brain retelling her life.	306 2019
Feb 22	The Missing	Jane Casey	3	Decent whodunnit about two missing children 16 years apart. First the 12-year old brother of 8-year old girl, then, a 12-year old girl who is pupil of the now English teacher who was the 8-year old. The English teacher both finds the body of her pupil and gets heavily into finding who did it - as ever a final chapter twist means it's not the warped types we've spent most time with.	477 2010
Feb 22	Exit	Belinda Bauer	3+	Light and amusing murder mystery set round (mainly pensioner) group of "Exiteers" providing arms-length assisted dying support to those wanting it. Things go wrong when he and a colleague kill the wrong man, triggering an extensive and highly twisty storyline. Not sure I followed all the detail (possibly because of a few small inconsistencies in the plot) but a most enjoyable read.	K 326 2020
Feb 22	Elizabeth is missing	Emma Healey	5	Forgetful / Alzheimer's old woman losing time and things, and fretting about a possibly fictitious missing friend.	275 2014
Feb 22	Let me tell you about a man I knew	Susan Fletcher	4	Slow and dull starting book of imagined interactions between Van Gogh and Jeanne Trabuc the wife of his warden when he was in the asylum near Arles (he painted both of them). She becoming slightly besotted by VG and slowly coming to terms with a constrained marriage as she talks with him and appreciates his painting.	261 2016
Feb 22	Black Out [IT#3]	John Lawton	3+	Troy on the trail of rogue OSS officer killing communist-linked scientists during 1944. Lots of near death experiences and some steamy relationships with the feisty woman working with the officer and the upper crust London beauty doing the deeds. Again, little or no reference to the other books, so maybe this series doesn't need to be read in any particular order.	K 353 1995
Feb 22	Madhouse at the End of the Earth	Julian Sancton	3	Story of remarkable Belgian Antarctic 1897/99 expedition, which spent over a year trapped in ice before escaping by the skin of their teeth. 19-man crew (2 of whom died during it) include Roald Amundsen and a bizarre (in later life at least) doctor Frederick Cook.	307 2021
Feb 22	Bewilderment	Richard Powers	3	Another scientifically (maybe some pseudo) laden engagingly written book. Academic astrobiologist dad with delightfully bright autistic 9-year old son, widowed a few years back from inspirational wife. To avoid proposed psychoactive drug treatment, lets colleague plug son into some brain scanning device to connect to Mum's scans and reduce his hyperness. All while researching distant (fictional) planets and earth flora and fauna.	278 2021
Feb 22	I Know What I Saw	Imran Mahmood	3	Mystery thriller starting with (once affluent) homeless man, Xander, being beaten up by a fellow drifter and then (apparently, as it turns out) hiding in unlocked Mayfair flat where he then witnesses a murder. Lots of twists as his fogged brain and police arrests eventually explain all. Sara Helen gets lots of credit as Editor. Some q's for her one day: - how old was Xander? From the 30-year gap, he must have been at least 60, which one wouldn't guess - how/why would the police take so much note of a fragment of LP produced late in the proceedings by Xander himself	255 2021

Books

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Feb 22	Local woman missing	Mary Kubica	3	Another before/after thriller slowly unpeeling who did what to whom. Starts off-puttingly with kidnapped 6 year old girl escaping from cellar 11 years later, but the many subsequent plot twists make for decent read. Well delineated characters and chronology throughout.	350 2021
Feb 22	The Old Curiosity Shop	Charles Dickens	3-	Saccharin little Nell (14 year old granddaughter of now-gone-mad Grandpa shop ex owner) fleeing with now useless (and gambling ruining) Grandpa from evil dwarf Quilp. Worshipful servant Kit pines for her. Death of both in the end. Would have made a vaguely decent book if not brought down by Dickens' endless over-wordiness.	K 1841
Feb 22	Fatherland	Robert Harris	3+	Grim tale set in 1963 world on the eve of Hitler's 75 th birthday, where the Nazi's won WW2. Good detective story with disaffected SS officer investigating series of deaths of all those who had been at Goering/Heydrich's 1941 conference about the Final Solution. Using this, and much other real material, to further cover the horrors of Nazism.	502 1992
Feb 22	The Honorary Consul	Graeme Greene	3-	Botched political kidnap in Argentina by educated Paraguayan (I think) discontents take titular British non-official hostage instead of (I think) US Ambassador. Anglo doctor (of Argentinian mum) is the main character and both lover of the HC's (native) wife and his friend and they all end up in isolated village hut with military/police surrounding them with ultimatum to release HC or be killed. Lots of religious aspects; one of the kidnappers was a priest, and is a good friend of the doctor who ends up dead while HC survives.	335 1973
Feb 22	Rush of Blood	Mark Billingham	3	Three English couples meet in Florida resort, where young girl goes missing on their last-but-one day. Initially slow, as the rather dull suburbanites characters are established, but as it becomes clear that one of them probably did the deed the usual slow un-peeling of which one it was happens, with, the to-be-expected twist at the end. All pretty un-believable, particularly the tie up between US and UK cops.	467 2010
Feb 22	Bitter Wash Road [PH#1]	Garry Disher	3	Constable Paul Hirsch has been exiled to a small, one-copper, outback town 3 hours north of Adelaide after informing on corrupt city police. Gets mixed up in same again - a mix of paedophilia, corruption, brutality (particularly to Aborigines). Good wide open spaces feel, if rather over the top set of deaths and misdoings.	K 416 2013
Feb 22	Burmese Days	George Orwell	3	His first novel based on his five years in Burma in the 1920's. Pillorying the white colonial behaviour to each other and the natives. Weak 35-year old single man who prefers non-white company to the boorish lot at the club, falls for 22-year old girl who's staying with aunt and uncle after being orphaned, but is as superficial and "white" as the rest.	332 1934
Jan 22	Lincoln Highway	Amor Towles	2	Delightful (long) life/road story of two pairs of young lads crossing 1954 USA. Emmett, just released from a young offenders reform school/farm because his Dad died leaving a bankrupt mid-west farm, heads off with Billy his 8-year old super bright brother to look for their Mum who walked out some years ago. The other pair, Duchess and Wooly escaped from the reform school when Emmett was released. The four of them get to New York meeting a wide mix of endearing characters, pay back some grudges (to and from themselves), get into all sorts of scrapes before Emmett and Billy head off into the sunset and Mum search. The roguishness and often rough justice has the feel of Cannery Row or Huck Finn.	576 2021
Jan 22	Harlem Shuffle	Colson Whitehead	3	Rather jargony, slangy and New York centric tale set in ~1960 Harlem. Young black furniture salesman/entrepreneur with side line in fencing stolen goods is dragged further to the latter by his feckless cousin. Main man survives the gangsterism, corruption and intimidation but cousin inevitably dies in the end.	320 2021
Jan 22	Siberian Red [IP#3]	Sam Eastland	3	Another samey, laboured sleuthing tale. This on the eve of WW2 mainly in Siberian Gulag camp/mine where an erratic Stalin dispatches Pekkala to find out a) who killed an erstwhile white Russian inmate and b) locate residue of Tsar's gold which the inmates cronies knew about. As with other books, P has ludicrous Russia-wide reputation as super sleuth and is forever bumping into folk he has known over many years. Would mark this as a 4 except that the fascinating afterword about the real history the book is threaded round is worth a read. In 1917/19 Russia and Siberia were a melting pot of White/Red armies and a large one of Czechoslovaks variously fighting Germans, Bolsheviks and others in some complex political mess (this was before Czechoslovakia and the two races were just stateless groups from the Austria-Hungary/Germany empire). The Czechoslovakian army were also moving the Tsars massive gold reserve out east, but were eventually forced to surrender it to the Bolsheviks.	K 324 2012
Jan 22	I Spy : my life in MI5	Tom Marcus	3	More bio from this ex-MI5 man. Further detail on his miserable childhood and PTSD burn-out, in very similar vein to "Soldier Spy".	291 2019
Jan 22	The Moth and the Mountain	Ed Caesar	3+	Remarkable story of man who became obsessed with being first to climb Everest. He had no climbing experience at all. His initial attempt was to fly a Gipsy Moth half way up and go from there, which he started in 1933 with only a few months flying training. He made it to the Himalayas with plenty of adventure (loads of bureaucracy and travel restrictions in the way) and then disguised himself as a Tibetan monk to get to the northern approach in spring 1934. Inevitably his lack of experience and kit led to his death, despite his Christian (Science) beliefs, mysticism and asceticism which helped him endure amazing privations. Slightly over-padded with background on his WW1 experience and wild love life.	227 2020
Jan 22	I am China	Xiaolu Guo	3-	Scottish female translating diaries and letters between two young anti-establishment Chinese, starting around Tiananmen (1989), ending in 2013 not long after the Jasmine revolution (2011) when he was exiled. Very ragged and far too fragmented chronology was hard to keep up with, but gave some flavours of Chinese oppression - from which both characters escaped to the West.	370 2014
Jan 22	A Long Petal of the Sea	Isabel Allende	3	Long saga of life and loves of left wing Spaniards, starting with the Retreat from Catalonia as Franco wins and starts taking his revenge. Moves on to Chile (the Long Petal of Pablo Neruda much quoted poems) which they get to on SS Winnipeg a boat chartered by Chile (with PN's organisation) to help such Spanish emigres to a new life. They there rub shoulders with Salvador Allende but then suffer persecution when his 3-year presidency is overthrown in 1973 by Pinochet. Good on the two countries nasty fascist regimes, but I found the central love and death themes were over-egged and too long.	K 319 2020
Jan 22	A Country Road, A Tree	Jo Baker	4	Novelised telling of Samuel Becket's time around WW2. Irritatingly told in arms length third person style and never actually telling you it is about SB - just an Irish writer whose friendships with real folk (like James Joyce) was true. First half very dry, gets a bit better at half way when SB (a Francophile and long time French resident) starts working with the Resistance. But ultimately it was just another bit of flannelled WW2 atmospherics.	331 2016
Jan 22	Hamnet	Maggie O'Farrell	5	Dull fictionalised tale of life and young death of Shakespeare's son, Hamnet.	367 2020
Jan 22	The Catch	Mick Herron	4	"Slough House Novella", brief and only tenuously linked to other books. Some old spook coerced into exposing some faked photo of Prince Andrew and a teenage girl in the Epstein milieu, I think.	105 2020
Jan 22	Fall : The mystery of Robert Maxwell	John Peston	3+	Fascinating story of this ebullient, needy, and frequently incredibly rude man. If it wasn't a biography it would be a great novel. Not at all clear how he raised so much money or why so many people revered him so much until, after his death, his crookedness was exposed.	288 2021
Jan 22	House of Correction	Nicci French	3+	Slightly off-the-wall woman in prison for murder of neighbour found stabbed to death in her garden. She's recently returned to the isolated village where she grew up. But, being severely depressed on the day, she remembers no salient details. Her lawyer recommends pleading guilty to manslaughter to reduce sentence, she refuses knowing she's innocent and conducts her own trial, doing (some) preparation from prison. One comment classes book as a "locked room mystery", which it appears to be; all evidence is that she was the only person near her house at time of death (a storm had brought a tree down cutting off the village) and the victim abused her years ago when he was her teacher. But fiendish plotting (and her increasingly competent lawyerly work in court) finally get her off and (privately) show who did it. Some of the fine detail didn't hold up for me, but a great read!	513 2020
Jan 22	Ring of Spies [RP#3]	Alex Gerlis	3	Next Prince-ery. Chasing German spies in England towards the end of the war lead by senior-ish Army man feeding troop deployment detail to the Germans which (fictionally) helped Germans at Arnhem, Bulge/Ardennes and the allies at Remagen (due to deliberately falsified map info fed by Prince and co). But, slightly wooden, naive, and repetitive with ridiculous coincidences leading the trail of pursuit making it a bit less satisfying than the first two books.	K 376 2020
Jan 22	The great Post Office scandal	Nick Wallis	3+	Long depressing expose of the scandal so far. A bit over-detailed and pernickety to make it an easy read, but an excellent reference book for the PO's dreadful behaviour - still not properly compensated for or resulting in any accountability from the plethora of PO employees (from CEO down) who propagated it (and whose culture continues little changed).	480 2021

Books

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Jan 22	The world that we knew	Alice Hoffman	3	Part fantasy part historical covering escape of (some) Jewish children from Berlin and Paris during WW2, many via Le Chambon-sur-Lignon (covered in Moorehead's "Village of Secrets"). Well told, though the fantasy/magic of a human-like Golem (Jewish folklore creation from clay) was rather distracting.	365 2019
Jan 22	The Strangler Vine [BA#1]	M.J. Carter	4	Loosely based on real events in India/Calcutta in 1837 round the all-powerful East India Company and promotion/existence of Thug gangs. Grossly dragged out and over wordy, with little story or plot to speak of, but just enough every so often to keep reading on. Mickey-mouse boys own tale of experienced odd-ball (Blake) and naive young lieutenant (Avery) searching for sympathetic poet author who has disappeared allegedly to research Thuggee's.	K 402 2014
Jan 22	A Hero in France [NS#14]	Alan Furst	3	Paris-based French resistance in 1941 getting downed allied airmen back to England. No high action or anything going wrong, but perfectly readable.	234 2016
Dec 21	Gravity's rainbow	Thomas Pynchon	5	Dense, impenetrable, somewhat stream-of-consciousness set mainly in 1944 UK with US overtones. Just readable by rushing it, rather than trying to follow each complex sentence. But too massive to do so to the end!	902 1973
Dec 21	A thousand ships	Natalie Haynes	3-	Plodding retelling of (Greek) myths in the 10 years of, and leading up to, the fall of Troy, and 10 years thereafter. Pretty much all the names one has heard are involved (Odysseus/Ulysses, Priam, Helen, Hector, Paris, Achilles, Hecuba, Cassandra, etc). Amazingly gory and bloodthirsty shenanigans throughout. Book is plaudited for covering this from a female, rather than male perspective.	340 2019
Dec 21	Inside Enemy [CT#4]	Alan Judd	3	Charles Thoroughgood, just recalled to head up MI6, becomes almost sole operative solving three linked issues: murder of two of the people (the other two being CT and someone long dead) involved in getting Russian spy imprisoned several years ago (who has escaped a few months short of his due release date), power, internet and other intermittent system failures due to rogue network hacks, and disappearance of UK nuclear submarine. Decent read for the first 75% but degenerates into a scrambled, over-the-top, one-man-solves-everything ending.	326 2014
Dec 21	Lake Success	Gary Shteyngart	3-	Unappealing rich mid-40's NY hedge fund manager and expensive watch freak does a runner from job (and court suits over unethical dealings), wife and (loved) autistic kid. Does a road trip on Greyhound buses scraping by (he's had to ditch his unlimited credit cards) to find his college girlfriend. In parallel his Indian-origin wife starts affair with neighbour/friend with similarly aged son. Readable, but not pleasantly so due to the ghastriness of the over-morbid classes, life discovery type book with 2016 Trump election in the background.	335 2018
Dec 21	Wild Shores [DL#2]	Maria Adolfsson	3	2 nd in the series, with rather slow start-up covering some of the back history of the characters. Story opens with man found dead in a reservoir near the Whisky distillery on the north island of the fictional Doggerland archipelago. His unpleasant nephew is found murdered a few days later. The high-speed helter-skelter crime solving gets going, with, at the end, the obligatory knife edge as cop Karen is locked in wine cellar by the perpetrator she has just figured out and manages a far fetched escape, killing him with a corkscrew. Atmosphere, environment and backstories of the main characters cover more pages than the murder solving.	K 459 2019
Dec 21	The Accomplice	Joseph Kanon	3	Nazi hunting in 1962 Buenos Aires. Nephew of famed Auschwitz survivor chasing an allegedly dead senior camp doctor/torturer, right hand man of Mengele. Incidentally seduces the target's daughter who, though deploring her father's past, is helping him survive his post-death life - all a bit implausible/convenient. Quite a bit about Argentinian politicking around the many German/Nazi exiles and Peron (ousted in 1955) comeback plotters.	324 2019
Dec 21	A Room Made of Leaves	Kate Grenville	4	Disappointing tale spun round a real life Devon woman, Elizabeth Macarthur. After succumbing to local not-wealthy soldier, John, they married in a hurry. His ambition (mainly for money) took them to an only-just-settled Sydney Cove, where he/they became the wealthiest landowners in NSW, pioneering (Merino) sheep farming. Sadly, 95% of the book has nothing about this and is just trivia and tittle tattle (they only get to Sydney 1/3 rd through the book).	317 2020
Dec 21	Lie beside me [JS#3]	Gytha Lodge	3	Dreadfully hungover woman wakes up in bed at home with dead body she doesn't know next to her. She's a habitual over-drinker frequently unable to remember what happened when drunk (as in this case). Endless twists and turns for DCI Jonah Sheens to pursue. Lots more team backstory too, particularly the recently transferred from Birmingham female cop, Hanson, being harassed by her ex.	372 2021
Dec 21	The Reservoir Tapes	Jon McGregor	4-	Dull as dishwater snippets of lives (ever so slightly) interlinked with those of Reservoir 13. No resolution to any of the dangling tales (especially the missing girl). Can't think why I read through it (tho' it was mercifully slim).	166 2017
Dec 21	After you'd gone	Maggie O'Farrell	3	MoF's first book. About love and bereavement crossing three(+) generations of N. Berwick based family. 30-year old woman is in a coma after deliberately walking in front of a bus a day or so after an impetuous dash to Edinburgh and back from her London home. Her and her Mum's and Grandma's back stories told in fragments. Each a page or so long, with no formal chronological setting, though the detail cleverly lets you figure out most time-frames OK.	372 2000
Dec 21	Bad Blood	John Carreyrou	3+	Pretty sickening tale of Elizabeth Holmes' hubris and her Therasno blood testing mirage. It's amazing how her charisma and salesmanship kept things going for so long (2003-2016) despite endless lying, cheating and vile treatment of any employees who crossed her (presumably why so many bright technicians didn't blow the whistle on her clearly flawed system). Also how so many luminaries (Kissinger, Murdoch, inter alia) helped keep the sham going. Decent reporter-y readable book, bit too prone to overlap chronology by focussing on characters.	301 2018
Dec 21	Saturday Requiem [FK#6]	Nicci French	4	More largely dull or ridiculously gory and creepy Frieda Klein. Decides to solve problem of 30-year old woman who's been locked up and abused in a mental hospital for 13 years after admitting brutally killing her Mum, loved younger brother and step-Dad. FK knows better and eventually solves what happened. There's the obligatory brief bit of Dean Reeve-ry to drag the same-old storyline onto, presumably, a Sunday denouement.	390 2016
Dec 21	Sea of Spies [RP#2]	Alex Gerlis	3	Richard Prince off to Turkey, then Czechoslovakia in 1943/44 documenting route of Chromium exports from Turkey to Germany to, ultimately stop Turkey shipping this vital-for-armaments mineral. All while leaving UK police to find his lost 5-year-old son. Scrapper telling than the first book, but readable.	K 376 2020
Dec 21	Our Man Down in Havana: The Story Behind Graham Greene's Cold War Spy Novel	Christopher Hull	3	More a history of Cuba in the 50's and 60's woven round the GG book (and filming thereof the year after, which was mired in revolutionary government restrictions); an interesting read and glad I read it soon after the that. Giving good summaries of Bay of Pigs ('61) and Missile Crisis ('62). GG and various siblings in (to various levels) SIS before and during WW2. Quite a lot of speculation of his SIS involvement on his Cuba visits there (before and after book published in '58) and overblown hints of prescience in, for instance, the invented structures in the hills (drawn from vacuum cleaner parts) vs those that triggered the Missile Crisis. Also laboured links to, eg, WMD in Iraq from out-of-control spies. GG a big friend of Kim Philby (and more extrapolation that Harry Lime in The Third Man was named after him, whose first name was Harold, and Lime/Greene). GG spent a long time trying to meet Castro, only succeeding twice in the end, and was an active hustler in Britain via politicians and the newspapers appalled at the US and UK arms support for Batista against Castro. Interestingly, Castro was not 100% Soviet-linked in early post revolution, but was pushed that way by US/UK cold shoulder.	292 2019
Dec 21	Dear Life	Rachel Clarke	3	Highly readable series of vignettes on dying and death by this very articulate, caring and wise ex-journalist palliative care doctor. The book threaded round her Dad's (he also a doctor) life and death from cancer. Slightly odd that all her patients seem to be from loving supportive families/couples and virtually all NHS staff super hard working, considerate, etc.	313 2020
Dec 21	Our Man in Havanna	Graeme Greene	3	Good tongue in cheek tale of pseudo spy in 1950's Cuba. Arm-twistingly recruited by numply in the British secret service, Wormold, a vacuum cleaner salesman, decides to play the game inventing agents and discoveries to get funds to pay for his young daughter's further education. Takes a long time for the phony reports to be picked up on, by which time his bosses are too locked into his wonderful information that they have to pension him off quietly.	225 1958
Nov 21	Between the Woods and the Sea	Christopher Bacon	3	Delightful extensive visitors book for basic cottage on Ardtornish estate on the side of the sound of Mull.	202 2010
Nov 21	The Rising Tide	Sam Lloyd	3-	Set in fictional Cornish fishing village. Husband with failing business takes family yacht out into imminent storm, and it's soon apparent he's also taken the family's two kids (17-year old and 6-year old). Yacht found drifting with no-one aboard. Wife rushes round trying to fix/understand, quickly realising that her past is linked in some way. Husband is rescued, almost dead, claiming he killed the kids. The girl is washed up some days later. Good thriller with massive number of twists, but far too many in the end, and the drama level is cranked to a silly level, all coming down to the totally unconvincing 20-year old grudge of a casual lover.	K 392 2021

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Nov 21	The Island of Missing Trees	Elif Shafak	3	Sentimental tale lightly woven across the recent history of Cyprus. Flits between the civil war in 1974, where teenage couple (he Greek, she Turk) manage to have a covert relationship with the help of another Greek/Turk gay couple who run a bar with a fig tree in the grounds. Relationship ends when he is shipped to London by his family. Then in early 2000's when the couple meet again and in late 2010's with her recently dead and their daughter learning their history in a roundabout way. Rather contrived use of the fig tree to relate much of the background history and story linkages and perhaps too much on the natural world.	347 2021
Nov 21	The Collini case	Ferdinand von Schirach	3	Another great, slim, succinct tale. 60-year old man of Italian heritage living in Germany for decades arranges to meet an 85-year old industrialist, brutally murders him and gives himself up refusing to say why he did it. His young defence lawyer (initially conflicted because the victim is a good and long standing family friend) manages to flip the case by revealing that the victim had a very nasty Nazi history during WW2.	187 2011
Nov 21	Hurdy Gurdy	Christopher Wilson	5	Set in ~1350 monastery, fantastical time jumping something or other to do with repressed 16-year old monk and the plague.	247 2021
Nov 21	Riptide [IT#2]	John Lawton	3+	1941. (Fred) Troy and an American captain hunt down a senior German officer who has (just) escaped to London and gives full details of, and date for, Hitler's impending Barbarossa invasion of Russia. Lots of good sub-plots on the way as the German is being hunted by skilled (pro) Nazi assassins and the American has to work round his very unhelpful colleagues, as well as share (and in the end win) the favours of the beautiful nymphomaniac East End police sergeant, Kitty Stilton, with Troy.	320 2001
Nov 21	Black River [TM#3]	Will Dean	4	Hot summer 24 hour day Swedish thriller. Tuva Moodyson now lives in Malmö, but zooms back to Gavrik when best friend Tammy goes missing leaving her mobile food van open, money, handbag, car all still there. Far too drawn out and with overmuch background atmosphere filler and ambient detail and, as in previous books, nonsense situations. With a summer setting, the bitter cold weather challenge is replaced with overbearing heat, bugs, stinging, mosquitoes and ticks.	K 389 2020
Nov 21	Slough House [SH#7]	Mick Herron	3	Same old reliable mix of humour and reject spook nonsense. The office and political politicking too complex for me to follow, but the Jackson Lambery as good as ever.	307 2021
Nov 21	The Volunteer: One Man, and Underground Army, and the Secret Mission to Destroy Auschwitz	Jack Fairweather	3+	Extraordinary, tragic, and grim telling of a Polish officer, Witold Pilecki, who voluntarily went into Auschwitz in 1940 to expose/document what was going on. He was part of the wide-ranging Polish resistance army/movement formed after Hitler invaded. Polish motivation and loyalties were wide ranging and conflicting on Communism, Fascism, "Pure" Catholicism, (anti)Semitism, and sorely stretched with Stalin going from German ally to enemy. WP was anti-Communist and appalled by Jewish treatment. He was 3 years in the camp, things getting slightly better for him after the first year of near starvation and death from brutality and severe illnesses (maybe as the focus at Auschwitz shifted from mainly Polish and German undesirables to killing first Soviet POW's from 1941, then Jews, particularly from the 1942 "final solution"). He seemed able to wangle less debilitating work shifts and organised a network of Poles to disrupt Nazi work and potentially break out. He catalogued the grotesque German barbarity: daily shootings (and, later, gassings), lethal (phenol) injections, folk left naked outside to freeze to death, beating to death by (often Polish or Jewish) Kapos. Somehow he and his followers documented these atrocities and communicated back to his HQ in Warsaw (via released prisoners; didn't know there were any!). But not getting the go-ahead for the break out, he escaped himself (with two others) in 1943, managing to get back to Warsaw. There he was a major player in the Battle of Warsaw in 1944 where the Germans, having been almost thrown out by a Polish uprising inspired by the false reports that the Russians were about to arrive, returned in force to destroy the city and murder hoards of its residents. This, in the grim real-politic of the time, happened because Stalin refused to step in, wanting Poland destroyed ready for him to take over. With WW2 over, WP wrote up more of his information and, as a fervent Pole, joined up with General Anders in Italy wanting to liberate their country from Russian ownership. He returned to Warsaw undercover but was eventually found by the Russians, tortured at length, put on a Soviet show trial shot in May 1948.	390 2019
Nov 21	Second Violin [IT#1]	John Lawton	3	First (chronologically, 6 th by publication date) of Inspector Troy series set in late 1930's and into WW1. Rather arbitrary set of complex separate mini plots weaving history and characters together. I was a bit confused by the Troy brothers (sons of Russian emigre eminent newspaper baron):- Rod journalist (and second violin player) got himself interned in Austrian (?) camp by the Nazis after Kristallnacht, eventually escaping with various Jewish prisoners to UK. There they were all interned in camp on the Isle of Man, where Rod organised the others, including education lectures whose descriptions give the book a mechanism to cover politics, nuclear science, evolution, inter alia. The other brother, Fred, confusingly mainly referred to just as "Troy", was a journalist briefly but then policeman for some years in the East End before being talent-scouted as a murder detective. When not screwing lovely ladies he investigates a series of murders of East End Rabbis who all signed an unpublished plea to incarcerate a bunch of nasty prominent rampant right-wing types.	K 433 2007
Nov 21	City of Devils: The Two Men Who Ruled the Underworld of Old Shanghai	Paul French	4	Describes the seedy side (maybe all!) of Shanghai in the 1930's. Focussing on two figures, coming from nothing to be major players in the corrupt and violent demi-world of gambling and nightclubs - Jack Riley (slot machine king) and Joe Farren (dancing girls and nightclub owner). Both of whom came to ignoble ends - along with some of the equally corrupt US police chasing them. Sadly the annoyingly chatty, gossipy, breathless, flyboy prose overwhelms the modest amount of history and politics covered. The book ends in 1941 with the Japanese in full domination (having been semi-occupiers for years since their invasions of China), meting out vile sadistic treatment to, for instance, JF because he'd not bribed them enough.	276 2018
Nov 21	Dead Lock [ND#8]	Damien Boyd	3	Tried, trusted and totally undemanding. Nick Dixon and his almost-wife (DCI Jane Winter) solve an involved case of kidnap, ransom, revenge. Two 10-year olds who go to same school kidnapped days apart. One turns out to be deliberate distraction for the other, which is ultimately due to unstable pissed off share holder in a failing business (with complex computer company background). Dixon and JW only appear on the scene 20% into book.	K 360 2018
Nov 21	The tobacconist	Robert Seethaler	5	Lightweight tale of 17-year old Austrian going to Vienna and further in late 30's/WW2.	234 2016
Nov 21	Long Road to Mercy [AP#1]	David Baldacci	3	Good (first) Attlee Pine thriller - a female Jack Reacher, but with a bit less whizz-bangery. She's a tall, strong, heavily trained and smart FBI agent who's chosen to work in a one-person Arizona outpost. Gets involved in complex international plot with potential nuclear bomb hidden in a cave in the Grand Canyon. She and her (older female) secretary go off grid to solve the problem, killing a number of dubious foreign and US military types on the way. Small mention (but links for future books) to some of her troubled past where at, age 6, her twin sister (Mercy) is abducted and never seen again.	401 2018
Oct 21	Berlin Days	George Clare	3	Interesting and very well-written memoirs of his time in Berlin in 1946/47 working for British denazification military/bureaucracy (mainly of arts and media folk). He was a middle class Austrian Jew who got out to England in 1938 at the age of 17 and subsequently joined up. Though fair, rigorous and mainly sympathetic, he rages at all the Germans (and, more so, Austrians) whinging that a) they had never been Nazi supporters (when he and his colleagues often proved the opposite) and b) because they were furious Hitler that had failed. Their investigations helped by masses of forms and documents the Germans kept and failed to (or were prevented from) destroy.	219 1989
Oct 21	A Fatal Grace [GM#2]	Louise Penny	3-	Gamache again in Three Pines village. Nonsense coincidence finds him investigating two murders - one of old bag lady in Montreal, the other of unpleasant younger woman who publicly humiliates her overweight daughter, artist neighbour, and others. The victims turn out to be mother and daughter, and, via complex and poorly told Gamachery, daughter murdered Mum, and was then ludicrously murdered by her daughter by electrocution in the middle of a curling match on the local heavily frozen lake. Given how bad the flow and plot is, goodness knows why Hillary Clinton chose LP to co-write her own thriller!	K 2006
Oct 21	Sorrow and Bliss	Meg Mason	5	Bland story of young woman and her emotional/romantic ramblings.	340 2020

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Oct 21	Midnight in St Petersburg	Vanora Bennett	5	Lightweight thing, set leading up to and during Russian revolution. Didn't grab me, and I thought I wouldn't like it!	466 2013
Oct 21	The Sandpit	Nicholas Shakespeare	4	Thin, potentially interesting, tale of junior Iranian physicist working in Oxford laboratory who discovers a way to do nuclear Fusion and in a panic that he will be found out entrusts the formula to the main character, Dyer. But larded with acres of irrelevant stuff, from Dyer's past and family. The main plot didn't start until 20% in, and fizzled out well before the end. Such a waste.	429 2020
Oct 21	How to Avoid a Climate Change Disaster	Bill Gates	3	Very clear and readable summary of issues and potential solutions. Will be interesting to see what COP26 comes up with!	230 2021
Oct 21	The Wild Other: A memoir of love, adventure and how to be brave	Clover Stroud	3-	Very personal telling of the life of this wild horse-, sex-, booze- and drugs-mad woman (mainly) from her mother being rendered severely brain-damaged (more or less a walking vegetable) from a riding accident when CS was 15 until Mum's death 22 years later. Part of an unconventional family, including sisters Emma Bridgewater/Rice (ceramicist) and Nell Gifford (Circus owner who died suddenly of cancer after this book was written). Probably would have been wild without the colourful escaping the awfulness of mum's state - including a couple of years with horse traders and Gypsies in Ireland and similar as cowgirl in Texas. Mildly interesting story, but went on and seemed to be written as self-therapy with far too much information of her wild living.	K 249 2017
Oct 21	Remain Silent [MB#3]	Susie Steiner	3	Set round Lithuanian more-or-less slave labourers in UK Midlands. One is found hung from a tree. There's no sign of struggle of him being got there, and a diversionary note is pinned to him. Surprisingly little on the policing and case solving. Mostly about the miserable and gangmaster-dominated conditions the Lithuanians work in. Also lots on the side stories of Manon Bradshaw and her police colleagues' personal lives.	358 2020
Oct 21	Spoils	Brian Van Reet	3	Story of capture of three US soldiers in 2003 Iraq by (non-Iraqi) mujahideen who have gone there to fight the Americans. Main focus on the female of the three who survives the beheading meted out to at least one of the others, only to be killed by her own side in the end. Good lead up to the final events from several sides, including a long-in-the-tooth and becoming disaffected ex leader of the mujahideen with (to my ear) some sensitivity to his/their motivations. Though, as the female character says when given a Koran to read, Islam "... seems far from peaceful. The battlefield is a continuing theme ... Rivalry, feuding, and conflict make appearances in nearly every surah [chapter]. If this is a religion of peace ... I'd hate to see a religion of war". End notes say BVT served in Iraq, and his descriptions certainly sound very authentic.	255 2017
Oct 21	Niccolo Rising	Dorothy Dunnett	5	Set in 1459 Europe amongst merchants. J struggled through it and found it interesting, but the prose is very awkward and the cast of characters voluminous, so I gave up.	470 1986
Oct 21	Watching from the Dark [JS#2]	Gytha Lodge	3	Much better than the first in the series. (alleged) boyfriend using Skype sees evidence of his girlfriend being murdered. Chapters flip between then and now as DCI Jonah Sheens and team work their way round a small, but hard to keep track of, set of the victim's bosom buddies and ex lover.	374 2020
Oct 21	Prince of Spies [RP#1]	Alex Gerlis	2	Above average WW2 spy fiction woven round real events. Richard Prince, a Danish-speaking Lincolnshire detective is spotted by the secret service and sent to Copenhagen in 1942 to find out about V1/V2 rocket developments (despite reluctance to leave his young son, his wife and daughter dying in a road accident 2 years before). He gets in and out of Germany twice (once into Peenemunde from where he got details back to trigger a RAF bombing raid) before squeaking back to the UK, having got t. Lots of good dangly plot and characters to lead into the next in the series.	K 366 2020
Oct 21	Village of Secrets	Caroline Moorehead	4	Relating WW2 world and life in remote high plateau area of France SW of Lyon (centred on Le Chambon-sur-Lignon) which managed to hide lots of Jewish kids (and others) from Nazis. Might have been decent book in other hands. Again CM just throws out masses of facts, little marshalled or sensibly structured. Didn't answer how so many (possibly 1000) were hidden in such a little-populated area. Lots of harping on about the centuries of religious background of the area and people - from escaping Huguenots to extreme Danby non conformist low church cults. Castigation of the Pope, Swiss and Vichy who all helped Nazis persecute and capture Jews. Camus lived in the area 1942/3 writing The Plague.	340 2014
Oct 21	Nightblind [DI#27]	Ragnar Jonasson	3-	Ari Thor's newish boss in their small northern Icelandic town is shot and killed. Slightly tedious parallel and, for a long time, disconnected, series of extracts from the diary from an inmate in a psychiatric ward at some indeterminate (until the end) earlier time. OTT and implausible relationship troubles one between female deputy mayor and her boss and the other between AT's wife and a doctor colleague. Simplistic and wooden prose, with pedantic plotting and tale telling, but an easy read. Maybe [DI#5]?	K 216 2015
Oct 21	Rules of civility	Amor Towles	3+	Delightful, frothy and witty tale of young woman in (nainly) 1938 New York who is chums with the rich young set (though not of them herself). Lots of literary references (the title from George Washington's youthful pronouncements). The fizz of their lifestyle told with great fun and real world events (such as Spanish Civil War) lightly but respectfully included.	324 2011
Oct 21	Vaxxers: The Inside Story of the Oxford AstraZeneca Vaccine and the Race Against the Virus	Sarah Gilbert, Catherine Green	3+	Excellent write up of the ~year of creating and deploying the AstraZeneca vaccine by Oxford women key to the process. Interestingly many of the other key players were also women (and as they comment, this is two-edged - people comment on this redundantly because they're women, but also it helps encourage young girls to think they could be the same). Surprisingly no mention of Kate Bingham, the Vaccine Taskforce leader, but maybe her involvement followed on somewhat, being for the rollout (from early 2021, this books coverage stopping about then). Alternate author chapters by each author, with more repetition than was necessary. Both pushed and supported a risky (to the process, not the vaccine as they are at pains to point out) faster processes with many, but not all, working. Daunting amount of money, regulatory processes and paperwork all at high speed and very long days.	K 304 2021
Oct 21	Burnt Sugar	Avni Doshi	3-	"I would be lying," the narrator begins, "if I said my mother's misery has never given me pleasure." Antara, now an adult, cannot forgive her parent's failings and cruelties yet feels compelled to care for her as dementia takes hold. Started OK with good Alzheimer's (the most common type of dementia) stress between young Indian woman and not-so-old Mum. But then splay out into their pasts, which are not particularly interesting.	229 2020
Oct 21	The Cut	Chris Brookmyre	5	Something about a horror-inculcated film student from a deprived Ayrshire background and a woman who was in prison for 25 years.	401 2021
Oct 21	Klara and the Sun	Kazuo Ishiguro	4-	Can't think why I read to the end of this rubbish about a future world with robot ("Artificial Friend") bought by very ill girl by her Mum as companion, potential replacement.	307 2021
Oct 21	The Unfortunate Englishman [JW#2]	John Lawton	3	More of the same quartet of part time hustlers and spooks interwoven with cold war and actual events. This largely focussed on Brit/Russian spy swap with Joe Wilderness/Holderness in the fore. Good opening chapters linking up with previous book and other good tie ins, and, though a complicated story I didn't fully follow, much less so than previous book. Again, good angst about handling of ill-gotten goods once owned by now all killed Frenchmen and purloined by vile Nazi.	K 314 2016
Oct 21	Between Two Evils [ZF#5]	Eva Dolan	3	Doctor who worked at an asylum seekers detention centre is found bludgeoned to death in his house. Loads of (ridiculously rapidly) changing suspicions before a predatory/grooming colleague is fingered. All inter-twisted with residue of another violent case from Zigic&Ferreira's past with over the top rushed end to that too. All a bit long and overloaded, and an awful lot of characters/suspects. A Sara Helen (implicitly at publisher, Raven Books, Bloomsbury) credited in acknowledgments	468 2020
Sep 21	She lies in wait [JS#1]	Gytha Lodge	4	Seven teenagers spend a drunken, druggy night camping in some woods. One (14 year old younger sister of one of them) disappears. Her body is found 30 years later under a tree where one of the gang stashed 15kg of drugs. DCI Jonah Sheens leads the investigation, though he has history with the gang. Thoroughly implausible characters, ludicrous detailed memories from the remaining six 30 years later, and endless plot jerks made a pretty unsatisfactory read.	K 396 2019

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Sep 21	The Railway Man	Eric Lomax	2	Articulate, slightly nerdy, Scottish engineer / administrator with no schooling beyond 16. Joins up for WW2, taken POW in the fall of Singapore and made to work on the notorious Burma/Siam railway. Initially avoiding the worst Japanese brutality by working as engineer / admin type. Runs secret radio receivers and draws a map of the railway; both are discovered and he and five others are brutally beaten (two to death) and tortured for about 2 years. Returns from the war unable to talk to anyone about it (even his new wife; the marriage not lasting all that long), having horrendous nightmares and wanting to kill his tormentors. But ~40 years later and with a supportive second wife, he opens up to PTSD-type treatment and, by chance, makes contact with and finds forgiveness for the man he had settled his hate on.	276 1995
Sep 21	The Stranger	Albert Camus	3	A strange (in the English language sense) loner of a man in Algiers is almost absent minded sucked into killing an Arab who was hounding a neighbour of his (for perfectly good reason). His clipped, disembodied, description of events ends with musings from his cell before he is guillotined.	123 1942
Sep 21	West	Carys Davies	3	Slim and thin story set in ~1815 of pretty loopy widowed man leaving his 10-year old daughter in eastern US to find massive animals (tall as trees) after read about discovery of huge ancient bones in a Kentucky swamp. Following a similar route to Lewis and Clark, but he dies after about 3 years.	149 2018
Sep 21	Hearts of Stone	Simon Scarrow	3	Lightweight readable story set round Greek resistance to Italian and Nazi invasion of Lefkas during WW2. Starts with three teenagers just before the war: local girl and boy and a German who is there with his Dad running a historical excavation. The three meet again during the war on different sides. Interesting skim on the war from a Greek perspective, though it stopped at war's end, not getting mired in the subsequent civil war.	492 2015
Sep 21	Agent Sonya	Ben Macintyre	3+	Biography of amazing German Jewess, fanatically anti fascist, Soviet spy. First married to fellow-German (and much later also a spy), but with many lovers (including Richard Sorge) worked (as spy and spy-mistress) in many countries, including China, Poland, Switzerland and UK from ~1930 onwards. Managed Klaus Fuchs as WW2 turned into Cold War. She was driven by the extraordinary combination of ambition, romance and adventure - always putting her work ahead of her much loved children - and inspiring such respect from her agents that none ever betrayed her. As with many of her ilk, her fanatical anti fascism, made her to see communism as the only game in town, letting her ignore the horrors of Stalin's paranoid purges of so many folk she knew and worked with (amongst the millions of others) and to self-justify the Nazi/Soviet pact. Her original husband, from whom she separated early on but kept good relations with, also kept his faith in the communist ideal, despite 10 years in Gulags and much brutal torture. Why did/do(?) so many do this?? Of her network, only one (Alexander Foote) is reported as turning against the Soviet way in later times. Interesting how much money the Soviets supplied her with, and how relatively easily she and her agents could move round the world. All supported by the incongruity of mail and banking services working almost unaffected during wartime. When she eventually stopped spying she wrote lots of books (under name Ruth Werner) and a Stasi-vetted autobiography.	K 386 2020
Sep 21	Rule Britannia	Daphne du Maurier	3	Her last book, I believe. Written and published before the UK joined the (then) Common Market but set in a future world where, having done so, they Brexited after falling out with the Europeans. The economy then tanked and the book starts with the Americans invading to form a joint USUK regime. Set round a Cornish coastal village with delightfully anti-establishment 80-year old ex actress, her grand daughter, and a brood of adopted boys. Intriguing set up given our current times and not clear what DdM's views were (they seemed pretty socialist, strongly anti-USUK, but no sign of pro Europe). But beyond that conjecture, the story was a bit boys-own and thin, and with a weak ending as the Americans withdraw leaving what, who knows?	318 1972
Sep 21	Knife Edge	Simon Mayo	4	Terror thriller starts with seven journalists from a News Agency being killed across London within a few minutes of each other. Mainly led by another agency journo, the hunt for the killers becomes ludicrous, ending in Coventry Cathedral, and exposing agency boss as the ultimate perpetrator.	419 2020
Sep 21	The Crocodile Hunter	Gerald Seymour	3	Opens with old-school backroom MI5 Jihad researcher on the night of his retirement party, happening on one of his targets sat on a bench with a primed suicide vest. He soft-talks the suicider and disables his vest, and is then persuaded to not retire and stay on. The main story is him organising the capture of a returning British ISIS recruit with a history of canniness and violence. Pretty formulaic but readable, once one accepts the (all too common nowadays) irritating style of curt phrases not sentences.	K 400 2021
Sep 21	Names for the sea: strangers in Iceland	Sarah Moss	3	Telling of her and her family's (2- and 6- year old's and, barely mentioned husband) year in Iceland 2009/2010, just after the banking collapse and during the volcano disruption. Readable and interesting on the place and people: - though crime rates similar to everywhere else, doors are left unlocked and babies left in prams while Mum's shop - appalling drivers - don't believe in 2 nd hand things, preferring to trash stuff no longer wanted - pretty dire and limited food But, too much on folk who seriously believe in elves and spirits, and the whole thing seen from inside and academic bubble.	356 2012
Sep 21	Zuleikha	Guzel Yakhina	3	Fiction set amidst Stalin's 1930s purge of Kulaks (peasants with smallholding). K is attractive young Muslim Kazak, enslaved to older husband and his beloved deaf and blind mother. Accepting both their abuses. Then a de-Kulakisation squad arrives, led by merciless soldier, Ignatov who kills her husband and takes her to be shipped to Siberia. He's then made to command the transport of Z and ~400 others out east. When they get there (only a few 10's left after attrition of the journey) he's made to stay and manage them creating a work camp in the middle of nowhere with precious little equipment. After a long and laboured start, decent (but also long) portrayal of the misery of life out there, the endless Soviet bureaucracy and it's inevitable snoops, carrying the two main characters through to late 1940's.	K 428 2015
Sep 21	Police [HH#10]	Jo Nesbo	5	Couldn't get interested during the first ~30 pages.	518 2013
Sep 21	The Wicked Boy	Kate Summerscale	3	Factual story of 13-year old boy who murdered his mother in East End London in 1895. Interesting enough story, with him being found guilty, his 12-year-old brother (on whose behalf the murderer claimed to have done the deed to protect him from Mum's violence) and spending 12? years in Broadmoor. On release he became a normal and respected man, serving with distinction in WW1 and ending up living in Australia. The trial (and book) played on the evil influence of Penny Dreadfuls on young minds. The book is massively padded with not relevant, though occasionally interesting, social and lifestyle info of the time.	307 2016
Aug 21	The Heart Of The Matter	Graeme Greene	3	Senior 50-year old policeman in colonial west-African state during WW2 with his unhappy wife. He takes a loan beyond his means to let her move to S. Africa and simultaneously becomes involved with and then lover of 19-year old girl who survived 40 days after she and her husband-of-a-month's boat was sunk by Germans, killing him. Lots of Catholic angst and English middle class / native and Arab caste colour with usual GG lugubrious and slightly depressing environment!	320 1948
Aug 21	Mission to Paris [NS#12]	Alan Furst	3	Hollywood movie star (born in Austria and lived in Paris until 8 years ago) returns to Paris in 1938 to make film. Paris is thick with German leaning types spending money on pro-Nazi messaging. They try to inveigle the actor, who starts low-level unofficial spying for the US via their embassy. Decent simple read, with none of the cryptic prose of some of his other books.	255 2012
Aug 21	The Nickel Boys	Colson Whitehead	3	Telling the grim story of black kids in 1964 southern US reform school. Focussed main on one bright 15-year old, due to go to college, incarcerated after hitch-hiking in a car stolen by another black youngster. Like the Underground Railway, a pretty elliptic style with three or four chronologies tens of years after the kid escaped. And, though very unemotional in tone, CW conveys the racism, corruption, brutality and killings meted out by the staff of the school. A fiction, but based on a real school.	211 2019
Aug 21	Anatomy of a Scandal	Sarah Vaughan	3	Flipping between early 1990's wild Bullingdon-style excesses of monied Oxford students (all men) who go on to be PM and close minister in ~2016. Set round rape trial of the minister being prosecuted by female QC who, it is slowly disclosed, was also (with a different name and persona) being raped by him at Oxford. Good story, but far too padded out.	K 401 2018
Aug 21	Abide with Me	Elizabeth Strout	3-	Not particularly interesting tale set in small town in 1959 USA. The minister is struggling with his life after his wife dies of cancer, and their 6-year old daughter becomes withdrawn and disturbed. Very ES, but not as engaging as usual.	294 2006

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Aug 21	Tripwire [JR#3]	Lee Child	3	Usual high-speed stuff with JR's lightening brain getting out of scrapes. Evil money-lending man, severely disfigured (missing arm replaced with hook and badly burned face from Vietnam helicopter crash) using name of allegedly missing-in-Vietnam-action son of elderly couple. Couple befriended by JR's former army mentor, just before he dies, who has clearly found out more about son. Ends with JR inheriting house and shacking up with daughter of his mentor - so will be interesting to hear how, in the next in series (The Visitor) presumably, he gets back to his loner-on-the-road life.	541 1999
Aug 21	Stalingrad	Vasily Grossman (trans: Robert Chandler and Yury Bit-Yunan)	3	Good, massive, sprawling people-focussed telling of the first 18 months of German/Russian war (from the German invasion in June 1941) leading to the battle of Stalingrad. Stops fairly abruptly in early November 1942, six weeks into the battle (which ended with German surrender in Feb 1943). Slightly long rambling to and froing across different characters (from both sides, mainly fictional, but some actual). The Russians particularly hard to keep track of with their annoyingly multiple names (three actual plus diminutive/familiar, sometimes very different, ones - I guess the excellent translators wanted to retain the subtlety the different forms imply). Written 1943-49 and rewritten at least four times between 1949 (first publication) and 1952 as VG (who I think was not a Stalin/party type) had to follow the heavy direction from the Soviet publishing machine (editors==censors I suspect). Post-Stalin more versions were produced allowing VG to be a bit more open. Plenty of totally unnecessary stuff, but gave a good feel for the war, for Hitler's manic and unreasonable directives (the ultimate failure at Stalingrad was the first real counter to this - and certainly a key turning point in the war). Also a flavour of Stalin's appeal, being calm and inspiring - though every bit as vile as Hitler (there's a good couple of chapters on Hitler's background as a failure turned bully, with, maybe, VG subtly showing parallels between the two) - and being able to milk Russians' devotion to their motherland. The first-day (mainly air) assault on the city killed 40,000 setting it afire with incendiary bombs. Over time the Russians (with incredible bravery, and bolstered by Stalin's "Not One Step Back" order) had, in the time frame of the book, fragmented infantry and artillery spotters dug in all over the East of the city (on the West bank of the Volga), with long range artillery on the East bank of the Volga. Other notes:	K 983 2019
				- Stalin's "Not One Step Back" order forbade further retreat under any circumstances with anyone doing so being shot on the spot. That many were is not mentioned in the book, in which Stalin is little mentioned (because of later editorial pressure to minimise Stalin's role in the war). - surprising extent of rank and class in Soviet life/society, also normal/western-like lifestyle, foods, luxuries, cinemas, etc. - mind-boggling amount of movement of troops and supplies, and massive industrial, steel, engines, production with factories moved east as Germans advance across the country - Vodka, potatoes and bread as staples - Book is one of two (from original conception) the second being "Life and Fate"; not sure I have the stamina for that.	
Aug 21	The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time	Mark Haddon	3	15-year old Asperger boy finds neighbour's dog killed with garden fork and decides to investigate. Leads to him discovering that his (he was told) dead Mum is alive and separated from his Dad. Very believable conveying of the boy's Asperger behaviour, and modestly interesting story line. Wonder how they made a successful stage play from it	271 2003
Aug 21	Istanbul Passage	Joseph Kanon	3-	Super-convoluted early cold-war tale set in 1946 Istanbul. American, who does odd spook jobs for US via their embassy, involved in smuggling a vile Romanian (ex?) Nazi who wants to defect to the west with secrets on Russians. Everything goes wrong time after time, with the plot too complicated to understand properly. Also let down by his staccato cryptic writing style using clipped phrases rather than sentences.	401 2012
Aug 21	Homecoming	Susie Steiner	3	Everyday story of country folk on a failing tenant farm in N. Yorkshire. 60-year old farmer and his wife wanting to pass it on to one son, but too many problems to do so sensibly. Son is also a bit of a waste of time, with other son down south running a small garden centre. Lots of relationship toing and froing.	295 2013
Aug 21	West with the night	Beryl Markham	2	Series of delightfully-linked, very selective, autobiographical snippets up to about 1936 (the year of her trans-Atlantic flight, when she was 34) having already had an amazing life in Africa as racehorse trainer and jockey pilot. Beautiful, lyrical, evocative writing with her deep love of animals (particularly her horses and dogs) shining through. Nothing about her promiscuity and pennilessness (see, for instance, Mary S. Lovell's bio) and only fleeting mention of the Happy Valley set (Blixen, Finch Hatton, et al).	304 1942
Aug 21	Invisible Women	Caroline Criado-Perez	3	Relentless diatribe against the endless male bias in so many aspects of life. Lots of stats and crazy "how come anyone did that?" situations (eg: Far East Tsunami rebuilds that created houses with no kitchen or integrated livestock area because only men, who attend to neither, planned it). Occasional rants despite female choice seemingly the reason (eg: smartphone apps that rely on proximity to body no good because females often don't have pockets - a fashion choice presumably - so phone is in handbag).	318 2019
Aug 21	Redhead By the Side of the Road	Anne Tyler	3	Slim low key, low action story of 40-year old nerdish Baltimore man (computer repairer, inter alia). Ditched by his current girlfriend and concurrently doordropped by son of a (platonic only tho' son thinks he's his Dad) college girlfriend he hasn't seen or heard of for 20+ years. Slightly cheesy ending with most things coming good.	178 2020
Aug 21	Unsheltered	Barbara Kingsolver	3+	Good then (~1870) and now (2016) tale hung round collapsing 1880's house and family in small New Jersey town (Vineland) where well known female scientist/biologist Mary Treat lived next door to modern science teacher both avid Darwinians (she corresponded with Darwin throughout her life). Delightful families in both era's. Lots of Darwin vs Creation angst in the 1870's part mirrored by Trumpism and ecological worries in the 2016 bit. Lots of real events and people (mainly in the 1870 parts) - Treat, Landis the right-wing developer of Vineland who did shoot a rival newspaper proprietor and got off the murder charge by pleading temporary insanity, the women of Vineland holding their own parallel voting in the 1868 election.	521 2018
Jul 21	V2	Robert Harris	3	Set over 5 days in 1944 two sided tale of V2 bombing on London. German scientist and childhood friend of Von Braun (both slightly disaffected with the German war effort, for different reasons) working on the firing end. Ballys WAAF officer who survives a V2 hit and gets posted to monitoring station in Belgium where they start reverse computing the firing point from initial trajectory and hit point. Both sides' PR misinforming their nations how successful they were. Slightly weak ending.	307 2020
Jul 21	Trio	William Boyd	4	Uninspiring tale of three characters involved in making a film in Brighton in 1968.	341 2020
Jul 21	The Old Enemy [PS#3]	Henry Porter	3	Complex follow-on to the previous two. Paul Samson almost killed a couple of times, as are two old friends. All being orchestrated by an ex-Stasi torturer and super-spy now billionaire westerner using green company to front data capture. Decent but far too complicated.	K 406 2021
Jul 21	On Chapel Sands: My Mother and Other Missing Persons	Laura Cumming	4	Mildly interesting recounting of the author's Mum's background. Illegitimate with no memory of life before age 3, she was passed from Mum to Dad, including being kidnapped in 1929 at age 3 while with Dad and his wife, resulting in legal "adoption" and actual Mum going to Australia. But massively over-egged with unrelated details about luminaries from that area of Lincolnshire, and many stretched linkages to various classic bits of artwork (LC also writes about painting).	297 2019
Jul 21	Still Me [LC#3]	Jojo Moyes	3-	3 rd Louisa Clark - rather sloppy sentimental romantic. None of the bite and emotion of the first two.	469 2018
Jul 21	The Spies of the Balkans [NS#11]	Alan Furst	3	Set in 1940/41 - Lothario Greek special detective with access to government (?) funds runs a modest escape route to get Jews out of Nazi-run Germany and Poland. Not a huge amount of action, but lots of good history (presumably accurate) and atmosphere.	279 2010
Jul 21	God on the Rocks	Jane Gardam	4	Slim dull tale of middle class family at some seaside resort. Father a religious bully of unsatisfied wife and 8-year old daughter.	215 1978
Jul 21	The Quiet American	Graham Greene	3	Slim story slowly set in early 1950's Vietnam before the French left. Experienced, weary, English journalist befriended by young eager US undercover spook, who naively (I think) is assisting one of the anti-communist factions with bombing supplies. They both love the same young Vietnamese girl.	180 1955
Jul 21	The Killing Choice [FP#2]	Will Shindler	4	Ludicrous, laboured and wooden Finn&Paulsen murder mystery. Teenager in mask accosts three (originally unconnected) people offering to chose between murder of themselves or a loved one.	328 2021

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jul 21	The Liar's Dictionary	Eley Williams	4	Weak, occasionality witty, wordsmiths story with two 100-year-apart aspects of an incomplete dictionary being compiled and then digitised.	K 288 2020
Jul 21	Instructions for a Heat Wave	Maggie O'Farrell	3-	Set in heatwave summer of 1976, round Irish family living in London. Dad (not long retired) walks out an leaves his wife with no explanation. Their three kids assemble to help find what happened and slowly all their back histories are told. But, sadly they are all rather dull tales.	337 2013
Jul 21	The Committed	Viet Thanh Nguyen	3-	The Sympathizer part II. More witty, surreal, but less political stuff. He's now in Paris with his two blood brothers but almost entirely taken up with gang violence and drug dealing.	341 2021
Jul 21	Me Before You [LC#1]	Jojo Moyes	2	Delightful sentimental tale of wealthy mid-30's businessman rendered paraplegic after a road accident and a younger, from the other side of town, woman employed as his carer for 6 months (respite before he goes to Dignitas, though she isn't told this initially). Very moving and realistic-sounding descriptions of the frustrations and problems of his life, but both of them keeping up a great sarcastic repartee as they slowly become close.	481 2012
Jul 21	The Overstory	Richard Powers	3+	Sprawling eco-saga of half a dozen characters each with a tree connection. Initially separate, they slowly come together as some of them get involved in serious environmentalist activism trying to save Redwood forest fellings in Oregon. Elegiac and extensively informative about trees. One of the characters based on the real Suzanne Simard who first discovered trees communicate and cooperate with each other. Would have been 2 if not quite so long.	K 493 2018
Jul 21	English Pastoral	James Rebanks	3	Beautifully written description of, and paean to, (small scale) farming and the family, friends and associates that support him. Lots of repetition of the contradictory and not-resolved messages that big industrial-scale farming is wrecking the countryside but that traditional rotational methods aren't economic. His lucky position of having other sources of income (books, speakership's, ...) means he can run his farm fairly traditionally, with plenty of attention to wildlife and waters, further weakens the message.	277 2020
Jul 21	I am, I am, I am : seventeen brushes with death	Maggie O'Farrell	2	Riveting micro-biography woven round 17 close to death experiences in her heavily health-challenged life. Mainly for her, with Encephalitis at 8 putting her in a wheelchair for a year and expected to die (and visited by Jimmy Saville who a noble 24-hour nurse refused to leave alone with her), but some for her children, one of whom has severe allergies which can result in ghastly emergencies.	288 2017
Jul 21	I Remember You	Yrsa Sigurdardottir	4	Torrid, laboured supernatural junk. Long dead children haunting and killing folk in remote NW Iceland. Can't thing why I read it through to the end.	391 2012
Jun 21	Reservoir 13	Jon McGregor	3	Reasonably absorbing (in an Olive Kitteridge way) telling of mundane life, and the passing seasons, in a village not too far from Manchester over the 13 years following the disappearance of a 13 year old girl. Rather too many characters, and very brief mentions of them to keep on top of. Went on a bit long, and disappointing that the frisson all the way through about the disappearance is never satisfied.	325 2017
Jun 21	Land's Edge	Tim Winton	3	Slim book of childhood (mainly) memories of life on the beach and in the waves. Lovely lyrical stuff.	113 1993
Jun 21	The Shadow King	Maaza Mengiste	3-	Fiction telling something of the Italian/Ethiopian war of 1935. Mussolini invaded partly to recoup Italian pride after being ignominiously thrown out in 1890's. Plenty of horror stories of Italian brutality (throwing prisoners off cliffs, dropping poison gas, etc). Structure (over)used a fictional photographer to help describe scenes, both of him taking photos and descriptions of the photos. But the writing style was too full of (to me) pretentious fragmentary interludes and impressionistic/allusiveness. Lots of emphasis on female warriors bolstering the Ethiopian army (from MM's endnotes based on fact).	428 2019
Jun 21	The Bone Clocks	David Mitchell	5	First 2/3rds quite a decent read with loosely linked series of mini-stories. Start with Holly, 15-year old Essex girl escaping home thinking she's moving in with boyfriend. Then series of self centred upper class types who talk with similar voice. One has good Iraq war parts (with Holly's childhood friend and journo other half) and another some amusing if rather too slick literary stuff. But all threaded with futuristic/supernatural events that come to the fore towards the end when I gave up. Why does he do this what would otherwise be a decent book?	613 2014
Jun 21	Then We Take Berlin [JW#1]	John Lawton	3	First Joe Holderness/Wilderness story which introduces the characters in the 3rd book (which I had mistakenly read first), with JW, a cheeky thieving (grandpa trained) East end lad spotted by military spooks for his high IQ. Predominantly Berlin-based, switching between immediate post-WW2 with masses of black market smuggling and racketeering and 1963 when JW has been persuaded to smuggle a female scientist out on the day Kennedy visits and makes his famous speech. But, this is kyboshed by his (now ex) lover Nell who is now PA to Willy Brandt. Post-war sections are good on the complexities of compromises over Germans roles (should they be forced to recognise their countries wickednesses, who can safely be employed, ...). But other episodes in the intervening years, including the mysterious 1955 Vienna episode and throwing in a similar one elsewhere in the later 1950's. Based on several actual events - some mentioned in JL's rather full of himself end notes, which, as with the main text, has many cryptic clever-clogs allusions. Very briefly introduces Inspector Troy - which JL has written many books about. Would be 3+ if less sprawling and strung out.	K 434 2013
Jun 21	To Calais, in Ordinary Time	James Meek	5	Set in 1348 ... mixed set of folk and plague. Never got going.	389 2019
Jun 21	Uncle Tom's Cabin	Harriet Beecher Stowe	3	Very mixed anti-slavery book, but readable given it's age (written before the US Civil war). Lots of it seemed patronising and sentimental, with highly god-fearing slaves respecting their masters. But HBS also gets in many digs at the white slave owners, traders and also Northern non-slave owning but not objecting to their Southern neighbours enough. And, despite endless polemic about good Christian types, she has some good anti-religion rants.	415 1852
Jun 21	Red Snow [TM#2]	Will Dean	4	Another Tuva Moodyson. Her private life and the banal daily to-ing and fro-ing in her remote rural Swedish town are OK. But the grisly thriller plot that breaks this up from time to time is just too silly. Various folk related to the local liquorice manufacturer die or are bumped off and TM (a journo) again does the bulk of the solving, as well as being nearly killed.	K 370 2019
Jun 21	Box 88 [B88#1]	Charles Cumming	2	Lachlan (Lockie) Kite is a Box 88 (super-secret joint venture between MI6 and CIA) spy kidnapped at the funeral of a wealthy, dissolute, lifelong friend (Xavier) and held hostage by Iranian gang, who also hold his pregnant wife as surety for him to confess something. Kite was from a modest/troubled Scottish background (Alcoholic Dad dying early, Mum running a hotel on Kintyre) but got a scholarship to an Eton-alike school where he and Xavier became best friends and where, at 18, he was recruited to go to one of Xavier's family's homes in France and spy on an Iranian man who was doing some deals with X's Dad. Three strand story follows the 18-year old, the current day kidnappee and an MI5 team on his tail to rescue him. Gets pretty complicated at the end, but this doesn't detract from the flow of an excellent thriller. Book ends with enough dangly bits for a follow-on covering Lockie's life after the French episode and the current day, including his relationship with the wealthy British girl he makes out with in France whose phone call triggers the MI5 link.	482 2020
May 21	Myself and other more important matters	Charles Handy	3-	Surprisingly uninspiring and half-hearted autobiographical musings.	213 2006
May 21	Heads or Tails [ND#7]	Damien Boyd	3	More of the same detective+girlfriend+dog. Gruesome series of murders (copycat's of historical ones from Manchester) with victim stabbed and having disc drilled out of his forehead (and tossed up before him while still alive, giving the title). To do with disturbed 15 year old grown up wrong, Irish thugs and other stuff, fine detail hard to follow, but trotted on in undemanding way.	K 369 2017
May 21	Holding the Line: Women in the great Arizona mine strike of 1983	Barbara Kingsolver	4	BK's first book I think. Admittedly one-sided report on an 18+ month strike at copper mines in Arizona, almost exclusively from the perspective of women who worked there or were wives of workers. Lots of verbatim from the women, but slightly rambling and lacking clear chronology. I wasn't clear why women appeared to be the main strikers and picketers - possibly because men were more at risk of being fired if they picketed. She also makes the point that the women were better "politicians" from their domestic, etc, experience of keeping family going. No real mention of the (almost concurrent) UK miners strike.	196 1989

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
May 21	The Abstainer	Ian McGuire	3	Two-sided tale following the hanging of three Fenians in 1867 for killing a policeman (a real event) in Manchester. Mainly set there when US-based Fenian arrives to avenge this, locking horns with (Irish) policeman who runs informers to keep on top of the Fenians. After more murder and assassination, plot shifts to the US where the US guy has returned and the (now ex) policeman goes hunting him down for (mainly personal) vengeance (his nephew was tortured and killed by the Fenians). Took a while to get many Irish names clear in my head, and had a disappointing flat ending.	K 368 2020
May 21	Stranger in the Shogun's City	Amy Stanley	4	"Set in the first half of the 19th century, this story of an obscure woman's everyday struggles in what is now Tokyo", but actually slightly dull anecdotal (over) detailed life in 19th century Japan (provincial, but mainly Edo/Tokyo). Was mildly interesting: - with no wars for almost two centuries, society seemed to consist of loads of idle (upper?) middle class men (Samurai/Bannermen) doing nothing but pandering to the Shoguns rich court / household / shogunate. - ludicrously Draconian dictates from shogun - particularly chief councillor Mizuno around 1841 - massively bureaucratic country - some side mentions of much more interesting Far East history: Opium War, US forced opening of Japan (Perry) in 1870's	252 2020
May 21	Fatal Isles [DL#1]	Maria Adolfsson	3	Decent Scandi crime thriller set in Doggerland, a fictional archipelago in the North Sea (nice Herman Melville opening quote "It is not down in any map; true places never are"). Main cop, Karen Eiken Hornby, is ~50 with (slowly exposed) interesting back history. Set in late 2010's, opens with her sloping off from a drunken and unintended one-night stand with boss; a few hours later that his (long) ex wife is found murdered. Events include initially parallel story of 1970's commune, which the victim turns out to be a product of. Long and a bit laboured, slightly wooden and wordy. Rather hard to believe levels of heavy drinking and many rather typical tropes, such as case being shutdown by Hornby's inept and biased bosses with her carrying on on her own to solve it.	K 407 2021
May 21	Breathtaking	Rachel Clarke	3	Often furious recounting of the first 4 months of Covid (ends end April 2020). She's a palliative care doctor working (mainly) in a hospice; it was largely taken over for Covid cases (20 beds added to the existing 6) and she is also drafted into main Oxford hospitals to help. Interesting to be reminded of the state of affairs back then (before vaccine euphoria had taken the heat off Boris&co's dreadful leadership): - Lack of PPE, despite govt. ridiculous claims that it was shipping millions of items they were not - Overblown/lying statistics (eg: counting a pair of gloves as two PPE items) - Her hospice being 24 hours from shutting down and discharging all patients (where to?) for lack of masks, she managing to rustle up 2000 from a charity - Little or no testing; she (almost certainly) got Covid in mid-Feb and was in bed for a week and off work for another, but the NHS refused to test her (a doctor on frontline), because they didn't have any capacity to do so - Long delayed lockdown, Boris hand shaking and going to Rugby in March still - NHS underfunded meant it didn't really "rise to the challenge" it had to shut itself down to do only Covid, with dire results on everyone else.	217 2021
May 21	Shuggy Bayne	Douglas Stuart	5	Grim poor life in Glasgow, couldn't get into it.	430 2020
May 21	Anything is Possible	Elizabeth Strout	3	Another very ES book. Loads of very ordinary story-lets of current and ex inhabitants of small rural Illinois town (including Lucy Barton and family). Rather too many characters to keep track of.	254 2017
May 21	The End of the Affair	Graeme Greene	4	Dull, distantly told brief story of man who had an affair with a friend's wife during the war. It ended suddenly for some reason but they met again a couple of years later, but didn't resume and she died shortly afterwards.	160 1951
May 21	Two Sisters	Asne Seierstad	3	Depressing and factual book about two teenage sisters from a well-educated and smart Somali/Norwegian family gladly and actively going to Syria to join IS. Despite all the upset and anti-IS/extremist stance of their parents and, in particular, their articulate brother, they stayed and continued to (seemingly not brainwashed) trumpet the medieval brutality of their deranged organisation. Surprising how the Dad (on social security) was able to fund, from his Norwegian handouts, many trips to Turkey/Syria to try to "rescue" them. Though he and his Syrian contacts also made money by providing sensationalist and wrong stories and photos to newspapers (who published it, even when knowing some of it was dubious), making one wonder how much similar fake news there is. Dad becoming increasingly deranged as time goes on, but put enormous effort in - including a week in a vile cell while IS toyed with beheading him, before he managed to escape. The book went on too long with too much detail and verbatim text message transcripts, muddled (sometimes plain wrong) chronology, and too many similar names.	448 2016
May 21	Double Agent [KH#2]	Tom Bradby	3	Follows on from first Kate Henderson. The PM who is suspected Russian agent is now in power. KH gets offer to expose him in exchange for asylum for two super-rich Russians who want to defect. Reasonable, if hard to follow, story with slightly flat ending as KH resigns and cow-tows to the MI6 cover up. But, it's a rather sloppily written (several small continuity and chronology errors) and thoroughly unconvincing tawdry office sex lives, in addition to KH's own over-complex private life - now divorced with ex-husband in Moscow; her vile dementia mum, serious panic attacks and sleep deprivation all make her totally non-credible as senior spook.	K 360 2021
May 21	Trust [MS#3]	Chris Hammer	3+	High-adrenalin page-turner, 3rd Martin Scarsden and Mandy Blonde thriller. Body of man who was thought to have just robbed a Sydney bank of \$10m 5 years ago is found, triggering complex flurry of events. MB used to work at same bank and was his fiancée (long before the Silver story). Secret dining club with 30 very high influencing members involved as some, then several of them die in increasingly frenzied plotting near the end. Almost too wild and silly for a 3+!	463 2020
May 21	The Bass Rock	Evie Wyld	5	Three stories separated by centuries and decades. Too many characters thrown in or referred to with no introduction. Felt as if it might be a decent read if I concentrated a wad of time to it, but I didn't!	355 2020
May 21	The Survivors	Jane Harper	3	Set in small SE Tasmanian ocean-side beach town and a group of 30-ish year-olds, who had different involvements in a storm tragedy 12 years before when two elder brothers/fathers died apparently trying to rescue a stranded one of the survivors. In current time a waitress at the local bar is found murdered on the beach and the ensuing police investigations uncover more of the 12-year old events. Decent JH stuff, with a slight feel of Chris Hammer's Silver (because of the beach-side community). But took more getting into than usual because the characters failed to gel in my mind.	375 2020
May 21	A Net for Small Fishes	Lucy Jago	3	Turgid telling of the complicated shenanigans in early 1600's round murder, by poison, of Sir Thomas Overbury. He was close friend and supporter of Robert Carr, James I's current favourite (probably lover) who was infatuated with beautiful noblewoman Frances Howard, at the time very unhappily married for about six years (since they were 13 and 14) to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. Narrated by Anne Turner, bosom friend of Frances, who mainly organised the poisoning and was hung for it. The intrigues and factional plottings were hard to follow and fathom, as was the (by today's standards) youth of so many of these privileged, devious and little-accountable nobles and the fickle awarding and removal of regal favour. The bisexual relationships and public sexuality described didn't ring true, but maybe was?	327 2021
Apr 21	The Sympathizer	Viet Thanh Nguyen	3	Mixed, often surreal, telling of the last days of the Vietnam war and a communist sleeper agent (embedded with the US and anti-communists) who escapes to California and the embryonic anti-communist (VC) re-invasion movement. Lots of great pithy, impressionistic, almost stream of consciousness, prose and turns of phrase. But very hard to follow the complex affiliations. Covers, inter alia, the chaotic US exit from Vietnam, making of an Apocalypse Now like film. The sleeper is constantly troubled by his history of "necessary" brutal acts (torture of other VC's, assassination of others he's persuaded the anti-communist General he works for are VC sleepers) Lots of dry critique of both US and Vietnamese culture and society - including the (mainly VC) mindless dogma. Convincing, if very drawn out, end section with the (now recaptured by the VC) sleeper being horribly mentally tortured (using techniques pioneered by the CIA and US). Made me realise how little I know of Vietnam now (or then), and must read more!	K 384 2015

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Apr 21	A Buyers Market [DttMoT#2]	Anthony Powell	4	More boring coverage of the upper-class characters in this series. Won't try any more!	274 1952
Apr 21	Slouching towards Bethlehem	Joan Didion	3	Good collection of 60's essays on American life in her dry, objective and impersonal first-person narrative. The titular one is both the longest and least interesting - sort of stream of events description of Californian drug culture in the mid 60's.	256 1968
Apr 21	From fringe to flying circus	Roger Wilmut	5	Too thorough to read all the way through detailing of the interwoven set of performers and radio/TV comedy/satire shows in the 1960/70's, virtually all nurtured in Oxford and Cambridge revues. From Beyond the Fringe (Cook, Moore, Bennet and Miller) through That Was the Week That Was, The Frost Report, I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again, Monty Python to Fawcett Towers and the Goodies.	256 1980
Apr 21	The new confessions	William Boyd	3-	Dense fictional biography of a hugely self-centred and not very likeable man. Scot, born 1899, after early interest in photography sees action on the Western Front and a prison camp, becomes on/off film director in Berlin in 20's and 30's, then Hollywood (with brief reporters job in WW2) then falling foul of McCarthyism. His films mainly based on an obsession with a massive biopic of Rousseau (7-hour part I is all that gets made) whose life partly reflects his own ups and downs and sexual frissons.	572 1987
Apr 21	Missing Presumed [MB#1]	Susie Steiner	2+	Young post-grad student found missing from her house by her boyfriend - front door open, some blood and smashed glass inside, no personal effects taken. As with the next Manon Bradshaw book, a pretty wild plot (with overmuch MB sex and drink, but good other side plots, including how she came to adopt her black son) with missing girl's gay relationship and her fathers involvement in death of London chancer lad.	404 2016
Apr 21	I. Boyhood	Martin Andersen Nexø	5	First of 4 volume Pelle the Conqueror series. About Swedish boy at end of 19 th century who goes to Bornholm to work - because wages are massively higher in Denmark. Readable, pastoral feel, but rather dull.	546 1913
Apr 21	The Other Half of Augusta Hope	Joanna Glen	2+	Rich and succinctly eloquent love story of two young folk. Augusta is a bright and literary girl from a small English town whose twin sister harbours a dreadful guilt from a Spanish holiday they took with their parents when they were 12-ish, and, at 23, has a stillborn kid and a year later commits suicide. The other, Parfait, is a (Hutu) Burundian who, after the (Tutsi) killing of his father, rape of his sisters and disappearance of others, heads for Spain with his younger brother. The horrors of the journey are not covered (unlike in "American Dirt"). Most of the book follows their totally separate lives in brief parallel chapters with very occasional hints of (mainly) distressing revelations to come - revolving round the twin sisters death and that of Parfait's brother when the two of them crossed from Tangier to Spain. Slightly drawn out, but a wonderful read.	K 339 2019
Apr 21	Konin : a quest	Theo Richmond	5	History of Jewish people and families from town of Konin (in what is now Poland) during 20 th century. Perfectly readable but didn't feel I would learn anything I hadn't read many times before.	466 1995
Apr 21	The plague	Albert Camus	3	Description of Bubonic plague epidemic in (French colonial) N. African town in 1947. Very (presumably) accurate description of the illness and quarantine/deaths/treatments, sounding familiar to Covid experiences. Apparently an allegory on the suffering of the French (the townsfolk) under the Nazi's (the plague) during WW2, though I can't say I noticed that!	238 1947
Apr 21	The Devil and the Dark Water	Stuart Turton	4-	Dreadful 17 th century "historical thriller" not (as I had thought) based on Batavia's Graveyard events. Full of supernatural and massively implausible events and nonsense as huge Dutch merchant ship returning to Amsterdam from Batavia is plagued by a supposed evil spirit. Very pompous author from his end notes. Only read to end because Sara Helen was commissioning editor (and credited by ST).	K 570 2020
Apr 21	Troubled Blood [CS#5]	Robert Galbraith	3	Another great (and very long) tale with the Strike/Robin solving a massively complicated murder, with many others surfacing and a Dennis Nilsen like serial killer largely thought to be the perpetrator. Triggered by search for the 40-year past disappearance of a young London GP (leaving her 1-year old daughter), via all sorts of dodgy types and, annoyingly for me, astrology / occult clues. Loads of sub-plots, with R finally getting clear of her awful husband and the frisson between S&R continuing.	927 2020
Mar 21	Isabelle	Annette Kobak	3	Biography of Isabelle Eberhardt. Russian-parented writer and traveller in French NW Africa, died 1904 at age 27 in flash flood. Intellectual and fiercely inquisitive with anarchist background, she became a Muslim (tho' claiming she was more or less born one) and largely rejected (mainly French) western life. Cross-dressed from an early age, partly to help get around both in France and Africa. Reputation for (bi-sexual) promiscuity (which, from this book, was rife in the upper class and military world she frequented).	248 1989
Mar 21	The Hand That First Held Mine	Maggie O'Farrell	3+	Good two-couple story threaded out for first half before starting to slowly expose the links between the two. First are a 1950's/60's pair, she becoming a journalist, he a self-centred, domineering, art magazine editor who dies young. The second in the 2000's, she a Finnish artist and he a film editor.	K 386 2010
Mar 21	Flamingo Feather	Laurens van der Post	3	Boys Own / John Buchan-like adventure tale set around fictitious African tribe which evil Communists are trying to use to foment revolution on the Continent. Great warm descriptions of the people and country rescues a rather dated/wooden plot.	320 1955
Mar 21	The Last Thing to Burn	Will Dean	3+	Gruelling, ghastly tale of Vietnamese illegal immigrant sold by her people traffickers to an evil solitary East Anglian farmer who holds her as a slave. Claustrophobic and slowly menacing, with a slightly rushed OK-in-the-end ending. Very believable (to this male) grim description of childbirth and early motherhood by the male author.	K 281 2021
Mar 21	The Offing	Benjamin Myers	3	16-year old Geordie lad heads away from home for the first time just after WW2 to see the country before an anticipated return to go down the mines for the rest of his life. He comes across a delightful, much older, quietly wealthy and (in her past) well-connected woman living in a cottage just above Scarborough. They bond, and she educates him, mainly in poetry, slowly revealing her past poetess lover. Her no-nonsense, zesty and articulate dialogue is great, but it was annoying that the narrative (by him) is often flowery and over-rich when the character struggles with the meaning of many words.	260 2019
Mar 21	The Time Traveler's Wife	Audrey Niffenegger	3	Decent and poignant love story spread over decades between an American couple who notionally first meet when she is 19 and he 27. As with many books, lots of chronological to-ing and fro-ing as their history is described. But, has the massive additional twist that he time-travels, appearing in her past and future, and often with himself from two different time eras. Bit of a weird scenario, but once one has taken it on board it works OK, with good headings for the (generally brief) chapters explaining the "current" date and the age of the two. Spelling sic: only one "I" not "II" in Traveller's.	518 2004
Mar 21	The Red Coffin [IP#2]	Sam Eastland	3	Another good Pekkala murder solving. This just before WW2 when he's working for Stalin to discover who killed the genius boss of a secret new tank (the coffin) development laboratory. Assisted by his long suffering (and cultured) assistant Kirov. Lots of Tsar-era back story interlaced with real events.	K 371 2011
Mar 21	Pure	Andrew Miller	3-	Disappointing tale spun round the dismantlement and destruction of Les Innocents church and graveyards in Paris, removing 1000's of skeletons to what is now the Catacombs. The main character is the (fictitious) Engineer tasked with this, but sadly the book is largely fanciful fluff around his life, rather than detail of the works.	342 2011
Mar 21	Their Final Act [AM#3]	Alex Walters	3	Follow-on from the first DI Alec McKay book. Several more gruesome murders in and around the Black Isle, clarifying/finishing the tale of grooming and abuse of women by a syndicate of men, including their parents. Pretty formulaic and laboured with, it felt, more murders per week than in the whole of Scotland per year. Sadly there are yet more books to come.	K 314 2018
Mar 21	The Cold War : a new oral history of life between east and west	Bridget Kendal	5	Interesting book-from-a-radio-series structured as voice-overs around personal recollections of key events of the east/west politics and tensions from WW2 across the world. A bit too anecdotal and script-like for a book. Will try the podcast!	503 2017
Mar 21	Master and commander	Patrick O'Brian	3	Very sailing-detailed fiction of ambitious English commander of small warship around 1800 picking fights and doing convoy duty in the Mediterranean and N. West African coasts. Gives a good feel for the complexity of these very-many-sailed beasts and the incredible skills needed to manoeuvre them, particularly during battles - when alignment and trim are key to canon-firing, and physical contact between warships is frequently used. Also shows the weird (to modern views) honour system, where, for instance, a captured officers can live fairly normal lives in captivity having given their parole to behave. But, despite the complex and not explained details of the sail usage and my confusion as to who was fighting who in a three (at least) way power struggles between Brits, French and Spanish, this was a decent read.	402 1970

Books

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Mar 21	The Spider Network	David Enrich	3	Lengthy recounting the many venal, immoral and devious characters who rigged Libor over the years - mainly strung round the eventual imprisonment of Tom Hayes one of the more "successful" of them. Vile to read again how ghastly and grossly paid all these folk are/were and of so many other dishonest-to-a-human, but not technically illegal, things they get up to, such as "switch trades" where two banks agree to buy/sell the same thing to/from each other, with zero final ownership effect, but hefty trading fees handed to the facilitators. Though Hayes was a super smart maths oddity who made himself and his banks millions, but he became a scapegoat, and none of his (equally involved) bosses and others were indicted. Glad to read that the, thoroughly flawed Libor (eg: gobsmackingly the British Banking Authority, which ran it, didn't define clearly until ~2010 that the rate should be what banks borrow from, rather than lend to, others at) will not be used after 2021. The book in much the same breathless and fast moving mould as his "Dark Towers".	K 453 2017
Mar 21	Dutch House	Ann Patchett	3+	Mid-40's man recounting his life. Brought up in stunning house in affluent Philadelphia suburb. His Mum ups and offs when he is ~4 without word, his balsy 7-years-older sister sort of fills in for Mum. While a youngster, his Dad, a modest property owner/developer, indoctrinates him into the business but, to his and his sister's fury, marries again and then, when lad is 15 dies. At which point stepmum (who has managed to disinherit the siblings) boots them out of the family home. The man studies medicine for a long time (entirely to drain funds from stepmum's control, since Dad did leave a trust to fund his education only) but then himself becomes successful property developer and family man. Sister remains single and dies of heart attack at 52, which brings back all the folk from his childhood.	337 2019
Mar 21	House of Glass: the story and secrets of a twentieth-century Jewish family	Hadley Freeman	3	History, starting in what is now Poland around 1900, of the author's extended family and the wider persecution of Jews. Primarily focussed on her grandmother and her three brothers. They all escaped pogroms getting to Paris just before WW2. The eldest invented a successful photographic reducing/copying machine that made him rich. The middle one, ever-obedient, responded to French police summons to register himself (his brothers didn't), and was shipped to, and killed at, Auschwitz. The youngest, a tirelessly pushy/cheeky type, had a series of careers and mixed with well known artists (Chagall, Picasso) and fashionistas (Dior, Ricci), in particular as a successful Parisian couturier (opening his first shop as a teenager with virtually no money), a Resistance fighter, and later a very wealthy art dealer. The brothers virtually their sister (author's gran) to go to America, marrying a man she scarcely knew. She had a frustrated and largely loveless life, but this may have saved her life. A decent read if a bit too heavy on family details.	425 2020
Feb 21	Good as Dead [TT#10]	Mark Billingham	3+	Decent undemanding police murder story. One of many Tom Thorne thrillers. Female cop going into her local newsagent on the way to work is taken hostage (with another guy) by the Asian owner who has flipped after his son (in Young Offenders Institution for murder of a harassing white boy) is found dead, apparently suicide. Shop owner is sure this is not so, and demands TT find out what happened. Tense, chronologically linear but pretty predictable plot with enough interest to keep the pages turning.	520 2011
Feb 21	Riviera Gold [MR#16]	Laurie R. King	3	Another delightful detective fiction-on-a-fiction romp with Mary Russell and (to a lesser extent her now-husband) Sherlock Holmes. Set in 1925 Antibes and Monaco where MR comes across a recently-retired-from-Holmes-service Mrs Hudson who turns out to have an exciting and illegal past. To finance her new life, she is trying (with the aid of a bosom buddy from her youth, Lillie Langtry) to cash some bearer bonds that her crook of a father (who she worked with pre-Holmes) acquired (probably stole). Lots of high life amongst White Russians with loads of money, rich Americans and smugglers of all classes.	410 2020
Feb 21	The Tenant [KW#1]	Katrine Engberg	3-	Silly, gory but cleverly twisting Danish murder mystery. Two young friends of would-be crime writer old lady are disfigured and killed in gruesome ways mimicking details from her first book that is shared with two other reviewers online. Jeppe Køner and Anette Werner are the cops.	K 368 2020
Feb 21	All the World's a Stage	Boris Akunin	5	Too wordy mystery featuring the Russian sleuth, Erast Fandorin.	423 2009
Feb 21	Trouble is What I do	Walter Mosley	5	Something featuring a black NY private detective with Southern origins. Far too many names in the first pages.	166 2020
Feb 21	A Promised Land	Barack Obama	3+	Fascinating inside story of his entry into politics and first 2 years as President. Pretty wordy and heavy on US and World politics and events, but in a human and readable style. Amazing to be reminded/told how violently divided America was way before Trump - with the vile Mitch McConnell confounding every move and the Palin/Tea Party getting going. Also the parallels with Biden's current struggles getting Republican support with Obama's on 2008 Financial Recovery and Obamacare, inter alia.	701 2020
Feb 21	Death Parts Us [AM#2]	Alex Walters	3	Another not-too-dramatic/gory Black Isle murder thriller. A series of retired, unpleasant ex-cops being murdered. Alec McKay worked with most of them as a rookie 20 years earlier. The victims are mostly confusingly similar with issues with girlfriends/wives. Pretty complex explanation at the end (links to Irish Provo undercover in the 90's and, as ever both AM and his gay sidekick, Ginny, having personal involvements) with lots of twists - again involving the pub (and its new owners) and bright young girl in the first book. Slightly laboured plot but a decent read.	K 353 2017
Feb 21	The Traitor	V. S. Alexander	4	Lightweight and unengaging telling of the anti-Nazi White Rose movement in WW2 in novel form. Presented through a fictional member who survived. First half just regurgitates the story with no added value. Book appeared to be targetted at US high school audience.	K 339 2020
Feb 21	Five Quarters of the Orange	Joanne Harris	5	Another WW2 linked book, too much like Peaches for Monsieur le Curé for me!	429 2001
Feb 21	Ian McKellan, the Biography	Garry O'Connor	5	Not interesting.	338 2019
Feb 21	The lady in the cellar : murder, scandal and insanity in Victorian Bloomsbury	Sinclair McKay	4	Rambling telling of the (inconclusive) "facts" about the discovery of a well-decomposed body of a 60-year old woman in the coal cellar of a Euston boarding house in 1879. The affair escalated into tawdry tabloid salaciousness of sex and other murders. The main story padded out with mildly interesting essays on life in Victorian London.	310 2018
Feb 21	The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox	Maggie O'Farrell	3+	Good tale of feisty 16-year-old, pregnant, girl (Esme) confined by her conventional parents to an Edinburgh mental institution in the 1940s(?). The babe is taken from her on birth by her originally loved older sister. 60+ years later Esme is ejected from the home, which is shutting down and temporarily looked after by a 30-ish woman (her sister's granddaughter, and who also has a complex semi-incestuous family background) who originally knew nothing about her. The history of events is told in flashbacks, recollections from the now-demented sister, often interleaved within paragraphs, but reasonably clearly distinguishable.	K 290 2006
Feb 21	Drug War	Peter Walsh	5	A comprehensive covering of UK (mainly) war on drugs from 1960s. The bit I read was perfectly readable and interesting, but pretty detailed, and I didn't think I'd last to the end.	710 2018
Feb 21	Homegoing	Yaa Gyasi	4	Fragmented tales of African slaves and slavery. Told as series of vignettes over the centuries "following" two sides of originally the same Ghana/Gold Coast family. One remaining in Africa, once intermarrying with a slave. The other transported to the US. Some interesting, if slight, history, but the whole effect messed up with the attempt to link the stories through the extended family.	305 2016
Feb 21	The Doll Factory	Elizabeth Macneal	4	Dreadful lightweight tale set round the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) at the time of the 1851 Great Exhibition. Young woman becomes model, muse and lover of fictional PRB and is stalked by deranged taxidermist.	K 384 2019
Jan 21	PMSL	Luce Brett	3...	Or How I Literally Pissed Myself Laughing and Survived the Last Taboo to Tell the Tale. Raw, grisly, often humorous, description of ongoing (mainly urine) incontinence following birth of her first child. Apparently a problem for many women (and, to a lesser extent, men) - particularly, but not exclusively, following childbirth. Probably too alarming, but if not would be good pre-starting-a-family read for all women at least. Both to alert them to the horrors of childbirth generally and for support should they be unlucky enough to get the problems described.	296 2020
Jan 21	A View Across the Rooftops	Suzanne Kelman	5	Sloppy tale of Dutch sheltering Jews in WW2. J read and rejected twice!!	K 398 2019
Jan 21	Disgrace [Q#2]	Jussi Adler-Olsen	4	Unpleasant tale of six kids at upper class boarding school becoming a brutal violent gang maiming or killing others for no good reason over many years. Ends with their comeuppance as the worst of them, the girl, turns on the others after they force her to lose a child. Carl Moeller / department Q at the fore, Jackson Lamb-like rude to his 2 assistants and with Herron-like dialogue though often broken prose (maybe the translation).	K 533 2008

Books

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Jan 21	In the Full Light of the Sun	Clare Clark	3	Tale strung round dodgy emergence of Van Gogh works and forgeries in Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s. Seemingly heavily influenced by real characters with lots of detail of life in those times, including the rise of Nazism. But rather messily written making it harder to follow than it should be, and not clarifying the complex chopping and changing disagreements in the art world over the authenticity of his works.	424 2019
Jan 21	Gentlemen Rogues & Wicked Ladies	Fiona McDonald	5	Dull, trite book about highwaymen (and women), though first 50 odd pages included 20 on clothing and weapons in the 1700s/1800s. Turgid patronising prose with few facts of interest, felt like it was aimed at 12 year old school kids.	218 2012
Jan 21	Independence Square	A.D. Miller	3-	Set round the Ukrainian Orange revolution in 2004 (Kiev) and 10 years later London. Confusing relationship between British diplomat in Kiev and a younger female protestor who connects him to a sly oligarch who facilitates some back-channel information. This stops (I think) the Ukraine government military shutdown of the protestors at Russian request but also ends with the diplomat being disgraced and fired as a scapegoat for the leak. Disappointingly over-focussed on the relationship with no clear telling of the political events.	221 2020
Jan 21	Homeland	Fernando Aramburu	3-	Strangely absorbing saga (in an Olive Kitteridge way) ranging over 40 years of two, originally close, families on either side of the ETA terrorist divide in the Basque region of Spain. Father of one family was assassinated by ETA, son of the other one is a (later imprisoned) ETA hitman (who probably didn't kill the father). All sorts of ancillary plot lines, including a gay son, a daughter severely disabled by a stroke in her 40's. The narrative seemed mostly anti-ETA, with the terrorist's Mum being a particularly virulent and unreasonable ETA supporter, but there was no real information on the rationale for either side. Would have been and OK/decent book if not as long.	K 588 2016
Jan 21	The Old Man and the Sea	Ernest Hemingway	3	Short story of old Cuban fisherman in epic fight to catch a huge swordfish. It goes on for three days but he subsequently loses it to sharks, only just surviving himself.	99 1952
Jan 21	Animal: The Autobiography of a Female Body	Sara Pascoe	3+	Bryson-like mix of light touch writing with loads of detail of, mainly female-focussed, animal sexual behaviour and motivation. Masses of female bodily detail and very open personal experience (good and bad) - should be mandatory reading for all!	326 2016
Dec 20	In Dark Towers: Deutsche Bank, Donald Trump, and an Epic Trail of Destruction	David Enrich	3	Diatribes into the evils of Deutsche Bank's trading shenanigans. Largely hung round the suicide in 2014 of one of their long-standing and semi-moral senior managers, Bill Broeksmit, with lots of input from his (often drug-addled and pampered) stepson. Loads of bad-mouthing of Trump, who Deutsche continued to shower with loans long after all other banks had closed their doors to him after his serial defaulting. Readable but rather too one-sided. And, as with many of these books, depressing to be reminded of these grossly overpaid, selfish, egotistical masters of the universe.	359 2020
Dec 20	Joe Country [SH#6]	Mick Herron	3+	More of the same wisecracking prose and frightful slob- super-man Jackson Lamb. Trackings and killings (with more SH and SH-adjuncts casualties) mainly in snowy Wales and mainly to do with River and his errant Dad. A better read than previous ones in having more going over backstories (or maybe it's just because I've absorbed enough from the previous 5!).	K 361 2019
Dec 20	How to Build a Girl	Caitlin Moran	4	Bawdy tale of overweight teenage Wolverhampton girl determined to be a music journalist forcing herself into the rock&pop world in the 1990s. Some amusing and apt observations, but massively outweighed by endless sexual obsession (and, later, events).	340 2014
Dec 20	Bleak House	Charles Dickens	3-	Decent story, partly a rant against the Chancery court (maybe all lawyers) and its multi-generational Jarndice and Jarndice inheritance case, which ran so long all the monies were used up on fees. In the latter stages a reasonable who-dunnit tale as detective Bucket tracks down a murderer. But this buried amongst acres of unnecessary and (to a latter day reader) unintelligible verbosity. Hugely unbalanced episodes with, for instance, two of the exposures of hitherto parentage (Lady Dedlock as Esther's mum, and similarly for trooper George) being whizzed out in a couple of pages where totally irrelevant descriptive junk can go on for a chapter.	K 1841
Dec 20	The Silent Patient	Alex Michaelides	3+	Artist is found in her Hampstead home with her dead, shot in the face, husband. She then goes mute, saying absolutely nothing, and is institutionalised. A psychiatrist who actively got himself a job there tries to work with her. As before-and-after threads develop it becomes clear that he, with a troubled childhood similar to hers, is far from objective.	339 2019
Dec 20	The Country Girls The Lonely Girl Girls in Their Married Bliss	Edna O'Brien	3-	Trilogy covering lives of two Irish girls. First book is them in early to mid teens in their country village, and then convent, desperate to get away. Kate, the narrator of the first two books lives with a drunken father and falls madly in love with an older married man (Mr Gentleman). Baba the other, wilder, less academic one is often so vile to Kate that it's hard to understand their friendship. Having got themselves expelled from the Convent and then pretty much run away from home, the second book is mainly about a few years life in Dublin, getting there as 18-year olds. Wild life and, again, Kate falls for and shacks up with an older married man. Final book is some years later when both are in London in dubious marriages and producing a kid each.	679 1960
Dec 20	The Second Sleep	Robert Harris	4	Took many pages to realise that, though dated 1468, this was set in medieval-like post Apocalyptic future (possibly 800 years after 2022). Ruled by church, horse and carts for transport and candles for light. A young priest gets mixed up with heretics who research the previous life trying to work out how it failed (conjecture being that computer systems crashed). But, though readable, not particularly interesting.	327 2019
Dec 20	Take nothing with you	Patrick Gale	5	Didn't get past 1 st few pages	344 2018
Dec 20	Cloud Atlas	David Mitchell	4	Series of basically unconnected stories spanning centuries and told in onion (or Russian Doll) layers: - 1830s white men visiting Pacific islands covering, inter alia, the massacre of Morioris by Maoris on Chatham Islands - Englishman acting as amanuensis for brilliant, ageing, curmudgeonly Belgian composer in 1930s - American female journalist pursuing evil doing by energy company in Berkeley in (?) 1960s - Slovenly British, slightly mad publisher, evading his creditors in (?) 1980s - Two futuristic bits I didn't even read. Would have given this a "3" had these not been there!	529 2004
Dec 20	Three Hours	Rosamund Lupton	3	Gripping but over-egged thriller. Two (or three?) White Supremacists lay siege at liberal school over 3 hours of a very snowy day. Lots of cutting between characters, with a pair of Syrian refugees who the school has given bursaries and support to, at the forefront. Lots of overt Columbine (and other US) parallels.	K 307 2020
Nov 20	The Way to the Sea: The Forgotten Histories of the Thames Estuary	Caroline Crampton	3+	Snippets of the history of the Thames (mainly the estuary east of London) intermixed with the author's sailing background. Her South African parents built their own boat and sailed to the UK, arriving at St Katherine's dock in 1984 (before its, and other water-side, gentrifications). She was born later and brought up sailing on the Medway, Thames and North Sea (not always happily in her awkward teenage years). Lyrical and engaging writing, with lots of interesting history - mainly new, though plenty on the Great Stink and Bazalgette's sewers.	315 2020
Nov 20	Lila	Marilynne Robinson	3-	Third in Gilead/Home trilogy. Lila is a poor orphan who was stolen by a caring Mum figure from some unidentified place. Tells her story with dreadfully scrambled chronology (often leaping around within a paragraph) as her life takes her eventually to marrying a much older clergyman. Some touching vignettes and warm characters, but marred by the rest of it.	261 2014
Nov 20	Snowblind [DI#1]	Ragnar Jonasson	3	Young cop moves to small remote northern Icelandic town for, expectedly, a couple of years to build his career, leaving his loved girlfriend in Reykjavik. Story there mainly revolves round the local Am Dram society, where the chairman, an elderly famous author falls (or is pushed) to his death down a stairway whilst well oiled. Partner of lead actor is also found in the snow dying of knife wounds. Poorly delineated characters and plot, and nonsense scenario where the young cop does most of the sleuthing privately, not letting his boss and other cops know what he's up to. But nice descriptions of snow isolated small town and hassles of the cop adjusting to that life.	K 321 2010

Books

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Nov 20	A House in the Mountains	Caroline Moorehead	3-	Covering of the Italian resistance from Mussolini's initial removal in July 1943 until the end of WW2 mainly through the lives of four intrepid women. Hugely confusing time with, in addition to the Germans, two civil-warring parties: - the Fascists, who regained puppet power in Northern Italy under German support 45 days after July, triggered by the armistice between the Allies and Badoglio and the King (who had to flee Rome for Brindisi) - the Partisans - anti Fascist and anti-German Gross brutality throughout mainly from Germans and Fascists (but maybe Partisans' is less admitted, like the French equivalent?). Each group itself heavily divided and squabbling, particularly the Partisans with competing Communist, National and other predilections. It's always hard to understand how/why the clearly losing German and Fascist groups continued, and often, increased their horrors right up to, and beyond (CM tells of Fascist snipers still active after VE day all psyched up to die gloriously). Some of it was grabbing hostages in the hope they could be traded for leniency in post-war recriminations, but much was just pure evil. But the plethora of events, people and often unnecessary little anecdotes made it an unrewarding read.	390 2019
Nov 20	The Foundling	Stacey Halls	3	Lightweight tale of young poor woman who (in 1747) gives her newborn daughter to the (Coram) Foundling Hospital. She scrapes together enough money to return six years later to recover the babe to discover she was already claimed back, allegedly by her, the day after she was left. The girl finds where her daughter is, gets herself employed there as nursemaid, kidnaps he and after some adventures everyone is friends. All rather thin and stretched out - with far too much, maybe reasonably accurate (who knows), period detail.	K 270 2020
Nov 20	Agent Running in the Field	John le Carre	3	Slightly wooden, dominated by MI5/6 politicking and smart-Alec prose. Late 40's spook is approached by idealistic, pushy younger man to play competitive Badminton. They don't talk about their jobs but have similar anti-Brexit and -Trump views and get on well. About 75% through the book gets more interesting as young man turns out to be MI6 employee who has just offered to spill secrets to Russians who he thinks are Germans. Last 10% is decent fun as the older spook and his wife help the younger and a younger ex-agent gets married to...	281 2019
Nov 20	After the End	Clare Mackintosh	1	Superbly powerful covering of some of the agonising decisions for parents and others involved with a 3-year old boy with terminal brain cancer. The story set in three parts. First half covers the ~1 year of illness leading to the point where the UK hospital determines that after various treatments the lad's tumour is incurable and the brain damage he has suffered as a result of all this makes his life not worth living. So, they suggest switching from treatment to palliative care and let him die. The (hugely loving) parents are split on this. Mum reluctantly agrees. Dad finds a "proton beam" therapy offered by a US clinic and wants to take the lad there for that. There is then a court case. The second half is two Sliding-Doors-like interleaved tales: 1. Mum and the hospital win the case. The lad dies three weeks later. The parents stick together and get on OK, but slowly drift apart and, divorce amicably and start other lives. 2. Dad wins, takes the lad to the US (Mum accompanying). Treatment goes well and he lives another 3 years, albeit with severe disability. When he dies the parents relationship breaks down and they divorce. He (once a high flying consultant) goes into breakdown for years. This second half is a bit hard to follow, particularly since in both threads each parent takes up with the same other person (Dad's childhood school chum and for Mum with an airline pilot - she have been, and have returned to, being a stewardess). All the agony is movingly and non-judgementally done and in an afterword CM tells that she and her husband had to deal with a similar ghastly decision themselves.	K 402 2019
Nov 20	The Krull House	Georges Simenon	3-	Written and set just before WW2 thinnish tale of xenophobia and persecution - here by French on Germans. Good modern-reading translation by Howard Curtis.	203 1939
Nov 20	Where the Crawdads Sing	Delia Owens	3	Life story of girl living in Carolina coastal marsh area. Intermittently abusive father causes her mother and then all other siblings to leave her alone with her Dad, who comes and goes and finally goes for good. She only does one day at school, but is taught to read and write by local lad who befriends her and they become close. But he too leaves her to go to college. She later has a relationship with a local hot shot who also deserts her, after intimating marriage but failing to introduce her to any friends or family, to marry another. The book starts with him being found dead and to's and fro's with her back history and her acquittal in the resulting investigation and court case for her murder of him. An engaging read but not as awesome as we had been told!	368 2018
Nov 20	Every Secret Thing	Laura Lippman	3	Good who-dunnit set in Baltimore. Two 11-year old girls were convicted of killing a toddler and have just been released after 7 years in gaol. Not long after, other small girls start disappearing (mainly to be found again). From a ragged, scrappy start the tale slowly uncovers what happened originally and now.	417 2003
Nov 20	Agent Zigzag	Ben Macintyre	3+	Another great biography of this incredible spy / crook / charmer.	K 385 2007
Oct 20	Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit	Jeanette Winterson	4	Young girl growing up and realising she is gay. She and family are pretty rabid religious types of some sort. Dreadful.	171 1985
Oct 20	The handmaid's tale	Margaret Atwood	3	Very slow, allusive, but perfectly readable, tale of some well-post-1985 world where all (?) northern America (at least) is a super-strict religious state (Gilead) run by men with women's role purely as breeders. Told by one of the breeder class and with lots of almost Nazi-like controls, executions and secret rebels. Slightly puzzling elipoge set in 2195 expands a little on what has been teasingly told of the state.	326 1985
Oct 20	Unit 731	Craig Saunders	4	Ghastly mindless violence in thuggish English family. Some (very) passing reference to Japanese WW2 unit of same name, but mainly excuse for gratuitous gore with some Japanese allusions.	K 216 2018
Oct 20	Fleishman is in trouble	Taffy Brodesser-Akner	5	Broken marriage and shenanigans in middle-class NY. J read it through and was ambivalent, I couldn't get interested.	373 2019
Oct 20	Hammer to Fall [JW#3]	John Lawton	3	Long and slightly rambling cold war spy thriller with loads of tiny "chapters". Starts poorly with fragmentary snippets with, initially, three military men (including the main one, Joe Holderness, aka Wilderness) in post-war Berlin running smuggling rackets. The disjointed and often overly cryptic tale carries on, first in mid-60's Finland (where Wilderness, now with MI6, is semi-banished to keep him clear of UK Parliamentarians, doing some smuggling along with some useful spying). Then the main body of the book is in 1968/9 Prague where all the characters from his past come together. Some snippets on a totally unexplained and unrelated events in Vienna in 1955. Hadden't realised this is 3rd in series, and suspect it would have been better read had I read the others first.	K 495 2020
Oct 20	The Reckoning [FH#2]	Yrsa Sigurdardottir	3	Tight and rapidly moving story spread across ~14 years starting with rape and murder of 8-year old girl and subsequent letter from young schoolboy (lodged with those of his classmates in a "time capsule" to be opened in 10 years time), whose father did it, and predicting various deaths in 10 years time. Sure enough a series of gory murders start happening as events unfold (perspectives changing to the last page) and more background of serious sexual child abuse surfaces. Again Freyja/Huldar at the forefront though in a mainly coldly separate non-relationship, which falters occasionally in their as usual overly sexed and drunk Icelandic scene.	406 2019
Oct 20	Three Cups of Tea	Greg Mortenson	3+	Highly readable auto-bio (co-authored by David Relin) of an amazingly dedicated, inspiring and energetic American, originally a climber. After an accident attempting K2 he was rescued by folk in a small isolated village and vowed to come back and build them a school in return. This he did and went on to do 100's more having tirelessly raised money, initially from an old (early days Silicon) millionaire also with Karakoram climbing background. They set up the Central Asia Institute (CAI) to do this, with GM putting in incredible hours and effort. His background as an unconventional lad raised in Africa with great linguistic skills helped and he was clearly hugely loved by the rural Pakistanis and Afghans he worked for and with. After 9/11, and also a hugely laudatory article in Parade magazine in 2003, his (already extensive) lecture circuit expanded to include influential politicians and US military intrigued by his championing of education, particularly of girls, as way to combat extremism. Sadly Wikipedia tells us that things subsequently went awry in 2010/11, with (I assume) his poor financial and time management causing several high profile original supporters (eg: Jon Krakauer) to turn on him big time.	331 2006

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Oct 20	Sleep in peace tonight	James MacManus	3	Fictionalised story of Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's right hand man, keeping FDR and Churchill talking during 1941. Interesting on the (presumably largely accurate) shenanigans in the US with FDR portrayed as weak and vacillating in the face of the serious isolationist faction, figure-headed by Charles Lindberg. Ed Murrow, CBS's star Anglophile reporter shown as helping HH too. Would be a much better book without the schmaltz plot - HH having an affair with the female liaison officer the Brits supplied and who left him to join SOE and die in Ravensbruck. Both FDR and HH with serious health conditions, not helped by heavy smoking and drinking, in contrast to Churchill who out smoked/drank both!	K 360 2015
Oct 20	Persons Unknown [MB#2]	Susie Steiner	3	City banker found stabbed to death in Huntingdon park. Decent detective thriller with lots of initially unrelated threads coming together. 2nd Manon Bradshaw book. She, not on the case because her 12-year old, black, adopted son is a suspect. Perhaps too much about her pregnancy (from sperm donor).	362 2018
Oct 20	The Weather Machine	Andrew Blum	4	Disappointingly dull book belying its sub-title "How we see into the future". Instead it's a brief trawl across weather data collection and forecasting history, and its many jargon's and organisations. He emphasised how the whole process has to be a global/international effort, with lots of sharing (which there is, as well as healthy rivalry), and how the ECMWF at Reading is at the top of the tree. Made me realise that this (the "Euro") is not the Met Office (which is now in Exeter having moved from Bracknell), but did not answer our perpetual question as to why, for instance, the Met Office and BBC (now using Meteo data) often have such disparate forecasts.	181 2019
Oct 20	Mystery of the Yellow Room	Gaston Leroux	4	Another "locked room" mystery - this in France where young woman is almost murdered twice. All the same hallmarks as the other two dreadful as the two Japanese ones I've read: - endless padding of thin story - ludicrously drawn stretched out - fiendishly clever enigmatic amateur sleuth (here an 18-year old journalist) and friend who narrates - endless trite pathetic theories further over one by one, infantile belief in each successive one - cloying fawning prose, tat melodrama	K 194 1907
Oct 20	Nothing to envy: real lives in North Korea	Barbara Demick	3+	The history and misery of the Kim Il-sung and then Kim Jong-il years (with 2014 epilogue giving brief update now Kim Jong-un in charge), particularly the famine in the 1990s, largely told by the life stories of six ordinary people. Some of them unlearning decades of ideology to become market traders, and finally finding out that the outside world is not worse off than NK and managing to escape to South Korea.	300 2010
Sep 20	Watch Her Disappear [ZF#4]	Eva Dolan	3	Zigic&Ferreira investigating murder and abuse of trans women in Peterborough. Sensitively done (to my ear), but pretty complicated following folk who were alternately him and her, or Dad and Mum. Lots on Ferreira's social life particularly. She continues to be hard smoking and drinking, and sleeps around a lot - currently with one of her bosses (unpleasantly cocky Adams, not the sympathetic and new-babe-exhausted Zigic). Several references to one of her previously living with a cross-dressing or gay man, Liam, which I didn't recall from earlier books.	416 2017
Sep 20	The 21 Escapes of Lt Alastair Cram	David M. Guss	3+	Story of a remarkable Scot, best known as a WW2 serial escapee. A lawyer and experienced climber (enthusiastic member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club). First captured in 1941 and spent the rest of the war in various camps and prisons (starting in Italy and including a castle deemed the least escapable in Europe, which he and others did escape). Aged 30 when the war began he was one of the older set of officers who became something of a club as they were moved from place to place, and he met David Stirling (and served briefly in the SAS). Interesting snippets from POW life: - despite gruesome brutality, they were generally treated in a reasonable honourable/gentlemanly, Geneva Convention dictated, way. So when in trouble while on the run, shouting "I am an escaped POW" could save them from arbitrary death, and they'd be returned to prison and put in solitary for a month. - the POWs had ready access to (some) money and their UK banks, being able, for instance, to carry out bank transfers (by letter) to settle gambling debts. - they could assemble a huge collection of money, food and cigarettes for escape packs and bribing guards. After the war he worked for a few years chasing and prosecuting war criminals and then moved to Kenya as a magistrate where he judged on various Mau Mau related incidents. This included one where two imprisoned suspects were found dead and had clearly been tortured and executed by the British-run system. He wrote a "whistle blowing" verdict, comparing British behaviour to that of the Nazis which he had suffered, and which badly upset the authorities! He was a modest man (few knew his story until after his death in 1994), living in Stockbridge after retirement where I might well have passed him in the street! He had amazing control of his body (partly helped by regular use of the Müller System) being able to walk silently through undergrowth and, during one 3-week period in a German forest, navigating and avoiding danger using what became an animal-like acute sense of smell and hearing. A good read though marred by awkward and unclear chronology at times. It also covers many other escapers as well as Cram. His own prose from journals and letters is extensively quoted and much more eloquent and thoughtful than the author's!	K 465 2018
Sep 20	Still Life [GM#1]	Louise Penny	3	First in the Chief Inspector Gamache Mystery series. Set in small village near Montreal. Old, slightly quirky, but much liked lady found killed by hunting arrow. The story is lightly hung round solving the murder (as it turns out to be, rather than tragic accident) with a few modest twists and some poor plot detail (like the police not noticing when first entering the victim's house a week after the murder - it had been handed over to her niece - that it had been extensively painted and wallpapered in the last few days). But the real attraction is in the peripheral stories of the villagers (many artists) and the family-like police. Almost had an Olive Kitteridge / Maine feel to it. Albeit with an unbelievable amount of good food and drink and endless cafe chats.	373 2005
Sep 20	Where'd you go, Bernadette	Maria Semple	3+	Surprisingly entertaining story of super-smart and comfortably off family of three, poking fun at the foibles of nauseating middle class Seattle-ites. He's a star Microsoft development manager obsessively working on a whizz-bang future product. Wife is a reclusive ex-star architect. Told mainly by the 14-year old daughter, (though lots of other angles in often film-script like narrative mechanisms). As wife becomes weirder Dad tries to commit her to an institution to be sorted out while he and daughter make a bonding trip to Antarctica. Wife escapes and disappears. She is then later found to have been on, and disappeared from, the Antarctica trip (assumed overboard while drunk) which the other two did not go on after all. The girl, who is adamant Mum is not dead, tricks Dad into doing the trip where all comes together. Though laced with plenty of silliness, there are lovely lyrical descriptions of the natural world in both the Antarctic and Washington state.	321 2012
Sep 20	The Fire Court	Andrew Taylor	3	Light who-dunnit set in Charles II's England featuring James Marwood and Cat Lovett. Hung round the post-Fire of London reparations court, where leases and freeholds of destroyed buildings and rebuilding prospects lead to intrigue and murder.	440 2018
Sep 20	Olive, Again	Elizabeth Strout	3+	Another excellent set of short stories each brushing by or involving Olive Kitteridge. This, presumably the last, has her outliving two husbands and ending in a care home. As ever coming across a variety of ex-pupils and acquaintances. But, all sadly overshadowed by dead or dying folk, becoming "invisible and not counting any more", as they live in "quiet houses".	K 304 2019
Sep 20	Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress	Steven Pinker	5	Too heavy for me positive spin on life. Initial credits include Hans Rosling et al at Gapminder.	453 2018

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Sep 20	Austral	Paul McAuley	3	Decent tale of fugitive woman fleeing authorities and baddies, taking with her the daughter of one of them to bargain with. Set in a futuristic, 200+ years away, world ravaged by climate change which, surprisingly for my reading palette, didn't put me off. The action is on a, now heavily inhabited, peninsula of Antarctica where the woman, having been one herself, was a "Corrections Officer" manning a convict encampment. The world is populated with smart drones and "fones" and much "printed" and manufactured food. Everything runs on electricity/batteries with no indication of charging needs. Most of the action is with the two females on the run in the outback, where all the key characters are also female - made me think PM must be a pseudonym for a female and feminist (he isn't). Some of the back history is explained but much, annoyingly, isn't - such as the global politics, the different "edited" races on earth (the protagonist is a "husky" who seems to have a seal-like physique).	276 2017
Sep 20	Man's search for meaning	Viktor Frankl	3	Austrian psychiatrist describing his thoughts and experiences during three years in concentration camps in WW2. He talks dispassionately about it, discussing how focussing himself and others on the meaning of their lives helped some survive. Frequently repeats of his favourite Nietzsche quotation: "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how". The camp horrors section is followed by two more academic essays, expanding on his logotherapy theory (also search for meaning) started apparently in 1926 when he was only 21. One example of dealing (long post-war) with unemployment neurosis. This (US I think!) assessment based on two erroneous diagnoses: jobless equates to being useless which in turn equates to having a meaningless life. His cure was simply to persuade patients to volunteer for unpaid work/occupation which gave their life meaning ... "man does not live by welfare alone".	154 1959
Sep 20	A Station on the Path to Somewhere Better	Benjamin Wood	3	12-year old boy (then 18 then mid-30's) slowly recounts his very grisly childhood background. His somewhat charismatic, witty, maverick and unstable father, separated from him and his Mum, arranges to take the lad for a 2-day visit to the TV set he works on for a supernatural series the lad is infatuated by. Turns out the Dad has been long-fired and is highly disturbed. He leads Mum (trying to recover lad) and others a trapeze round the country then brutally kills her, three others, and himself. But the bulk of the text (excluding acres of, to me, gratuitous and dull content from the book behind the TV series) is the highly observant and articulate boy/man coming to terms with what he saw and experienced, presented in the form of a diary to his own yet-to-be-conceived son.	K 266 2018
Sep 20	Tyll	Daniel Kehlmann	5	Novel using Tyll Ulenspiegel as character to cover, inter alia, 30 year war. Didn't get me interested	342 2017
Sep 20	A thousand moons	Sebastian Barry	3	Post American civil war follow-on from "Days Without End" featuring "Winona" the young Indian girl McNulty and Cole adopted. They all still live in a backwoods farm, more or less avoiding the attentions of the white bigots that dominate America. But she, now about 18, is raped by someone (maybe while drunk) and gets into trouble having lost her friends rifle when secretly going to witness the authorities trying to wipe out a nearby vigilante camp. She's then found guilty of murdering a one-time fiancée by the biased legal system with a dramatic reprieve in the last couple of pages. All told in her first person with rather awkward dialogue-like and impressionistic prose.	251 2020
Aug 20	The Secrets We Kept	Lara Prescott	3	Story of the publication of Dr Zhivago told as novel. Pasternak was lionised in the USSR for his poetry and translations though, for some reason, both supported by Stalin but also mistrusted and stigmatised. A key character is the poet and writer Olga Ivinskaya. They met in 1946 when he was 56 and she 34 and was his lover (until his death in 1960), muse and inspiration for Lara. But she also endured years in the Gulag before Stalin's death to try and get at Pasternak in some (unexplained) way. Other characters are a confusing set of (mainly) CIA women - dual role of typists and low-level operatives All used to tell how, because the USSR refused to publish it, the manuscript was smuggled out to Italy from where it had its western world publication. The CIA then secretly got Russian copies back into the USSR under a program of trying to destabilise it by exposure to forbidden ideas.	K 445 2019
Aug 20	The Anarchy: The relentless rise of the East India Company	William Dalrymple	5	Well reviewed and probably readable tome on the rapid growth of the East India Company in the 2 nd half of the 18 th century. But I didn't have the stamina to pursue it.	397 2019
Aug 20	The Absolutist	John Boyne	3+	Grim story of young men in WW1. One is gay and having been thrown out of his family for this falls for Will, a co-recruit, as they train for and then go to the trenches. His love is erratically returned and Will, having tried to report the cold blooded murder of a German prisoner, refuses to fight any more ("Absolutist" being a more extreme renunciation of war than Conscientious Objector). He meets his predictable and dramatic end. Tale mainly flits between this and three years later when the young man meets Will's sister and explains what happened.	426 2011
Aug 20	London Rules [SH#5]	Mick Herron	3	More of the same old. North Korean amateurish terror cell carrying out scripted series of atrocities. Lamb's lot at the bleeding edge. Endless politicking and smart alec prose but a diverting read.	344 2018
Aug 20	The Weather Experiment	Peter Moore	3-	Covering (mainly) 19th Century work on weather forecasting developments, getting more scientific and with lots of serious disagreeing camps (eg: Espy vs Redfield). Interesting related fields, with painters such as Constable trying to understand clouds, communications with telegraph (Morse) and its signalling precursors, and classifications (Beaufort) and terminology. But dominated by Robert FitzRoy, who had commanded the famous Beagle voyage (carrying friend Charles Darwin) in 1830s. He became the first government "forecaster" - albeit that his remit was more for information than forecasts - and after battling criticism and, latterly, ill-health, committed suicide in 1865. Apparently GMT was only adopted in the UK over Göttingen mean time in mid-century. I was amazed at the high-altitude ballooning of another key player (James Glaisher), going up and down 7 miles in 2 hours, with no mention on how they navigated; maybe they only did it on still days? The book started well and had spells of interest but was largely rather nerdy!	342 2015
Aug 20	American Dirt	Jeanine Cummins	2	Powerful novel set in the America's but conveying the ghastly menaced life of migrants fleeing persecution anywhere. Middle class woman and her bright 6-year old son are only survivors of the massacre of her husband and extended family by a drug cartel in Acapulco. Her husband was a journalist who wrote an article exposing the local main drug baron, who she had by chance come to know and like as a regular at her bookshop. Starting with a little money they head for the USA, but can't just fly because she doesn't have her son's birth certificate. So they join hordes of other migrants riding on top of freight trains and teaming up with two beautiful mid-teen Honduran girls fleeing similar narco troubles. Apart from the physical perils, they are hounded by narco cartels, corrupt law enforcement and other villains and forced to pay "ransoms" and the Honduran girls are raped. It's a longish book with relentless dull inevitability of the many impending troubles. But finally the four of them make it to Maryland. It's presumably pretty accurate on many details and facts. It's interesting how much low key local support the migrants get from folk along the way, ranging from hostels run by priests to gifts and help from passers by. JC says almost everyone in Mexico knows of drug cartel savagery and will help when (usually) safe to do so.	K 401 2019
Aug 20	North Korea journal	Michael Palin	3-	Pretty dull embellished journal recorded while making a 3-week documentary in the DPRK. The entire visit shepherded by minders, so little of great real interest seen. Though I hadn't realised how much of the country is mountainous and, barring the ghastly architecture, scenic.	170 2019
Aug 20	A Spy's Life	Henry Porter	3+	Thriller about British ex-spy now working with the UN. Starts when the small plane he is in crashes in mysterious circumstances coming in to land in New York in late 90's (?). The tale covers his time in the Czech republic in 1975, where he fell for a young woman who worked for StB (secret police). Their love had to be abandoned and he finds out about their son after the plane crash. All sorts of high-powered evil going on emanating from a Russian super-spy who married, and later divorced, his lover, along with dodgy MI6 folk. Massively complex, but remarkably readable for all that.	470 2001

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- Ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Aug 20	Operation Jihadi Bride	John Carney, Clifford Thurlow	3+	<p>Story of ex military guy, JC, running a modest operation from Erbil (in Iraqi Kurdistan) to rescue young women (and, often, their kids) from ISIS (roughly 2014-18). Co-written with CT, and with a gung-ho, almost thriller, smart-Alec style. But presumably the main facts and events are real and his, and his Kurdish associates', achievements are impressive (though most operations seem to be slightly protected with the first stage of the women's journey being by a paid-for "fixer" and the rest often back through YPG-cleared access routes).</p> <p>Though he eventually extracts dozens (maybe low 100's) it seems a pin-prick in the mass of misery, and his funding is unclear (seems to be paid by various NGO's and parents, but on occasion just does the runs out his own pocket).</p> <p>Lots of classic anti-ISIS rhetoric, and most of his clients realise within minutes of their arrival with ISIS what a dreadful mistake they have made. Nothing about the aspects of ISIS that do/must command grudging respect from some of their subjects (eg. making infrastructure work, which the inept/corrupt regime - Syrian, Iraqi - often doesn't).</p>	K 322 2019
Aug 20	I'll Be Gone in the Dark	Michelle McNamara	3+	<p>Absorbing telling of the hunt for a serial rapist and murderer who operated across California in the late 70's and 80's by an excellent amateur true-crime writer. She died before finishing the book, which was then completed by two others and published in 2018. Weeks later the perpetrator was finally arrested, and a post-script added to the updated book.</p> <p>A rollicking thriller of a read with excellent writing keeping one interested amongst the plethora of victims and places and similar grisly details.</p> <p>Though the police said the book did not contribute to the arrest, many acknowledged MM's huge contribution to the ultimate arrest, by keeping the case in the public eye with blogs and magazine articles and a good moniker (Golden State Killer) as it became clear that the 50+ rapes and 12+ murders were all linked to the same person.</p>	K 371 2018
Aug 20	Harvest	Jim Crace	3-	<p>Village in early middle-ages (?) over seven days. Three strangers appear; the same night the manor dovecote is burnt down. The narrator, a relative newcomer (moved to village a dozen years ago), knows the culprits were from the village, but mob rule blames the newcomers. The two men are put in a pillory for a week, the woman escapes after having her hair shorn. The three (one dies on the pillory) trigger a witch-hunt amongst the villagers. This interwoven with the village's imminent takeover by a new lord of the manor who wants to replace arable and cattle with less man-power needy sheep. Also, lots of, presumably reasonably accurate agricultural and period detail. But, all in all nothing really moving or inspiring.</p>	272 2013
Jul 20	The Lost Boys: A Family Ripped Apart by War	Catherine Bailey	3	<p>The grim journeyings of an aristocratic German woman married to an upper-class Italian. They lived in a comfortable Italian estate near Venice and he headed to Rome to work with the anti-Fascists and then Allies as Italy crumbled. Her father was connected with the von Stauffenberg plot to kill Hitler and was hung in Sept-44. At Himmler's orders she was subsequently seized by the SS along with their two very young sons. She was separated from them within a few days and spent a bizarre and often gruesome -6 months being shipped round German occupied areas (often in secret quarters within concentration camps) with a bunch of other high-ranking Germans and others that Himmler was painstakingly keeping safe as bargaining pawns come the end of the war. As the war ended, the group survived Himmler's final command to have them liquidated by hours and with the help of the non-Nazi German Wehrmacht. Finally reunited with her husband they amazingly tracked down their sons (who had been renamed and, with many other kids, hidden away by the Nazi's in preparation for re-population of a third Reich super power).</p> <p>Fascinating, if rather over-wordy, story albeit highlighting how the connected and privileged can survive compared to the hoi polloi even in such circumstances.</p>	404 2019
Jul 20	Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World - and Why Things Are Better Than You Think	Hans Rosling and Ola Rosling and Anna Rosling Ronnlund	2	<p>Wonderfully readable run over many major world statistics mainly, in health and human well being. Written with his son and daughter in law, in the months before his (predicted) death.</p> <p>Many parts hung round sets of 3-answer multiple choice questions (eg: How did the number of deaths from natural causes change over last 100 years? A: more than doubled B: about same C: decreased to less than half).</p> <p>As well as using universally available and recognised data sources, he was a prolific poller (eg: of audiences at his talks) and founded www.gapminder.org to continue this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The majority of people live neither in low-income countries nor in high-income countries, but in middle-income countries. This category doesn't exist in the divided mind-set, but in reality it definitely exists. It's where 75 percent of humanity lives, right there where the gap is supposed to be. Or, to put it another way, there is no gap. - To control the gap instinct, look for the majority. Beware comparisons of averages. - Beware comparisons of extremes. In all groups there are some at the top and some at the bottom. But the majority is usually somewhere in between, right where the gap is supposed to be. - There are three things going on here: the misremembering of the past; selective reporting by journalists and activists; and the feeling feeling that as long as things are bad it's heartless to say they are getting better. - He uses analogy of a Baby on an incubator to the state of the world: on all the main measures, she is improving, but she still has to stay in the incubator because her health is still critical. Does it make sense to say that the infant's situation is improving? Yes. Absolutely. Does it make sense to say it is bad? Yes, absolutely. Does saying "things are improving" imply that everything is fine, and we should all relax and not worry? No, not at all. Is it helpful to have to choose between bad and improving? Definitely not. It's both. It's both bad and better. - Remember that the media and activists rely on drama to grab your attention. Remember that negative stories are more dramatic than neutral or positive ones - in 1800 women on average gave birth to seven five children, in 1948 to five. From 1965 it dropped to just below 2.5. Hence world population is heading for peak of 11 billion (from 7.6 now) by 2100 - As billions of people left extreme poverty, most of them decided to have fewer children. They no longer needed large families for child labour on the small family farm or as insurance against child mortality. Women and men got educated and started to want better-educated and better-fed children: and having fewer of them was the obvious solution. - "Saving poor children just increases the population" sounds correct, but the opposite is true. Delaying the escape from extreme poverty just increases the population. - Fukushima: not one person has yet been reported as having died from radioactivity. 1,600 people died because they escaped - mainly old people who died because of the mental and physical stresses of the evacuation. - Refugees from Syria: have the theoretical right to enter Europe under the Geneva Convention, are therefore in practice completely unable to travel by air and so must come over the sea because airlines (for instance) have to ship them back if they are not given entry - so they pay 1000's of Euros to unsafe traffickers rather than the 50 Euro for a flight. So, our own immigration policies are responsible for the drownings of refugees. - Don't let gross figures mask per-capita ones. Eg: pre-capita CO2 emissions from developing countries still way lower than the "west's". 	K 342 2018
Jul 20	Dadland	Keggie Carew	3+	<p>Biography of low-key war-hero and then dementia'd Dad (Tom Carew) and background of her and her unusual family.</p> <p>Dad was SOE Jedburgh sent into France just after D-day. Then in Burma doing same against the Japanese, where he was hugely trusted by the Burmese nationalists (including Aung San) in a similar Communist-conflicted accommodation with SOE to that of the French Maquis.</p> <p>Her Mum (Dad's middle wife) was clinically lunatic in her middle age and kept in an institution for a while, but also had secret service connections, including meeting Ahmad Shah Massoud (he that was assassinated two days before 9/11) in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Dad, of Irish birth, was a huge charmer and unconventional. He left the army and had a series of rarely successful jobs before declining into chronic dementia. But he was clearly loved and respected by a wide range of folk he had worked with during the war, including William Colby (later CIA boss), an introduction to whom saved KC from trouble when backpacking around the US.</p>	415 2017

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jul 20	For the Missing	Lina Bengtsdotter	3	Decent murder- (actually missing-) mystery. 30-something female Swedish cop goes to the small rural town she grew up in and escaped 20 years ago. She's investigating a teenage girl who has gone missing after drunken and druggy party with friends. This story intertwined with the cop's own troubled back history and a third strand about an unidentified (until the inevitable at the end) pair of troubled girls in the same town sometime in the past. Rather too much alcoholism and ludicrous personal involvements, but a decent, largely non-violent Scandi read.	K 307 2017
Jul 20	The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid	Bill Bryson	3	Trawl through 1950's and 60's America and his growing up in Des Moines, Iowa. Usual mix of interesting (and presumably accurate) facts and witty hyperbole. But somehow not as amusing as my memory of listening to the audio version in car a few times.	404 2007
Jul 20	The Secret Scripture	Sebastian Barry	3	Life in tortured 1920s Ireland with civil war and violent distrust between the pro- and anti- factions for the 1921 Irish Agreement with Britain that separated out Eire. Told via two characters. One, a 100-year old woman in a psychiatric home remembering her past (including marriage to Tom McNulty, brother of the main character in his "The Temporary Gentleman"), the other her doctor in current times initially having to work on releasing her from almost 50 years there because the home is being shut down. But he goes on to investigate her background, including a lost baby ... As with his other books he comes at things sideways and can be hard to follow but lots of castigation of the Catholic church (with its hatred if not of women, then of the sexuality of women, or sexuality in general) and massively conservative Irish social norms. I would have liked explanation, rather than assumed knowledge of, the complex politics of the time, de Valera and the splits in early Sinn Fein and IRA, and the recriminatory murdering carry-ons of both sides.	K 332 2008
Jul 20	Pale Rider	Laura Spinney	3	Wide ranging coverage of the 1918/Spanish flu. Read during Covid-19, I was in two minds as to whether I wished that the book covered that too. On balance it was best as it is, though it was often hard to realise she was discussing things from 100 years ago (Social distancing et al). There were too many relatively unrelated side stories and many oft-peddled "facts" which a) have never been established and b) seem overstated (eg: - 1 in 3 people on earth fell ill. 1 in 10 of those, maybe 1 in 5 - died). She also related the theory I had heard before that the high death toll of 20-40 year olds was partly explained by the immune systems of those who had been exposed in some way to the 1890s Russian flu did not react to the 1918 one thinking it was the same thing, when it wasn't. Lots of theorising about where case zero was, including the Chinese (spread via workforces sent to behind-the-lines service in N. France). Other notes: - it also purged the world of a disproportionately large number of TB patients who would otherwise have died more slowly over the following decade. - Woodrow Wilson was badly affected and so wasn't able to tone down treaty of Versailles, hence WW2!	K 352 2017
Jul 20	Mother tongue	Bill Bryson	3	Disappointing for BB trawl across the English Language. Rather a long list of mildly interesting facts about its history with less than usual witty leavening. But remarkable volume of detail which was culled before the Internet was there to help, and, presumably, limited computerised access to texts (eg: to count number of puns in all Shakespeare's works).	244 1990
Jul 20	Amy & Isabelle	Elizabeth Strout	3	Another strangely readable tale of often dull lives in New England. The 15/16-year old daughter and Mum of the title don't get on well. Daughter finds illicit love and lust with much older school teacher. Mum turns out to have not dissimilar teenage secrets which slowly come out.	402 1998
Jun 20	The Burning Men [FP#1]	Will Shindler	3+	Good detective story - first in series with DI Alex Finn and Mattie Paulsen with interesting back stories. His wife has just died of cancer, she's a gay DC transferred to Finn's cop shop after losing her cool with a paedophile and successfully encouraging him to commit suicide. The well-crafted and twisted plot revolves round five firefighters who attended a massive burn in a prestige building site, and all left the force not long after. They had helped themselves to sacks of bank notes they found, and left the money launderer villain who was trapped in the building with them to die. Five years later someone starts burning the ex-firefighters alive one by one.	K 401 2020
Jun 20	With the End in Mind: Dying, Death and Wisdom in an Age of Denial	Kathryn Mannix	2	Powerful and hugely readable book from wise and articulate (now retired, I think) Palliative Care and CBS-trained doctor. Sections on aspects of death of folk who know they have a short time to go, and how they handle it, almost all of it very reassuring and sensible. Interesting to hear how calmly (with any necessary pain relief in place) most people die and how they often at the end become "nicer" people replacing any selfishness or self-centredness with fretting, and planning, for their loved ones after the death.	K 369 2018
Jun 20	The Body	Bill Bryson	3+	Another wonderful fact-packed book delivered with his characteristic light-touch. Really reinforces the marvel of life and its complexity of gazillions of tiny components and sub-systems. Full of great quotes and phrases, often from the less well-known alleys of science. eg: - Human brains have shrunk from 1500 to 1350 cc over the last 12k years. Interesting of Jared Diamond's view that primitive Indonesians are brighter than modern westerners - Light takes 0.2s to travel to brain which therefore predicts things 0.2s ahead! - Every day you produce and use your bodyweight in ATP (a tiny battery that stores and releases energy) - 200 trillion molecules. They are consumed and used almost instantly so only 60g in you at any moment. - Nearly all mammals have 800 million heartbeats in average lifetime. Over last 10-12 generations only, humans hit this at 25 and go on another 1.6 billion - ie: our longevity is, in this respect (inter alia), unnatural/a-typical. - He ends many meaty paragraphs on a lighter note, such as this following the description of pain of human childbirth: "If ever there was an event that challenges the concept of Intelligent Design, it is the act of childbirth. No woman, however devout, ever in childbirth said 'Thank you, Lord, for thinking this through for me'"	386 2019
Jun 20	The Honjin Murders	Seishi Yokomizo	4	Another ludicrous Japanese "Locked Room murder" mystery, very similar feel to "Murder in the Crooked House" and same hammy prose. Don't know if that's because of this awful Japanese genre or because the same translator (Louise Heal) makes a major mark on the telling. Again a hugely complicated mechanical process to kill someone in a room with all access locked from inside.	K 151 1973
Jun 20	The Accidental Tourist	Anne Tyler	3	Surprisingly readable story of dull obsessive. He's a reluctant travel writer (title is his nom de plume) in (?) living in early 80's Baltimore. Separates from his wife a year after their only son is killed in a restaurant burglary. Meets slightly zany younger woman who helps tame his out-of-control dog and starts to humanise him, eventually to the point where he moves in with her for a year or so. Was reminiscent of Strout's Olive Kitteridge - being most unremarkable but somehow engaging.	K 418 1985
Jun 20	Undaunted Courage	Stephen E. Ambrose	3+	Highly readable telling of Lewis and Clarke's traversal of the US continent 1803-1806. An amazing journey started the day after the Louisiana purchase (not current L, this being all land between the Rockies and the Mississippi) - instigated by president Jefferson who wanted to expand the US from the 13 east seaboard states to include everything to the Pacific. AL very plausibly extrapolates from the L&C journals and reports to describe their experiences as if he'd talked to them. It's most focussed on Lewis who (as was Clarke who was a great friend) was a remarkably gifted and hard-working man - logging endless details of geography, flora and fauna, and keeping the political and commercial potential of their discoveries at the front of his thinking. He sadly committed suicide three years afterwards (he may have been a manic depressive amongst his brilliances). Interesting side note (which Cozzens might have mentioned out in The Earth is weeping) was a comment from an Indian brave that tribes needed wars to endorse their chieftains credentials.	532 1996
Jun 20	Love After Love	Ingrid Persaud	3+	Warm positive story of Trinidadian threesome (of Hindu Indian background) with troubled lives. Woman killed her violently abusive drunken husband to protect herself and their small son. He, on finding out later, spumed Mum and became very disturbed and self-harming. Lovely colleague of Mum's became lodger and surrogate father, but is gay and suffered torments and, at the end, worse in the (still) homosexuality-forbidding country. Rather too much gay sex for me, but otherwise a lovely read.	K 336 2020
Jun 20	Candles and Roses [AM#1]	Alex Walters	3	Good first in serial killer detective (DI Alec McKay) series set round the Black Isle. Three murdered young women found in graves surrounded with candles and roses. All from troubled backgrounds firmly separated from their fathers. Plenty of twists towards the end including whether a father or his estranged daughter did it.	K 250 2016
Jun 20	Tree Surgery for Beginners	Patrick Gale	3	Book opens with tree surgeon recovering from some dramatic incident where he attacked his wife and is briefly accused of her murder. She and their young daughter are amicably taken in by decent architect who later takes them to the US. TS has loads of ups and downs as he recovers, including time on a bridge cruise where he becomes besotted by, and fling with, a rumoured trans woman and also ends up in the US. All sorts of dramatic turns and meetings of hitherto unknown relatives but all in the usual gentle PG way.	274

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
May 20	Eye of the Red Tsar [IP#1]	Sam Eastland	3	Detective fiction set round the murders of Tsar Nicholas and his family. The main man (Inspector Pekkala) used to be favourite detective of the Tsar but was arrested and Gulag'd by Stalin just before Tsar was shipped to Siberia. IP summoned back from Gulag 10 years later to try to locate the Tsar's treasure and, maybe, survivors of the assassinations. Decent premise with lots of actual fact intermingled.	K 464 2010
May 20	Murder in the Crooked House	Soji Shimada	4	Dreadful plodding tale of ludicrous set of murders in locked rooms in eccentric Japanese millionaires sloping house. Set of emotionless characters in an Agatha Christie style country house murder mystery, with them potential victims, suspects growing band of wooden police all wandering round murder scenes in plethora of rooms, with no crime scene protections.	K 352 1982
May 20	History of Wolves	Emily Fridlund	3	Puzzling book exploring unconventional upbringings and castigating Christian Scientists. Told by young woman mainly about her 15-year old self. Brought up by distant and alternative parents next to a backwoods Minnesota lake, the residue of a failed commune. She becomes babysitter and friend to 4-year old boy and his 27-year old Mum in a house across the lake, with CS Dad who is away working until towards the end. Lots of outdoors lore and alternative lifestyle and readable events, if no particular action. Attention held by references (from only about 1/2 way through) to a trial and some key event. This turns out to be a slightly damp squib, with the boy dying unnecessarily because CS Dad won't allow medical treatment.	275
May 20	The Defenceless [AF#2]	Kati Hiekkapelto	3-	Run of the mill Scandi-noir. Young female (Anna Fekete) and getting past it, bigoted male, detectives solve various murders that seemed to do with middle-Eastern drug gangs and Hells Angels in northern Finnish city (probably Oulu), but turn out to be home-brew and due to family greed. She is 30 and has been in Finland for 20 years from Serbian/Hungarian stock. The plot starts and ends with Christian lad who has fled Muslim persecution in Pakistan but has degenerated into drugs and despair. He was mixed up in the murders and, despite confessing to them in hope of remaining in Finland, ends up being deported back home to his terror. Most characters don't ring true. eg: the young female detective going on occasional booze and sex benders for no obvious reason. Plot following not helped by my finding Finnish and Hungarian names indistinct. Plenty of superficial and gratuitous reference to the environment and underprivileged refugees, and niggles with open red-herrings in some characters' behaviour.	K 313
May 20	Killers of the Flower Moon	David Grann	3+	Remarkable story, told detective style, of dozens (later thought to be many hundreds) of murders of Osage Indians in Oklahoma in the 1920s. The Osage (as with many other tribes) were restricted to a reservation in the late 19th century by the American government, being given (and often reneged on by the government - see "The Earth is weeping") full ownership of their new land. When doing this, an astute lawyer had the agreement keep the mineral rights of the land separate even if the land was sold; these "head rights" (or underground reservation) being retained with the tribe, and only inheritable through bloodlines. Extensive oil was subsequently found and, as a result, by 1920 the Osage were the richest people in the world, per capita. Furthermore, the law said that an Osage was not a responsible citizen and could not manage his/her own affairs, which must be done by a (typically white male) guardian, who controlled the purse strings of the wealthy Indians. The 1920s saw a growing number of suspicious deaths of Osage (referred to as a Reign of Terror), with the particular set that the book mainly covers being of those in the same extended family, resulting in the head rights coalescing on one rich squaw married to the subservient nephew of a crooked white man, William Hale. These included shooting, bombing and poisoning - the squaw was also slowly being poisoned, which stopped when the FBI stepped in and discontinued her "treatment" by two corrupt local doctors. But the corruption and venality of judges, marshals, police, lawyers, etc, at the time (is it any different today?) and the general (white) view that Indian and their lives were worthless meant that the few investigations did anything. The publicity, and the wealthy Osage who were able to make a fuss, eventually got the Federal government to take action. In 1925 an embryonic FBI under a young Edgar Hoover (newly appointed to sort out corruption in that body too!) tasked a diligent Texan, Tom White, with investigating a set of murders. This eventually led to the imprisonment of Hale, the well-connected and respected instigator, and the squaw's husband. Interesting on the emergence of the FBI as well as the main story. Slightly too many names and details to make an easy read.	K 354
May 20	Dear Mrs Bird	AJ Pearce	3-	Sloppy Girls-Own tale of young woman (best friend called Bunty!) getting a job helping a totally unsympathetic agony aunt on a woman's magazine (having thought the job was as trainee war correspondent), then surreptitiously answering (normally rejected) letters on Unsuitable Subjects (lots of mixed or ALL CAPS everywhere). A few decent bits about life in the blitz.	K 316
May 20	Let me lie	Clare Mackintosh	3+	Thriller starts with new Mum mourning the anniversary of first her Dad and, a few months later, her Mum in identical jumping-off-Beachy-Head assumed suicides. But as the plot twists pile on these change from suicide to murder to hoax to ...	K 402
May 20	Guest house for young widows : among the women of ISIS	Azadeh Moaveni	3	Covers a dozen mainly young girls who joined ISIS. She shows that, though many were young and ridiculously naive they all thought this a way to a better, less oppressed Muslim world. The reality sank in for most later on after the early days (predominantly male) recruits with similar ideals were superseded by thugs and misfits bent on violence, degenerating into Muslim factions killing each other. Many came from dysfunctional (Tunisia, Syria) and non (Libya post Gaddafi) states. Slightly academic but readable. The structure has short interleaved snippets on her subjects. This maintains a rough chronology at the expense of making it hard to remember who was who and what their story so far was.	332 2018
May 20	Spook Street [SH#4]	Mick Herron	3	Another ludicrous super-speed smart-Alec/crypto-text thriller for Jackson Lamb's crew. A rogue operation, somehow financed secretly by River Cartwright's grandpa when nearly head of MI5 years ago, deliberately breeds terrorists from (literally) the cradle. One goes rogue and suicide bombs a London shopping centre, the warped boss then sends some others to wipe out RC's now dementia'd grandpa to cover their tracks. As ever with the SH formula, one of JL's band dies in the readable nonsense follow ons.	K 321
May 20	An Impeccable Spy: Richard Sorge, Stalin's Master Agent	Owen Matthews	3	Slightly over-detailed account of another amazing spy. Born of German father (and language) in Baku, and not speaking Russian until he was a man. Became Communist sympathiser and, after postings in China and elsewhere, ended up in incredibly complex situation in Tokyo in the 1930s, where he was arrested in 1941 and hanged in 1944. A charismatic hard drinker and womaniser, superficially there as a journalist. He fed key information to both German/Nazi and Japanese sides (often gleaned each from the other), but was also running a spy ring feeding everything back to the Russians. From 1937 the Germans considered him almost as valuable an intelligence officer as the Russians did. Being far from Moscow (he was refused endless requests to return there for the last 8+ years of his life) he avoided Stalin's constant paranoid massacres of top men and somehow accepted (how did so many Russians do so?) the purges and inconsistencies. Very hard to follow geopolitical complexities intermingled with his own operational ones ... - Japan's army (occupying, northern at least, China) has gone rogue and no longer under the control of the politicians / emperor - Two competing factions, one wanting to invade Russia from N. China or head south to Asia/Pacific for oil and rubber - Nomonhan incident (peaking) in August 1939 where out of control Japanese general overreacted to minor Russian incursion, sparking minor war where 80% of his army was wiped out by well-organised Soviets under Zhukov. - This persuaded Japanese to go south, thereby: a) Stalin can move troops to the West ready for the post Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (MRP) invasion of Poland, though S also desperate for anything to delay Germany attacking Russia b) Hitler convinced that more direct measures are needed to keep Russia out of the war (eg: MRP) c) Japanese get resources that made them less dependent on keeping in USA's good books, leading ultimately to Pearl Harbour. - conundrum in China with Mao and Kuomintang (Chiang Kai-shek) civil war. Russia support both Mao but also the temporary joining of the two to challenge Japan and lessen risk to Russia's East - counting on continued hostilities in China to keep the Japanese Army pinned down.	K 448

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
May 20	The Darkness [H#1]	Ragnar Jonasson	3	Icelandic murder mystery. Hulda, 64-year old female detective about to retire, has her retirement brought forward and has only days to solve an old case of one (then two) Russian asylum-seeking girls. Interesting characters and twists, but let down, as with so many books, with ridiculously, and unnecessarily, short timeline, cramming into hours and three days what clearly couldn't have happened in that time.	327 2015
May 20	Sarah's Key	Tatiana de Rosnay	3	The book the film was made from. Fiction built round the French-fronted round up of Jews, mainly women and children, on 16 July 1942. They were initially held in the Velodrome d'Hiver before being deported via Drancy, and other French-run camps to Auschwitz where all died. The 10-year old Sarah locks her 4-year old brother in a cupboard to save him from the round up, thinking she will be back to release him soon after. She escapes her French camp and returns (weeks later) to find him dead. Story told in two eras with 2002 American journalist woman stumbling on the story, and the fact that her French husband's family took over Sarah's family flat. Lots of implicit criticism of the French connivance during the war. But somehow the book was mainly predictable and rather dull.	K 294
May 20	Admissions	Henry Marsh	3	Written soon after his retirement, a rather fragmentary and unstructured series of reminiscences on episodes of his career and life. Just as readable as "Do No Harm".	270 2017
Apr 20	Secret Service [KH#1]	Tom Bradby	3	Splendid spy thriller featuring Kate Henderson, head of MI6 Russian desk. She's tipped off to a secret meeting between three top Russian spooks which she bugs (with blackmailed eastern European girl who ends with her throat cut) and hears that a) the UK PM is about to resign because of cancer b) the Russians have a preferred candidate to replace him and c) they also have a mole supplying all this info. Lots of good Stella Rimington reminiscent action as the twists develop; both PM candidates have embarrassing and/or murky pasts. Ends in a rush with more deaths and KH suddenly finding out (the pretty in-credible) mole. Would be 3+ without this jarring end.	K 357
Apr 20	Guns, Germs and Steel: A short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years	Jared Diamond	3	Argues that Eurasians conquered or displaced other continents' peoples because of features of their continent, not biological differences. Particularly its high diversity of wild plants and animals suitable for domestication. This coupled with an east/west major axis helping the spread of that domestication, people, and technologies for long distances with little change in latitude. The 500+ readable pages, leave one's head reeling from so much info. Some pieces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition from Hunter/Gatherers (HG) to farmers: - Domesticated crops came from natural mutations that had hitherto failed. Wild peas have popping pod to disperse seeds, but non-popping ones more attractive to humans. They are easier to harvest, so would be taken home and eaten. This mutation grows in latrines giving the domestication cycle. - The "Fertile Crescent" ("FC" - Middle East, spanning from modern-day Egypt up through Israel, Iraq to western Iran) was cradle of Eurasian development. Was much more temperate than its largely arid present-day state, with large stands of highly productive domesticable wild crops. - Wild candidate predecessors of domesticated animals almost all in FC. North America, Australia, and sub-Saharan Africa had none at all. - Anna Karenina principle (All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way): only need one issue to inhibit domestication. More calories per acre lead to denser populations, which spawns full-time specialists, kings and bureaucrats. Then tax, wars, priests to justify wars, soldiers and craftsmen, technologists, weapons. With fixed location, can store food and develop tools and weapons that do not have to be portable More children (every 2 years), compared to mobile, child-toting, HG (every 4 years) Large domestic animals for farming, transport, war (horses) Humans have occupied Eurasia for about a million years, far longer than they have lived in the America (which they reached by Siberia/Alaska land bridge in ice age when sea levels up to 500' lower than today) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Madagascar was populated from Borneo (4000 miles away) not adjacent Africa. Pizarro's 200 men rout 8000 Inca's in early 1500s due to horses as much as weapons. The Americas never having had any such significant large domesticated animals Long before Columbus (1492), China was major sea power with large ships and crews crossing the Indian Ocean as far as Africa. But in that highly developed empire, one of the two squabbling political factions reacted to the loss of seven treasure ships in early 1400s by totally shutting down their maritime industry, which worked because they were such a centralised nation. By contrast, Columbus (an Italian) had to tout himself round a fragmented Europe before Spain, the fifth county he approached, backed him. Hence Europe colonized America, and Africa, rather than the Chinese. By 1600 Japan owned more and better guns than any other country. Then Samurai/honour tradition legislated against them, resulting in almost no functioning guns soon after. This was only possible because Japan is isolated, with no neighbours to preserve the gun-toting tradition. The Germs of the title that so helped the conquering Eurasians came from domesticated animals mutation (cf: Covid-19!) Of modern world's 6000 languages, 1000 are in New Guinea and 1500 in Africa He has a New Guinea focus/bias (he worked there a lot). Its rugged inhospitable terrain fragmented tribes giving dense (small) populations, disease resistance, reasonably advanced technology. He also points out how much more "intelligent" the NG natives are, with so much innate wisdom and skill compared to westerners spoon-fed information on their TV couches! Sadly he didn't (I think) cover how religions arrived 	K 571
Apr 20	The Legacy of the Bones [Baztan#2]	Dolores Redondo	3	Another absurdly far-fetched and gruesome murder mystery for female Spanish detective Amaia Salazar. Series of linked murders of women, victim having right arm severed and removed, but not by the murderer, who shortly afterwards commits suicide. Linked to desecration of a church, the appearance of right arms of non-baptised infant corpses, and cannibalism. Plenty of supernatural aspects and premonitions and, ludicrously, everything is linked to AS's family, including her vile institutionalised mother wanting to kill her offspring.	516 2013
Apr 20	The Man in the Balcony [Martin Beck #3]	Maj Sjöwall (Sjowall) and Per Wahlöö (Wahlöo)	3	Another low-key police murderer hunt. Loner man befriends young girls in Stockholm parks and rapes and kills them. MB and co catch the man in the last pages almost by accident after lots of fruitless and lead-less lugubrious angles. Remarkably fresh and current feeling given the 1967 setting - sex, drugs and homelessness, rapid communication using walkie-talkies; even computers (tho with teletypes and, presumably, mainframes) to correlate data. A bit hard to follow who is who amongst the policemen who are often called by only first or last name, and seldom both together, making it hard to remember/work out if they are one or two people. Also the set of them seem to sit around a lot together doing not much between bursts of activity.	208 1967
Apr 20	The Co-op's got bananas	Hunter Davies	3	Long-winded autobiography, covering (mainly) his life as youngster in WW2 poor suburbs (Carlisle and Dumfries) through the 50's until, as a well-started-off journalist on the Sunday Times, his marriage in 1960. Small bits of general life and background were interesting enough, but there was far far too much dull personal detail and weak commentary. Though not a long book, might have been OK at half the length.	K 327 2016
Apr 20	Paris Echo	Sebastian Faulks	3	19-year-old Algerian lad and 30+ American woman meet up in Paris exploring its streets and metros and WW2 and later history. Slightly limp plot with both of them having out-of-body experiences (Autoscopy) in pursuing their different tracks. Both meet sort of reincarnations of WW2 women experiencing the horror of the Nazi's and the vileness of the collaborating French, touching on many well known stories from that time. His also brings up the 1961 massacre in Paris of many Algerians by what became the CRS under Papon, who had led many of the same bunch of thugs as Milice supporting the Germans during the war.	298 2018
Apr 20	Silver [MS#2]	Chris Hammer	3	Follows on from Scrublands. The solve-the-case-for-the-police journalist (Martin Scarsden) is about to start living with the single mum from Scrublands who has inherited property in Port Silver, where MS is from - though he has not been back since he was a teenager. Starts with MS arriving at her house to find her in shock with his one-time best friend stabbed to death in her hallway. Lots of complex property shenanigans, and clearing up of MS's history (such as why his Mum and twin sisters died in a road accident when he was 8). All mixed up with dodgy religious guy having drugs parties on the small beach campsite run by an ex surf champion woman from PS, who is also tied in with MS's past.	K 576 2019

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Apr 20	The Conscience of the Rich [SaB#3: 1927-37]	C. P. Snow	3	Next in the mannered Lewis Eliot series. Follows his friendship with Charles March, son of wealth Jewish family. Slightly similarly to George Passant it revolves round a scandal that is hard to appreciate in these later times - this to do with a lawyer passing on knowledge of an upcoming government contract to some folk who made money on the back of it, including a not-close relative of March. Also the scandal to the March patriarch of his son backing out early from a career as a barrister to be a GP (almost a tradesman!), and his disinheritance.	233
Mar 20	Motherwell: A Girlhood	Deborah Orr	3	Depressing autobiography of (mainly) her childhood and relationship to her frequently vile parents - both smart but not formally educated, and resenting her super-brightness, going to University, and living a free life. But she came across as very self centred with many left-wing political and feminist rants. She was a well-known journalist, editor of prestigious magazines, and died at 57 from recurrent cancer soon after finishing the book.	294 2020
Mar 20	The Long Run	Ted Alibeury	3	Set in (I think) early 90's as international collection of anarchists (KAOS) start bombing and assassinating politicians in lead up to some larger destruction. Somehow tightly linked to using an unbreakable encryption system to communicate across the Internet. The main character. In an (briefly) unrelated thread British SIS man with extensive German background is sent to Berlin to find out what happened to incriminating (to various international politicians) documents that another rogue, now assassinated, SIS guy kept as his insurance. He meets, and becomes friendly with, a German professor who is key to the KAOS network. Manages to persuade him to "delete the key" hence stopping the network and the main threat. The technicalities seemed a bit silly to me, but, for a book published in 1996 he made some very prescient comments on encryption, and governments' arguments for installing backdoors everywhere. Also for the a growing disrespect of out-of-control politicians.	K
Mar 20	After You [LC#2]	Jojo Moyes	3	30-year old woman (Louisa Clark) recovering from Dignitas death of her employer of 6 months who she fell in love with. His hitherto unknown, wild, 16-year old daughter turns up and lots of other twists and turns as she gets their lives back together. Good for first 40% then started to drag a bit. Turns out this is 2 nd in 3-part series, will try the first in due course.	407 2015
Mar 20	Once Upon A Time in the East: A Story of Growing up	Xiaolu Guo	3+	Autobiography of remarkable Chinese woman. Discarded at birth in 1973 by her parents, brought up in very poor coastal village by her violent grandfather and her supportive, abused and foot-bound, grandmother. Starving for years, living off seaweed and grass, which probably contributed to dreadful eyesight through her life. Taken back by her parents at 7 (father a kindly sensitive artist, who survived labour camp during the cultural revolution; mother an unpleasant and aggressive full-on Communist) to live in an industrial 24/7 Communist dogma town. Here she (and her friends) suffered sexual abuse at the hands of macho, male-centric culture - by her late teens vowing to never go out with a Chinese man again. Despite everything, she (who must be ferociously bright) worked astonishingly hard (often only able to read and write with a magnifying glass), won one of five places in the main Beijing film school (from a field of over 7000) and later, also from a large field, a scholarship to film school in Beaconsfield at age 30. From this she moved to Hackney, finding England and Wales (during a brief fling with a hippie co-student) ugly and depressing compared to China! Made films and wrote scripts and various books - this one in flawless and erudite English, despite being almost unable to speak it when she arrived in the UK ten years earlier.	314 2017
Mar 20	The Lacuna	Barbara Kingsolver	3	Mexican/American writer, slightly brought up by peripatetic mother, largely in Mexico. Spends lots of teenage and early 20's living with and around Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo and the exiled Trotsky. Witnesses the latter's murder by a Stalin/NKVD agent, the tempestuous relationships of the three. Also the 1932 "Bonus Army" demonstration by disgruntled WW1 veterans in Washington DC. After a stint in WW2 working for the government relocation art works into safety, settles in Asheville NC becoming a very successful writer, paralleling Thomas Wolfe (another, not Tom Wolfe, writer). Tale is told as book written by his long-time, older, typist platonic friend (he is gay) cobbled together from diaries she managed to save from his wish to destroy them. With is "communist" association, at the end of the 1940's he is hit on by the mad House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and effectively put out of work, with his hitherto keen readers disowning him in their deranged vitriolic way. A good book that went on a bit too long in places.	507 2009
Mar 20	The Unwomanly Face of War	Svetlana Alexievich	3	Grim oral memories of WW2 horrors from Soviet women serving in the front line, both as non-fighters (nurses, surgeons, etc) and as soldiers, airwomen and partisans. Slightly same-y verbatim transcriptions of hundreds of interviews SA made. The (long) book was finished and banned in 1975 - the Communists not wanting to tarnish heroic memories of the war. The Russian spirit coming out from almost every remember-er - an almost animal/childlike passionate and emotional attachment to the homeland, belief in Communism, motherland and Stalin. A few mentions of Stalin's horrors, but usually even then downplayed. Survivors of the war often banished to Gulags (because they can't be true/malleable Communists if they didn't get themselves killed) and, if female, often castigated and distrusted as "front line girls".	K
Mar 20	Prophecy	S. J. Parris	5	Set in Elizabeth I's reign mix of magic and, maybe, history seemed dull from page 1.	
Mar 20	A History of Loneliness	John Boyne	3+	Damning tale of the Catholic Church and Ireland handling of paedophile priests in particular and sexuality in general. Told by a naïve priest who didn't realise what was going on around him. He rubbed shoulders with Popes (interestingly positive on the middle of the three in 1978, John Paul I, who died 33 days after being elected, replaced by the Polish II who JB castigates as failing to address priests many sexual problems) and didn't clock that his best friend was an abuser (caused by a history of abuse as a child).	
Mar 20	The Earth is weeping : the epic story of the Indian Wars for the American West	Peter Cozzens	3	Exhaustive (and exhausting) description of the fighting against and among the American Indians in the second half of the 19 th century, ending in the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. Reasonably objective showing both the various humane US/white participants and the debilitating inter-tribe war and butchery. But it was far too full of puffed up, perfectly readable, detail that couldn't all have come from the masses of oral and written records that he presumably based the book on. Also, it's one long, slightly unconnected, recounting of events. It fails to explain the administrative and other structures the whites imposed - Agents/agencies, Treaties and ceded/unceded territory.	
Mar 20	My Name Is Vittoria	Dafna Vitale Ben Bassat	4	WW2 Historical Novel, Based on a True Story of a Jewish Holocaust Survivor. Not really particularly interesting to those outside the extensive Italian family she came from. Little description of the world outside (WW2, move to the new Israel afterwards).	K
Mar 20	Real Tigers [SH#3]	Mick Herron	3	Same-old style and story type. This time the ex-alcoholic older woman in the team is kidnapped in some immensely convoluted power struggle between a new (male) Home Secretary, the current (female) head of MI5 and the female scheming to replace her. Again a ludicrous timescale (all happens in little over 24 hours), a nonsense shoot-out finale, and totally non-credible mix of animosity and loyalty amongst the team. But, the cryptic-ese text has plenty of good lines. eg: - "... the Barbican, which resembled an Escher drawing assembled in brick by a spook architect, its primary purpose being not so much to keep you from getting where you were going, but to leave you unsure about where you'd been. Every path led to a junction resembling the one you'd just left, offering routes to nowhere you wanted to go" - "Staffordshire or somewhere, one of those counties that only existed because otherwise there'd be gaps on the map"	K
Feb 20	Miss Garnet's Angel	Salley Vickers	3	Retired lady teacher goes to Venice for 6 months and becomes absorbed by local statue of Angel Raphael. Parallel telling of a story from the Apocrypha of Tobit and his son Tobias is rather tedious but (at least brief) necessary because the today-Venice main story is tightly linked to it.	K
Feb 20	The Rosie Project	Graeme Simsion	3+	Amusing tale of Aspergers-y mid-30's Aussie academic starting to find a Wife using questionnaires and help from colleagues. Falls in with inappropriate (to his nerdy requirements) good looking feisty Psychiatry student who he decides to help locate her unknown birth-father via complicated DNA trawl. Slightly hard to follow at times, and a little drawn out, but many a good chuckle.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Feb 20	Chastise: The Dambusters Story 1943	Max Hastings	3	Decent telling of the raid and the main protagonists - Barnes Wallis, 24-year old Guy Gibson and "Bomber" Harris. The latter totally against the whole thing, but cynically got in on the credits when it worked out OK. He (and others above him) also failed to follow it up, not attacking the dams as the Germans (Speer) rapidly and efficiently rebuilt them within a few weeks. The whole project was very rushed (BW only solved the spinning/dropping design 2-3 months before the drops) and poorly researched (the crews had never seen models of one of the dams and had to do many runs over it on the night to work out how to drop) - all part of the general half-hearted, out-on-a-limb attitude to it (it probably only happened because of BW's doggedness, carrying on much initial work in his spare time as a Vickers engineer). Though not a very long book (~300p) there's much repetition (eg: for some reason the Luftwaffe was not scrambled, so the bombers "only" had to contend with ground fire) and far too much personal detail on too many of the lesser characters.	
Feb 20	Dunstan	Conn Iggulden	5	Set in 940+ England, never got going with any interesting history, just lots of fluff about his early life.	
Feb 20	Priests de la resistance!	Fergus Butler-Gallie	3	Series of chapters on (mainly) priests involved in (mainly; a couple of USA Civil Rights ones too) WW2 resistance. Elegant readable prose but too much on the origins and upbringing of each, rather than the deeds they were involved with.	
Feb 20	Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded	Samuel Richardson	5	Written 1740 as, reputedly, the first English novel. 15-year old maidservant regularly touched up by randy unscrupulous master of the house, after he inherits from his Mum who nurtured Pamela. She ludicrously (to a 21st century reader) continually fails to leave the household, though manages to rebuff him, because of her religious and class conventions. Gave up 20% through - would have done so earlier had I realised there was so much more drivel to come.	K
Feb 20	Killing Ground	Gerald Seymour	4	Mafia shenanigans in Sicily. Young British girl is coerced by a troubled CIA agent to return to nanny for a family for whom she did the same some years earlier. The man of the house is the money man and younger brother of a brutal secretive Cosa Nostra soon-to-be boss. Decent story ruined by ghastly irritating prose and unnatural dialogue style - staccato phrases, smart-Alec, almost pompous, ugly grammar - and thoroughly unbelievable characters (from the girl, Charley, down).	K
Feb 20	Becoming	Michelle Obama	3	Bio of an impressive woman, from poor-ish background in disadvantaged area of Chicago to the White House and disappointment at handing over to odious Trump. Though she's obviously biased, reinforces what an amazing man Barak is. But, really too detailed and emotion-based for me!	
Feb 20	Cannery Row	John Steinbeck	3+	As good as I remember it. Burns in Californian ocean-side town (Monterey) in the depression. Good guys and wretches, full of great intentions that often go awry.	
Feb 20	Woman at point zero	Nawal El Saadawi	3	Life story told by NES of woman in death row in Cairo prison who had refused to talk to anyone. The woman from a poor rural background was variously abused, became a comfortably off self-managed Cairo prostitute but with ambitions took a less paid ordinary job. But being continually hounded by men eventually killed one and, with no remorse at all, was hung shortly after talking to NES.	
Feb 20	Girl	Edna O'Brien	3	Over-egged and -fictionalised telling of one of the 300 girls abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria. After rapes and forced marriage, she escaped with her baby to deal with PTSD and be feted by the President and press.	
Feb 20	Swan Song	Kelleigh Greenberg-Jephcott	3	Strangely compelling gossip-ware covering Truman Capote's life and friendships with six rich, socialite "swans": Slim Keith, Babe Paley (wife of CBS boss Bill), C.Z. Guest, Gloria Guinness, Lee Radziwill (sister of Jackie Kennedy) and Marella Agnelli (wife of Fiat owner Gianni). The writing style is intriguing being largely told by the group of six as an entity, flitting to and fro across the decades, in an anecdotal, allusive, chatty, bitchy way. From lowly (I think) beginnings in the rural South, where his neighbour and best friend was Harper Lee he appears to have shot to wealth and fame long before "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1958) and "In Cold Blood" (1966 which HL helped him with); this seems to be because his other writing, a form of genius and great skills at flattering and flirting with women (he a tiny homosexual with a child-like face). But the tales of the six+one are of a tawdry and over-privileged life with endless partner-swapping. TP degenerated into drugs and booze and blew the love his six (and others) had for him by kiss-and-tell articles in the 70's, leaving him still rich but virtually friendless when he died at 59 in 1984. Also intriguing how KG-J (a Texan product of UEA) carefully used only already-public information for a huge amount of salacious (sexual mainly) detail to avoid libel actions from the families of those covered.	K
Jan 20	Red Notice: How I became Putin's No. 1 Enemy	Bill Browder	3+	Recounts the murder and subsequent US Congress act by the energetic US/British citizen for whose Russia-based fund Segel Magnitsky worked. BB had exposed some of the massive corruption in Russia and was refused entry back in 2005. While starting to fight this, with SM as his lawyer, Putin's establishment laid into them big time - including illegally taking over two companies his fund owned, and the "investigators" stealing \$230m from the state by getting an illegal tax "refund". SM actively continued to battle the intransigent state, and refused to leave Russia. But in 2008 he was arrested and then killed in custody in 2009. Amazingly, given the Russian antagonism and the turgid political chasing required, the Magnitsky act was passed in 2012.	
Jan 20	A taste of Treachery	Manda Scott	3	Short/sample prequel to "A treachery of spies" - a few pages telling how the main female assassin / SOE agent started out in Paris, killing her lover.	K
Jan 20	The Marriage of Opposites	Alice Hoffman	3+	Dramatisation of life of Camille Pissarro's mum. A Creole Jew born on St Thomas, in the Caribbean, living there most of her life despite longing to escape to Paris. A turbulent and slightly mystical person, married in her teens to a man twice her age to help her father's shipping and store business. Widowed in her 20's, fell in love with her 7-years-younger nephew by marriage who had been sent out from Paris to manage the company. This caused scandal in the community which took years to clear. Pissarro himself, last child of this pairing, also wild and unconventional, had many flare ups with his mum (as she had with hers). Must get to see more of his excellent paintings.	
Jan 20	Harry's Game	Gerald Seymour	2	Good thriller set in ~1974 Belfast. The eponymous off-grid army officer sent deeply undercover to track provisional IRA hit-man who gunned down minister on the steps of his London home. Suitably non-happy ending with both men dying, but the politico's being able to spin it as their success. The fear, anger, hatred on all sides well conveyed. As is the organisation and discipline of the provos. Lots of reference to actual events and characters one heard about from "Say Nothing" (Dec-19), all the more impressive in that this book was written before 1975, so many of the details were, presumably, less known.	K
Jan 20	Into the Fire [IP#1]	Manda Scott	3	Two books in one, with, annoyingly alternate chapters. One (poorly) recounts history of Jean D'Arc up to her burning in 1431 with dramatic embellishments including presenting her (involuntarily) swapping with her half-sister just before the burning so her followers could keep up the campaign to unite France (a thesis that has lots of current believers). The other, with detective Ines Picaut in 2014, has series of arson attacks in New Orleans (some deliberately killing folk that will give FN a boost) in run up to Mayoral election between IP's ex-husband, backed by local Mafiosi, and a Front Nationale (FN) woman. Both the FN candidate and IP are variously portrayed as latter-day Jean D'Arcs.	K
Jan 20	The Man Who Cycled the World	Mark Beaumont	3	Great day-by-day telling of his 2007/8 Guinness World record, doing 18,300 miles in 81 days. Reinforces his amazing determination through some gruelling times. Would have rated higher if it wasn't quite so long and, inevitably, rather same-y at times. Interesting to hear his Mum's side of events. She ran his "base camp" in Scotland with endless activities re-calibrating the route he took (inevitable changes might have compromised the 18,000 mile minimum he had to ride), remotely contacting and cajoling bike shops, immigration and airline officials, police and many other. All from a non-tech-y background. A formidable woman - can see where he gets his spirit!	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jan 20	Accidental Empires	Robert X. Cringely	2	Superbly readable history of the evolution of PC's and their software from early 1970s to 1991. Though a bit technical at times to me (I'm not really, and wasn't at all in that time-frame, a PC person) it is a fascinating assessment of the speed and money and happen-stance of the PC evolution and fortunes made and lost from it. Starting with Wozniak's Apple I and by 1991 being a software-based world dominated by the ruthless Bill Gates and Microsoft. A good post-script chapter written in 1996 picks up on most of his successful predictions at the end of the 1991 parts - IBM on the way out, software dominating, impending tectonic shift to Internet and some non-PC device world: he harps on about TV set top boxes but also some as yet not clear merging of phones, watches, portability. Sadly this a year before Jobs returned to Apple, which, no doubt, would have added more interesting predictions Cringely is quite an extraordinary brain, wordsmith and visionary. So sad his blogging seems to have dried up two years ago.	
Jan 20	The Rules of Magic	Alice Hoffman	5	Something about a Boston/NY family in the 1960s+ with magical powers.	K
Jan 20	The Way Back to Florence	Glenn Haybittle	3+	WW2 saga following a set of young men and women who (mainly) get to know each other as art students in Florence. One, a Brit, returns to become a bomber pilot with a remarkably long run of safe-home raids before being shot down in 1943/4 in Italy where he then makes his way back to his Italian painter wife. Another a German Jew heads back to Florence from Paris with his young daughter after a few years marriage and his wife's capture by the Nazi's. Slightly drawn-out and stuffed full of the most gruesome descriptions of the torture and violence by both the Germans and their Italian Fascist acolytes.	K
Jan 20	The Fall	Simon Mawer	2	Excellent tale follows the lives of two generations of couples with lots of serious climbing and partner exchange between them. In the 1940's two women get close to a charismatic climber who goes on to die on a major (Himalayan?) mountain having loved the first and married the second. In the 1970's the sons of each woman meet and become bosom climbing buddies - also doing major routes with the narrator breaking a leg near the top of the N face of the Elger. Again lots of sharing of women (mothers and girlfriends). Though the chronology flows to and fro, it ends with the other son seemingly committing suicide in his 50's by climbing beyond his (then) capability.	
Jan 20	A Moveable Feast	Ernest Hemingway	3-	Short ramblings about life in (mainly) Paris in the 1920s and the folk he mixed with.	
Jan 20	Nine Elms [KM#1]	Robert Bryndza	4	Usual compulsive read. First in series with a new lead - Kate Marshall, once a cop, now a ~40-year old Crime academic with a (platonic) ~21-year old male assistant. More grisly than ever, following both a historical case (that KM solved as cop) of cannibalistic man killing young girls, and in current time a copycat doing the same in cahoots with the (jailed) original.	K 372 2019
Jan 20	A Very Expensive Poison: The Definitive Story of the Murder of Litvinenko and Russia's War with the West	Luke Harding	3+	Detailed telling of Litvinenko's murder (on the 3rd Polonium attempt by his inept assassins), its background and eventual 2016 enquiry/trial in London. Also heavily pushing Putin's direct responsibility and continued brazen barbarities since (several other "unexplained" deaths, Crimea, MH17, entry into Syrian war). Being published in 2016 did not include the, even more incompetent, 2018 Skripal poisonings in Salisbury. LH became Guardian Moscow correspondent in early 2007, weeks after the murder and had lots of first hand information and involvement in events (including being on the same flight as the killers used when bringing Polonium to the UK). Tiny bit scrappy and pedantic at times, but a fascinating read.	424 2016
Dec 19	Hard Times	Charles Dickens	3	Set in industrial Coketown and a decent read, partly because it is 25% the pages of most Dickens tomes. Starts with Mr Gradgrind who supervises a school having its teacher M'Choakumchild force only dry facts and no sentiment or fancy or imagination into its pupils. There's also the wonderfully unpleasant pompous rags-to-money ass Bounderby, banker and industrialist with no time for workers concerns. Gradgrind has his indoctrinated teenage daughter, Louisa, marry the 50-year old Bounderby - which she accepts as her lot. Later events get Gradgrind (now an MP) to realise how poorly he's treated her and the marriage dissolves as does Bounderby's pomp when his estranged Mum turns up to discredit his claims of a poor background. Also Louisa's brother Tom is finally nailed for robbing the bank and blaming it on the only decent worker in town (though being of privileged class his father spirits him out of the country to avoid prosecution, while the salt-of-the-earth worker he put the blame on dies).	K 1850
Dec 19	When it grows dark [WW#6]	Jorn Lier Horst	3	Good undramatic detective story, in the style the Martin Back ones, set in Larvik, west of Oslo. Sixth book featuring the same William Wisting character - this being both a final(?) and prequel in that it dives back 30+ years to his first case (a smash and grab ATM theft) and solves the other, almost 100-year old one, that was intertwined with it where a cash and gold delivering being made in a fancy car in 1925 disappeared, until WW stumbled on the long-hidden car in the 1980s(?) and was sent the vital info to solve it in the 2010s.	
Dec 19	Country Girl	Edna O'Brien	4	Memoir of her life escaping down-at-heels Irish comfort, with over-weaning religion and drunken father to her wild and controversial writings. Far too much name dropping and self-anguish!	
Dec 19	An American Marriage	Tayari Jones	3+	Husband of not long wed black couple in Alabama is jailed for rape he didn't commit, which breaks the marriage. Great telling of the tale, mercifully pretty much chronologically, but from each of the three main characters in turn - him, his wife and his wife's childhood friend and neighbour who becomes her lover during the prison spell. On acquittal and release after 5 years he comes back, with understandable upset to clear. Good flipping of expectations and events, but eventually everyone settles down amicably.	K
Dec 19	The Cat's Table	Michael Ondaatje	3	Three boys on long liner journey in 1954 from home in Ceylon to live in England meet all sorts of characters, some relatives, some villains. The book flips between (largely) snippets of the journey and their adventures, and then their continuing interwoven lives much later. Decent but not as engaging as, for instance, Warlight.	
Dec 19	The War Doctor	David Nott	3	Gritty detail from a vascular surgeon who has spent much of his career doing stints in areas of war and major emergency. Lots from Syria amongst other places. Slightly jagged structure, and often with too much medical jargon for a layman, but the guy is clearly hugely dedicated and impressive. Not only the at the coal face stuff, but lots of fund raising and political pressurising - he credits himself with being a significant force in getting Assad and Putin to let a bunch of children and civilians escape from Aleppo. One wonders how on earth he has time for all this when he is also an NHS consultant practising in several London hospitals, and a keen pilot of planes and helicopters	
Dec 19	Cloudstreet	Tim Winton	2	Fabulous image- and language-rich saga covering the intertwined lives of two poor Western Australian families between 1940s and the 1960s. One, the three-child Pickles, have profligate Mum, gambling Dad who lost fingers of one hand in an industrial accident, but were gifted a large house on Cloud Street in Perth. To make ends meet they take in the seven(?) - child Lamb family who are dominated by hard working religious Mum, who moved to Perth after tragic near-drowning left their favourite young son, Fish, as an imbecile. Mum starts a shop in the house which goes from strength to strength, but keeps herself separate from the rest of the family, moving out of the marital bed into a tent in the garden (TW's gran did the same). Wonderful Ozzy-rich language and description of an age of fish-rich rivers and history- full houses. In an afterword TW laments the loss of passing on of old stories and respect of ones elders and the lack of elegance of new housing. Has a feel of Cannery Row.	K
Dec 19	France in revolution, 1776-1830	Sally Waller	3	AS/A2 studies primer. A bit earnest, but gave a good run through the Revolution. Starting from French virtual bankruptcy after years of wars, and brought to a head by their joining the Americans in the war of Independence 1775-1783. This coupled with many poor harvests through the period meant that "... up to 88% of a Parisian workers wages were spent on bread alone" in the last 1780s. So 1789 started a huge series of revolutionary disruptions, the years of Terror and executions, constitutional changes and re-groupings. Despite this France (the most populous country in Europe) went to war, very successfully, with almost all its neighbours. In part due to the great pride the population now felt in their country. Through this Napoleon shot to prominence - General at 24 (1793), First Consul in 1799 and Emperor in 1804 - as a superb military mind. His deterioration from his peak in 1808 ended with the re-establishment of a monarchy in 1815, Louis XVIII followed by Charles X - which lasted until the July 1830 revolution replaced it with another one which lasted until 1848. Sadly, this book didn't cover that or the June 1832 Paris uprising which Hugo witnessed and immortalised in Les Misérables.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Dec 19	The Falcon Of Sparta	Conn Iggulden	3	Fictionalised telling of the battle of Cunaxa (401 BC) and follow-on, derived mainly from the later writings of Xenophon. Battle initiated by Cyrus, younger brother of Artaxerxes II, recently king of Persia after his father's (Darius II) death. Cyrus led an army of ~100,000 loyal(ish)-to-him Persians fronted by ~20,000 Spartan and Greek mercenaries against a Persian army of over a million. Despite Cyrus being killed early on, the Spartans cut through the feeble Persian hordes, but then had to retreat under the leadership of Clearchus. He and the other Spartan/Greek generals went under truce to meet Artaxerxes and his nasty right hand man, Tissaphernes, who broke the truce and slaughtered them all. Generalship of the remaining 10,000 mainly Spartans then fell to 26-year old Xenophon (a student of Socrates, who happened to be executed while X was away) who led them back to Greece through great hardship and with great cunning. Not a bad read, with decent attempt to describe the day-by-day hassles of moving masses of troops and their vast army of servants and suppliers through the heat and desert. But, it would have been good to get a clearer idea of more of the detail and the true numbers - he often talks of 5000 troops suddenly shooting off here or there, which can't be right with the limited communication, mobility and supply chains.	
Dec 19	Under Occupation [NS#15]	Alan Furst	3	Parisian detective novel author becomes involved with Resistance movement during WW2. Lightweight easy read, but as with many of his books, slightly disjointed narrative and way more description than action.	
Dec 19	Say Nothing: A True Story Of Murder and Memory In Northern Ireland	Patrick Radden Keefe	3	Interesting but poorly presented (too much rambling and odd chronology) book about the Irish Troubles. Particularly following Gerry Adams, Brendan Hughes (a senior IRA leader) and Dolours and Marian Price (hunger striking sisters who "beat" the system); the latter three all disapproving of the Good Friday "peace". Also, the family and story of Jean McConville a widowed mother of ten who was taken from her home in 1972 and never seen again. Though almost exclusively about the IRA, rather than loyalist terrorists, it was extremely critical, and exposing, of Adams and his denial of being in the IRA or having anything to do with the many atrocities and disappearings. Though at the same time reporting the theory that without this duplicitous stance he could not have got the IRA to agree to the ceasefire and GFA. Interesting angles on some of this from secret oral testimonies from many of the terrorists that were taken and kept by Boston College in the USA.	K
Dec 19	Secret Pigeon Service	Gordon Corera	3	Disappointing book about an intriguing aspect of WW2: use of carrier pigeons parachuted into occupied Belgium and France (mainly) with questionnaires for finders to fill in and send back to England. Sadly the rambling, overly detailed at times, and uninformative at others (how do they train pigeons to "home" to different places, let alone to do so while dodging shots, hawks and other hazards?). But did give a feel for the unforgivable hostility between the various UK organisations involved; as so often, MI5, MI6, SOE, Admiralty, inter alia, often deliberately suppressing key information resulting in agent and other deaths.	
Nov 19	Land of the Living	Georgina Harding	3	A man's experience of (fairly) horrific times fighting the Japanese in N. East India during WW2, escaping after all his friends and troop killed to be nurtured by a local head hunter tribe before being returned to a sympathetic local British administrator and anthropologist. Told by flipping between his ~1947 life now married to a childhood sweetheart and the story she slowly coaxes out of him.	
Nov 19	The heart's invisible furies	John Boyne	3+	Absorbing saga following the life of a repressed gay Irish man at 7-yearly intervals from 1945 to 2015. Adopted at birth because his unwed 16-year old Mum was publicly castigated and physically thrown out the church in her rural village by the hypocritical priest, after being denounced by her mother. Follows his life and loves and the (very slow) changes in acceptability of his homosexuality. Lovely interweaving of the characters over time with him finally meeting his mum in old age.	588 2017
Nov 19	Two Years Ago	Charles Kingsley	4	Dreadfully wordy rambling tale set in mid-1800s. Covering slavery, Cholera, Crimean war. Would actually be a good book but for pages of unnecessary descriptions, polemic and Christianity.	K
Nov 19	Wolf Hall	Hilary Mantel	4	Fiction hung round life of Thomas Cromwell. From poor origin (abusive blacksmith's son) to right-hand man of first Cardinal Wolsey and then Henry VIII. Covers mainly the machinations and politicking as Henry dumps Katherine of Aragon for Anne Boleyn (1533). Good to be forced to look up some of this history. But the book is very long with an awkward-to-read prose style. I believe its sequel, Bring up the Bodies, covers the rest of TC's life (executed in 1540), but I won't be reading it!	
Nov 19	Rough passage to London	Robin Lloyd	3	Fiction spun round the life of one of the author's ancestors - Elisha Ely Morgan (1808-64), an East coast American who ran away to sea at 16 to find his lost brother (who had done the same). He joined a packet ship company (doing regular Atlantic crossings carrying mail, etc.), becoming captain in his early 20's and manager in later life. He was obviously likeable and formed great friendships with an artistic crowd in London including Dickens, Turner and many other painters. Lots of (maybe too much) detail of sailing ship life and a fair story thread of him avoiding death from an illegal English slaving syndicate and finding his brother.	
Nov 19	White Hot Silence [PS#2]	Henry Porter	3+	Great 2 nd Paul Samson thriller. Lots of back reference to the 1 st (Syrian lad come computer whiz) and to (I think) a not written one about the woman who helped him rescue the lad who, in this one, is the kidnab victim as pawn in her (semi-hero) millionaire ex-Kurdish husband's US high-tech business dealings. Chasing all over Europe as Russian-backed villains siphon millions of dollars from crypto company to fund far right terror organisations across Europe.	K
Nov 19	A Woman of No Importance: The Untold Story of Virginia Hall, WWII's Most Dangerous Spy	Sonia Purnell	2	Astounding biography of female American, one legged, US SOE (then OSS/CIA) agent (actually not even that - she was officially just an SOE coordinator who managed to get, and stay, in France) who, according to SP, more or less singlehandedly organised Resistance across France during WW2. Endless super-close calls avoiding the Nazi's and managed to never tell anyone her tales after the war. This partly because of the so-common conflict between the successes she had and the deaths and torture of the hundreds who helped, or knew of, her.	K
Nov 19	The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed, 1600-1900	T. M. Devine	3	Long book. Initially readable, but descended into fairly repetitious morass of facts which did not give the chronology and detail of events they relate to. As if the reader was assumed to know the history and events over these 300 years. His intro seemed to expect you to have read John Prebble's Highland Clearances to know what was going on there (though he also mildly disses JP for being too anecdotal and emotional, albeit acknowledging that JP only claims to be a "historical writer" not a historian). Lands for sons. Potato and corn crop failures. the limitations of natural endowment in the Highlands; a marked increase of population on poor land with no long-term alternative for subsistence or employment for a people who had always lived close to the edge of subsistence in the old clan-based society; the destruction of infant Highland manufacturing by Lowland competition; bankruptcy of the traditional landed class; the overwhelming power of market capitalism; and the absence of any viable long-term alternative to pastoral husbandry.	K
Oct 19	The Beekeeper of Aleppo	Christy Lefteri	3+	Syrian couple (he a bee-keeper, she an artist) fleeing the carnage in Aleppo after their son is killed by a bomb. Both hiding their traumas (her functional eyes stopped seeing after seeing her son blown up, he fantasising about a son-like other refugee lad). Grim telling of the stages of their journey with good chronological switching between before, it and after when they are in an English B&B trying for asylum.	
Oct 19	The Moscow Sleepers [LC#10]	Stella Rimington	3	Weaker than the other Liz Carlyle's. Refugees being talent-spotted in Germany by Russian sleeper agent. Transfers them to hacker-schools in USA and UK.	
Oct 19	Fame is the Spur	Howard Spring	3	Long elegiac tale of poverty to riches and/or influence following the rise of British socialism and Labour party via a number of characters starting in the backstreets of Manchester and the Rhondda from 1880s to 1940.	
Oct 19	Warlight	Michael Ondaatje	3	Very indirect fiction of boy/man slowly finding out about his mother's complex past as spy and/or secret service person both during and, mainly, after WW2. The boy and his sister pretty much abandoned by her and his dad at the end of the war and left in the care of a handful of oddballs, some of whom also (maybe) had spying affiliations.	K

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Oct 19	Barbarians at the Gate: The Fall of RJR Nabisco	Bryan Burrough, John Helyar	3	Long, rambling, over-egged but gripping recounting of the 1988 LBO of RJR Nabisco by Wall Street's KKR - at around \$25 billion the largest ever until ~2005. The background detail was exhaustive and exhausting, and the book impressively put together in about 8 months soon after the deal. Though hard to follow (particularly using Kindle, where it is less easy to flip to and fro the intro pages giving the names of the many players), the main impression was of the grotesque greed, luxury, arrogance and extravagance of these latter day emperors/kings - both the management team (mainly Ross Johnson the CEO) and the Wall Streeters. Also the crazy hours and massive manpower brought to bear, particularly in the final hours as the deal went to the wire - with commensurate huge fees! And what a small incestuous, squabbling, group of players, in each others pockets were involved - with many companies working for all three of the bidding groups.	K
Oct 19	The Leopard	Tomasi di Lampedusa	5	Semi (I believe) fiction set around titled family at the time of Garibaldi's 1860s invasion of Sicily.	
Oct 19	Let go my Hand	Edward Docx	3+	Three sons drive with their MND-dying Dad to Dignitas in a VW camper-van. Back histories come out, as the tale is told by the (way) youngest, born of 2nd marriage. Witty and inventive, with lots of humour and pathos, as all four are massively open an d articulate. Would be a "2" if some of the over-long sections had been edited or removed.	
Oct 19	A Farewell to Arms	Ernest Hemingway	3-	Uninspiring memoir/fiction of time in, and deserting from, the Italian army during WW1. Probably thinly disguised autobiography. Style mainly reported conversation and much more of his affair with, love for, an English nurse who died having their baby, than the war.	
Oct 19	The Secret Speech [Child 44#2]	Tom Rob Smith	3	The Leo character tries to get away from his KGB-y world, but gets dragged back into it when his disaffected adopted teenage daughter is spirited away by a woman he used to love but whose husband he brutally beat when he was a young pedant. Ends up in the 1956 Hungarian revolution.	K
Oct 19	Middle England	Jonathan Coe	5	Dull	
Oct 19	The House We Grew Up In	Lisa Jewell	3-	Family disintegration and, eventually, re-uniting told in endless different chronological snippets to the (pretty dull) final denouement. Events included suicide of a twin in his teens (I think), kleptomaniac mother who shackled up with gay neighbour immediately after, one sister secretly sleeping with the other's partner. Other twin dumping his girlfriend and new baby, who then become an item with his Dad, and getting imprisoned in Thailand for drug smuggling.	
Sep 19	Peaches for Monsieur le Curé	Joanne Harris	4	Pretty slushy follow-on from Chocolat (which I'm not sure I have read). Set in French riverside village with the Chocolatier returning to sort out aggro between Muslim families, the local priest and bigoted locals.	K
Sep 19	The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War	Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva	3	Auto-biography by two of a group of four young S. African war photo-journalists. Mainly covering the township wars in the early 1990s before the "Mandela" election in 1994. Brutal violence between Inkatha Zulus and the ANC - allegedly mainly due to the former, but with hints that the dying white establishment encouraged the violence to show that blacks couldn't be trusted with the country. Rather ragged descriptions of many gruesome events the gang witnessed, but being in up with loads of personal stuff and work in other parts of the world didn't help the focus. Exposed, but didn't answer, the conundrum of how they could take photos of folk being butchered or left to die in front of their lenses instead of helping the victims. But, this pressure and, in two cases, a druggy and drunken lifestyle, led to two of them committing suicide. Remarkably given the dangerous and out-of-control conflicts they were in, only one of the immediate gang was killed (though the main author was seriously wounded several times) - and this by SA peace keepers who were trying to catch an Inkatha sniper.	
Sep 19	The Theoretical Foot	M.F.K.Fisher	5	1930s Americans in Europe. Writer was known for foody things. Uninspiring start.	
Sep 19	The Third Man and The Fallen Idol	Graham Greene	3	Pair of short stories. Third Man a (slightly better) feel than the Americanised and dated famous film. Fallen Idol about a young boy being looked after by his family butler and wife while Pa and Ma are away, and being exposed to adult affairs and death.	
Sep 19	Barchester Towers	Anthony Trollope	5	More 1850s Church politicking. As readable as the others, but really not interesting enough to plough through all six books!	K
Sep 19	Nightfall Berlin	Jack Grimwood	3-	Late 1980s ex cold-war thriller set mainly in E. Berlin where ex-MI6 brit has been sent back to accompany Philby-like traitor who UK and USSR agree to return to Britain in his old age. He is found dead. All sorts of historically linked paedophilia affecting all main characters and devilishly complex interactions of UK spooks, Stasi, KGB. Cryptic, often awkward prose, and disjointed storyline.	K
Sep 19	A Country Road, A Tree	Jo Baker	5	Irish guy in Paris in 1939 just never got going	
Sep 19	Tell no Tales [ZF#2]	Eva Dolan	3	Very convoluted mix of murders in low-rent Peterborough among the Eastern European and Asian communities. One deliberate car ramming into bus queue killing a girl, badly hurting her sister and killing an (initially thought to be) random man. Then three vile beating and booting to deaths of young Asian men. All mixed in with nasty EDL type xenophobes give Zigic&Ferreira chasing one red herring after another until they finally get their man, and he almost kills F when blowing himself up.	
Sep 19	Forty Autumns	Nina Willner	3	Biograph of large E. German family from just after WW2 until just after the Berlin wall came down. One of them (Mum of the author) managed to escape to the West in 1948. Grim telling of the miserable and oppressed life of Ostis under their dreadful leaders and the Stasi. The author became a senior US Intelligence Officer in W Berlin in the 1980s so had good anecdotes on the spying and surveillance by both sides. But mainly a book of the family - who remained Communist non-believers beneath, mainly, a resigned kowtowing adherence to the universal pressure to conform.	
Sep 19	I Let You Go	Clare Mackintosh	3	Child killed by hit-and-run driver who drives away. Unpeeling detail and chronology has the first half of the book intimate that a disconnected woman appears in a remote Welsh village is the Mum and the killer. Then a history of domestic abuse from vile husband (and, as with some other similar fiction I have read, hard-to-understand how/why she stayed with him through it) evolves, but the woman is found by police and admits to the killing. But in the last pages things turn round and the vile husband is unmasked and killed.	K
Sep 19	The Novel	James Michener	5	A Pennsylvania Dutch successful novelist in 1990s	
Sep 19	Solo	William Boyd	3	Undemanding sequel to the Ian Fleming's Bond series. 007 sent to sort out war in obscure W African country. Suitable villains, CIA goodies and baddies and the main evil man left alive for a possible follow-on book.	
Sep 19	August Heat	Andrea Camilleri	3	Very undemanding Sicilian police murder mystery. Inspector Montalbano finding teenage girl murdered six years ago and getting involved with her twin sister in finding and punishing the killer. Lots of Italian illegality within the police as well as everyone else.	
Sep 19	Anna of the Five Towns	Arnold Bennett	3	Another good read, though I could have done with a bit less about the Methodist domination of the age/area. Girl finally escapes her miserly, wealthy and domineering bully of a father by marrying a decent man. But in doing so loses the poor man she prefers and who her father has forced out of business. Great descriptions of pottery making and the life in the towns.	K
Sep 19	Foe	J.M.Coetzee	3-	Slim, weird and slightly surreal tale. Woman gets shipwrecked onto the same island as Robinson Crusoe and Friday. They all get off but Crusoe dies on the way back to England where the woman (with Friday in tow) writes to Mr Daniel Foe (also referred to as deFoe) giving him the material for his book.	
Sep 19	Pigs in Heaven	Barbara Kingsolver	3	Fiction based on, apparently, real cases. ~30 year old poor white woman has very successfully adopted a Cherokee girl now six, but thrust on her when she was three by recently dead Mum's sister. The child had been badly abused by Mum's brutal other half. The situation comes to the attention of the Cherokee Nation who, with a tradition of extended families and a 1968(?) legal ruling that Indian kids should not be adopted by whites, raise the case of removing the child from her now-Mum. Both sides of the agonising situation are well and sympathetically presented, with a final compromise as various relationships build or are discovered. Interesting and generally well written (some early parts don't flow well), with some cracking witty repartee, particularly from the now-Mum's dry-as-the-desert-they-live-in boyfriend.	
Aug 19	Eye Of The Needle	Ken Follett	3-	Trite, quick read, WW2 spy thriller. German super-spy in the UK for a few years, trademark killer with stiletto (needle), discovers the phoney military build up in East Anglia under General Patton to fool Germans that D-day will be Calais not Normandy. Almost escapes to U-boat to tell Hitler but is foiled by beautiful repressed young woman living on tiny island off Aberdeen coast with her embittered and amputee husband in a loveless marriage that the spy briefly arouses.	1978

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Aug 19	Death Sentence [ND#6]	Damien Boyd	3	Another uncomplicated plot, linear, murder mystery for the dog-loving Nick Dixon. Various folk being killed who are all connected to a couple of incidents at the end of the Falklands war. First the attempt by an officer to stop a sergeant fleeing a battle. Then the squaddies who knocked out the officer, letting the sergeant return to battle (where he compensated by intense bravery and getting killed), made to clear up asbestos-lined Argentinian sheds from which they are all dying 30 years later.	K
Aug 19	A Walk-On Part	Chris Mullin	3	Political diaries from 1994-1999 (ending just before he was made a minister). Interesting run through the politicking of those early New Labour years with his usual gentle wisdom and wit.	
Aug 19	The Moonstone	Wilkie Collins	3	Massive diamond of great importance to an Indian Brahmin group is stolen by English soldiers in 1797. It brings a trail of grief over the next 60 years as Brahmins try, and eventually succeed, in recovering it. Billed as the first detective book, the mystery is solved with casual acceptance of peoples word and, basically, guesses at scenarios that seem pathetic in today's evidence-based world. But reasonably readable if massively over-wordy.	K
Aug 19	Why Did You Lie?	Yrsa Sigurdardottir	3	Three independent mystery stories told with interleaving chapters made it seem like it should have been three separate books - but in the final 10% they are linked up. Each connected to a supposed suicide 30-odd years before (in 1985) which three young kids were partly witness to, but kept this secret after being threatened by the murderer. In the present time each kid is then killed (or almost so) in an apparent suicide, after getting stream of anonymous notes threatening retribution. Stories are pretty slowly drawn as denouement eventually comes - but with the latter day murderer evading suspicion.	
Aug 19	The moving toy shop	Edmund Crispin	3	Extremely lightweight fast paced tongue-in-cheek story set in 1930s Oxford. Poet/author stumbles late at night into a toy shop to find a murdered woman. Is knocked out by someone and when he wakes up the shop has been changed to a grocers. He and his amateur detective pal (Gervase Fen) rush all over town ultimately solving a pretty silly puzzle.	
Aug 19	A Legacy of Spies	John le Carre	3	Ageing one-time Smiley subordinate recalled from retirement to answer latter day legal charges that he was instrumental in deaths of MI6 agents in the 60's. Hideously cryptic but readable.	
Aug 19	Deadly Secrets [EF#6]	Robert Bryndza	3	Another page-turner with ridiculously gory/ghastly/hard-to-believe murder mystery with some interesting twists. A tall dark-coated gas-masked man is assaulting a variety of people - male, female, gay, straight, young, old - and brutally kills one (which turns out to be a copy-cat killing mimicking the others by an old ex-Nazi lady). As ever, the book's appeal is more in the lives and back stories of the police and related folk, led by Erika Foster. And again hints and leads would allow for yet another follow-on, though word is that this may be the last.	
Aug 19	The Dogs Of War	Frederick Forsyth	4	Mercenary employed by nasty Tiny Rowland-like mining boss to overthrow unpleasant tinpot African regime so he can finagle deal to mine a Platinum hoard that his company came across accidentally. Most of book padded with boring detail on the sourcing, funding and assembly of the mercenary force. Last few pages cover the successful attack followed by the honourable twist as the mercenary leader dumps his employer and hands the country to "good" Africans before topping himself to avoid the last months of a long-diagnosed cancer death.	K
Aug 19	The Lost Man	Jane Harper	3	One of three brothers running massively remote farms in super hot and arid mid-Australia found dead of dehydration 10k from his well water-stocked truck. Only conclusion being that it was an odd suicide. But the slow un-peeling of everyone's back history hints at many potential murderers until the final reveal that his Mum did it because of his and his long-dead Dad's abuse of their partners. Not quite as good as her others, but more great feel for life in these isolated farmsteads.	
Aug 19	In Extremis: The Life of War Correspondent Marie Colvin	Lindsey Hilsum	3	Thorough biography of the almost rock-star journalist. Wild, exciting and charismatic from childhood. Became sufficiently trusted (and female) to build relationship with Gadafi and Arafat (inter alia). Always focussing on war's effect on ordinary folk and managing to get into more and more dangerous and relevant places. Her reporting arguably helped end Suhartu's persecutions in E. Timor. Certainly brought Tamil war in Sri-Lanka (where she lost the sight in one eye, gaining the trademark eyepatch) to international focus - though not enough to prevent government massacre of surrendering Tamils. Always pushing the boundaries of danger, finally too far in Syria where she was killed by deliberately targeted rocket strike by Assad's army on a media centre. Turbulent private life with lots of men, sex, booze, cigarettes and sailing. Including a very close (but not quite sexual) relationship with Lucien Carr (Beat Generation muse, gaol for killing man who molested him, supplier of the Teletype roll Kerouac wrote "On the Road" on) who, at twice her age, was her mentor in early days at UPI.	
Aug 19	The Spy and the Traitor: The Greatest Espionage Story of the Cold War	Ben Macintyre	2+	Superb story of Oleg Gordievsky, KGB man who became possibly the best ever MI6 spy. Told as page-turningly as a fiction but all true. He worked up the KGB to become its deputy head in London and excelled in accurate and prescient briefings to the West on Soviet thinking, KGB personnel and structures. Fascinating now declassified info on, for instance, how Thatcher/Gorbachev entente was enabled by OG supplying Moscow with MI6-fed briefings to ensure the two leaders such good progress. Then, when exposed by a KGB mole in the CIA, an amazing and you-wouldn't-believe-it-if-it-were-fiction last minute escape via Finland and Norway.	
Aug 19	American Pastoral	Philip Roth	4	Upstanding all-American Jewish boy, baseball champ at school in 1940's marries local beauty queen. Idyllic life shattered when, in 1968, their rebellious first-born 16-year-old girl bombs local store killing one person. She disappears and becomes more radical joining Weatherman-like outfits and doing more bombing and killing before letting her Dad locate her. She is now in early 20's and living a still furiously miserable life as an all-denying Jain. Far too wordy and rambling to recommend.	
Aug 19	We Were the Lucky Ones	Georgia Hunter	5	Fictionalised version of true history of Jewish family that survived WW2. JC found it worth reading, but I couldn't get past acres of overly-pap introduction to the various family members.	K
Aug 19	Codeword Cromwell	Ted Allbeury	4	Group of six off the record German saboteurs bent on destruction in S. England during the Blitz Let by titled Anglophile young SS officer who, before the war, fell in love with Jewish girl in Cambridge. All too trite with ludicrously long and dull intro to the couple. Then the saboteurs stopped by idiotic German HQ decisions in pique that the officer did not have official sanction (and paralleling the earlier idiocy of Hitler switching the Luftwaffe to Blitz London instead of finishing destroying the RAF).	K
Aug 19	In your defence: stories of law and life	Sarah Langford	3	Recounting a number of trials this barrister has worked on. Each covering some aspect of Criminal or Family law in a highly readable way, and with lots of personal commentary (though some cases were complex, legalistic and hard to follow). Most interesting impressions of barrister and court process: - Barrister often getting very little notice - sometimes minutes, seemingly - between getting a brief and standing up in court (possibly for a preliminary hearing). How on earth do they master the background material so quickly (lots of reference to spending hours the night before boning up)? - Barristers not well paid and, as we know from Richard Whittam, self employed. So dependent on rushing from case to case - Frequent chaos in court when lawyer, CPS, Social Workers turn up unprepared and the case has to be delayed and court schedule re-jigged all the time.	
Jul 19	Dead Lions [SH#2]	Mick Herron	3	The Slow Horse MI5 rejects gang in another complex tale of 20+ year Soviet sleeper agent popping up to deliver a K blow to the Capitalist City and help another Russian crook steal diamonds in a final scene built up to look as if it would be London 9/11 with a light air-plane flying into a Shard-like glass edifice. If it weren't for the irritating smart-Alec'y, deliberately fragmented, story lines and the totally unbelievable rude relationships between and amongst the SH boss and his underlings this would be a good book.	K
Jul 19	Straight On Till Morning: The Life Of Beryl Markham	Mary S. Lovell	3	Biography of remarkable woman. Upper class but almost always penniless. Brought up in rural Kenya and schooled with Africans. She was a brilliant horse trainer (as was her father) and most of the book covers this, bookending her famous first solo East-West transatlantic flight. Married first at 16 and was top Kenyan horse trainer at 19. Promiscuous, very attractive. Mixed up and in with the Happy Valley set, prince Henry and many other well known folk.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jul 19	The Radium Girls	Kate Moore	3	Gruesome telling of the awful and protracted maiming and deaths of girls who painted luminous dials with Radium from ~1915, using a technique (only used in USA for some reason) of licking the paintbrushes to ensure a suitably fine tip. Sadly the writing style is gossipy and full of unnecessary purported event detail. This also made it hard to follow the complex legal and medical investigations of the two main culprit companies - one in New Jersey (where victims won some recompense in the mid 1920s in exchange for no further legal action or information sharing) the other in Illinois, where the final legal judgement against the company there wasn't until 1939. Lack of medical information sharing (often because the companies hid it and/or lied) meant the acceptance of the link between Radium and the grotesque degeneration of bones and/or growth of horrid sarcomas took ages. But even then a company linked to the Illinois one was still using radiation products with improper worker protections in 1978! Didn't tally with my memories of the wonderful "These Shining Lives" play which I remember only covering the Illinois cases. Pointed out that of the three types of radiation (Alpha, Beta and Gamma), Gamma is the least dangerous but most penetrating, needing lead containers. Beta can be stopped by Aluminium foil and Alpha, the most dangerous, can be stopped by a sheet of paper. But the problem is that the girls ingested the Radium where the Alpha destroyed their bones and caused sarcomas.	K 480 2016
Jul 19	Normal People	Sally Rooney	3-	Light-weight arms-length love/friendship between two young Irish. Starting at high school, where he the lower class academic footballer and she is daughter of wealthy Mum. They have a non-public affair/affection which stretches over the next ~10 years. But its all pretty dull and the relationship totally unconvincing.	
Jul 19	Go, went, gone	Jenny Erpenbeck	3+	Very human angle on African asylum seekers in Germany. Retired professor comes across a group of them protesting about their situation in a square in Berlin where they have ended up stateless after Mediterranean crossing. Intrigued he starts talking to, and then befriending, them getting their back stories. Each has a predictable history of violence, horror and death but which comes over in a casual, dispassionate, way making it more powerful than is often the case.	
Jul 19	Brandenburg	Henry Porter	3+	End-of-cold-war thriller. One-time Stasi agent (now an art historian in GDR) who was double agent for the Brits, is forced to re-connect with an old agent to save his twin brother who the Stasi have in prison. He re-starts his work for the Brits and as the plot gets increasingly complex, the CIA and KGB to get info to the West about an Arab terrorist there. All heavily interwoven with events leading up to and including the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Unlike some super-complicated spy books, though I didn't follow all the shenanigans of the double-crossings I could follow the gist of the story pretty well.	K
Jul 19	The Cut Out Girl	Bart Van Es	3	Reconstruction of young Dutch Jewish girl's life in WW2. Handed over to foster parents by her parents in ~1940 (they were both killed in concentration camps not long after) she is passed from place to place. One, the happiest, being with the author's grandparents. Lots of grim detail of the war, but mainly a personal tale uncovering her repeated rape by the man of one family she was with, and the cold breakdown of friendship with the author's grandmother in her old age due to a silly misunderstanding. Also interesting on the vile behaviour of the Dutch to the Jews and, after the war, to their colonies in the far east.	
Jul 19	A Story like the Wind	Laurens van der Post	3-	Set in 1950s (I think) outback S. Africa where a young teenage white boy and his enlightened parents live in great harmony with the Africans. Full of atmosphere and bush craft but slightly trite as the lad builds deep relationships with his dog, a lost Bushman, and centuries-wise locals of all races. Rather sudden ugly end as his extended family is wiped out by an invasion of soldier-like men.	
Jul 19	Cut: One womans's fight against FGM in Britain today	Hibo Wardere	3+	FGM explained and prevention encouraged by this brave campaigner. She was cut when six in Somalia and has managed to have 7 kids after partial reversal of type III FGM (Infibulation). FGM still a huge problem as it is largely encouraged by females who themselves were cut and are usually too ignorant that they accept it as normal and necessary. Despite more legislation it will only be eradicated by, presumably, years of slow education and publicity.	
Jul 19	The Romanovs: 1613-1918	Simon Sebag Montefiore	3	Covering the dynasty from a largely private/personal/anecdotal perspective. Many world events (wars, treaties, alliances) not explained (though to do so would have made this massive tome just too big to read). Some thoughts: - Disregard of pain and death inflicted directly or by ineptitude on others, particularly the mass of soldiers, peasants who often (more or less) worshipped them (tho' this was probably endemic in the ruling classes everywhere) - Their 100% belief of their God-given role to rule as autocrats - Amazing sexual and pornographic concurrent relationships from Emperor/Empress down. Alexander II topping the list (bonking his wife and/or mistress many times a day right up to his death at ~65) - Hugely emotional race. Lots of bursting into tears - Political marriages for alliances. Often fuelling the fully accepted keeping of mistresses and lovers by both sides of a "marriage"	K
Jul 19	Original Skin [HM#2]	David Mark	4	More Hull-based murders for Ds McAvoy. Again the main story is gross (sex gaming adults all over the East Riding, with someone hunting down two distinctly tattooed swingers and a side story of vicious drug violence) and I would have given up but for the more interesting lives of the cops and their families.	
Jul 19	Super Sad True Love Story	Gary Shteyngart	5	Set slightly in a future world where USA is a basket case more or less slave to China. Ex-Russian money man lusts over S. Korean girl. Dull, but, written in ~2010, possibly prescient of a Trump-wrecked America?!	
Jul 19	You Will Be Safe Here	Damian Barr	4-	Disappointing lopsided book. Billed as being about the horrors of British concentration camps in the Boer War, about 20% covered that in the form of the diary of a Boer wife held in a camp because her husband was out being a guerilla. Then switches to rambling totally unrelated stuff in 1970-2015 of little interest until more or less the end when an oddball teenage white kid is sent to an AWB-like indoctrination/"training" camp to be sorted out. Here brutality and death lead to a trial of the AWB-ers, who in the closing acknowledgements have their virulent right wing views linked to Afrikaner mistreatment in the Boer wars.	
Jun 19	Prague Spring	Simon Mawer	3-	Perfectly readable but underwhelming fiction interwoven with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. But too much on the lives of two couples (a pair of English students whose Dice Man style hitch-hiking takes them to Prague and a British diplomat there falling for a local girl) and vapid scene-setting and not enough raw history or other interest.	
Jun 19	The Elegant Lie	Sam Eastland	3+	Above average thriller set in black markets and post-war US military of 1949 Germany. Main character was an undercover cop in the 1930s chasing petrol smugglers in the New York docks. Then drafted into the army to do something similar in 1944 Belgium. Picked up for his skills and posted to do same again in 1949 with super complex set of subterfuges.	
Jun 19	South Atlantic Requiem [Catesby#6]	Edward Wilson	3	Catesby, now a senior ~60-year old spook, is part of all the key aspects of the Falklands war. Including derring-do to prevent the Argies getting more Exocets and some gratuitous and unconvincing sex. Was salutary to be reminded that the war was bloodier than I'd remembered, with many ships and planes lost along with 258 Brits and 649 Argies dead.	
Jun 19	Midnight in Europe [NS#13]	Alan Furst	3	Another readable tale with lots of authentic sounding detail, but little else. Set in 1938 with upper/middle-class Spanish Republican supporters in, mainly, Paris trying to avoid Franco's spies as they arrange to steal ammunition from Russian Odessa to get to Spain for the last push battle.	2014
Jun 19	Ulverton	Adam Thorpe	5	Series of short stories round fictional English village over 3 centuries. Most written in dialect - some so heavy as to be unreadable. I read a few stories but skipped many.	
Jun 19	The Care of Time	Eric Ambler	4	American ghost writer with background in middle east terror is inveigled into helping a rich German/middle-Eastern fixer set up a dialogue between the US and a UAE prince-ling in late 1970s. Low on action and massively complicated shenanigans amongst the players with different and only slowly exposed agendas.	K
May 19	A Question of Upbringing [DittMOT#1]	Anthony Powell	4	Pretty boring intro (presumably) to the upper-class characters in this 12-book "magnificent" series. Mainly at their public school and early working/Uni life. Not even as interesting as CP Snow's Strangers and Brothers, but I might try one more volume.	
May 19	The Reluctant Contact	Stephen Burke	4	Weak thriller set in ~1980 Russian North Pole outpost on Svalbard. Engineer's assistant found dead. Engineer gets involved with single woman waiting for someone to contact her about, allegedly, defecting to join her already-defected husband (later girl friend).	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
May 19	The German Girl	Armando Lucas Correa	3	Fiction spun round events of persecuted (mainly) Jews, slightly less punchy for the fact that the main family is very wealthy and so some of them can buy their survival. First the treatment of 940 who, after paying masses for visas and redundant return tickets escaped from Germany in May 1939 for Havana on the luxury liner St Louis. But, while in transit, the Cuban president revoked almost all their visas. A handful were allowed to land and the rest sent back to Europe after both the USA and Canada refused them entry. Of these, 287 were given entry to the UK, the rest going to France, Belgium and other countries where they virtually all died after the Nazi's invaded. The saga moves on to the Cuban revolution making (maybe stretched) comparisons with the internment and expulsion of Jews and others by the Castro regime. Interesting historically but dreadfully laboured telling in the first person by one woman who was 12 when she was allowed off the St Louis and stayed in Havana and the other a 12 year old great-niece who meets up with her.	K
May 19	Taft	Ann Patchett	3-	Uninspiring and poorly focussed tale of black ex jazz drummer running a bar in Memphis. White 17-year old girl comes for a job and brings her drug dealing younger brother along, and for some reason the bar guy gets all involved with them and their past.	
May 19	The Salt Path	Raynor Winn	3+	Pleasant mini-history of 50 year old woman and her husband, Moth. Starting when they lose their house, farm and business due to a personal loan that went wrong and, within days, hear that Moth has an incurable illness likely to see him dead in two years. With nothing but £48/week they decide to walk the 630 mile South West Coast Path, free camping. She writes cheerily and philosophically of the trials and joys of the process. All interspersed with bits of their back history, info on places they pass and the occasional eco tub-thumping. They come over as delightful types to meet and talk to, which is clear from the folk who encourage and help them on their way and their life after the walk. Reminiscent of Driving over Lemons Chris Stewart in this.	
May 19	The Key to Rebecca	Ken Follett	3	Much better than several of his. Loosely based on real events (Operation Salam) mainly in in Cairo in 1942 where a German spy is feeding Rommel British battle plans - leading to success at Tobruk, inter alia. But a boys-own English major finally nails the spy and enables victory at El Alamein. Also has brief fictional involvement of Egyptian nationalists Nasser and Anwar Sadat. Tiny bit drawn out and some pretty weird sexual bits, otherwise I would have given 3+	K
May 19	Lethal White [CS#4]	Robert Galbraith	3	The main murder for the intrepid duo to solve is very convoluted. An upper-class, horsey, family all have different takes on what was superficially a suicide, but is clearly not, of cabinet minister with a shady past. But, outwith that, the frisson between Strike and Robin is the main interest for me as she separates from her clearly doomed marriage and again ends with an almost-death scenario ... leaving nice hooks for, hopefully, a fifth book.	649 2018
May 19	The Map that Changed the World	Simon Winchester	3	Sort of bio of William Smith, a relatively uneducated man who single-handedly created the first geological map in the world - of the UK. It was published in 1815 after years of research and hard work.	
May 19	The Green Road	Anne Enright	3	First 60% is set of low key short stories about each of 4 Irish siblings and their mother. No particular dramas, but most engaging in an Olive Kitteridge way. Last part, when they all come together is just dull	K
May 19	Golden Hill	Francis Spufford	3	Set in 1746 New York, a young man arrives from London with a bank draft for £1000 (riches then) which local money changers are sceptical about and a secret assignment (only revealed right at the end). He has all sorts of scrapes, including killing the best friend he makes there (a gay soldier) after insulting the military by being found <i>in flagrante</i> with a major's wife. Mostly a good rollicking read, but some passages needlessly badly written and over wordy.	
May 19	The Necessary Angel	C K Stead	4-	Thoroughly dull and self-indulgent, if elegantly written, story set round literary academics in ~2014 Paris with lots of unconnected discourse on famous authors and current politics. Just over half way through a tiny plot of interest appears (probably a dozen pages across the rest of the book) as a girl steals a painting.	K
May 19	Circe	Madeline Miller	4	Modern style fiction telling of various Greek myths involving witch/sorceress Circe, who narrates in first person, and Odysseus (Ulysses). Quite a good angle on these stories, but maybe better appreciated by someone who knows more about the plethora of fictional gods, etc.	
May 19	Vanity Fair	William Makepeace Thackeray	5	OK early 19 th century upper class guff, but gave up after about 30% through.	K
Apr 19	The Troubles	JG Farrell	5	10 dull pages and gave up	
Apr 19	Crash	J G Ballard	5	Ghastly mix of violence and eroticism	
Apr 19	Started Early, Took My Dog	Kate Atkinson	5	Unintelligible nothing drivell for first ~40 pages	
Apr 19	The Choice	Edith Eger	3+	Memoir of Hungarian woman who survived Auschwitz. Sent there in 1944; her mother and father killed on day one, she and a sister survived (partly because Joseph Mengele spotted her as a ballet dancer and made her dance for him). She became a clinical psychologist in the USA, which eventually helped her deal with her trauma. Highly articulate book, covering her own and some of her patients problems. A devotee of Carl Rogers and Viktor Frankl. I liked her quoting this from her teachers: every emotional shade ... is derived from ... primary emotions: sad, mad, glad, scared	
Apr 19	Ed King	David Guterson	4	Modern take on Oedipus Rex (with punning title to boot). 15 year old au-pair gets pregnant from man of the house in 1962 Seattle. Has a son who she leaves in a basket on a random doorstep in Oregon. He is adopted, but never told so (and hence never knows his parents aren't his real ones), and becomes a mega-rich IT founder of Google-like company. But, as teenager he kills his birth Dad in a car accident and then goes on to meet and marry his mother. Reasonable plot ruined by wads of dull and irrelevant padding. Though written in/before 2011 some of it's tech bits sound pretty percipient – except for a HAL-like super computer at the end.	
Apr 19	A Dying Breed	Peter Hanington	3	Thriller with BBC journalists in Afghanistan contending with dodgy UK spooks trying to cover up their murder of various folk (in UK and Afghanistan) who might block a potential major phone infrastructure contract. Written by ex-BBC and Today journo and in passing gives insights into the 14-hour overnight shifts that each Today episode involves.	
Apr 19	The Beautiful and Damned	F. Scott Fitzgerald	5	Superficial all fancy/clever description fluff of more wealthy New Yorkers	K
Apr 19	The Silver Road	Stina Jackson	3-	Dad looking for 3-year missing daughter in remote northern Sweden. Set in rural community with several oddball potential abductors But a thin story was spun out with far too much irrelevant episodes into and albeit short book.	K
Apr 19	1666: Plague, War and Hellfire	Rebecca Rideal	3	Short history of the years 1665-6 encompassing the Plague, Dutch-Anglo wars (mainly sea battles in the channel and N. Sea) and the Fire. The first two aspects being, in many ways surprisingly, more interesting than the last. Though from the descriptions it is surprising how limited an area the fire devastated in it's ~1 week rage.	
Apr 19	A Vicious Circle	Amanda Craig	3	Incestuous and overly self-absorbed tale of (largely) middle-class Cambridge graduates growing up in in literary London. Also mixed up with poverty in London housing estates and the crumbling early 1990s NHS. Largely centred on an outsider Irish girl (probably AC type character). Lots of the characters seemed to be thin references to known people (including Robert Maxwell). In an interesting post-script AC explains that she was unable to publish the book initially because of a libel case by David Sexton.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Apr 19	The Innocents Abroad	Mark Twain	3	Lovely dryly amusing write up of ~1 year cruise to Europe and the near East that MT took in 1867 with 65 other Americans. There were several longish land-based excursions, the itinerary including: Marseilles, Paris, Venice, Florence, Rome, Greece, Constantinople (Istanbul), Odessa, Syria, Damascus, Palestine/Holy lands and Egypt. Sometimes denied access due to quarantine restrictions (which he and some chums often broke surreptitiously). He is wonderfully wittily irreverent about religion and, especially being ripped off by peddlers of relics and antiquaries (often being shown the same alleged item in different places). Also the endless demands for baksheesh. Though only 32 at the time he is remarkably knowledgeable about the history of all the places they went (the book is likely to be as useful to a modern day traveller as to its intended 19 th century one); with good wads of time to fill, I think he did a lot of reading up as they progressed. Slightly repetitious at times including an (allegedly verbatim) negative article (which he claimed wasn't) he wrote a day or two after returning to New York and a good bit of criticism of some other uncouth tourists – on many occasions allegedly hacking bits off ancient monuments with hammers as trophies.	K
Apr 19	Paris Requiem	Lisa Appignanesi	3	Murder mystery set in 1899 Paris. Jewish girls being trafficked into prostitution are turning up dead mainly after being committed to the Salpêtrière hospital. One, lover of a young American, triggers his visiting lawyer brother to find out why. Faint references and background to Dreyfus (who had just been exonerated). Far too long and far too many plot twists for a decent read.	
Mar 19	George Passant [SaB#2: 1925-33]	C. P. Snow	3	Covering GP, who so encouraged Lewis Eliot to move from the provinces to the Bar in London, but mainly his trial with two others for fraudulently raising money, for which LE was part of the defence team. Over-verbose and introspective and often quite woolly. Also hard to comprehend the apparent horror of 1930s provincials to modest financial misconduct.	
Mar 19	The Special Collection	Ted Allbeury	3	Another almost incomprehensibly complex cold war spy thriller. Ex WW2 military spook coaxed out of semi-retirement in the 70's to work with wartime Russian to foil some Soviet destabilisation of Britain (via unions and IRA sympathisers) before launching nuclear strike on USA (I think). Pretty silly really but readable.	K
Mar 19	Flight Behaviour	Barbara Kingsolver	5	Something to do with butterflies possibly. Set in poor Appalachian farming community. Totally un-enticing.	
Mar 19	The Wake	Anna Hope	5	WW1 widows	
Mar 19	The Secret History	Donna Tartt	4	Ghastly set of six (mainly) rich upper class US kids at Vermont university studying classics and being obnoxiously erudite as well as constantly drinking and drug taking. Four of them accidentally kill a local farmer during a bacchanalian romp. One who wasn't there then goes so wobbly the others kill him. Far too long as well.	
Mar 19	Scrublands [MS#1]	Chris Hammer	3+	Murder mystery in bone dry heat ravaged Australian outback town. Local priest has cold-bloodedly shot all five members of a local hunting club and deliberately forced the local policeman to kill him as a result. But all sorts of complex back stories start emerging as the main character, a journalist from Sydney, starts digging around and getting heavily involved with the remaining locals and further murders.	K
Mar 19	Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine	Gail Honeyman	5	Nerdy 30-year old accounts clerk girl about to change her life, maybe.	
Mar 19	The Girl Who Wasn't There	Ferdinand von Schirach	3	Well known Berlin artist gaoled for murdering a girl who is not identified. He employs famous lawyer to represent him and the whole thing turns out to be a complex art installation with no death! But about half the (short) book is taken up with unnecessary and somewhat cryptic back history.	
Mar 19	Autumn in Oxford	Alex Rosenberg	3	Another fiction spun round many real events. This including US racial discrimination – particularly in the Army in WW2 – and many cold war spies, especially the executed Rosenberg's (no relation to author) and the now accepted fact that she (Ethel) was totally innocent. It's a good read but, as with "The Girl from Krakow", the spy stuff is frightfully complex and hard to follow, and again there's some pretty unrelated sex and padding.	K
Mar 19	The Lie of the Land	Amanda Craig	3	Couple can't afford to divorce so rent their London home and move to rural Devon renting a house whose previous owner was beheaded. All sorts of local intrigue and incest but dragged a lot.	
Feb 19	Alone in Berlin	Hans Fallada	3	Depressing story of anti-Nazi's during the war (which the film was based on). Centred on very ordinary couple who start dropping postcards castigating Hitler around Berlin. They are caught and eventually guillotined. But the ghastly connivance of many other Germans as well as the SS and Gestapo brutality is well told.	
Feb 19	Time of Hope [SaB#1: 1914-33]	C. P. Snow	3	First chronologically in the Strangers and Brothers series, though not first-written. Covers the life of narrator (Lewis Eliot) until he's about 28 and a barrister in London having worked hard from his industrial Midland town background. Mainly about his obsession with his unstable muse/wife who he loves to distraction despite her frigidity and erratic attentions – very hard to believe or take seriously.	K
Feb 19	The Shepherd's Hut	Tim Winton	3+	Screwed up teenager escapes violently abusive father – just dead through his own drunken carelessness. But son fears he will be blamed for death since everyone knows his miserable home life. So he heads off into the dry NW Australian desert to the only person who understands him. But, close to dying of thirst he stumbles on a 70-year old ex-Catholic priest banished to a remote Shepherds hut where the Church (I think) sends supplies twice a year. From a very wary start the lad is befriended by the priest – but then inadvertently brings death to him.	
Feb 19	Dark Pines [TM#1]	Will Dean	3	Young female reporter on local paper in backwoods Swedish town embroiled in investigation into gruesome murders in the hunting woods around – which have resumed after a 20 year pause. Single-thread plot and a bit OTT at the end. But the main character, Tuva Moodyson (who is also gay and deaf and used to work for more illustrious publications in England), is intriguing and, apparently, there will be more books with her.	K
Feb 19	The Stolen Bicycle	Wu Ming-Yi	4	Taiwanese surreal rambling loosely anchored on a bicycle covering bike history in the East, WW2.	
Feb 19	East West Street	Philippe Sands	4	Mixed up telling of family history of the author's ancestors and their connections to two key lawyers (also Jews) involved with the Nuremberg Trials and the first use of charges of Crimes against Humanity and Genocide (not actually proposed at the trials but accepted soon after). Disappointing, though the (brief) trial bits were interesting albeit almost entirely focussed on Hans Frank (the "butcher of Poland") who was indirectly responsible for the deaths of most of the families of both lawyers and the authors grandparents generation.	K
Feb 19	Love is Blind	William Boyd	3	Tale of ~1900 Scottish piano tuner falling obsessively for a Russian woman who is wife/lover of pianist he works for for a while. The two of them float round the world snatching moments of passion. Perfectly readable – but the first 75% is pretty slow and not at all up to usual WB standards.	
Jan 19	The Making of the Atomic Bomb	Richard Rhodes	3	750 pages following the development of the 1945 A bombs. Lots of science, which I mainly skipped. Too much ancillary / background (acres of personal histories of the many key players). But nevertheless readable. Lots of reiteration that (most of) the scientists, politicians and military involved were deeply worried about what they were doing, but convinced it would shorten the war. Also the US avoiding letting the Soviets know what they were doing, fearing they would start/speed-up a competitive operation (which of course came immediately afterwards in the Cold War). The initial expectation was to use the bomb in Europe, where they feared the Nazi's were well along the way to building one too (they found out in 1945 this was not so). The Hiroshima/Nagasaki use (August 6+9 1945) was only days after the Trinity test in the US. The assumed (and well documented) ethos of the Japanese (military and civilian) to fight to annihilation also argued for the drama of the bombs to break through that - though before the bombs the Japanese were (apparently) prepared to surrender, but with a condition (preservation of the Monarchy) that the US would not accept (tho' that's pretty much what happened after post-bomb surrender). Fascinating on the vast amount of research and engineering that went on, at high speed, from the early 1940s. One interesting gem, was the need for masses of copper to make the windings of the electro-magnets used in the U235 separation process; the US having precious little of this during the war, they used silver instead. They needed ~10,000 tons, which they got from the Federal Reserve – who only did measurements in Troy ounces! The last 150 pages covered the summer-1945 events. The cold process of selecting the Japanese targets (ones not hitherto hit by conventional bombing to make it easier to document effects of the bombs) and the description of the horrific injuries. There had been extensive firebombing of Japanese cities in the year before – with, for instance, 100,000 killed in Tokyo (cf: 140,000 at Hiroshima in 1945 – ie: excluding post-bomb mortality).	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Jan 19	Dead Level [ND#5]	Damien Boyd	3	Diabetic wife of Tory candidate for local west country constituency (under heavy flooding) is murdered. Lots of back story about "human" (synthetic) vs animal insulin. The wife almost died on the former until switched to the latter. The book is a partial rant at the UK's lack of information on this (triggered by a friend of DB who had the same near fatal reaction and ND is also diabetic). The plot is linear and interesting enough as the murder turns out to have been a paid-for hit to protect the financial interests of the "human" insulin camp. Undemanding read, but better than the last.	K
Jan 19	Interrogating Ellie	Julian Gray	3	Dramatised partial biography of British woman who left Guernsey shortly before WW2 to marry an Austrian. Partly because of his family's Nazi sympathies she separated from him not long after bearing their second child and floated round that German controlled part of the world doing a mixture of jobs and living a fairly promiscuous life. But also mixing with Russians and Nazis (unknowingly helping a group of the latter who were trying to foil Hitler's ways). In 1945 she was used by the British army organisation handling the ex-German/Austrian populace, and seeking out hidden war criminals. But she rubbed up some of the Brits the wrong way (and some the right) and had a hard time getting a visa to return to the UK. In the denouement, this she did and is then revealed to be the mother of the author. A good story, but rather disjointed in the telling.	K
Jan 19	The Hunting Party	Lucy Foley	4	Before/After chronology murder mystery set over a few days round Hogmanay. Group of London-based "friends" (one of many things that rings totally untrue as the plot develops) in remote Highland lodge being looked after by ex-soldier gamekeeper and ex-paramedic woman. One of the friends is killed and, most unconvincingly, the back and on-the-day stories of all the characters are told until one finds out who dunnit.	K
Jan 19	The Secret Ministry of Ag. & Fish: My Life in Churchill's School for Spies	Noreen Riols	3	Memoirs of SOE French section (Buckmaster) by smart, upper crust, woman who worked in the UK during the war. She joined as teenager / clerk but graduated to work debriefing and (modestly) training agents, getting to know most of them personally. Also doing lots of good work after the war at annual reunions. Sadly in a rather rambling repetitive style and, though good to hear them as fact and from personal involvement, almost all the details have been covered in other SOE histories and fictions.	K
Jan 19	The Durrells of Corfu	Michael Haag	3	Light and interesting coverage of the various Durrells lives before during and after their 1930s Corfu sojourn. Larry, particularly, coming over better than in Gerald's My Family portraits. But a remarkable family headed by the (often tipsy) Mother (after their Indian origins destroyed by Dad's early death there in 1928).	
Jan 19	The Way We Live Now	Anthony Trollope	3	Satirical tale set in 1870s-ish society/class/overt-money-obsessed upper crust (mainly) world. Complex and overlapping love affairs mostly get sorted out. Dodgy supposedly rich man ends up killing himself to avoid the disgrace of his swindling. All hard to assimilate with today's sensibilities but readable (except for being immensely long).	K
Jan 19	The boy behind the curtain	Tim Winton	3	Series of short autobiographical/memoir pieces by this Western Aussie ecologist. Most interesting on his background, with pale reminders of "Educated" - he from a fairly religious family (and still a practising Christian) and he and, particularly, his policeman father surviving horrendous accidents. Also some lyrical pieces on the changing/man-threatened wild life, lands and waters he so passionately champions.	
Dec 18	The Watchmaker of Filigree Street	Natasha Pulley	4	Weird supernatural/fantastical story set in 1880s London. Psychic /clairvoyant Japanese watchmaker whose amazing creations (watches being the most prosaic, and including a sock-fetish mechanical Octopus) are used for bombings in London. Quite silly and hard to follow as it got sillier. Echoes of The Miniaturist.	
Dec 18	Educated	Tara Westover	2	Memoir of amazing young woman from an extraordinary Mormon family and background. Dad (mainly) is rabidly religious, believes the End of Days is very imminent, and fiercely anti anything to do with the government. Thus not registering births of his kids, not sending them to school never using hospitals (his wife teaches herself to be a midwife and herb remedy expert). The (6, I think) kids are, to an extent, home schooled (tho' this is surprisingly little-mentioned) but mainly work with Dad in his scrap and barn building business. All suffer horrendous injuries as he is cavalier with safety (not insuring vehicles - despite two big crashes which severely harm Mum and Tara) - with both one son and then himself having extensive burns when welding near gas tanks, which extraordinarily they both live through. Dad's behaviour deteriorates though injuries and, Tara believes, from started being bi-Polar in his 20's. One son suffers two particularly horrible head injuries from/with Dad - the second being so severe the family reluctantly take him to a hospital for a short time (all the other super-severe family ones are handled with herbs and mumbo-jumbo). He then becomes even more erratically behaved, severely beating up Tara (and, she says, her sister earlier). Somehow Tara keeps taking all the abuse and neglect, rationalising that it must be God's will and she is somehow to blame. But she manages to extricate herself from the family clutches and by amazing hard work gets into university at 17 (having never had any schooling she didn't understand what the multiple choice entry exams worked) and is clearly a massively bright person (as are three of her siblings and her parents) and from there to Cambridge and Harvard and getting a PhD.	
Dec 18	I'll Keep you Safe	Peter May	3	Husband of husband-and-wife team running successful Lewis weaving business is assassinated with a car bomb in Paris when they are there for a fashion show. Good build-up of background to the couple, their lucky break being chosen by a flamboyant designer-star, and antagonisms in the small Lewis community they both come from. Nice involvement of a career-challenged female French detective. But let down in the last few chapters with an over-the-top finale where the wife's supposed best friend is so besotted with her as to try to kill her, and the husband not being dead after all.	
Dec 18	Secret Asset [LC#2]	Stella Rimington	3+	Liz Carlyle / MI5/6 thriller. Three young potential Afghan terrorists spotted in London bookshop leads to chase of them. But there's also a mole in MI5 warning them off that has to be found too. Ends with mole dying at the end of his (deliberately, it seems, but I didn't totally follow this) failed "bomb" attack on Oxford event.	
Dec 18	A treachery of spies [IP#2]	Manda Scott	2	Excellent, if hard to follow at times (I could not keep up with all the characters and their, often, several aliases) spy thriller. Keyed from events in WW2 with SOE and Jedburgh agents in France helping the Marquis. Some having a complex relationship with a Nazi commander which runs on beyond the war to events in 1957 (when the Nazi and a collaborator are almost caught) and then in 2018 when, with several gruesome murders, everything is resolved under the eye of female Orleans detective Ines Picaut.	
Dec 18	My name is Lucy Barton	Elizabeth Strout	4	Banal but strangely readable slim book about a woman's life. Told round her thoughts (mainly as she recovers from an appendix operation) of her failing marriage and kids.	2016
Dec 18	Transcription	Kate Atkinson	3	Low-key WW2 and 1950s spy thriller. Young woman in 1940 is recruited into MI5 to type up transcripts of meetings in a Dolphin Square flat between an MI5 agent and German sympathisers who think he represents the Nazis. Flips between that and her life 10 years later when she works for the BBC but is still used by MI5 and her Soviet handlers (at the end of the book we discover she has been a Soviet agent from early on). Lots of allusions to facts one has heard before, and KA's notes at the end show that many aspects of the book are based on real events.	
Dec 18	Star of the North: An explosive thriller set in North Korea	D. B. John	3+	Thriller set in and about N. Korea (DPRK). Young female academic is persuaded to join CIA's DPRK arm which she does in the hope of rescuing her twin sister who was abducted by them. Lots of genuine-sounding (and corroborated in after-notes) grisly detail on the regimes horrific treatment of it citizens. The plot gets a bit far fetched in the second half, but worth a read.	K
Nov 18	One summer : America 1927	Bill Bryson	3	Rather long and American-centric set of interesting facts and histories linked to the summer of 1927. Main event, covering the most pages, was Charles Lindbergh's Spirit of St Louis first transatlantic flight - both in itself and all the background and follow-ons of early flight; interesting that the US was very late to this field, most European countries having surged ahead during WW1. Other events included the meeting of four Central Bank governors to agree (mainly at the US one's direction) to cut interest rates. BB reckons this directly caused the bubble in 1928, subsequent crash in 1929, and then the Depression. Lots on baseball and Babe Ruth which I skipped over, and on boxing. Also various murders, executions and the brief (only 2 years) reign of Al Capone.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Nov 18	How Not To Be a Boy	Robert Webb	2	Brutally frank autobiography of his life so far. Spoiled youngest of three Lincolnshire lads with smatterings of bisexuality amongst his very open sexual yearnings and experiences. Wanted to be a famous actor and comic writer from an early age. Screwed up when his adored mother died when he was doing his A levels and by a childhood terrified by an abusive father (who he was reconciled with after his Mum's death) – all leading to very selfish and bad behaviour to friends and lovers. Very dense powerful prose at times means you can't read it lightly, though the humour and wit keeps it going. Lots of sensitivity and railing against male inhibitions and the pernicious effects of the culture of "acting like a man", suppressing emotion and not talking about anything personal. Quite full of himself, and hard to credit some assertions, including claims to have been a pioneer against anti-feminist male stances.	K
Nov 18	MI5 and Me	Charlotte Bingham	4	Flimsy "memoir" of debutante-y 18-year old daughter of titled toff (John Bingham an MI5 bod, reputedly the inspiration for le Carre's George Smiley) in the cold-war early 1950s. Her dad made her join MI5 as typist where she had frivolous fun with other similar types and, allegedly, did some low-level sleuthing support.	
Nov 18	Still Midnight (Alex Morrow 1)	Denise Mina	3-	OK crime solving story with female main (if not lead) detective. Kidnap of (originally Ugandan) Asian father/shopkeeper from Glasgow house by two rather inept masked gunmen getting money for an (IRA?) Irish gangster. Not all threads neatly tied off at the end (which was fine) and some slightly silly ones (like one 30-year-old gunman and the 17-year old girl he shot going off together). But the book let down a bit by two aspects so common nowadays: a) ludicrously tight chronology (everything seemed to happen in a totally impossible 48 hour period) b) tedious female/male aggro and politicking amongst the police	K
Nov 18	Fascism: A Warning	Madeleine Albright	3	Very readable brief history of Fascism from Mussolini (who founded the name and behaviour), Hitler, Franco (a bit), Erdogan, Tito, Milosevic/Mladic, the Kim family, Putin, Orban. Ending with comments and (a few) linkages to Trump. Her definition: "someone who claims to speak for a whole nation or group, is unconcerned with the rights of others, and will use violence ... to achieve their goals". Also generally needing a disaffected populace/electorate who feel they are missing out.	
Nov 18	Tender is the Night	F. Scott Fitzgerald	4	First 25% pretty uninteresting story of unlikeable wealthy Americans living (mainly) on the French Riviera in the 1920s. But a bit of pith emerges as the tale settles on Dick and Nicole Diver. He a medical/psychiatric doctor of modest background and she a super wealthy young woman he originally meets as a disturbed patient.	K
Nov 18	Amnesia	Peter Carey	4	Tediously allusive/indirect style. Fictionalised tale mixing real scandal with USA influence on Australian politics in 1975 that brought down the Whitlam government and some (2000s?, fictional I think) story of activists exposing pollution by a major water supplier.	
Nov 18	Firefly [PS#1]	Henry Porter	3	Thriller as MI6-hired person-finder of middle-eastern background hunts 12-year old Syrian boy genius on the run from ISIS killers. They used him and made him witness endless horrors, and are now after him because he (a technical whiz, amongst other highly improbable skills and maturities) stole masses of incriminating data and photos. Set in in the migrant route from Turkey into Greece and then the Balkans. Let down by very simplistic and highly implausible minute-by-minute tracking of him from mobile phone hook-ups.	K
Nov 18	Cousins	Salley Vickers	3-	Rambling tale of relationships and tensions in 3+ generations of a family. Two tragedy's in accidents when sons of two different eras climb spires at Cambridge – one dying, one ending in locked-in syndrome and ultimately having assisted death by his devoted cousin.	
Nov 18	Great Expectations	Charles Dickens	3	Follows the life of Pip who we meet as poorish young orphan being grudgingly looked after by his much older brutal sister and her lovely but ineffectual blacksmith husband Joe. Pip helps escaped convict, is befriended by strange old solitary woman, Miss Havershaw, and bewitched by her young charge Estrella. He then comes into money (his Expectations) from a secret beneficiary, who he thinks is Miss H. Goes to London and becomes a man about town still pining for E. Ultimately turns out his beneficiary is the convict, Magwitch... Way more readable than many of his. Some ludicrous coincidences and, as often, hard to comprehend in this age attitudes – such as Pip disowning his inheritance when he finds it is from a convicted felon.	K 1861
Oct 18	A Rising Man	Abir Mukherjee	3-	Lightweight crime tale set in 1919 Calcutta. Fresh from WW1 and his brief wife's death, an ex CID Detective investigates a murder and some robberies. Probably first in series and I think I've read a later, worse one.	
Oct 18	Origin	Dan Brown	4	Dreadfully samey techno/religious mumbo-jumbo. Super bright ex pupil of superman Robert Langdon says he's discovered the origins (chemical reactions in the primordial soup) and future (humans morphing into lifeless techno-things) of life. He sets up worldwide presentation of it and has himself assassinated at it to increase ratings.	
Oct 18	The Pickwick Papers	Charles Dickens	5	Far too rambling and over-wordy for this day and age.	K 1832
Oct 18	On Wings of Eagles	Ken Follett	3	Remarkable story of Ross Perot inspiring and organising the snatching of two EDS managers who were imprisoned for no reason in late 1978. This, in the dying days of the Shah's reign, done by an over-eager bureaucrat wanting to extract ransom for them. Perot and his military-backgrounded guys tried various parallel strands to free them, two legal and one not. Ultimately the hostages walked out of the prison when it was stormed (partly at the instigation of a young Iranian EDS employee) a week or so after the revolution (end Jan 1979). There was then a hairy process of getting them, and all the EDS-ers still in Iran, out. Told in a slightly tedious gung-ho padded-out style, but a fascinating story and Perot's luck and management in stark contrast to the better-known hostage crisis of 1979-1981.	K
Oct 18	The Book Smugglers of Timbuktu	Charlie English	3-	History and tales of (possibly) massive collection of manuscripts that were assembled from pretty ancient times in this Malian town. Most of book using alternate chapters. One set describe European attempts (1780-1880-ish) to find Timbuktu, the other the subterfuge and work to save the manuscripts when Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other Islamic Jihad's took over (2010-13-ish) and destroyed buildings and other history. But some poor chronology and a final chapter that cast doubt on much of the second thread of the book.	
Oct 18	The Warden	Anthony Trollope	3	First of the Barchester series. Church politics and intrigue. Much more readable than many 19 th century novels. The, perfectly decent and unknowing, Warden is getting £800/year for his (more or less sinecure) job looking after a charitable home for old folks that was endowed centuries earlier, while the dozen inmates get a pittance. After an almost-court case and vilification in the newspaper he steps down and his good friend the bishop (who appointed him) decides not to appoint a replacement. Series is: - The Warden (1855) - Barchester Towers (1857) - Doctor Thorne (1858) - Framley Parsonage (1861) - The Small House at Allington (1864) - The Last Chronicle of Barset (1867)	K
Oct 18	The Web and the Wing	Teresa Raftery	5	Post-WW1 England, Spain. J liked its history but the writing style was poor making it hard to read.	
Oct 18	A boy in winter	Rachel Seiffert	5	SS invading small Ukrainian town. Grim and probably realistic but just didn't grip me.	
Oct 18	Swansong [ND#4]	Damien Boyd	3-	Another simple Nick Dixon crime to solve. Set in co-ed boarding school where girl is found dead with ring finger removed. Almost identical looking to ND's own teenage girlfriend who disappeared 17 years earlier when they were both at a nearby public school.	K
Oct 18	Waiting for sunrise	William Boyd	3	Re-read – last read May 13, and I ploughed thru again without realising!!	
Sep 18	He Said/She Said	Erin Kelly	3	Eclipse-following couple stumble on girl being raped by another young festival goer. He is from wealthy family and despite smarmy lawyers is found guilty and sent to prison, but comes after his accusers when released. The "was it / wasn't it rape" is well teased-out over an increasing number of plot twists as the before/after chronology uncovers more of the back stories of the characters.	K
Sep 18	Kingdom of Shadows [NS#6]	Alan Furst	4	Another overly cryptic/allusive spy/politics tale. Centred on Hungarian upper class man living in Paris in 1938/39 and running various pretty incomprehensible anti-Nazi visits to Hungary, Romania and Austria. But the devious plot seems similar to others of his books, and basically dull.	2000

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Sep 18	The Last Girl [MK#3]	Jane Casey	4	OK murder mystery starting with Mum and one of twins being brutally stabbed, vile QC father being bashed on head and other twin not found. But the endless intra-police relationships, ridiculous bickering and bad-mouthing tone of (what seems) the bulk of her books is getting really tedious.	K
Sep 18	Engleby	Sebastian Faulks	4	Very very slow to get anywhere story of pompous unpleasant man who murdered a female fellow-student he fantasised over.	
Sep 18	Oscar and Lucinda	Peter Carey	4	Long rambling tale of two gamblers who meet on voyage to Sydney in 1850s. Sea-scared clergyman Oscar and young woman Lucinda who inherited a chunk of money and bought a glass works in Sydney. Poorly described mega-wager after they get there and are sharing a house ends in his death after transporting a steel-and-glass church across country.	
Sep 18	Little Fires Everywhere	Celeste Ng	3	Rich tale of mothers and their ties to babies and children. Set in 1990s USA. Itinerant mother and 15-year old daughter start renting a cheap apartment from one of the denizens of a middle class suburb. She's an unrecognised artist with a history of moving on every year of so and getting whatever work she can. Her daughter pals up with the comfortable kids of their landlady. But frictions and drama develops as a single Chinese girl tries to recover her 1-year old daughter that landlady's childless best friend adopted after the kid was abandoned outside a fire station when the Mum was too poor and distraught to care for her. Two of the teenage girls start sleeping with boyfriends and landlady's daughter gets pregnant and has a somewhat regretted abortion. Would have been a very good book if properly edited of far too much filling fluff.	K
Sep 18	The Woman in White	Wilkie Collins	4	Good what-happened thriller ruined by Victorian prose and mores. It is just so hard to read the mannered, far too verbose, full of hard-to-credit sentiment and (largely) upper-class formalised behaviours from the perspective of this day and age.	K
Sep 18	The World at Night [NS#4]	Alan Furst	3-	Perfectly readable tale of life in occupied France. Main/only character is a film producer who gets involved with both the Germans and British intelligence. Lots of very authentic sounding detail of daily life in 1940/1941 France, but not really much else.	1996
Sep 18	The Defectors	Joseph Kanon	3	Double-crossing spy story set in 1961 Russia. Senior CIA agent who defected 10 years ago lives in Moscow and is visited by his brother, now a publisher (having lost his US government job due to the defection, though not involved) to agree details of defector's autobiography. Defector tells bro' he wants to return to the US with his now alcoholic life. But bro figures out that defector actually just wants to ensnare some other senior CIA bod, and arranges to foil defector's plans (fuelled by his past love for the wife, who he dated before defector married her). Frightfully complicated escape to Finland ensues with defector getting killed by Russians and bro' and wife making it out.	
Aug 18	After you die [ZF#3]	Eva Dolan	3+	Another Zigic&Ferreira murder mystery, lots of back reference to, presumably ZF#2 which I haven't yet read, set round 3 erstwhile friendly households. 1) Promiscuous divorcee found stabbed to death in her house three days after her murder and her paraplegic 16-year old daughter also dead, due to resulting lack of regular care. 2) School teacher and his late in life first-time pregnant are foster parents to two kids. One disturbed 11-year old lad who disappeared the day before the body was found and who is under super-secure alias (cops running it initially refuse to cooperate with Z&F) prior to giving evidence against gangsters who murdered his Mum in front of him. 3) Woman with unpleasant teenage son (who Internet-trolls the paraplegic) living with ex-husband of divorcee. Loads of switches in probably culprit until finally it turns out to be the other foster child – teenage girl with a bad temper and previous history of violence.	
Aug 18	Motherland	William Nicholson	5	Starting as sloppy WW2-based romance. Possibly linked to other books. J thought I wouldn't like it!	
Aug 18	Jericho's War	Gerald Seymour	4	Another idiot gung-ho rescue with lone wolf British secret service bloke supported by a 2-man sniper team, and turned Al-Qaeda (Geordie) recruit and a single woman doing an archaeological dig. Dreadful terse/clipped prose and dialogue (with all characters using the same, which is ridiculous). I really really must stop reading his later stuff. His early books were fine.	
Aug 18	The Great Gatsby	F. Scott Fitzgerald	3	Set amongst the grotesque wealthy who live on Long Island and do a few hours work a day in New York maintaining their gross (mainly) inheritances in early 1920s USA. Initially Jay Gatsby seems to be just another one of them, but he comes from a poor past en-richened by criminal dealings. His long term love for the wife (also cousin of the narrator) of a racist boor comes to tragic end as husband's lover is killed by his wife in road accident, and lover's husband then kills JG.	K
Aug 18	The Geneva Option [YA#1]	Adam Lebor	3	Thriller lambasting the corrupt and profligate UN. Senior 35-year old female behind the scenes negotiator and fixer is dumped by the UN after her report on a vile Congo-area warlord is leaked by someone in the UN. Right-hand woman of the Secretary General (SG) is murdered - with a botched attempt to make it look like suicide. The superwoman (Yael Azoulay) goes off grid to prevent a shady international conglomerate from using the UN to take over all the valuable Coltan mines in the region. Supported by her long-time superman body guard she kills or exposes top men and physically fights her way out of impossible situations. At the end she is reinstated in the UN and the SG's possible guilt/connivance left in doubt. All good crazy fun; will be interesting to see what the next two books in the series hold.	K
Aug 18	Force of Nature [AF#2]	Jane Harper	3	Another Australian outback murder mystery for Aaron Falk. Five women on a 3-day company bonding trip in the wild come back one short. Before/after plot style exposes tensions between the women and conflicts due to two of their kids and son of the company boss have all been involved in sexting scandals. But eventually the culprit is the oldest friend of the acerbic victim who is killed by accident. Not quite as good as "Dry", but a good quick read (I read in a day!).	
Aug 18	The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter	Carson McCullers	2	Powerful tale set in late 1930s southern US city. Intertwined lives of dirt poor whites and Negroes Left wing firebrand seething against the injustice of major poverty in such a rich country. Smart, feisty, poor Irish girl with dreams of getting away but ultimately anchored by having to go to work (to help support her family who run a boarding house charging \$5/week for full board) as soon as she no longer has to be schooled. Generous black doctor's good nature destroyed when his son is so brutally punished by white prison guards that he has to have both feet sawn off. Serene deaf-mute white man is confidant to the others, but secretly pines for an old chum and then kills himself when chum dies in hospital. All laced with references to the impending war in Europe. But strangely, though the book ends in death and despair, it leaves a suggestion that this could be a turning point away from racial bigotry and discrimination and the grinding poverty of all the have-nots.	
Aug 18	The Leopard [HH#8]	Jo Nesbo	4	Another ludicrously complicated, macabrely gory thriller with the occasionally alcoholic and, this time, opium smoking Harry Hole. Ten or so deaths, several with a gruesome, Congo-linked, "Leopold apple" - metal sphere put in mouth with powerful springs that fire small knives into the palate and throat resulting in victim drowning in their own blood. I really must stop reading this rubbish.	K
Aug 18	Drifting House	Krys Lee	4	Set of short stories about Koreans (North, South and in USA). None grabbed me. Unexpected amount of sexuality and Christianity. But made me want to find out more about the South's history after the war. Seems to have had an initial dictatorship (Park Chung-hee) in the mid-1970s at least. Then in the 1990s democracy and some significant, IMF-enforced, economic upheaval. Out of which, presumably, came the current tech and industrial powerhouse.	
Aug 18	The Beekeeper's Apprentice [MR#1]	Laurie R. King	3+	Very light but engaging fiction spun on a fiction. Starts in 1915 when Mary Russell (MR), a precociously bright, recently orphaned, teenager, stumbles across a retired-from-London Sherlock Holmes in Sussex where he keeps bees and continues his, now largely academic, investigative ways. She is almost a match for him and over the next years, between her studies at Oxford, they work together solving a series of crimes. A delightful read but the characters may not have the legs to carry over the ensuing series (many books).	
Aug 18	A Long Way from Home	Peter Carey	3-	Finally disappointing tale set largely in 1954 Australia. Unlikely team of gung-ho car salesman, his sassy, good looking, hard driving, super competent wife and an ex-school teacher neighbour of dubious ethnicity compete in round-the-continent Redex Trail. About 85% through, the neighbour, who turns out to be a white-skinned aboriginal, is booted out by the husband and trapped in a remote farmstead run by a bullying white boss. This turns out to be where he came from as offspring of an earlier vicious boss. Book then dissolves into pretty unintelligible aboriginal history and angst.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Aug 18	Slow Horses [SH#1]	Mick Herron	3	Ridiculously cryptic tale of incestuous corruption within MI5. Starts with abduction of apparently random "Muslim looking" lad by "British Patriot" thugs who threaten to behead him on camera. Turns out to be crazily complex operation run by one part of MI5. When it goes wrong they try to plant the blame on a bunch of discredited MI5-ers consigned to second class roles as the "Slough House" (SH) unit. Half the book is on the backgrounds of these folk, so presumably setting a platform for a chain of books. Reasonably gripping plot let down heavily by totally unbelievable back stories of the SH lot.	K
Aug 18	The White Road	Edmund de Waal	3	"A pilgrimage of sorts" following the history of Porcelain. He's a potter and already a devotee, so sadly failed to explain why people raved about it over the ages. Emperors and princes poured vast wealth into its discovery (complex fusing of two sorts of clay) and production. His journey starts in China, its birthplace in (I think 17th century), takes in Versailles, Dresden/Messein, Cornwall, Staffordshire and Cherokee country in S. Carolina. The latter parts reinforcing the Wedgwood story in "A Potters Hands". Staccato diary-style writing uplifted by his wonderful rich use of the English language.	
Aug 18	David Copperfield	Charles Dickens	4	Ghastly garrulous 19th century sentimental guff. Very small bits interesting (eg: description of the East Coast storm), and good to meet so many names that are so often mentioned by others: Micawber, Uriah Heep, Peggotty, Little Emily, ... But the voluminous, allusive, indirect prose is almost indecipherable to (this) modern reader. This is why I shy away from such aged writing, and am pleasantly surprised to find those of his era who could write clearly and simply, such as de Tocqueville, Marcus Clarke and James Backhouse Walker.	K 1850
Jul 18	Stuart – A Life Backwards	Alexander Masters	3	Another absorbing, if depressing, biography. This of a wild, often homeless, smart man. History of drug, substance and alcohol abuse going back to when he was about 10. Also endless bullying (he had Muscular Dystrophy) which triggered his constant violence. The "backwards" chronology means you hear of his (presumed) suicide early on and the grotesque sexual abuse by brother and babysitter at the end.	
Jul 18	Sunburn	Laura Lippman	3	Enigmatic woman turns up in a nowhere rural US town escaping her complex past. Joined by a similarly not-what-he-seems man who has been hired to find her because someone she helped cheat insurance policies wants to blackmail her. They have a steamy and finally fatal relationship. On the way her history is told, including a brutalising and crooked husband she killed, and a nosy local woman she also killed without justification.	
Jul 18	Crimea : the last crusade	Orlando Figes	3	Comprehensive history of the "Crimean War". Would be better termed WW0 – being a) the creator/uncover-er of unrest across Europe that pretty directly led to WW1, and b) though the Crimean peninsula was the key part of it, the war covered much more territory and years than the peninsula part. Hugely convoluted and hard to keep track of objectives and politicking throughout.	
				In mid-1853 Russia invaded the area of the Ottoman Empire round the Danube/Black Sea. They wanted to support the Orthodox Christian minorities against Turkish/Muslim repression. France and Britain backed Turkey, partly because their Latin Christian culture was so opposed to the Orthodox, but more because they expected/fear the break up of the Ottoman Empire (the corrupt and backward "sick man of Europe") and wanted to make sure they got their part – particularly the so important control/access to the Dardanelles. Attempts were made to defuse things, with a peace conference, but on 30-Nov-1853 the Russians more or less wiped out the Ottoman fleet at Sinop and in early 1854 laid siege to Silistra (south bank of the Danube). But, the Turks finally repulsed them (24-Jun-1854). This, coupled with Austria's siding with (though not taking up arms) the western allies (Russia had expected them to be their allies), made the Russians retreat. According to OF, at this point the whole flare up could have ended. But, France and Britain had already moved their armies into the area and were basically spoiling for a fight to teach Russia a lesson. OF also characterises this as the first press-influenced war. British (particularly, and especially Palmerston) politicians were hugely influenced by public outcries and war-lust. So, the allies (France, Britain, Turkey mainly, with later military support from Piedmont and non-military support from Austria) decided to destroy Sevastopol, landing their armies about 50km north of there on the Crimea. Here they quickly and solidly defeated the Russians at Alma (20-Sep-1854). But they failed to rush on to Sevastopol which OF reckons the shattered and disillusioned Russians would have lost too. Instead they circled round to its south and started a siege that would last almost a year (and in so doing failed to shut off Russian supply lines from the North). The French (the dominant and most successful of the allies) used the supply port of Kamiesh, while the British used the less suitable Balaklava. This the Russians attacked 25-Oct-1854 and were repulsed (despite British idiocies such as the Charge of the Light Brigade). On 5-Nov-1854 the allies again beat the Russians at Inkerman on the eastern outskirts of Sevastopol whose siege then went on until 9-Sep-1855 – this was dominantly a French success, so they went on to host the Paris peace accord signed 30-Mar-1856.	
				Various things: - Russia was in almost every aspect (military, medical, economic, ...) backward compared to the allies (even the Turks, who were advised and supplied by the West). They relied on totally illiterate, brutally recruited and disciplined serfs, and endlessly harped back to their success in repulsing Napoleon in 1812. - They used muskets with a 30-pace range compared to allies Minié rifles with 1200 range. So their attacks were almost always slaughter. - Their autocratic Tsar and sycophantic nobles brutally ruled a hodgepodge of tribes and races. Before the war (and ethnic cleansing that followed) a good %age of the Crimea was inhabited by (Muslim) Tatars who hated the Russians. - Cross-Christian (Orthodox/Latin) and Christian/Muslim divides were exacerbated by the war. Lots of ethnic cleansing afterwards (mainly by Russians and Turks) opened angers, especially in the Balkans and Palestine, leading to WW1 and continuing religious-based furies. - Neither side had any decent maps. The British landed on the Crimea with only a tourist book. Even the Russians had no maps! - Russia was humbled and its self-esteem shattered after being shown to be so backward. But, over subsequent mini-wars and aggressions managed to reverse all its territorial losses. - Battles continued outside the peninsula – particularly in the Caucasus, only partly ended with the Paris accord. - Massively complex involvement of Piedmont which wanted to take the lead in the imminent unification of Italy (1861) which the other allies, particularly Austria, were nervous of, made for various dodgy dealings in and around the Paris accord. - British preparation and logistics were dreadful (tho' improved towards the end). Despite getting more provisions the Tommy's had much worse food. This partly because the bureaucratic system was organised so squaddies just expected to get fed. French troops, by contrast, from a working peasant background were used to fending for themselves, so lived better off the land. - Disease killed hugely more men on all sides than fighting. 80% of the 21,00 British who died (20% of their total force) died of sickness or disease (lots of Cholera).	
Jul 18	The Muse	Jessie Burton	3	Story uncovering the history of a painting thought to be by a young Spanish left winger who died in the early days of the Civil War. Flips between 1936 Spain and 1997 London, where a young Caribbean girl, soon to be authoress, gets a job with an art gallery with a mysterious older woman. Woman turns out to have been part of the Spanish story (sister of the non-painter and would be, I think lover of the girl who did the painting) and provides the answers to all the puzzles. Echoes of other painting-focussed books: The Goldfinch and The Improbability of Love.	
Jul 18	Big Pig, Little Pig	Jacqueline Yallop	5	British couple in France raising pigs...	
Jul 18	True History of the Kelly Gang	Peter Carey	3	Fictionalised story of the outlaw's life in his own very rough, ready and chatty words. Eldest boy of Irish family on NE Victoria state. Drunken Dad died when he was 12 leaving him as man of the homestead looking after his adored Mum and siblings. Grinding discrimination and a fiery temper led to his famous death in a steel-suited shoot-out at the age of 25.	

Books

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Jul 18	The Old Regime and the Revolution	Alexis de Tocqueville	5	Interesting, but ultimately too wordy for me to keep on at, comparison of France's structures pre- and post- the 1789 Revolution, written around 1850. Some points: a) man is driven to destroy aristocracy, and despotism surfaces and thrives when there is no aristocracy, and then nurtures selfishness and anti-societal behaviour (particularly, presumably, amongst the folk at the top) b) the Revolution removed rather than created freedom in the sense of control of individuals by the state c) the Revolutionaries claimed that central government control was one of the benefits of the Revolution, where in fact that had happened a long time before. Despite the facade of Lords controlling their local area and serfs, the Royal Council had taken over much of this decades before. Ultimate local control was all via the Council's appointed "intendants". d) In doing this, the Lords' obligations to care for the needy were removed, partly accounting for their popular overthrow.	
Jul 18	A Damned Serious Business	Gerald Seymour	5	Some cyber/terror/whatever thing. Disjointed start with tediously cryptic wee sections on different characters who would, no doubt, come together in the end somehow.	
Jul 18	In Dust and Ashes [HW#10]	Anne Holt	3	Last Hanne Wilhelmsen book. Not as good as some. Linked deaths 12 years apart solved by HW and her (autistic?) aid Henrik Holme. First was an apparent murder for which the recently separated husband spend 12 years in prison, the second a suicide of the wife of the sister of the first victim. But they are back to front, with the suicide being murder, and murder being suicide.	
Jul 18	Can You Forgive Her?	Anthony Trollope	5	Grossly wordy tale of relationships in upper class 1860s English society. Mannered and hard to digest, though I madly ploughed through 30% of it before giving up.	K
Jul 18	The Poisonwood Bible	Barbara Kingsolver	3	Dense, eloquent and evocative tale of wife and four daughters of unpleasant rabid US Baptist minister sent to the Congo in 1959 to proselytise the natives. After independence in 1960 he insists on staying on, despite being urged to leave by his mission and his family. The family become more and more troubled and, after deliberate release of a poisonous snake by a disgruntled local villager, the youngest daughter is bitten and dies (17-Jan-1961 - the same day that Patrice Lumumba is killed by Mobutu's thugs). This is the final straw for Mum who walks out with the remaining daughters, leaving the husband to carry on insanely until a fiery death 30 years later. The eldest daughter (~17) slopes off with a disreputable white man and ends up staying in Africa with a chain of wealthy husbands and a white supremacist lifestyle. One of the other two stays in Congo (and later Angola) married to a smart anti-Mobutu local schoolteacher, raising a family and being a real friend of Africa. Her ever-so-smart, and originally physically stunted, twin returns to USA with Mum and becomes a doctor. Would be an excellent book if not so long. Too much in the first 60% just about the characters, albeit with a good feel for African life. Disappointingly little info on the politics and events that are alluded to. I had to read other sources to discover that Mobutu was a CIA puppet brought in to overthrow the Soviet-friendly Lumumba. Also the brutality of the early Belgium colonists as they plundered a country the size of Western Europe of, first, Rubber, then Copper and other minerals and (causing the most US interest) Uranium.	
Jun 18	The Whitehall Mandarin [Catesby#4]	Edward Wilson	3	Another complex spying story spread over many years with allusions to and brushes with various real events (Profumo, Portland Down spies). Main focus on antagonism/mistrust between USSR and China's ideologies and the CIA's incapability of distinguishing one communist from another. All the devious double-dealings and -agentising hard to follow in the second half. Main thread around a glamorous top British civil servant and her wayward Mao-fanatical daughter. With weird twist at the end that her glamour-puss Mum is a surgically altered Dad.	K
Jun 18	Guilt	Ferdinand von Schirach	2	Excellent set of short stories by the author of "Terror". Some only a couple of pages, all crisp and engaging. Most describing ghastly true episodes where FvS defended abused or misunderstood people. Makes you realise that grisly crime fictions we read are not necessarily far fetched.	
Jun 18	61 Hours [JR#14]	Lee Child	3	Typical breathless Jack Reacher, despite being snow-bound in a small South Dakota town connected to a prison. Midget Mexican drug lord operating some Crystal Meth distribution from massive USAF bunker west of town where the meth was stashed at the end of WW2. Ends with JR apparently dead when bunker and remaining baddies incinerated, but, of course, we're only part way thru the series.	
Jun 18	The Siege if Krishnapur	JG Farrell	5	Slow starting 1850s-ish Indian colonialism	
Jun 18	Rome : a history in seven sackings	Matthew Kneale	3	Snapshots of Rome around seven (of many more) overrunning s: 387BC – Gauls, AD 410 – Goths, 546 – Visigoths, 1084 – Normans, 1527 – Spanish and Lutherans (Martin Luther had been a possibility for Pope before was so disillusioned by the Church's greed and venality), 1849 – French, 1943 – Germans (after Italian's left the Axis). Bit of a headful of people and events. Reminded me how ludicrously powerful and wealthy the Church and Pope were. Also how aggressive and contentions the Popes were – often several Papal candidates fighting each other. And interesting to read that by WW2 Mussolini and Fascism were already hated by the majority of Italians who were therefore not behind the Axis and were exultant when M was deposed.	
Jun 18	Roseanna [Martin Beck #1]	Maj Sjöwall (Sjowall) and Per Wahlöö (Wahloo)	3	Usual low key, slow-paced and overly-descriptive but nevertheless absorbing murder solving case. This of a nymphomaniac American girl found naked, raped and strangled in a lock on the Swedish canal system. MB and co more or less stumble on the culprit who shows no sign at all of being so. Some unexplained hunch of MB's, weeks of uneventful tailing, and a sting using a female cop bring about a pretty unforced confession.	K
Jun 18	Zennor in Darkness	Helen Dunmore	5	Some young women and farmers in WW1 Cornwall. Never got going.	K
Jun 18	The Dark Circle	Linda Grant	3	Strangely empty story of TB sufferers in 1949/50's England. Set round Jewish brother and sister who both survive (tho' she ends up deaf due to mis-drugging by her devoted wide-boy brother). Learnt a bit about TB and its eventual eradication with drugs. Lots of implied criticism of the nascent NHS (and others) use of crude cure attempts before the magic drug (Streptomycin) was widely available.	
Jun 18	The Reckoning [MK#2]	Jane Casey	3	Another grisly murder thriller with female cop (Maeeve Kerrigan). This starting with deaths of three ex-paedophiles each horribly tortured before being killed. This due to a gang boss whose 14-year old daughter has disappeared bringing him back to the UK from exile to find the (assumed) kidnapper because (in his view) the cops aren't trying. Then rolls on to the two nasty kidnappers linked to some vile website that specialises in videos of young girls being abused and raped. Pretty OTT but the main plots are gripping enough. Book let down by far too much of the romance between MK and her police colleague and Spooks-like nonsensical time lines.	K
Jun 18	Days Without End	Sebastian Barry	3	Two pre-teen orphan boys in 1840s America (Thomas McNulty and John Cole) become bosom buddies and, later, lovers. They start out being nurtured by a supportive impresario who dresses them up as women to be dancing and drinking partners with miners in the wild west. They move on to being soldiers fighting the gruesome Indian wars witnessing and taking part in hideous tit-for-tat slaughter. During this they rescue the 6-year old niece of an Indian chief who becomes their adopted daughter and focus of their bizarre "family" for the rest of the book. Next they fight on the Union side in the civil war with more gore and vile weather. When trying to settle down in the south they are attacked by vigilante's and again mixed up in more Indian genocide. The book is told in an at times difficult to follow, very colloquial, first person by the Irish lad of the two (another McNulty). But despite this, the action packed events and the sharing and nurturing of the two men and their "daughter" are stirring and moving.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jun 18	Breakout at Stalingrad	Heinrich Gerlach and end notes by Carsten Gansel	3+	<p>Fictionalised account of the 1942-3 siege of Stalingrad written by a German intelligence officer who survived it. Having captured the city of Stalingrad in mid-1942 (partly as a Hitler ego trip to counter the failure to take Moscow in 1941) the German army was out on a limb (~2500 Km from Berlin) and clever (and expensive in their lives) Russian tactics surrounded the city and nearby region with a 1-million strong army, trapping 300,000 Germans in a "cauldron" about 25x35 Km between the Don and the Volga.</p> <p>Here they froze and starved to death until surrendering in Feb 1943, when the Russians captured the remaining 91,000 soldiers and imprisoned them. Only 6,000 survived to return to Germany after the war.</p> <p>The narrative is remarkably objective and largely about the misery and suffering of the forsaken soldiers. There is a good bit of anti- Nazi and Hitler invective.</p> <p>Lots of reiteration of the army's blind following of their oath of allegiance in the face of continuing lies and exhortations from Hitler.</p> <p>Quite a lot about the morale roller-coaster as one rumour after another of a liberating German army ran amuck. Also the frustration as Hitler continued to refuse to let them break out of the cauldron.</p> <p>Only one (I think) mention of the atrocities the Germans meted out to Jews and others as they followed their path to make Germany great again.</p> <p>Surprisingly brief coverage of the final surrender where Field-Marshal Paulus (promoted a few days earlier by Hitler to emphasise that German FM's never surrender) weakly let his right-hand man organise the white flags and terms.</p> <p>80% of this publication is the book, with the rest being fascinating end notes by CG.</p> <p>These cover HG's ~6 years in Russian captivity where he wrote the book, while having great access to many of the senior officers who survived with him.</p> <p>He was in one of two groups nurtured by the Russians to generate support and propaganda to depose Hitler. The first (which HG was a big part of) was largely traditional army folk wanting to avoid the destruction of Germany. The second were communist-supporting and included many who went on to run East Germany (including Walter Ulbricht, early leader in the GDR, who was instrumental in HG's prolonged post-war incarceration and suppression of the manuscript).</p> <p>The Russians confiscated his manuscript so when he got back to Germany in 1951(?) he re-wrote it from memory and help from a hypnotist (with an intriguing legal case later between the two) and it became a best seller as "The Forgotten Army".</p> <p>But, while doing other research in Moscow in 2011, CG found the manuscript which is what this publication is of. CG has interesting comparisons between the two books – the "remembered" one being more politically orientated promoting the message of the young German's being manipulated by the Nazi's and thus less guilty, whereas the original is very non-political.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Seydlitz had gone into captivity with the rest of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad, after having tried in vain to persuade the commander-in-chief of the Sixth Army, Field Marshal Paulus, to defy Hitler's orders and break out of the Cauldron.</p>	K
Jun 18	The Razor's Edge	Somerset Maugham	4	Pompous flannelly tale of wealth Americans with SM himself a constant character relating events. Set in the 1920's-30's. Mainly about one young man who manages to avoid the money/career expectations and float round the world searching for a God and suchlike.	
May 18	The Kennedy Moment	Peter Adamson	4	Fiction purporting to explain why the US and the world got round to mass vaccination of kids in the 1980s, having agreed and failed to do so years earlier. Here a group of five 40-year olds meet up 20 years after leaving Oxford and, having access to smallpox spores, send a blackmailing note to the US administration saying they will release it unless the US honours its commitments.	
May 18	This Is How it Ends	Eva Dolan	3	Reasonably interesting story and plot, but book ruined by far far too much fluff and padding. The story and interest proper really only starts half way through!	
May 18	Odd Numbers [HW#9]	Anne Holt	3	Murder mystery set round young female anti-Gentrification activist with an ex-cop father and a brief stint in cop training herself ending when she beat up a fellow trainee who assaulted her. She gets close to 60-year old ex-Greenham Common mother figure who she asks to help her when she accidentally kills someone else who assaults her.	
May 18	Sweet Caress: The Many Lives of Amory Clay	William Boyd	3+	The book operates on the now common mechanism flitting between brief scenes from pre and post the main event slowly exposing what's going on.	
May 18	The Last Girl	Nadia Murad	3	Slightly disappointing finale with the two main characters falling to their death.	
May 18	Show me a hero	Ted Allbeury	3	Penultimate Hanne Wilhelmsen (and last Billy T). She (still wheelchair bound) is doing some cold case work from home which comes up with a set of immigrant misfits who have links to a just-happening series of bombings in Oslo – which turn out to be being orchestrated against Muslims by a nasty far right group, which includes Billy T's son, with tragic consequences.	
May 18	The Great Swindle	Pierre Lemaitre	3+	Life and loves of a fictional female photographer, born 1908 took her own life in 1983. Mixed up in bohemian Berlin in the early 1930s, WW2 and Vietnam war. Great wide-ranging with several real people mixed in. The book peppered with, allegedly, her photos – poor print and picture quality, but would be intriguing to know who actually took them and who they are all of.	
May 18	Surely You're Joking Mr Feynman: Adventures of a Curious Character as Told to Ralph Leighton	Richard P Feynman	3	Chilling biography of Iraqi/Yazidi girl captured by ISIS and made a sex slave and repeatedly raped. They also killed most of her family.	
May 18	Manhattan Beach	Jennifer Egan	3	Slightly thin on "action" with a fair amount of hard-to-follow history of the area its many factious tribes.	
May 18	The Burning [MK#1]	Jane Casey	3	Another tale starting in 1930's and ending in 1990s covering SOE in WW2, CIA and high politics. Mainly about a Soviet spy who runs operations undetected in New York and Washington for decades behind the cover of running a bookshop (with echoes of Rudolph Abel, the quiet spy swapped for Gary Powers). But also, though always a firm and naïve believer in Communism, he slowly realises the ghastliness of Soviet leadership and bullies, and becomes a two-way conduit of common sense between US Presidents and Soviet top brass. Lots about his behind the scenes wisdom during the Cuban Missile crisis.	K
May 18	The Kremlins Candidate [RS#3]	Jason Matthews	3+	Three French survivors of WW1 get into to two different swindles. One, a vile captain (who killed two of his troops to force the rest to attack Germans on the eve of peace so he could get fame, and almost killed the other two) finagles contracts to move corpses from battlefield graves to new ones. But he does it on the cheap and gets his comeuppance. The other two decide to make a million by setting up a shell company to sell war memorials, scarpering once they've taken deposits.	
May 18	The Burning [MK#1]	Jane Casey	3	Series of very chatty reminiscences from the enthusiastic and ever-inquisitive Nobel physicist. Some a bit too technical, but others, such as times with showgirls and gamblers in Las Vegas, not. He was clearly a remarkable man, but the book went on too long and his open and slightly self-centred style began to grate.	K
May 18	The Burning [MK#1]	Jane Casey	3	1930's/40's New York (mainly). Young girl daughter of Mafia boss' bagman, who disappears presumed "terminated". In her late teens she becomes a diver (fixing ships damaged in the war) and ties up again with the Mafia boss. Her Dad reappears (in the story), having survived his liquidation somehow and purposefully disappeared. He becomes merchant sailor and survives shipwreck in the Indian Ocean.	
May 18	The Burning [MK#1]	Jane Casey	3	Indirect/allusive style makes it a challenging read. But excellent detail on deep-water diving, life in 1940's New York, and the horrors of surviving weeks adrift on the ocean.	
May 18	The Burning [MK#1]	Jane Casey	3	Murder thriller. Female cop (Maevie Kerrigan) solving murder of woman made to look like 5 th in series where others had been stunned, disfigured and then burned. This one was a look-alike by an internally deranged lawyer who managed to project cool and innocence.	K
May 18	The Burning [MK#1]	Jane Casey	3	Lots of good side plots and relationship stuff with MK ditching her boyfriend and falling for a satirical colleague (feel not dissimilar to Robert Bryndza's Erica Foster).	
May 18	The Burning [MK#1]	Jane Casey	3	Good gripping read, let down by a turgid denouement with a (far too long) suicide note from the lawyer killer tying up all the loose ends.	
May 18	The Burning [MK#1]	Jane Casey	3	More CIA/FSB intrigue with top level moles. The Female one gets to be head of SVR (Russian equivalent of CIA) and just thwarts appointment of Russian mole to head CIA (after Russians murder previous head). Gory complex finale removes her CIA lover from the scene – so maybe this is the last book.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Apr 18	John Macnab	John Buchan	2	Every bit as good as Andrew Greig's reprise in this story of three+one youngish (30's?) upper class men bored with their respectable lives and the return to normalcy following WW1. They announce to the owners of three Scottish estates their intention to poach a deer or salmon, which they variously achieve with clever ruses and good assistance from a young gipsy lad – Fish Benjie – and the spirited daughter of one of the targetted estates.	K
Apr 18	Under a Pole Star	Stef Penney	4	Slushy romantic/overly-sexual tale set partly in Greenland as late 19 th century explorers ramble around in the cold.	K
Apr 18	Red Sparrow [RS#1]	Jason Matthews	3	Rather involved and jargon heavy. Young niece of top dog Soviet (Putin era) KGB/SVR outfit loses belief in her country and, with encouragement from a CIA agent (they fall in love) turns double agent. All controlled initially by an even higher level old Soviet double agent who ends sacrificing his life to let the woman head for top dog-dom.	
Apr 18	If This Is a Man and The Truce	Primo Levi	3	Pair of books – first about his ~15 months in the Auschwitz complex and second about the 8 months return home. Very factual and non-judgmental but giving clear idea of the horrors he and his body somehow survived. He was one of 3 who survived from a batch of 650 Italians shipped to Auschwitz in late 1943. He somehow survived the first winter and managed the second because his Chemistry background got him on a work detail that kept him inside during the second. When the Russians were about to arrive in March 1945 he was in the hospital unit and so avoided being marched off by the Germans with the 20,000 others who all disappeared. The Truce was slightly less interesting though it is intriguing how long it took for the systems to get him home – his initial 7 months being at the mercy of the Russians disorganisation.	
Apr 18	District VIII [DB#1]	Adam Lebor	3	Thriller set in Budapest, Hungary as 2015(ish) surge of (mainly) Syrian refugees mass there trying to get to EU. Main character is Roma cop trying to solve the murder of one refugee and catch a terrorist planning to get through amongst the refugees. Lots of top level corruption (from President down) and conflicts between regular police, MI5-y lot and the presidents private army. Would be 3+ at least if a bit less wordy!	K
Apr 18	The Son	Jo Nesbo	3+	Better than usual thriller. Son of policeman who committed suicide goes to pieces as teenager and spends 12 years in prison by confessing to murders he hasn't done in return for drug baron keeping him fed with heroin. Other prisoners think he is out-of-it and ease their consciences by confessing their crimes to him, in return for some loopy absolution. The last of them tells him his Dad was actually killed. He then escapes, goes clean and starts killing villains, homing in on the drug baron and corrupt policeman he used. In the finale one of these turns out to be the sympathetic, not (now) corrupt and smart older cop who helps him get to the baron and to the shock that his Dad was also corrupt. Pleasingly few plot jolts as the Son moves from revenge to revenge. But it jars that on the one hand he is so out of touch with modern life (after 12 years inside he can't operate a mobile phone, the Internet, a TV remote), but on the other is super-clever in getting to (and then away from) murder each of his victims.	
Apr 18	The Boys In The Boat	Daniel James Brown	3+	Engrossing story of the winning USA 8-man rowing team in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Bit of sports-jock intensity, but interesting that rowing was (is?) such a major sport and entertainment – more so than in England. Lots on the technicalities and physical and mental prowess needed will make me appreciate boat races I see in the future. The team were all from working class Washington State, and were also its Uni team. They fought their way up the rankings in the USA against the more traditional top notch Uni's to get the Olympic position. Lots of breathless and highly detailed descriptions of races on the way to and including the Olympic gold. For the latter they squeaked over the line a foot or two ahead of the Germans despite being positioned in the most unfavourable (wind swept) side of the course, having one of the main on-boat crew ill and, because an unfair starting process made them miss a few strokes at the start (along with the UK boat, which included Ran Laurie – Hugh's father). Lots of philosophising on crew make-up, and personal histories of the boys - focussed on one of them Joe Rantz, who the author had a month with before his death in 2007. The rowing side of the story is well balanced with world events, from the depression and dust bowl and poverty that the boys came from to the rise of the Nazis and their clever PR whitewash and presentation of the Olympics.	K
Apr 18	The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst	Nicholas Tomalin and Ron Hall	3+	Story of the fatal voyage of a bright but unstable man, written in great detail within months of his death. He entered the 1968 Sunday Times round-the-world non-stop race for publicity to revive his tiny and failing sailing technology company. Due to very scrambled boat build and preparation crucial equipment was missing or not working – even such low tech stuff as the reinforced pipe needed for the mechanical pump to clear bilges and float leakage. He was clearly out of the running within a weeks of leaving, and then went off air for months as he drifted in the Atlantic and concocted his reappearance months later as if he'd done the circumnavigation. Ironically all this "worked" (including superb navigational calculations to generate his spoof course) and, according to the authors, he might have lived, letting himself come in second to Tetley who (one of few still in the race and, like DC, in a trimaran) was on course to win the speed prize, thus (as 2nd) not having to have his logs and course inspected in too much detail. But his "reappearance" made Tetley push on too hard and his boat broke up. This made DC the de-facto winner, with no place to hide his cheating.	
Apr 18	The Tenderness of Wolves	Stef Penney	3+	Good who-dunnit set in the milieu of the all-powerful Hudson Bay Company in 1860s Canada outback. A French trapper is found murdered and scalped and everyone in the surrounding outposts, and many beyond, seems to have some involvement or deep interest. Famously, SP had never been to Canada and is an agoraphobic with little or no knowledge of the cold grim winter life she describes, but produced mainly believable writing. Still, some aspects of the writing jarred with what one assumes 19th century life was like – particularly in such remote communities: - school kids going swimming and smoking on outings - casual acceptance of half-breeds and full Indians by some characters. - everyone bumping into each other in the acres of snow-covered Ontario - trackers able to follow tracks after many weeks of fresh snow	K
Mar 18	This is the Story of a Happy Marriage	Ann Patchett	5	Series of, no doubt, all decently-written essays and biographical snippets	
Mar 18	The Terrorists [Martin Beck #10]	Maj Sjöwall (Sjowall) and Per Wahlöö (Wahlöö)	3	Swedish thriller, last in pre-planned series published in 1975 just before Wahlöö died, remarkable for its freshness today, and understandably an influence on, apparently, Stieg Larsson. This with intertwined stories of cell from feared political terrorist movement trying to blow up a Regan-like senator visiting Stockholm (in a MO matching a successful one in S. America), a naïve 18-year old girl being poorly handled by society who ends up in an understandable assassination and a porn baron being killed by the father of one of the girls he exploited. Lots of social angst amongst the action.	
Mar 18	The Legacy [FH#1]	Yrsa Sigurdardottir	2	Gripping Icelandic crime story. Gruesome murders interlaced with child psychologist trying to help affected kids and many troubled adopted characters. Also, solving coded messages left at crime scenes and broadcast over short wave radio. Full of twists and cliff-hangers making it as compulsive as a Lee Child!	K
Mar 18	The Underground Railroad	Colson Whitehead	3+	Grim account of slavery in mid(I think) 19th century America. Told round the escape of a black girl from a brutal Georgia plantation and her recaptures and escapes from a nasty slave catcher. Lots of detail of the vile and often sadistic treatment of slaves by owners and ordinary citizens as well as "night riders" and other slave-hounding organisations. Instead of describing the true mechanisms of the "railroad" the book takes the odd approach of portraying it as an actual thing with tracks and tunnels, trains and stations with platforms, but well-conveys the huge risks and organisation of the actual processes.	
Mar 18	Secessia	Kent Wascom	4	Set in New Orleans near the start of the American Civil War. Yankees, under General Butler, have taken it over. Story is mainly about personal lives of about 6 characters, some glimpses of history and real events. But hideously awkward prose made it a poor read.	K

Books

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Mar 18	A Gentleman in Moscow	Amor Towles	3+	Delightful, if rather too loquacious, tale of Russian aristocrat in the decades following the revolution. Hugely well-mannered, cultured, educated and wealthy epicure Count Rostov returns to Moscow in 1917 from Paris for love of his country (not the Bolsheviks). Installs himself in a suite of rooms in the massive and luxurious Hotel Metropol and continues his dilettante life of pleasure. In a few years the regime put him under house arrest in a garret in the same hotel. But he carries on his cultured lifestyle as best he can (fine dining, regular visits to the in-house barber and bars), though over the years he is made to work, being head waiter of the smartest of the hotel's restaurants, and one gets glimpses through this of the changes in Russian life in the outside Soviet world. He is befriended by a charming and precocious (also aristocratic, I think) 10 year old girl also resident in the hotel. Over the years this friendship morphs to an even greater one with her daughter who Rostov (who becomes her surrogate father after Mum first goes Soviet and then disappears in the Gulags) helps escape Russia in 1954. Would be an excellent book if a bit less verbose – particularly in the first quarter.	
Mar 18	His Bloody Project	Graeme Macrae Burnet	3-	Over-egged tale of crofter lad who brutally murders a nasty neighbour and two of his children. Portrayed as a true tale with (far too many) excerpts from witness testimony, the trial proceedings and the (ludicrously articulate) memoir the lad wrote while in prison waiting trial and death. But, gives a good flavour of the feudal system in 1860s highlands with laird/factor/factors-constable imposing harsh rules on the peasant/serf crofters.	
Mar 18	I Love You, Goodbye	Cynthia Rogerson	4	Slushy libidinous set of relationships in small N. Scottish town. Divorcing couple fled from Edinburgh after she has an affair, Relate councillor they use who herself, while pregnant with her husband's child, has affair with Polish man.	K
Mar 18	Splinter of Silence	Val McDermid	3	Decent crime/detective story. One of series I believe with same characters – particularly Carol Jordan alcoholic super-policewoman and Tony Hill psychological profiler. Here CJ is enticed from retirement to re-form team and solve series of deaths of female bloggers who infuriated bigoted males who then viciously trolled them. Each death was thought to be suicide due to the abuse, but turns out to be very cleverly staged by a well-disturbed man.	
Mar 18	Crocodile on the Sandbank [Amelia Peabody Book 1]	Elizabeth Peters	3	Very light detective story with formidable late 19 th century 32-year old spinster in the Egyptian desert. Corny Europeans exploring for relics with disinherited heiress being chased by charming and wicked cousin after her (not really disinherited) fortune playing silly buggers to frighten her.	K
Mar 18	The Snowman [HH#7]	Jo Nesbo	3	Hugely complicated, gory and ludicrous murder mystery. Killer leaves Snowman after each gruesome murder. Many false suspects are found and assumed to be the killer before the real one is presented.	K
Mar 18	Tales from a Young Country	Marcus Clarke	3	Series of essays written in 1871, as factual as he could be, of events 1780-1860 in early Australia. Often in an amusing Mark Twain / Bill Bryson style and many covering the real events used to build "For the Term of His Natural Life"	K
Mar 18	Down Under	Bill Bryson	3	Good re-read en-richened by our two recent visits to Oz and various other readings (some of which make me question a couple of BB's seemingly in inexhaustible stream of facts!). Shame he didn't do Tasmania.	
Feb 18	The Dry [AF#1]	Jane Harper	3+	Whodunnit in small rural town in hot drought-smitten Australia. Farmer, his wife and young son (but not infant daughter who was also in the house) found killed with shotgun. Initial indications and assumptions are that he did it in desperation after months of drought affected his farm. But there are some niggles possible tie-in with the unexplained death of a teenage girl 20 years earlier. She was part of a gang of four – the farmer, another girl still in the town (now a single Mum) and the main solver of both crimes in the end – Aaron Falk. He and his father were hounded out of town after the 20-year past death and is now a financial cop in Melbourne. He's back for the farmer's funeral and gets hooked into jointly solving the crimes with the conscientious local one-man-band cop.	K
Feb 18	Your Blue-eyed boy	Helen Dunmore	3-	Successful female judge supporting two kids and a recently bankrupted husband is caught up by Vietnam vet lover from a summer fling in the States 20 years before. He sends compromising photos from their youth and then comes to their Suffolk home. The book exudes potential menace but nothing really comes of it and he dies in a freak accident which she covers up. A book that didn't fulfil its promise.	
Feb 18	For The Term of His Natural Life (Annotated): A Trilogy	Marcus Clarke	3	Written in the 1870's about Australian convict life in the 1830's-40's. Over-romanticised and unrealistically spun from a mugging/murder in Highgate where all the main characters were involved in one way or another – particularly the wronged and noble main character who ends up with a lifetime in Macquarie Harbour, Port Arthur and Norfolk Island. The sadistic brutality meted out to the convicts is well told and, apparently, all based on real events strung together to make this a readable adventure tale – marred by going on far too long at the end as the noble exile/convict and a guiding/redeeming young girl are finally joined in death.	K 392 1872
Feb 18	A divided spy	Charles Cumming	3	Third (and probably last) in the Thomas Kell series. TK now out of MI6/SIS gets lead on Russian SVR officer who had TK's girlfriend killed in a previous book. SVR guy is a closet gay and TK tries to use this to turn him, aided by his lover being assassinated soon after TK is on to him. Lots of conflicts of interests ad TK ends saving life of SVR man (despite wanting him dead) in exchange for crucial info allowing TK/MI6 foil a Jihadist atrocity in Brighton.	
Feb 18	This must be the place	Maggie O'Farrell	3	Tale covering ~1986-2016 told in non-chronological fragments. Initially philandering American studying in the UK is back 15 years later and meets and marries a reclusive ex movie star who staged her own disappearance with her young son. Flits between Ireland, where she hides out and he marries her, and the US and other locations incidental to the unfolding. A good read that went on a bit too long.	
Feb 18	Cold Blood [EF#5]	Robert Bryndza	3	Another great Erika Foster thriller with the usual structure. This with vile sadistic misfit and his besotted girlfriend killing several folk – often leaving their dismembered bodies in suitcases. Erika manages to get roughed up a bit as usual, but the main denouement action is when the kids of her one-time boss, possible lover, are kidnapped by the desperate killers.	K
Feb 18	The Story of an African Farm	Olive Schreiner	4	Modern-feeling tale written in ~1880 following 3 young orphan kids brought up on a remote farm run by cruel selfish 33-year old Boer widow. There's lots of powerful feelings (though I didn't understand it) philosophy and emotion as their lives separate and return to each other with, in one case, premature death. Good descriptions of Boer farm life, the charlatans and profiteers who floats round it, and the fat wives.	K
Feb 18	Long Way Home [ZF#1]	Eva Dolan	3	Uninspiring murder thriller. Set amongst Eastern European more-of-less slave labour with a number of murders and complicated but uninteresting finale. Sort of interesting set of detectives, so maybe later books are better?	
Feb 18	13-Point Plan for a Perfect Murder (A Pufferfish Tasmanian Mystery)	David Owen	3	Tortuous murder mystery set in Hobart – two coincident murders. One of an abusive ne'er-do-well killed by his loony cult-following wife and daughter. The other a posh rich English Polo champion. Gave some good pointers of places to visit near Hobart and was an OK read outside some hard to follow Aussie slang and grammar. The cop (Pufferfish) has interesting back history (Dutch self-exiled to TAS after killing someone in revenge for the torture and murder of his girlfriend) that might make it worth braving the prose with other books in the series.	K
Jan 18	Sister Noon	Karen Joy Fowler	5	Women in 1890 San Francisco. No sign of history or interest like her other book.	
Jan 18	The Outrun	Amy Liptrop	3-	Second in a row alcoholic's biography. This of a young Orkney woman with extreme alcoholism. After 10 years in London and eventual rehab returns to Orkney and tells her tale intermingled with island life and history. Well written, but not uplifting.	
Jan 18	Lucky Lupin	Charlie Mortimer	4	Self-centred rather repetitious description of his wild, drug-abused, long-term AIDS victim, gay, upper-class, rich man's life. He has an amusing turn of phrase and some hair raising life scrapes to cover, but not someone one warms to.	
Jan 18	Obedience	Jacqueline Yallop	5	Something about nuns and German soldiers in Italy in WW2.	
Jan 18	Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy	Gabriella Coleman	5	First pages dull introspective and, now, a bit dated I suspect.	
Jan 18	Kickback [ND#3]	Damien Boyd	3	Another undemanding single-threaded murder tale. This set in horse racing milieu starting with gay stable boy being bludgeoned to death and dumped in with known wild horse to make it look like an accident.	K
Jan 18	A Necessary Evil	Abir Mukherjee	4	Weak murder mystery set in 1920s India.	
Jan 18	English Passengers	Matthew Kneale	3	Engrossing (sadly, rather too long) tale set ~1820-60, based on many actual events. Three main stories: 1. Tasmanian Aborigines being hounded out of their territories and eventually wiped out by disease and brutality by the western colonials. 2. Religious-based expedition by three Englishman. One manic clergyman expecting to find the Garden of Eden in Tasmania and one Doctor/anthropologist wanting to reinforce his view that different races (Saxon, Celt/Manx, Black) are different species with innately different capabilities. 3. Isle of Man sailors who unwillingly get diverted from smuggling in British waters to taking the Englishmen all the way to Tasmania and back (albeit on the return journey they've been captured by the mutineering Doctor)	K

Books

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Jan 18	No Echo [HW#6]	Anne Holt	3-	The murder plot (high-falutin chef found stabbed to death but was also stuffed with enough Paracetamol to have killed him shortly after) is typically outrageous, and marred by poor continuity and too many (mainly police/legal) characters with hard to distinguish names/characters. But, there's good additional info on the Hanne W extended family. Book starts in a Verona nunnery where she'd fled after death of her long-term partner (Cecilie). As she leaves to return to Oslo she meets her to-be wife (Nefis) and on return takes in the dissolute old whore (Hairy Mary) who becomes a permanent house guest.	
Jan 18	Munich	Robert Harris	3	Recounting the days leading up to Chamberlain's last Munich meeting with Hitler and the famous bit of paper. Linked by two fictional young men, one German one British, who had been good friends at University and were now involved on each side (the German part of faction wanting to kill Hitler, but nevertheless in his entourage) and each wanting to prevent the Czech/Sudetenland take-over. Not a whole lot of action or new info, and lots of description of streets, clothes, hotels, etc. Shows Chamberlain to be more subtle than the trite appeaser label he holds (eg: the bit of paper being deliberately chosen so that if/when Hitler acts contrary to it, it would be easier to bring USA into the war).	
Jan 18	The Luminaries	Eleanor Catton	3	Massive (~950 page) murder/mystery/derring-do set in gold boom New Zealand (Hokitika on the west of the south island) in the 1860s. Mix of opium trade, gold find smuggling, murder and much else written in an effective Victorian style. Complex inter-relationships of the 20 or so main characters who have all arrived there (often with prior connections) from Britain and China are hard to follow, but enough repetition as the layers (and chronologies) unfold largely helps. As is the last 5% being an odd rush of 1-paragraph "chapters" filling in the blanks from the allusive earlier and wordier sections. Chapter titles have astrological references which had no bearing on the story that I could discern, so I clearly missed something!	K
Dec 17	Red Joan	Jennie Rooney	3	Cambridge female graduate with slightly naive socialist/Soviet sympathies gets job in WW2 in top secret nuclear research lab in WW2. Her (now) soviet agent friends try to persuade her to steal secrets to avoid the west being the sole nuclear power. She resists this until her disgust at Hiroshima turns her into a top KGB source, managed through a girl she thought her best friend. Story told with split chronology as she is uncovered in her 80's after one of her original (titled) collaborators, who became a senior MI6 man, is found dead. Excellent read, inspired by the real life of a somewhat similar (and again invisible to the authorities because she was female) Melita Norwood – who, unlike the Joan in the book, did not regret her betrayals.	
Dec 17	The Hare with Amber Eyes	Edmund de Waal	3	Personal history of his family loosely linked by a set of 250 Netsuke (small, handleable, Japanese carvings). He's a respected potter and his story starts with his hugely wealthy Jewish (Ephrussi) family in 19 th century Paris. They build a large banking dynasty and the well-heeled offspring collect art – one starting the Netsuke collection as he patronises his well-known artist friends (Monet, Rodin, etc). They are Vienna-based come WW2 where they lose pretty much everything, except the Netsuke that the Nazi's ignore long enough for one of their servants (non-Jewish and hence allowed to stay) to rescue them. Engagingly written with the first (Paris) and last (Tokyo post WW2) sections compensating for a rather dull middle section.	
Dec 17	Blood of Victory [NS#7]	Alan Furst	3-	Another eastern Europe on edge of WW2 spy thing. This a Russian working for the Brits to disrupt oil supply (the blood of the title) to Nazis. But dreadfully cryptic / allusive / curt style made most of it unsatisfying or incomprehensible.	2002
Dec 17	A houseful of daughters	Juliet Nicolson	3	Largely an autobiography but wrapped in the history down her distinguished maternal side. Starting with the feisty Spanish dancer Pepita who rose from obscurity to be an international star. Lionel Sackville-West (the older) fell madly for her and they lived in sin around Europe Her (bastard) daughter Victoria confusingly married another Lionel Sackville-West and produced Vita, who married Harold Nicolson (amongst her many lesbian affairs). Their son Nigel, is Juliet's father and bought the Shiantis and passed them to his son (Juliet's brother) Adam ("Sea Room"). All the daughters covered were alcoholics at one time or other – Juliet and her mother in particular. But, a rather self-centred book best suited for those with an interest in the dysfunctional and wealthy Sackville-West/Nicolson clan.	
Dec 17	Three Ways to Capsize a Boat: An optimist afloat	Chris Stewart	3	Slim book in his usual amusing style recounts his sailing days in his 30's. He got a job skippering an old-style yacht in the Greeks islands when he had never sailed before. He did some training and managed that. Then did a Norway/Iceland/Newfoundland/US transatlantic trip with some others which he describes well. Memorable description of peeing overboard in the night strapped to fore-stays in a gale with all the access problems of many layers of clothing and member shrinkage. Also learnt that "bitter end" is when the anchor rope runs taught to the bitt post.	K
Dec 17	Early Tasmania	James Backhouse Walker	3	Series of papers presented to the Royal Society of Hobart in the 1880s describing the early settlement around 1800 (and even earlier Tasman sighting in 1640s) of Van Diemen's Land / Tasmania. Amazing that the very first landings in Hobart area (from, I think, Sydney) preceded the discovery of the Bass Strait, and so the land was still thought to be the southern excrecence of mainland Australia. Some mentions and shame for the extinction of the Aborigine's – of which he thinks there were only about 6000 at peak. Despite their date, the writing is crisp and interesting.	K
Nov 17	War in Val d'Orcia	Iris Origo	3	Diary of English aristocrat lady married to large patriarchal landowner in Italy, covering 1943-44 as their lands were eventually freed of Nazi and Fascist control by the advancing allies. Interesting, if confusing, how fragmented and fractious the Italians were – with at one point, as she says, four different governments in the country from German, German backed Fascist, non-Fascist traditional and then Allied-backed Italian. Also how, as so often, one is amazed just how much "normal" life continues absolutely side-by-side with invading or occupying armies.	
Nov 17	The Seeds of Treason	Ted Allbeury	3	Very samey safe read. This on top SIS/MI6 spy man in ~1980-ish Berlin who falls for wife of KGB man and gets blackmailed by them to swap a computer disk in SIS's monitoring computers. Itself a fairly innocuous bit of treason, but when the two lovers come together again after some years he has been quietly exited from SIS to avoid their embarrassment Run in parallel with another love/spy relationship in the US for some odd reason.	K
Nov 17	How I Became a North Korean	Krys Lee	4-	Intertwined stories of 3 or 4 young N Koreans either escaping DPRK or one returning to China from USA to get involved in escapes. Dreadfully badly written and hard to follow.	
Nov 17	Memory Wall	Anthony Doerr	5	Series of short stories. None very good.	
Nov 17	The Invisible Guardian [Baztan#1]	Dolores Redondo	3	Pretty far-fetched with whiz-bang female Spanish detective back in her native land solving a series of murders where early teenage girls are left by remote river banks naked but neatly laid out. Various Tarot and Spanish "big foot" (Basajaun) supernatural aspects as well as the detective's brothers in law being in the frame.	K
Nov 17	A God in Ruins	Kate Atkinson	4	Long chronologically-challenged story about WW2 bomber pilot and his family over the years.	
Nov 17	The Legacy of Elizabeth Pringle	Kirsty Wark	4	Then and now saga of loves and wars (WW1 and WW2) and Arran. Over-sloppy and highly female-orientated.	K
Nov 17	Head in the Sand [ND#2]	Damien Boyd	3	Short and light murder solving for the same detective. This following series of gruesome murder+be-headings over 30 years. Single linear plot, no complexities or cliff hangers, and rather too rapid and easy. But an OK, undemanding read.	K
Oct 17	Death of the Demon [HW#3]	Anne Holt	3	Not as good as other Hanne W books. Woman running foster home is stabbed. Various staff have possible motives, as does obese 12-year old who has not been there too long.	
Oct 17	The Girl From Venice	Martin Cruz Smith	5	Something to do with the end of WW2 in Venice. Jewish (?) girl escaping Nazis found by non-Fascist fisherman.	
Oct 17	The Genius in my Basement	Alexander Masters	3-	Quirky biography of pure maths genius, Simon P Norton, who peaked at around 30 and is now a very eccentric pursuer of bus and rail routes and timetables. Some attempt to explain his field of maths (Group theory), which left me cold (but thankfully he flagged such chapters, so they were easy to skip).	K

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Oct 17	Night Soldiers [NS#1]	Alan Furst	3+	Rich, complex saga of spies/insurgents from 1934 to 1945. A group of young men from different countries are recruited by the Soviet NKVD and taken to Moscow to be trained as spies. The main character, a smart 18-year old Bulgarian peasant, is easily lured from his home town after seeing his brother beaten to death by Fascists. Initially ardent communists, he and the group he trains with, are being prepared for a very long game to be useful in future events. Some will be placed as sleepers being activated years later; the book feels and sounds hugely authentic all the way through, so presumably this is also accurate and it is amazing what very long-term, detailed and thorough preparation the NKVD (and, from other books, SIS/MI6) did. In the final stages of their training the small group were shafted by the NKVD and made a pact to look out for each other rather than the soviets if required. The main character does stints in Spain (as NKVD political officer and fighter), pre-WW2 Paris, WW2 Maquis and elsewhere. Furst often writes in a very allusive/unclear way and there are masses of characters, so I didn't really follow all the details (would have rated this higher if I had). But, over time the group become totally anti-Soviet (despite working for them in many cases) and allied to the OSS. Some outfit (possibly the OSS) manages to keep track of their movements and imprisonments over the years, rescuing them on occasion. Very little direct action or gore and quite slow moving (this, published in 1988, is refreshing compared to more modern wham-bam spy thrillers), but very believable minutiae on deprivation and misery during the pre- and war years.	K 1988
Oct 17	Les Parisiennes	Anne Sebba	4	Bitty, rambling, gossipy details of Paris women's life in and through WW2. Far too many women mentioned to keep track of, but, by going chronologically, many reappeared several times. Also heavily focussed on the wealthy, artistic and fashion-based (endless talk of clothes).	
Oct 17	One Hundred Years of Solitude	Gabriel Garcia Marquez	4-	Confusing multi-generational family saga with supernatural undertones set in Columbia from 19 th century. Too many hard to distinguish family names and many assumptions of ones familiarity with Columbian civil wars.	
Oct 17	The Dangerous Edge	Ted Alibeury	3	Same old formula, but interesting/readable. Double agents during WW2 being investigated by young modern day (~1990) SIS man at behest of his seniors who know already what he is going to discover. This time set first in post-war Berlin where a Nazi recruited by SIS to help run agents in and out of the almost-DDR proves hugely loyal to the UK. Further probing finds him in Holland in 1940s picking up most of the SOE agents dropped there, because the SOE radio protocol is so useless. He also executes 50 of them under orders. Turns out he was a double agent too with all the conflicts that involved.	K
Oct 17	I See You	Clare Mackintosh	3	Thriller set round stalking of women on the underground. Several are killed or abducted by different people, but all linked by a website which gives details of their commutes so perpetrators can latch onto them. Good climax to killing of (one of the) website runners who is also neighbour and best friends with the woman whose stalking the book revolves round.	K
Oct 17	Ragtime	E.L. Doctorow	3	Aspects of early 20 th century America with real people and events woven together as a fiction linked (mainly) by a New York family. The real characters include: - Harry Houdini - JP Morgan and Henry Ford - Emma Goldman (anarchist founder of Mother Earth) - Evelyn Nesbit – socialite whose husband kills well known architect in anger at her being molested by him as a teenager - Robert Peary, polar explorer A large part of the story revolves round fictional Coalhouse Walker, a smart Negro jazz-man abused by a red-neck fire-chief.	
Oct 17	The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists	Robert Tressell	3	Long and laboured diatribe on Socialism written in very early 20th century (before Bolshevism and Communism had proved inept at its variances). Quite readable story set round a collection of painter decorators for ever being laid off as their scrimping employer cheats customers and exploits them. Lots of contrived settings (eg: lunch break discussions and lectures and parliamentary election hoardings) to promulgate the "Public Ownership and Management of the Means of production" ("... Money—is a device for enabling those who do not work to rob the workers of the greater part of the fruits of their work by spending all their wages"). The producing class should be able to buy back All they had produced and "only produce things we need" - tho' I'm still not much wiser as to how this would work in practice. But good exposure/ranting of the idle owning classes, and the Church and its ministers for supporting the status quo and telling the penniless workers that they will get their reward in heaven. But also balanced with (some) working man's drunkenness Depressing pre-ending where a Socialist turned Liberal because working men were too stupid to understand the message.	K
Oct 17	Morvern Callar	Alan Warner	4	21-year-old girl finds her live-in boyfriend has committed suicide messily in their (Oban / "the port") kitchen. She dismembers and buries the body for some reason and continues her binging/boozing life fuelled by money and a script for a novel that he leaves her. 3 years later she returns broke and pregnant.	
Sep 17	The Miniaturist	Jessie Burton	3-	18-year-old in arranged marriage to 40-year-old East India Company merchant arrives in Amsterdam in 1686 from Dutch countryside. He turns out to be gay and at the end is executed by the burghers of Amsterdam for sodomy. He gives her a model of their house which she has populated by a mysterious Miniaturist with models of members of the family and friends which turn out to predict future events. A bit supra-natural and unsatisfying, but gives a good feel for 17 th century Dutch trading power and politics.	
Sep 17	Arch of Triumph	Erich Maria Remarque	3-	Refugee surgeon in 1938/9 Paris, escaped from Nazi torture. Being illegal, he can't work officially and is used by various ageing or incompetent French surgeons to do their work. They pay him a pittance compared to their fee, but he lives very comfortably in a hotel which favours such emigres and doesn't ask for paperwork. Much interesting and detailed surgical descriptions. But most of the book is taken up with his slightly arms-length unemotional infatuation with an Italian singer refugee he befriends one night. Story also includes his revenge on his main Nazi torturer who he bumps into by chance and subsequently kills.	
Sep 17	Last Breath [EF#4]	Robert Bryndza	3	Fourth Erika Foster. Similar pattern. This even more outlandish villain, odd friendless young man living on farm with parents who more or less disown him. He works in London, carefully selects beautiful girls, befriends them on Facebook, kidnaps them on first date and takes them back to Oast house at farm to torture and kill, then dumping bodies back in London dumpsters. EF has the usual angst with the police bosses, and the dramatic ending has her new subordinate/lover shot but not killed, reviving memories of her own husbands death on a case they both worked on.	K
Sep 17	The Crossing	Ted Alibeury	3	Typical TA fiction wrapped round Colonel Abel / Gary Powers spy swap. Flips between 1918 Russia, WW2 Berlin + Poland, and ~1960 cold war. A lot of the detail and characters are real, though the swap is a minor part of the tale with an alleged hugely complicated (and I didn't fully follow) back story of a secret release (behind the scenes of the "Bridge of Spies" public one) of the release of a SIS double-agent who had been almost dying in the Gulags after being lifted from Poland by the Russians. Book marred by far too many characters (compounded with several different names/persona) – the first 25% of the book introduced them with no linkage or context.	K
Sep 17	Children of the Master	Andrew Marr	5	Another political intrigue but too wooden to be worth finishing. This set a year or two after Brexit (despite being published in 2015).	
Sep 17	Anatomy of a Soldier	Harry Parker	3+	Raw fictionalised tale of soldier being blown up by IED and losing both legs. Based on his own story (in Afghanistan) and using the contrivance of using the viewpoints of about 50 objects (tourniquet, helmet, bag of fertiliser, watch). But the effect is vivid and gruesome, giving a memorable flavour of what the horror and recovery process must be like. The chopping and changing perspectives and time-line work well and let him add interest as he deliberately obscures the exact story sequence until the last pages.	
Sep 17	Love, Nina : despatches from family life	Nina Stibbe	3	Letters from (initially naïve) girl who moved to NW1 from Leicester in 1982 to be nanny to impressive single-ish Mum Mary-Kay Wilmers (founder, and later editor, of London Review of Books) and her two smart precocious kids Sam and Will Frears (from MK marriage to Stephen F). Delightfully fresh and full of many well known neighbours, such as Alan Bennet, who seemed to come to supper most days. Amusing read, though I didn't laugh out loud a J did all the way through!	

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Sep 17	As The Crow Flies [ND#1]	Damien Boyd	3	First (and shortish) Nick Dixon book. Detective investigating death of his old climbing buddy. Some good outdoorsy stuff and easy to read. Buddy, who he'd not seen for years, had gone off rails and was peddling a few drugs and smuggling rare birds eggs to the Middle East – which also got his accomplice murdered. Detective character and back-story look good for more reading.	K
Sep 17	Dark Winter [HM#1]	David Mark	3-	Over-the-top series of Hull-based murders and assaults all with common theme that the victim is someone who survived some earlier tragedy. Opens with young African girl who, when four, was sole survivor of machete butchery of her family; she subsequently came to the UK and was fostered in Hesse. The police character (this is the first in a series for this Ds Aector/Hector McAvoy) witnesses this first attack, and then gets caught up in the rest – which include the only survivor of a fictional fourth trawler to go down in the Feb 1968 tragedy. The cop character and background are interesting and make me want to try another one. But this book is far too far-fetched, with a ridiculous motive for the serial killer and ludicrous and contradictory rapid timelines for events.	K
Sep 17	State of wonder	Ann Patchett	3+	70-year old female doctor in deepest Amazonian jungle is researching drug on behalf of a big pharma company, who she keeps in the dark as to her progress. They sent one doctor out from Minnesota to check progress, and a few months later she writes to them saying, rather tersely, that he died of fever and has been buried. Company and wife want to know more so send out second 40-ish female doctor (who happens to be secret lover of company boss). She gets stuck up-Amazon at Manaus for a while, because the 70-year old keeps her location and ability to contact secret. But eventually 70-year old turns up and takes 40-year old back to the remote research station, where she learns that as well as the original drug (one that extends female fertility for a lifetime; and towards end the 70-year old has a C-section, from the 40-year old, of a still born) they have found a vaccine for Malaria, and are shielding this from the pharma until they've thoroughly tested such a blockbuster (though I was actually a bit confused as to the state of the two drugs and what the 70-year old was planning). Great descriptions of jungle life, and somewhat reminiscent of "The Mosquito Coast" and "The Devil's Garden".	
Aug 17	Vienna Spies [SM#3]	Alex Gerlis	3	Third WW2 spy book, with some common main characters. This at the end of the war with Brits trying to retain hold of Austrian politician who's been in hiding from the Nazi's for most of the war. As with "The Swiss Spy" this involves SIS-run man working for a Swiss-linked bank in Vienna. Lots of gruesome descriptions of Gestapo torture of Soviet agents and highlighting of the Soviet/Western tensions throughout the war (the Austrian politician was to be the figurehead in maintaining the allies committment in the 1943 "Declaration on Austria" that Austria should return to being an independent country, and not assimilated by one of the winning powers).	K
Aug 17	Star Island	Carl Hiaasen	5	Dull drugs, rock stars, ... only read a very few pages	
Aug 17	Dance With Me	Louise Doughty	4	Two (or maybe more) girlfriends/fiancées of man who dies in freak accident a week after making his will over to the second of them only 3 weeks after they get together. Weird chronology and bits of supernatural nonsense.	
Aug 17	The Cartel	Don Winslow	5	Mexican drug war gangsters vs. US DEA (presumably) super-man. Thin.	K
Aug 17	The Harvest Of Sorrow	Robert Conquest	5	RC's (a good friend of the Amis'es) seminal history of the terror famine and (I believe) other Stalin monstrosities. Perfectly readable but just a bit too heavy going!	
Aug 17	Dangerous Pleasures	Patrick Gale	3	Eleven short stories – a few not great, but mainly his usual strangely absorbing tales of ordinariness (tho' in this case most with some, often repressed, sexuality).	
Aug 17	The Likeness [DMS#2]	Tana French	2	Cassie Maddox is back (despite "In the Woods" ending). Superb plot with discovery of dead girl who is both the spit of CM and was using the fabricated identity CM had when she was an undercover cop. Circumstances allow the cops to put CM back undercover into the dead girl's life, persuading (most) of her house mates that she did not die after all. The girl was one of five young academics living in an inherited country house all with trouble pasts and an unrealistically close (and largely platonic) and isolated relationship. They are (lovingly) controlled by one of them, whose house it now is and who gifted shares in it to the other four. As before, the detail is laboriously teased out as it transpires that the CM-look-alike had found she was pregnant and wanted to split from her assumed life (as, it turned out, she had done many time before in her life from different pseudo-personalities) which indirectly caused her murder. The closeness of the five is hard to believe, particularly come the denouement where bitter antagonisms surface, but a great read!	K
Aug 17	Sea Room	Adam Nicolson	3	Elegiac description and history of the Shiantis – three tiny Islands AN owns off the east coast of Lewis/Harris. He's an enthusiastic naturalist and encourager of archaeologists, making the islands available to anyone who wants to use them. Great descriptions of sailing across in the tricky waters of the Minch and of the hard lives of shepherds and fishermen over the centuries when the islands were inhabited. He was given the islands by his Dad (who bought them from Compton Mackenzie) and has now given them to his son. The book is a sort of farewell/appreciation from him. He discusses the issue of many folk thinking such lands should not be privately owned (viz. from "A Man in Assynt": Who possesses this landscape? The man who bought it or I who am possessed by it) – particularly the SNP – but sadly doesn't give any more riposte than that he probably protects and preserves the place better than the RSPB or any other public body.	
Aug 17	Lovers in Enemy Territory	Rebecca Winters	5	Tat	K
Aug 17	Gone Astray	Michelle Davies	3	Teenage daughter of recent EuroMillionaires in Buckinghamshire town is abducted, leaving blood-stained skirt. Tho' a detective in other cases, DCI Maggie Neville is Family Liaison Officer who discovers the potential problems between the distraught parents (one red-herring being that he is at one point thought to be having an affair with a very old girlfriend). The story also follows the perpetrator, deranged man who thinks he should have had the millions, since he was in the queue in front of the winning wife, who, with his permission, butted in ahead of him to register her ticket. "Friends" of the missing girl also muddy the water – as she has had to move from low-rent set of friends to wealthy lot as her parents moved across town into their mansion.	K
Aug 17	The Burning Gates	Parker Bilal	3	Another Makana investigation/thriller. He is hired to find someone and is soon deeply enmeshed with several evil types with different agenda. Even more complicated than "The Ghost Runner", he more or less gets everyone their death or just deserts. This has a vicious ex-Saddam henchman living secretly in Egypt with hoards of priceless Kuwait loot from the 1990 invasion. He's being hunted by a bloodthirsty ex-US-mercenary who the Iraqi double-crossed and who is himself being hunted by an ex-LA cop because his son was (supposedly) murdered by the mercenary. M's finessing of the disparate factions was too hard to follow fully, but his low-key, luck-filled Cairo life still makes a good read.	
Aug 17	The Girl Before	JP Delaney	3-	Overly drawn-out murder mystery set round obsessive architect who controls rental of his extremely minimalist house, letting only to women who resemble his dead wife, and with whom he has relationships. Story flips between current one who starts investigating the previous one who died in the house in suspicious circumstances. All too silly, despite some decent twists at the end. Lustful females and controlling man reminiscent of (TV film) Apple Tree Yard.	K
Aug 17	Don't you Cry (CRY)	Mary Kubica	3-	Another Chicago area mystery. Girl goes missing leaving her good friend and room-mate assuming she's been abducted. Things turn up making her think the missing girl may not be all she seems. Parallel story seems to have the missing girl behaving oddly in a nearby town and befriending a teenage loner boy. After a very drawn-out time the girls turn out to be sisters with the 2nd being a "bad girl" so evil her parents put her out for adoption aged 5, and she's now back for her revenge. Not a patch on the Good Girl, which may be MK's one-hit-wonder.	
Aug 17	Where my heart used to beat	Sebastian Faulks	3	Melange of love story, WW2 and WW1 soldiering and psychiatry of the mad. Woven round 60-year old doctor in the 1980s coming across a wise old man on a Mediterranean island who encourages him to retell his history – from modest background, via heroic and slightly deranged service in Italy in WW2, with brief major love affair with (married) Italian girl while he's recuperating from wounds. All a bit trite and irritatingly silly with every woman he meets throwing themselves into bed with him.	
Aug 17	Eyrie	Tim Winton	3	Set in down-and-out/welfare-land Freemantle, a powerful tale in rich, staccato, slangy Ozzy prose. 50-year old wreck, frequently drunk/drugged, ex-high-profile eco-warrior fallen from grace and now often blacking out comes across woman who was neighbour when they were small kids – she from a ghastly family with a viciously drunken father. His dad was a fundamentalist Christian, happy to beat up such an abusive ne'ere-do-well, and was thus an idol to the mistreated girl. But she'd gone on to live a rough life and is now Gran and carer for her daughter's very bright 6-year old frightened son. Mum is in prison for drugs and Dad is threatening Gran and kid with violence and murder. The eco-character befriends the (Asperger's?) kid but fails to emulate his Dad's rough justice and hero persona. Book ends abruptly and ambiguously.	

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Aug 17	As Time Goes By	Ted Allbeury	3	Another rather formulaic fictionalised telling of SOE's history and carryings-on. This in the Dordogne with doughty young officer setting up networks, including three good looking and spunky girls. Not a lot happens, and nothing really goes wrong for 95% of the book. It ends with two of the girls being captured by the Nazis – neither crack; one is later shot at Ravensbruck and the other takes many months to recover from her brutal torture. The third sails through seemingly unscarred, marries the officer and they start an ideal-seeming post-war life, which ends as she later goes to pieces under the guilt that she survived when so many of her close friends did not.	K
Aug 17	Bel Canto	Ann Patchett	3	Set in an unspecified S. American country. A set of VIP's and others are at a dinner in a fancy mansion to celebrate the birthday of an important Japanese industrialist thinking of investing in the country. He's an opera fan and there's a recital by a well known diva. The house is overrun by a rebel group wanting to kidnap the country's president, but he's unexpectedly not there so they end up in a 5 month hostage situation. A modus vivendi settles in with all sorts of relationships forming amongst and between the hostages and the kidnappers – many of whom are teenagers (and two are girls). The diva is the only woman left in the hostage group and music becomes a bond, as is the industrialist's many-lingual translator. Though the industrialist is killed when the siege ends with the storming of the house and the death of all the rebels, the translator and diva survive.	
Aug 17	The Blue Afternoon	William Boyd	2	Colonial-feeling mystery set mainly in the Philippines just after the 1899/1902 US/Philippine war. Bookended with early 30's single female architect in 1936 LA who is approached by a man she's never met claiming to be her father. Dubious of this, she joins him journeying to locate a mysterious woman from an old photo, during which he tells his story. He was a successful modern surgeon in a Philippine town who is asked to post-mortem the grisly murders of two US soldiers. He, more or less estranged from his wife, falls headlong for the equally unhappily married beautiful wife of the soldiers' colonel. When she falls pregnant by him he arranges an audacious plan for the two of them to escape to a fresh life together in Europe. This goes wrong when he's arrested, hours before getting away, for the murder of her husband – which he claims he did not do, and that was not in the plan. The "truth" in the story is ambiguous, and is mixed in with an enthusiastic local anaesthetist colleague who makes a flying machine, but dies on its otherwise successful inaugural flight, leaving questions as to his possible involvement in the murders as retribution for barbaric reprisals by the US during the insurgent war.	
Aug 17	Beyond the truth [HW#7]	Anne Holt	3+	Quadruple murder disturbs Xmas break for the Oslo police. Three victims are from a dysfunctional millionaire family with loads of skeletons in their closet, and all but Hanne Wilhelmsen are convinced that someone in the family did it. She's niggled by the fourth victim, and oddball investigative journalist with no connection to the others. Eventually, as ever, she's right and the murders turn out to have been a mistake, with the murderer being a senior policeman (again!). A gratuitous brief ending explains why HW is paraplegic in the next book (1222).	
Jul 17	Zigzag: the incredible wartime exploits of double agent Eddie Chapman	Nicholas Booth	3	Biography of remarkable WW2 double agent. From a poor background on Tyneside, EC became a prolific thief, con-man and safe-blower. In and out of prison in the 1930s he was doing 2 years in one on Guernsey when the Germans invaded. Ever restless and looking for a challenge, he persuaded the Germans to take him on as an agent and, after lots of training, they parachuted him near Ely in 1942. He handed himself in to MI5 (who already knew of him from Enigma intercepts, and were expecting him). After spoofing the successful destruction of the Mosquito bomber factory, MI5 helped him return to his German masters. They eventually sent him back in summer 1944 where he again teamed up with MI5 and helped dis-inform the Germans as to where the V1 doodlebugs were landing – thereby making them re-target them which hugely reduced their effect. A massive womaniser, huge charmer and chancer this read more like fiction than fact.	
Jul 17	The Liar's Chair	Rebecca Whitney	3+	Drunk-driving woman kills tramp on isolated country road. In shock she hides the body and then lets her smarmy husband/business-partner remove all evidence. Things then spiral downwards: she is an alcoholic nymphomaniac from a (not clearly explained) very disturbed and abused childhood; vile husband and her have long fallen way out of love, but he needs to keep her at his side for the business (the least believable part of the plot). Echoes of Saving Rosie, though without the closing death.	K
Jul 17	A Tale of Two Cities	Charles Dickens	3	Weak story full of ridiculous coincidences and (to a modern reader at least) way over the top schmaltzy devotion between the main characters. At times unintelligible (to me, at least) Victorian prose. But, conveys well the brutal horrors of the rampaging mobs and their (almost) kangaroo courts sending thousands to the guillotine during the Terror. Shades of ISIS in their fanaticism.	1859
Jul 17	The Light and the Dark	Mikhail Shishkin	5	Something about a man and a woman in Russia – possibly split across about a century. Writing OK but couldn't get to grips with it.	
Jul 17	The Last Days of the Bus Club	Chris Stewart	3	Next (possibly last – it has a valedictory air) in his series of vignettes of the life and locals in Andalusia. This mainly after his daughter has left home for University in Granada (the title refers to the Dad's who collected on the rural road to put their kids on the local school bus).	
Jul 17	The Gustav Sonata	Rose Tremain	5	Two boys in post-WW2 Switzerland ... just not interesting.	
Jul 17	Bad Monkey	Carl Hiaasen	3	Set in Miami and Bahamas. Man who has swindled millions from US Medicaid fakes his own death by having his arm amputated and "found" in the ocean apparently indicating he was lost while fishing. Ex-detective, recently demoted to Food inspector after assaulting his girlfriend's husband, gets hung up on solving the mystery. All pretty raucous and tasteless but a fun read.	
Jul 17	The Swiss Spy [SM#2]	Alex Gerlis	3	Another decent thick-with-detail, relatively low-action, WW2 double-agent tale. This hung round leaks of the imminent Operation Barbarossa (Hitlers turning on Russia). A British/Swiss man long a Soviet spy is recruited by SIS and used to feed information to his Russian spymasters. He goes in and out of Germany (from Zurich) posing as bank courier. Things hot up towards the end when he goes off script and tries to spirit a Jewish woman and her young daughter out of Germany into Switzerland. Some characters (SIS spymaster Edgar) shared with "The Best of our Spies".	K
Jul 17	Jack's Book – an oral biography of Jack Kerouac	Barry Gifford	3	Written about 10 years after K's death in 1969 and comprising a transcriptions of thoughts by many involved with him (and still alive) – including Ginsberg, Orlovsky, Parr, Homes, Burroughs and both K's and Cassidy's many wives/women. Depressing tales of endless debauchery (booze, drugs and any which way sex) and re-affirmation of the chauvinist/misogynistic ways of the Beats from their emergence in the 1940s.	
Jul 17	Ursula's Secret	Mairi Wilson	3	Complex family secrets of three women who meet on boat out to Malawi and become bosom buddies. A nasty Brit from wealthy company-owning family messes two of them up and they end up discarding various new born children. ~70 years later, the granddaughter of one of them (after the suspicious death of another) goes to Malawi and then to remote Scotland to uncover the devious truth. A good tale mired by far too much irrelevant text; the story proper only really starts half way through.	K
Jul 17	Submission	Michel Houellebecq	5	French political something	
Jul 17	The Burgess Boys	Elizabeth Strout	4	Full-length book version of one chapter from Olive Kitteridge (not sure which came first). Very dull.	2013
Jul 17	The Circle	Dave Eggers	5	Set in a sort of Google/Facebook super-tech company. Thoroughly dull start.	
Jul 17	The Best of Our Spies [SM#1]	Alex Gerlis	3	Wide-ranging (if overlong and over-egged) drama of female WW2 French Nazi spy in the thick of Operation Fortitude (the Allied deception that convinced the Nazi's that the real invasion would be in the Pas de Calais not Normandy – and, amazingly, managed to maintain this for a month or so after D-Day). She, from German stock in the Alsace, enters the UK at Dunkirk as a sleeper agent. She is detected by SIS and (unbeknownst to her) used to feed false info to the Germans via the young British invalided Naval officer she marries (initially for the job, but love comes into it) who is totally unaware of what's being done. She is sent as SOE agent to Boulogne area (as part of the deception) and disappears. Husband having found out how he (and she) have been used tracks her down just before the Brits do (to silence her), but not before the French do the same. Fair bit on French treatment of Jews and collaboration with the Nazis.	K
Jul 17	An Honourable Man	Gillian Slovo	4	Poor fiction hung round the failed attempt to relieve General Gordon in Khartoum in 1885. Three separate strands: 1: Gordon and a sole white boy remaining in Kartoum 2: a non-military doctor attached to Wolseley's relief force making its draining progress on camels across the desert 3: totally unconnected and time-wasting details of the doctor's Laudanum-addicted wife left behind in London.	

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Jun 17	The Girl from Krakow: A Novel	Alex Rosenberg	3	Grim tale of interwoven the lives of several Polish Jews during WW2. Some links to events and people (Katyn, General Anders, the Warsaw Uprising, Stalin's and Soviet brutality) and major stages of the war, but mainly the ghastly domestic, daily lives of persecuted non-combatants – possibly accurate, but hard to believe how folk existed. Quite a lot of philosophising, particularly on Darwinism which the Nazi's claimed supported their master race ideas, but which the book's main characters see as explaining Nazi's as a temporary aberration. Book let down with silly and gratuitous romance and sex. Somewhat reminiscent of Louise Doughty's Fires in the Dark.	K
Jun 17	The Light Between Oceans	M L Stedman	3+	Sentimental tale. In 1926 a WW1 Aussie veteran becomes keeper of isolated lighthouse on island off SW Australia. Marries feisty local girl who joins him. A rowing boat with a dead man and a living 3-month baby is washed onto the island soon after she has a 3 rd miscarriage. She persuades him to let her keep the baby as hers. All is sort of OK for about 4 years, until a chance meeting with the distraught (and partly unhinged) real mother tips his disquiet at what they've done to ultimate exposure of it. Lots of angst as, over much to-ing and fro-ing, the baby girl is reunited (initially very reluctantly) with her birth mother.	
Jun 17	Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus	Lyndall Gordon	3-	Rambling bio. of this seemingly significant woman's liberation icon. The book failed to convey why she became so famous in her short life – her fame coming in the ten years before her death from post-natal complications at 38 (after producing her 2nd daughter who became Mary Shelley). She wrote about women's rights and child care. Also several novels thinly fictionalising the mistreatment of herself and others at the hands of fathers and husbands. She was in Paris during the terror in the early 1790s, was a virgin until 34 when, after years of championing women's independence from men she fell for a philandering American, Gilbert Imlay (to whom she had a pseudo marriage giving her American status to avoid being killed or banished from France), and by whom she had an illegitimate daughter. After finally giving up hope of Imlay, she met and married another enlightened writer, William Godwin, who's memoirs of her are the basis of her latter day fame.	
Jun 17	The Girl from Addis	Ted Alibeury	3-	~25 years after being a spy in the was in the horn of Africa, a long retired now photographer is persuaded to go back there to do some snooping on Russian/Cuban military build ups. He falls in love with beautiful Somali(?) girl and does his stuff in a slightly Graham Greene world.	K
Jun 17	1222 [HW#8]	Anne Holt	3+	Agatha Christie like tale. A now wheelchair-bound Hanne Wilhelmsen is marooned in an isolated hotel with the passengers from a derailed train in the middle of a major storm. In the 5 or so days before the storm lets them be rescued, two people are murdered and HW, tho' no longer in the police, figures out the murderer and does a Poirot-like exposure in front of all the passengers in a big room.	K
Jun 17	The Secret Place [DMS#5]	Tana French	5	Something about murder of teenager at Dublin boarding school and involvement of girls in neighbouring girls one.	K
Jun 17	A Wilderness of Mirrors	Ted Alibeury	3	Another good cold war / SIS / CIA thriller. Slightly marred by part of the plot hinging on folk with ESP powers (able to read minds of people, or view internals of buildings, on the other side of the globe!). One, used by the KGB, is a naïve girl who SIS kidnap in E. Berlin and take to the West. When, for complex reasons, SIS discard her and send her back to DDR/Russia (to almost certain Gulag), her kidnapper disobeys orders and helps her stay in the west. Eventually they marry and are reinstated in SIS's books, with her being used again. Subsequently her husband finds she's being used unethically again and they abscond. Book starts with SIS internal investigator trying to find them and ends with their location and murder by the (SIS-encouraged, by implication) IRA.	K
Jun 17	Quite Ugly One Morning [JP#1]	Chris Brookmyre	3	Virulent anti-conservative author's first book (pub 1996). Satire on how they are destroying the NHS mixed in with violent crime thriller being solved by investigative journalist Jack Parlabane.	
Jun 17	The Ghost Runner	Parker Bilal	3	Cairo detective (Makana #3) story. He's set to find whoever burned to death a young woman, and gets involved in all sorts of mayhem and historical intrigues in, mainly, a small town in the desert. Hard to follow some of the complexities, but an enjoyable read and old-style detection! Can't be such a memorable book, since I also read it 2 years ago!	
Jun 17	We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves	Karen Joy Fowler	2	Relationships and psychology, human and animal cleverly told by woman who was brought up from birth until 5 years old with baby chimpanzee as sister. Well spun tale switching between periods of her life and the griefs she and her family had (you only find that the sister is a chimp about 1/3 rd through). Lots of references to real-life similar cases, such as Kellogg&Kellogg and Gua in the 30's. Also to various horrors of animal testing, and the Animal Liberation Front.	K
Jun 17	Irene	Pierre Lemaître	5	First of several starring short Parisian detective ... but hugely grisly, so stopped.	
Jun 17	The underground girls of Kabul	Jenny Nordberg	3	Swedish female journalist reporting on the practice in Afghanistan of female children being presented as males, both for the freedom it gives them and for the family to counter the "shame" of an all-girl set of children. Depressing stuff, especially since all the womanhood (even those who did stints as boys) basically endorsed the hideously patriarchal status quo.	
Jun 17	Olive Kitteridge	Elizabeth Strout	2	Novel made up of a rich and absorbing set of short stories linked by (sometimes passing mention of) a common character (OK). Mainly about loss, separation, ageing and death and set in a small New England coastal town.	K 2008
May 17	Uncertain glory	Joan Sales	5	Spanish Civil War novel written 1948-1956 translated from Spanish. Just didn't grab me. Author is man who fought in the war.	
May 17	A life discarded	Alexander Masters	3	Unusual biography of unknown person told as sleuthing story starting with the discovery of 148 detailed diaries begun in early 1950s. The subject is originally assumed to be unknown, dead and male, then discovered to be female, and finally to be alive and kicking! These "discoveries" give an excitement to the book, which the diaries' (lucid) writing (and drawings) do not – being self-centred and hugely personal (bizarre passions between the young author and women 30-50 years her senior). The 148 are less than half the woman's to-date writing and, AM says, make her the most prolific diarist ever.	
May 17	419	Will Ferguson	3-	Daughter chasing the perpetrators of a Nigerian 419 scam which drives her Canadian father to suicide (driving off a bridge) after losing his family's savings. This intertwined with tales of two young men on the Nigerian sides of this, and their backgrounds – one from poor delta background who gets tied up with pregnant Muslim girl fleeing persecution in the north. The two threads only join towards the end, and I found the Nigerian background too drawn out.	
May 17	The Lantern Network	Ted Alibeury	3	Unremarkable middle-aged British man spotted in minor spy links with the KGB kills himself when casually questioned about it by an MI5 agent in the 1980s(?). Slip back to SOE in the Dordogne in 1944 where a British officer is regarded as a hero for his organisation of the Resistance, but is betrayed and disappears into a Nazi camp not to be heard of again. The MI5 agent finds links to the SOE man, and that he was the suicide, the hero being shamed into KGB work because he had cracked under Nazi torture and gave away dozens of colleagues.	K
May 17	Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million	Martin Amis	3	Anecdotal memoirs and retellings of snippets of Stalin's (and Lenin's) ghastly era. Lots of (mainly Kingsley) Amis family connections with Russian diaspora help MA's insights. The chill horror of the times comes through fiercely, despite his wordy and pompous writing style. Also interesting to be reminded how out of touch Stalin was in WW2 – particularly when Hitler invaded – echoing Hitler's similar isolation described so well in Norman Ohler's Blitzed.	
May 17	In the Woods [DMS#1]	Tana French	2	Pair of early-30's detectives investigate the murder of a talented 12-year old girl in a wood near a housing estate outside Dublin. Echo's of, and links to, disappearance of two of three kids in the same wood 20+ years earlier, the third kid was so traumatised he couldn't remember what happened and was then given a new identity, but is the male of the two detectives - so lots of conflicts of interest. The other detective is a smart female also with a troubled past. The two of them are ridiculously close, but platonic, friends until one emotionally drained night 2/3 ^{ths} through, after which the guy clams up. All very hard to believe. But the murder investigation is well told and a good read, despite being a long book (~590 Kindle pages). Interestingly the two main characters are discarded at the end, so subsequent books in the series presumably don't have them (I would have liked more of the female particularly – Cassie Maddox). But, despite the murderer being found (feeble fellow admits all in the end), his evil motivator and other dangly ends are left for, maybe, later treatment.	K
May 17	Dead Girl Walking [JP#6]	Chris Brookmyre	3	Decent who-dunnit with disgraced journalist and sleuth Jack Parlabane (6 th in series I believe) working to solve mystery of missing lead singer star of Scottish rock band during European tour. All mixed up with human-trafficking villains using the band's tour to move their girls around.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
May 17	Soldier Spy	Tom Marcus	2	Gung-ho memoir of MI5 on-the-streets officer with thriller-style accounts of several of his high-adrenalin deployments. From poor street-kid background, into the army at 16, where his nous, daring and fast brain got him into covert ops in Northern Ireland, from where MI5 recruited him. A little over the top in his enthusiasm, but brutally blunt about his subsequent burn-out and early retirement because of PTSD.	
May 17	Alive, Alive Oh!: and Other Things that Matter	Diana Athill	3	Series of essays/memoirs from her life. Includes fairly graphic description of her late-term miscarriage in her 40's (she never had kids and was fairly promiscuous), her upper middle class (but not wealthy) life as debutante, LMH graduate (just before Mum), and publisher's editor. The best was her talking about moving into a care home in her early 90's – which she dreaded, but was then pleasantly surprised by (tho' it is a special sounding place in Highgate!).	K
May 17	Beyond the Silence	Ted Allbeury	3+	Gentle uncovering of caring, long-retired, earl ex-SIS who was fictionally the 5 th or 6 th man and who sent Philby to Russia as treble/quadruple/whatever agent. As with all these, hard to follow the complex motivations and machinations, and little action, but a good read.	K
May 17	Blitzed	Norman Ohler	3	Description of the pervasive use of drugs by Germans (military and civilian) before and during WW2 – particularly Crystal Meth (methamphetamine) under the trade name Pervitin, and Cocaine. Hitler being an almost total junkie at the end, having been started on the stuff by his fat personal physician, Morell, in 1941. Pervitin was issued in industrial quantities to the forces to aid some of their super-human feats, such as the rapid, several-days-without-sleep push through the Ardennes in 1940 to take Belgium and France. The German author laces the book with the main events of the war, and from his telling it is hard to see how the Germans lasted so long – particularly given Hitler's dreadful physical state, his brain addled with uppers boosting his delusions of control and power, and almost total isolation in various bunkers and lairs from last 1941.	
May 17	All for Nothing	Walter Kempowski	4	German author's rather detached and stylised telling of the slow disintegration of east German small town life in the ending months of the WW2 with the Russians closing in from the east and the Germans unable to get out west (I guess the allies already holding parts of Poland?). Set round landed family in a large estate house with Dad away in the war in Italy (surprisingly still going in Jan 1945), poor relation Auntie looking after the house and detached Mum ending up in prison after harbouring a Jewish refugee from the Nazi's. Main thread is 12 year old lad wandering around observing the chaos.	K
May 17	A Parrot in a Pepper tree	Chris Stewart	3	Middle of the three memoirs of his Andalusian hill farm life. Includes some back history, such as a teenage year with the embryonic Genesis. Somehow not quite as engaging as the other two.	
May 17	Walk Through Walls	Marina Abramovic	3-	Memoir of this weird Yugoslavian performance artist. Seems to specialise in either hours of sitting still or lots of naked self-abuse (cutting, fasting, etc). Interesting number of allegedly correct consultations with mediums.	
May 17	Last Rituals [TG#1]	Yrsa Sigurdardottir	4	Unpleasant and generally slow who-dunnit with Icelandic lawyer (Thora Gudmundsdottir) helping rich German family find the real killer of their loathsome son. He had been a student in Reykjavik researching mediaeval witchcraft but also led a group of dissolute Icelandic students in a black magic cult, which involved, inter alia, own body disfigurements (in his case including having his tongue semi-surgically split). Despite this the lawyer and general book structure makes me think I might try another of her books.	K
May 17	Ada's Algorithm	James Essinger	3-	Biography of Ada Lovelace (born 1815, died agonisingly of cancer in 1852). Lots on Babbage, who she met when she was 17 and he 42. At that time he had an initial model of his Difference Engine, but had let it lapse as he worked on the (never implemented) design for the much more general Analytical Engine (AE). She is reputed (by JE at least) to have understood the AE's potential much more than Babbage. After ~12 years of cooperation on it (mainly with her translating and then extensively extending a description of it by an Italian), in 1843 she suggested to him that she became much more involved, which he rejected. JE reckons that had he accepted she would have got the AE going and with it computing as we know it (even given her early death). Sadly the writing though readable is garrulous and full of unnecessary detail (eg: long chapters on the dissolute and unpleasant Lord Byron, her father).	
Apr 17	The Lost City Of Z	David Grann	3+	Tells the Amazonian adventures of Percy Harrison Fawcett, who was never heard of after his last expedition in 1925 to find an El Dorado with his eldest son and son's best friend. He was so famous and intriguing that there were dozens of subsequent attempts to find him, many of which also disappeared without trace. He was an amazing man with some physiological make-up that protected him from most ravages of the hoards of insects and human-burrowing maggots that made life in such remote places so miserable for most others – but somehow did not discourage them from carrying on in semi-dead states!	
Apr 17	Brooklyn	Colm Toibin	5	Irish/American slop I think. Gave up after a few pages	
Apr 17	The Blue between sky and Water	Susan Abulhawa	5	Palestinian / Israeli historical/family fiction. Gave up after a few pages	
Apr 17	Pretty Baby	Mary Kubica	3	16-year old orphan who has been fostered by abusive man (and out-of-it wife) for 8 years appears homeless on Chicago streets with a baby. She is spotted and befriended by a 40-year old woman with 12-year old daughter and Financial Analyst husband, who had wanted a large family, but had to abort her 2 nd child and have hysterectomy due to cancer. The woman's latent trauma makes her try to take over the baby as her own. Style just like the (much better) Good Girl, with successive chapters told from perspective of each main character. But, the direction of the plot is clear from early on, so the book feels very laboured – and could have the middle 1/3 rd removed.	K
Apr 17	Joes war. My father decoded	Annette Kobak	3	Disjointed telling (mainly) of Czech and Polish aspects of WW2 – particularly their destructions (by Hitler and Stalin) and lack of allied support (special castigation of Britain who relied so heavily on Poles in Battle of Britain and other theatres, and ignored them at the end of the war as realpolitik meant keeping Stalin on side). The book is hung round the history of her father, a Pole brought up in Czechoslovakia who escaped in 1939 as a 19-year old to join the various Polish military units – ending up in the UK in 1941 as signals monitoring. She also has some uncovering of his past – which he never spoke of, even to his wife, until decades after the war – and retraces some of his 1940s journeys.	
Apr 17	Smoke and Mirrors	Elly Griffiths	4	Two 13-year olds found murdered in snowy 1951 Brighton, both keen amateur actors. Local DI Stevens solves in the end with his chum (Mephisto) a pantomime performer. Weak.	
Apr 17	Hitler	Ian Kershaw	3	Describes how Hitler came to power and maintained such a messianic pull on Germany. Pretty heavy going, but not too long (~200 pages), and assumes understanding of what the key events (night of the long knives, Kristallnacht, Munich agreement, von Stauffenberg assassination attempt, etc) were, mentioning them only by reference. Sadly also only alludes to, rather than explaining, the collapsed state of the Weimar republic, which caused so many Germans to want return to an authoritarian system (such as under the Kaiser).	
Apr 17	Blessed are those who thirst [HW#2]	Anne Holt	3	2nd Hanne Wilhelmsen book. Scrappy disjointed tale of rapist and murderer of asylum seekers – who's disappearance goes unremarked. Finale of rape victim and Dad killing the rapist and due to get away with it because both claim to have done it alone, thus neither is more than 50% dead cert for conviction! But an improvement on first book and showing signs of moving toward the better written later ones.	K
Apr 17	Blind Goddess [HW#1]	Anne Holt	3-	Drug dealing syndicate being run by government minister. First Hanne Wilhelmsen book, introducing many of the characters that will make much much better later books!	K
Apr 17	Dress your Family in Corduroy and Denim	David Sedaris	3-	Lightweight amusing anecdote stuff from gay American wordsmith.	
Mar 17	Last Friends	Jane Gardam	3-	Disappointing last in Filth Trilogy. This about Terry Veneering's rise from Sunderland backstreets. But pretty thin, repetitive of incidents in the previous two, and marred by cryptic/allusive style.	
Mar 17	The Dressmaker of Dachau	Mary Chamberlain	3-	Teenage working class girl falls for a con artist who takes her to Paris in August 1939. They stay there during the phony war, she working at a couturiers. They flee to Belgium just before the Nazi's invade. He rapes her and dumps her. She is hidden by nuns but ends up interned with some of them in Munich, has a baby (removed at birth) and is moved to Dachau and forced to make dresses for Nazi women. At the end, back in England working part time as a prostitute while trying to get money for her own dress business she is pimped back to her con artist. He doesn't recognise her, but admits to leaving his fancy woman in Belgium. She leaves him drunk with the gas on and kills him, and is hung for murder after a one-sided trial. A thin and drawn-out book gives a different view on the war's horrors, and the miserable life of women!	K

Books

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Mar 17	Waking Lions	Ayelet Gundar-Goshen	3	Israeli doctor accidentally runs over and kills an Ethiopian migrant in the desert, panics and doesn't report it. He is tracked down by the migrant's wife (he left his wallet at the scene) who then blackmails him into working in a makeshift illegal hospital serving other illegals. His guilt and problems spiral as he both covers this up from his wife (a police detective working on the team who are supposed to find the hit-and-run killer) and becomes obsessed with the migrant's beautiful and determined wife. Problems and tensions escalate, though dissipate a bit in the finale as the migrant wife (who was happy to have her drug-running abusive husband killed) kills someone attacking her – which lets the doctor, who helps cover this up, cancel his guilty secret with hers.	
Mar 17	Fires in the Dark	Louise Doughty	3	Comprehensive saga of Gypsy family in Slovakia, from 1927 to 1945 as they and their clans are increasingly hounded by fascists and finally largely exterminated by the Nazis. Though possibly too in-depth and long, it gives a good flavour of the fervent tight, male-dominated, family structures; the antipathy of the Roma's to the Gadje ("white folks") and their, to them, unhygienic lifestyle (living in houses, washing in same sink as food is cleaned in, etc. The torrid and believable detail of labour camp life made me wonder how human bodies could survive such starvation and brutality.	K
Mar 17	The Almond blossom appreciation society	Chris Stewart	3	Another lovely gentle, amusing, set of autobiographical tales of life in Andalusia.	
Mar 17	The man in the wooden hat	Jane Gardam	3	2 nd part of the Old Filth trilogy. This about his wife, Betty, her marriage to him and her liaisons with Veneering. Sadly, her life before marrying Filth – born in China, orphaned and interned in Shanghai, code breaking at Bletchley - is only briefly mentioned.	
Mar 17	We need to talk about Kevin	Lionel Shriver	3	Ghastly story of evil-from-birth boy who goes on to be a high-school (and familial) teenage mass-murderer. Densely excellent prose as the disturbing tale unfolds in a series of letters from the high-achieving Mum to her (now dead) husband.	
Mar 17	The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn	Mark Twain	3	Slightly more serious than Tom Sawyer. Here Huck escapes from his drunken Dad and, along with escaped slave Jim, heads down the Mississippi on a raft. Lots of great jinks and descriptions of river life. Also angst that he is helping a run-away nigger mixed with his liking of Jim. Tom comes back into it at the end with a some nonsense chapters as he plans to free Jim, but deliberately makes the process as hard as possible, for the fun of it. In the end it turns out this is because he knew that Mrs Watson had already freed Jim in her will. Interesting the implicit acceptance of the wrongness of a "nigger" escaping his servitude, in this book set around the 1830s, with Huck agast that Tom would support such a thing (and being right, in that Tom knew Jim was now free).	K
Mar 17	The Adventures of Tom Sawyer	Mark Twain	3	Lovely chuckle read with all sorts of wild times – including Tom and Huck witnessing a murder, finding gold and Tom getting lost in caves for several days with Becky. Can't think why I haven't read it before. I wonder if MT's claim at the front that all the events actually happened to different folk is true.	K
Mar 17	The tragedy of liberation: a history of the Chinese revolution, 1945-57	Frank Dikotter	3	First of trilogy on Mao's (mis)management of China. Very depressing reading, but also something of a rambling repetitive litany of anecdotes of the horrors and nastiness of the regime. No indication as to whether, for instance, it took over from something equally awful. Communism had been vying with Nationalism (Chiang Kai-shak) since before Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria and subsequent (1937) war on China – which sort of held them together. Once WW2 was over and Japan gone, the civil war starts. From this book its hard to understand how the Communists won – so again, there must have been major un-mentioned weaknesses in the Nationalists (or unclear strengths in the Communists). But, once the Communists had the upper hand, Mao started vile repression of both non-Communists and Communists. From the rather one-sided descriptions of the deliberate and mindless destruction of peoples lives, one can't imagine how the regime survived and "prospered". Maybe it was because Mao was such a master at getting everyone (from his lieutenants to the lowliest peasant) to distrust, accuse and kill each other. Thereby managing to keep himself clear of blame.	K
Mar 17	While My Eyes Were Closed	Linda Green	2	Excellent "why-dunnit". 4 year-old girl disappears from a park while playing hide&seek with her Mum. You are told almost from the outset who took her, but the book powerfully covers the anguish and loss of the Mum (and the rest of her family) and similar emotions that led the abductress to take her.	K
Mar 17	Dark Water [EF#3]	Robert Bryndza	3+	Another cracking Erka Foster thriller. Skeleton of young girl who disappeared 26 years ago is found by accident. EF and team work out what happened to her. But with similar aspects to the previous books: someone in the police working more or less against her, someone breaking into her flat and trying to kill her (tho' the girl turns out in the end not to have been murdered). Relationships with Peterson and ??? (female cop) develop.	K
Mar 17	Old Filth	Jane Gardam	3+	Partial life story of a "Raj Orphan" - send home from Malaysia in the 1920's, aged 4½, to abusive foster parents, from which he is rescued into the Prep/Public school system, does a brief stint in the Army (in England) during WW2 and goes on, via huge success as a lawyer in Hong Kong (Filth: Failed in London Try Hong Kong) to be an English judge. The tale flips between his up-to-mid-20's life (and the grisly end to his fostering) and his decline and death in his 80's. Looking forward to the next two in the trilogy!	
Mar 17	The Spies of Warsaw [NS#10]	Alan Furst	3	French colonel based in their embassy in Poland is really spying on Germans in 1937/8. He builds case from his contacts that the Germans are planning how to invade France by bypassing the Maginot line, driving it through the forest of the Ardennes forest (as the did indeed do in 1940). But his findings are dismissed by his Petain-ist bosses in Paris. Slightly disjointed, flat and low-key story, but a good historical refresher.	K
Feb 17	Burial Rites	Hannah Kent	3	Fiction based thinly on the story of the last person executed in Iceland (a 30-year old woman beheaded with an accomplice for murder). Quite readable, but made more interesting at the end when the (Aussie) author talks about the origins of both the actual events and her stumbling on them and then deciding to write.	K
Feb 17	The Angels Game	Carlos Ruiz Zafon	3-	Second in the Cemetery of Forgotten Books series. Again a convoluted rambling inbred tale of a writer in Barcelona. This with pretty supernatural aspects. I won't be reading the last in the series: The Prisoner of Heaven	
Feb 17	When breath becomes air	Paul Kalanithi	3	Poignant if slightly empty autobiography written by 36-year old American neurosurgeon, in the two years following diagnosis with serious cancer and his death. Though well-written, the first half was a rather superficial covering of his life from student to (almost) professor. The second half covered the downs and ups of the illness. After initial treatment he was back at (over) work for almost a year, and used IVF to conceive a daughter who was born a few months before his death. Also, subsequent TED talk by his wife: https://www.ted.com/talks/lucy_kalanithi_what_makes_life_worth_living_in_the_face_of_death? What a remarkable couple!	
Feb 17	The vegetarian: a novel	Han Kang	5	South Korean man's wife turns vegetarian much to his and her family's disgust. Unappetising	
Feb 17	Blind Arrows	Anthony J. Quinn	3-	Weak history/fiction about Michael Collins' internecine struggles with parts of the IRA and the sprawling spy networks of the English (based in Dublin Castle) and IRA. Set in 1919, the first winter of the Irish War of Independence. From the postscript, it is loosely based on some actual events, but the feeble portrayal of the various spies – who seemed happy to tell anyone on the other side what they were up to – and the fact that the English, despite putting a price on his head making him "the most wanted man in Europe" knew where Collins was much of the time and even met with him on occasion. The implication was that this was because Collins was thought to be key to a divided Ireland solution (which he eventually achieved in 1922 before being assassinated by hard line separatists), so they had to work with him in secret. The tale emphasised Collins' charisma (particularly for women) and extensive book keeping (the story revolves round funds, and related accounts, missing from IRA coffers which an IRA enemy of his, Cathal Brugha, tried to pin on him, when in fact it was, allegedly, someone else). Also the brutality (albeit in caricature) of some English to the Irish.	
Feb 17	The Shadow of the Wind	Carlos Ruiz Zafon	3-	Convoluted and long overlapping tale of bookish boy/youth in 1950s uncovering life of Spanish author from 1920s to the Spanish Civil and WW2 (both only mentioned in passing). Lots of misplaced love and sinister ex-Francoist nasty policemen. From about 75% through a decentish story is told, but I'm not sure its really worth it.	

Books

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Feb 17	A Time without Shadows	Ted Allbeury	3	SOE operation in France – with many parts sounding very close to actual events. A very successful unit (named "Scorpio") which is heavily German infiltrated by a traitorous French ex-pilot. The young Scottish head of the unit is told by Churchill to start causing trouble ready for an allied landing in the fall of '43 – at which point the Germans close the operation killing most of the team. 40 years later, after a question in the Commons, a SIS (MI6) man is tasked with checking what really happened. Though somewhat inconclusive, he exposes all sorts of double dealings within UK operations as well as SOE.	K
Feb 17	A Humble Companion	Laurie Graham	5	Another lightweight pseudo-historical novel. This set round "companion" to princess Sofia – one of George III's 20 (sic) children	
Feb 17	Cold Comfort Farm	Stella Gibbons	3	Amusing parody written in 1930 and set around 1950. Upper middle class young Flora Poste is orphaned and left to live on £100/year so has invites herself to be guest of with a peculiar collection of troubled cousins on a Sussex farm. But she determines to lick them into shape, getting them, variously, married off, taken to Hollywood, and sent round the country inflicting sermons on religious gatherings. The book is probably well known for at least two of its repeated phrases, mainly from the reclusive controlling Aunt Ada Doom, who Flora also sorts out: - "Something nasty in the woodshed" (you never find out what!) - "There have always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort" - "And did the goat die?"	
Feb 17	War and Turpentine	Stefan Hertmans	3	Belgian author's disappointing (probably too personal) biography of his grandfather, who started life in very poor and miserable conditions – at 14 working an iron foundry where he was scarred by molten iron – and was a gifted amateur artist. Tone of the book was hard to assimilate as it mixed between SH's telling and wads of, apparently, verbatim text from his grandfather-written memoirs. About half the book was the latter, covering his distinguished/heroic time as an NCO in horrific WW1 trench warfare (getting severely wounded on three separate occasions).	
Feb 17	The Night Stalker [EF#2]	Robert Bryndza	3+	Another great Erika Foster thriller. Slightly similar structure to "The Girl in the Ice" - she rubs the police establishment up the wrong way, solves the murders in her own time, almost gets killed by the (female) murderer. Plot is of a serial killer using "suicide bag" to kill a series of apparently unconnected men, egged on and abetted by an internet chat-room buddy who she also kills before being caught.	K
Feb 17	Midwinter Sacrifice	Mons Kallentoft	5	Swedish female detective (Malin Fors) thriller with typically screwed up private life. Plot was to do with obese oddball in back-country Sweden found butchered and hanging from a tree. Endless unconnected-with-the-plot allusive mini-chapters and pretty tedious. Somehow I read about 80% while ill in bed but shouldn't have read so far	K
Feb 17	Waterloo: The History of Four Days, Three Armies and Three Battles	Bernard Cornwell	3	Absorbing and detailed tale of the battles of Quatre Bras, Ligny and, on the fourth day, 18-Jun-1815, Waterloo (Mont St Jean). Always hard to realise how communications and perspectives were maintained, despite it being a relatively small area, with only horse-messengers. Despite Wellington and Blucher's skills (and in spite of one of the latter's anti-Wellington generals) and the torrential rain on the the penultimate day/night, BC gives the impression BC that Napoleon (and Ney who he delegated the whole thing to) lost battles they should have won if they'd been more on the ball.	
Jan 17	When the Doves Disappeared	Sofi Oksanen	3-	Novel about Estonia in 1940-44 and then early 60's. In the earlier period it goes from a Russian to a Nazi and back to a Russian territory. All sorts of hard-to-follow partisan activities as Estonians want to be free (as they had been since 1918). The messy, allusive rather than descriptive, story follows two cousins one who switches sides ending up as a Soviet stooge and the other having been an underground resistance leader of some sort. Really not worth reading, though it did manage to convey/refresh the grim dull nastiness of Soviet life, as well as the atrocities by all sides during the war.	
Jan 17	The Twentieth Day of January	Ted Allbeury	3	Good, relatively uncomplicated, thriller with refreshing lack of plot jolts and breathlessness. Intriguing parallels with Trump's recent election. Set in 1980 after a Republican who has come from nowhere is elected President. An MI6 man picks up on the fact that the President-Elect's (PE) right hand man (a charming millionaire young man) was a Communist in 1968 Paris and is chummy with Russian FSB fixer. The MI6 man alerts the CIA who incorporate him into a team to investigate in the 66 days between election and inauguration. They discover that the PE has been groomed and aided for years by the Russians. PE starts to peddle Russian-dictated lines (leave NATO, become more inward-looking), and the CIA team have to move fast and carefully amid the political and operational minefields – finally confronting the PE with a solution where he retires for health reasons, though he commits suicide instead.	K
Jan 17	Breaking Cover [LC#9]	Stella Rimington	3+	Another cracking Liz Carlyle thriller. Russian thugs/FSB honey-trap the new female Communications Director at MI6 and then blackmail her to glean secrets. LC and the ever-solid Peggy Kinsolving (who is also indirectly targeted by the FSB – getting to her feeble partner) again win the day with not too much gore or nonsense.	K
Jan 17	The House of Mirth	Edith Wharton	3	Densely and wittily worded tale of 1870s upper class East Coast US society. Single 29-year-old beautiful woman, with less money than her class and lifestyle requires, agonises over who and how to marry. But events get away from her and she sinks down and then off the social scale, eventually (possibly accidentally) killing herself. Ultimately a silly book but the language keeps it readable, it felt as if almost every paragraph had a gem such as: "Miss Bart had the gift of following an undercurrent of thought while she appeared to be sailing on the surface of conversation..." or "... she was not accustomed to taste the joys of solitude except in company..."	K
Jan 17	The Truth about the Harry Quebert Affair	Joel Dicker	3-	Ludicrously convoluted who-did-it told in overlapping manuscripts (apparently) by a Famous Author (FA), his protegee, also an FA. They cover the disappearance (originally) and then death (when her skeleton is found 30 years later) of a 15-year-old. She had been (allegedly) the inspiration for the book that made FA#1's reputation, as well as his lover (?). Endless soppy love bits, more twists than a bag of Fusilli, and plot jolts on the casual say-so of every Tom, Dick and Jenny.	
Jan 17	The Good Girl	Mary Kubica	2	Excellent thriller in the "Try Not to Breathe" or "Girl on a Train" style, with successive "before" and "after" chapters slowly uncovering an event. In this case a kidnapping of the late 20's daughter of a well-known US judge by a desperate lowlife – who turns out to be a Good Man. After resulting Stockholm Syndrome she is rescued in a dramatic shoot-out which leaves her with weeks of amnesia about the whole episode. After this lifts and the truth of the events are exposed there's a great final twist as it turns out she instigated the whole thing to punish her hated father (tho' the finer details of which eluded me).	K
Jan 17	The Emperor of Paris	C.S. Richardson	5	Something about a baker and Louvre employee in (?) ~1900 Paris. Lousy prose and nothing of interest.	
Jan 17	The Importance of Being Kennedy	Laurie Graham	3	Easy-read story of the early life of the 9 Kennedy kids (Jo Jnr, John, Rose, Kathleen/Kick, Eunice, Patricia, Bobby, Jean, Ted) told by a fictional Irish nursery maid / companion. Ends with Kick's death in the air-plane crash with the Fitzwilliam son (as in Black Diamonds). Interesting aspects: how sickly John was, how vile Rose his mum was and how philandering his Dad (Joe Snr) and he were.	
Jan 17	The Diary of a Nobody	Weedon Grossmith, George Grossmith	3	Tongue in cheek (originally Punch) story of City clerk and his suburban life at the end of the 19 th century. Full of (weak) puns and self-mockery.	K
Jan 17	South From Granada	Gerald Brenan	3	Descriptions of life in, mainly, a mountain village on the southern slopes of the Sierra Nevada in the 1920s. GB was a young, poor (but well enough off by Spanish standards to live there without working as far as I can tell) writer who rented a large house there. He travelled around observing the lifestyles and customs, and occasionally having his Bloomsbury friends stay (eg: Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf). Nice intro from Chris Stewart who lives not many miles from GB's village, Yegen. The book was written in the 1950s and there are some unclear comparisons with life in other countries; you can't work out whether he is comparing 1920s rural Spain with, for instance, England in the 1950s or the 1920s.	
Jan 17	The Girl in the Ice [EF#1]	Robert Bryndza	3+	Daughter of a Labour peer is found brutally killed and under the ice in a London museum's lake. Slightly formulaic world with troubled and volatile (female) cop (this is the first of the Erica Foster thrillers) solving the problem despite having to battle an antagonistic police force (being initially dictated to by the peer). EF links the killing to similar ones of East European prostitutes and a Lee Child like page turner ensues. It's just a shame that the over-the-top brutality of the serial killer and his milieu is so hard to believe.	K

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jan 17	Ten Days	Gillian Slovo	3	Tale of riots in sweltering London, heavily modelled on the 2011 Tottenham ones following Mark Duggan's death. Here again a black man is killed by police who fail to come and explain to the family, and the peaceful protests then get hijacked by young violent folk. Story spiced up with intrigue in Westminster as Home Secretary is vying to depose the PM, but HS is brought down by his secret affair with his PA, and brand new chief of Met Police is intermingled. Also, an undercover cop who is in the thick of the riots, seems to go AWOL and is then found hanged. An easy and quick read, but somehow dissatisfying because it is so similar to the 2011 events.	
Jan 17	Driving Over Lemons: An Optimist in Andalucia	Chris Stewart	3+	Lightly told auto-biography of musician/shepherd/ecologist and his wife who left Sussex around 1990 to buy a small, poor, and remote farm in southern Andalusia. Great wry and self-deprecating style, but its clear from how their lives develop (they are still happily there, albeit now helped by royalties from this book that came out in 1999) that they won great endearment and respect from the locals.	K
Jan 17	Escape from Camp 14	Blaine Harden	3+	Story of Shin Dong-hyuk (ex: Shin In Guen) a young man born in the N. Korea prison camp / Gulag, who managed to escape at the age of 23 in 2005(?). At the time (maybe still) the only known escapee in the camps' 50+ year history. The detail of the brutal, starving conditions, inmates casually killed or worked to death, and informer-culture (he hated his Mum and she and his brother were executed after he informed on their escape attempt when he was 13) are grim. BH makes the point that Nazi death camps and Russian/Communist Gulag lasted much less long than these continuing NK ones. From the information both on the camps (where inmates are worked to death by 40, they have little food and eat rats and steal what they can and, for instance, a 7-year old girl is beaten to death in her classroom by her teacher for having 5 grains of wheat in her pocket), and the miserably poor lives of the 90% of the "free" population that it is not part of the pampered elite, it is puzzling why the regime has not been overthrown yet.	
Jan 17	Forty Days without Shadow	Olivier Truc	5	North Norway / Lapland Reindeer policy thing. Dull	
Jan 17	Flashman and the Redskins	George MacDonald Fraser	5	Tone too gung-hoey for me. So, I missed the historical education the Economist journalist enthused about.	
Jan 17	Canada	Richard Ford	3-	Life for a 15-year old small-town USA boy is wrecked after his ne'er do well Dad gets into debt with local Indians after dodgy money making scheme. Dad inveigles Mum into robbing a bank and both go to prison (she to commit suicide there after writing an epistle to her twin kids about it). Sister runs away to California and the boy is smuggled over the border to Canada where he works for the slightly odd fugitive owner of a hotel in a small town. This ends after a year or so when the man casually kills two men who have come to investigate him, and the boy heads off again – this time to spend the rest of his life as a school teacher. Partially compelling style but ultimately an empty read.	
Dec 16	The Improbability of Love	Hannah Rothschild	3	Art-world / cookery thriller. Winsome 30-year old girl has moved to London after end of long relationship to earn her living as a cook. She buys a small painting from a junk shop for £75, which turns out to be a priceless Watteau (which gives the book's title), though she's not aware of this. But others in the pompous, incestuous and over-moned art world are, particularly the unpleasant owners of a top dealer – he being an ex-Nazi who's managed to masquerade as a Jewish holocaust survivor since the war. A contest between good (the girl), evil and billionaire potential potential buyers in the middle develops round the painting, compounded by the girl working for many of the other parties as she creates fabulously opulent banquets on art themes. After a few murders, all comes fine in the end with the girl and an adoring supporter eschewing the troublesome painting. Would be at least a 3+ rating if there had been a bit less voluminous art history woven in, but a great read.	K
Dec 16	Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition	Nisid Hajari	3	Depressing retelling of the partition into India and Pakistan. As well as the original Hindu Muslim divide, the Sikh's weighed in a big brutal way just before the 15-Aug-1947 deed (as they became disturbed by their place in the still unresolved Punjab/Kashmir region). Horrid to be reminded of the widespread vicious and maniacal violence on all sides both in the couple of months before and the year or so after (and, of course carrying on still decade after decade). Religion should be banished. NH pushes back a bit against the widespread cant that Jinnah was the main villain of the piece. He makes the interesting point that both he and Nehru were inappropriately thin-skinned for the crucial roles they played, also that Jinnah's legacy was so much worse than Nehru's because he failed to build a decent team beneath him, relying on sycophants.	
Dec 16	The Memory Stones	Caroline Brothers	3-	Novel covering the horrors of various "disappeared" during the Argentinian Junta in the 1970s. Far too much back-or irrelevant- story in tale of parents whose pregnant 19-year old daughter disappears. From reports they glean over decades of dangerous and miserable research they learn that she was tortured and abused, but delivered a daughter (who was then given to one of the Junta's torturers) and was then killed; her husband was also tortured and then thrown out of a plane into the sea. Very drawn out ending as the grand-daughter is finally found and then agonises over taking DNA test to prove her beloved pseudo-parents were as vile as she hears.	
Dec 16	A Quiet Life	Natasha Walter	3-	Laborious novel based on a fictionalised couple with similarities to the Donald Maclean's. Mainly focussed on the American wife, also working with the Russians to get some of the Maclean character's info to them. Ends soon after the equivalent of the Burgess/Maclean escape. Far too much emotional and dress description drowned a decent storyline.	
Dec 16	Try Not to Breathe	Holly Seddon	2	Cracking "psychological thriller". 15-year old girl is attacked and put in coma; 15 years later she's still in it when similarly-aged alcoholic ex-star journalist takes an interest in the un-solved attack. Excellent slow un-peeling of the history of the journalist, the girl and related friends and family ends with conviction of the original attacker. Excellent read despite a couple of non-sequiturs and the un-believable number of people involved in hiding the truth for so long.	K
Dec 16	Queen of the Desert	Georgina Howell	3	"The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell" - and so it is, and most readable. Born to a wealthy industrial family (grandpa made a fortune in iron and her beloved father continued this in a non-opulent way). She was astoundingly bright – getting a first in Modern History (first woman to do so) at Oxford in 1887 at the age of 19. She had a brief and formidable mountain climbing career, but is most know for her wide travelling in and knowledge of the Arab world. She spoke Arabian fluently and was thoroughly accepted by the Bedouin sheiks she met and charmed. She had various official roles in the British administrations as they first fomented revolt by the Arabs against the Turks (who owned all the area) during WW1 – alongside, at times, T. E. Lawrence – and then set up subsequent countries (despite broken promises and expectations including the secret British/French Sykes/Picot agreement). She was particularly involved in the creation of Iraq in the early 1920's, headed by king Faisal ibn Hussain – who she got on with enormously well. The hassles of the process – getting boundary agreement with Syria (a French-operated area) and Kurdistan, and the endless fractions in the Arab world, including with Ibn Saud in the south and Faisal's vile father Abdullah – are all too familiar in today's ghastly mess in the exact same area. Whilst reading some of this (particularly the Kurdish mess) I was reminded of the similarly intrepid female right-hand-person Emma Sky in the 2000's.	
Dec 16	The Special Operations Executive Chronicles: Book 1: Nancy	Nigel Watson	4-	Dreadful book. Feeble Boys-Own style is an insult to the story of one of SOE's most successful agents – Nancy Wake. Can't imagine why anyone let him sully her, and others', reputations with this drivel, or why I read it to the end!	K
Dec 16	Dead Joker [HW#5]	Anne Holt	3+	Another good Hanne Wilhelmsen / BillyT who-dunnit. Starts with beheading of clearly innocent, but totally covered in suspicion lawyer's wife and running to a second beheading a paedophilia and corruption swirl around. The social and physical closeness of several of the main players continues to run most un-true. This one sees the death of HW's girlfriend and her and BillyT spending a night together.	K
Dec 16	The Dinner	Herman Koch	3-	Secrets of violent Dutch man and his troubled son and nephews (who have inadvertently killed a homeless woman and mimicked Dad in beating up someone else) told over the courses of a restaurant meal with his (eminent politician) brother and their two highly involved wives. I liked his casual chatty style, but the story didn't start until halfway through the book making it most annoying.	
Nov 16	Tommy – the British Soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918	Richard Holmes	5	Seems to be well written and very readable account of "real" life in the trenches. From the intro, not as full of blame on Donkeys leading Lions as most modern takes on WW1, or as full-on horrible. But I didn't have the stomach to read more than a couple of chapters of the ~680 small-print pages ;-(

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Nov 16	The Ghost Fields [RG#8]	Elly Griffiths	3-	Female forensic archaeologist at front of discovering dark secrets of Norfolk landed gentry family. One son assumed killed in WW2 bomber is found in a single seater plane uncovered during building works in present time, but was killed by shot to the head. Another one had apparently disappeared after being WW2 POW in far east. Turns out the other brother had killed both and continues to be vicious. The archaeologist also hugely intertwined with local policeman (by whom she has a baby, but he remains with his wife) and some US TV-archaeology star who is also on the scene.	
Nov 16	A Week in December	Sebastian Faulks	3	Threaded tales of several characters over one week, including disaffected Muslim lad going on a suicide bombing mission (he sees the light just before in some way) and, predominantly, venal fund manager gaming the system and purportedly about to bring about the 2008 financial crisis. Readable but light. Noticed later I'd read in Aug-2013 and given it a 4!	
Nov 16	The Pillars of the Earth	Ken Follett	4	Very simplistic/trite 1100+ page book set round characters building and campaigning for and against a cathedral in 12th century England. Woven around (presumably) accurate events including civil war (Henry/Stephen/Maud), Thomas a Becket's murder, etc.	K
Nov 16	Do No Harm: Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery	Henry Marsh	3+	At times overly graphic descriptions of the mechanics of brain and spine surgery. But heavily overlaid with the pain for such surgeons in handling the grief and inevitable failures of their trade. Highly readable, if a bit heavy on jargon (which one didn't need to understand at all). Interesting parallels with the Timothy Ihrig's TED talk "What we can do to die well". Though not directly reiterating TI's focus on patient choice overriding medic's tendency to fix (even temporarily) discrete problems, he made the point that patients are often schizophrenic in their wish to live or die when confronted with fatal tumours and the like. He also rails extensively at the NHS bureaucracy and out of touch management interfering with his ability to care for patients.	
Nov 16	Tightrope	Simon Mawer	3	Young SOE girl (British with French origins) is dropped into France and (by some unexplained process) has her resistance job subverted by a more secretive UK organisation to spirit a French scientist (one of her many lovers) out of the country. She is betrayed by someone, incarcerated and tortured in Paris (Fresnes) and then sent to Ravensbruck. Back in England after the war (she's helped by the famous Vera Atkins – one of many real people mentioned in the story) she gets into a complicated multiple-cross spying thing with a Russian. He is recalled suddenly when his bosses suspect oddities, but manages to escape and they evade both sets of handlers and live out their lives in Switzerland. Tale is told by the 12-years younger son of a friend of the main character, who is besotted with her (and gets to sleep with her once), also becomes a spy and catches up with her in her 70's to get the story he tells.	
Nov 16	A Very British Ending [Catesby#5]	Edward Wilson	3-	Chronology of the long running slurs and conspiracy theories about Harold Wilson's surprise resignation in 1976. The tale is long drawn out and far too full of code names and jargon. Starts with Wilson's mis-attributed (and fictional I believe) championing of the sale of Rolls Royce engines to Russia in 1951. This pissed off the Americans at the start of their McCarthy era paranoia (heavily stoked by James Angleton the insane but long term head CIA counter-intelligence) who then see the UK being run by Russians/Communists through miners strikes and non-involvement in Vietnam. They encourage and sponsor a UK right wing revolt being planned by military and business heads in a men's club in London. The ever-present Catesby (and boss Bone) are on to it and everything defuses before an imminent coup with Wilson's resignation.	K
Oct 16	Half Blood Blues	Esi Edugyan	5	Something about black jazz musicians in 1940 Paris and again in present day.	
Oct 16	The Trouble with Goats and Sheep	Joanna Cannon	5	Something to do with two young girls in 1976 suburban detectivery	
Oct 16	The Exile	Mark Oldfield	4	3-period tale set around Spanish Civil war (1937), an episode of vicious reprisals and mayhem (Basque separatists being slaughtered with Franco's approval in 1954) and 2010 police/forensics woman (linked to the previous and researching 1000's of children seized by the authorities and sold right up to the 1990's). Badly written with lots of non-sequiturs and the impression that chunks of explanatory information had been left out. I really shouldn't read any more of this guy's stuff, the thing felt like (and may have been a sequel to) The Sentinel. It, if I remember, ended abruptly with a cliffhanger, as did this, so I assume he's planning another violent bit of rubbish.	
Oct 16	Human Traces	Sebastian Faulks	4	Very long rambling tale of two 19th century mad-doctors ("alienists" in original parlance) who meet as students and work together in the evolving psycho/psychia- areas of medicine. Lots of pretty fatuous side stories pollute an (apparently very factual) description of this branch of medicine if making it less dry.	
Oct 16	Eleni	Nicholas Gage	3+	Gruesome and gruelling (far too long and overly detailed) recounting of the horrors of the Greek civil war during and after WW2. Eleni was NG's mother. They were from a remote small village (Lia) in NW Greece that was in the midst of the Communist (ELAS) vs right wing mayhem and vile brutality. Eleni managed to send 4 of her 5 kids away in 1948 towards her long-distance husband in America, including Nicholas then aged 9. She stayed on because one daughter was still in ELAS' hands. But in the distrust and terror of the ELAS "administration" she was accused by fellow villagers, brutally tortured and finally "tried" and executed with 5 other villagers. NG became an investigative journalist and, after 20 years with the NY Times quit to track down and seek revenge on the ELAS brutes who killed his Mum. Sadly for a reader, the book is far too detailed and full of recreated thoughts and dialogue, but was clearly cathartic for him. It was also made into a film, which may be worth seeing.	
Oct 16	Tea Planters Wife	Dinah Jefferies	3-	Lightweight colonial/upper-crust tale in 1920/30's Ceylon. Sufficiently interesting storyline so survive reading the trashy/feeble style. 2 nd wife of young planter whose 1 st wife and very young child were dead, gives birth to twins – one white and one coloured. She thinks latter must be related to drunken night she can remember nothing of, so has it taken away to be looked after by locals. Turns out this mixed colour can be, and is, due to mixed race futher back in its lineage, so lots of tears and ultimate confessions.	K
Sep 16	Exposure	Helen Dunmore	3	Family-orientated cold war spy book. Junior spook living in 1960s Muswell Hill. He gets call from his boss (male, and ex-lover), who's been in a drunken accident whilst having a secret file at his flat, to recover the file from flat and return to the office. He does this but then the spook establishment is set on him making him scapegoat for boss's boss and he is charged with spying. Faithful and resourceful wife spotted the file and hid it without husband knowing and then organises the kids and life and ultimately fixes the problem all while he's in prison pending trial.	
Sep 16	The Illegal	Lawrence Hill	3	Saga of illegal immigration and corruption in two fictional large island states in the Indian Ocean: Freedom State the US/SA-like white isolationist super power and Zantorand the poor black African-like one, many of whose populace want to escape to FS. Story revolves round distance runners from both and the venal and murderous carryings on of the powers in both to maintain their evil ways.	
Sep 16	House of Grief	Helen Garner	4-	Labourered and poor retelling of the trial and (failed) appeal of man found guilty of killing his 3 kids, by driving them into a reservoir (and escaping himself), in revenge at his ex-wife's ditching of him. Her overly-complex and lousy verbiage failed to convey why his claim that he blacked out in a severe coughing fit and swerved off the road whilst unconscious was not believed.	
Sep 16	Rough Music	Patrick Gale	3+	Another absorbing tale set mainly round, and evocative of, very ordinary things – 1960's seaside holiday, prep school, Alzheimer's parents and also his own background of being the child of a prison governor. But also the usual then and now threads slowly uncovering the drama during the '60's holiday (disappearance/suicide of brother-in-law who had fling with his mother when his father had to leave the holiday early to deal with Ronnie Biggs like escape from Wandsworth) that hung over everyone's lives since. Also, the unravelling of the main character's gay relationship.	K
Sep 16	The House by the Lake	Thomas Harding	3	Story of Germany told through the families that owned and inhabited a small country house to the west of Berlin. Originally built by a Jewish doctor in 1927. Nazi's booted him out and passed it onto a successful music publisher, who had to scarpin in the post-WW2 mess as East Germany crunched down. The Berlin Wall was built through its back garden (separating it from the lake it was on). After years of mis-use and final neglect the author (a descendent of the original owner) got it adopted and preserved as a historical monument.	
Sep 16	The Return of John Macnab	Andrew Greig	2+	Three middling-aged mates and a feral female journalist reprise the Buchan story – poaching a salmon, a pair of grouse and a stag from three Scottish estates, returning the game to the owners with proof of their deed, after publicly announcing their intention. This time to highlight/protest at private land ownership. Wonderful derring-do as they succeed against all odds, but have to disown their deeds in a fitting compromise with Prince Charles as they finish with the stag at Balmoral. Nicely woven in romances and breathless rapid plot-lines made it hard to put down.	

Books

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Sep 16	The Darkling Spy [Catesby#3]	Edward Wilson	3	Another pretty unintelligible tale of multiply-crossed spies and cold war doings. Again featuring Catesby (and, a bit, Kit Fournier). This in 1956 and including the Hungarian Revolution, but mainly a hunt for a dodgy German/Russian agent working for who knows who ultimately killing C's girlfriend before C gets him in a boat escaping from the GDR.	K
Sep 16	The Norfolk Mystery	Ian Sansom	3-	Lightweight who-dunnit solved by prolific writer (dozens of books and articles a year) self-taught polymath with his younger side kick. Set in 1930s Blakeney where they stumble across the local minister hung in his own church.	K
Aug 16	Treachery in Tibet	John Wilcox	5	Feeble fictionalised history covering the Younghusband / Curzon British invasion of Tibet in 1903. "A Simon Fonthill novel" - to be avoided in future!	
Aug 16	The Lions Mouth [HW#4]	Anne Holt	3	Hanne Wilhelmsen series who-dunnit. Norwegian (female) PM is found shot in the head in her office. The investigations uncover various motives from different parties – one being linked to an investigation of a 1965 surge in cot deaths due to dodgy MMR vaccine the government of the day - one of which was the PM's own first child. The book is set and written ~1997 but includes some remarkably prescient snippets of politics and intrigue that make it seem it must have been written after 2014, as well as mention of a one-time syringe, when I thought the 2009 TED talk on that was an innovation!	K
Aug 16	Testament of Youth	Vera Brittain	3	More-or-less autobiography of a hugely intelligent and articulate upper middle class gel living through the carnage of WW1 which destroyed the manhood of her generation (as an intro said, the upper/officer class suffered disproportionately). Her teenage lover (Roland Leighton), adored brother and their two bosom buddies (all Uppingham-schooled) were all killed. She was an ardent feminist (though, interestingly, not a suffragette) and firmly anti-war, but came down from her first year in Somerville Oxford (where the 4 young men had been due to join her) to join the VAD as a nursing assistant/dogsbody. Last 150 pages (of 600) a bit tedious in post-war politicking, and long term friendship with Winifred Holtby, leading up to her marriage to George Catlin by whom she produced Shirley Williams.	
Aug 16	A place called Winter	Patrick Gale	3+	Young married upper-middle-class Englishman around 1900 discovers he's homosexual, has an affair which is discovered by his wife's brother who forces him to leave everything and flee to Canada. There he becomes a homesteader, carving himself a farm out of the wilds, finds a new love – brother who fled there with his sister after he was ousted/evicted from a city – but are hounded by an acquaintance from their youth. Sister is raped by this man, main guy marries sister to cover shame of resulting daughter and they live as threesome until WW1, the 1918 flu and another visit from the acquaintance tear their lives apart. A typically well-told Gale book – here set in two-part chronology with the main tale line cutting to and fro with the English guy in some sort of sanatorium recounting/remembering some of the main story.	K
Aug 16	The Old Man and the Sea A True Story of Crossing the Atlantic by Raft	Anthony Smith	3	Story of an 85-year-old's crossing the Atlantic in a raft made of large polythene pipes. Two-part voyage – first with 3 ~60-year old guys to the East side of the Caribbean and then, with two couples, onto his determined destination – Eleuthera, following the journey of 7 shipwrecked sailors in 1940, only two of whom survived. He was physically frail having been in a nasty hit&run motor accident not long before the project (compensation for which partly funded it). Spends as much time philosophising and (slightly repetitively) giving some of his history as he does the voyage details. But, despite slightly pompous and self-centred style an interesting read.	
Aug 16	Moonlight over Denmark	J.H. Schryer	5	Lightweight WW2 story of agents going into Denmark to help resistance. More schmaltz than anything else.	K
Aug 16	Leaving Berlin	Joseph Kanon	3	Jewish writer expelled/controlled by US as part of McCarthy witch hunts, returns to (East) Berlin. He's immediately embroiled in killings and trying to contact/involve his previous non-Nazi friends as he mingles with Brecht and other luminaries back to endorse Soviet ways over both Western(US) and ex-Nazi. Hard to follow all the allegiances, but a good thriller.	K
Aug 16	The Good Soldier	Ford Madox Ford	4-	Tedious and mannered tale of two wealthy couples in the decade before WW1. Recounted by one, an Anglophile American, mainly covering his British officer friend and his many peccadilloes and affairs.	K
Jul 16	Paris Spring	James Naughtie	3-	Chronological precursor to "The madness of July". Set in Paris 1968 with slim backdrop of the student revolutions. But mainly another ludicrously complex cold war spy-ery with the two secret-world brothers involved in silencing an East German spy. JN's ghastly indirect and pompously un-realistic prose style again mars what would have been a good-ish tale.	K
Jul 16	Career of Evil [CS#3]	Robert Galbraith	3+	Another grizzly Cormoran Strike tale with the usual Robin/Strike tensions (cliff-hanging at the final sentence when Strike stumbles late into Robin's wedding to the boring accountant). But the story is set round a villain using others wanting to become amputees (having BILD - Body Integrity Identity Disorder - a real syndrome) to get at Strike for an ancient grudge. Also covers paedophilia and abuse of females along with the usual aggro with the Met police as Strike solves several murders for them.	K 494 2015
Jul 16	Rosie's War. An Englishwoman's escape from occupied France.	Rosemary Say and Noel Holland	3	Autobiographical story of 19-year-old Hampstead girl who was and au-pair in France when Germans invaded. She was imprisoned and, after ~2 years managed to escape. Not a lot about the broader aspects of the war or politics, but an interesting read on how she survived (tho' only one of her two prison camps was of the usual gruesome ilk).	K
Jul 16	The madness of July	James Naughtie	3	Spy thriller set round three brothers (of a Scottish estate). Main one used to be a British spy and is now a senior politician, another is a US spy. They all come together when some US (also spy) is found dead in a cupboard in the House of Commons. All sorts of reasonably unintelligible high stakes diplomatic hush hush goings on, and another death, over six days eventually answer all questions (except for this reader). But had an irritatingly cryptic and allusive style and, as with J, I probably wouldn't have kept reading but for the author.	K
Jul 16	Marked for Death	James Hamilton-Paterson	3	Good history of the development of air-planes, their flyers and the UK air-force (from Army adjunct, the RFC through to RAF - founded in 1918) during (and just before) WW1. Fascinating if occasionally dry and rather-too-WE-Johns (Biggles author) centric. The rate of development of the machines and armaments (through-the-propeller synchronisers only being used - by Germany - in 1915 and not by the Brits until 1917/18) was fantastic. UK procurement and manufacturing was as politically-hampered and erratic as Nevil Shute (Slide Rule) described in the '30's to '50's during WW2 and jet development. As was the miserable and lethal conditions the pilots flew in, with little or no input from the flyers to the designers.	K
Jul 16	A Little Life	Hanya Yanagihara	5	Some massive tale of (all gay?) young men in NY. Not engaged by p30	
Jul 16	Black Eyed Susans	Julia Heaberlin	3	Tale of teenage Texan girl abducted and buried alive with 3/4 other corpses of girl-killing monster (whose motives/rationale are, surprisingly, not covered as he is slowly fingered). Then same young woman 15+ years later convinced the man convicted is innocent and trying to work with police/lawyers and around her traumas to have his death sentence quashed. Took patience to stick with the poorly identified then/now chronology shifts, but worth it for her crisp clear (and, from end notes) accurate descriptions of US death row and forensics that can identify a corpse's home area from the ratio of trace elements in its bones (including leaded petrol residues many years after the switch to unleaded). Would have given 3+ if this were easier prose.	
Jun 16	A Sentimental Traitor	Michael Dobbs	3	Convuluted thriller with a totally unbelievable, out-of-control, senior British mandarin female in an EEC security organisation with some inexplicable vindictiveness almost destroying the life of the Harry Jones character. Starts with the shooting down of an airliner with, inter alia, 37 US kids on it, over the channel and ends with the expected comeuppance of the witch after HJ and teacher girlfriend do the heroics! 4th in HJ series, which started with "Old Enemies". The two between being "The Lord's Day" and "The Edge of Madness"/	
Jun 16	The Cobra	Frederick Forsyth	3+	Thriller based on the US giving a retired CIA chief carte-blanche to stop the international cocaine business. He (the Cobra) does this with a small team of whizzos (mainly SAS and SEALs), lots of clever planning and bucket loads of dollars. Lots of fun derring-do, entirely one-sided (the baddies almost never have any success or luck). Nice twist at the end as the Cobra is done down by his more moral super lieutenant.	
Jun 16	20,000 Leagues under the Sea	Jules Verne	3	Extraordinary mixture of fiction and, presumably, fairly accurate marine science and technology predictions. The amount of detail about Nemo's submarine Nautilus, and the structure of the earth at depth (possibly some of it fantasy) and its sea creatures was fascinating for a book written around 1868. Slightly grating naïve style (possibly exacerbated by the translation).	K

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jun 16	A Wanted Man [JR#17]	Lee Child	3	More rapid-fire Reacher. Picked up hitching by 3 puzzling folk, he is drawn into some unintelligibly complex CIA/FBI/terrorist shenanigans. Ends with a typically ludicrous spat with him single-handedly beating a team of 24 villains	
Jun 16	The Danish Girl	David Ebershoff	3	Novel massively fabricated round the real life of trans-gender man->woman Lili Elbe. He (Einar Wegener) underwent physical "sex reassignment therapy" (and, in the book, surgery) in 1930 and died a year later.	
Jun 16	The Little Red Chairs	Edna O'Brien	5	Something to do with Balkan war fall out with Radovan Karadzic like figure as faith healer in backwater town/village in Ireland. The chairs being the memorial used for the 11,541 red chairs laid out in Sarajevo to commemorate those killed during the 1,425 days of siege.	
Jun 16	The Hollow Man	Oliver Harris	3-	Rogue disreputable skint drunkard policeman super-man story. Both illegally trying to steal money from a dead apparent millionaire and unable to resist solving his (and other murders) along with major money-scams. Some interest being N. London venues and quite a ridiculous page turner.	
Jun 16	The Curator	Jacques Strauss	5	Tale of frustrated and unpleasant SA man wanting to kill his equally unpleasant Dad I think.	
Jun 16	The Prodigal Spy	Joseph Kanon	3+	Cold war spy sleuthing. In 1950 a sharp-witted American hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) is spied on by his loyal 10-year old son. The guy then defects and later admits his guilt. 20 years later, son, who has not seen Dad since, is summoned clandestinely to Sovietly-crushed Czechoslovakia to meet dying Dad who wants to return to USA in return for shopping an unknown US super-mole. Dad is killed, son and girlfriend becomes sleuths, sort of reliving his Dad's story and (predictably as the book slightly labours on) uncover Kissinger-like step-Dad.	
May 16	The Light of Day	Graham Swift	4	Ex-cop private detective helps(?) female client kill her husband who has been cheating on her with a Croatian refugee they gave home to. Irritatingly cryptic fragmentary-sentence style reminds me never to read any more of his stuff.	
May 16	The Road to Little Dribbling	Bill Bryson	3-	Another gently amusing ramble round Britain with pithy observations and endless interesting facts. Not quite as much fun as some of the earlier ones (such as Notes from a Small Island, which follows-on from) but maybe one does tire a little of his style. Here he also gets a bit over-adamant and preachy about some things, like HS2	
May 16	Assegai	Wilbur Smith	4	Trite, single plot, linear rubbish. Young Anglo/colonial African man in v early 1900s is big-game hunter and gets mixed up in spying against and doing down German coming out for hunting.	
May 16	All the light we cannot see	Anthony Doerr	3+	Tale of two young teenagers caught up in WW2 and beyond. He a clever German orphan fascinated with radios which he learns to mend. At 14 he's drafted into an elite technical school and at 15 out into the war using his skills to track down enemy radios (thus getting their operators killed). She's the blind daughter of a craftsman locksmith for a museum in Paris. When the Germans take Paris, he is dispatched with one of four fabulous diamonds – the original and three copies made to try to prevent the Germans finding the real one. He and daughter end in St Malo where his reclusive uncle is also a radio enthusiast. German lad's team end up there too trying to track him down (along with another nasty German after the diamone), as his broadcasts (originally educational) are now for the Resistance. But the lad realises he used to listen to the uncle before the war, and he eventually meets the blind girl for a day. One of them survives the war, and the final chapters give a reprise of the fates them and many of the other characters.	
May 16	Secret State (aka: A very British Coup)	Chris Mullin	3	Derring-do in 1980s Britain as left wing Labour PM (modelled on Tony Benn, apparently) is elected with plans to get rid of US nuclear bases, inter alia. The establishment is aghast and subverts it all, deposing him by finally digging a tiny tiny bit of insinuation from an otherwise flawless career and record. Written in 1981 (less than 2 years into Thatcher), it interestingly "predicts" British Leyland collapse, something like the miners strike, and many other things that makes it feel as if it were written in the 21st century! Very readable, if a bit full of fictional big-wig names.	
Apr 16	The Widow	Fiona Barton	3+	Well teased-out tale of sterile paedophile husband of feeble, child-besotted wife. Young girl taken from her single-Mum and never seen again. Story chops and changes chronology and first-person's stories of the detective, journalist, child's Mum and both the couple. Slightly similar structure as "The Girl on the Train".	
Apr 16	Secret Letters from the Railway	Charles Steel edited by Brian Best	3	Excerpts from letters from POW on the Burma railway in WW2. The poor guy was at Dunkirk, then a year or so later, 3 weeks after getting married was at the fall of Singapore. He wrote nearly 200 letters, which he couldn't send and had to hide carefully, to his wife telling of his time and trials. The letters slightly monotonous after a while, but conveyed his superb determination to last until the end and get home. He and BB make the point that many men died because they didn't have the enviable strength of mind to keep positive. Reminiscent of John McCarthy during his captivity. Jap brutality and their privations were only referred to indirectly. One thing that was interesting was the cash society going on in the camps. The POW's were paid (a tiny amount) for their "work" (I think) and spent much of it on optional extras at the canteens to make life survivable. The Jap/Korean guards ripped some of this off for themselves, but CS and co had a very profitable system of double book-keeping to skim tens of thousands of dollars from the Japs which they used to fund illegal medical drugs and so on!	
Apr 16	Midnight Sun	Jo Nesbo	3+	Chronological sequel to "Blood on Snow" - from indirect involvement of the Fisherman Oslo drugs baron, but otherwise different characters. A non-violent mid-30's drug dealer who the Fisherman thinks has killed, and so mistakenly hires to do the same – which the guy accepts only because his baby daughter is dying of leukaemia. But guy bottles out on his first assignment, and flees retribution to the arctic north of Norway. Here he hides amongst the isolated and heavily religious Sami folk, falls for woman in an abusive marriage, ending up with her after almost accidentally committing his first murder.	
Apr 16	Mudbound	Hillary Jordan	3+	Another good American book by a female author. This in rural late 1940s Mississippi. Two brothers 20-years apart, one a WW1 veteran, the other a WW2 bomber ace, with drink and PTSD troubles. Wife of the older (aged midway between them) gets friendly and protective of the damaged younger. Negro tenant farmers in the mix, also with again a WW2 hero son returning with his troubles. All spiced with KKK lynchings and racial bigotry ruining lives.	
Apr 16	Our Fathers	Andrew O'Hagan	5	Something about Scotland. Had promising put downs of overly-Nationalistic types, but never got interesting enough to stick with.	
Apr 16	Everything I never told you	Celeste Ng	3+	Mixed race US family in 1960's and 70's. He is first generation Chinese academic, she a white aspiring doctor. They marry, stopping her ambitions and he has to accept a below-his-ability post in a hick town in Ohio. His kids (and he) suffer loads of discrimination, which the parents don't realise. When the first two kids are under 10 she gets fed up with her lost learning and disappears to enrol for more medical training, leaving the kids even more insecure. This only lasts a few weeks since she turns out to be pregnant with their 3rd child, a daughter. 10 years later the older daughter is found drowned in the local lake and all sorts of guilt and thwarted dreams are excellently told.	
Apr 16	The Temporary Gentleman	Sebastian Barry	3	Fiction of 50-ish Irish guy writing his memoirs in the 1950's from a lair in Accra. Starting as a 15-year old working on colonial ships during WW1 (from the dates, but this was not clear). He gets to Uni where he meets middle class girl from political family. Some mentions of the Irish civil war, but mainly the two get married he, always a drinker and gambler, is unsympathetic to childbirths she didn't want and filches her savings. This then turns her alcoholic and the story is mainly about the miseries of that, as they first move to Ghana/Togoland where he works as an Engineer. She returns to Ireland for the kids and they see less of each other. He volunteers for the British army in WW2 and after being torpedoed on the way also works in E. Africa. A better read than this write-up may imply, albeit slightly muddled storylines. From the back pages there may be more from SB involving related characters.	
Apr 16	Friday on my mind [FK#5]	Nicci French	3-	The story of psychoanalyst/super-woman Freida Klein gets yet more ridiculous. Here her one-time lover is found dead and she looks like the suspect. She goes on the run from the police until the murderer (husband of fragile woman she used to treat) is proved guilty – not, surprisingly, the evil Dean Reeve – though he turns out in the final sentence (literally) to have been in this book too under another guise.	
Apr 16	Threat Vector	Tom Clancy	3	Thriller with cyberwarfare-fronted Chinese taking on USA and rest of the world. The Ryans (Jack senior is now president and his son Jack junior works for covert US intelligence/espionage organisation) sort it out in rapid-fire 700 pages. The main villain is Chinese superman, both world's top malware/hacker and boss of hoards of dedicated assassins he maintains round the world.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Mar 16	The Japanese Lover	Isabel Allende	3	Tale spread from 1930's to 2010s of relationships, old age and death, US Japanese internment during WW2, AIDS and child abuse. Set round two main characters – Polish Jew girl who's parents died a Treblinka after she had been shipped out to join live with wealthy relatives in San Francisco – and Japanese American son of the family gardeners who became her lifelong lover, plus a 3rd, the ex-Moldavian girl looking after the woman in her old age. Very much a JC book!	
Mar 16	Echo Burning [JR#5]	Lee Child	3	Another OK superman Reacher. Mexican wife being beaten up and threatened by her white Texan farmer husband (initially in prison for tax fraud) and chums. Slightly less violence than usual (and surprisingly almost none against him) but a heavier diet of perfect pre-guessing his targets moves (eg: finding the right hold-up motel amongst 1000's with minutes to spare).	
Mar 16	Sleeping on Jupiter	Anuradha Roy	4	Dull tale of Indian girl abused as an orphan returning for a work visit from her home overseas to the town she had been captive in. Very little information or action.	
Mar 16	Operation Mincemeat	Ben Macintyre	2	Excellent re-telling of the British deception in WW2 that convinced Hitler the allies would attack Greece in summer 1943, rather than the bleeding obvious Sicily. As ever in retrospect it's amazing the thing came off – floating an already dead body (it had been kept in fridges for 4 months) with fake papers onto the coast of Spain where corrupt and partisan authorities copied them to the Germans, who proved immensely gullible, though possibly because one very senior guy in Berlin – von Roenne – was violently anti Nazi and keen to mis-inform Hitler whenever possible. He did similar during the D-Day landings before being hung after the von Stauffenberg episode. Cf: "The man who never was" - the original story by one of the two main deceivers, Ewen Montagu	
Mar 16	Standing in another man's grave	Ian Rankin	3	A good Rebus read. He's now out of the police but still involved and gets intertwined in a case of several missing girls on the A9 near Inverness. Usual battles inside the force over his unconventional ways and disreputable lifestyle.	
Mar 16	An Artist of the Floating World	Kazuo Ishiguro	5	Elderly Japanese artist in just-post-WW2 and turgid Japanese culture & society.	
Mar 16	Head of State	Andrew Marr	3	Rollicking thriller set in the few days before the EU referendum (the book published in 2014). PM (post-Cameron and a brief Boris!) is running the stay in camp and is well respected. But he dies 6 days before and a ridiculous cabal tries (and finally fails) to hide the fact (using mock ups and impersonators) to avoid fouling the campaign. Lots of digs at, or plaudits for, known folk as well as implicit predictions that Hilary Clinton will be president, David McAllister the German chancellor and Charles king.	
Mar 16	The Old Wives' Tale	Arnold Bennett	3+	Very readable 720 pages of life in latter half of 19th century. Tale of two sisters from his 5 towns, from family that ran a haberdashery shop. Wonderfully wry humour and wide ranging, as the younger girl elopes with a travelling salesman at 19 ending up dumped by him in Paris where she sees the Prussian siege and ensuing commune (1870/1). She worked hard running a pension, ending up making a good sum selling it, and returned to join her sister. Her sister never left the town, married one of the tailors and the two of them ran the shop until his early death left her going until she was bought out but stayed living in the adjoining house. This badly edited Vintage edition had a surprising number of typos – mainly the word "there" peppered everywhere; occasionally when it the word should be "the" or "their" but often completely spuriously!	
Mar 16	Tulip Fever	Deborah Moggach	4	Scrappy tale of 17 th century Amsterdam in middle of ludicrous tulip mania. Sadly little about that, mainly poor tale of young wife escaping old husband for young portrait painter with twists round the birth of a baby to her maid being passed off as her own to help.	
Mar 16	Of Human Bondage	Somerset Maugham	3	Long depressing but absorbing tale of boyhood thru to young manhood of upper middle class man around turn of 19/20 th century in (mainly) London. After a few years as an indifferent art student in Paris he studies medicine in London and becomes unconvincingly infatuated with a tea house waitress who doesn't care for him and drags him down until he's penniless and sleeping on the street. Typically mannered, class-based, SM stuff, with lots of references to how many shillings a week one could live on in those days.	
Feb 16	Honourable Friends? Parliament and the fight for change	Caroline Lucas	3	Very readable blunderbuss of a polemic against the current parliamentary system. But rather too many topics covered by this clearly delightful lady.	
Feb 16	Trespass	Rose Tremain	3+	Dark well-crafted who-dunnit, set in rural southern France. Ageing man living on a farm he has allowed to go to rack and ruin decides to sell up, but is hampered by his sister (who he and his father raped endlessly in their youth) living in an adjacent bungalow that mars the view and prospect. A once successful art dealer finding his London business and life atrophying decides to move to the area, and stays with his protective sister and her jealous-of-him lover. After showing interest in the farm, he disappears and turns up much later murdered.	
Feb 16	Blood on Snow	Jo Nesbo	3	Slim easy-read thriller of good-hearted killer on his final jobs, killing his boss for love and being double-crossed by boss' wife.	
Feb 16	A Dangerous Place	Jacqueline Winspear	3	Very lightweight sleuthy thing. Female (Maisie Dobbs) with history of amateur detecting (seems this volume is long down a series on her) in Gibraltar in 1937/8 gets involved in death of communist photographer, and mixed up in Republican sympathisers in G and Madrid. OK sick bed read.	
Feb 16	The Unravelling	Emma Sky	3+	Memoir of fascinating British Jewish woman who after a feisty young life, including 10 years in the Middle East, was working at British Council when she volunteered for a 3-month stint to help sort out Iraq after the 2003 war. 10 years later she finished, having been, seemingly, the key political advisor and diplomatic-aide to the main US Generals running things there. She managed to calm tensions and recover situations where some US types' insensitivity or ignorance had created loggerheads. But it was hugely interesting to see how the US military top types spent almost all their time on politics and persuasion, rather than "fighting". She reckons that after the 2006/7 "surge" and the excellent work of her main man (General Ray Odiemo) and the US ambassador (Ryan Crocker) things were looking positive, Then came the 2010 election which the Shia-sectarian Maliki lost but insisted on (and succeeded in) challenging, and was supported (or not denied) by Obama probably due to Crocker's woeful successor (Christopher Hill).	
Feb 16	Falconer	John Cheever	5	Upper-crust, highly educated US drug addict, ambi-sexual, alcoholic brother-killer in prison in US. Started vaguely readable, but dried up in its own wordiness.	
Jan 16	The Potter's Hand	A.N. Wilson	2	Fiction spun round the family and fortunes of Josiah Wedgwood – a little-educated man who turned a modest pottery business into an internationally renowned firm in the mid-late 1700s – both as an expert potter, detailed researcher into techniques and materials, and user of good assistants. He was also connected to many well known folk – including Erasmus Darwin, celebrated doctor, poet, philosopher and scientist, and grandfather to Charles (whose mother, Susannah, was JW's daughter), James Watt, Coleridge (who DW's spendthrift sons bankrolled on drunken travels round Europe), Benjamin Franklin and David Garrick. Many of the connections were fellow members of the Lunar Society in Birmingham. Book opens with gory description of JW having his leg amputated, being an interesting parallel with Samuel Foote (also, Garrick and Franklin connected!). There are fascinating historical linkages throughout with the American War of Independence and the French Revolution (Voltaire features) – making me realise how little I know of either. This lets him tie in the search for good China kaolin/clay for the trademark white porcelain/pottery (not sure of the difference) from the Cherokee's, because an act of Parliament had restricted the Cornish variety to a single other manufacturer (something JW eventually managed to overturn). Also, ANW (who I was at school with) probably had family feed into this excellent book because his Dad was MD of Wedgwood's.	
Jan 16	After the Fire a still Small Voice	Evie Wyld	3	Tale of Aussie family over three generations of very disturbed men. Interestingly believable maleness from a female author. First generation volunteers for the Korean war and comes back emotionally damaged. His young son takes on the fathers small town bakery, but is then conscripted into the Vietnam war where he witnesses and perpetrates horrors and in his turn returns very disturbed. His son also turns out bad, beating up his girlfriend, inter alia. Might have been a good book if not so elliptically and awkwardly written.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jan 16	The Goldfinch	Donna Tartt	3	Grossly over-long rambling tale of New York teenager surviving bomb blast in museum which kills his Mum and from the rubble of which he emerges with a small priceless painting (the "real life" Goldfinch) and a ring given him by dying man. Over the next 10-15 years he becomes drug-addled, teams up with wild, also parent-less, kid, moves into the art/furniture world and is becomes enmeshed in a criminal underworld as the secret painting takes over his life.	
Jan 16	The Last Kestrel	Jill McGivering	3	A no doubt slightly biographical story of female journalist embedded with active UK forces in Afghanistan. Bit of a thriller as she arrives soon after a suicide bombing in a local town. As she delves into it, this turns out to be related to the suspicious death soon after of a young translator she likes and has worked with. Tale woven around the bigotries and mistrust between the many parties, "normal" Afghans, Taliban, middle men, UK soldiers. With a slightly surprising twist that the suicide bomb was paid for and directed by the UK commander!	
Jan 16	The Edge of Eternity	Ken Follett	4	1160-page final part of his "The Century" trilogy. This from early 60's Berlin Wall and Civil Rights to 1989 Wall down and a brief epilogue in 2008 for Obama. A very American- and Communism-centric set of world events linked by trashily simplistic intertwining of the same set of families.	
Dec 15	The washing of the spears – The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation	Donald Morris	3	Readable tome on the Zulu nation. He tells how Shaka took over a mass of fragmented tribes, and with a good deal of military skill and a lot of terror consolidated them into one "nation". Hard to follow politicking from his successors and from the emerging Boer and British resulted in the Brits invading Zululand in 1879 with initial military disaster at Isandhlwana and, later the same day, Rorke's Drift where a small British contingent managed to hold off the impis. Amazing amount of fine detail with, often, blow by blow descriptions that DM presumably unearthed from all sorts of sources. He gives a good feel for the massive practical problems of operating an army with bullock-drawn supply chains often getting extended and bogged down.	
Dec 15	Relentless	Simon Kernick	3	Page-turning thriller of perfectly ordinary guy caught up in hunt by vicious thugs for some collateral incriminating a powerful businessman which the guy has nothing to do with. Intriguing kick-off with the guy getting a frantic phone call from someone who was a good friend years ago; he hears the friend being killed just after giving guy's address to the killers.	
Dec 15	The Zahir	Paulo Coelho	4	Dull book hung round tale of rich Paris-based author whose (3rd) wife of 10 years disappears without word. A couple of years, and a girlfriend, later, he hooks up with young man from Kazakhstan who has mystical visions and who his wife met on her travels and helped come to Paris. He takes with him on a "journey to discover love" or some such rubbish to retrieve her from her retreat in the mongolian steppes.	
Dec 15	Natchez Burning	Greg Isles	5	First few chapters about horrid KKK, and worse, white thugs in the 1960s South. Was moving to present day but shaping up as an unpleasant read. Oh dear – three duds in a row!	
Nov 15	The Sunrise	Victoria Hislop	5	Cyprus tale. Couldn't get into it!	
Nov 15	City of Women	David Gillham	5	Anti-Nazi German women in WW2 Berlin. Just didn't grab me.	
Nov 15	Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End	Atul Gawande	2	Excellent book by highly readable Indian-originated American surgeon talking about death and dying (so, a pretty depressing read!). Plea to shift emphasis from continual tackling (and often worsening the life state) of the various medical mis-functions of end of life patients. Instead there should be more talking about what the patient fears and wants to achieve before death. Less nursing home, with its regimes and de-humanising, and more home/hospice care with managing pain and decrepitude but retaining home life and dignity.	
Nov 15	Freeze Frame [Enzo#4]	Peter May	3	Another Enzo Macleod on one of the unsolved murders from a journalists book of them. This followed a Nazi concentration camp butcher doctor who evaded the Simon Wiesenthal pursuers after the war and ended up on the small Ile de Groix off the Brittany coast. The mystery was of a dying-of-cancer etymologist on the island who was shot but left a trail of word-play clues for his son to follow. Son was also no longer alive to do so, but EM managed it 20 years after the event. Slightly less silly than other EM tales.	
Nov 15	Americanah	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	3	Follows young Nigerian couple from childhood lovers, their separation as she goes to USA (as poor student going on to be successful blogger) and he to UK (working menial jobs and then deported as an illegal) before they both return in later life. He becomes a wealthy businessman. Lots of talk about black women's hair (weaves, relaxers, comrows, ...) and sadly no politics, though lots on Nigerian and black US society. A very long book (nearly 500 small type pages); it would be OK if it was half the length.	
Nov 15	Early one Morning	Virginia Baily	3	Tale of loss. In 1943 Rome, an Italian woman is persuaded by his mother to take a young Jewish boy off the lorry that will take her and the rest of her family to their deaths in Auschwitz. Excellent slow unpeeling of the grief and losses both suffered over the years as the story flits between then and mid 1970s when the boy's daughter turns up in Rome (the boy having gone to drugs and been lost to the woman who treated him as her son). But sadly an excellently told story fizzled out towards the end – it felt as if the author had to finish it off in a few hours scribbling letting down the first 75%	
Nov 15	Patrick Leigh Fermor: An Adventure	Artemis Cooper	3	Biography of the enthusiast, war hero and writer. Clearly an amazing person – cut off from 1 to 4 years old from his parents in India. Then his famous (made so by two books he wrote about it in 1977 and 1986) teenage walk from Holland to Istanbul in 1933/4 where he rarely slept rough because his charm and interest in all he met got him posted from one Brideshead to another across the aristocrats and wealthy of the continent. In 1939 he left the Romanian muse he had settled with after the walk and became an Intelligence Officer, mainly in Greece (which he loved), gaining fame from kidnapping the main German general on Crete (made into the book and subsequent film "Ill Met at Midnight"). But the second 2/3rds of this bio became rather a litany of his affairs, booze-ups, stayings with well-known folk and slow gestations of his books, poems and magazine articles. AC was not the most objective of writers, being daughter of PLF's great friend John Julius Norwich and grand-daughter of Diana Duff-Cooper one of PLF's many bosom buddies.	
Oct 15	The Uncommon Reader	Alan Bennett	4	The Queen takes up reading. Starting from a chance encounter with a travelling library and a reading-enthusiast palace minion, this changes her view of life. Briefly amusing but too long, even though a very small and short book.	
Oct 15	Munich Airport	Greg Baxter	3	Intriguing, almost stream-of-consciousness, book. Not one blank line, let alone chapter, in the whole thing. Hung round (London based) son and American father waiting to fly home to US from Munich with body daughter/sister who starved herself to death. Lots of back story (often several within a page but all clearly signposted to the reader) tells more about the relationship of the family members. But then the book just stops, without explaining why the sister killed herself or why father and son are both having odd eating and behavioural disorders. Annoying.	
Oct 15	A body in Barcelona	Jason Webster	5	J didn't rate it, not sure why I started. Didn't show any promise in the first pages.	
Oct 15	H is for Hawk	Helen Macdonald	3+	Absorbing and beautifully written book by rather nerdy bird woman. Fascinated by wildlife and birds in particular since a small child, she had trained birds and worked in bird sanctuaries. The death of a much loved and massively missed father triggered her to get a Goshawk and train it. Lots of, rather self-serving introspection about her feelings and reactions as she progresses, all interwoven with detail of TH White's similar process in the 1930s, which resulted in his "The Goshawk". He was clearly a damaged (beaten mercilessly by his father and at boarding school), unpleasant, and troubled man, which chimed with her emotional chaos.	158
Oct 15	While the Gods were sleeping	Erwin Mortier	5	Supposedly book about (Belgian, I think; author is) girl in WW1 – first 50 pages were all ramblings from (I think) her older self in current times. Dishwater	
Oct 15	Underneath the Lemon Tree	Mark Rice-Oxley	3	Lucid description his year or so of clinical depression. I believe he first wrote about it in a series of Guardian articles. Surely very helpful to others in the same predicament, but most of the depression bit passed me by. But he writes excellently and almost 1/3rd of the book is the autobiography of a talented middle class guy ending up in journalism across the world and having a hugely stressful time as night editor at the Graunaid during, amongst other things, 7/7 2005.	
Oct 15	Whispering Shadows	Jan-Philipp Sendeker	2	Low-key thriller set in China/Hong-Kong. American, who has lived for 30+ years there, and a great Chinese friend (and passed-over policeman) solve the murder of an American businessman they have no connection with. Lots of back history of the horrors of recent Chinese history (Mao's purges et al) and the widespread corruption and vast wealth that remains.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rat- ing	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Oct 15	The Enchanted April	Elizabeth von Arnim	3-	Four upper middle class women, hitherto unknown to each other, rent a villa in Italy for April 1922. Very light and lightly amusing as they variously unfreeze their mannered relationships and blossom – in two cases having left husbands behind, who subsequently turn up for different reasons.	
Sep 15	The Lady in the Van	Alan Bennett	3	Amusingly recounting aspects of the later life of an eccentric Miss Shepherd who lived in an old Bedford van on Camden streets, and who then moved onto AB's driveway for the last~15 years of her life.	
Sep 15	A Woman in Berlin	Anon	3+	Diary of female journalist in the month the Russians captured Berlin and the following first month post surrender (Apr-Jul '45). Dispassionate, hugely eloquent, description of the rapes and miserable hand-to-mouth existence as she and others tried to hide from drunken (and very occasionally respectful) "Ivans".	
Sep 15	Last Train to Istanbul	Ayşe Kulin	3	Thin story (based, apparently, on real events) of Turkish diplomats and Jews in WW2. Written by Turkish female and about two sisters – one wife of assistant to Turkish PM and the other ostracised by her family after marrying a Jew, and so having moved to France as WW2 starts. The main event is a railway carriage chartered by the Turkish govt. to move Turkish and other Jews from France to Istanbul in (I think) 1944. Felt like propaganda emphasising their secular credentials, from late 1400s when Spain evicted all Jews (and seized their property and assets) and the Ottoman emperor welcomed them, to the great benefit of his realm.	
Sep 15	Empire of the Clouds	James Hamilton-Paterson	3+	More interesting than I had expected tale of the almost glory days of British jet aircraft development from, roughly 1946 to 1960. He was a schoolboy/teenage anorak enthusiast at the time, but is now damning of the lousy British management and manufacturers that let down their brilliant and ground breaking designers! It starts with the 1952 Farnborough Air show disaster where a jet performing acrobatics broke up and crashed in front of and into the spectators, killing about 30 including both pilots. The carry-on-regardless post blitz mentality meant that there was only a few minutes delay in the remaining program while they cordoned off the dead and dying and continued on with the next jet's display; Churchill even congratulated the pilot of the next display for keeping things going! Another couple of incidents that would be anathema today: - at a Paris sales trip / airshow, a prototype jet was flown up and down the Champs Elysee <i>below</i> the level of the rooftops - a Vulcan bomber on joint low-flying exercises with the US in a desert state deliberately dragged one wing through the ground creating a long gouge to show the Americans how sturdy the plane was and how good the pilot But on the whole his critique of potential wasted echoes Nevil Shute Norway's, with much blame on the unrealistically ambitious, changing and badly managed government contracting (eg: having at least four of far too many companies all designing and building for one aircraft spec).	
Sep 15	Talking to Zeus – My year in a Greek garden	Jane Shaw	2	Delightful, well-written and absorbing story of a young woman's one-year internship in a garden near Athens curated/run by a 70-year old wise, cantankerous, lovable, English woman and gardener (Joy Strataki). Sort of cross between the wonderful characters of My Family and Other Animals and one of many eccentric elderly lady characters (eg: Maud of "Harold and"). No sign of garden (Helikion) or Joy Strataki on Google (other than in this book). So I wonder if the whole tale is a fiction, but probably it is just that the names have been changed to protect the real persona – including the multi-talented Pavlos who feared the Greek mafia because of his secret wealth.	
Sep 15	The Avengers	Rich Cohen	3	Anecdotal retelling of the lives of, mainly, three young Jews (Abba Kovner, and teenage girls Vitka and Rushka) who went underground in WW2 to fight the Nazi's however they could. As the afterward says, it is a little told side of the Jewish war experience, and includes their aggressive and often vengeful stance in the face of betrayals by other Jews and Poles. The title refers to the group of about 50 survivors (all non-religious) that Kovner set up at the end of the war to go after Germans – in one (disputed) coup poisoning over 2000 Nazis in a US-run ex-concentration camp. Harrowing stuff but sadly so ramblingly written it is hard to recommend.	
Aug 15	Home	Marilynne Robinson	5	Middle of "Interesting trilogy about same set of virtuous people in 1950s back-country USA!" according to the Economist – but I found it hard to read and dull.	
Aug 15	Resistance	Agnes Humbert	3+	Memoir (in first-person diary form) of 43-year old left wing Paris museum art historian's WW2. She starts with the fall of France and the creation of a group of (mainly) museum staff who publish an anti-Nazi paper called "Resistance". They are betrayed and, after a year-long trial in Paris, most of the men are executed and she is sent to Germany. She spends the rest of the war there in a series of very grisly slave-labour camps. Despite the ghastliness of it all she maintains a cocky and wryly amusing turn of phrase and respect for the non- (or anti-) Nazi Germans she comes across.	
Aug 15	The Lady from Zagreb [BG#7]	Philip Kerr	5	First pages were silly smart-Alec narrative and no story.	
Aug 15	The Greatcoat	Helen Dunmore	5	Ghost story I think. Gave up after a few pages.	
Aug 15	Runaway	Peter May	3-	Tale of five Glasgow lads who run away to London as teenagers in 1965 and do the same again as 70-year olds, one on his last legs with cancer. The second time to tie off loose ends after murder and wild living in the swinging 60's. Good enough story structure but too little of great interest.	
Aug 15	Alone on the Ice: The greatest survival story in the history of Exploration	David Roberts	3	Description of (later) Sir Douglas Mawson's Australian Antarctic expedition 1911-13. Less well known than Scott's fatal concurrent South Pole one (1910-12), this was to explore the coast due south of Australia. Apparently subsequently lauded as the most successful ever (from a geological/mapping POV), this also had its tragedies and supreme human endurance. It is an area of massive wind christened "the home of the Blizzard", which made things even harder (there's a great photo of one of the team "walking" in a 100 mph wind at almost 30° angle using an ice axe, and a description of one person being blown 12' in the air). DM had been a (minor but respected) member of one of Scott's earlier Antarctic expeditions and two of his team (Frank Hurley and Frank Wild) were key players in Shackleton's famous 1914-17 Endurance expedition, which they joined less than a year after the DW one. DM's journey with two others resulted in both their deaths – Belgrave Ninnis falling down a crevasse and then, as their supplies and energy waned on the return leg, Xavier Mertz dying of (possibly) Vitamin A poisoning. DW scraped back to his "Main Base" camp in a gruelling 30-day trek, losing the soles of his feet in the process. When near the end, and practically starved/exhausted to death, he fell into a crevasse. His sledge somehow braked, leaving him dangling 14 foot down on a rope; he hauled himself hand-over-hand up, only to fall back again, then somehow managed to do it a second time and get out! He got back to base just hours after the expedition ship (the Aurora – captained by the "gloomy" 27-year-old John King Davis) had headed off to the west to collect Wild's team and get them back to Australia just before winter prevented further support and he ran out of coal. So DM and 6 others spent a second winter in the cramped and catastrophically problematic conditions of their hut. One of them, Sid Jeffries, turned clinically lunatic in the process (he was committed to an asylum not long after they all got back). Would have rated higher but for rather poor chronology and, at times, unclear and rambling writing. Some things that it would have been good to have better info on: 1. The mechanics of how DM's sledge braked his fall into the crevasse 2. The two skin-of-the-teeth Aurora tie ups for Wild's "Western Base". On the first dropping-off run it took so long to find and land at what became the "Main Base" that Davis/Wild only just managed to find and set up the Western one before the Aurora had to leave to avoid both being iced in and running out of coal. On the final pick up a year later (after Davis had decided to give up waiting for DM and so took the bulk of the Main base team leaving the six to wait for him) he again had severe weather problems that meant he only just managed to collect Wild's lot and return to Hobart. 3. Anything of the five(?)-man team left on Macquarie Island for the two years to act as radio relay station. For the first year they could do nothing presumably because the Main Base never managed to get its radio gear installed; in the second year there was intermittent traffic (hindered by the fact that the only operator on MB was the lunatic and deluded SJ).	

Books

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Aug 15	Frog Music	Emma Donoghue	3	Embellished account/fiction of true story of the murder of a wild tomboy, originally French, woman, Jeanne Bonnet, near a very young San Francisco in 1876. Lots of steamy details of her and her, also French, friend Blanche Beunon, a whore and showgirl much misused by her ex-trapeze artist lover/"mac" and his partner/henchman. Slightly awkwardly written, but conveyed the tale well, propounding ED's theory as to why EB was killed (the cops never prosecuted anyone, though the case ran for ages with them and in the popular press).	
Aug 15	The Ghost Runner	Paker Bilal	3	Slightly ordinary and low-key who-dunnit. Unusual in being set round a private Sudanese investigator (Makana – there's a series of books on him I believe) who lives in Cairo. This about honour killing and other backward Islamic carrying's on.	
Aug 15	The Sisters Brothers	Patrick deWitt	3-	Quirky tale of two brothers (surname: Sisters) who are contract killers in the Wild West making their way from Oregon City to gold rich California to bump off a prospector for their gangster boss. After much mayhem on the way they (sort of) side with the prospector who has discovered a miraculous if corrosive chemical to locate gold. All ends badly, but the brothers survive to return to their long-estranged Mum, one less a hand. Odd, jokey, far-too-erudite-for-their-characters language.	
Aug 15	Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail	Cheryl Strayed	2	Excellent telling of 27-year-old woman's walking the Pacific Coast Trail (PCT) through the Sierra's and Cascade's of California and Oregon and reflecting on her troubled (poor and hippiesh) upbringing and mourning for her suddenly-dead-at-46 Mum. The physical descriptions of the trail (as a deliberately lone walker she carried more than the couples/groups she met, carrying a very heavy pack and having serious problems with feet – losing half her toenails – and boots) and wonderful descriptions of the terrain, her life memories and insights are elegiac and moving.	
Aug 15	White Heat	M. J. McGrath	3	Who-dunnit set in small Innuut settlements on arctic Ellesmere Island (next to Greenland). A bit drawn out and rough round the edges (this is her first novel) but a good storyline as dogged single mid-30's woman uncovers who murdered three men (two American's she is hired to guide and one her ex-step-son). Lots of detail of (to me) grim/dull life in these cold and isolated places, along with regular digs at what the outside world and global warming is doing to them. But also not shirking from the drink and drugs problems of the Innuut.	
Aug 15	Slingshot: a Spycatcher Novel	Matthew Dunn	5	First few pages showed another dreadfully bad and massively overcomplicated "thriller". Gave up.	
Aug 15	Clever Girl	Tessa Hadley	4	Dull life story of Bristol girl's life from schoolgirl to single Mum via hippiedom and two deaths and two kids. "Articulate" but uninteresting.	
Aug 15	The Girl on the Train	Paula Hawkins	3+	Unlayering thriller of 3 confusingly similar women being manipulated by a deviously lying husband/ex-husband/lover with two deaths and lots of (not, it turns out) commuter train journeys.	
Aug 15	I am Pilgrim	Terry Hayes	2	Fiendishly clever and patient Islamic terrorist caught in the nick of time by superman super-secret US Intelligence hero. All the usual characters (not unlike a Lee Childs / Jack Reacher book) in world-spanning twin-plotted 700-page-turner. The trained doctor extremist is about to unleash smallpox on the USA by replacing flu vaccines, and in parallel a massively skilled and devious woman kills her way to a billionaires fortune.	
Aug 15	Now all Roads lead to France – the last years of Edward Thomas	Matthew Hollis	3-	Biography of the troubled (aren't they all?) WW1 poet. Readably written but since I don't much care for poetry and had scarcely heard of ET, I skip-read. He was, it seems, a very late poet. - writing his first only a couple of years before he was blown up in the 1917 trenches on is first posting. He was better known during his life as an accurate and objective critic – often of his friends' works. He and Robert Frost were very close and his coterie included WB Yeats, Rupert Brooke, WH Davies, de la Mare and Masefield. He met, but probably didn't know well, Wilfred Owen.	
Aug 15	Lumen	Ben Pastor	3	German army captain (Martin Bora) investigating murder of abbess and potential saint in just-occupied Poland; also the apparent suicide of his boorish womanising room-mate officer. And his witnessing of Nazi recrimination horrors which he tries to alert his superiors to. Good read despite the slightly irritating style of announcing some key event/fact with zero detail and then giving the detail, or allusions to it, many chapters later.	
Aug 15	The Lower River	Paul Theroux	3	60-year-old American newly estranged from both wife and daughter sells off his atrophying Boston clothes shop and returns to the remote and isolated African village he remembers with great fondness from 4 years as a Peace Corp volunteer in his youth. But he is milked of the money he has brought to help the villagers and slowly imprisoned and sucked down a spiral of increasing menace by the young corrupt head man. Reminiscent of similar grim descents and last minute escapes in his Mosquito Coast and in Edward Docx's The Devil's Garden	
Jul 15	Close Call [LC#8]	Stella Rimington	3	Another solid Liz Carlyle / Peggy Kingsolver thriller. Here chasing an arms (and people) smuggling operation across Manchester, Yemen, Paris and Berlin. Martin, LC's boyfriend (part of the French M16 equivalent) dies in the process, but there are hints in the final pages of another (CIA) bloke to take over! A refreshingly easy read after the far-too-complex and multi-plotted recent reads from Nesbo inter alia!	
Jul 15	The Iraqi Christ	Hasan Balasim	4	Short stories from Iraqi writer now based in Finland. Most pretty poor and/or hard to follow. The only thing of vague interest is the amount of gratuitous violence, brutality, sexual reference, alcohol and drug use – no doubt reflective of the ghastly violent part of the world he comes from.	
Jul 15	Nemesis [HH#4]	Jo Nesbo	3	Another ludicrously over-dramatic and long murder mystery for Oslo detective Harry Hole. In this one the threads include: - a grizzly shooting during a bank heist, which turns out to more murder than robbery - what initially appears to be suicide, then murder, then suicide of a woman he had a brief fling with years ago and which he becomes a suspect for (he was last person with her before she died) - the ever present Tom Waaler, excellent and handsome co-detective who everyone else likes but whose evil (gun running and murder) HH suspects. This also caught up with Romany crime boss voluntary doing penance in jail but still able to orchestrate his minions from there and work with HH a bit (he is suicide girl's father).	
Jul 15	Vagabond	Gerald Seymour	5	Some thriller with under cover UK (?) military folk in N. Ireland and unintelligible first couple of chapters.	
Jul 15	The Shepherd's Life	James Rebanks	3	Life and times of Lake District fell farmer. Interesting if slightly unstructured.	
Jul 15	Backlight Blue [Enzo#3]	Peter May	3	Another Enzo Macleod. Pretty silly tale of someone out to kill him but first doing so to a semi-woman-friend and one of his daughters. Killer (stolen-as-a-toddler twin who changes his identity several times) initially appears to be doing so to cover his tracks to an unsolved murder that EM knew of many years back, but then things get much more complicated ...	
Jul 15	Outlaws	Javier Cercas	5	Street gang in Spain.	
Jul 15	Mendel's Dwarf	Simon Mawer	3	Intertwined fiction of modern day distant offspring of Gregor Mendel, himself also a scientist and a dwarf. Tells of shy Mendel's rise from poor family to his painstaking study and exposition of the generational mutations of peas (often dwarf varieties), subsequently termed genetics. In SM's assessment Mendel's 1865 paper is one of the three groundbreaking papers on biology – the others being Darwin's (at around the same time, but who did not know of M's work) and Crick&Watson's DNA in 1953. The modern day dwarf also makes key genetic discovery isolating the flaw in DNA that made him a dwarf, which is well agonised around as he and a sympathetic (married) woman gets pregnant by him twice.	
Jun 15	A French Life	Jean-Paul Dubois	3-	Fictional autobio of my-age, raunchy, left-wing Frenchman married to initially successful establishment beauty running the family company. Some bits of elegiac prose and allusions to political events from the student 60's to (I'd forgotten about) explosion at the AZF factory in Toulouse shortly after 9/11, but mainly rather run-of-the-mill.	
Jun 15	Headhunters	Jo Nesbo	4	Initially slow and generally unpleasant. Selfish egotistical headhunter rambles on for ¼ of the book before a brief and quite good spiral of interest as he turns out to be a closet art thief who runs up against a vicious CEO candidate and the two slug it out to the death.	
Jun 15	Resistance	Anita Shreve	3+	Badly injured WW2 American pilot shot down over Belgium is sheltered for a month by resistance couple. The plane's ditching and Nazi search for him and other crew lead to husband disappearing and pilot and wife having brief affair as he recovers. Horrible reprisals and denunciations abound. Vivid and very believable details of the fears and deprivations and double-dealings under German occupation.	

Books

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Jun 15	Double Cross	Ben Macintyre	3+	Fascinating description of the complex (and often hard to follow) world of double and triple spies in WW2. Britain had intercepted all German spies sent to UK and turned or removed them, so they (Brits) ran the entire German spy operation in the UK carefully feeding in the misinformation they wanted. Because they also had Enigma reading all German traffic they could a) check their ruses worked and b) get key message originals to Bletchley to speed solving each day's Enigma keys. But, the key set of 5+1 spies they ran (who fabricated 20+ others) were a key part of the deceptions leading up to and following D-Day, keeping major German forces deployed in Pas de Calais (and Bordeaux) expecting the "real" invasion, instead of going to Normandy to repel the "feint" (as they had been led to believe and, it seems from senior officers interrogated after it, continued to believe long after the war). The 5+1 were a bizarre bunch and the tales remind one of the bizarre way some normal things continued throughout the war, with regular postal services being used to get (invisibly inked) letters sent to and from, and nervous German spy masters feeling secure from the Nazis in Spain or Portugal. Also, the corruptness and incompetence of the Germans was mind blowing.	
Jun 15	The Lying Days	Nadine Gordimer	3	Her first book. The maturing (from 6 to 24) of daughter of a S. African mine manager in the 40's and early 50's. Too much on her personal life and loves, but also much on her growing (anti establishment) political awakening in the nascent and early days of Apartheid.	
May 15	Slide Rule	Nevil Shute	2	Fascinating partial autobiography covering most of Nevil Shute Norway's life before WW2 (when he was ~40). He was a headstrong and inquisitive youngster, fascinated by airplanes. He talks movingly of the horrors and teenage fascination with war. His only brother was killed in the trenches at 19 and he was in the army for a year (I think), and only just missed being posted to France. Then in the later '20's he became a senior engineer at Vickers working (with Barnes Wallis) on the private team building the R100 airship "against" the government team's R101. R100 was a success (due in his view to private enterprise discipline and flexibility) but R101 crashed on its first main flight killing almost all on board (including the overbearing Air Minister who he blames for this), and stopping airship work in the UK. He is scathing on the arrogance and ignorance of the politicians and civil servants whose misdirection and un-challenged demands led to R101's crash. In the 30's he founded and was MD of an airplane company – Airspeed – which took masses of effort and all sorts of skills from his engineering ones to banker-harrying and salesmanship. There's repeated mentions of him fighting to avoid laying off staff (they started during the depression) – but reading between the lines this is to counter a cavalier reputation he got when trying to raise money (the company was in debt for its first ~5 years). Authoring was little mentioned and only done during the less frenetic parts of this period as relaxation in the evening.	
May 15	The Snow Child	Eowyn Ivey	3	Slightly supra-natural tale of girl "created" by a childless couple who moved to 1920s Alaska to forget their own childlessness. The weaving-in of the folk tale of the snow child who comes to life for a while was made tolerable by the good descriptions of the drudgery of carving a homestead out of virgin territory in the inclement Alaskan weathers.	
May 15	Catcher in the Rye	J D Salinger	3-	Immediate/conversational style narrative by rich American 16-year describing life in the day or so after he leaves his posh high school and returns to his wealthy parent's NY flat. Couldn't for the life of me see why its such a seminal book!	
May 15	After the Crash	Michel Bussi	3	Drawn out and overly garrulous thriller. A 3 month old girl is only survivor of a plane crash. Two families claim her as their grand-daughter – one hugely wealthy, one of modest means. After a court case the babe goes to the latter. But the former give a private detective an 18 year contract to find whose the babe really is. Book opens with his apparent suicide after the 18 years ... but there are endless twists, held together by his far-too-wordy "report" on what he discovered. Not the next Stieg Larsson as was claimed, but an OK read!	
May 15	The Twilight Hour	Nicci Gerard	3-	Promising first half as 95-year old nearly blind old lady employs a 20-something man to organise and tidy her possessions in her grand old house before moving to a home. Recollections and flash backs to her youth and wartime romances give a great sense of intrigue, which sadly develops into a fairly ordinary tale of love lost.	
May 15	A Buzz in the Measow	Dave Goulson	5	Readable rambling by insect nerd now living in France. I just couldn't get as interested as him in bugs and bees.	
May 15	The All-Girl Filling Station's Last Reunion	Fannie Flag	5	Nothing happened in first 30+ pages. Author wrote "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe"	
May 15	Personal [JR#19]	Lee Child	3	Better than usual, typically fast moving thriller. Rogue sniper(s) are on the loose in Europe and Reacher is the only one who can find and neutralise him/them.	
Apr 15	Reckless	William Nicholson	3	Fiction heavily interwoven with fact mainly covering the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and the louche milieu round Cliveden and Stephen Ward. Interesting how very close the crisis was. And, perversely, it was the unauthorised shooting down of an American U2 plane over Cuba hours before a potential American invasion to neutralise the missile bases that made Khrushchev blink and let Kennedy back down (albeit with a secret agreement to withdraw end-of-life rockets from Turkey – which only became common knowledge 25 years later).	
Apr 15	A Colder War	Charles Cumming	3+	Another good spy thriller. Tom Kell again; back references to "A foreign country" which this (I think) follows. Female "C" and he again in cahoots as Turkish section head dies mysteriously flying himself; his daughter and Kell get involved to uncover a US/CIA agent (who along with the daughter die in the end scramble).	
Apr 15	London Recruits – the secret war against Apartheid.	Ed: Ken Keable	3	Collection of in-their-own-words recollections from a bunch of folk who were UK based white students and youngsters in late 60's through the 80's who worked as ANC undercover operatives running leaflets and arms into South Africa. Inevitably rather repetitive (often both from a team of two would recount the same story) but interesting how well organised and generally successful it all was. Most of the all planted synchronised "bucket bombs" - which used a small explosive charge to shower leaflets at busy intersections in main cities.	
Apr 15	The Cairo Affair	Olen Steinhauer	3+	Great (until the rather complex final chapters) spy thriller. 20-year to/fro chronology shifts as young American couple move from idealism and a dark secret when they visited Serbia in 1991, to him as CIA in Cairo and her co-erced spying there and then returning there from Hungary after he is shot in front of her.	
Apr 15	A Spy among Friends (Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal)	Ben Macintyre	2	Fascinating and gripping story of Philby (with some reference to the other Cambridge spies Donald MacLean and Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt), Nick Elliott (his of-the-same "old school" class supporter within MI6 who refused to believe his long term good friend could be a spy when MacLean and Burgess skipped to Moscow in 1951 – 12+ years before Philby was finally uncovered and himself went/was allowed-to-go to Moscow) and James Angleton (CIA Anglophile also totally taken in by Philby). Quite amazing how the old school ethos of MI6 (ever at odds with the more middle/lower class MI5 which was pretty sure of Philby's traitorship from 1951 or earlier) overrode common sense and fact.	
Mar 15	Flames of Calais	Airey Neave	3	Very detailed account of the defence of Calais which delayed the Germans by vital hours enabling the BEF to get out of Dunkirk. Dobbs' book gave a better overall picture but this from someone who was there (and survived!) emphasised the heroics stubbornness that did so well despite the chaos and mismanagement (Churchill and others being up to 2 days out some key information)	
Mar 15	A load of bull	Tim Parfitt	5	Englishman goes to Madrid to help start Spanish Vogue. Feeble	
Mar 15	Naked to the hangman	Andrew Taylor	3-	Rural town detective with a past troubled by serving with the Brits in Palestine just before Israel was formed, gets mixed up again with a killer from that time.	
Mar 15	Nemesis	Philip Roth	2	Very low key, matter-of-fact, tale of a bad Polio summer in New York and nearby in 1944. 23 year old respected sports teacher with poor eyesight (and hence fretting at not being able to fight in the war where his best friends have gone and one has died) sees Polio killing his wards in down-town NY. Then, despite reluctantly leaving there for an out-in-the-country summer camp find it hits there and ultimately him.	
Mar 15	The Sentinel	Mark Oldfield	4-	Gratuitously violent (though maybe based in some truth) and too complex to follow tale of vile Franco henchman, in three timeframes – initial adoption by Franco in 1936, leader of a no-laws-apply squad doing reprisal killings in 1953 and three implausible women researching his history in 2009. Can't think why I read it to the end.	
Mar 15	Nightwoods	Charles Frazier	3	Solitary young woman looking after a remote old house suddenly has to start looking after the two young uncommunicative and traumatised kids of her recently murdered sister. Sisters murdering husband also comes to the area trying to find money he thinks his wife had and the kids may have. Woman is bolstered by young man who has inherited the old house owner and who knew her years ago. A good, gripping and menacing story sadly ruined by awkward and cryptic prose.	
Mar 15	The Critic [Enzo#2]	Peter May	4	Pretty silly and tediously oenophile story of Scottish forensic expert long-established in S. France chasing murders of several people all pickled in wine.	

Books

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Feb 15	Bertie's Guide to Life & Mothers	Alexander McCall Smith	3	Lovely amusing easy read, poking fun at Edinburgh (mainly) New Town folk and their airs and graces.	
Feb 15	A World between us	Lydia Syson	3	Readable but flimsy tale of three young Brits (nurse, and two lads who love her) in the International Brigade during the Spanish civil war. Much like many another similar book.	
Feb 15	Never Surrender	Michael Dobbs	3	Fictional rendering of Churchill's first ~3 weeks as PM from May 19 1940. Presumably all pretty accurate. I hadn't realised that he started just as Dunkirk was about to happen (and it went on for those 3 weeks). Also that the Germans screwed up by letting their Panzers head off to Paris instead of finishing off the BEF -- thereby allowing ~350k men to get away instead of the planned ~30-50k; also had they done it WC would almost certainly have been booted out by the appeasers. Just amazing the amount of serious politicking (and lying) WC had to do to keep the appeasers on board long enough.	
Feb 15	What Never Happens Aka: The Final Murder [VS#2]	Anne Holt	3	Next in the Stubo/Vikl series. 4 years on and they are married and grappling with series of gruesome celebrity murders. Again the killers story goes in parallel, which still works OK, though this one had too much overly cryptic passages, which made it harder to enjoy.	
Feb 15	Gentlemen & Players	Joanne Harris	3	12-year-old, whose Dad is the temperate porter in a private boys Grammar school (and from whom keys can be stolen), plays imposter there, living an growingly daring life, and becoming involved with another rebellious pupil. Book is told mainly in the first-persons of the 12-year-old and an old-school, about-to-retire, Classics teacher at the Grammar school. It flits to and fro between the year of the imposture and 15 years later. Slowly we find the horrid things that happened 15 years ago when the impostor returns to the Grammar school as a teacher and wreaks fatal revenge. The last 20% of the book has great dramatic and unexpected twists as all is revealed. This would have been an excellent book had the first 80% been cut in half, removing much of the common-room tedium that was slightly reminiscent of the frightful "Quatermaine's Terms".	
Feb 15	Punishment [VS#1]	Anne Holt	3	Norwegian murder mystery (first of Adam Stubo / Johanne Vik series I think). A clever villain is seizing children, killing them in an undetectable way and returning them to their parent(s). Interestingly the various threads mean that you know who did what most of the time, but not why. Let down in the final pages where several ridiculous coincidences and too much drama wraps everything up far too neatly.	
Feb 15	An Officer and a Spy	Robert Harris	3+	Excellent telling of the Dreyfus affair. Done through the person of the military man who uncovered the hideous anti-Semitic establishment cover ups, corruption fabrications and lies - Major (ultimately General and minister of War) Picquart.	
Jan 15	Rhapsody	Robert Ford	3-	Young US conductor with some dodgy past in Berlin to study at the feet of a German maestro just as/after the wall comes down. Falls for escaped-from-DDR oboist with an even more murky past. Far too much classical music to it for me.	
Jan 15	Gentleman's Relish	Patrick Gale	3	Bunch of short stories. Some good Gale-ery, but half were dull.	
Jan 15	Tatiana	Martin Cruz Smith	3	Another Arkady Renko story. Here set round Russian female investigative journalist on a follow-up to the Moscow theatre hostage crisis in the cinema and the Kursk submarine disaster. This about some dodgy refit of a useless brand new nuclear sub being arranged by villains operating out of a shell Amber company in Kaliningrad. But, again an annoying glib and implicative style jarred.	
Jan 15	The Defections	Hannah Michell	3	Well-told story of 30 year old unsettled South Korean woman (Korean father and an English mother who discarded her as a child). She is a translator at the British Embassy in Seoul and has affair with her boss, as well as self-harm and casual sex with US soldiers, as she becomes mired in cross border people/letter smuggling and slowly un-peels more of her life and her fathers and step-mothers' (whom she lives with).	
Jan 15	Pantheon	Sam Bourne	4	Ludicrously laboured repetitive style ruined a good story based on intriguing facts and conjecture. Young Oxford academic in mid-1940 finds his equally academic wife and 2-year-old son disappeared to Yale into the maw of eugenics-inspired US anti-war faction determined to prevent FDR, feared pro-war president, being re-elected in late 1940 and then likely to join Britain in the war.	
Jan 15	The Cemetery of Secrets	David Hewson	3-	Gory and vastly convoluted twin tales set in Venice of a brilliant anonymous musical score. One is about its creation in 1773 by a beautiful Jewess -- who had to dissemble just to be outside the ghetto at night and to even enter a church to play her work with a waning Vivaldi -- sponsored by what turns out to be an evil English nobleman. The other in modern times as another evil (and English!) man manipulates and kills those who have found the long-hidden score.	
Jan 15	The fall of the stone city	Ismail Kadare	3	Allegorical (I think) tale of surgeon in an Albanian city at the forefront when the Nazi's march in following the collapse of Italy in 1943. After (presumed) communist partisans fire on the arriving Nazis, tanks roll in to destroy the ancient historical city. But the German officer leading them is a student-days bosom buddy of the surgeon. The two allegedly strike some deal both to prevent the bombardment and to release 80 hostages taken and due to be shot. Years later (60's/70's?), in the thick of communist misery when (amongst other things) it appears that the German officer friend was dead weeks before the tanks arrived, the state takes against the surgeon who is imprisoned, tortured and killed by secret police allegedly trying to discover the truth of the wartime episode.	
Dec 14	The Conductor	Sarah Quigley	5	About Shostakovich in Leningrad in 1941. Gave up after ~50 pages.	
Dec 14	The Corporal's Wife	Gerald Seymour	4	Badly written, with indirect style, phony sounding jargon and little clarity. Tale of driver of Iranian general caught by British intelligence.	
Dec 14	The Narrow Road to the Deep North	Richard Flanagan	3	Grim telling-thru-fiction of the treatment of (Aussie) POW's on the Siam(Thailand)/Burma railway. There's a some explanation of the Japs' bizarre mentality: life is no better than death, to surrender is worse than to die, all edicts from home / the Emperor must be obeyed regardless because they are godlike. Also the (lesser) brutality they meted out to their own people. But ultimately the starvation and endless beatings, torture and killing of the POW's, along with vivisection of live (mainly US) prisoners (back in Japan) is just ghastly.	
Dec 14	A Spell of Winter	Helen Dunmore	3	Dark tale of brother and sister in troubled, crumbling household (mainly) just before WW1. Told by the sister with incest, (would be) murder and abortion - a depressing but very well written book.	
Dec 14	The Death Instinct	Jed Rubinfeld	3-	Boys-own style yarn woven round loads of true facts and people (1920 Wall Street bombing, an apparent psychic with secret service connections who alerted about aspects of it beforehand, Radium and cancer in painters of luminous watch dials, Freud and his work in Vienna, inter alia). Features two friends (one a doctor and ex WW2 user of X-rays, one an NY detective) and a beautiful young French acolyte of Marie Curie. The three manage to be in the thick of many international events in scrappy Buchan-esque style.	
Nov 14	The Book Thief	Markus Zusak	3-	Oblique telling, by Death, of (mainly) domestic life in WW2 Germany. Young girl and others struggling with bombings and anti-Semitism. But messy wrting style and over-long.	
Nov 14	The whole day through	Patrick Gale	3	Another told-by-flashback tale. This time two once-lovers get together again briefly in their 40's. She has returned from Paris to look after her slightly dementuring naturist ex-senior Doctor Mum and he living separately from his long-time wife. He's also a doctor specialising in AIDS/HIV/STD and there's lots on that and its casualties.	
Nov 14	The Chess Men	Peter May	3+	Last in the Lewis trilogy. More murders to solve as Fin is now back full-time on Lewis (as security manager on an estate) and they again are of, or involve, his childhood friends. Starts with finding his thought-to-be-dead-for-18-years rock-star friend's plane after the freak drainage of a loch. Plane has a body in it which is only found to not be the friend at the end of the book in the usual scramble of excitement. The best of the three books, possibly because one has already been introduced to so many of the characters.	
Nov 14	The House of Dolls	David Hewson	3	Oddball Amsterdam ex-detective brought back onto the force in tandem with young rural female detective to solve disappearance of teenager made to look like the same for his own daughter three years earlier. Lots of awkward prose and sudden and unexpected deaths.	
Nov 14	The Casual Vacancy	J.K. Rowling	5	Tedious over-peopled story about death of a local councillor in a boring provincial town. Can't think why I kept going for 150 pages (of the 500).	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Oct 14	The Devil's Garden	Edward Docx	3+	Gently paced but absorbing story set round a small group of western academics studying ants in the remote Amazon jungle. Then an intriguing Judge and vile Colonel and vicious troops arrive to "register" the local tribes – but really to kill, torture, or terrorise them into supporting the government to help Big Oil set up, and to shut down the local drug farmers. Vivid and totally believable descriptions of raw jungle life and many horrors. Much philosophical reference to western/tribal relations and how ant species work – including their initial conundrum to Darwin in the selflessness of many of them in being infertile or committing suicide for the good of the colony.	
Oct 14	The Lewis Man	Peter May	3	Second in the trilogy. Same structure as "The Black House" - present day thread solving a murder and past thread with first-person memories filling the back detail. This time Fin has quit the Polis in Edinburgh and is back on Lewis where, as a civilian, he solves another murder closely associated with his extended family there.	
Oct 14	A River in May	Edward Wilson	3	Story of life on the ground in the Vietnam war. Lots of gory detail and reinforcement of the futility of the US's situation. Revolves round 23-year old US officer who in the end is so sickened by the brutality the US inflicts on civilians that he turns traitor – though you never hear what happens after that.	
Oct 14	The Black House	Peter May	3	Thriller set in Lewis let down by unlikely revelations at the end. Lewis-born cop returns to the island after ~18 years to help when a nasty murder has similar MO as one he investigated in Edinburgh. He knows all those involved and there are lots of flashbacks, with a well-described 2-week annual cull, by a select band of Islanders, of seabirds on a remote rock in the Atlantic a key part.	
Oct 14	The Corners of the World [GlobeNotWorld?JM#2]	Robert Goddard	3-	Part two of the trilogy. Just as complicated but more wooden and less interesting than "The Ways of the World"; still the hero Max getting out of scrape after scrape in Buchan-esque style. But, I'll still try and read the last one whenever it comes out.	
Oct 14	Old Enemies	Michael Dobbs	3	Kidnapping thriller with Nelson Mandela's "secret diaries" at its heart, and villains contracted by a nasty Mugabe follow-on Zim leader trying to suppress them to hide his past. All sorted by he-man MP ex-SAS type egged on by his ex-lover the boy's mother!	
Sep 14	Salmon Fishing in the Yemen	Paul Torday	3-	Feeble and laboriously-written light novel of fishing boffin getting involved with on/off-UK-government-encouraged project.	
Sep 14	Telegram from Guernica	Nicholas Rankin	3+	Biography of an exceptional journalist and military (propaganda) man, George Steer. Best known for his eye witness report on the Guernica bombing, but the book covers his times in Ethiopia before that and during its liberation from the Italians at the beginning of WW2. Sadly he died near the end of the war while in Burma/India.	
Sep 14	Starting Over	Tony Parsons	3-	Middle class cop has heart transplant and starts behaving oddly round his north London family. Bit weird but some nice observations on parent/child relationships on the way.	
Sep 14	The Envoy [Catesby#1]	Edward Wilson	3	Slightly laboured spy tale. This has Kit Fournier as US spy in the UK and some horribly complex stuff in the mid-1950's with nuclear weapons at Orford Ness and multiply-crossing spies US/UK/Russian with ludicrous love-lives. He ends having to hide away for 12 years in the Falklands (where he is a minor character in the subsequent "Midnight Swimmer").	
Sep 14	The Lie	Helen Dunmore	3	Disturbed Cornish man survives WW1 trenches but is tormented by memories of his best friend dying in front of him. He returns to a remote cottage outside his village and starts to rebuild himself with visits to best friends sister, now alone in the family house, but finally fails to make it.	
Aug 14	An Act of Treachery	Ann Widdecombe	5	Dull girly thing in 1940 Paris	
Aug 14	Colloden	John Prebble	3	Telling of this battle and the ensuing grisly clearances by the victorious "Billy" Duke of Cumberland and his men. All from more or less verbatim accounts JP trawled through, with some embellishments of his own. Lots of savagery on both sides. Sadly the battle details weren't great. One got the impression that it was mainly lost by the Rebels being so knackered; he made very passing mention of the side-stabbing technique that Billy Connolly explained so clearly in his TV show.	
Aug 14	Black Roses	Jane Thynne	4	Dull thriller set in 1933 Berlin. Young English actress goes there to escape home and gets mixed up to top notch Nazi's and British spying. JT is married to Philip Kerr, and though the feel resembles his Bernie Gunther books, her style is wooden and vacuous.	
Aug 14	April in Paris	Michael Wallner	3	German army translator working for the SS in Paris in ~1943 falls for French Resistance girl (after inexplicably deciding to wander wartime Paris streets in civilian clothes in his spare time, contrary to army rules). He gets mixed up with her work, is caught and becomes a victim of the brutal interrogations he had to witness. Though nothing one hasn't read before (and episodes reminiscent of Koestler's Darkness at Noon, which MW credits), these carry additional horror by being described through the eyes of the perpetrators (and MW is also German).	
Aug 14	Birds, Beasts and Relatives	Gerald Durrell	3+	Delightful companion to My Family and Other Animals recounting other episodes of his family's life on Corfu. Wonderfully amusing and eloquent language.	
Aug 14	Phantom [HH#9]	Jo Nesbo	3	Ostensibly the last Harry Hole nonsense (though his heart is still just beating as the book closes). Over-tempo not-actually-a-cop-now HH survives several fatal situations as he breaks up Oslo drug cartel.	
Aug 14	Thursday's Children [FK#4]	Nicci French	3	Another ludicrously over-dramatic case for psychoanalyst/super-woman Freida Klein. This time revealing, when a young rape victim from her home town comes to her, that FK was raped by the same person 20 years before. Again the evil Dean Reeve character is somewhere in the background. Will we get to the end of the week before she finally nails him?	
Aug 14	A Perfectly good man	Patrick Gale	2	Life story of a Cornish priest laid out in a series of, effectively, short stories. The chapters are not chronological and each stands alone with no dependency on the others as the secrets and excitements of the lives on the main characters are slowly unfolded. There are a couple of dramatic moments, but the unpeeling story would be compelling without them.	
Aug 14	A Delicate Truth	John le Carre	3	Great Secret Service / Foreign Office spy thriller. Whistle blowers try to expose a miserably failed hush-hush anti-terrorist operation in Gibraltar. Excellent story let down by an odd, awkward and gratuitously irritating broken sentence writing style.	
Aug 14	Let my People go Surfing	Yvon Chouinard	3	Manual/mantra of Patagonia founder on how to create and run an ethical multi-national business. Heavy on company PR and slightly hippie philosophies. Touched too lightly on the inevitable (?) compromises and mistakes and not at all on how they grew from his one-man blacksmithing of a handful of carabina's and pitons to a world-wide company. Interesting that a newspaper article I saw a few days later charted public recognition of ethical companies with Unilever at ~35% and Patagonia second with ~5%.	
Aug 14	The Silkworm [CS#2]	Robert Galbraith	3+	Second and equally good Cormoran Strike who-dunnit. Similar structure and too many hard-to-keep-a-handle-on suspects. This set in the world of authors and publishing. Again CS solves the crime ¾ way through and spends the rest of the book working out how to prove it to the antagonistic police before all is revealed in the last pages. The delightful Robin plays a larger part.	455 2014
Aug 14	After Leaving Mr Mackenzie	Jean Rhys	3	Thin (and heavily autobiographical, according to the intro) tale of mid 30's woman leaving 1920's Paris after her latest man stopped funding her. She returns to London in time to see her long-estranged mother die. Though rather gloomy, it is well written and has story and interest, unlike the dire Sagasso Sea. Why it took the latter, published 36 years later, to make her name I don't know!	
Aug 14	Cockroaches [HH#2]	Jo Nesbo	3	Another fast-moving and, towards the end, ludicrously complex multi-murder case for superman Hole. This in Bangkok amongst ex-pat Norwegians into paedophilia, construction scams and money dealing. Becoming a bit formulaic.	
Jul 14	Wide Sargasso Sea	Jean Rhys	4	Dull and hard to read story of "white Creole" woman and English husband in mid 19th century Caribbean island. Goodness knows why this book brought her fame!	
Jul 14	The Cuckoo's Calling [CS#1]	Robert Galbraith	3	Who-dunnit introducing one-legged private detective Cormoran Strike finding out who pushed famous young model to her death from her fancy London apartment. Slightly convoluted and overly detailed plot; I'm sure I would have suspected the author (JK Rowling) was a woman even if I hadn't know her fame.	449 2013
Jul 14	The Bat [HH#1]	Jo Nesbo	3	First Harry Hole. He's in Sydney helping solve murder of Norwegian barmaid. Falls for another Scandi lady there who ends up gets killed by same person (due to HH using her as bait). The usual fast moving and, towards the end, silly thriller.	
Jul 14	Smile Please	Jean Rhys	3-	Not very interesting partial auto-biography (put together by a friend after she died). Mainly her Dominican childhood and very early days in England. Read it because she was JB's favourite author. But, having had my interest lightly piqued, will persevere with one or two of her known novels.	

Books

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Jul 14	A Possible Life	Sebastian Faulks	4	Five rather flat short stories. The first – about a non-emotional bachelor school master from childhood to oldish age – had a significant section with him in a Nazi POW camp much of which sounded as if it had been lifted almost verbatim from:-	
Jun 14	I Was a Boy in Belsen	Tomi Reichental	3	Grim autobiography of (at the time) 7 year old Slovak boy who spent about a year in Belsen. His immediate family all survived, but dozens of his wider family and friends all died. Interesting that this episode started in 1944 when Germany demanded that Slovakia sent its Jews to camps – and how they continued maintaining them even when in 1945 the Russians were sweeping in, and they had to shut down Auschwitz, sending its inmates to, inter alia, Belsen.	
Jun 14	A Mad World My Masters	John Simpson	3	Random discourses on his experiences and thoughts. Not chronological, as "Strange Place, Questionable People" was, and just went on a bit too much. Good value if he was rambling on in a pub, but less engaging as a book.	
Jun 14	Miracles of Life. An autobiography	J G Ballard	3	Slightly thin and repetitive autobio. Told you some of where he'd been over his life and what he thinks of various artists and writers. But somehow didn't get a good feel for him. Lots about his various books. Might make me read "Crash" and/or "The Kindness of Women", and even re-read "Empires of the Sun".	
Jun 14	The Redeemer [HH#6]	Jo Nesbo	3	More Harry Hole – less drunk and disorderly. This time chasing a less than usually interesting or believable maniacal killer in the Salvation Army. Seems the chronology of his HH books is: The Bat, Cockroaches, The Redbreast [R], Nemesis, The Devil's Star [R], The Redeemer [R], The Snowman, The Leopard, Phantom, Police	
Jun 14	Americana – the Kinks, the Road and the Perfect Riff	Ray Davies	4	Dull and jumbled. Sad that such a wonderful song-writer is so uninteresting and self-centred; no wonder he's had such a turbulent private life. Far too much about music contracts and recording process for the man in the street. Can't think why I finished the book, but I did learn (more than I wanted to) about his serious mugging and shooting in New Orleans in 2004, which must have passed me by.	
May 14	The Midnight Swimmer [Catesby#2]	Edward Wilson	2	Hugely complex spy-world thriller set in time of Cuban Missile Crisis. Hero (Catesby) rubs shoulders with everyone from Fidel and Che to Robert Kennedy and various significant Russians. Seems heavily laced round fact (not sure if the destruction of most Russian missile skill and technology in the "Nedelin Disaster", leakage of which is a key part of the plot; to avoid strikes by gung-ho US military, MI5 do not want them to realise how weakened the Russians were). With so many double-agents and mis- and real-informing it was hard to follow the detail, but an excellent read. Lots of back reference to Catesby's earlier life which is presumably covered in the other books.	
May 14	The Devil's Star [HH#5]	Jo Nesbo	3	Complex Norwegian police thriller with the same drunk and almost-out-of-the-police hero finding a serial killer despite (and this time nailing one of) massive police corruption in his way. Several false suspects change to the ultimate villain being having a pretty daft rationale. But, despite some gore, mainly good suspense with things left open for yet another Harry Hole book.	
May 14	Wildwood. A journey through Trees	Roger Deakin	3	Lyrical descriptions of travels and thoughts and wildlife, particularly trees. Clearly a lovely guy. Did go on a bit.	
May 14	The Ways of the World [JM#1]	Robert Goddard	3+	Thriller set mainly in 1919 Paris during post WW1 peace treaty meetings. Senior British contingent bloke found dead apparently jumped from his mistress's flat. But his war flyer ace son thinks otherwise and in the end finds who did. Slightly irritatingly some threads left for a follow-on book, which should also be a good read!	
May 14	Stieg. From Activist to Author	Jan-Erik Pettersson	3	I thought this was going to be a biography of Stieg Larsson. In fact it is a run through various things he was interested or involved in, often with little reference to him, including: - Grenada uprising and invasions (Maurice Bishop et al, ~1983?). SL and his partner Eva started a Swedish/Grenada liaison society - State of Swedish publishing and crime authors over the last 60+ years - Sweden's well organised and extensive neo-Nazi and Racist organisations and history.	
May 14	Bad Pharma	Ben Goldacre	5	Readable enough expose of the miserably selective and company-financed state of drug research and therefore cost and use. I didn't get far through it because his chatty style became irritating and very repetitive. I probably should have persevered!	
Apr 14	The Outsiders	Gerald Seymour	3	Good thriller with ageing female MI5 team leader getting off-the-record revenge on brutal killer of one of her young proteges. The killer and his associates are vicious Russian/Serbian Organised Crime world and the main action is in Spain/Gibraltar. Nice mix of characters, but with slightly silly denouement.	
Apr 14	Those Wild Wyndhams	Claudia Renton	4	Boringly written bio of aristocratic family ~1870-1920. Not helped by many having the same Christian names and author failing to distinguish them.	
Apr 14	Strange Place, Questionable People	John Simpson	3	Run through his life and times from starting at the BBC in 1966 until late 1990s. Rather too much about him and his (self-admitted) pomposities than the bigger picture of the events he was reporting on. Jon Snow's Shooting History was a better book.	
Apr 14	The Dealer and the Dead	Gerald Seymour	3-	Fine thriller, let down with a silly ending. Charming arms dealer gets hooked back in for a deal (the only one in his career) where he'd let down the buyers – Croatian fighters during the war 19 years earlier – and they take out a contract to have him killed.	
Apr 14	Private Battles	Simon Garfield	3-	Assembly of diaries of four articulate UK-based people 1940-1945. All written as part of a public process (Mass Observation Archive) and each writer (early 20's ex soldier with leftist wing views, the others, all late 30's, degreed single secretary in Glasgow, female would-be writer in Slough, and husband and scientist/engineer in Hertfordshire) covered public/war events well amongst the minutiae of daily life. Interesting things: - how little respected/loved Churchill was - how alien Americans were - how many bombs and doodle-bugs the southerners saw and heard but for how little loss of life - how wide was the general opinion (as reported by the four, rather than their own) that the Germans should be severely treated ("all should be shot") – particularly as news emerged as the camps were liberated in 1945	
Mar 14	An Englishman in Madrid	Eduardo Mendoza	3	Well written and translated story of mid-30's English art expert who goes to Madrid on the eve of the Spanish Civil War. There he mixes with the aristocracy and "real" folk – such as José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the leader of the Falange – and is ostensibly due to value a previously unknown Velazquez painting. Most of the book is good fiction with interesting art interludes and some slightly over-egged derring-do. But the denouement is scrambled and increasingly silly.	
Mar 14	The Daughters of Mars	Thomas Keneally	3	Illuminating view of WW1 in the Dardenelles and France following two Aussie sisters who go there as nurses and witness the horrors and futilities of war in graphic detail. Would be an excellent book if it wasn't for dreadfully awkward prose, which makes you re-read lots of sentences.	
Feb 14	The Septembers of Shiraz	Dalia Sofer	3+	A middle-class Jewish family in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution in ~1982. The father is imprisoned and tortured by an almost mindless bureaucracy, suffering at the hands of those wanting retribution for what they went through from the Shah's people. His wife and 9-year old daughter (DS was 10 when her family fled Iran in 1982) see life on the streets, with people turning on each other, and the family's employees (he was a jeweller) looting his entire business. Ends with his release (by giving his jailers all his savings) and them escaping to Turkey en route to join his son who they got out to New York earlier.	
Feb 14	Starshine	John Wilcox	5	Competent but dull WW1 soldiering and sweethearts. Gave up after more pages than it merited.	
Feb 14	Typhoon	Charles Cumming	3	Less good than his others. Youthful MI6/SIS spy in Hong Kong, then some years later, mainland China grappling with personal CIA friend who is running an evil destabilise China scam. Too much inter-personality stuff and not enough action or believable politicking	
Feb 14	Equilateral	Ken Kalfus	3	Strange tale of massive project to build a 300-mile-a-side equilateral triangle in the Sahara in the late 1800s to fill with petrol and light to contact Martians. Feel of a latter-day Tower of Babel.	
Feb 14	The Trinity Six	Charles Cumming	3+	Another good thriller. This mixing the fiction that there was a 6 th Cambridge MI6 mole/spy (alongside Philby, McLean, Burgess, Blunt and Cairncross) who in his 90's wants to ditch the dirt on the fact that the now president of Russia (a Putin-alike) tried to defect just before the end of the Cold War. All action follows a London academic who gets caught up when his best friend is murdered by the Russians and manages with not-quite Indiana Jones derring-do.	
Jan 14	The Einstein Girl	Philip Singleton	3-	Laborious fact-inspired fiction round Einstein's (possibly illegitimate) daughter born to his first wife. Daughter turns up with full amnesia and almost drowned near Berlin, where a psychiatrist gets too involved with her. Some well told heavy duty maths+physics.	
Jan 14	The Passport	Herta Muller	5	Awkward thin book, one chapter per page, which didn't grab me.	

Books

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Jan 14	One Day	David Nicholls	3	Life of a couple seen on the same day of the year over ~20 years. Starting with a fling on their Edinburgh graduation day and eventually getting together before tragedy. A much better book than the film was, but mainly because of the girl; the guy was far too hedonistic and self-centred.	
Jan 14	A foreign country	Charles Cumming	3+	Above average spy thriller. Newly appointed female MI6 chief is scammed by French equivalent (?DGSE) – by creating an imposter for her adopted-at-birth-and-never-seen-since only child. Well crafted suspense, let down by unnecessary flurry of violence in final scene.	
Jan 14	The Expats	Chris Pavone	2	Great thriller. Slow un-peeling of the hidden lives of an ex-CIA woman and her cyber-security whizzo husband. Largely based in the US expat community in Luxembourg and Europe. No violence and great suspense through the many changes in who is/knows what, with a rapid finale which I didn't follow all of!	
Jan 14	Winter of the World	Ken Follett	3-	Over-long (800+ pages) continuation from the Fall of Giants. Several families interweave across the world to let him tell the story of WW2 and the years before and after.	
Dec 13	Any human heart	William Boyd	3	Life memoir of fictional author covering most of the 20 th century. He's a somewhat pompous character and knows anyone who was anyone in the art and literature world. But its well told and gives a good feel of a life well lived through its end.	
Dec 13	The Secret Rooms	Catherine Bailey	3	Another highly readable thriller-like telling of a weird aristocrat family's lives – this time the 9 th Duke of Rutland. While researching a different book, she finds three distinct and intriguing gaps in his voluminous and carefully archived papers, which he clearly destroyed deliberately. As ever she over-does the drama of the mundane and conjectural dragging out of the denouement (war shirking, and preserving the male blood line at all cost). Sickening to hear how much these people could manipulate Kitchener, Sir John French and other senior WW1 generals who had much more important things to do.	
Dec 13	Three Stations	Martin Cruz Smith	4	Badly written thriller set in miserable low-life Moscow.	
Dec 13	The Tiger's Wife	Tea Obreht	3-	Disappointingly surreal tale set in anonymous ex-Yugoslavian countries. Melange of folk tales, current day events touching on post-civil-war horrors and life-of-Pi-like anthropomorphism.	
Dec 13	The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival	John Vaillant	3+	Splendidly told story of the hunt for a man-eating tiger in far-Eastern Russia. Thriller-like unfolding because of the animal's almost human-like intelligence (a generic feature as he tells it), including the carrying of grudges. Masses of background information (probably too much) about life in the brutal cold of Siberia and Soviet Russia (the episode was in 1997, but much of the history and culture of the protagonists goes back decades). Surprising how Soviet ethos both trashed nature (one Stalin era paean saying how the wilds should be tamed with concrete and asphalt) and established wild-life preservation units manned by remarkably altruistic men. Also lots on the (to us) miserable life under the Soviets (eg: in Afghanistan having no first aid kits, wounds were held together with strips cut from food tins). Fascinating how extremely precise the trackers can be in their forensics as they follow animal and human trails.	
Dec 13	Spies	Michael Frayn	3	Very evocative tale of childhood told by an adult. He is one of two young (~7/8?) boys in WW2 London suburbs who start "spying" on one of their Mum's thinking she is a German spy. Rather too wordy (tho' a slimish book) and some poor-, or non-, sequiturs (eg: the apparent suicide of the rough sleeping "German" is only mentioned as a passing comment at the end of a related scene; also the talk of steam trains and live rails in the same breath). But the fears, fantasies and obsessions of the way pre-pubescent boys rang very true!	
Nov 13	Killing Floor [JR#1]	Lee Child	3	First in the Jack Reacher series (tho' I thought his brother – who dies in this one – was in a later one!). Usual gripping bloody stuff, with a better than usual plot about industrial-scale US bank note counterfeiting by the usual bunch of vicious psychopaths. Made my first eRead fairly decent.	
Nov 13	In Cold Blood	Truman Capote	2+	Superb almost fly-on-the-wall telling of the callous murder of a family of four by two bright misfits. TC followed the case closely and interviewed most of the players at length and gives an almost thriller style to the unfolding of the story. According to Casey Cep inter alia, Harper Lee worked with/for TC (they were great friends, having grown up together in rural Alabama) getting much crucial info that TC was too idle to do himself.	
Nov 13	Waste: Uncovering the Global Food Scandal	Tristram Stuart	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> illuminating, if too figure-full and repetitive, discourse on food waste, including - as consumers we tend to want to over-supply, thinking lack of offered food shows inhospitality or poverty - Supermarkets think we shy away from empty shelves, so overstock - they also often push back unsold stock on their suppliers in one way or another - and often don't give binding/firm orders to suppliers - we should allow food to be used as pig-swill again 	
Nov 13	Valentine Grey	Sandi Toksvig	3-	Weak fiction of girl who takes her gay cousin's place and goes to fight in Boer War. Some interesting period info (half is set in seedy/gay London circa 1900) and glimpses of the war.	
Nov 13	Cry Argentina (Saving South Georgia)	Ian Sykes	2	Vivid, occasionally tangled, description of the lead up to the Falklands war and the recapture of South Georgia a couple of days after Port Stanley was taken. I didn't explain (maybe nobody knows) why on earth the Argies took SG in the first place as a prelude to the Falklands.	
Oct 13	The Crimson Petal and the White	Michel Faber	5	I couldn't get engaged during the first ~50 pages of this 800+ page monster about seedy life in Victorian London.	
Oct 13	The Geneva Trap [LC#7]	Stella Rimington	3+	Another solid Liz Carlyle. N. Korean's hacking US/UK drone control software development being run in super secrecy by the MOD. Villain based in Geneva with operation in Marseille.	
Oct 13	Dissolution	C J Sansom	4	Dull detective story set in medieval Sussex monastery and London. Avoid any more of these Matthew Shadlake tales.	
Oct 13	The Dreadful Judgement	Neil Hanson	4	Over-sensational and repetitive "first person" account of the 1666 Great fire of London. I was puzzled by his endless statements about it racing from area. These conflict with my knowledge of City streets – which would imply that it took longer than its reputation and than you would expect from its tinder dry wooden buildings.	
Oct 13	Berlin Noir : March Violets; The Pale Criminal; A German Requiem. [BG#3-4-9]	Philip Kerr	4	Final OD of this increasingly annoying author and his smart-Alec slangy detective Bernard Gunther. Masses of gore, sex, and, particularly in the last of this trilogy, unfollow-ably complex double-double-double... dealing.	
Oct 13	A Hundred and One Days - A Baghdad Journal	Asne Seierstad	3	Female Norwegian journalist's diary-like report of her life in Baghdad before during and just after the US-led invasion and toppling of Saddam. More personal-level detail than coverage of political/military events (tho' those are mentioned en passant). Very pro-Iraqi and anti invasion in first two parts with some balance in the last part as many Iraqi's no longer feel constrained by Baathist/Saddam-ery and say how relieved they are to be free and what horrors they suffered under him.	
Sep 13	Waiting for Wednesday [FK#3]	Nicci French	3	Another in the series with the increasingly unbelievable Psychotherapist Frieda Klein. The authors are overly obsessed with cramming in a complex plot that only this woman can solve, ensuring she gets to kill someone legitimately or accidentally. Also maintains the lurking presence of the Dean Reeve character (who supposedly committed suicide in the first of the series, but who only-she-knows did).	
Sep 13	The Worst Journey in the World	Apsley Cherry-Garrard	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long book by one of the survivors of Scott's last journey written about 10 years after – quoting extensively from diaries and memories of the others. I skip-read much of the science, but vivid impressions of the grim and painful experiences of their ~3 year stay in Antarctica – well laced with great English stoicism from a bygone era. Some justification and explanation of what went wrong for the Polar team (it was only one aspect of a scientific research project – much of which was successful), including: - with hindsight, a poor route (Amundsen took a more direct one) - ponies caused massive amount of work and weren't of use in the end (they'd all died or been shot and fed to dogs long before the Polar push) - not enough food (particularly for larger bodied men, such as Evans who died on the Polar stint) - leaking oil cans meant shortage of oil at the end - unexpectedly bad weather Sadly the book had only 3, very poor, maps; I printed some from the web to help me.	
Sep 13	The Photograph	Penelope Lively	3	Unravelling (somewhat) the relationships between a couple of families when a widowed man finds a photo of his wife indicating that she had an affair with his brother-in-law.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Sep 13	The Colony of Unrequited Dreams	Wayne Johnston	2	Absorbing mixture of fiction and fact of Newfoundland's history. Set round Joe Smallwood (the real first premier of NF after it separated from Britain to Confederation with Canada in 1949, which he engineered) and a delightfully intriguing fictional woman journalist "Fielding". The two (he from a dirt poor background, she from a privileged but divorced family) are expelled in their teens from a fancy school and have unrequited love-hate relationship. She has a wonderful ironic turn of phrase (one review calls her Dorothy Parker-like). All this set interspersed with references to NF's history from a key source of fish (only?) in the 1500s - surprisingly rich enough to justify the British the long voyages, and summer-only residence (winters being too harsh for pretty most folk to live there) - to eventual separation. Probably only really worth a 2 to someone interested in the history, but some lovely sentimental and almost poetic bits woven throughout.	
Sep 13	Mervyn Peake's Vast Alchemies. The illustrated biography.	CG. Petr Winington	3	Thorough, I assume biography marred in part by author's constant carping at errors in a competing/earlier one! Hadn't realised how prolific MP was in poem and art+illustration. Or that he died young of Parkinson's (in 1968) which he suffered badly and progressively from 1950-ish. Sadly, despite its title, there weren't enough of his illustrations.	
Aug 13	Sunset	Douglas Reeman	3	WW2 naval story, starting in the UK but mainly Hong Kong and the far east. Ending with Japan's invasion of HK on the day they hit Pearl Harbour. Slightly too much on naval ranks, but lots of excitement and sentimental and tragic sub-plots.	
Aug 13	Four Days in June	Iain Gale	5	Fiction around Waterloo - just didn't seem to get going.	
Aug 13	The Childhood of Jesus	J.M.Coetzee	3	Strangely compelling story of man and 5-year old (almost savant) boy starting life in an anonymous Spanish-speaking Marxist/Socialist state after escaping (?) with many others from somewhere. The two are unrelated, but man is looking after boy who has no parent with him and has lost a letter saying who he is. Man is fixated on finding the boy a mother, even if not the biological one. He does so and strange relationships evolve in an almost surreal world.	
Aug 13	The story of my Assassins	Tarun J. Tejpal	4	Hard to follow "based on actual events" story of Indian journalist famous for exposing government corruption being allegedly saved by police from an assassination attempt by 5 young villains he knows nothing about. Endless vile violence and almost gratuitous brutality described in the (possibly realistic) miserable backwater criminal lives of the 5.	
Aug 13	A week in December	Sebastian Faulks	4	Uninspiring set of stories of 7 or so people with very slightly overlapping lives. Weak ending as terrorist bottles out and vernal money man looks set to make a killing.	
Aug 13	Dear Lupin. Letters to a wayward son	Roger Mortimer and Charlie Mortimer	3	Amusing long-running set of letters from an old-school upper-crust horse-racing journalist. Lovely irreverent style. Went on a bit and partly let down with the illumination as to what a spoilt wastrel the recipient son is/was.	
Aug 13	Churchill's Hour	Michael Dobbs	3	Fictional (but heavily laced with fact and quotes) account of Churchill and close family in the year or so leading up to Pearl Harbour. Mainly focussed on his constant efforts to get the US into the war and positing that a) he knew PH was coming two weeks before and kept mum to get US in, and b) he fed misinformation to Germany, via a French spy who was a maid on his staff, this triggering Hitler's declaration of war on US days after PH.	
Aug 13	Saturn over the Water	J.B.Priestly	4	Unclear and stilted 60's story of a man uncovering and overcoming some shady international organisation wanting to rule the world in some way. Lots of jibes against Capitalism and Consumerism but a very tedious read.	
Aug 13	Something like a House	Sid Smith	2	A brief book of two parts. First the savage, brutal, worse-than-basic life of a second class race (Miao) in China where a Scottish man ends up after deserting during the Korean war and with whom he is semi-involuntarily, incarcerated. Last 10% about Chinese Eugenics and development of chemical weapons (racially targeted to preserve pure Chinese only) - for which the Scot was a guinea pig - the more vile parts attributed to the Japanese who did the same to the Chinese. Powerful and realistic sounding description of the miserable existence of backwater Chinese - one wonders where SS got his information; his one-paragraph bio shows little background in writing or China.	
Aug 13	Trustee from the Toolroom	Nevil Shute	3	Delightfully dated boys-own/jolly-good-chaps 1950s tale. Hugely unassuming creator of model engines and the like and writer about them in, and main contributor to, the weekly <i>Miniature Mechanic</i> gets sucked into complex scheme to recover diamonds. These he inadvertently helped his sailor brother-in-law stash in his yacht as BIL tried to emigrate to Canada, but died in fluke storm near Tahiti. He manages to recover all with great skill and masses of help from all sorts of folk around the world who respect him for his MM pieces. Not a nasty person in the book and great sailing and engine descriptions!	
Aug 13	The Girl Who Fell From The Sky	Simon Mawer	3	Fictionalised take of SOE woman, with various real characters inter-twined (Buckmaster, Col. Peters, (Vera) Atkins). But more an emotional story (as naïve young girl finds her feed on first/only stint in France) than much about the war and resistance horrors.	
Aug 13	Out of the Sum	Robert Goddard	3	Good holiday thriller of the disreputable-old-soak-comes-good-and-hunts-the-baddies type (he being Harry Barnett - of whom there are a few other books). Thankfully the main story was gripping and a good read. The official "plot" about mathematicians and extra dimensions being able to predict the future was rubbish. With a good plot this would have been a 2!	
Aug 13	Complicit	Nicci French	3	Very well crafted murder mystery. Good Before/After structure starting with the body and implicating that the narrator (surreptitious girlfriend of the dead musician) did it. But many a twist before the (slightly flat) denouement.	
Jul 13	Devil May Care	Sebastian Faulks	3	Pretty run of the mill James Bond (sic - he was commissioned to write another in the style of Ian Fleming) thriller. I can't really remember the Fleming books, but this tale seems to fall between their style and the over-load of the films, and has more explicit violence than was in the books, I'm sure!	
Jul 13	Alias Olympia	Eunice Lipton	3	Easy read but weak tale of American art historian woman searching for details of the life of the model for Manet's <i>Olympia</i> . (Victorine Meurent) Not sure how much was fact and what was fiction.	
Jul 13	Then Again	Diane Keaton	3	Stream-of-consciousness self-therapy biography of herself and her mother. Mum was an extraordinary woman (as are/were the rest of the family - Hall being the family name and Woody Allen deliberately basing parts of Annie Hall on them). Mum wrote voluminous diaries and sent (and un-sent) letters around which this book is structured, along with DK's own outpourings and revelations - particularly ~5 years of bulimia in the '70s which no-one (apparently) knew about until this book. Despite (passingly mentioned) relationships (with, inter alia, Allen, Warren Beatty and Al Pacino) she remains single and sounds more earth-mother, now than fey Annie, and adopted two kids when she was over 55 who she dotes on.	
Jul 13	Loving Peter	Judy Cook	4	Not well written inside story by Peter Cook's longest serving wife. She seemed remarkably un-put-off by his increasingly vile and drunken behaviour to everyone around him. She seems shallow, name-dropping and weak. Couldn't understand why they lasted so long together!	
Jul 13	Waging Heavy Peace	Neil Young	5	Pompous rambling start - only read a few pages and gave up!	
Jul 13	Shooting History	Jon Snow	3+	Highly readable romp through (mainly) politics ~1970-2003. After a year VSO-ing in Uganda and leftist-wing student years (he seemed to be at the same Old Trafford S. Africa demo that I was which didn't make sense given he's 4 years older) his journalism took him to many key places and events. My only quibble is that the chronology wasn't well flagged as he dives around the world and to's and fro's with time.	
Jul 13	The Girl You Left Behind	Jojo Moyes	2	Surprisingly good tale. Starts in German-occupied 1916/17 France where local woman enduring brutality (that sounds unrealistic, and more like Nazi era) from occupiers, including (less brutal) officer who admires her artist husband's portrait of her. Time warps to and from 20xx, where young widow has the portrait and is sued for its recovery as being, allegedly, war spoils. Lots of intrigue, and parallels of misrepresented women, as the 20xx one is also involved with the guy commissioned to see her.	
Jun 13	Dominion	C J Sansom	2	Great thriller set in a 1952 following May 1940 when Hastings and not Churchill took over from Chamberlain, and surrendered to Hitler. Britain is then a vassal of SS-run Germany, with a dying Hitler (about to throw it into near civil war between SS and rest) and still fighting a debilitating war with Russia. The hook for the thriller (scientist who's heard a secret about USA's success with the Bomb) is very weak and the plot rather strung out, but a good read with lots of believable detail about life in a different world.	

Books

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Jun 13	The Man who Broke into Auschwitz	Denis Avey with Rob Broomby	1	Amazing and well told autobiography of feisty guy who having fought for a year in N. Africa (including routing the Italians at Tobruk) was captured when the Germans arrived. He then had an amazing journey ending up at the IG Farben / Auschwitz-III camp, where he was used as slave labour and witnessed widespread German (not just Nazi) brutality. While there he helped various Jews and did a couple of hugely risky overnight swaps with a Jewish prisoner.	
Jun 13	The Last King of Scotland	Giles Foden	3+	Rich tale from which the film was made. Makes me want to see the film again. The last 1/3 rd of the book became a bit fantastical and less Amin-focussed, but the rest gave a great (and presumably accurate) view on the reign of the unpleasant and mad dictator Idi Amin.	
Jun 13	Black Market	James Patterson	4	Weak thriller. Disaffected Vietnam vets blow up part of Wall St (in 1985) in some unintelligible tie up with international terrorist. Rapid action with one-off cop solving the whole thing while whizzing round the world in no time at all. I must have misunderstood Eric's comments, or mis-noted the book!	
Jun 13	Black Diamonds	Catherine Bailey	3	Readable (if slightly rambling and fragmentary) lightweight history of the decline of the Fitzwilliam family (scions of the massive Wentworth house) and the changes in the coal industry (the Earl was one of the richest men in England in 1900 due to owning acres of land in the Yorkshire coalfields) as unions and governments fought. Interesting on the miners vs. landowners struggles (Fitzwilliam was actually one of the most loved and enlightened owners): - the establishment's terror of potential Bolshevism takeover from the early 1920s - miserable negotiating and management by the Conservative (Baldwin) Government in 1926 with a petered out general strike (in support of miners locked out by owners) and then miners go-it-alone one following on for some months - vile conditions in the mines - Manny Shinwell's vituperative insistence on wrecking Wentworth after WW2 to open cast mine vital coal next to the house. Also brief references to Welbeck Abbey another vast estate owned by bizarre reclusive Duke of Portland, with acres of underground rooms and passages. Book reminiscent of Lovell's gossipy "The Churchills", with loads of inter-family discord and doomed love affairs.	
Jun 13	Other People's Money	Justin Cartwright	3	Derring-do as ancient private City bank has financial problems and sells itself to an American one. Lots of deviousness, uncovered by country journalist. Titled family that owned/ran the bank with its own problems and intrigues too. OK, if slightly pretentious, read.	
May 13	The Examined Life	Stephen Grosz	3	Very readable snippets from the case loads of a charming sounding psychoanalyst based in Hampstead. Lots of wise words which all sounded great at the time, but few I can now recall.	
May 13	Spy Story	Len Deighton	4	Far too cryptic, clever-clever spy stuff, larded with boring passages. Something to do with cold war nuclear Sub exercises and unfathomably (forgive the pun) complex devious Western plot to encourage a Soviet defection thereby scuttling plans for German unification (I think).	
May 13	House of Orphans	Helen Dunmore	4	Disappointing tale of radical students in Finland 1902-04 amongst anti-Russian and Marxist movements. Far too much dull personal fluff and little info. The "brief historical context" page at the end was more interesting, and had more information, than the whole book.	
May 13	The thin red line	James Jones	5	Story (US platoon in Pacific WW2 expedition/battles on Guadalcanal) didn't start with enough interest to counteract the thick paperback with dreadful typeface.	
May 13	Skios	Michael Frayn	3	OK farce from the author of Noises Off. Boring lecturer and charming philanderer arrive on same Greek island and get mixed up. Philanderer is assumed to be giver of prestigious lecture to dubious wealthy organisation and lecturer gets tied up with philanderer's various girlfriends.	
May 13	carry the one	Carol Anshaw	4	Dull. Three siblings and friends who in drunken drugged-up drive home after wedding of one kill a small child. Then revisit them over the ensuing years. Can't think why I bothered finishing it.	
May 13	Waiting for Sunrise	William Boyd	3	WW1 thriller with young, well off, resting actor starting in Vienna being counselled for sexual dysfunction and ending up as spy hunter in the War Office. Not a huge amount of follow-thru between the major plot/scene changes (felt a bit like 4 or 5 short stories pasted together). Also it was annoyingly unclear to me who, amongst the twisting denouement, was the real villain.	
Apr 13	Agent 6 [Child 44#3]	Tom Rob Smith	3	3 rd in trilogy about Leo the ex-KBG super-man. Another fantastical tale, this largely in Afghanistan before he manages to get to NY in the 1980's to solve his wife's murder in the 60's.	
Apr 13	Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet	Jamie Ford	3	Chinese boy and a Japanese girl growing up in and around Seattle at the beginning of WW2, sharing a love of Jazz as well. She getting shipped off to US concentration camp, he eventually to his Chinese roots (his father managing to keep them apart because of his hatred of Japanese). Flashbacks/forwards with 1986 after the Chinese guy's wife has died and there's the inevitable happy ending. A bit lightweight, but not too soppy, and interesting on the US/Japanese/Chinese relationships in the war.	
Apr 13	Child 44 [Child 44#1]	Tom Rob Smith	3	Gripping thriller set in end of Stalin era Russia. Gruesome and so depressing (and, one suspects, accurate) descriptions of the misery of ordinary lives and the endless informing and fear. The actual murder trails that the story is hung round became increasingly ridiculous and fantastical, which was annoying!	
Apr 13	Cross Bones	Kathy Reichs	4	Female forensic anthropologist (heavily autobiographical) on ludicrous tale of Christ's (maybe) or some Masada-survivor's bones. Apparently based on some facts, but dreadful macho/jokey/smart-Alec style that doesn't work (unlike Lee Child's which, it resembles, which does). Forced myself to read it through, but should have given up early!	
Apr 13	Doves of War	Paul Preston	3	Biographies of four women whose main, but by no means exclusive, claim to fame was involvement in the Spanish Civil war. 2 Brits: Right-wing upper-class Priscilla Scott-Ellis, chasing a Spanish aristo rather than in the war by choice. Left-wing working-ish class Nan Green; determined Socialist, went out to join husband fighting, leaving two kids at Summerhill – paid for by well wisher. 2 Spaniards: Right-wing upper-class Mercedes Sanz-Bachiller, great organiser of, generally, even handed aid. Artistic Margarita Nelken; one of the first women MP's in 1931/2, stirring propagandist, starting Socialist and ending Communist. The latter two's pieces were mainly detail of the endless inter-factional politicking of their respective sides. The two Brits' stories were a little more broad based. But all of them really giving little about the war.	
Mar 13	The Cardamon Club	Jon Stock	4	Spy(ish) story set in India. Very evocative descriptive bits, but nothing happens until just before half-way and one the most dramatic bits in the last page. Poor read.	
Mar 13	Guernica	Dave Boling	2	Families caught up in the famously bombed town. Gives good feel for what it must have been like, and is an excellent read. But I would have liked some historical background (there's hardly any, other than allusion).	
Mar 13	Scum of the Earth	Arthur Koestler	1	Amazing insight into the brutal treatment of foreigners (he's a Hungarian Jew) by the French at the beginning of WW2. Written in 1941 after he escaped France following a year in a gruesome camp (Le Vernet) and then endless trials with mind-boggling bureaucracy trying to get out legally (amazing how everyone adhered to bits of paper during such awful times).	
Feb 13	The Thread	Victoria Hislop	3	Another sentimental saga giving a better glimmer of history than "The Return". This time Greece 1917-1970s. Set around Thessaloniki starting with its great fire, then Muslim/Greek separation and their war. Going on through WW2 and into the Civil war that followed.	
Feb 13	The Suspicions of Mr Whicher	Kate Summerscale	4	Overrated rehashing of interesting enough brutal murder in 1860 of 3-year old. In the early days of the Detective. Which of the two prime suspects, one his 16-year old step sister and the other his nurse in cahoots with his father, never really certain - despite sister confessing 5 years later and spending time in prison. But endless references to the many burgeoning detective novels (Wilkie Collins, Poe, Dickens, etc) and loads of total irrelevances made it a tedious read.	
Feb 13	The Wrong Blood	Manual de Lope	4	Poor Spanish civil-war themed book. Badly structured time shifting between now and then, but ultimately not much of a story about two women giving birth in 1936. One raped by soldiers, the other's having still birth of the child conceived in the few months she had with her husband (a Red) before he was executed by his friends (fascists).	
Feb 13	A Partisan's Daughter	Louis de Bernieres	4	Tat. Yugoslav girl and 40 year old man get close by her telling her life history.	

Books

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Jan 13	The Betrayal	Helen Dunmore	3+	Grim continuation with the characters from The Siege. It's now 1952 and Andrei (doctor) is arrested after a vicious KGB man's son has cancer and has leg amputated. In KGB man's distressed and warped mind this is the doctor's fault. She parallels this with Stalin's purge and paranoia round the "Doctors Plot" (but, as with The Siege doesn't really explain it) just before he died. Vivid portrayal of the misery of life in this hideous totalitarian state.	
Jan 13	A Durable Fire	Barbara & Stephanie Keating	2	Intense mid-60's story of three young women bound together by a (mainly) white Kenyan childhood. All still early 20's. One a world-famous model, one a wildlife researcher and photographer and the other the wife of farmer. But evil lurks from Mau Mau days and brutal reprisals continue. Very emotionally/sentimentally themed and slightly clumsily written. But good value sweep through just-post independence white/black/Indian relationships.	
Jan 13	Rip Tide [LC#6]	Stella Rimington	3	Another Liz Carlyle. Shipping hijacks near the horn of Africa and Islamic militants in Birmingham. While LC get friendly with a French colleague.	
Jan 13	The Fear Index	Robert Harris	3	Drawn out and not hugely gripping thriller – Hedge fund whizz-owner goes berserk Tries to tie it in with the over-trading melt down day in 2010 (?) and lots of laboured explaining of the financial world.	
Dec 12	Shadowstory	Jennifer Johnston	5	Didn't grip me at all. Stopped after a few pages.	
Dec 12	The Churchills	Mary S. Lovell	3	Unapologetically gossipy life of Winston, his family and forbears from an almost purely social point of view. A bit of a long haul and far too much on the many many relatives. But interesting re-focus on his times. Eg: in 1936 (?) having been shouted down in the Commons he is really depressed and tells Clemmie that his political life is over and his human one probably has less than 10 years left (he died in 1965). Also, what a pain son Randolph was.	
Dec 12	The End of the Wasp Season (Alex Morrow 2)	Denise Mina	3-	Weak and not easy to follow mystery. Precocious 15-year old son of wealthy businessman kills wrong woman when he thinks he's killing his Dad's mistress. Set in Glasgow and Surrey.	
Dec 12	The Redbreast [HH#3]	Jo Nesbo	4	Probably a decent thriller/who-dunnit set around Norwegian German and/or Russian collaborators in WW2 and 2000. But too many similar sounding characters, and the key character has some sort of split personality disorder and operates as two differently named people (I think).	
Nov 12	Portrait in Sepia	Isabel Allende	3	Another seemingly autobiographical story about (her?) Chilean/Chinese family in the 1800s. Lots of allusive coverage of the "War of the Pacific" between (I think) Chile and Bolivia and Peru.	
Nov 12	Decline & Fall	Chris Mullin	3	Political diaries from 2005-2010 after he lost his place in the Labour cabinet. Covers Blair/Brown transition and ends on Labour loss to Tory/LibDem coalition. Amusing in parts, interesting slant on events from a politician's view. He bangs on a lot about MPs over-long summer recess, how dire things are for Labour, and how awful Joanna Lumley is. Can't say I'd really heard of him, but he sounds a likeable and very conscientious MP. Must try to read the prequel, when he was a minister.	
Nov 12	Carnival for the Dead	David Hewson	3	Hugely complex who-dunnit set in Venice. Main character a 30-ish Roman pathologist lady, who goes to Venice in the first place to locate her missing naughty, not much older than her, aunt. Lots of classic picture allusions and totally unbelievable characters steering her, via stories involving her, to the many truths.	
Oct 12	Against all Enemies	Tom Clancy and Peter Telep	5	Uninspiring start. JC didn't like (full of gory action). I didn't get that far and gave up after ~50 pages – maybe PT did that bit!	
Oct 12	Painter of Silence	Georgina Harding	3	Very indirect tale of life just before and after (and a tiny bit through) WW2 for Romanian family and followers. Set in aristocratic estate where the daughter and one of the servants (who is deaf&dumb, but draws/paints wonderfully – hence the title) meet again in ~1950 the hideous mess that is Communist controlled mindlessness. Spent far too long saying too little, but well written and readable.	
Oct 12	Winter in Madrid	C J Sansom	3+	Spying, intrigue and love set in 1931, 1936 and 1940 Madrid. Exposes and covers more of the horrors of the Spanish Civil war. Got a bit soppy towards the end but still a great read.	
Oct 12	Tuesday's Gone [FK#2]	Nicci French	3	Second Frieda Klein. Another nonsense murder-plot full of totally unbelievable involvement by FK in the police enquiries. Ends with another ludicrous cliff-hanger as she is almost killed by (as only she knows in this book) the villain from the first book. Would be hard work reading this without having read Blue Monday.	
Sep 12	The Darling	Russell Banks	2	Excellent tale woven round the troubles in Liberia in the first person of a rebellious (Weathermen) American woman. She marries a medium-ranked Liberian government man and has 3 kids with him. Sees him killed in the fighting between Samuel Doe, Prince someone and Charles Taylor. Lots of, I assume, accurate historical/political background on Liberia. Would have been good if the tale had run on in some way to Taylor's come-uppance.	
Sep 12	The Story of England	Christopher Hibbert	3	Potted history 5000BC – 1990. Helped a bit remember some history.	
Aug 12	Blue Monday [FK#1]	Nicci French	3	Thriller centred on psychotherapist treating one of (as it turns out) two identical twins. One of whom abducts small kids to try and address the absence of the other. A bit larded at times, but good read with no overt gore or violence.	
Aug 12	Let It Bleed	Ian Rankin	3-	Same-ish thriller. But I didn't really follow the complex politic-ing and machinations between high up Scottish politico's, police and dodgy computer company supremo's.	
Aug 12	Beyond the Gates of Hell	Colin Rushton	4	Badly written biography of the 5+ years a Polish Jew, Mayer Hersh, spent avoiding death in the Holocaust (he was still alive on 2003). Gruelling story, but so badly told that it lost almost all impact.	
Aug 12	Ordinary Thunderstorms	William Boyd	2	Excellent detective-y thriller of comfortable man who accidentally gets mixed up in a murder, with big-Pharma shenanigans trying to hide field study problems just before release of a drug to cure Asthma. Having done so he ends very up down-and-out in London, but manages to sleuth and drag himself out of that. Sort of mix between Bonfire of the Vanities (didn't the main man there end up in skid row?) and Constant Gardener.	
Jul 12	The Messenger of Athens	Anne Zouroudi	3	"Detective" tale set on small Greek island. Enigmatic fat "detective" comes to put the world to right and solve the death of a young woman. Plenty of interesting slants on the macho, treating women as sex objects of Greek (maybe all!) men. Would be a 2 if her flashbacks and chronology were better signalled.	
Jul 12	The English Civil War	Dianne Purkiss	3-	Disappointed in its promise to make the war understandable by concentrating on (often common) people's experiences. Though this did make for a mainly readable (very long) book, I don't feel much wiser. I think I learned that it was heavily religion-focussed, with Archbishop Laud a high Church "Anglican" and Charles I's Catholic wife Henrietta making the Royalists appear pope-ists against the low/non-church Parliamentarians. But, annoyingly: - she started by saying that the majority of the 800k deaths were in Ireland, but failed to say anything about that – other than that it was an Irish rebellion in 1641 (with Catholics killing Protestants) that triggered the war on the mainland. - a map at the front showed preponderance of battles in Scotland, but, again, little or no mention of them. - precious little mention of Cromwell – giving the (maybe correct) impression that he wasn't a key part of the war as one has always thought. She points out that Fairfax, the main man of most of the Parliamentarian war forces, was more key to most of the war.	
Jul 12	Little hut of leaping fishes	Chiew-Siah Tei	3	History-drama set in end of 19 th century and early 20 th as China opens up (or is forced to) to western trade, ideas and technology. Sadly far too little historical detail (though much of it heavily alluded to) and rather too much imagined life inside middle and upper class Chinese patriarchal homes.	
Jul 12	The Return	Victoria Hislop	3-	Pseudo-history drama covering Spanish Civil War. Pretty sloppy/soppy with little decent history and lots of rather silly pining and dancing couples.	
Jul 12	Echo Park	Michael Connelly	3	LA Police thriller. Rather like Lee Child-like in its violence and rapid pace. Also, from the covers, one of a long series with the same lead (detective) character.	
Jul 12	A Thousand Splendid Suns	Khaled Hosseini	2+	Superb but grim story of (almost exclusively) women's lot in Afghanistan – mainly Kabul. Horribly use by their husbands and family in this medieval and fragmented society.	
Jul 12	The Pearl	John Steinbeck	3	Short story of poor Mexican pearl fisherman finding a valuable one which then changes and corrupts him.	
Jul 12	The Enemy [JR#8]	Lee Child	3	Possibly the first Reacher book. Same lightening-acted, sometimes violent, thriller set in 1990 as the Berlin wall is coming down. He's in the army in the US, getting to the bottom of a ridiculous-sounding plot by top brass to kill off colleagues so they can control the future direction of the military after the cold war.	
Jun 12	Vienna	Eva Menasse	5	Jewish/Austrian family diaspora around WW2. Not gripped enough to continue after ~30 pages.	

Books

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Jun 12	Amangsett	Mark Mills	3+	(almost 2). Good thriller set in Long Island coast town in 1947. Monied/ political family mixing with local fishermen – one particularly smart one worrying through the death of the monied family's daughter (who was also his lover). Good flash-backings to fill in peoples history. Interestingly, tale unfolded with few surprises, since each major unravelling was flagged up early – but this didn't lessen the enjoyment.	
Jun 12	The Enigma of Arrival	V. S. Naipaul	3-	Tedious self-history. Gave up half way through.	
Jun 12	The Lost Daughter	Lucretia Grindle	3	Another to-and-fro in time who-dunnit. This about woman involved with Red Brigades murder of Aldo Moro in Italy in 1978. Reasonably good read, but no main surprises. Also, it was a bit drawn-out (despite being not a lot of pages) and used an allusive style that didn't work well.	
Jun 12	Fall of Giants	Ken Follett	3-	Massive, sloppy/sentimental docu-history of first ~25 years of the 1900s. Covered with five families (Welsh miners, London and German aristos, pair of orphaned Russian workers and upper crust American). All keep on intertwining around the northern hemisphere as WW1 and Russian revolution play out. Not worth its tedious 850 pages.	
May 12	Music & Silence	Rose Tremain	3-	Rather tedious historical novel set in the court of Christian IV of Denmark. A main character is good-looking young English lute player. But far too much lightweight/lovey stuff for me!	
May 12	Mothers and Sons	Colm Toibin	2	Series of crisp, largely rural, short-stories (all Irish, with one set in Spain). Mother/Son in each but not always particularly relevant to my mind. Couple of them had more homosexuality than I like, but each was a good read. Sadly with 8 in the book, I forget the story of most!	
Apr 12	World War Two: Behind Closed Doors	Laurence Rees	2	WW2 from the heavily Russian/Polish angle concentrating on the shenanigans between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt (C&R). Brought home the vast importance of Russia in the war – could really say they won it (losing 27 million to Britain's and US' ~400k each). Stalin's evil is chilling (tho' his skill and charm when required well described). His military ineptitude and meddling exacerbated early years' losses – Russia only started winning once he allowed his generals to lead. The ongoing (both during the war when you'd think he'd want to focus manpower and motivation on fighting the enemy) and afterwards (to ensure his iron grip) torture, murder and deportation of his people is just awful. You wonder (as LR does ineffectually) whether Stalin was a greater evil than the Nazi's. Interesting to be reminded how (OK after first siding with the Germans and helping them take Poland in 1939 before joining the allies after Hitler's long-trialed and expected invasion of Russia in 1941) Russia held the Germans while western powers seemed to do much less until D-Day in 1944. Also, how D-Day operations were dwarfed by the much more man-intensive (165 German divisions versus 30 in France) concurrent Bagration invasion that the Russians were fighting in tandem from the East. Katyn much mentioned; Stalin's personal authorisation exposed in the 90's (I think) after his cold-faced denials and attempts to alter the facts (eg: planting 1941-dated docs on corpses shot in 1940). Lots on the grim (but, for C&R, coldly pragmatic) agreements the three leaders made, often in secret; eg: Tehran conference (1943) agreeing to massive re-set of Poland. Readable, tho' LR rambles a bit. He tries and fails to give an idea of how C&R could have played things more honestly/ morally without causing massive ongoing war.	
Apr 12	The faces of Angels	Lucretia Grindle	3	Gripping who-dunnit with series of women being gruesomely murdered in Florence. Main character is one who escaped an attack a while back and has returned to Florence to be with her new husband-to-be and, maybe, to lay old ghosts – but the murders continue to a rather far fetched but readable conclusion.	
Apr 12	All our worldly goods	Irène Némirovsky	3-	Middle class French families based near Boulogne from WW1 to fall of France in WW2. Surprisingly little real feel to the politics and trauma of the wars. Mainly the machinations of (all too believable) small-minded families – the local factory magnate and non-acceptance of marriage of his grandson to a beneath-our-class local girl. Vindictive (almost) lifelong anger of jilted well-dowried girl who therefore lost out but ended up with the factory.	
Apr 12	Field Grey [BG#12]	Philip Kerr	3	Another of the same. This less violent (I thought) but very complex and hard to follow (at times) plot. Bernie Gunther mainly in 1954 endlessly double crossing as PK weaves a tale taking in the real Erich Mielke (Stasi boss)	
Mar 12	The Somme	Peter Hart	3	Massive tome chronicling the July-Nov 1916 battle from, almost exclusively (sadly), the British perspective. I didn't get a clear idea as to how or if things could have been done better. He tried to exonerate some of the known names (Haig, Rawlinson, Gough) from the ignominy heaped on them from healthy hindsight. He did give some inkling of the Brits logistics/admin strengths (tho' the Germans were very impressive too – but he didn't cover that). But, ultimately it was an endless chain of first-hand accounts of the hideous conditions and amazing preparedness of the cannon fodder to go over the top and be mown down.	
Mar 12	If the Dead Rise Not [BG#2]	Philip Kerr	3	Another in the German ex-policeman/reliant-Nazi thriller series. This part during 1934 build up to 1936 Olympics with US gangster muscling in ruthlessly on contracts. Part 2 in 1950s when both men meet in Cuba and scores are finally settled. I didn't find it particularly grizzly (JC did) but his fatuous smart-Alec writing style really grates.	
Mar 12	And the Land Lay Still	James Robertson	2	Sweeping tale of various ordinary Scots interwoven with the political moves towards SNP-dom/devolution from 1950s to early 2000s. I could have done with a little less of the homosexual practices of some of its protagonists (which added nothing to the story), but hugely good read – very even handed on both sides of the devo camp.	
Mar 12	Winnie and Wolf	A.N. Wilson	3	Fictionalised account of relationships and correlations between Richard Wagner, the story-lines of his operas, his (Welsh orphan originally, apparently) daughter-in-law, Hitler, Nazi-fication of Germany. Also it's treaty of Versailles and lost nationhood, and post-war East Germany. As ever ANW is rather too erudite and a bit pompous, and it would be great to know how much (one suspects quite a lot) is true.	
Feb 12	Spartan	Matthew Dunn	3-	Mix/CIA thriller written by (allegedly) ex-M15 spook. Started out thinking it would be good, but it degenerated into unbelievably rushed (hero in and 100% conversant with, a different European capital every few hours) implausible (hero continuing with major physical feats just after each of several serious woundings) and, ultimately silly.	
Feb 12	The Song before it is sung	Justin Cartwright	3-	Built round story of Adam von Trott and Isiah Berlin (fictionalised as Axel von Gottberg and Elya Mendel) and Trott's filmed hanging after involvement in von Stauffenberg's failed attempt to kill Hitler. Used the looming "retelling" of the trial and hanging overlaid with a 200? story of an author re-visiting this, but far to full of the author's boring private life.	
Feb 12	Prague Fatale [BG#6]	Philip Kerr	3	Who-dunnit with German anti-Nazi detective investigating murders revolving round General Heydrich. Seemed to be full of real people and (some) events giving it extra bite. Would be an excellent book if not for a rather tedious smart-Alec style that somehow didn't work as well as, for instance, Lee Child's.	
Feb 12	The Affair [JR#16]	Lee Child	4	Poor. Slow start then overly unbelievable (and -followable) plot of Reacher in his last job before leaving the army (but only just published).	
Jan 12	Iris & Ruby	Rosie Thomas	3	Tale of three generations of women (mainly gran and granddaughter). Gran had been in Egypt during WW2 and after heartbreaks and a roving life was back there where her escaping-teenage granddaughter comes into her life). Bit sentimental, with the war bits OK (tiny bit reminiscent of Balkan trilogy) but the rest rather laboured.	
Jan 12	The Etymologicon	Mark Forsyth	3	OK loo read. Endless tidbits about word origins. Bit hard to read straight through (as I more or less did). Would be a much more useful book if it had an index of all the (very many) words and phrases he rambles on about.	
Jan 12	The Villa Triste	Lucretia Grindle	2	Excellent who-did-it thriller set around Italian WW2 partisans based in Florence. Switches between modern day and the war. Made me realise how little I knew of Italy's swings to and fro. Starts in fall 1943 6 weeks after Mussolini has been deposed in popular coup and Italy signed armistice with allies. All to be overthrown a few weeks later when Germans invaded and put M back in power, sparking vicious conflict between Fascists/Nazis and partisans. Would be a 1 if the writing was very slightly clearer (not easy to follow who's doing what to who all the time).	
Jan 12	Innocent in the House	Andy McSmith	3	"Barely fictional" tale of new MP moving up in the Commons as his murky past is not fully exposed and, ultimately, helps him.	
Dec 11	A Nurse in Action	Evelyn Prentis	3	Lightly written auto-bio of young provincial nurse finishing her training and moving to somewhere on the outskirts of London to work in a TB ward / hospital during WW2.	

Books

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Dec 11	All that I am	Anna Funder	3	Novelised story of anti-Nazi German socialists in the late 1920s and 1930s trying to alert the world to Hitler's regime. Lots of Nazi agents working assiduously in other countries killed several of them (including, we think, Dr Dora Fabian in London). Very interesting read but badly marred (again for her) by over-complex structure - switching between the two main characters (Ernst Toller and Ruth Kopolowitz/Wesemann/Blatt, who Funder knew well) each talking in similar voices and in several different eras - and unclear chronology.	
Dec 11	Stasiland	Anna Funder	3	Stories of East Germans told to Australian investigative and well-involved woman. Mainly reinforces the pervasive scope and mindless control of the Stasi empire and its vast network of agents and informers. She claimed up to one (97,000 Stasi employees, 173,000 informers plus more part-timers) per 6.5 of the 17m population, compared to one Gestapo agent per 2000 3 rd Reich citizens or one KGB per 5830 in Salin's Russia. But I don't think her maths is correct!	
Dec 11	The Aztec	Bill Vidal	3	Thriller set round "famous" Spanish civil war (republican) hero, who went on to become a Cuban hero too running shady operations in S. America. Story has ex-soldier English professor writing 80+-year-old hero's biography and getting caught up in hero's final act of retribution. It's Vidal's first book I believe and would be much better if he flagged the chronology properly - the story flips endlessly between periods, usually with no indication at all. It's also too larded with redundant over detail.	
Dec 11	The Appointment	Herta Muller	3-	Woman being hounded by semi-secret police after placing a few slips of paper saying "Marry me" in suits for the Italian market from the factory she works in. Conveys the tedium, drabness and petty dictatorships of Ceausescu's Romania, but too rambling and allusional to be readable.	
Dec 11	The Help	Kathryn Stockett	3	Life and grind for black maids in 1960s (and much later) Mississippi. Told as white rebel woman working secretly with maids to write their own stories. Possibly didn't touch enough on the horrors meted out to those trying to break down the segregationist situation, but also brought out some of the occasional (rare, maybe) love and deep respect from whites to blacks. Was a little hard to read because so much was written in (realistic sounding) black patois - tho' the (white) author says she wrote it all herself.	
Dec 11	Steve Jobs	Walter Isaacson	3+	Absorbing, slightly bloated, bio of a brilliant man. Before reading it I'd had a warm feel to the man who often appeared so fragile and winningly enthusiastic. The book covered his extensive, often vicious, rudeness and somehow didn't explain his inspirational side - despite endlessly telling the results of it. I would have liked a time-line in an appendix, because some of the events seemed to happen so fast (eg: return to Apple in 1997 and pretty rapid follow on with the iMac, I think). Also, there was too much repetition of opinions of people who know him, and omission of interesting facts (why did Corning not find a use for "gorilla" - virtually unbreakable - glass until Jobs persuaded them to make it for the iPhone?). I got a more tempered view of him, but still hugely impressed by his determination, perspicacity, willingness to risk everything (delays, reworks) to get things exactly right. And, as often with such people, I did not understand how he found the time to do all he did (eg: Apple and Pixar, grand marketing, heavy-duty negotiations with partners and tiny tiny detail of design and production, coping with his physical deterioration).	
Nov 11	The Road Home	Rose Tremain	3+	Slightly sentimental story of 40 year old widower from unspecified Eastern European country coming to the UK to make money to support his daughter and Mum. Though plenty of breadth to his character and progress (he manages to screw up several things, but eventually works his socks off to achieve his dream of opening his own restaurant "back home", using the skills and wisdom he's picked up from the many folk who helped him along in the UK), everything seemed a little too easy and too-good-to-be-true.	
Nov 11	Nineteen twenty-one	Adam Thorpe	3-	Young author struggling to write his first book in the super-hot summer of 1921. He'd just missed the war, the guilt of which affected him and those around him. Started well enough but then dragged.	
Nov 11	Indemnity Only	Sara Paretsky	3	First of her books I believe. Very samey and not a series I'll continue with. This one something about illegal writing of injury insurance claims. As with her other book, the plot is fairly complex, but the writing is let down by a) lots of redundant fluff (endless listings of which street she was driving down) and b) un-believable process of having the intrepid heroine verbalise her deductions to all and sundry in the story	
Oct 11	The Glass Room	Simon Mawer	3	Story of a real, stunningly architected house in Brno (Villa Tugendhat) interwoven as a fiction of characters involved with it. But, based on very similar facts; the owner a Jew who fled in late 1930s.	
Oct 11	Blacklist	Sara Paretsky	4	Chicago private detective-ette investigating deaths in rich part of town related to '50s history of McCarthy-era evils. But, I couldn't get the relationships of all the suspects in my head, so found it poor.	
Oct 11	Passage of Arms	Eric Ambler	3	Different from all previous ones. This about derring-do's in colonial Malaysia in the 1950s. No upright Brit and almost all main players pretty unlovable as a complex trade in stolen weapons (found by an ambitious Indian worker on a rubber plantation) takes place across several countries.	
Oct 11	The White Rajah	Tom Williams	3	Docu-fiction of gay British colonizer running Sarawak (Borneo) in the 18xx's at request of the main (native) ruler there. Good detail of life. Narrative allegedly written by the Rajah's servant/assistant/lover.	
Sep 11	Stick out your tongue	Ma Jian	3	Rather grizzly (eg: "air funeral" where body is hacked to pieces and thrown to vultures) set of short stories by Chinese dissident. All in some form having an urbanised man in backwater parts of Tibet. I didn't get any of the allusions to Chinese system (book was published ~'87 and made him and exile).	
Sep 11	Snowdrops	A.D. Miller	3	Single, 40-ish British lawyer in Russia dealing with shady oil contract and being used by two unscrupulous girls working for outfit conning folk out of their Moscow flats. Good (modern) Russian background, but very very slow burn on the menace that is eventually exposed.	
Sep 11	Cutting for Stone	Abraham Verghese	1	Powerful, heavily and interestingly medical/surgical story of twins of British surgeon and Indian nun working initially in Ethiopia.	
Aug 11	Uncommon Danger	Eric Ambler	3+	One of the best of a good bunch. English journalist in Austria/Czechoslovakia pre WW2 caught up between Russian spies protecting stolen photos and vicious "Big Business" people after same.	
Aug 11	The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet	David Mitchell	3-	Grammatically ungainly and cumbersome to read tale of c 1800 life in Dutch trading post off Nagasaki. Centred on newly arrived young Dutch Japanese-o-phile. Some goodish bits of story, not always well finished off. Felt more like a collection of short stories with common character or two tossed into one longish book. Interesting detail on life in Japan and in 1800s but not as good as everyone told me it would be.	
Aug 11	Politika	Tom Clancy	4	Weak thriller. Written in cohort with someone else (Martin Greenberg). Not as good as his usual. But, interestingly written in 1997 and centred round a terrorist atrocity on Millennium eve in New York (Time Square) with echo's of 9/11. This one turns out to be down to a Putin-like follow on to Yeltsin (who is shown to die of alcohol excess in 1999).	
Jul 11	The Cairo Trilogy	Naguib Mahfouz	5	Dull massive tome. I got to p200 out of ~1200 and gave up. Endless detail of the perverse and antiquated social life of Cairo family in the 1930s (I think). Hidden women, massive repressed lust, ... ghastly and probably all too true!	
Jul 11	Venom	Joan Brady	3	Thriller about big corporate greed and nuclear radiation cure based on bee venom. Most unbelievable characters and relationships and poor plot continuity. But an OK-ish read	
Jul 11	Journey into Fear	Eric Ambler	3+	Set of characters trapped on a boat. Main one an English (armaments) Engineer returning from Turkey in 1940 has been shot and lightly wounded in his hotel. Turkish police desperate to get him back to UK (wanting his report on their Navy actioned quickly). On the boat are those trying to kill him. Was also made as film by Orson Welles.	
Jul 11	Mercy [Q#1]	Jussi Adler-Olsen	2	Splendid thriller. Lives up to its Stieg Larsson comparisons. Claimed to be the first in a series - great! This gruesome one has beautiful politician kidnapped and imprisoned for 5 years in pressurised container, due to be killed by sudden decompression just before the denouement.	
Jul 11	Judgment on Deltchev	Eric Ambler	3	Slightly hard going compared to his others with very involved court case in some (presumably) Yugoslav/soviet statelet just after WW2. Case is set-up trying a non-party guy who had been influential in the war and friendly with the allies.	
Jul 11	At Home	Bill Bryson	2	Massive collection of not particularly connected, but fascinating facts. Strung together pretty tenuously round the rooms in his Norfolk home (built 1851) - but covering the world and all history.	
Jul 11	The Master Butchers Singing Club	Louise Erdrich	3	Absorbing low key tale of immigrant (German) family in the mid-west USA and various native Indian related minglings.	

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Jun 11	The Mask of Dimitrios	Eric Ambler	3	Covering history of Greek villain from 1922 to 1938, improbably told by British crime writer following up details of a dead man he is shown in a Turkish morgue. Includes references to Turkish slaughter of 120,000 Greeks in Izmir in 1922. Very topical dealings in drug and woman smuggling round Europe. But style was predominantly 3rd parties relating parts of the thread (many "letters" and monologues), which made this less good than his others.	
Jun 11	A Treaty of Love	Samir El-Youssef	3	Very autobiographical (I think) fiction of Palestinian (the author) guy with Israeli girlfriend living in London in 90's. He hooks events round those going on in Israel/Gaze/West bank but in a rather gratuitous way. It is generally very un-sensitive to the Palestinians. The book ends with a twist as he turns out to have killed his girlfriend, as his uncle killed his cousin after she was raped.	
Jun 11	Eva Luna	Isabel Allende	3	Weaving story of two young people – S. American half-caste Indian girl and German who escaped a vile father and post-war background to go to S.A. She's a great story teller and the book is part incestuous in implying its part of her work. They both end up involved in political and guerilla uprisings and bizarre trans-sexual characters.	
May 11	Cause for Alarm	Eric Ambler	3+	Even better than the previous one. English engineer posted to Italy in 1936 just after the Berlin-Rome axis was signed gets involved in double-agent spying. As before, much of it seems amazingly prescient given when it was written.	
May 11	Illegal Action [LC#3]	Stella Rimington	3	Slightly weaker one of her Liz Carlyle MI6/5 thrillers. Set round potential threat to assassinate a UK-based Russian oligarch. But not enough story and action and too much office politics and description of what clothes everyone wears!	
May 11	Requiem	Clare Francis	3	800 page sort-of thriller set round the villainous agrochemical business. Mis-spraying using improperly tested new chemical kills wife of rock star who gets recruited by the leading lady – who works for a small chemical abuse chasing organisation. Action speed gets pretty silly at times as they rush round Scotland, London and the US.	
Apr 11	Summertime	J.M.Coetzee	3-	Self-centred, ostensibly fictional style of a biography of himself. Convoluted and not really interesting!	
Apr 11	The Solitude of Prime Numbers	Paolo Giordano	3	Twisted lives of an oddball guy (maths genius) and girl (anorexic) who each have a disturbing childhood experience. They very briefly get together but then carry on separately with occasional contact. Not particularly engrossing, but readable.	
Apr 11	Epitaph for a Spy	Eric Ambler	3+	Excellent who-dunnit/spy tale. Written in and set in the mid/late 1930s. Mixture of Agatha Christie and John Le Carre. Apparently Ambler was one of the first spy writers, who set the tone/scene for Le Carre et al. Hungarian in French South Coast hotel gets mixed up with an anti French spy but he (Hungarian) is blackmailed by the police to help them get to real spy's master. Interesting, given that the book was written before 1938, the detail on Nazi-run concentration camps to subdue and torture dissidents.	
Apr 11	The Mystery Writer	Jessica Mann	4	Very poorly written mystery story. Hopelessly not-clear characterisation and lots of time shifting.	
Apr 11	The Lieutenant	Kate Grenville	3	Another tale of very early Australian settlement. This, though fiction, based on a real person William Dawes who went out as a young astronomer and marine on the first settlement convoy. He learnt the language, became hugely respectful of and friendly with the Aborigines. He was sent home in disgrace after refusing to obey further orders after being sent on an unsuccessful expedition to capture and behead 6 Aborigines as punishment for the killing of one white convict. OK read, but I'm now a little tired of her rather prosaic writing style.	
Mar 11	Eva's Story	Eva Schloss	2	Slim autobiography of young Austrian Jewish girl who had moved to Amsterdam early in WW2, where she was a neighbour of Anne Frank (and became her step-sister, posthumously). Also in hiding, then betrayed in early '44 (on her 15 th birthday) and transported, with her Mum, brother and Dad, to Birkenau (Auschwitz). Horrific treatment for a year until liberated by the Russians who shipped her and her Mum (Dad and brother perished) back to Russia to avoid the drawn out skirmishing with the failing Germans. She had great praise for the Russians. Somehow her dispassionate recounting of the vicious, sadistic and just plain miserable treatment had more power than all the fictionalised stories telling exactly the same thing.	
Mar 11	The Secret River	Kate Grenville	3	Tale of convicts transported from London to Australia around the turn of the 18th/19th century. Light read but plenty of grisly and disturbing detail about the misery of the poor in London, the life of convicts both in the initial year of so and then when "freed" (to live only in Oz), and then the barbarity meted out to the Aborigines (and, to some extent, vice versa). A bit light in content, and very unbelievable time-frame of the convict couple getting their initial small holding going in only 6 months.	
Mar 11	Samarkand	Amin Maalouf	3	Interesting fictionalised covering of two main era's of Iranian (Persian) history. Omar Khayyam and his contemporaries (including Hassan al-Sabbah, founder of the Assassins). Then events ~1890-1912 when an abortive-ish uprising against the Shah – with real life US people such as Howard Baskerville and William Morgan Shuster an impressive (too) straight talking financier who the embryonic new Iran regime recruited as Treasurer-General.	
Mar 11	The Reluctant Fundamentalist	Mohsin Hamid	3+	Slim and absorbing (modest) suspense story. Interestingly pitched as young Pakistani guy relating his life history as one side of a conversation with an American he befriends (seemingly) in an outdoors café in Lahore. The Pakistani had stellar University and Wall Street early career in USA then became disillusioned after a year or two to return to Pakistan and become a stirring-up University lecturer.	
Mar 11	Submariner	Alexander Fullerton	3	WW2 submarine captain based in Malta. Very staccato, clipped-of-parts of speech style initially irritating, but in the end helped convey the pressure and tension of stalking and being stalked. Text also too full of mnemonics often not explained (tho' also not important).	
Mar 11	The Walking Dead	Gerald Seymour	3	Usual absorbing thriller. This for a suicide mission run by infamous Arab "enabler" in the UK. Endless separate threads come together at the end so the good guys prevail, much more by luck than skill.	
Feb 11	Stalin's Ghost	Martin Cruz Smith	3-	Poor detective/thriller. Moscow/Kalinin (now Tver) violent politics. Poorly presented characters, bad grammar and ill-introduced events marred what was a decent tale.	
Feb 11	Red Scarf Girl	Ji-Li Jiang	3-	"A memoir of the Cultural Revolution". Very naively told memories of a girl when she was 12-14 during the CR in 1966. Hugely depressing retelling of the behaviour of all the brainwashed Chinese (she and her family persecuted, but not as much as many, because her grandfather, who died when her father was 7, had been a landowner). Did tell me the the CR was a result of Mao reacting to threats from other high-ups in the Communist party.	
Feb 11	Deception Point	Dan Brown	3	Same old thing. Reasonably readable; high-tension scrapes from one page to the next. Very scientific-based (and he claims all the technology exists, which I take with a pinch of salt). Tale of USA secret service / NASA planting a fake meteor containing fossils (ie: "life from outer space") in the North Pole's ice cap.	
Feb 11	The China Study	T. Colin Campbell	3	Very repetitive and verbose compendium saying how bad animal products are in the human diet. Turned Eric into a Vegan – didn't quite do that to me, but will certainly make me try to avoid animal. Particularly milk, cheese and red meat – sadly.	
Jan 11	The Flight	Bryan Malessa	3+	East Prussian family split up and (Mum and 2+ kids) fleeing Russian invasion of Germany in WW2. Mum and kids ending up in the new East Germany, estranged Dad in West. Less history in it than I'd hoped, but a memorable descriptions of intimate, and larger, horrors inflicted on Germans by Russians. I assume pretty faithful; not sure where author gets his info.	
Jan 11	The Garden to the Finzi-Continis	Georgio Bassani	3	Life for a set of very privileged Jewish young people in the summers just before, and the first of, WW2. Readable and holding some tension as one knows that most of the persona will end up being killed. But really its a story of a beautiful rich girl toying with a lovestruck neighbour, larded with endless literary reference that leaves me cold.	

Books

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Jan 11	Gone Tomorrow [JR#13]	Lee Child	3	Less violent (in the first half at least) than many of his. Equally page-turning and ludicrously Reacher-beats-a-world-of-villains. He sees a (lowly) woman from the Pentagon blow her head off on a late night NY metro, and this leads on to a vicious team headed by a pair of Al-Qaeda women (one beautiful and, initially, apparently OK and believable) trying to recover some file. From the front flap, this comes after: Killing Floor Die Trying Tripwire The Visitor Echo Burning Without Fail Persuader The Enemy One Shot The Hard Way Bad Luck and Trouble (R) Nothing to Lose ® - no sign of Worth Dying For !	
Jan 11	War Trash	Ha Jin	3	Interesting thin fiction (I believe) of life of Chinese in POW camps in the final years of the Korean war. The two factions (Communist and Nationalist) virulently opposed to each other and both endlessly meeting-o-crat (every tiny decision having to be referred up the chain of command and everyone being "rewarded" with 1st/2nd/3rd class awards and the like) made the book drag a little. Massive and hideous brutality between the prisoners, apparently uncontrolled by the UN overseers (I guess they rely on POW's being roughly self-policing). But it made me realise how little I know about: - How the Korean war started and ended - Why (seemingly) both sides of the Chinese divide fought together for the North - How the Chinese split happened (1949 – I believe – Communists took over)	
Jan 11	The Maze of Cadiz	Aly Monroe	3	Very readable, if difficult to follow, first novel by this female author. Set in 1944 Spain it's a who-dunnit/thriller of English agent sent to Cadiz to clear up after a predecessor. Something to do with plot to assassinate Franco. Lots and lots of scenic detail and atmosphere, but plot obscured by unexplained asides.	
Dec 10	Present Danger [LC#5]	Stella Rimington	3	Good easy to read thriller. Less convoluted than the "Dead Line" one a few days earlier. This set round post-peace treaty N. Ireland as rogue (US) boss man tries to continue the troubles.	
Dec 10	An Act of Treachery	Ann Widdecombe	3	Non-believable tale of 17 year old French girl and married 40+ German Major falling in love in Paris during the occupation. She sticking with him despite her collaborator status. A (very few) bits of interest in Resistance and Jewish activities in the background. None of the love or (absent) sex element rang at all true; it read like (I would suspect) a schoolgirl's romance, and one wonders whether AW is naive or ignorant or both of more real-life relationships.	
Dec 10	Dead Line [LC#4]	Stella Rimington	3	Excellent M15/6 thriller with her female whizzo solving a plot to disrupt Gleneagles peace meeting between Syrians and Israelis. Her stuff is gripping but without the violence and with slightly less improbable shifts than many other authors'. Would be a 2 but for the fact that I didn't follow all the plots endless multiple-crossings!	
Dec 10	Suffer the little children	Donna Leon	3	Pretty dull tale of same Venetian detective and pharmacist zealot embroiled in baby selling to childless couples. Really too over-stodged with detail about what he eats and the names of the streets he walks down.	
Dec 10	Worth Dying For [JR#15]	Lee Child	3	Another breathless and hyperactive and hyper-engrossing typical Jack Reacher tale. More violent and ridiculous than ever, but I zoomed thru it in 3 nights! Storyline is of Midwest backwoods family firm people trafficking from the East and how JR beats them and a team of heavies from various of the traffickers clients.	
Dec 10	The Thing around your Neck	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	3	Short stories. Many with same ghastly details as in her "Half of a Yellow Sun". Lots focussed round couples living full or part time in USA as ex-pat Nigerians. Loads of corruption.	
Nov 10	Charlie Johnson in the Flames	Michael Ignatieff	3	Gritty story of war journalist who goes for a story by getting to a Bosnian in-between area to see the atrocities, and gets involved. A woman in whose house he waited is deliberately burned to death by a Bosnian (I think) commander dousing her in petrol. Journalist tries to save her and gets badly burnt himself. She dies and he then goes after the commander, who kills him for his troubles.	
Nov 10	The Bad Book Affair	Ian Sansom	4	Jokily told tale of miserable, almost-30, Jewish mobile librarian in remote Irish town. Gets tied up with the disappearance of local Politician's 14-year old daughter, but far far too much boring padding to let the plot be interesting.	
Nov 10	In the hands of the Taliban	Yvonne Ridley	3	Description of her brief kidnapping by the Taliban after she sneaked into Afghanistan just after 9/11. She's a journalist and wanted a scoop. Hugely padded out with far too much personal and irrelevant information.	
Nov 10	After Midnight	Robert Ryan	3	Crashed WW2 pilot turned resistance liaison officer in occupied Italy returns there 20 years later to uncover the complex, double-crossing and untrustworthiness of the many sides involved. Good story poorly told; he uses a smart-Alec style that jars, and flips between 1 st and 3 rd person narrator for no clear reason.	
Oct 10	The Collaborator	Gerald Seymour	3	Far too fragmented and allusive style. Changes of scene almost once a page. Main storyline totally unbelievable of Mafia-like family daughter turning in the rest of her tribe because her childhood girlfriend dies of Leukaemia due to tribe dumping toxic waste near her (for profit). Additional lines (some almost gratuitous, and sometimes with ludicrously tenuous and coincidental linkages) involve recent English boyfriend who follows her back to Italy and is kidnapped by remaining tribe in attempt to stop her going to court against them, and a negotiator who tries to get him out.	
Oct 10	Anil's Ghost	Michael Ondaatje	3	Another unsatisfactory book from him. Easier to follow than English Patient (not saying much). Lots of dis- and non- connections. Book telling bits of the inter-faction brutalities in Sri Lanka in the '80s/'90's.	
Oct 10	A Most Wanted Man	John le Carre	3	Steady story of Chechin with inherited Russian mafia money trying to assimilate in Germany. Ends with him being renditioned to USA – who think he's an Islamic terrorist (it's never clear what he is).	
Oct 10	The Blind Side of the Heart	Julia Frank	3	Depressing tale of (mainly) a young German woman born to demented Jewish mother and soon to die father before WW1. Torment and instability then lead her onto abandoning her son as WW2 is underway – having married unhappily after the love of her life tragically dies pre-WW2.	
Sep 10	The Welsh Girl	Peter Ho Davies	4	Two eventually linked and one almost completely independent (Rudolph Hess related) tale set in WW2 Wales with German POW's moved there after D day.	
Sep 10	The Good German	Joseph Kanon	3	Mid '45 in conquered Berlin, US journalist re-finds his German mistress and helps her scientist husband escape Russian and get to US. Pretty complex thriller. First 50 pages a bit tedious scene-setting and last few I didn't follow totally, but an OK read!	
Aug 10	We are now beginning our descent	James Meek	3	War journalist cum author struggles to find himself and a woman (his childhood crush, a fellow journo who turns out to be alcoholic, ...) in three years following 9/11. Good storyline, with slow unravelling of his background and influences. Lots of very believable on-the-scene life in war torn Afghanistan and Iraq. Interesting flashbacks/forwards across adjacent paragraphs which all worked fine. But let down a bit too much agonising and internalising when carrying on with the story would have been better.	
Aug 10	Jackdaws	Ken Follett	2	Thriller about female SOE team blowing up a crucial telephone exchange on the eve of D-day. Led by glamorous and hugely wily girl, who is pitted against an almost equally clever German officer. Ridiculously fast pace (almost Spooks-like in its collapsed time frames), but a great read.	
Aug 10	The Courilof Affair	Irène Némirovsky	4	IN is author of Suite Française. This is set in Russia before WW1 round revolutionary's' assassination of the Czar's Education minister. Apparently modelled on fact, but a very overly-full of uninteresting detail and Russian-feeling (mercifully slim) book.	
Aug 10	Chronicles (Volume One)	Bob Dylan	4	Rambling, totally non-chronological. Lots of jumps in time and place with no introduction. All very like the man on stage. Endless lists of people who influenced him, but otherwise deadly dull.	
Aug 10	The Last Empress	Anchee Min	5	Dull as dishwasher	
Aug 10	One of Us	Melissa Benn	3	New labour families political setting; not great.	
Jul 10	A Carrion Death	Michael Stanley	3	Good thriller set around mining conglomerate and its ruling family in Botswana. Nice mix of "white" and native characters. Excellent "Detective Kuduf" uncovers the derring-do in the end (tho, the last 3rd dragged a bit once one realised who had done what – if not why). Author is two people (Michael someone and someone Stanley) and front cover promises there will be more of the same. Will be worth reading.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Jul 10	The Warning Bell	Tom Macaulay	3	Powerful story unravelling events during WW2 in a small Brittany port (set somewhere west of Dinard). Layers of cover-up amid the horrors and compromises and decisions by local residents in occupied France, and a British air-sea-rescue pilot involved with them. All dredged up 60 years later by his son. Would give it a 2 except it dragged a bit from time to time in the first half.	
Jul 10	Chapel at the Edge of the World	Kirsten McKenzie	3-	Split fiction of Italian POW's captured early in the war ending up on Orkney where they built its "Italian Chapel" from Nissan huts. Other part is life back in Italy for the girlfriend of one of them who becomes a resistance person, and some of the wartime horrors there. But, the grammar was awkward, the pace slow and the structure contrived.	
Jun 10	City of Thieves	David Benioff	2	Set in and round the siege of Leningrad (St. Petersburg / "Pitter") during WW2. Two young Russian men get thrown in gaol by Soviets and offered chance out if they can get 12 eggs for some big boss. Good story line with lots of 100% believable detail of the horrors and severe deprivations that the Russians went through an, ultimately, survived.	
Jun 10	Divisadero	Michael Ondaatje	4	Poor, disjointed, fragmentary story. Style akin to the English Patient, but just no interest/strength behind the obfuscated presentation.	
Jun 10	The Last Resort	Douglas Rogers	3	Very first-hand description of white life through Zimbabwe's deterioration. Primarily describing his resourceful parents altering the use of their (originally) backpacker hotel/camp to cater for various waves of monied locals and avoid being killed or thrown off their acreage. Ends in mid-2009 with them still holding on. Book had more of son's private life details than was necessary, which made it a slightly uninspiring read at times.	
Jun 10	Unknown	Mari Jungstedt	3	More of the same. Multiple gruesome murders with religious/ritualistic settings. Same detective and journalist (this is 3 rd in series). Similar anonymous thread through the book giving the killers thoughts and behaviour.	
Jun 10	Unseen	Mari Jungstedt	3	Murder mystery. 3 women viciously hacked to death on Swedish island of Gotland. Only link is panties stuffed in their mouths. Cool, steady plot working to the denouement. Same tensions between police and journalists as in Stieg Larsson books.	
Jun 10	Exit Music	Ian Rankin	3-	Uninspiring and convoluted story set round murder of Russian poet in Edinburgh backstreet. Followed by another murder of linked person. Tedious churning to the end where they are not linked and Rebus retires (also a plodding theme of the book).	
May 10	The English Patient	Michael Ondaatje	3	OK read, but I wouldn't have followed it without seeing the film first! Has the same lyrical feel that the film captures so well. But very ragged and disjointed chronology and plot. Differences from (if I remember it well) the film: - the thumbless Caravaggio knew Hana well from Canada - EP admits to being Almásy the upper-crust Hungarian spy - there didn't seem to be the bit about the EP giving something away that directly caused Caravaggio's torture	
May 10	The Diving Bell and the Butterfly	Jean-Dominique Bauby	2	Excellent short book that the film was made from. He writes lyrically and amusingly despite his awful situation and the frightfully tedious eye-blinking "dictation" process.	
May 10	Bomber	Len Deighton	3	Hugely detailed description of 24 hours in WW2 ending with a bombing raid on a fictitious N. German town (mis-targeted when it should have been a larger industrial one nearby). Rather long build up, with too many characters to keep tabs on, but, despite the often ragged and non-sequitur-ing prose (apparently written on IBM computer thing in late 60's pre-dating word-processors by a decade; maybe that mixed things up!) vividly describes the horrors of all involved.	
Apr 10	The Museum of Innocence	Orhan Pamuk	5	Randy, unfaithful wealthy Turkish young man and his sex life – very uninteresting. Didn't finish it.	
Apr 10	Alarm Call	Quintin Jardine	4	Poor "mystery" by a pompous writer (I suspect) with a pompous and self-important main character. Scot's film start doing some sleuthing around ex-wife's allegedly kidnapped small son.	
Apr 10	Address Unknown	Kressman Taylor	2	Very slim fiction published in 1938. Consists of a handful of letters between an American Jew and his good German friend who returned to Germany from the US in early 1930s. Friend then turned Nazi and tried to disown Jew, who managed to get friend killed by Nazi's by keeping on writing to him.	
Apr 10	Notes from an Exhibition	Patrick Gale	3+	Good flash-forward/back tale of manic depressive (now called bi-polar) painter woman and her troubled past. Set (mainly) in Cornwall and confusingly using real people (like Barbara Hepworth) as fictionalised characters. Story unfolds after painter's death with nice chapter intro's/hints in the form of exhibit notes from a retrospective of her work. Had the feel of a book written by a woman, and found out in the after-words that PG is a renowned gay!	
Apr 10	The Girl who kicked the Hornets nest	Stieg Larsson	1	And the final part. First half pretty hard work with all much more detailed exposition of the government/security service structures and cover ups. But in 2 nd half Lisbeth is back in play and it zips again.	
Mar 10	The Girl Who Played with Fire	Stieg Larsson	1	More of the same. Getting further into the Lisbeth character's tormented background. Totally sudden ending, more or less needing the last book as follow-on.	
Mar 10	The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Stieg Larsson	1	Fast moving and excellently written. Basis of the main storyline is lurid and over the top, with sex, violence and unbelievably sick characters. Given he writes and intrigues so well with normal subject matter this is a shame. But a cracking good read! Also, nice wind-down at the end with the main thread (finding originally-thought-to-be-dead industrial tycoon's niece, Harriet) running on to the secondary story – the discrediting of the nasty industrialist's doings.	
Mar 10	The Vagrants	Yiyun Li	3	Slightly indirect tales of life in post-Mao and still hugely repressed Communist China. Hung round the execution of a fanatical 28-year-old girl who, as a teenager had terrorised and beaten up those who hadn't been Communist enough for her. The regime that killed her did so in a vile way (cutting her vocal chords so she couldn't pontificate at the massively public "denunciation" that preceded her execution, and removing her kidneys on – possibly before – death to use in a transplant). So, another reminder of what a ghastly place China has been for many despite regime changes. The writing was a trifle hard to follow at times, but worth reading.	
Feb 10	Self-made Man	Norah Vincent	3+	Interesting and very readably analytic description of a gay woman living as a man for 18 months. She found men's on-the-surface reserved and unemotional face hid feelings she could understand (tho, being Americans they all seemed much more open than Brits!). Also how dumb girls are dealing with men – wanting the macho and sensitivity. Just slightly too verbose to get a "2" rating!	
Feb 10	Don't Lets Go to the Dogs Tonight	Alexandra Fuller	2	Vivid, if slightly staccato, autobiography of life of a poorish white girl and family in southern Africa. Parents must both have been immensely capable (he owned and/or managed farms), delightful as well as drunks. Mother particularly so (and with good reason). But amongst all that, they worked hugely hard to recover or keep going the many farms they were on over the years. Had to contend with Rhodesia/Zimbabwe civil war, terrorists, mines as well as the weather and, usually, poorish land. Would have been good to find out how her father actually managed to do what he did.	
Feb 10	The Catastrophist	Ronan Bennett	3	Congo revolution 1959/60. Told through the eyes of a writer/journalist seeing and getting mixed up in the horrors of first Belgian misrule then inter-tribal slaughter after independence, including slaughter of first PM, Patrice Lumumba. Story muddled for me by intense plot line of the writer's infatuation with Italian journalist who was reason he went to Congo, but subsequently left him, but kept drawing on his life there. Reminiscent of "Half of a Yellow Sun" but not as focussed.	
Feb 10	To Kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee	3+	Good man (Atticus Finch) defends Negro accused of raping a white woman in the deep-ish South in the 1930s. Told through the eyes of his super-smart tomboy 8-year old daughter (Scout) and her 12-year old brother (Jem). Lots of good background on life of smart well-educated family rubbing against the more basic folk in the backwoods.	
Feb 10	The Lost World of the Kalahari	Laurens van der Post	3	Description of his journey to find some of the last Bushmen in the Kalahari in the 1950s. He only found them in the last ¼ of the book and slightly rambling about them; maybe because the expedition was also making a film, which presumably was more illuminating. But makes me less than keen to read the sequel to this, "The Heart of the Hunter". But, he writes well and the first ¾ was much more interesting with the process and hassles of assembling his team. Including having to ditch his first, French, prima-donna camera man a few weeks in and the zip back to Jo'burg to find another one along with a fairly unique camera that could use his specially prepared film!	

Books

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Jan 10	The White Tiger	Aravind Adiga	3	Tale of poverty, wealth, misery and corruption in India. Well presented as a letter/confession from a peasant who becomes a chauffeur and makes it after killing his master and taking a wad of money Master was on way to bribe politician with.	
Jan 10	Home Leave	Libby Purves	3	Family saga – four 30-40 year old siblings, children of a diplomat (hence "Home Leave" – term for slightly unsettled stints in the UK during childhood). Based on her own experience as such, but not, she says, autobiography. Mainly centred on oldest woman, with upsets and relationship problems coming and going. Nice easy read – first few chapters, when she rattles through their first 40 years is easier to follow than later book, when I found the (modest) number of characters harder to keep track of!	
Jan 10	Let My People Go	Albert Luthuli	3	Autobiography of S. African ANC/freedom leader in the 50's. A very Christian and pragmatic person, in much the same mould as Mandela, who sort of followed on from him. I think there may have been some bad blood between the two (post the date of this book – 1960; AL died in '64); must read elsewhere. A very forgiving, patient and all-embracing guy – who must have set the tone for ANC during its banning and struggles.	
Jan 10	Labyrinth	Kate Mosse	3	Tale sweeps between 1200-ish Cathar/French wars around Carcassonne and 2005 follow-on. Cathar (anti-catholic, Christian religion) aspect not at all well explained, but was the basis of some nasty violence from the northern/French "crusaders". The Grail thread behind it all is pretty silly, but the (presumably reasonable) historical and thriller sides of this 700-pager make it a decent read.	
Dec 09	Borkmann's Point	Hakan Nesser	3	Good Swedish cop/murder-thriller. Rather convoluted plot as retiring chief-of-police is found to be the culprit series hero, Van Veeteren, on assignment.	
Dec 09	An American Dream	Norman Mailer	5	Almost unintelligible verbal diarrhoea. Wierd, lurid and drunken tale of New York TV presenter husband who murders his upper class ex-wife. He seems to get off with it because father-in-law is a villain with power to pressurise the police.	
Dec 09	River God	Wilbur Smith	5	Pseudo-history of Egyptian nobility; might have been good if his writing style wasn't so sensational and salacious.	
Dec 09	On Chesil Beach	Ian McEwan	3	Dullish slim story of just-wed couple falling apart after sexual incompatibility found on their wedding night.	
Dec 09	Strattons War	Laura Wilson	4	Overly complex and not hugely gripping tale of murder and treason in WW2.	
Nov 09	The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire	Edward Gibbon	5	Too much heavy going for me (despite being edited edition). Gave up in the 1 st chapter while he was establishing what a settled/happy place the Empire was in the time of the Antonines (Marcus Aurelius, I think) before the fall started.	
Nov 09	In Stitches	Dr Nick Edwards	3	Unstructured, scattered and generally light hearted moans of an A&E Doctor. Seemed to think that Blairite investment in, and targets for, NHS have been a good thing, but with many problems that he didn't really have cogent suggestions for. Good to hear him saying the same things we do about the lack of communication and excess of paperwork duplication and target chasing that hinder the service.	
Nov 09	Praying Mantis	Andre Brink	4	Dull tale of slightly mystical SA native (Hottentot) – based on real people there between 1760 and 1830. The guy rose from very poor roots, via being a drunkard and womaniser to being a preacher for the London Missionary Society.	
Nov 09	Unforgotten	Clare Francis	4	Poor. Two virtually unrelated stories in on book. First and very uninteresting one takes first 1/3 rd of book and last few pages. Decent who-dunnit buried in the rest. Both involve solicitor – in first he represents man claiming damages after seeing his child burnt to death in a road accident, second when the solicitor's wife if murdered in what initially looks like a house fire.	
Nov 09	The Cellist of Sarajevo	Steven Galloway	3	Detailed misery of life for ordinary folk in 1992 S during the siege (which ran until 1996). Running across exposed roads to try to avoid being hit by snipers; few amenities; fetching water from a well across the city. Interestingly told with no politics or explanation for the situation at all – the besiegers just being referred to as "the men in the hills". Totally believable descriptions from the Canadian author who was 17 when the siege started and, from the notes, not there.	
Nov 09	The Piano Tuner	Daniel Mason	3	Intriguing tale of 1890s Londoner contracted by the War Office to go to Burma to tune the grand of an unconventional Doctor who is in charge of a key area on the Burma / Siam (Thailand) border. The Dr demanded the piano and then the tuner to keep him sweet; the army are happy to humour him because of his (non violent) success with "the natives". Some good atmosphere and scene descriptions, but the political situation was not at all well explained/alluded-to (involved many different local tribes, as well as French and Russian imperial ambitions). Ends with dramatic reversal in the situation as portrayed, with the Dr being a spy and the tuner being killed by the Army.	
Oct 09	Mortal Fear	Greg Isles	4	Lurid, massively over-sexual and violent thriller. Superman oddball doing "SYSOP" for an online sex chatroom system eventually gets his man. Technical/computery stuff all pretty silly, but I grudgingly read to the end – he does have an ability to convey in words Spooks-like ridiculously rapid action scenes. I guess I might read him again if the subject matter was less revolting.	
Oct 09	The Road to Wigan Pier	George Orwell	3	Great clear descriptions of living with early 1930s working class and visiting coal mines. Then runs into a diatribe on the need for Socialism to counteract the misery and poverty he saw. Including plea to current Socialists to discard their loony appearance and posturing which puts so many normal people off them. Fairly prescient about likelihood of another war (book written in 1935/6) and amazingly still-valid criticisms of many aspects of life: eg: dumbing down by mass media (arts of conversation and listening being destroyed by radio on all the time), loss of quality of food as mechanisation/standardisation produces good looking but poor tasting imports.	
Oct 09	Ice Road	Gillian Slovo	3	Far too indirect view of Stalin's terror and the siege of Leningrad (whose Ice Road across Lake Ladoga helped many flee – though this wasn't clarified in the book). Story dominated by minutia of loves, lives and sufferings of various fictional players. I think she implied the terror started with Stalin's (alleged) murder of Kirov (whose name later given to the renamed Marinsky ballet) – up till then his best buddy and right hand man running Leningrad – in Dec 1934. Interesting date parallel with Hitler's killing of his erstwhile ally/challenger Ernst Roehm in June '34.	
Oct 09	Rat Run	Gerald Seymour	3	Usual solitary outcast hero story with lots of threads slowly being pulled together. This of Al Qaeda big man being smuggled into Europe and then UK by mixture of Albanian ruffians and London low life. Pretty gruesome drugs and violence background, but an OK holiday read.	
Sep 09	auto da fay	Fay Weldon	3	Read this autobiography because of the great title and to find out if she mentioned Aunt Joanna (she didn't). A bit too much on her grandparents and parents. But interesting start in NZ and then poverty and madness in post war England. Though published in 2002, almost nothing after 1961 when she met and married Ron Weldon (3 rd of 4 th husbands).	
Sep 09	The last of the Mwldan	Idris Matthias	3	Very bitty memoirs of childhood in the slum area of Cardigan. Horrific tales and well written prose, but the book is just a stream of unconnected paragraphs.	
Sep 09	he Mosquito Coast	Paul Theroux	3+	Absorbing if depressing tale of manic American inventor who leaves a USA whose materialism he hates. Takes his entire, youngish family into jungles of Honduras where they live a deteriorating mixture of Robinson Crusoe and Lord of the Flies.	
Sep 09	Playing with the Moon	Eliza Graham	3	Flash forward/back what-happened tale of black GI dying on Devon beach. Rather sentimental and not particularly gripping.	
Aug 09	Staying Alive	Alexander Fullerton	3	Pretty average WW2 thriller set round young female SOE radio operator on her first mission. Very derivative storyline, padded out with much too much dull and easy to find detail (eg: endless road names). Apparently 5 th book about the same character - Rosie Ewing – the others having been published earlier and covering chronologically later episodes. Intriguingly told as if the author is finally meeting the real life person behind the previous 4. But this is rather too contrived; the grammar and speechifying is also too chatty to be that easy a read.	
Aug 09	The Black Swan	Nassim Nicholas Taleb	3	Hard work, though written in relatively accessible language. How random events are so important in predicting the future, and so important because they are unpredictable. But, he is a garrulous writer and very full of himself. Another one lacking a decent editor!	

Books

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Aug 09	The Girl of his Dreams	Donna Leon	4	Dreadful book. Pages 1-106 are about some dubious religious sect, but are very slow moving and never get anywhere (they feel like a very long winded sketch of the first chapters of some story that has not been developed). The remaining 220 pages are a completely different story (and the one that's plugged on the back cover), of Gypsy persecution and/or villainy, but ends abruptly with no conclusion. I can only assume that the author and publisher had some asinine deadline to produce 300 pages, and did so by cut&paste from two unfinished doodles.	
Jul 09	The Little Drummer Girl	John le Carre	3	Complex, hugely detailed, tale of Israeli intelligence run operation to get to a ridiculously well protected and careful Palestinian terrorist leader. They use a young English actress to pretend to be the girlfriend of TL's younger (and killed) brother. Readable, and surprisingly undated, given that it was written in 1983.	
Jul 09	Could do better	Phil Beadle	3+	Hugely readable and encouraging teachability book by a clearly inspirational and energetic teacher. Great general life info, which, in later chapters becomes more specific about what parents can expect and do to help their kids. Shame it wasn't there for us when S&T were being schooled.	
Jun 09	The House of Special Purpose	John Boyne	3	Romantic fiction of Russian peasant lad who, by chance, is taken into the Tsar's household, falls for Anastasia, and sees all the key details of the end of the Romanov's. Time shifting as same guy tends his dying wife in England years later, with expected denouement that they are the same woman.	
Jun 09	The Lemon Tree	Sandy Tolan	3+	Real lives described through the origins, birth and messy present of Israel/Palestinian conflict. Author a bit full of himself, and tries to be too clever mucking around with chronology and dramatic lead-ins. But good history throughout. He manages not to take any obvious sides, though is less clear as to why the Israelis (think they) should have a land there than vice versa. Also, I was not clear why the bitter war started immediately the UN decreed independence in 1948 (97), or why the Israelis were allowed to win it so thoroughly. I guess it was not unlike India/Pakistan a year or two before.	
May 09	The Other Side of the Dale	Gervase Phinn	3	"The James Herriot of schools". Pleasant enough bio of school inspectors life in Yorkshire Dales. Several interchanges with young kids portray them as non-believably mature.	
May 09	Death wore white	Jim Kelly	4	Poor and over-convoluted thriller about murders in snow laden Norfolk, by the Wash.	
May 09	Beijing Coma	Ma Jian	3	Would be an excellent book if edited to a third its size. Tells of the Tiananmen Square massacre through the intriguing mechanism of the mind-wanderings of one of the student leaders who was shot in the head on 4 July 1989 and was a vegetable thereafter. There are no chapters, but every few pages there's a visual break with an italicised phrase. The descriptions wander in time from his memories of growing up and the atrocities his parents generation and later suffered in the decades leading up to 1989, to post 1989 which he reports from the mass of information he gleans by listening to life going on round him, and visits from his surviving colleagues. But, the phrasing is so clever that one is never in doubt as to what era he's talking about paragraph by paragraph, but without the need for heavy-handed scene-setting. As well as hammering home China's state awfulness, his turgid detail of the students' endless bureaucracy makes one wonder which tyrants one would want to live under! Not sure I fully appreciated the metaphor of his coma and the sterility of the post-1989 decade. The book ends with his "now" physical self coming to some unclear but final relief – presumably death.	
May 09	The Islamist	Ed Husain	3	Autobiography (to date) of youngish British Muslim who moved from radical Islamist in his teens and early 20's to moderate in later 20's. Difficult to fully believe the massive amount of time he seemed to spend agitating, politicking and reading about Islam and other faiths during (particularly) his GCSE and A levels. Also, where he got money to live throughout (he lived at home a fair bit – tho' his parents hated his radicalism). Almost too much interesting and not hugely digestible fact (I assume) about Islam and its history. But, ultimately depressing seeing that even tho' he, a smart enquiring type eventually "got wise" there is no sign of any end to the hoards who, like the younger him, want to impose an ill thought out system on all unbelievers at any cost and violence.	
Apr 09	Bad Luck and Trouble [JR#11]	Lee Child	3	Another great thriller. This introducing some of Reachers MP background as he and three of his original team hunt the killers of the other four, and he gets \$100k to keep him going.	
Apr 09	Work Hard Be Nice	Jay Matthews	4	Hagiography of two American guys who founded KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) in the US. Recommended by Bill Gates on a TED video. Encouraging to hear of positivism and progress. But, very little detail on the actual teaching methods. Mainly hugely repetitive adulation of the two men and their inspirations. I stopped reading half way through.	
Apr 09	The Glass Palace	Amitav Ghosh	3	Long, multi-generational tale of India, Burma and Malaya from, roughly 1900 – 1996. Could have done with a family tree to help keep track of the numerous families and generations. Some interesting history of, for instance, the Indian National Army – 1000's of thousands of Indians who (largely) defected from the British one during WW2 and fought with the Japanese. Similar in Burma (led by General Aung San - Suu Kyi's grandfather). But nothing on Indian independence, and many of the characters pretty flimsy.	
Mar 09	Nothing to Lose [JR#12]	Lee Child	3	Good thriller. Pretty unlikely super-action ex Marine hero character (Jack Reacher). Able to beat 6 attackers, etc, etc. But all good fun. Very staccato style rubs off; I found it hard to sleep after reading!	
Mar 09	The Night Manager	John le Carre	3-	Massively complicated thriller. The thriller bit just about intelligible – deep spy trying to finger a weapons+drugs baron - but incomprehensible politicking sub plot.	
Mar 09	Dreams from my Father	Barack Obama	3	Good auto-biography and background. Published mid-90's before he'd done any official politics. Lots of "organising" in Chicago, and a surprising (to me) amount of black consciousness and talk of black (rather than just 1995 disadvantaged) improvement. Comes over as a very warm and decent guy.	
Feb 09	Kipling	Jad Adams	3	Interesting bio of the man – who's works I'm pretty ignorant of. He had a miserable childhood – sent away to school from 6 till 16. He was a worldwide success in his early 20's and, the author implies, wrote more sensitive and intelligent verse and stories than he and the public may have given him credit for. Seems to have gone down hill and even further to the right as he got older. He nearly died in his early 30's (his young daughter did) of bronchial complications.	
Feb 09	Dangerous Pursuits	Alanna Knight	4	Poor end of 19 th century detective yarn. 30 year old woman and totally out of era language and grammar!	
Feb 09	White Boys don't cry	John Fullerton	3	Tale of murder in South Africa used as vehicle to hang some history of the ANC/Communist struggle and end of Apartheid around. First half was pretty good, but the second degenerated into unnecessarily strung out and tortuous connections.	
Feb 09	Cleanskin	Val McDermid	3	Pretty gory thriller about London gang master villain getting his revenge. Much like many a TV show in its fast pace and goriness. But, a fair day's read!	
Feb 09	This Green Land	John Fullerton	3+	Thriller set in Lebanese civil war. Good read and some understandings of a female suicide-bomber's mentality. She and an English UN guy are the mixed up protagonists. Sadly the politics was still too confusing for me to grasp!	
Jan 09	The Faithful Spy	Alex Berenson	3	Good Seymour-like spy thriller. CIA agent deep in Al Qaeda sent back to US (after many years away) manages to foil AQ plans in the end.	
Jan 09	Get a Life	Nadine Gordimer	5	Another dreadfully-written book; I didn't finish it. Frightfully unreadable prose, probably good story set round man, and family, recovering from thyroid cancer op.	
Jan 09	Hornet Flight	Ken Follett	3	Good, undemanding wartime thriller. Lots of derring-do (mainly) by Danish teenagers out-witting the local Nazi/police to get details of advanced German radar development to the Brits in the nick of time.	536 2002
Dec 08	Maps of My Life	Guy Browning	3	Amusing auto-biography told in wry, Bryson-esque style. But, surprisingly given the title and the PR sessions on Radio 4, there's virtually no "map" connection.	
Dec 08	Diamond Dove [ET#1]	Adrian Hyland	3	Who-dunnit in outback Australia. Interestingly and believably written by (I think) a white man with an Aboriginal woman (cover says: "An Emily Tempest Mystery") as the very main, rough and tumble character. Slightly glib, Raymond Chandler(?) -esque, style – not sure whether this is tongue-in-cheek, but doesn't grate too much.	
Dec 08	A Brief Excursion and Other Stories	Antun Soljan	3	Selection of shortish stories by Croatian activist writer. Good readable translations, but the subtle undercurrents were pretty much lost on me, though the title story of an almost Pilgrims-Progress-like quest for some important truth was good. The narrator and the instigator being the only ones who didn't fall by the wayside, but the narrator being the only one to reappear after locating the frescoes tended by a solitary monk in a remote monastery.	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Nov 08	Confessions of and English Opium Eater	Thomas de Quincey	3	Remarkably readable (given it was written in the early 19 th century), anecdotes from his interesting life. Not all that much on Opium or dreams – despite the title and the introducers ramblings – but some fragments of bumbling round Wales (having quit school at 17 – being so massively ahead of his teachers in, particularly, classics) and being down and out in London. It's not clear to me why this book was so popular when it came out – I can only assume he had a name in the literary world that helped punt it.	
Nov 08	A line in the sand	Gerald Seymour	3	Good reliable easy read. Similar to all his – various characters being slowly woven to a just about plausible finale. This built round an Iranian hit-man coming after a UK Engineer who had spied and deceived his Iranian hosts many years ago and gets dubious MI5/6 protection.	
Nov 08	The Doors of Perception. Heaven and Hell	Aldous Huxley	3-	Massively erudite essays on, partly, his experiences under mescaline and LSD. Didn't really follow too much of it!	
Nov 08	The Ghost	Robert Harris	3	Slow to get going and unusual thriller – hung round ghostwriter brought in to do a Tony Blair-alike's auto biog. Used to dig at TB and his politics, US control, etc, but the 2 nd half is a goodish read!	
Nov 08	The High Road	Edna O'Brien	3-	Love recovery for an Irish woman in Spain. Not very interesting!	
Oct 08	White Mughals	William Dalrymple	3	Lengthy history of British in East India (Hyderabad-based) late 18 th – mid 19 th century. Mainly concentrating on James Kirkpatrick who (in)famously "went native" - marrying a 15 year old princess, assimilating well with the Moslems and trying to temper bone headed British behaviour. Quite an interesting twists and turns, but rather more detail than I'd have liked (500 pages could have been a lot less!). Fascinating how much was transacted by letter (and how many of them survive), and how JK survived in his senior post despite being hated by the Governor General (Wellesley) and others – his amazing rapport with the locals keeping him in place.	
Oct 08	Blue Man Falling	Frank Bernard	3	RAF fighter pilots during the Phoney War and Battle of France (ie: up to July 1940 – before the more well-known Battle of Britain). Rather too much re-iteration of engine speeds and oil pressures but a good story of the steady retreats and losses in this early part of WW2.	
Oct 08	A Crime in the Neighborhood	Suzanne Berne	3	To-kill-a-Mockingbird-like (I think) tale of murder and disruption in 70's suburban USA (DC). Told through the recollections of the young girl who put blame on the wrong person (cf: Ian McEwan's Atonement).	
Sep 08	Zugzwang	Ronan Bennett	3	Thriller set in 1914 St Petersburg amid Bolsheviks and general unrest. Hung round a psychiatrist whose patients get him mixed up in murder and mayhem. Ultimately a bit convoluted, and I didn't follow at all the chess game details that are woven through it (Title means chess position where player is reduced to helplessness). But, not a bad read!	
Sep 08	The Dragons Tail	Adam Williams	3	Story of two China-born men – one western one Chinese – and a Chinese girl. Lots of graphic and believable detail of the horrors of China before during and after Mao. Far too long-winded, but still a good read. Turns out to be last of 3 books linked by the same family (others from previous generations).	
Sep 08	Wolf Winter	Clare Francis	3	Good thriller about edge-of-cold war spying in Norway with hang-overs from WW2 derring-do's. Started a bit slowly, but 2nd half very gripping. More depth in relationship and character than in many thrillers.	
Aug 08	A Wild Herb Soup	Emilie Carles	3-	Rambling autobiography of very impressive French woman. Managed to become a schoolteacher from her Peasant background, and then a respected campaigner to save her near-alpine valley. Interesting on the hardships and pettiness of the peasants (who still called themselves that in the 1970s); I loved it, but I found it pretty tedious!	
Aug 08	A Golden Age	Tahmima Anam	3-	Story of a Pakistani/Bangladeshi widow and her two young-adult children through the Bangladesh war. Disappointingly little or no information on the reasons for, progress (9 months?), and outcome of the war. Plenty of mundane and horror detail, but ultimately, and sadly for me, more a tale of relationships than history. So, even less useful background than the Biafran-equivalent in "Half of a Yellow Sun".	
Jul 08	The White Nile	Alan Moorehead	3	History of Central/East African exploration in the 19 th century. Good read conveying the determination, courage and horrors as westerners colonised this wild area. Burton, Speke, Gordon, Stanley (a surprisingly frequent and successful journalist-cum-explorer), inter alia. Horrors as much from the climate and topography as the varied and devious locals (cannibals, butchering tribal leaders and the great Mahdi).	
Jul 08	Heart of Betrayal	Andrew Britton	3	Slow-off-the mark and run-of-the-mill thriller. Too much "heart" (love threads), but, despite a whopper at the end, not as unbelievable as some of the genre. OK holiday read; nothing more.	
Jul 08	The Moscow Vector	Robert Ludlum	3-	Formulaic thriller with little thrill. Just about OK as a holiday read!	
Jul 08	The Lost Garden	Helen Humphreys	3-	Weak war tale of horticultural and up-tight young woman looking after an old houseful of Land Girls during WW2.	
Jul 08	A pair of Silver Wings	James Holland	2	Great semi-true story of WW2 fighter pilot. Well-pitched with him looking back on his time after 50 years – having more or less given up on life following his 6 years of excitement, pain and loss – all vividly described. Written by a young guy who had clearly managed to really get into the spirit and lives of such youngsters (the book's subject was a 23-year-old squadron leader at the end of his war) from just talking to old men.	
Jul 08	The Fist of God	Frederick Forsyth	2	Excellent read about the first Gulf war. Thriller about Saddam Hussein's mysterious "supergun" and how it might have explained his apparently suicidal behaviour in invading Kuwait.	
Jun 08	The Collaborator of Bethlehem	Matt Benyon Rees	3-	OK-ish who-dunnit set in Palestinian Bethlehem. Sleuth is ageing teacher trying to find perpetrators of crimes against his ex-pupils; plenty of realistic sounding horrors of hate/distrust (amongst Palestinians as much as against Israelis), retribution and mob law. But basically too weak and poorly paced plot to be recommendable.	
Jun 08	The Cold Moon	Jeffrey Deaver	3	Endlessly twisting cops&villains tale. Quite engrossing plot as supposed killer turns out not to be what is first presented. Interesting (NY) cop set: paraplegic forensics expert, Cracker-like behavioural/body-language ("kinesics") analyst woman. Also the less common trait of telling you who the villains are and what they're up to in parallel with the cops (tho' the twists mean this is all red-herring land). But let down by pretty unsavoury thread to the first half (main villain's side-kick being a sexual pervert).	
Jun 08	Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible	Jim Steinmeyer	3	OK, but slightly lugubrious wade through the history of magicians in 19 th and early 20 th century. Explanations on some illusions/tricks, but, annoyingly, none on a couple of major ones (Sawing lady in half, walking through brick wall). Interesting how most magicians need great mechanical and scientific skills.	
May 08	The Egg and I	Betty MacDonald	3+	Delightful autobiography of 4 years of a young girl's life in the 1920s as she and newly-wed husband set up a chicken farm in (pretty remote) mountains in Washington State. Wonderful light and witty, self-deprecating, style; somewhat Bryson-like but all the more impressive from being a) written 50 years earlier and b) remaining so readable today – 70+ years since she wrote it. Also amazing to read how much effort the two of them (and many like them, no doubt) put into the mechanics of life (building house, water supplies, fending off bears, ...).	
May 08	Half of a Yellow Sun	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	3	Extensive tale of lives and horrors of the Biafran war in late 60's. Largely human focus meant it failed to explain the politics that caused western (mainly Yoruba) Nigeria to fight eastern (which declared itself independent as Biafra; mainly Ibo/Igbo). Or why the oil-rich east ended up being starved into submission.	
Apr 08	A Life in Secrets	Sarah Helm	3+	Unusually riveting biography of a little-known 2 nd in command (effectively) of SOE French operations during WW2 – Vera Atkins. Slightly repetitive, but told with slow unravelling and detective work to uncover secrets and speculations about a very remarkable woman. Managed to skirt much of the allegation/fact on massive incompetence of SOE/France chief (Maurice Buckmaster) and others leading to many agents being parachuted straight into German hands.	
Apr 08	At Risk [LC#1]	Stella Rimington	3	Terrorist thriller by ex boss of MI5. Interesting that she seemed to describe things no differently than any other pure-fiction spy writer – so guess they all do their research pretty well. Slightly long-winded, and weak-ending'ed, but a decent enough read!	
Apr 08	City of Joy	Dominique LaPierre	3	Life (just by our standards) in a slum in Calcutta in the 70's. Hopefully things are a little better then. Wide-ranging tales involving some real "foreign" heroes (Polish priest, Mother Theresa, young US doctor) living in its bowels (literally at times) and endless indigenous ones. Tone a little too constantly heartening, but very amazing withall.	
Mar 08	The Innocent	Ian McEwan	3-	Hard to read and very over-wordy 1964 treatise on the process of (Architectural) design. I struggled through most of it.	
Mar 08	The Three Sisters	Chekhov	3-	Yet another depressing/dull decline of middle class family into humdrum life.	
Mar 08	The Conservationist	Nadine Gordimer	4	Very poorly written 1974 S.Africa story. Apparently it was joint winner of the Booker prize – god knows why!	

Books

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Feb 08	The Hidden Face of Eve	Nawal El Saadawi	3-	Reputedly key work on women in the Arab world. Written 1979 (soon after the Iranian revolution replaced the Shah with embryonic fundamentalism), it is amazingly relevant today – most of what she describes sounds little changed since then. Some grizzly detail on female circumcision and general social second-class status. Endless stuff on women's suppression; but badly marred by her regular claim that it's just as bad for Western women (with zero sensible illustration). But endless repetition and pretty left-wing ranting make it tedious to read to the end.	
Jan 08	Have I Got Views For You	Boris Johnson	3+	Collection of articles in his inimitable style, over a 15 year period. Strangely the original date of each was only found by checking a list at the end of the book, making context of each harder to discern.	
Jan 08	The Russian Concubine	Kate Furnivall	3	1930s derring-do in fictional Chinese town peopled with exiled Russians and Brits. Teenage girl of the former falls for communist Chinese guy and the two get embroiled in aggro with Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang and opium dealers. All hugely over-dramatic and -sensational, but a good enough read.	
Dec 07	The Spanish Game [AM#2]	Charles Cumming	3	Good spy thriller. Young divorced-from-SIS/MI5/6 Brit in Madrid gets lured back into very twisty tale set round ETA terrorist-ery. Surprisingly readable given almost nothing happens in the first 1/3rd of the book. Lots of apparent allusions to the spy's previous life (and a previous book - "A spy by nature" - must read it).	
Dec 07	Red Fox	Gerald Seymour	3	Good, standard-fare thriller, set and written ~1979, around RAF/BaderMeinhoff style terrorists in Italy. Slightly ropey english made it harder to read than later Seymour's – I wonder if it was his first.	
Dec 07	Coram Boy	Jamila Gavin	3	Readable fiction hung loosely on the London Coram "hospital" for orphans. Starts with evil child-snatcher who preys on women distant from London, taking money to allegedly take a child to Coram – when he usually kills them. Then lots of coincidences as different generations get involved.	
Dec 07	The Afghan	Frederick Forsyth	3	Classic FF thriller. Difficult to tell fact from fiction as he weaves real names into the tale of a ex SAS "ringer" taking over from a "released" Guantanamo internee to infiltrate an Al Qaeda attempt to blow up the Queen Mary with all the main heads of state on a global climate change conference. Chillingly believable.	
Nov 07	The Dream of Rome	Boris Johnson	3+	Great romp through latter Roman history (mainly round BC/AD era, Julius and Augustus Caesar). His writing style is much like his spoken – cheery, opinionated and hugely readable. Lots of parallel-ing to current EU – pointing out that the Roman empire worked because a) the Romans embraced and absorbed different religions and cultures, rather than demanding adherence to some Roman ones and b) they subtly and effectively promoted the benefits of citizenship. Good final chapter on the importance of talking with Islamists and pleading for acceptance of Turkey into the EU.	
Nov 07	A Spell of Winter	Helen Dunmore	3	Uncomfortable tale of sibling lovers early 20 th century. Parts quite good and harrowing, round the separations and isolations and bereavements of WW1, but mainly pretty creepy. Well written, though!	
Nov 07	Turkish Gambit	Boris Akunin	3	Weak historical/spy novel. Apparently one of a series with the same super (and young; 20-ish in this one) mid-19 th -century noble Russian sleuth (Erast Fandorin). Set at end of Turkish/Russian war ~1876 with very Russo-confusion on endless different names for the same people, and pretty rambling plot. Shame, since the historical side was interesting, if unclear.	
Oct 07	Restless	William Boyd	3+	Good spy thriller. 2-generations – with daughter of WW2 British agent (Russian/French recruit) hunting down her betrayer/lover.	
Oct 07	Au Revoir	Mary Moody	4	Very light auto-biog of 50-year old Aussie journalist taking 6 month holiday in France. Almost zero interaction or information with any French people. Entire book talking about herself or the Aussie/Ex-pat community she teamed up with and what they ate.	
Oct 07	The Map of Love	Ahdaf Soueif	3	Overly romantic/female parallel stories of ~1900 English woman marrying an Egyptian and her ~1997 descendants doing similar. Blurb promised political details about Egyptian/English/Colonial shenanigans around 1900 but it was far too light on this. Was interesting to realise: a) how the (pre)Turkey Persian empire ruled all the middle east, including Egypt, and the inter-Moslem/Arab tensions that was causing as the Persians empire disintegrated. b) how Palestinian/Jewish problems were already growing then (large influx of Jews from Russia after Japan beat Russia in 1905)	
Sep 07	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows	J.K. Rowling	3	Final book. Nuff said.	
Aug 07	School for Love	Olivia Manning	3-	Another dull mid-east (Jerusalem) colonial story. Teenage boy orphaned goes to live with horrendous spinster distant relative.	
Aug 07	Simon & the Oaks	Marianne Fredriksson	3-	Psychologically-heavy story of adopted Jewish boy growing up in Sweden before and after WW2. Good basic story polluted by too much metaphysical images of spirits he communes with.	
Jul 07	Trapped	David McKeown	3	Contrived thriller, set round people trafficking and internet villainy, with Bosnian base, but in London and taking in the world. Very fragmentary structure (100+ 1-5 page chapters) with mass of participants, and so little character development.	
Jul 07	Alibi	Joseph Kanon	3	Good thriller set in upper-crust end of WW2 Venice. US lead character mixed up in post-war vendettas of collaborators and Jewish persecution.	
Jul 07	The Natural History of Selbourne	Gilbert White	3	Surprisingly readable late 18c series of letters on, mainly, birdlife in a small English parish. Can't see how it gets its "4th most published book in the English language" claim; interesting how much time a (presumably not over-wealthy, but upper class) educated Vicar/Curate had to spend observing life around him. The letters appear a bit repetitive and scrappy – slightly inevitable being one side of them only, but also, I guess, partly because he was reporting in almost pre-science days.	
Jul 07	Heaven Forbid	Christopher Hope	3-	Rather indirect information on the 1948(?) election of Verwoerd's Nationalist party in South Africa, ushering in the 40+ years of Apartheid. Contrived telling through the eyes of a 5 year old boy didn't work particularly well.	
Jul 07	If the Invader Comes	Derek Beaven	3+	WW2 tale of extended family; two girl cousins, one working class and unstable, the other middle class, returning with father from colonial Malay life. The cousins end up sharing a man and a (as a result hugely confused) young son. Excellent detailed descriptions of wartime life, east end bombings, coal strike in 1944 stopping the trains (!), and D-day battlefields made it difficult to believe the author hadn't been there himself. Excellent read – might have got a 2, but the prose was occasionally convoluted, and hence sticky to read.	
Jun 07	Biko	Donald Woods	3	Largely factual account of Biko's life&death. A bit too much transcript of the (rather unenlightening) inquest. Though Woods is pretty dismissive of it and the judge, my impression was that the verdict – pretty much that he was killed by the police, but no-one specific could be indicted – was more than might have been hoped for at the time (1977). This edition was ~10 years later and benefited from an epilogue from Peter Jones (co-arrestee) giving gruesome and graphic detail of the torture he was put through (during 2 years solitary) – which clearly reinforced the way that Biko was treated and killed.	
May 07	Tales from the South China Seas	Ed: Charles Allen	3	Collection of verbatim descriptions/tales (originally on radio, I think) of life in the early 20 th century Malay peninsula. Bitty, but gives an idea of the generally friendly if paternal relations between the (mainly rubber planting) colonialists and natives.	
May 07	Popular Music	Mikael Niemi	3-	Occasionally amusing; but rambling subjective story of young boy growing up in remote northern Sweden – where they mainly speak Finnish dialect.	
Apr 07	Girl with a Pearl Earring	Tracy Chevalier	3	Weak, but more readable than "The Lady and the Unicorn". Presumably fictional invention of Vermeer's maid who was the object of the famous painting and, a/c author, his interest/love.	
Apr 07	The Places in Between	Rory Stewart	3	Yet another of an "interesting journey" - walking from west to east of Afghanistan a couple of months after the Taliban fell. Not in the same league as Crane, Bryson, Dalrymple or Jason Elliot but readable. Mainly very depressing how unpleasant the locals (almost) all were. Despite his intro saying he met lovely people, in fact he describes a rude, surly and often downright hostile and aggressive set of natives.	

Books

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Apr 07	Kleinwort Benson – the history of two families in Banking	Jehanne Wake	4	Much more detailed history than I needed! Clearly the author did a great job pandering to every last detail of her sponsors. Far too much on the people and, often, relatively irrelevant information. But some good history buried therein. Sadly its also pretty jargon-rich, so, again, would be ideal for her sponsors (who would be fluent in the nuances of banking terminology), but not for this ignoramus! But, what was interesting was:: 1. to realise how few people were involved until pretty recently (60's at least) – partly 'cos there was less going on than now, and partly 'cos the owners/money-makers only worked a few hours a week (often Tues-Thurs, 10'3-J) 2. how up and down things are – with both houses (and many others) recovering from some pretty grizzly and lousy low times. 3. what a major player KB was until (roughly) big-bang – when slight stuffiness and Premier Oil debacle hit.	
Feb 07	Sagittarius Rising	Cecil Lewis	3	Great tales of WW1 (mainly) flying days, from someone who joined up at ~16 and survived (when typical pilots life expectancy was 3 weeks). All upper crust, and of another age, but reminds you how seat-of-the-pants it all was. Small section at the end on his subsequent couple of years in China helping to set up their first commercial airlines – again very primitive stuff.	
Feb 07	The Doves of Venus	Olivia Manning	3-	Plodding autobiographical bits of young girl starting in London. Very thin male characters particularly.	
Jan 07	Notes on a Scandal	Zoë Heller	3-	Dull ramble of confidant/friend to teacher who has an affair with one of her school's pupils.	
Jan 07	Death and Judgment	Donna Leon	3	Good easy quick read. Who-dunnit about murder and prostitution set around Venice. From blurb this is one of many with the same likeable Italian cop protagonist.	
Jan 07	A Son of War	Melvyn Bragg	3-	Weak sequel to The Soldiers Return. Too much very minor detail – no doubt nostalgic for the author but pretty boring for the reader.	
Jan 07	Belle Ruin	Martha Grimes	4	Inspired uninspiring first few chapters. Didn't finish, threw away.	
Jan 07	The Sicilian	Mario Puzo	3	Gung-ho mafia sideline to the Godfather story (which didn't, we think, make into any of the films).	
Jan 07	The Architecture of Happiness	Alain de Botton	3	Pretty erudite set of essays and musings. Some nice illustrations and the some good snippets, but generally a bit hard work!	
Jan 07	The Rain Forest	Olivia Manning	3	Colonial setting on a fictitious Indian Ocean island in the '70s. Again a slightly adrift couple – ex movie script author and novelist wife. Similar feel to her two big trilogies, but much less absorbing.	
Jan 07	Saturday	Ian McEwan	3	Hung round 24 hours of a central London neurosurgeon's life (with lots of flashback/fill-in covering preceding many years). Unexpected slightly shocking incidents (maybe crashing plane, mugging and stalking by a mental case) reminiscent of Enduring Love. Graphic descriptions of brain operations.	
Dec 06	Coastliners	Joanne Harris	3-	Young woman returns to her home on an island off the Vendee coast. Starts well enough, hinting at mysteries to be uncovered as she tries to assimilate back to here birthplace, but ends up being strung out and dull.	
Dec 06	Postcards from No Man's Land	Aidan Chambers	3	Young love mixed up in flash to+fro between battle of Anrhem and modern day Amsterdam/Holland. Grandson of Arnheim casually comes to Holland to celebrate its anniversary and discover he has a second grandmother, who had sheltered his Grandpa during the war.	
Dec 06	Cold Sassy Tree	Olive Ann Burns	3	An everyday story of turn of +1906 small town America. Hung round teenager adapting to the second marriage, and life, of his one-armed grandfather to his milliner (GP runs the local store), a few weeks after his first wife's death. Good gentle stuff.	
Nov 06	The Blue Ice	Hammond Innes	3	Decent thriller. Late 40's chase for minerals expert, inaccurately assumed dead, by ex colleague – starting on yacht heading for Norway, and ending up on glacier. Feel of Riddle in the Sands.	
Nov 06	A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830	T C Smout	4	Dull/turgid. I picked it up hoping it would give details of the clearances, but they only got a handful of pages (out of 490). Ridiculously allusive, rather than instructive (eg: "... after 1707 ..." - expecting you to know that was the date of Union). No list of key dates; just awful!	
Oct 06	Working Effectively with Legacy Code	Michael C. Feathers	4	Interesting definition that Legacy Code is any that you can't test. Focussed almost entirely on Unit tests of methods - and the problems thereby when method parameters or their classes are hard to construct in a test environment. Lots of OO-ery to help do this (eg: create Interfaces which test harnesses can exercise using Fake objects that implement them). Plenty of formalised, but sensible, dogma about the careful steps and renamings to do when extracting code into more well-defined/testable units. A fair bit if C++ and C in examples, but, thankfully, mainly Java. Odd mix of fairly brief and well-pitched description of techniques (which were perfect for Java stuff that I could follow) and unnecessarily detailed step-by-step edit instructions for pretty obvious ones. Could be usefully about half the length.	
Sep 06	Our Game	John le Carre	4	A book in 3 parts: slow/good/incomprehensible. Retired spymaster tries to find his missing (also retired) "Joe" against the old Office (MI6) wishes. Complex relationship (eg: shared girlfriends) between the two.	
Sep 06	I Can't Stay Long	Laurie Lee	3	Collection of articles in his inimitable style, but not as rewarding as the trilogy or A Rose for Winter	
Aug 06	The Levant Trilogy (The Danger Tree, The Battle Lost and Won, The Sum of Things)	Olivia Manning	3	Autobiographical (ish) tale sprawling across the Balkans and Near East at the beginning of WWII. Charismatic lecturer (Guy Pringle) returns to Belgrade (Romania) just before war is declared with his just-married wife (Harriet). As the war waxes and wanes for the Germans/Axis they have to retreat to Athens and then Egypt. Vivid descriptions of life and surroundings for the largely monied and upper class (and often hedonistic) circles they move in.	
Aug 06	Cloudsplitter	Russell Banks	3+	Fictionalised history of the John Brown of US Civil War/Slavery fame. Told by his surviving 3rd son Owen (he had 25 children, half of whom born dead or didn't survive infancy; 2 sons executed or died with him at Harpers Ferry). Thick with interesting detail (but at ~800 pages could have had less) of life in the emerging mid-19th century USA for a large and poor family. JB was a virulent Christian and anti-slavery campaigner, who eventually turned terrorist – attacking and killing pro-slavery southern whites. He was hanged after capturing the (pro-south) federal armoury at Harpers Ferry in 1859 but then being captured when the mass slave rising he expected didn't materialise. Some intriguing points the fictionalised "Owen" makes, or fails to make: a. though very well known for his rhetoric and campaigning, and clearly having planned HF and other attacks for years, JB wouldn't actually have taken the leap to violence and terrorism unless pushed into it by this oddball bachelor son. b. at the time of HF, and the earlier butchering at Pottawatomie in Kansas, Kansas was a territory. As it would inevitably become a state, it's political colour (pro- or anti-slavery) would be crucial to the future of a Union that was already (aka "Owen") southern-dominated. RB/"Owen"'s contention was that if Kansas went pro-slave, the northern states would secede and probably join with Canada in a semi-British association. This was more unthinkable to the Browns and their like than killing pro-slave whites! c. how on earth JB found the time to do all he did. He seemed to be almost permanently poor, various failed business ventures leaving him working mainly for others. He moved around a lot (with all the build-everything-from-scratch that that entailed). Even made a trip to England (including a couple of days over to Waterloo – by train and boat!? - to inspect and learn from the battlefield) in a dreadful commercial failure to get a good price for his employer's (and others') wool. Cloudsplitter is one name for the mountain near JB's last home (in North Elba, NY), also called Tahawus.	
Aug 06	The Songlines	Bruce Chatwin	3-	Dull/academic ramblings based round his field research into the way Aborigines pass their history down with song and stories, all deeply routed to geographic routes/lines.	
Jul 06	Travels with my Briefcase	Peter Biddlecombe	3	Very average, slightly witty but rather repetitive jokes full of stereotypical foreign experiences (maybe true for all that). The guy either has a great imagination or has done a phenomenal amount of travel and representation of businesses in and of all sorts of places.	
Jul 06	A Rose for Winter	Laurie Lee	2	More of the wonderful same. This written and published before the Cider with Rosie trilogy, but chronologically 15 years after the end of the Spanish Civil war. Lee and "Kati" (WAG?) return to the coastal town he was evacuated from at the end of As I Walked out one Midsummer Morning and tour around in his usual lyrical way.	
Jul 06	Star of the Sea	Joseph O'Connor	3	Diatribes on the treatment of the Irish during the famine told as an intriguing who-dunnit set on a ship carrying refugees and toffs over to New York. Rather odd pseudo-factual-historical presentation took a little getting into but after that an illuminating and grisly tale	
Jul 06	Wondrous Times on the Frontier	Dee Brown	4	Generally dull compilation of anecdotes about real "wild west" life in the words of people who were there.	

Books

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Jun 06	A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian	Marina Lewycka	3	Readable, but rather frustrating characters; light, but not "funny" as the cover quotes claimed. Old Ukrainian widower living in Midlands, tricked into marriage to mid-30's country-mate wanting to get a UK visa. Man's 2 daughters fighting the situation, and in the gaps we get their and their father's war history and some on tractors and civilisation!	
Jun 06	Adrift in Caledonia	Nick Thorpe	3	Good travelogue. Much in the same vein as Nick Crane, et al. Guy hitched round Scotland meeting interesting(ish) folk and dropping in appropriate historical and other facts. This style of book is becoming same-y, unless the author has an especially good turn of phrase; this one was borderline!	
May 06	Winston Churchill: the Struggle for survival 1940/1965	Lord Moran	2	Long but excellent insiders view of WSC. Moran was his personal physician but also a powerful writer who must have had a phenomenal memory to document so much detail (assuming it's not all BS). Interesting WSC info: - he was a miserable manager; never listening much to anyone - his great skills were good intuition and dogged belief in that he was right (as when he almost single-handedly sparked British will to keep on after Dunkirk) - a great actor and poser and prima-donna - hugely loyal to those he liked but prone to dismiss and not pursue those he took an unreasonable initial aversion to - hugely dependent on drugs to sleep	
Apr 06	The Dark Room	Rachel Seiffert	3	Three separate (I think, tho' it's not billed as short stories!) stories about Nazi Germany from German's perspective. Last one was a bit tedious but the first two were excellent, if a bit harrowing. Interesting perspective of kids of senior Nazis struggling through (one in Berlin during the bombings, the others post defeat on a major cross-country journey) with only tiny glimpses of what their parents wrought.	
Mar 06	An Expensive Place to Die	Len Deighton	3	Very complex/unclear plotted spy story. Made readable by the character and ambience – set in 1960s Paris	
Mar 06	A Singular Hostage	Thalassa Ali	3	Improbable mix of fantasy and history set around 1838 British expedition by Lord Auckland to seal a treaty prior to the first Afghan war. The contrasts between the aloof Brits and the huge support organisation (the camp moved about 6 miles a day, needing full formal dining and residences set up each night). The story centres around fictional rebellious young British woman who gets herself caught up (largely by mistake) in the "native" world, to the horror of her compatriots.	
Feb 06	Round Ireland with a Fridge	Tony Hawks	3	Amusing account of his self-inflicted one-month journey. Made hugely more easy by having got on a prominent radio show, so getting endless lifts and freebies from those who'd heard it.	
Feb 06	A year in the Merde	Stephen Clarke	3	Lightweight and over-sexed melange of Bryson and Mayle. Young, smug brit starts working as marketing exec for French food firm and sends up many French foibles.	
Feb 06	City of Gold	Len Deighton	3	Different and more mellow than his Bernard Samson Berlin ones. Set in and around Cairo just before El-Alamein with lots of black marketeering and double-identity derring-do.	
Jan 06	Notes on the Synthesis of Form	Christopher Alexander	4	Hard to read and very over-wordy 1964 treatise on the process of (Architectural) design. I struggled through most of it.	
Jan 06	Traitors Kiss	Gerald Seymour	3	Good gripping stuff. Normal structure – starts with lots of highly fragmented snippets finally coming together in a partially successful denouement. This about trying to lift a "blown" Russian spy from Kaliningrad by a bunch of has-been MI5(6?) operatives.	
Jan 06	All Quiet on the Western Front	Erich Maria Remarque	2	Classic grim WW1. Great translation from the German, reading every bit like an ironic British tract on the ghastliness of the trench war. Graphic descriptions of the misery and horrific injuries as well as the almost offhand acceptance of it all.	
Jan 06	44 Scotland Street	Alexander McCall Smith	3	Light read about a handful of inhabitants of (I assume) a fictional SS address. Started OK but the bitty style (first published as daily sections – now 3-page chapters) and content didn't allow any decent momentum or interest to develop.	
Jan 06	A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland The Journal of a tour to the Hebrides	Johnson and Boswell	3	Slightly hard work. Both books aimed at the literati of the age, assuming an extensive knowledge of contemporary (1773 journey, J's book written 2 years later, B's in the 1780s) authors as well as the ability to read Latin and Greek. But, amongst this, got a reasonable feel for the recently (after 1746?) reconciled (to English ways) Scots. The rather fawning reverence for J by B (and almost all the educated Scots they encountered) is amazing; I suppose that in such a conversationally/verbally dominated time a person so adept at language, discourse and argument was a major celebrity.	
Dec 05	The Monkey Wrench Gang	Edward Abbey	2	Great, if slightly raw, action-packed tale of four eco-terrorists trying to do their bit to halt the spread of civilisation to the wild US outdoors (destroying mining and roadbuilding gear with great glee and ferocity). Great descriptions of the landscape and wildlife in a Kerouac/Steinbeck (Cannery Row) breathless style. Wonderful twist at the end as the Abbey character (Hayduke) carries on alone. Written 1975	
Dec 05	Life of Pi	Yann Martel	3	Great tale – ½ the book sets the pseudo-reality scene, and then gets into the fantasy of an Indian boy and a Royal Bengal Tiger in a post-shipwreck lifeboat. Can't say I saw any fable/allegory in it, but great zoological info and just-believable, if extreme, descriptions of the 6 month open boat journey.	
Nov 05	The Brethren	John Grisham	3	Good, if a bit tawdry, read. The Brethren are 3 imprisoned judges running a scam to entrap closeted gays and extort money from them. This interwoven with CIA-run election of right-wing President.	
Nov 05	No Logo	Naomi Klein	4	Didn't finish it! She likes the sound of her own voice too much, and it drowned out whatever it was she was trying to say.	
Nov 05	Fathers and Forefathers	Slobodan Selenic	4	Started well, but ended up a lugubrious political romance. Serb professor and his English wife losing their son at the end of WW2.	
Oct 05	Daphne du Maurier	The Parasites	4	Dull story of artistic siblings (actress, composer and frustrated artist)	
Sep 05	Angels and Demons	Dan Brown	3	Very similar to the Da Vinci Code. Equally breathless; same hero. Chronologically before it. Again, academic against a, possibly mythical, deeply-(anti)-religious secretive sect.	
Sep 05	Dare to Discipline	James Dobson	3+	Excellent, slightly moralistic, primer on bringing up kids. Amazingly fresh, topical and accurate when read in 2005 (probably at least 10 years too late!), when it was written in ~1970. Strongly recommend to anyone starting a family!	
Aug 05	Digital Fortress	Dan Brown	3	Good computer (NSA) centric thriller. In his usual rather too breathless and superficial style, but worth a read.	
Aug 05	The Untouchable	Gerald Seymour	3	Standard thriller. Mainly set in post-war Bosnia, where junior London Customs&Exercise officer pursues London drug baron trying to expand his empire.	
Aug 05	Cider with Rosie As I Walked out one Midsummer Morning A Moment of War	Laurie Lee	1	Superb; vivid concise beautiful writing. Almost every paragraph is a gem and could stand by itself. CwR: traces his early years in poverty in rural England tying his leaving to the end of a 1000-year era, where everything was dictated by the range and needs of the horse. AIWooMM: penniless walk across Spain just before the Civil War. AmoM: his time in and around the Civil War.	
Aug 05	Harry Potter and the half-blood Prince	J.K. Rowling	3	The usual.	
Aug 05	Good Daughters Indifferent Heroes Welcome Strangers	Mary Hocking	3	Mary Wesley-like trilogy focussed on three sisters growing up before, through and after WW2. Fairly sentimental, and rather superficial in its mingling of history with story.	
Aug 05	An Autobiography of Margot Asquith	Margot Asquith	3	Gallop around late 19 th / early 20 th century upper class and political England/Scotland. She writes well and was clearly quite a character, but the tone assumed far too much familiarity with then-current events and people (it was written in 1920/1)	
Jul 05	Parvana's Journey	Deborah Ellis	3	Tom's book about a homeless and fatherless Afghan girl's miserable trip through her war-infested country. Easy read, slightly simplistic story-line, but, presumably, unsettlingly true to life.	
Jul 05	Mrs P's Journey	Sarah Hartley	3	Badly written bio of the woman behind the London A-Z. Did get to appreciate her ghastly background – misogynistic father perpetually putting her down amongst his flights from poverty to wealth and back – but little about the mapping process or explanation of how she really kept going against the odds.	
Jun 05	It's a long way to penny apples	Bill Cullen	3	Warning autobiography of one of 11 Dublin backstreets kids who went on to be a very successful Irish businessman. Huge amount of maternal line influence (his mum a street seller). Good antidote to Angela's Ashes et al.	

Books

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Jun 05	The Soldiers Return	Melvyn Bragg	3	Rather too slowly-paced tale of WWII Wigton man returning from the horrors of Burma to his now more emancipated wife and not-seen-before young son. Probably more interesting if one was a lover/intimate of the north-lakes area.	
Jun 05	White Teeth	Zadie Smith	3	Rambling saga of mixed race families in N. London. Went on too long!	
May 05	A Far Cry from Kensington	Muriel Spark	2	Easy to read tale of plump literary editor woman and her life and the household she shared in 1950s London	
Apr 05	The City	Richard Roberts	3	Good on history, less clear on who does what and why. Tolerably readable though. But, I still don't know enough about the business I work in!!	
Apr 05	The Maharajah's Box	Christy Campbell	4	Overlong and drawn-out tale of a disenfranchised Sikh Maharajah trying to regain his birthright (inc. the Koh-i-Noor diamond) from the Victorian empire. Amazing the amount of money and patience the British upper crust / politicians spent on this pretty unstable and unattractive man.	
Mar 05	On Green Dolphin Street	Sebastian Faulks	3	Undemanding novel about British diplomatic wife, in Washington during the Kennedy/Nixon election, falling for a US reporter, but ultimately staying with her breaking-down husband.	
Mar 05	Sailor Song	Ken Kesey	3	Usual wild Kesey stuff – booze and drug guzzling characters at the fringes of civilisation. This time a mix of fishermen, Innuits and Hollywoodians in a small Alaskan town.	
Feb 05	The Da Vinci Code	Dan Brown	2	Excellent fast moving Catholic Church / Holy Grail thriller. Not quite up to the standard of Le Carre and Clancy in pot-boiling – somehow the hero/heroine escaped each scrape a little too quickly and slickly – but great holiday read.	
Feb 05	Junk	Melvin Burgess	3	Sam's book about a pair of kids who run away from home and end up as junkies. Easy read, but rather depressing, despite a mixed ending (she's OK he's not)	
Jan 05	The Keeper of Antiquities	Yury Dombrovsky	3	Very Russian (many sidetrackings that have no bearing on the main themes). Apparently an allegory of the Stalinist era, though all that passed me by, leaving a reasonably readable tale of state interference in the life of a Museum keeper and various others (including the chief of a rural soviet that somehow got into trouble after trying to find a mythically escaped boa-constrictor) in the Alma-Ata (aka: Verny) region.	
Jan 05	Amsterdam	Ian McEwan	3	Pretty dull tale of two old friends who fall out over each's approach to a nasty situation and kill each other (in Amsterdam). The respected classic composer fails to report his voyeurism of an aggressive meeting that transpires to be precursor to a rape and murder. He also takes offence at his newspaper editor friend's use of private-ish photos to expose the cross-dressing of a government minister.	
Dec 04	Blue Latitudes	Tony Horwitz	3	Captain Cook homage. Mixture of historical info and author's retracing of Cook's voyage – didn't always work that well, often with too much non-Cookery in of the latter. But did reinforce what a remarkable man C was, and also that he was killed on Hawaii, not Tahiti as I'd thought!	
Dec 04	The Lady and the Unicorn	Tracy Chevalier	4	Junk. Speculative fiction based round an ancient tapestry. Present from Mum (who regretted getting it), by author of "Girl with a Pearl Earring" (of film fame)	
Dec 04	The Bookseller of Kabul	Asne Seierstad	3	Yet another pretty depressing inside story of women's life in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Author (Norwegian) lived with the booksellers family. Though probably much more liberal than many, male-, and class-, dominance permeates everything, and is being passed on to his sons (and daughters). I gather the family, feel understandably let down by this exposition, referring to her as the "Backstabber of Kabul".	
Nov 04	In Another Light	Andrew Greig	3	Story of Orkney-based man researching his dead fathers' brief pre-WW2 colonial spell after his (current day man) mid-life change. Both father and son finding inappropriate but deep loves. Good atmospherics both of the current day Scot and the fin-du-siecle colonial life. Book slightly marred by the style of running as two interlinked tales on alternate, very short, chapters.	
Oct 04	The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain	Mark Twain	3	Too many and too similar. But a few gems (I've marked the index on our copy).	
Sep 04	The Constant Gardener	John le Carre	3	Derring-do's of vile Pharma's trialling insufficiently tested TB drug in Africa. Company kills an investigating woman, who's foreign office husband then goes after the truth and is also killed - leaving the villainous FO and company to triumph.	
Sep 04	The Vintage Book of War Stories	Edited by Sebastian Faulks and Jörg Hensgen	2	Grim and disturbing selection. Made one want to read or re-read most of the books that the extracts are taken from.	
Aug 04	Faith Hope Charity	Len Deighton	3	Finally get to the end of the same reliable Bernard Samson stuff.	
Jul 04	Quartet in Autumn	Barbara Pym	4	Dull tale of four office colleagues as two retire and one dies.	
Jul 04	A Short History of Nearly Everything	Bill Bryson	2	Excellent, exhaustive and exhausting. The gamut of life, the universe and all in standard readable Bryson-speak. I'm sure it will be a great reference book over time. Makes you realise what an insignificant thing is man - lodged in a tiny sliver of the vast expanse and time-scale of the cosmos, and assembled so fortuitously from the complexities of matter's tiny particles.	
Jul 04	Not Without my Daughter	Betty Mahmoody, with William Hoffer	3	Very depressing, but gripping story of Michigan woman married to an Iranian, who took her and 5-year old daughter to Iran soon after the revolution. He leaving, ostensibly, a lucrative US medical career (was well paid, but lost his job and blamed others on it). She, having slowly begun to realise his potential manic nature after several years of harmony, agreed to let him take her and daughter this once to Iran, to avoid possibility of him forcing them there permanently later. Despite oath on the Koran, once in Iran his unhinged, lazy despotism surfaced; he refused to let her return, beating, imprisoning and abusing her. After almost 2 years she and daughter managed a very hairy escape (starting the day before he was going to expel her alone) across freezing mountains into Turkey and thence the US. The author met several women similarly mistreated in Iran, and the whole picture of Machiavellian women-abusing Arab/Muslim men rings so sadly true - in spite of the handful of warm helpful and respectful ones who eventually helped her to freedom.	
Jun 04	The Ship that Changed the World	Dan Van Der Vat	3	Good detailed description of how the German battleship Groeben, accompanied by cruiser Breslau, evaded allied navies in the Mediterranean in the first days of the WW1. Inept French and British Admirals made this easier - resulting in Court Martials a few weeks later (interesting how the establishment did this so thoroughly in the middle of a war!). Cunning German Admiral then palled up with the Turks (almost independently of his Admiralty in Berlin), switched Groeben into the Turkish navy, and then slipped into the Black Sea to bombard Sebastopol. This a) brought Turkey into the War, and b) prevented Russian naval and merchant marine access via the Bosphorus (Gallipoli was subsequent failed attempt to free this), which, it is claimed, cost at least an extra 2 years on the war.	
Jun 04	The Moon and Sixpence	Somerset Maugham	4	Pompous and contrived - with pretence of being a biography (footnotes quoting other alleged books on the same painter - "Charles Strickland")	
Jun 04	A House in Flanders	Michael Jenkins	3	Low key memoirs of an English teenager's (ex: DrKW Vice Chairman) summer staying with (many) elderly relatives in Northern France. A bit slow, but painting a lovely relaxed picture of (mainly) ageing aunts and their cunning management of the family round them, along with poignant snippets of 1st and 2nd world war in France.	
Jun 04	Spy Sinkers	Len Deighton	3	More of the same	
May 04	Spy Line	Len Deighton	3	More of the same	
May 04	Spy Hook	Len Deighton	3	More of the same	
May 04	The Russians	Hedrick Smith	3+	Very interesting mid-1970s perspective on life in Russia. Author a New York Times correspondent there for only about 3 years, but appearing to have massive factual and personal experience of the place. Very readable (a la William L. Shirer). Longish book, with, in the end, too much illustration by example (could easily be edited down to have one example for each point). Shows the secretive, paranoid, mind-numbingly restricted life. Abject deprivation of the isolated and un- or mis-informed masses versus luxuries for the top echelons.	
May 04	A Tramp Abroad	Mark Twain	3	Very mixed. Lots of wonderfully dry irony - though some far too over-the-top and drawn out - interspersed with basic travelogue. Must try Innocents Abroad sometime!	
Apr 04	Prodigal Summer	Barbara Kingsolver	3	Good - more environmentally- than storyline- friendly (the latter being a bit sentimental and unexciting). Lots of wild life information on Coyotes, Moths and Trees - particularly the N. American Cedar, apparently wiped out by blight in the early 1900s.	
Apr 04	When we were orphans	Kazuo Ishiguro	3	Well crafted story of a far-Eastern-born detective uncovering details of his past. Very upper crust / colonial, and perhaps a bit over-full of allusive-let story threading.	

Books

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Apr 04	The Berlin Diaries	Mairie 'Missie' Vassiltchikov	3	Very personal account of the war years of an ex-Russian aristocrat who was a close friend of the von Stauffenberg Hitler assassination attempt plotters (particularly Adam van Trotter). Fascinating views of wartime life, though her circle managed to continue the social world (balls, concerts, champagne, oysters and buying hats) in some form throughout!	
Mar 04	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	J.K. Rowling	3	More of the same. Rather too long, this one!	
Mar 04	Tears of the Giraffe	Alexander McCall Smith	3	Better sequel to The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency. More focussed main story line. Same delightful and gently moral views.	
Mar 04	Pompeii	Robert Harris	3	Good, oblique tale of the eruption of Vesuvius. centred on a Roman engineer recently arrived in the area to manage the Augusta aqueduct. It fails just before the eruption, dragging him into its maw, with a modicum of who-dunnit as well. Lots of great description of what was going on - much, I believe, reconstitution of Pliny's first hand accounts (he also features large in the tale).	
Mar 04	Natasha's Dance	Orlando Figes	3	Rather academic trawl through Russian cultural history from founding of St Petersburg (1703) to about 1970. Natasha is an aristocrat from War&Peace who slips naturally into a peasant dance at one point, which he uses to emphasize the oft-made point about the ethnic mother country love of all real Russians!	
Feb 04	Twelve Bar Blues	Patrick Neate	3	Tapestry of stories woven into an entertaining tale of discovery of roots for a black English ex-prostitute part-time Jazz singer. Running from a slave's capture and transport from Zimbabwe to the deep south. Full of tie-ups between the unlikely of characters.	
Jan 04	Into Thin Air	Jon Krakauer	2	First-hand account of May 10th 1996 Everest, when 7 people died on a crowded ascent (several teams trying to summit on the same day). Interesting to realise how debilitating high altitude and lack of oxygen can be. The author was vilified for a) mistaking the identity of one of the people he saw his way down (he summited) and so saying this person had made it back to camp, when he hadn't (and he subsequently died) and b) for "lying in his tent 350m from a dying Japanese woman" (he was so out of it that he probably would have got himself killed had he known she was out there and had tried to find her in the teeth of the fearful storm that was part responsible for the tragedy)	
Jan 04	The Devil that Danced on the Water	Aminatta Forna	3	Very personal biography of her father (Mohammed)'s last years. He had been an (apparently) very upright minister in Sierra Leone in the late 60's / early 70's. He fell foul of the vile president, Siaka Stevens, was found guilty of a set-up explosion and hung in 1974. She writes evocatively (if a little ungrammatical and mixed up from time to time) about her childhood memories (she was ~10 when he was hung), and privileged life of boarding schools in England. Slightly disappointing from a "story line" point of view, because the book was mainly set as an investigation into who instigated the explosion that was used to convict her father and it didn't manage to do so; ho hum, real life is a bitch!	
Jan 04	The Rise and Fall of the third Reich	William L. Shirer	1	Massive (1400+ pages), very readable but draining detailed history of the rise and fall of Hitler's vile regime. Phenomenal book. Distillation of mounds of diaries (General Halder one of the main ones), detailed meeting minutes and meticulous German records. Lots of it, apparently, no longer available (was locked away by the US about 10 years after the war ended). Shirer web radio interview (search for "William Shirer") says he only had two secretaries helping do this, which seem hard to believe. Edition I had only showed the very main chapter titles in its table of contents. A listing of all the sub-titles (with dates) would, of itself, be an excellent precis; maybe you get this in other editions. Amazing how the war dragged out amongst the headline events everyone knows. Particularly the time it took from Stalingrad (Feb 1942) to the end. Also, the last year after D Day when clearly Germany had lost, but the fighting went on. The plotters partly held back by wanting to preserve some of Germany's acquisitions (or at least not to have a 2nd Versailles). See also: Longish precis used to be at: www.traces.org/williamshirer.html "Berlin Diary" also by WLS.	
Dec 03	Eats, Shoots & Leaves	Lynee Truss	3	Entertaining and educational polemic on (mis)use of punctuation. Probably necessarily a bit difficult to read, but she has an amusing turn of phrase and it's not a long book!	
Nov 03	Imaginings of Sand	Andre Brink	3	Slightly supernatural tale woven round the week of the first South African post-Apartheid election (1994). Tells the matriarchal hierarchy of a young woman, going back to early voortrekkers and before as retold by a dying, bird-surrounded, 103-year-old to her grand-daughter. Interestingly believable feminine story teller, given the male author.	
Oct 03	Winter	Len Deighton	3	Semi-historical pre-cursor to the Bernard Samson trilogies. Quite good glimpses of parts of Germany's changes 1899-1945. Hadn't realised how much of a civil war there was after 1918 - but on the whole the history was frustratingly skimpy.	
Oct 03	Uncle Tungsten	Oliver Sacks	3	Early biography of a very bright man. Uncle Tungsten is one of the large and gifted Sachs family, who helped feed the young Oliver's precocious scientific enthusiasms (though he later turned to medicine rather than the Chemistry and Physics he revelled in as a gifted, and persecuted, loner). Reasonably easy to read, though at the end I felt I'd been too besieged with Chemistry.	
Sep 03	Beau Geste	P.C.Wren	3	Classic early 20th century boys magazine whodunit. Buchan-like style, with the good chaps suffering dreadfully in a self-induced immersion in the awful French Sahara to spare their aunt the ignominy of admitting to her horrid husband it had sold a family heirloom.	
Sep 03	Condition Black	Gerald Seymour	3	OK Seymour thriller. Set around Iraq nuclear program, and written just before the Kuwait invasion. Interesting topicality when read 6 months after the US/UK/Iraq war.	
Sep 03	Ties of Blood	Gillian Slovo	3	Lengthy, slightly over-fictionalised (too many neat coincidences to link in the major real world developments) of two ANC families developing over 3 generations. Ends just before Mandela's release and the end of Apartheid	
Aug 03	Match	Len Deighton	2	Any then the conclusion, finding out Stinnes was a plant/double/triple/I-don't-know agent	
Aug 03	Set	Len Deighton	2	Good part 2 of the trilogy ... getting Stinnes to defect	
Aug 03	An Imaginary Experience	Mary Wesley	3	Undemanding romance about wealthy 30's literary agent and troubled woman who's just lost her ghastly husband and young child in a car crash.	
Aug 03	Billy	Pamela Stephenson	3	Light biography of the great man. His spirit, humour, poetical nature and diverse and great skill (music, words, relating to people, plain surviving his background) come through well. Was a little disappointed not to get more on his childhood abuse (mentioned in passing). PS also puts a fair amount of herself into this far from objective book!	
Jul 03	Slipstream	Elizabeth Jane Howard	3	Fairly dull and overly-detailed memoir. Much too much minute and uninteresting detail of this promiscuous (for the first half of her life at least) one time wife of Peter Scott and Kingsley Amis.	
Jul 03	Single & Single	John le Carre	3	Average thriller. Son-with-a-conscience helping crack Customs team to do down his wealthy Investment Banking father and Russian manipulators.	
Jul 03	Palestine Twilight	Edward Fox	3	Fairly involved melange of "who killed American archaeologist working in Palestine" and Palestinian background and 1990s Intafada. The former was reasonably unsatisfactory, but the latter instructive though too tortuous for me to follow properly.	
Jun 03	The Malcontents	C. P. Snow	3	Dull who-dunnit, laid out in a rather backward way (endless not telling you what's going on). Group of students in early 70's failing to expose a scam by a high up Politician, being well beaten by the corrupt system.	
Jun 03	The Siege	Helen Dunmore	3	Detailed fiction of the horrors of surviving starvation during the 1941/2 siege of Leningrad. Sadly no political or historical info about what was going on outside the family in focus.	
May 03	The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency	Alexander McCall Smith	3	Delightful series of positive storylets based round a fat Botswanan lady detective. Always coming up with the best-possible solution, avoiding the normal police or authoritarian answers.	
May 03	England our England	Vernon Coleman	4	Jingoistic rubbish. Good for stirring up anti-EU feelings, of dubious accuracy and no objectivity.	
May 03	The Just Vengeance	Dorothy L Sayers	3	Short play written for the 1946 Lichfield festival. Present to Dad from his parents. Based on the Divine Comedy - set in the moment of death of a British Airman. A bit deep for me!	
May 03	As Meat Loves Salt	Maria McCann	4	Odd mixture of apparently detailed history mixed round tail of homosexual young men in the Civil War era. The historical detail's authenticity very suspect due to the pretty unbelievable personal/romantic stuff. Enough of a story to keep me reading, but I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. Economist 2001 pick - must treat their reviews with more caution!	

Books

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May 03	Clear Waters Rising	Nicholas Crane	2	Excellent travel/history book, in the vein of William Dalrymple or Jason Elliot. On-foot (only) trip from Santiago in Spain, following the watersheds to Istanbul. Clearly good at languages and at making friends, he had a colourful year and a half of it. Amazing how he managed to have all he needed with him in a relatively light pack - especially when traversing the Alps in mid-winter thigh-deep snow: tent, maps, food, very limited spare and dry clothes.	
Apr 03	The Ascent of Rum Roodie	W.E.Bowman	3	Great 50's spoof on mountain climbing expeditions. Looking for weak-willed Sloths, made miserable by the ghastly cooking of Pong and sort of achieving their objective despite the incompetence of navigator Jungle.	
Apr 03	The Waiting Time	Gerald Seymour	3-	Poor spy-like thriller. Set round drab post-Stasi people and places. Obtuse writing style made it more hard work than was worth it to follow the plot and characters.	
Apr 03	Dear Tom	Tom Courtenay	3-	Pretty self-centred and overly detailed auto-biography crafted round his dear Ma. He's had an interesting rags-to-fame life, from his Hull Hesse-road start.	
Apr 03	Red Dust	Gillian Slovo	3	Politico-novel about Truth and Reconciliation in S.A. Readable, but predictable. Not in same class as her biography of her Mum	
Mar 03	The Shark Net	Robert Drewe	3	Very good autobiographical story of growing up in Perth rubbing shoulders with a remarkable set of murders. Slightly contrived cutting between the murderers background and his own - the latter actually being more interesting. He has a great tight, lyrical and laconic style; must try some of his other stuff.	
Mar 03	Point Blanc	Anthony Horowitz	3	Good next round of Alex Rider teenage Bond-ery	
Mar 03	Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence	Doris Pilkington	3	Interesting re-telling of 1600km escape by three Aborigine girls from a white man's capture and institutionalisation in the 1930s. Though clearly an amazing story, it didn't come across too well being poorly written - probably hampered by lack of detailed memories from the protagonists.	
Mar 03	Black Lamb and Grey Falcon	Rebecca West	3	Monumental (~1150 pages) diatribe on the history and culture of Yugoslavia, framed round a tour there in 1937, with Epilogue added in 1941. Fascinating detail and beautifully poetic writing - just rather a lot of it and not really making the Balkan complexities any clearer. From her writing and friends it's clear RW must have been an incredible woman. One particularly larger-than-life Poet/Politician (Constantine) and his awful German wife (Gerda) are particularly memorable.	
Jan 03	The Path of the King	John Buchan	3-	Weak collection of historical conjectures tenuously tied together as a genealogy of Abraham Lincoln	
Jan 03	Snow falling on Cedars	David Guterson	3	Great whodunit, set on near-Seattle island in the 50s'. German-originated fisherman dead, apparently at the hand of a Japanese-originated neighbour...	
Jan 03	Archangel	Gerald Seymour	3	Excellent, if grim, thriller of Russian-born Brit exiled to a Siberian labour camp, where he stirs things up, and is eventually killed.	
Dec 02	Big Sky	Gareth Creer	3	Urban villains (n/east England) in drugs-linked international tale. Rather a pretentious hard-to-read/almost-stream-of-consciousness style, but a cracking tale.	
Dec 02	The Naked and the Dead	Norman Mailer	3	Grim, readable, long war story. Dull and awful life of US soldiers on an operation to take a Japanese island during WWII.	
Dec 02	Songs of Enchantment	Ben Okri	4	Convolutd and overfull of images. Mystic/spirits in demented African place. Gave up 1/2 way through!	
Nov 02	Love, Again	Doris Lessing	4	Dull. Gave up nearing 1/2 way!	
Nov 02	Isaac's Storm	Erik Larson	3	First hand accounts of the hurricane that ravaged Galveston in 1900. Rather scrappy delivery, piecing together verbatim reports and details, but certainly gives a good flavour of the catastrophe (~6000 dead). Interesting that up till this storm Galveston was neck and neck with Houston as the potential main city in Texas (though T also hit oil a year or two later).	
Nov 02	The Hanging Garden	Ian Rankin	3	More of the same. OK read, but two-in-a-row is overdoing it!	
Nov 02	Set in Darkness	Ian Rankin	3	Predictably diverting Rebus cop tale. Usual glum outsider, Edinburgh flavour.	
Nov 02	Tears in the Snow	Arnie Wilson	3	Rather egotistical hackery, describing his and Lucy Dicker's round-the-world ski and Lucy's subsequent death. Janet gets a mention in the credits, as do many other skiing folk.	
Oct 02	Castle Gay	John Buchan	3	Dated tale of Evalonian intrigue against an initially unlikeable Press baron. Not of the Hanny calibre.	
Oct 02	Blood Red, Sister Rose	Thomas Keneally	4	Poorly written fictionalised account of Joan of Arc's progress from peasant to King-crowner. Full of fatuous fiction-detail through which it's hard to get the facts. Doesn't cover what happened from the coronation to her death at all!!	
Oct 02	Stormbreaker	Anthony Horowitz	3	Good teenage James Bond'ery. Orphaned daredevil 14-year old follows in his murdered Uncle's footsteps to beat a Lebanese villain intent on spreading Biological warfare by donating powerful computers with hidden test tubes of bacteria to all schools.	
Oct 02	'Tis	Frank McCourt	3	Sequel to Angela's Ashes. The drunken Irishman makes good in New York. Slightly depressing, though he seems to make good, and to inspire his pupils to do the same, somehow.	
Sep 02	Ghandi	William L. Shirer	3+	Illuminating personal recollections of this great man. Shirer spent a year reporting on him around 1931 and became pretty close to him. He covers everything before and after, giving a most compelling view on such an amazing person. Shirer, as an American, is usefully objective from the British and Hindu/Muslim shenanigans that caused such political turbulence before and after independence (1947) and Ghandi's assassination (1948).	
Sep 02	Edith's Book	Edith Velmans	3	Very readable and moving autobiography of a Dutch Jewess's years before and during WW2 - hiding with friends while the rest of her family died or were shipped off and killed. A sort of Anne Frank who survived (and who's hiding was less physical - she lived fairly openly with her non-Jewish saviours).	
Sep 02	The Ground Beneath Her Feet	Salman Rushdie	3	Good wide ranging and raunchy tale of Indian (and US/Indian) rock stars "Ormus Cama" and "Vina Aspara". Slightly surreal in parts, particularly in the latter 1/4, but enough story and excellent writing to keep the attention. I'm sure if I was more classically aware it would be even better, since the blurb associates the story with the myth of Orpheus; the book's full of related (Ormus/Orpheus, Orpheum) and unrelated (Colonel Tom Parker the rock star, Madonna the journalist, quadruple murder of the Kennedy's, Steve Marriot living into the 90's) puns and distortions of real people and events.	
Aug 02	McCarthy's Bar	Pete McCarthy	3	Good light-hearted Irish pilgrimage in the Bryson/Pilton mould.	
Aug 02	In Between the Sheets	Ian McEwan	4	Ghastly pretentious rubbish short stories. Must remember not to read any more of him!	
Aug 02	The Dead of Jericho	Colin Dexter	3	Standard Morse stuff. First I've read, remarkably like the TV show (with a few exceptions, like Lancia instead of Jag, and M smoking).	
Jul 02	Why Men don't listen & Women can't read maps	Allan & Barbara Pease	2	Excellent, readable and amusing exposition of human differences.	
Jul 02	The Amber Spyglass	Philip Pullman	3	Last in the trilogy. OK. Rather too many twists and turns and didn't really grab me as well as the others.	
Jul 02	E=mc2	David Bodanis	3+	Highly readable and informative view of the physics leading to and following from Einstein's famous equation. I'm too ignorant to assess his selection of people and events, including: - origins of algebra and the equals sign - Roemer who in ~1676 computed the speed of light, following on from Galileo's idea (~100 years earlier?) - Emilie du Châtelet, a highly intelligent French aristocrat who both herself, and by assembling and encouraging a sort of International skunk works think tank (which Voltaire was part of, as well as being her occasional lover) nurtured Leibnitz to E=mv2 (Energy increases by the square of velocity) in the mid 1700's - Lavoisier, whose painstaking experiments in the later 1700's (he was executed in the revolution) proved that mass can't be destroyed (eg: by burning or rusting iron in a sealed chamber) - Faraday (poor lad/bookbinder made good) in the 1820's showing relationship between magnetic and electric energy (managing to do so despite the jealous deprecation of his mentor, Davy). - The man himself in 1905 - Rutherford finding that the atom contains particles around a nucleus, which is itself composed of smaller particles. - Lise Meitner, another hugely academic female mind that worked out the atomic instabilities that cause radioactivity in the 1903's. Mainly done remotely, by encouraging German experiments after she herself, as a German Jewess, had been banished to Copenhagen. Her work being relatively little know since her turncoat collaborator, Otto Hahn, managed to suppress or discredit her pivotal role. - The American/German race between Oppenheim and Heisenberg to build the Atom bomb, with surprisingly small reference to Neils Bohr. Also the importance of the commando sabotage of the Heavy Water plant at Vermork in Norway and the later sinking of the Tinnsjö ferry in 1944, depriving Heisenberg of a large enough shipment of HW to proceed. - Fred Hoyle and Subrahmanyam Chadrasekhar going on to find "Big Bang" and "Black Holes".	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/ Pub
Jul 02	The Snow Geese	William Feinnes	3	Poetic and readable, but a trifle too introspective account of following the migration of Snow Geese from Texas to Baffin Island as part of his recuperation from a (presumably) serious illness. The trip tightly woven into his growing homesickness (originally clinically referred to as <i>Nostalgia</i>). He's a bit too keen on unnecessary detail (eg: descriptions of what clothes the various ordinary people he meets wear). I learnt that the Swift's Greek name is <i>Apus</i> , meaning "without feet".	
Jun 02	A Book of Memories	Péter Nádas	4	Far too wordy and indirect story of bi-/homo-sexual Hungarian who's father was high up in the system before the 1956 uprising.	
May 02	Run with the Horsemen	Ferrol Sams	3	Amusing, informative tale of a young white boy growing in the rural US South between the wars. Interesting threads of the paternalistic but caring and close relationship with the "blacks" and the tensions of a bright academic (slightly pompous) lad amongst more traditional booze+women WASP manhood. A very good read.	
May 02	The Subtle Knife	Philip Pullman	3	Part 2 of the trilogy. A bit more involved. Presented with the info that Asriel is out to destroy the church (?) and it's God/Authority. Windows in and out of the world.	
May 02	A Long Way to Shiloh	Lionel Davidson	3	Thriller built round randy UK prof persuaded by Israelis to hunt for the true Menorah from clues in ancient scroll. Poor/slow start and finish, but reasonably good read between.	
Apr 02	Still Me	Christopher Reeve	2	Vivid and absorbing description of life as a quadriplegic. Hugely readable, and admirable. His amazing resilience and determination well qualified by his down moments. Would that I had a tiny fraction of his spirit in any halfway comparable circumstances.	
Apr 02	Northern Lights	Philip Pullman	3	Great tale: evil powers, special child, morality. Looking forward to the next two books!	
Apr 02	The Four Adventures of Richard Hannay (The 39 Steps, Greenmantle, Mr Standfast, The 3 Hostages)	John Buchan	3	Pretty dated adventure stories making a good read (amongst the page-by-page coincidences and dated upper class bigotry). First two better than the second two which both had longer slightly tedious bits.	
Apr 02	Down Under	Bill Bryson	3	Good Brysonage. Rather more straight informative, rather than entertaining than some others. He obviously loves Oz (as he does most places, I suspect).	
Mar 02	City of Djinns	William Dalrymple	3	Well written Indian history. Delhi-centred. He and his wife spent a year there, from which he extrapolates from his usual inquisitiveness long tales of past horrors and invasions. Not quite as light a read as In Xanadu.	
Feb 02	Holes	Louis Sachar	3	A great easy read (particularly refreshing after the last two). Actually Sam's book, but perfectly interesting and good for adults. Tells the tale of a young US lad (Stanley) erroneously imprisoned in a detention centre in the middle of the Texas desert run by a weird female governor who makes the boys dig holes looking for buried treasure, which has well-woven links to Stanley's ancestors.	
Feb 02	Rebellion in the backlands	Euclides da Cunha	3	Hard work too! Had on my list for ages after rave review somewhere. But, I gave up on the first half of the ~700 pages after not many pages. It was giving a dry detailed account of the geography and politico/social background of this part of Northern Brazil. I ploughed through the second half, which started off quite readably, but became a chore as he went on and on in not hugely well connected or contextualised narrative. Rated as comparable to The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, it covers the shambolic and gruesome suppression of a rebellious religious group in a remote part of Brazil, by the newly Republicanized government (whose, very unclear, motivation was partly, and incorrectly according to EdC, fuelled by a suspicion that the rebels were a front for the ousted monarchists). After losing a huge number of men and face (though this wasn't really exposed since the campaign was so remote the government were able to suppress their massive incompetence), the government eventually exterminated the entire rebel force - who fanatically fought to literally the last man.	
Jan 02	Among the Believers	V. S. Naipaul	3	Rather hard going Islamic/travel book. Starting in Iran (in 1979 just after Khomeini toppled the Shah), then Pakistan (weeks after Bhutto's murder), then Malaysia and Indonesia. Some interesting stuff, but a lot of intense dialogues with little coherence made it a difficult read. Interesting to hear about the pervasive indoctrination that must have provided the ground work for later blossoming of Islamic fundamentalism and terror. He (like many later writers) makes the point that feelings of inadequacy (global/political as well as personal/social/sexual) are a major force driving these people to the shelter of Islamic fundamentals.	
Jan 02	La Grande Therese	Hilary Spurling	3	Fascinating story of French peasant girl who conned all France's high society of millions of francs. Very easy and quick read (~130 pages, many pictures). Slightly reportage style, and shame she didn't give more details of the mechanics of the con's.	
Jan 02	The Falls	Ian Rankin	3	Rather dark "Inspector Rebus" police mystery set in and around Edinburgh with Internet gaming overtones. All a bit contrived and plodding in style.	
Jan 02	Jamaica Inn	Daphne du Maurier	3	Average excitement of strong woman against evil men. Weak ending.	
Dec 01	Galileo's Daughter	Dava Sobel	3	Good biography of G. The daughter is fairly incidental. Amazing how he managed to survive and accept so much antagonism from the Catholic church. Memories of a great play at the Almeida, from which I recall him having an even worse time than this book depicts.	
Nov 01	With Friends Like These	Nicholas Coleridge	3	OK thriller set round boss of fashion magazine Publishing house. A bit thick on the Publishing/Press world but reasonable holiday read.	
Nov 01	The Road to Oxiana	Robert Byron	3	Seminal mid-30's travellers tale of Persia (Iran) and Afghanistan, quoted by many. RB uses a very readable (tho' not quite in the Jason Elliott/William Dalrymple class) terse diary style. He's particularly keen and informative on the architecture, but the history and current day foibles are also well relayed. "Greatest travel book ever written" - Sara Wheeler, Terra Incognita p152	
Nov 01	A Legacy	Sybillie Bedford	4	Late 19th C / Early 20th German/Jewish family rambling. Dreadful character naming (and multiple-names for some key characters) made it pretty much un-followable.	
Oct 01	An Unexpected Light	Jason Elliot	2	Enthusiastic and detailed description of Afghanistan, written around 1998 (as Taliban started to take over the country, having Herat and Quandahar but not yet Kabul) but stretching back to end of the 80's when he'd inveigled his way into the heart of the Mujahidin front fighting the Russians at the age of 19. His love of the country and impression of the natives warmth, hospitality and deep interest in his beliefs, along with side comments about how the Taliban wouldn't be able to keep control of the hearts minds and life of such a strong people make sad reading in the midst of the post-Sep-11th bombing.	
Oct 01	The Pillars of Islam	Frances Gumley and Brian Redhead	3	Nicely brief explanation of the "five pillars" (though as one of the Muslim contributors says, the first is hardly a pillar being the foundation on which the others stand): Faith (<i>kalma</i> or <i>shahada</i>), Prayer (<i>namaz</i> or <i>salat</i>), Almsgiving (<i>zakat</i>), Fasting (<i>roza</i> or <i>sawm</i>) and Pilgrimage (<i>hajj</i>). Faith including: - the Koran (<i>Qur'an</i>) is the final and absolute word of God, with emphasis that there is one undisputed version, unlike the Gospels, though, like them, is a complex work requiring illumination from the clerics - there is one God, the same worshipped by Jews and Christians - Mohammed was the final prophet, following on from those of the Jews and Christians (Jesus, Elijah, Adam, etc.). His importance being both that he was the last one and that he was the vehicle for God to pass on the Koran (they reject Jesus as Son of God) - the pure faith is gentle, humanitarian and accepting/tolerant.	
				Some mention of the fact that the fanatics/"fundamentalists" have no basis in Muslim teaching (the book was published in 1990, based on a 1998? BBC series, when mid-East Shi'ite hostage taking and terror was fresh in the mind but long before Sept 11 2001). The Koran only endorsing fighting to counter religious oppression. The <i>Jihad</i> (struggle) is in two forms: "greater" being a person's inner striving to follow the Koran and "lesser" against oppression.	
Oct 01	The Kings General	Daphne du Maurier	3	Another lightweight historical/fiction. But much better written than "Katherine". Story set in Cornwall tells of Richard Grenville, the arrogant but, one gathers, talented Royalist leader during the Civil War.	
Sep 01	If not now, when?	Primo Levi	3	Fiction based on true events of a mixed group of Jewish/Polish/Russian partisans (men and women) operating in Russia behind lines during WW2. Strangely avoiding the horrors that they had escaped from.	
Sep 01	Katherine	Anya Seton	4	Very lightweight romance extrapolated around the life of Katherine Roet who was mistress and finally wife of John of Gaunt. Minimal useful history and endless references to the clothes people wore. Pretty unsatisfying read.	

Books

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Aug 01	Scapegoat	Daphne du Maurier	3	Very good light tale of the inter-change of identical men (hitherto unknown to each other). Follows the one who picks up the pieces of the messed up life of the other, and, having has to surrender it back to the renegade. Great light read.	
Aug 01	A passage to Juneau	Jonathan Raban	3		
Aug 01	A Boys Tale	Edmund White	3	Evocative, almost poetic. I found it a shame that the raconteur is gay and includes some pretty explicit teenage gay sexuality.	
Aug 01	The Periodic Table	Primo Levi	3	Unusual series of essays/chapters each formed round a Chemical element and using it to retell a fragment of Levi's (presumably it's heavily autobiographical) life. A bit academic, but an OK read.	
Jul 01	Shackleton	Roland Huntford	2	Hugely readable (if long ~700 pages) biography. Harps on about the incompetent blinkered lack of planning that meant that both S's and Scott's trips failed in their objectives. But S's incredible tenacity and leadership shine through. RH gives due measure to other heroes of S's last mission (eg: Wild who was left in charge on Elephant Island; Worsley the navigator).	
Jul 01	The Riddle of the Sands	Erskine Childers	3	Great sailing/spy tale set in the flat waters off N. Frisian coast.	
Jun 01	The Last Grain Race	Eric Newby	3	Excellent deckhands view of the last of the working sailing boats. 4-master fetching grain from Australia to Europe just before WW2. Amazing the complexity of the ship and how it could be handled by a 12-man crew (2 shifts of 12).	
Jun 01	The Cruise of the "Nona"	Hillaire Belloc	3	Nice, if rather dated, mixture of accounts of coastal sailing from Wales round to Suffolk with musings and philosophizing. Rather bombastic and right wing in his views (written ~1926), but some interesting insights into politics et al.	
Jun 01	Learning the Ropes	Eric Newby	3	The pictures to go with Last Grain Race - how he had the energy, patience and skill to take these between such arduous watches is incredible.	
May 01	In Xanadu	William Dalrymple	2	Excellent account of overland trip from Jerusalem to Xanadu, retracing Marco Polo's similar trip. Good light touch in describing both the travails of the journey and the history and culture he and his (two different) female companions passed through.	
May 01	The Girl at the Lion D'Or	Sebastian Faulks	3	Good Faulks, between wars love+conscience; with harking back to horrors of WW1.	
May 01	An Indian Summer	James Cameron	3	Wide ranging, at times bitter, and rather too subjective account of this journalists life in India. Married to an Indian and finally leaving almost in a coffin for months of intensive body-rebuilding after a bad car smash near and during the Bangladesh war of independence. Not a bad background to life in India, despite all.	
May 01	Like Water for Chocolate	Laura Esquivel	3	Romantic novel set in revolutionary Mexico (early 20th C?). Easy read, interesting structure - scattered with recipes and household tips (how to make matches, cure bad breath, etc.) - and nicely misleading stages in the dénouement.	
Apr 01	Eating People is Wrong	Malcolm Bradbury	4	Dull novel set in '50s provincial university.	
Apr 01	I dreamed of Africa	Kuki Gallmann	3+	Very personal and lyrical autobiography of wealthy Italian lady and family, who lost husband, son and various friends in separate violent accidents. The story is gripping/appalling but I found in the end that she did go on a bit!	
Apr 01	Paradise Postponed	John Mortimer	3	Run-of-the mill Mortimer; good holiday read. Mystery around a home-counties provincial vicar and his family and friends, as a (ambitiously aimed) story covering England from the war to mid 1980s.	
Apr 01	Homage to Catalonia	George Orwell	3	First-hand record of the second half of the Spanish Civil war. Good read, reasonably clear explanation of the politics, tho' I'm still not clear a) how/why Franco's side "rebelled", b) who "won". Did follow some of the incredible inter-nicene warfare of the anti-fascist alliance. Interesting how GO could switch in and out of being the foreign Gentleman, also how much non-war activity (trade, politics) went on during the "war".	
Mar 01	Raising Boys	Steve Biddulph	2	Excellent, brief, and highly readable coverage of the challenges of, and ways to succeed in, bringing up boys.	
Mar 01	Possession	A. S. Byatt	3	Literary mystery about a pair of 19C poets found to have been lovers. Good unravelling, but rather too full of poetry (mostly of the fictitious pair) for my taste.	
Mar 01	Battle Cry of Freedom	James M. McPherson	3	Pretty comprehensive, bordering on the obsessive. Rather heavy going, trying to follow the politicking as well as the military. Still not a lot clearer as to which of Slavery or Independence was the root of the war, and what the final stimulus was.	
Jan 01	John Halifax, Gentleman	Mrs Craik	3	Very stylized and fulsomely sugary tale of a too-too-perfect <i>gentleman</i> . I was all set to give up on it about halfway through but, not liking to do this, kept on. The second half was better, with a little more pith and the end result was to be reminded of the bizarrely (by today's standards) formal and distant way the early 19th C classes lived.	
Jan 01	The Road to Lichfield	Penelope Lively	3	Average relationship novel about daughter of dying father having an affair with father's friend/neighbor and finding out about how the father had similar in his time.	
Dec 00	The Lighthouse Stevensons	Bella Bathurst	3	Slightly too person-dominated and superficial account of RLS' family's amazing history of building and managing the creation of Scottish Lighthouses. I missed any depth or detail into the design and building process. How did they get those blocks loaded from boats onto tide-swept rock outcrops? How did the advances in light technology actually work - she just rattles off their names with no explanation.	
Dec 00	The American Commonwealth	James Bryce	3	Mammoth (2 volume, 1600 page) discourse on the US constitution and political structures. Remarkably readable, though I stopped about half way through. Though dated (written end of C19 and updated a few times up to 1920) much still rings true. Though very digestible, he is a bit repetitive (maybe when reference works of this size hit a certain size it's to restate rather than cross refer, resulting in self-inflation?). Would be wonderful if someone would update and edit down to give a C20/21 version!	
Nov 00	The Great Railway Bazaar	Paul Theroux	3	Travelogue built on a round the world railway journey. Somehow failed to be as wry/amusing as, for instance, Bryson or a pithy and insightful as Palin	
Nov 00	Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee	Dee Brown	2	Grueling lie-by-deception chronology of America's destruction of the native Indian races in the second half of the 19th century. A depressing read.	
Oct 00	Gather Together in My Name	Maya Angelou	3	Readable, but sad and uninspiring continuation (from "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"). As depressing as the first book, but somehow less moving.	
Oct 00	The Last of the Mohicans	J. Fenimore Cooper	3	Excellent tale, based partly in fact, of bloody Anglo/French /Indian wars in upstate New York in the late 18th century. Unfortunately, the story's pretty hard going due to it's 19c English.	
Oct 00	Sandpiper	Ahdaf Soueif	3	A few Egyptian/American emotional/subjective/female short stories. Much like "The Map of Love" but even less interesting.	
Sep 00	The Long Walk	Slavomir Rawicz	2	Astonishing and gripping account by a young Polish officer horribly captured and imprisoned by the Soviets in 1939 and then sent to a remote Siberian camp. Amazingly he and 7 others escaped and walked 3000 miles to India, taking nearly 4 years; four died, but the others survived quite incredible deprivation (often many consecutive days without anything at all to eat or drink).	
Sep 00	The Empty Raincoat	Charles Handy	3	Ethical, people-centred primer on how to re-organize/manage business and society. Pretty repetitive, rather pre-repetitive to suit American/Business-Seminar audience. Liked the Chinese Contract (not required because both sides win) and suggestions for valuing time.	
Sep 00	Faith	Len Deighton	3	Good spy stuff (Bernard Samson tale)	
Sep 00	The Birds on the Trees	Nina Bawden	3	Pretty dull relationship story.	
Aug 00	Too many men	Lily Brett	2	Well woven story of holocaust revisited through the eyes of daughter-of-survivors and her memorable father.	
Aug 00	The Agony and the Ecstasy	Irving Stone	3	Fiction-bio of Michelangelo. Good read.	
Aug 00	The Red Badge of Courage	Stephen Crane	3	Horrors of war. Grim and readable, interesting in that the author was never in this (American Civil), or any other, war.	
Aug 00	A Fool's Alphabet	Sebastian Faulks	3	Italian/English boy growing up post war, with higgldy-piggledy chronology mixing up the years and the locations - in strict A-Z order: A for 'orses, B for mutton, C for yourself, D for Dumb, E for brick, F for vescence, G for Police, H for 'imself, I for Novello, J for oranges, K for restaurant, L for leather, M for sis, N for a penny, O for the wings of a dove, P for comfort, Q for a ticket, R for mo, S for Williams, T for two, U for me, V for la France, W for money, X for breakfast, Y for mistr - er, husband, Z for breezes.	
Aug 00	Herzog	Saul Bellow	3	Slow going to start with; rather academic/authors book. Failed Jewish writer/teacher and his problematic life. Dense prose, demanding good concentration!	
Aug 00	A brief history of time	Stephen Hawking	3	Not nearly as digestible as I'd been led to believe. SH has a readable style, and strives to simplify and hide the maths, but I ended up skip reading most of it.	
Aug 00	A good man in Africa	William Boyd	3	Fairly readable. Seedy British colonial stuff in 70's fictional African country.	

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Jul 00	SS-GB	Len Deighton	3	OK-ish who-dunnit set in a 1941 Britain recently occupied by a successful Germany. Rather too convoluted plot intricacies which mostly passed me by.	
Jul 00	Brain Longevity	Dharma Singh Khasla, with Cameron Stauth	3	Stimulating and encouraging. Pretty easy to read (if a bit too American/gung-ho/repetitive). Made me think (even do) more about mind, body and diet.	
Jul 00	The Garden of the Finzi-Continis	Giorgio Bassani	3	Good enough tale of love and literature amongst doomed upper crust Jews in the late 1930's. I had expected more pathos and horrors, but though present, the politics were very peripheral (tho' hidden messages probably passed me by!). As the sibyl character says "memory of things is much more important than the possession of them".	
Jul 00	Vile Bodies	Evelyn Waugh	3	OTT 20's Bright Young Things send-up.	
Jun 00	An Innocent Abroad	Barry Pilton	1	Witty, pithy, evocative autobiography (apparently - though the steady stream of memorable events seem unlikely for one person's experience) of Paris in the late 1960s. An English Bill Bryson with a bit more bite and a bit less whimsy.	
Jun 00	Age of Iron	J.M.Coetzee	3	Stark end-of-Apartheid story woven round a dying old lady and her entanglements with the sordid side of the black underground movement.	
Jun 00	The Map of Love	Ahdaf Soueif	3	Convoluted-ly told intertwined love stories of early 1900s Egyptian and British couple and their end-of-1900s descendants. Brings in some Egyptian politics but too obscurely to learn much.	
Jun 00	The Oxford History of the French Revolution	William Doyle	4	Pretty heavy going. Slightly better than the Alfred Cobban, but again too much assumption of existing knowledge. Yet another out of touch academic! I guess the subject matter is pretty tortuous too. Shame Mitchener didn't write about it.	
Jun 00	Quarantine	Jim Crace	3	Odd fiction about an alternative scenario to Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness - with a bunch of other oddballs in attendance. Didn't appeal to me!	
May 00	The Partner	John Grisham	2	Excellent thriller about lawyer who discovers massive corruption which he exposes in a ridiculously perfectly planned scheme whereby he so steals \$90m and eventually allows himself to be caught.	
May 00	The Alexander Trilogy - Fire from Heaven - The Persian Boy - Funeral Games	Mary Renault	5	Gave up! Too many poorly introduced names and non-sequitur start-up scenes.	
Apr 00	The Caine Mutiny	Herman Wouk	2	Great tale of 2nd WW life and misery on an old Destroyer-Minesweeper under a cowardly tyrant.	
Apr 00	Notes from a Big Country	Bill Bryson	2	Compendium of Mail on Sunday articles. Great light read.	
Apr 00	Goodbye to Berlin	Christopher Isherwood	3	Period feel to the inter-war Berlin life, though not as glamorous or evocative as my memories of <i>Cabaret</i> .	
Apr 00	A History of Modern France (Vol 2: 1799-1871)	Alfred Cobban	5	Gave up! More an academics ramblings, assuming the reader was already familiar with all the major players and happenings	
Apr 00	Churchill & Secret Service	David Stafford	3	Detailed but readable coverage Churchill's involvement with and use of secret services. Amazing how he had the time to give such attention to, and make such good use of, this amongst all his other responsibilities. Interesting how by reading raw intercepts he would sometimes outflank his own military, and at other times completely mess up in his analysis (tho' often admitting as such afterwards).	
Mar 00	Made in America	Bill Bryson	3	Fairly disorganized views on American history, heavily centred on the evolution of it's English language. Slightly heavy going at times, but some fascinating details (which I've forgotten already!). Keep as a reference book to dip back into (reasonable, though not exhaustive index).	
Feb 00	Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire	Amanda Foreman	3	Detailed account of this influential 18th/19th century aristocrat. Amazing how much she managed to cram into a ~50 year life - politicking, debauchery, gambling, travelling, cheating and lying! Found the (dominant) politicking difficult to follow because it concentrated so much on personalities without explaining the policies that were causing all the agitation (also because I can't understand how anyone gets so worked up about politics!). Very poor use of footnotes (lots of them, and too much relevant info. in them!)	
Feb 00	Deceit	Clare Francis	3	Good murder mystery set in sailing Suffolk. Found the first person (woman who's husband disappeared / committed suicide / was murdered) a bit grating for some reason.	
Feb 00	Charlotte Gray	Sebastian Faulks	2	Great wartime / love story.	
Jan 00	Breakfast at Tiffany's (plus "House of Flowers", "A Diamond Guitar" and A Christmas Memory")	Truman Capote	2	Very stimulating - even more so than my memories of a rather muted and stylized Hepburn film of the fey and captivating Holly Golightly.	
Jan 00	It's a Battlefield	Graeme Greene	4	Rather dreary tale of family and friends and politics of bus driver due to be hung for killing a policeman who was about to kill his wife.	
Jan 00	The Card	Arnold Bennett	3	Amusing tale of sharp young man in the "Five Towns".	
Jan 00	Archangel	Robert Harris	2	Thriller telling of Yeltsin-era finding of Stalin papers leading to his son.	
Jan 00	New Grub Street	George Gissing	4	Writer-centric tale of the dreary life and ambitions of minor writers in late 19th century London. Frightfully pompous and unattractive characters, which I trust were painted with deliberate irony.	
Dec 99	Goodbye to All That	Robert Graves	3	Dryly ironic account of the First World war and its craziness. Very good read.	
Dec 99	Rumours of Rain	Andre Brink	3	Good anti(Apartheid) regime tale centred round a pro-Nationalist Afrikaner businessman.	
Nov 99	The Monocled Mutineer	William Allison and John Fairley	3	Weak and lugubrious account of the life of the supposed ring leader of the 1917 Etaples mutiny. Book scarcely mentioned his part in it, and I was left with the impression that there's a great story in there that the authors failed to bring out.	
Nov 99	Sanctuary	William Faulkner	3	Grim tale of rape and prostitution in the 1920s south. Indirect style makes it hard to follow all the twists.	
Nov 99	The Age of Innocence	Edith Wharton	3	Pleasantly ironic view of 1870s upper class society in New York, used to decorate a frustrated love affair. Would have been better if 2/3rds as long.	
Nov 99	Munich. Prologue to Tragedy	John W Wheeler-Bennet	3	Very detailed but readable coverage of Munich treaty (1938) and the 6 months either side. Written 1947, but still has pretty good post-war perspective (tho' some information inevitably not available).	
Oct 99	A Distant Thunder	Anne Topham	3	Insiders view of the last(?) major Royal court by the Kaiser's daughter's English teacher. Anne T's broad political appreciation and pithy asides (some with benefit of post war hindsight) leaven the pure domestic detail.	
Oct 99	Kidnapped and Catriona	Robert Louis Stevenson	2	Great romping read. Heavy to follow Scots helped with a good glossary.	
Sep 99	Civilians at War	George Beardmore	2		
Sep 99	The Heirs of the Kingdom	Zoé Oldenburg Trans: Anne Carter	4	Dreadful rambling French-written guess-timentary of the pas-du-Calais contingent at the 1st crusade.	
Sep 99	The Sacred and Profane Love Machine	Iris Murdoch	4	Dull tale of adulterous psychotherapist.	
Aug 99	Armadillo	William Boyd	3	Light but fairly drawn out tale of loss adjuster, corporate derring-do, murder and the like.	
Aug 99	A Scots Quair	Lewis Grassic Gibbons	2	Early 1900s rural Aberdeenshire life. Slightly heavy dialect language but very readable.	
Aug 99	Close to the Wind	Pete Goss	2	Vendée round the world and other breathtaking adventures	
Aug 99	Terra Incognita	Sara Wheeler	2	Antarctica years. Very personal, good descriptions.	
---- some read before this record - dates set to 1-Jan-90 to help stats/checks ----					
Jan 90	Riddley Walker	Russell Hoban	4		
Jan 90	A Time to Heal	Beata Bishop	3	ISBN: 0-7278-2041-9	
Jan 90	The Color Purple	Alice Walker	3		
Jan 90	The Great Fortune: The Balkan Trilogy 1	Olivia Manning	3+		
???	The Surgeon of Crowthorne: A Tale of Murder, Madness and the Oxford English Dictionary	Simon Winchester		Dr Minor, contributor to OED	

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
Books Janet (mainly) read and does not recommend!					
Feb 17	Snowball: Tad Anders Book 1	Ted Allbeury	J		K
Mar 17	Italian Assets	Ted Allbeury	J		K
Jun 17	Lie Down With Lions	Ken Follett	J		K
Aug 17	Spanish Crossings	John Simmons	J		K
Jan 18	An Equal Stillness	Francesca Kay	J		K
Jan 18	The Crow Trap	Ann Cleeves	J		K
Jan 18	Queen Bees: Six Brilliant and Extraordinary Society Hostesses Between the Wars	Siân Evans	J		K
Mar 18	Into Suez	Stevie Davies	J		K
Jun 18	Miss Burma	Charmaine Craig	J	Modern day Burma	
Jun 18	Babylon Berlin	Volker Kutscher	J	Hard to read	
Nov 18	Night Over Water	Ken Follett	J		K
Nov 18	STRANGE MEETING	PB North	J		K
Nov 18	LEAVING PIMLICO	PB North	J		K
Aug 19	The man between	Charles Cumming	J	Did not like, though read through	
Oct 19	Big Sky	Kate Atkinson	J	Brodie crime thriller. J didn't get into it	
Nov 19	When the lion feeds	Wilbur Smith	J	Dull	
Dec 19	A View Across the Rooftops	Suzanne Kelman	J		K
Jan 20	The Light Years	Elizabeth Jane Howard	J	Did not like or recommend	K
Aug 20	Prisoner from Penang	Clare Flynn	J		K
Aug 20	The Forbidden Promise	Lorna Cook	J		K
Jul 21	Victim 2117 [Q#8]	Jussi Adler-Olsen	J	Horrid violent story	
Jul 21	The Betrayal	Kate Funnell	J	Rubbish, P wouldn't like!	
Aug 21	Wrong Place	Michelle Davies	J	Female cop series	425 2017
	The Seamstress	Maria Duenas and Daniel Hahn	J		K
	The Tuscan Child	Rhys Bowen	J		K
	Those Who Are Loved	Victoria Hislop	J		K
	Daughters of War	Dinah Jefferies	J		524 2021
Aug 22	The Unheard	Nicci French	J		452 2021
Nov 22	Snow Country	Sebastian Faulks	J		
Jan 23	A Double Life	Charlotte Philby	J		
Jul 23	The Dressmaker's Gift	Fiona Valpy	J		K
Jul 23	The Paris Affair	Melanie Hudson	J		K
Jul 23	The Dictator's Wife	Freya Berry	J		K
Aug 23	Agent in Peril [WP#2]	Alex Gerlis	J		
Books Recommended (rough chronological order)					
	Richard Meinertzhagen: Soldier, Scientist and Spy	Mark Crocker		Secker	
	The Timeless Way of Building	Christopher Alexander		1979 New York. Oxford Univ. Press	
	The Oregon Experiment	Christopher Alexander			
	A Pattern Language	Christopher Alexander			
	Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples	V. S. Naipaul			
	The Machine that changed the World	James P. Womack		James P. Womack (Author), Daniel T. Jones (Author), Daniel Roos (Author)	354 2008
	Maverick!	Ricardo Semler		I may have read this? About unorthodox S. American businessman.	
	A Cancer Therapy - results of 50 cases.	Max Gerson		Totality Books, Del Mar 1977	
	A Mother's Ordeal	Steven Mosher		Brace Harcourt	335
	A far-off place	Laurens van der Post			311 1974
	From Sea to shining Sea: Present-day Journey into America's Past	Gavin Young		Hutchinson	
	All-American Boy	Scott Peck		Scribner	240 2010
	The European Discovery of the New World	Samuel Eliot Morison			
	Travellers ??	Ruth Praver Jhabvala			
	The Undeclared	George Wolfenden			
	All Space My Playground	Cedric Stokes			
	The Staffordshire Assassins	Cedric Stokes			
	Madame Merlin	George Beardmore			
	Gob's Grief	Chris Adrian			400 2013
	Queen Victoria: a Personal History	Christopher Hibbert			557 2000
	Computers Ltd. What they really can't do	David Harel			
	One Summer's Grace	Libby Purves		A Family Voyage Round Britain	307 2010

Books

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	Paris between Empires: 1814-1852	Philip Mansel			576 2001
	Blood-Dark Track: a family history	Joseph O'Neill		Nationalism thru 2 grandfathers (Economist 2001 pick)	354 2017
	Batavia's Graveyard	Mike Dash		Wiedenfield. Horrific behaviour led by Dutch man after shipwreck on small islands off W coast of Oz	514 2011
	Voyage to Disaster	Henrietta Drake-Brockman		Batavia	324 2006
	Lucretia's Batavia Diary	Howard Gray ?			
	The Rock: a tale of 7th Century Jerusalem	Kanan Makiya		Pantheon	368 2002
	The Main Cages	Philip Marsden		Cornish sea fiction	256 2012
	A very English deceit	Malcolm Balen		S. Sea bubble	260 2002
	In the Land of Pain	Alphonse Daudet		Trans: Julian Barnes	112 2002
	The Indian Mutiny: 1857	Saul David			718 2003
	The Kaiser's Last Kiss	Alan Judd			184 2003
	Waking Raphael	Leslie Forbes			404 2003
	I Can Get It for You Wholesale	Jerome Weidman		(and other titles)	436 2013
	Emma's War	Deborah Scroggins			576 2003
	The Tragedy of Erskine Childers	Leonard Piper		ex: Dangerous Waters. The Life and Death of Erskine Childers	264 2007
	Pointing from the grave	Samantha Weinberg		DNA	
	Into Africa: ... Stanley, Livingstone	Martin Dugard			418 2012
	In search of Nomads	John Ure			
	21: Bringing Down the House	Ben Mezrich		How six students took Vegas for millions	320 2012
	Beyond Fear	Bruce Schneier		Thinking sensibly about security	304 2006
	1812: Napoleon's Fatal march on Moscow	Adam Zamoyski			644 2004
	Conquerors of Time. Exploration and invention in the age of Daring	Trevor Fishlock			
	Duel in the Snows	Charles Allen		The true story of the Younghusband mission to Lhasa.	368 2015
	Younghusband:	Patrick French			
	Undertones of War	Edmund Blunden			
	The First Detective: The Life and Revolutionary Times of Vidocq	James Morton		Booked via library who then couldn't find it	352 2013
	The secrets of Rue St. Roch	Janet Morgan			
	The Boilerplate Rhino	David Quammen			289 2012
	The Song of the Dodo	David Quammen			707 2012
	The Interrogators War	Chris Mackey with Greg Miller			
	The Maintenance of Headway	Magnus Mills			164 2009
	On the Black Hill	Bruce Chatwin			284 1982
	Journey to the End of the Night	Louis-Ferdinand Celine			1988
	Fly away Peter	David Malouf			
	The Somme	A.D. Gristwood			
	A very long engagement	Sebastien Japrisot			312 1993
	The heat of the day	Elizabeth Bowen			284 1949
	The Sea and the Poison	Shusaku Endo			
	Hiroshima Joe	Martin Booth			
	Wartime Lies	Louis Begley			203 1992
	The Gallery	John Horne Burns			
	Palm Sunday	Kurt Vonnegut			337 2010
	The Hunters	James Salter			
	Paco's Story	Larry Heinemann			
	Highways to a War	Christopher J. Koch			
	My favourite war	Christopher John Farley			
	Darwin's ghosts	Rebecca Stott			383 2012
	The Attack	Yasmina Khadra			257 2006
	Binocular Vision	Edith Pearlman			2013
	Ladysmith	Giles Foden			
	Zanzibar	Giles Foden			400 2003
	Moon in a Dead Eye	Pascal Garnier			128 2013

Books

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	A House by the River	Sid Smith			272 2004
	Scarlet Memorial	Zheng Yi			
	Unit 731	Peter Williams and David Wallace			
	The Smartest Kids in the World	Amanda Ripley			
	The Great Escaper: The Life and Death of Roger Bushell	Simon Pearson			449 2013
	The Counterfeit Agent	Alex Berenson			373 2014
	Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal	Conor Grennan			
	The Golden Spruce: A True Story of Myth, Madness and Greed	John Vaillant			
	In Search of Robert Millar: Unravelling the Mystery Surrounding Britain's Most Successful Tour De France Cyclist	Richard Moore			
	Dear Leader	Jin-sung Jang		ex: Jang Jin-Sung	326 2014
	Dirt Music	Tim Winton		Western Aussie ecologist	420 2001
	Breath	Tim Winton			228 2008
	Island Home	Tim Winton			207 2016
	Gould's Book of Fish	Richard Flanagan			482 2016
	I came out of France	Cecily Mackworth			
	The goshawk	T. H. White			158 1951
	Blood Year: Islamic State and the Failures of the War on Terror	David Kilcullen			
	Love and Lies	Clancy Martin			
	Escape from Pretoria	Tim Jenkins			
	Around & Around & Around	Roy Starkey			
	Liar Moon	Ben Pastor		Martin Bora character	210 2012
	A Dark Song of Blood	Ben Pastor		Martin Bora character	386 2014
	Tin Sky	Ben Pastor		Martin Bora character	428 2015
	Alamein to Zem Zem	Keith Douglas			156 1966
	This is the Schoolroom	Nicholas Monsarrat			424 2012
	The Sovereign Individual	William Rees-Mogg			
	The Great Reckoning: Protect Yourself in the Coming Depression	William Rees-Mogg			
	A Century of War: Anglo- American Oil Politics and the New World Order	William Engdahl		F. William Engdahl	333 2011
	The Sopranos	Alan Warner			336 2011
	The Descent of Woman	Elaine Morgan			
	Spy Princess: The Life of Noor Inayat Khan	Shrabani Basu		SOE	259 2011
	Independence day	Richard Ford			451 1995
	The Washington Stratagem [YA#2] The Reykjavik Assignment [YA#3]	Adam Lebor		Yael Azoulay novels	451 2015
	Woody Guthrie: A Life	Joe Klein			
	Masai Dreaming	Justin Cartwright			308 2020
	... others ...	Justin Cartwright			
	The Ship Of Brides	Jojo Moyes			572 2005
	The Watcher	Ross Armstrong		Woodbury Downs flat life	401 2016
	Letters to a young Muslim	Omar Saif Ghobash		Anti-fundamentalist wisdom	244 2017
	The Way of the Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State	Graeme Wood			317 2017
	Three Daughters of Eve	Elif Shafak			367 2016
	The man who made things out of trees	Robert Penn			
	A Beautiful Place to Die	Malla Nunn		Emmanuel Cooper Series: (South Africa, detective series)	385 2011
	Let the Dead Lie	Malla Nunn		Emmanuel Cooper Series: (South Africa, detective series)	404 2011

Books

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	Blessed Are the Dead	Malla Nunn		Emmanuel Cooper Series: (South Africa, detective series)	309 2012
	Present Darkness	Malla Nunn		Emmanuel Cooper Series: (South Africa, detective series)	337 2014
	Mao's great famine: the history of China's most devastating catastrophe, 1958-62	Frank Dikotter		Trilogy on Mao's (mis)management of China	420 2010
	The cultural revolution: a people's history, 1962-76	Frank Dikotter		Trilogy on Mao's (mis)management of China	396 2016
	Romantic outlaws: the extraordinary lives of Mary Wollstonecraft & Mary Shelley	Charlotte Gordon			649 2015
	The Hidden Persuaders	Vance Packard			
	I saw the Crucifixion	Sydney Morrell			
	The Long Way Home	Stuart MacDonald			260 2014
	Want you gone [JP#8]	Chris Brookmyre		Also books with his partner?	503 2017
	The Forgiven	Lawrence Osborne		Moroccan desert	305 2012
	Hunters in the Dark	Lawrence Osborne			
	Succession	Livi Michael		War of Roses	368 2014
	The White Russian	Vanora Bennett		1930's Paris	372 2014
	Blood and Banquets: A Berlin Diary 1930-38	Bella Fromm		WW2	
	The Moon is Down	John Steinbeck			129 1992
	The General	C.S. Forester			1936
	The dancer upstairs	Nicholas Shakespeare		1980's Peru. The Sandpit is sequel to it	258 1995
	Six Minutes in May: How Churchill Unexpectedly Became Prime Minister	Nicholas Shakespeare			508 2017
	Singled out	Virginia Nicholson		WW1 spinsters	312 2007
	The summer book	Tove Jansson			172 1975
	The Viceroy's daughters: the lives of the Curzon sisters	Anne De Courcy		India	512 2000
	A Coward if I Return, A Hero if I Fall: Stories of Irish soldiers in World War I	Neil Richardson		Ireland	371 2020
	No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years 1900-1923	Sinead McCooile		Ireland	320 2015
	Man is Wolf: Surviving the Gulag	Janusz Bardach			
	(Journey) Into the Whirlwind	Eugenia Ginzburg			
	A Report to an Academy	Franz Kafka		Short story. Referenced in "We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves"	
	I Was Told to Come Alone: My Journey Behind the Lines of Jihad	Saoud Mekhennet			
	Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth	Holger Hoock			
	Sound	Bella Bathurst		Deafness and communication	210 2017
	Requiem	Frances Itani			
	A Rumor of War	Philip Caputo			378 2014
	The Seabirds Cry	Adam Nicolson			400 2017
	Von Ripper's Odyssey	Sian Mackay			240 2017
	Family Matters	Rohinton Mistry			487 2002
	Offering to the Storm [Baztan#3]	Dolores Redondo		Series of Spanish detective	488 2017
		Julian Barnes			
	Pink Sari Revolution: A Tale of Women and Power in the Badlands of India	Amana Fontanella-Khan			304 2013
	The Hungry Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World	Lizzie Collingham			401 2017
	Red Famine	Anne Applebaum			481 2017
	Row on a Barbed Wire Fence	Harold Lewis			
	The novel of the century: the extraordinary adventure of Les Misérables	David Bellos			307 2017
	Under the Knife : The History of Surgery in 28 Remarkable Operations	Arnold van de Laar			

Books

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	The Dollmaker	Harriette Arnow		Detroit	628 2017
	Island of a Thousand Mirrors	Nayomi Munaweera			290 2014
	A Stranger in Spain	H V Morton		Not on Kindle	374 1955
	Word from Wormingford River	Ronald Blythe Esther Kinsky		Not on Kindle	
	Detective Work	John Dale			2017 224 2015
	No Place to Lay One's Head	Francoise Frenkel		Jewish woman's WW2 memoir (Françoise) - TODO: mappings to ignore these in C col	304 2018
	Baba Dunja's Last Love	Alina Bronsky and Tim Mohr		First in series I think	192 2016
	Crime	Ferdinand von Schirach		Terror author	192 2011
	We Die Alone	David Howarth and Andy McNab		WW2 Norway	208 1999
	Need to Know	Karen Cleveland		Poor Amazon reviews	292 2018
	Outback	Thomas Keneally			256 1983
	Australian paradox	Jeanne Mackenzie			
	Rum Jungle	Alan Moorehead			
	A Secret Country	John Pilger			
	The Passing of the Aborigines	Daisy Bates			
	The Rise of the Meritocracy	Michael Young			
		Jodie Piccoult			
	The Life and Adventures of William Buckley	William Buckley and Tim Flannery		Or, maybe, by John Morgan	200 2017
	Reckoning: A Memoir	Magda Szubanski			
	In a Lonely Place	Dorothy B. Hughes			255 2010
	The Moor [MR#4]	Laurie R. King		Mary Russell & Sherlock Holmes	386 1998
	The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia	Orlando Figes		Grim!	903 2007
		Torquil McLeod		Malmo	
	The Body in Jingling Pot	JR Ellis			
	The Thirty-One Kings: Richard Hannay Returns	Robert Harris		John Buchan follow-on	256 2017
	All That Remains	Sue Black		Forensic anthropologist – not pathologist who work out how someone died, she works out how they lived.	354 2018
	1983 The World at the Brink	Taylor Downing		Reagan/Andropov almost missile scare	391 2018
	Serious Illness Conversation Guide	Atul Gawande			
	Exactly: How Precision Engineers Created the Modern World	Simon Winchester			395 2018
	Stalingrad	Theodor Plievier			
	Odyssey in Red	Heinrich Gerlach		Odyssee in Rot	
	Outside Verdun	Arnold Zweig		Erziehung vor Verdun	
	Ultimate Folly: The Rises and Falls of Whitaker Wright, the World's most Shameless Swindler	Henry Macrory		19 th century swindler	
	Conan Doyle for the Defence: A Sensational Murder, the Quest for Justice and the World's Greatest Detective Writer	Margalit Fox			318 2018
	La Femme De Gilles	Madeleine Bourdouxhe			160 2014
	Bird in a Cage	Frederic Dard			129 2016
	Frog	Mo Yan			391 2014
	If Not Critical	Eric Griffiths and Freya Johnston		Eric Griffiths – brilliant English teacher	
	From the Edge	Mark McKenna		Early Australia	277 2016
	The Good Sister	Morgan Jones		Father rescuing daughter from Syria/ISIS	
	A Terrible Country	Keith Gessen		Russia	352 2018
	Bread for All	Chris Renwick		Birth of the Welfare State	322 2017
	Sevastopol Sketches	Leo Tolstoy			
	The Removes	Tatjana Soli		Fiction round Custers Last Stand, and his wife	384 2018
	The Shoemaker and His Daughter	Conor O'Clery			304 2019
	A River of Stars	Vanessa Hua		China fiction	
	"China books"	Peter May			
	"Italy books"	Peter May		Probably means Enzo Macleod ones, which aren't great	
	Small Fry	Lisa Brennan-Jobs		Steve Jobs' daughter memoir	381 2018
	Miss Ranskill Comes Home	Barbara Euphan Todd		Creator of Worzel Gummidge	328 2014

Books

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	The Tax Inspector	Peter Carey			279 1991
		Elizabeth von Arnim			
	Enemies: A Love Story	Isaac Bashevis Singer			240 2012
	Rust & Stardust: A Novel	T. Greenwood		About real abduction of Sally Horner	344 2018
	Built: The Hidden Stories Behind our Structures	Roma Agrawal			300 2018
	The Vogue	Eoin McNamee			266 2018
	Still Lives	Maria Hummel			372 2018
	The Girl With Seven Names	Hyeonseo Lee		New York Times bestselling memoir about her escape from North Korea	304 2015
	Six Stories	Matt Wesolowski			
	Long Road Home	Kim Yong			
	The Real North Korea	Andrei Lankov		whose wry humour was much appreciated ... both superb general introductions to North Korea	
	North of the DMZ	Andrei Lankov			
	The impossible state	Victor Cha			527 2012
	Human Voices	Penelope Fitzgerald			176 1980
	Operation Jedburgh: D-Day and America's First Shadow War	Colin Beavan			464 2007
	Secret War Heroes	Marcus Binney			324 2005
	A Confederacy of Dunces	John Kennedy Toole			428 1981
	Only Killers and Thieves	Paul Howarth			339 2018
	What dementia teaches us about love	Nicci Gerrard			254 2019
	Arabs – a 3,000 year History of Peoples, Tribes and Empires	Tim Mackintosh-Smith			656 2019
	Reasons to be Cheerful	Nina Stibbe			276 2019
	Utopia Avenue	David Mitchell		Economist, not as good as Ghostwritten	544 2020
	Ghostwritten	David Mitchell			436 1999
	The Nature of Spring	Jim Crumley		JC heard. Scottish	240 2019
	Two Girls Down	Louisa Luna		Thriller	313 2019
	Vietnam	Max Hastings			722 2018
	Vasily Grossman and the Soviet Century	Alexandra Popoff			
	Life and Fate	Vasily Grossman			
	Dogstar Rising	Parker Bilal			384 2013
	City of veils	Zoe Ferraris			442 2010
	Gone girl	Gillian Flynn		Seen the film	466 2012
	Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy and the Rise of Jim Crow	Henry Louis Gates junior			
	Cold Bones [HM#8]	David Mark			368 2019
	The Easternmost House	Juliet Blaxland		East Anglia coast, erosion, ...	258 2019
	The Need	Helen Phillips			261 2019
	Ashenden	Somerset Maugham			247 1928
	The Fair Maid of Perth	Walter Scott		Side reference in another book to shoemaker vs glovemaker	1897
	First to fight: the Polish War 1939	Roger Moorhouse		A killing field First to Fight: The Polish War 1939	343 2019
	Somebody I used to know	Wendy Mitchell		Dementia	294 2018
	The brothers York: An English Tragedy	Thomas Penn		Wars of the Roses history	655 2019
	Book of Human Skin	Michelle Lovric			516 2010
	The Life and Afterlife of Harry Houdini	Joe Posnanski			336 2019
	The Highland clearances	John Prebble			352 1963
	The Lowland Clearances	Andrew Cassell and Peter Aitchison			
	Glencoe	John Prebble			299 1973
	Independence or Union: Scotland's Past and Scotland's Present	T. M. Devine			312 2016

Books

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	The Ashes of London	Andrew Taylor		Charles II's England (Marwood and Lovett Series)	482 2016
	The King's Evil	Andrew Taylor		Charles II's England (Marwood and Lovett Series)	463 2019
	Yours, for Probably Always: Martha Gellhorn's Letters of Love and War 1930-1949	Janet Somerville			580 2019
	Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind	Tom Holland			594 2019
	House of Trelawney	Hannah Rothschild		Out Feb-2020	358 2020
	The whereabouts of Eneas McNulty	Sebastian Barry		Third brother to those covered in "The Temporary Gentleman" and "Secret Scripture"	308 1998
	Execution	S. J. Parris		6 th Goridiano novel - Babington plot against Elizabeth I	416 2020
	You People	Nikita Latwani			
	Barnaby Rudge	Charles Dickens		TBR in the Kindle compendium	K 1841
	Dombey and Son	Charles Dickens		TBR in the Kindle compendium	K 1848
	Little Dorrit	Charles Dickens		TBR in the Kindle compendium	K 1857
	Martin Chuzzlewit	Charles Dickens		TBR in the Kindle compendium	K 1844
	Oliver Twist	Charles Dickens		TBR in the Kindle compendium	K 1867
	Our Mutual Friend	Charles Dickens		TBR in the Kindle compendium	K 1865
	Nicholas Nickleby	Charles Dickens		TBR in the Kindle compendium (The Life and Adventures of)	K 1839
	The Mapmaker's Wife: A True Tale Of Love, Murder And Survival In The Amazon	Robert Whitaker			368 2008
	L'ecluse numero 1 (Lock No. 1 The Lock at Charenton Maigret Sits It Out)	Georges Simenon			
	La Maison du canal	Georges Simenon		Same as: L'ecluse numero 1 (Lock No. 1 The Lock at Charenton Maigret Sits It Out ????	
	Poor economics: The Surprising Truth about Life on Less Than \$1 a Day	Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo			320 2012
	A short history of England	Simon Jenkins			319 2011
	Your Life in my Hands	Rachel Clarke			320 2017
	Why Be Happy When You Could be Normal	Jeanette Winterson			230 2011
	For the Dead	Lina Bengtsson			436 2020
	Fighting with my family	????			
	The Red Hand	Peter Temple			332 2020
		Peter Temple		Jack Irish series	
	Afloat: A memoir	Danie Couchman			179 2019
	The World Beneath Their Feet	Scott Ellsworth			
	You Never Forget Your First	Alexis Coe		Bio of George Washington	304 2020
	Saint Maybe	Anne Tyler			337 1991
	Breathing lessons	Anne Tyler		Couple going to funeral	336 1988
	The Light and the Dark [SaB#4: 1935-43]	C. P. Snow		Strangers and Brothers	
	The Masters [SaB#5: 1937]	C. P. Snow		Strangers and Brothers	
	The New Men [SaB#6: 1939-46]	C. P. Snow		Strangers and Brothers	
	Homecomings [SaB#7: 1938-50]	C. P. Snow		Strangers and Brothers	
	The Affair [SaB#8: 1953-54]	C. P. Snow		Strangers and Brothers	
	Corridors of Power [SaB#9: 1955-58]	C. P. Snow		Strangers and Brothers	
	The Sleep of Reason [SaB#10: 1963-64]	C. P. Snow		Strangers and Brothers	
	Last Things [SaB#11: 1964-68]	C. P. Snow		Strangers and Brothers	
	Another Fine Mess	Tim Moore		travels across Trumpland in a 93-year-old Ford Model T	327 2018
	Whistle in the Dark	Emma Healey			338 2018
	The Hummingbird [AF#1]	Kati Hiekkapelto			315 2014
	The Exiled [AF#3]	Kati Hiekkapelto			300 2016
	The Beast in the Red Forest [IP#5]	Sam Eastland		Inspector Pekkala Books	336 2013

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
	Red Icon [IP#6]	Sam Eastland		Inspector Pekkala Books	256 2015
	Berlin Red [IP#7]	Sam Eastland		Inspector Pekkala Books	384 2016
	The Moment of Lift	Melinda Gates			289 2019
	Darke	R. A. Gekoski		Rick Gekoski	299 2017
	Outraged: Why Everyone is Shouting and No-One is Talking	Ashley 'Dotty' Charles		Contra the everything-is-racism mode of much Internettery.	113 2020
	The Long Ships	Frans G. Bengtsson		Viking rampages - https://www.amazon.com/Long-Ships-Review-Books-Classics/dp/1590173465	481 2014
	Wartime Traveller	Trans: Robert Taylor		Translation of Thein Pe Myint's book about Burmese Marxism and independence movements around WW2	
				Books about the Matthew Perry 1853 Edo expedition The Great Commodore: The Exploits of Matthew Calbraith Perry By Edward M. Barrows Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan : Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, 1852-1854 Francis L Hawks Peter Booth Wiley's "Yankees in the Land of the Gods" John W Dower - Black Ships and Samurai NOT: George Feifer - Breaking Open Japan: Commodore Perry, Lord Abe, and American Imperialism in 1853	
	The Shogun Quartet	Lesley Downer		Japan mid 19 th century	
	Sand and Steel: A New History of D-Day	Peter Caddick-Adams			
	Calling Bullshit: The Art of Scepticism in a Data-Driven World	Carl Bergstrom and Jevin West		Data manipulation. Prob need hardcopy for graphs?	318 2020
	The Devil in the Marshalsea	Antonia Hodgson		Ref from review of 4 th Thomas Hawkins book: The Silver Collar	384 2014
	The Children of Ash and Elm	Neil Price		Viking history	
	Heart, You Bully, You Punk	Leah Hager Cohen			
	The Thief of Time	John Boyne			522 2000
	Next of Kin	John Boyne			501 2006
	The Dare	John Boyne			112 2009
	This House is Haunted	John Boyne			304 2013
	The Congress of Rough Riders	John Boyne			
	Crippen	John Boyne			
	Mutiny on the Bounty	John Boyne			528 2009
	Eight Detectives	Alex Pavesi			345 2020
	The Impeachers: The Trial of Andrew Johnson and the dream of a just nation	Brenda Wineapple			592 2020
	Thirteen [EF#4]	Steve Cavanagh		Eddie Flynn series. Previous (?): The Cross, The Defence, The Plea, The Liar	357 2018
	The Kingdom	Jo Nesbo		Not HH	549 2020
	Three-Fifths	John Vercher		Race in America	
	JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century, 1917-1956	Fredrik Logevall			
	The Greengage Summer	Rumer Godden		https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-54526146	194 2011
	The International Brigades	Giles Tremlett		Spanish Civil War	745 2020
	Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce	Christopher Hibbert			
	Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Dictatorship, 1915-1945	Richard Bosworth			
	Cry of the Kalahari	Delia Owens			
	Oystercatchers	Susan Fletcher		Norfolk	375 2006
	Heart of Darkness	Joseph Conrad			1902
	The North Water	Ian McGuire			337 2016
	Kleptopia: How Dirty Money is Conquering the World	Tom Burgis		It is hard to write about international corruption in an accessible and colourful way, while retaining an urgent sense of moral condemnation. This book beautifully captures both the murkiness and turpitude involved. Its ultimate theme—the intersection of politics and personal enrichment—is one of the most important stories of the age.	336 2020
	Eat the Buddha: Life and Death in a Tibetan Town	Barbara Demick		This is the grippingly told story of Ngaba, a county seat near the edge of the Tibetan plateau, and of the sufferings of its people under the Chinese Communist Party's rule. Exploring an area rarely visited by foreigners, the author paints striking portraits of people living there, with a fine eye for detail and a keen grasp of Tibet's history.	336 2020
	Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot	John Lloyd		A timely, forceful rehearsal of the painful consequences that might follow independence for Scotland, and of the virtues of union with England. The author, a distinguished journalist, makes a case for enhanced devolution, powerfully enlisting and evoking his own childhood in a Scottish fishing village.	209 2020

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	Kiss Myself Goodbye	Ferdinand Mount		This is the hilarious tale of a bizarre, multi-bigamist, pathologically inventive aunt in raffish, upper-class Britain either side of the second world war. Part detective story, part social history, it moves from the backstreets of Sheffield to Claridges.	272 2020
	Alaric the Goth	Douglas Boin		History may mostly be written by the victors, but the destruction of Rome by the far less literate Goths in 410AD is an exception. This colourful portrait of the city and empire in the fifth century tells their side of the story. Rich Romans lived in splendour while Goths endured slavery. Alaric, their leader, served in the Roman army—before turning on the oppressors.	
	The Slaughterman's Daughter	Yaniv Iczkovits		Echoes of Russian and Yiddish literature resound in this delightful picaresque, but you need not hear them to enjoy it. It is the late 19th century, and a Jewish mother in the Pale of Settlement sets out to retrieve her wayward brother-in-law from Minsk. Technicolour characters, pathos and humour are all wonderfully captured in a nimble translation from the Hebrew.	528 2020
	Come as you are	Emily Nagoski			
	I am Nujood: Aged 10 and Divorced	Nujood Ali			192 2010
	Agency	William Gibson			416 2020
	Portrait of the Spy as a Young Man [Catesby#7]	Edward Wilson			290 2020
	Hades, Argentina	Daniel Loedel			
	The Lochart Plot	Jonathan Schneer			
	The Idea Factory	Jon Gertner		Bell Labs history	
	Lady M: The Life and Loves of Elizabeth Lamb, Viscountess Melbourne 1751-1818	Colin Brown			393 2018
	The Holdout	Graham Moore			322 2020
	Reputation	Sarah Vaughan			
	The Picture She Took	Fiona Shaw			352
	Untraceable	Sergei Lebedev			195 2021
	The Inevitable	Katie Engelhart		Assisted dying	353 2021
	The Gallows Pole	Benjamin Myers		Historical novel, coin clippers. ???	
	The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's forgotten genocide	David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen		Namibia	394 2010
	The Republic of False Truths	Alaa Al Awwany			
	Stalin's War	Sean McMeekin		WW2 (and pre- and post-) as a Stalin rather than Hitler	
	Instant In The Wind	Andre Brink		sex scenes between the white woman and her black slave	
	Standard Deviation	Katherine Heiny		First book before Early Morning Riser	338 2017
	Early Morning Riser	Katherine Heiny			304 2021
	The suitcase	Frances Stonor Saunders		Six Attempts to Cross a Border. Memoirs of father's attempts to escape Romanian inter-war	224 2021
	The Killing Kind	Jane Casey		Stalking	474 2021
	Consolation [PH#3]	Garry Disher			371 2020
	Last waltz in Vienna	George Clare		George Clare had died while I was writing A Lily of the Field, a novel which learnt a lot from his Last Waltz in Vienna (Macmillan, 1980). In 2011 I was at work on this novel, which derives just as much from his second volume of memoirs, Berlin Days (Macmillan, 1989).	274 1980
		Madeleine Henrey		Thus prompted, I decided to look up Madeleine Henrey on the Internet—she had died in 2004.	
	The Smoking Mountain	Kay Boyle			
	Berlin	David Clay Large		Most readable factual account of Berlin after the war	
	Widowland	C J Carey		Nazi's win WW2 story	
	Risk of Harm [RL#2??]	Lucie Whitehouse		Female cop	320 2021
	All the frequent troubles of our days	Rebecca Donner		The True story of One Woman at the Heart of the German Resistance to Hitler	
	All Her Fault	Andrea Mara			
	Spike: The Virus vs. The People - the Inside Story	Jeremy Farrar, Anjana Ahuja			253 2021
	Lilian Bland	Guy Warner		Female aviatrix in early 1900's. "The First Woman in the World to Design, Build and Fly an Aeroplane"	
	Just the Plague	Ludmila Ulitskaya		Translated by Polly Gannon. Plague better than Soviet life in Stalinist Russia of the 1930's	
	Old Glory: An American Voyage	Jonathan Raban			
	Freight Dogs	Giles Foden			
	The Dark	Emma Haughton			
	Night Train to Lisbon	Pascal Mercier			504 2008
	A Sea of Straw	Julia Sutton			288 2016
	Butchers	Ruth Gilligan		Irish thriller	
	Calypso	David Sedaris			274 2018
	Reaping the Whirlwind (The Schultz family story Book 2)	Paul Grant		JC OK. Title starts "BERLIN: "	
	Stars and Spies	Christopher Andrew and Julius Green			
	Black Drop	Leonora Natrass		1790's London thriller	352 2021
	The Bloodless Boy	Robert J. Lloyd		1678 murder/history	464 2021
	Jimi Hendrix Live in Lviv	Andrey Kurkov			
	Small Things like These	Claire Keegan			73 2021

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	The Plots Against the President: FDR, a Nation in Crisis, and the Rise of the American Right.	Sally Denton			
	Chasing History: A Kid in the Newsroom	Carl Bernstein			
	Rings of Saturn	W.G. Sebald			296 1998
	Capture or Kill	Tom Marcus		Fiction - probably much like his memoirs	
	Salt	Jeremy Page		Not on K or Lib	336 2008
	Firmament	Simon Clark		The hidden science of weather	
	How to build Stonehenge	Mike Pitts			
	Resistance: the Underground war in Europe	Halik Kochanski			
	Breathless	Amy McCulloch			
	We know you remember her	Tove Alsterdal			368 2022
	The Hunting Ground [FP#3]	Will Shindler			
	The Blood Line [FP#4]	Will Shindler		Another Alex Finn	
	The Echo Maker	Richard Powers			
	Jungle Soldier	Brian Moynahan		About F. Spencer-Chapman	353 2013
	The jungle is neutral	F. Spencer Chapman		Freddy Spencer Chapman	420 2021
	The gates of Europe	Serhii Plokhy		Ukraine history	
	Shadowlands	Matthew Green		Journey through lost Britain. Dunwich, St Kilda's etc	
	Winchelsea	Alex Preston			
	The Prophets of Eternal Fjord	Kim Leine		18 th century Danish settlements in Greenland. Trans Martin Aitken. 1 st	
	The Colony of Good Hope	Kim Leine		18 th century Danish settlements in Greenland. 2 nd	
	The Bell in the Lake	Lars Mytting		Norwegian early 1900's. 1 st	
	The Reindeer Hunters	Lars Mytting		Norwegian early 1900's. 2 nd	
	The Clockwork Girl	Anna Mazzola		18 th century Paris thriller	362 2022
	Moonlight and the Pearler's Daughter	Lizzie Pook		Ozzie late 19 th century - lively heroine	304 2022
	The Matchmaker	Paul Vidich		Spies	
	The Mercenary	Paul Vidich			
	Fabulous	Lucy Hughes-Hallett		Myths retold in modern time, I think	
	Vector	Robin Cook			
	Day of the Oprichnik	Vladimir Sorokin		2028 world with Putin like Tsar	
	Freezing Order: A true story of Russian money laundering and surviving Vladimir Putin's wrath	Bill Browder			
	Redeucated	Lucy Kellaway		60 year old going into teaching	
	She said	Jodi Kantor		Harvey Weinstein	302 2019
	A Traitor's Heart	Ben Creed		2 nd in trilogy	
	The Physician	Noah Gordon		... and 2 others	650 2012
	Russia Revolution and Civil War 1917-1921	Anthony Beevor		Horrors of Red Army torturing inter alia	
	Two Wheels Good	Jody Rosen		Rather sensationalist history of biking	
	The Flood	Maggie Gee		Flooded London	
	The Anglo-Saxons	Marc Morris		Brief series of chapters on A-S life	508 2021
	We had to remove this post	Hannah Bervoets		Fiction set round social media content censors	
	The Flame of Resistance: The Untold Story of Josephine Baker's Secret War	Damien Lewis			
	The Facemaker: A Visionary Surgeon's Battle to Mend the Disfigured Soldiers of World War	Lindsey Fitzharris			320 2022
	Zero	Jeremy Hunt		NHS recipe for improvement	
	Sun Damage	Sabine Durrant			
	The young accomplice	Benjamin Wood			
	The Bellwether Revivals	Benjamin Wood		Earlier BW book, well rated by ST	
	The Ecliptic	Benjamin Wood		Earlier BW book, well rated by ST	
	A Fortunate Woman	Polly Morland		GP in rural practice	240 2022
	A Fortunate Man	John Berger		GP in rural practice (inspiration for A Fortunate Woman)	
	Wake	Shelley Burr		Oz crime thriller	
	Storm	Stephanie Merritt		Tech wealthies and #MeToo. SM also uses pseudonym S. J. Parris	
	The Apartment Upstairs	Lesley Kara		Super suspense	289 2022
	The Lazarus Heist	Geoff White		N. Korea hackers	
	A Spy by Nature [AM#1]	Charles Cumming			370 2011
	The Siege	Ismail Kadare			337 2008
	Broken April	Ismail Kadare			
	Spring Flowers	Ismail Kadare			

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
	Stand your ground	Victoria Christopher Murray			
	An Illuminated Life: Belle da Costa Greene's journey from Prejudice to Privilege	Heidi Ardizzone		Biography of BdCG	
	Goodbye to Budapest	Margarita Morris		A Novel of the Hungarian Uprising	317 2019
	The Night Belongs to the Maquis	Carolyn Kay Brancato			473 2021
	The Lighthouse of Stalingrad: The hidden truth at the centre of WWII's greatest battle	Iain MacGregor		Slight debunking of soviet (and Putin) propaganda	
	The Twyford Code [SS#2]	Janice Hallet		German spies and scheme to steal UK gold reserve. Steven Smith	
	The Appeal [SS#1?]	Janice Hallet			416 2020
	The Partisan	Patrich Worrall		Complex Russian and other thriller	
	The Retreat [EW#2]	Sarah Pearse		Agatha Christie-like. Elin Warner	
	The Sanatorium [EW#1]	Sarah Pearse			
	The Witch Elm	Tana French		Standalone novel	
	Gallows Rock [FH#4]	Yrsa Sigurdardottir	?	Next Freyja/Huldar	
	News of a Kidnapping	Gabriel García Márquez		An unsurpassed journalistic account by Colombia's most famous novelist of the horror inflicted by Pablo Escobar, the murderous drug-trafficker from Medellín, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It focuses on the kidnapping of Diana Turbay, a journalist and daughter of a former president, tracing the agonising choices of officials torn between national interest and personal ties	291 1997
	Dealers of Lightning	Michael Hiltzik		Many of the 20th century's important inventions were products of corporate-research labs. The greatest belonged to Xerox, a photocopier manufacturer. Starting in 1970, its Palo Alto Research Centre (parc) pioneered personal computing. This pacey book shows how, by adopting darpa's free-for-all approach to research, parc became a hub of innovation	480 2000
	No Filter	Sarah Frier		A captivating account of the rise of Instagram, one of the modern Valley's successes. Most riveting are the passages on the platform's acquisition by Facebook for \$1bn in 2012, which offer insights into the negotiating tactics of Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey of Twitter.	
	Broken Heartlands: A Journey Through Labour's Lost England	Sebastian Payne		Red wall seats	320 2021
	Back to the Front	Phyllis Campbell		Horrors of WW1 from womens / nursing perspective?	
	Hope to Die [AF#6]	Cara Hunter			
	The Twist of a Knife [DH#4]	Anthony Horowitz			373 2022
	My Traitor's Heart	Rian Malan		Book about South Africa in the olden days. whose spectacular tour de force, inspired Hammerman in Mahmood's book	544 2015
	A Street shaken by Light	James Buchan		1720's - The Story of William Neilson, Volume I	
	The Bookseller of Inverness	SG MacLean		Culloden-started Scot's bookseller	
	Shrines of Gaiety	Kate Atkinson			448 2022
	The Shadow Murders	Jussi Adler-Olsen			
	Ancestry	Simon Mawer			
	Empires of the Sea	Roger Crowley		Middle ages Christians vs Ottomans	
	Edible Economics: A Hungry Economist Explains the World	Ha-Joon Chang			
	The House by the Dvina	Eugenie Fraser			
	The Man in the Queue / Killer in the Crowd [IG#1]	Josephine Tey		Inspector Grant of Scotland Yard series [IG#2] A Shilling for Candles [IG#3] The Franchise Affair [IG#4] To Love and Be Wise [IG#5] The Daughter of Time [IG#6] The Singing Sands	247 1929
	The Night Man [WW#1]	Jorn Lier Horst		First Wisting	
	Auld Acquaintance	Sofia Slater			
	The World: A Family History	Simon Sebag Montefiore		Don't be put off by the doorstopper length: this history of the world, told through the stories of eminent families, is a riveting page-turner. The author brings his cast of dynastic titans, rogues and psychopaths to life with pithy, witty pen portraits, lading on the sex and violence. An epic that both entertains and informs	1344
	Maror	Lavie Tidhar		Corruption, drugs and assassination feature in this wildly ambitious saga set over four decades in Israel from the early 1970s. It is loosely organised around a series of murders on a coastal road and the career of a crooked cop, but takes detours to Lebanon, Los Angeles, Colombia and Cancún. A caustic alternative history of the dream and development of Israel	560
	The Trees	Percival Everett		Someone is murdering white people in Money, Mississippi. A mutilated black body is found at the crime scenes but keeps disappearing. At first the victims are connected to the lynching of Emmett Till in the neighbourhood in 1955; but then the circle of comeuppance widens. Two wisecracking detectives head down to investigate. A bitingly funny, boldly satirical, deadly serious tale of racism and the legacy of injustice	
	Queen of Spies: Daphne Park, Britain's Cold War Spy Master	Paddy Hayes			
	Tales of the South Pacific	James Michener			384 2014
	The Drifters	James Michener			723 2014
	A Dangerous Business	Jane Smiley		Murder mystery in mid 19c America	305 2022
	The Things we do to our Friends	Heather Darwent		Donna Tartt / Secret History like thriller	
	Hidden Mountains: Survival and Reckoning After a Climb Gone Wrong	Michael Wejchert			256 2023
	A Jock's General	Colin Graham			

Books

Date	Title [seq#, published]	Author	Rating	Notes	K/pp/Pub
	Someone else's shoes	Jojo Moyes			
	The Aftermath	Rhidian Brook			354 2013
	Biram Wood	Eleanor Catton		First 50 pages a slog	433 2023
	The Rehearsal	Eleanor Catton			
	The broken afternoon [DIRW#2]	Simon Mason		2 nd in Oxford-set	
	Stay Buried	Kate Webb			
	The Past	Tessa Hadley			370 2015
	Redemption: From Iron Bars to Ironman	John McAvoy		Brinks Mat villain grandson	330 2016
	The Restless Republic	Anna Keay		Cromwell's time	482 2022
	Cut Adrift	Jane Jesmond		Free climber Jen Shaw	
	On the Edge	Jane Jesmond		Precedes Cut Adrift	
	Portnoy's Complaint	Philip Roth			
	West	Anne Sholt		????	
	Magician	Claire Keegan		????	
	Motherless Brooklyn	Jonathan Lethem		Detective novel Main char has Tourettes	324 2014
	The Warlock Effect	Jeremy Dyson and Andy Nyman			396 2023
	Map of a Nation	Rachel Hewitt		OS mapping	484 2011
	The Wager	David Grann		1742 shipwreck	352 2023
	The Secret Barrister	The Secret Barrister			
	The Girl by the Bridge	Arnaldur Indridason		2 nd Detective Konrad to: The Darkness Knows	
	Bank of Dave: How I Took On the Banks	Dave Fishwick			
	Killing Thatcher	Rory Carroll			416 2023
	Windmill Hill	Lucy Atkins			352 2023
	Magpie Lane	Lucy Atkins			354 2020
	Homegrown	Jeffrey Toobin		Timothy McVeigh and the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism	
	Whips	Cleo Watson			400 2023
	The Scarlet Papers	Matthew Richardson		Spy	567 2023
	Drowning	T. J. Newman			
	That Night	Gillian McAlister			
	The way of all flesh	Ambrose Parry		1st in series, Chris Brookmyre and partner	
	Foreign Affairs	Alison Lurie			315 2010
		Lawrence Osborne			
	Seventeen Moments of Spring	Yulian Semyonov		Russian le carre	
	Fearless	MW Craven			
	Hiroshima	John Hersey		One of the greatest pieces of journalism ever written - and you can read it in a single sitting	
	The Art Thief	Michael Finkel		Obsessive stealer of fine art	
	Someone you know	Erin Kingsley		Murder mystery in Norfolk	
	The Red Hotel: The Untold Story of Stalin's Disinformation War	Alan Philips			
	Coming Wave	Mustafa Suleyman		AI	
	The Other Mothers	Katherine Faulkner			
	The Beasts of Paris	Stef Penney			515 2023
	The Invisible Ones	Stef Penney			449 2011
	Politics on the Edge	Rory Stewart			
	The Pit	Peter Papathanasiou			
	The Running Grave [CS#7]	Robert Galbraith			
	The Beaver Theory	Antti Tuomainen		Finnish comic thriller. 3Rd in trilogy with Henri Koskinen	
	Beyond the Door of No Return	David Diop			
	The White Lie	JG Kelly		2nd hand Scott of the Antarctic	
	Love in a Lost Land	James McManus		African colonialism	
	Kennedy 35 [B88#3]	Charles Cumming			
	The Trading Game: A Confession	Gary Stevenson			2024
	Demon Copperhead	Barbara Kingsolver			
	Restless Dolly Maunder	Kate Grenville			
	Never Look Away	Linwood Barclay			
	Let Me Tell You About a Man I Knew			v Gogh	

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Jul 08	The Visitor	Thomas McCarthy:	2	Sad and single (widowed) Boston professor returns to his long unused NY apartment to find two more or less young squatters – both immigrants. He a Lebanese drummer who brings prof back to life by getting him drumming, tho' the Lebanese gets deported.
	<i>Dinard 2008 Film festival</i>			
Sep 08	Cassandra's Dream	Woody Allen: Ewan McGregor, Colin Farrell	2	Hitchcock-esque suspense-thriller. Two working class lads are persuaded by their rich uncle to murder, and find it destroys their lives.
Oct 08	Scoop	Woody Allen: Scarlett Johansson, Woody Allen	2	Wry tale of famous journalist giving scoop to gauche journalism student (SJ). She teams up with an old-style WA Jewish/anguished magician and solves the murder story behind the scoop.
Oct 08	Revolution Revisited	Hugh Hudson: Al Pacino	4	Weak big-scene/budget US war of Independence movie largely focussed on the vileness of the Brits. Over-stretched love tales thread together otherwise disconnected and un-explained war scenes.
Oct 08	My Life So Far	Hugh Hudson: Colin Firth	3	Delightful tale of young boy growing up in zany wealthy family in Scottish castle. Based on real story of Sir Denis Forman who went on to be a big TV and Opera boss.
Oct 08	My Cousin Rachel	Henry Koster: Richard Burton, Olivia de Havilland	3	Classic B&W of Daphne du Maurier story. Young man falls for dead cousin's beautiful, mysterious and devious widow.
Oct 08	The Escapist	Rupert Wyatt: Brian Cox	2	Gripping, poignant and ambiguous prison breakout by erstwhile resigned inmate who learns his daughter is getting too far into drugs.
Oct 08	A Complete History of my Sexual failures	Chris Waitt:	2	Very funny dead-pan pseudo (maybe) documentary. Excruciating S&M scene. Mainly amusing and warm ex'es all very good on camera. Touching ending where he eventually gets a girl!
Oct 08	Of time and the City	Terence Davies:	4	Billed as documentary/homage to Liverpool. Pretty dull. Some good archive footage, and a fair bit of (unrelated to Liverpool) political rant.
Oct 08	Genova	Mark Winterbottom: Colin Firth	3	Father and troubled young daughters try to recover from wife's death in car accident (caused by youngest). Set in Genoa, pretty scenes and averagely watch-able.
Oct 08	The Hide	Marek Losey:	2	Tight suspense with two odd men in a bird-watching hide.
Oct 08	Shadows in the Sun	David Rocksavage:	3	Beautifully filmed and gentle/sad story of separated father and two kids visiting his Mum in a fantastic old Norfolk house next to the coast.
Oct 08	I've Loved You So Long (Il y'a longtemps que je t'aime)	Philippe Claudel: Kristin Scott Thomas, Elsa Zylberstein	1	Brilliant well-paced French film of sister reuniting with her sister and life after 15 years in prison for (mercy) killing her 6 year-old son.
Nov 08	Burn After Reading	Ethan + Joel Coen: George Clooney, Brad Pitt, John Malkovich, Frances McDormand, Tilda Swinton	4	OK but far too slow moving. As quirky and interesting as "No country for old men" but with less reason to see it to the end. Complex story of inter-related lovers and CIA (?) agent losing his job and a CD of secure "sig int".
Nov 08	The Bader Meinhof Complex		3	German docudrama of the RAF history. Long, but a great film. Very slow build up, partly to emphasise Meinhof's surprising switch from pretty ordinary journalist to key member of the group – though it didn't really clarify what made her drop husband and two kids to become an outlaw.
Jan 09	Slumdog Millionaire	Danny Boyle, Loveleen Tandan: Dev Patel, Amil Kapoor, Irrfan Khan, Freida Pinto, Madhur Mittal	3	
Jan 09	Australia	Baz Luhrmann: Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman	3	
Jan 09	Revolutionary Road	Sam Mendes: Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet	3+	Excellent; rather slow start but fantastically acted and unpredictable plot of thwarted dreams and 1950's suburban veneer.
Feb 09	The Curious Case Of Benjamin Button	David Fincher: Starring: Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett, Tilda Swinton	3	Wonderfully curious story line, based on a 1921 short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, of someone born old and dying a baby. Reworked time frame, but very long drawn out. Excellent acting.
Feb 09	Vicky Cristina Barcelona	Woody Allen: Starring: Scarlett Johansson, Rebecca Hall, Javier Bardem, Penelope Cruz	3	Good fun, longer than necessary. Very ex-pat Americans in Barcelona with WA-tone voice-over explaining the torments of the two US girls hanging around the Spanish artist and his unstable ex-wife (PC).
Apr 09	The Reader	Stephen Daldry: Kate Winslet, Ralph Fiennes, David Kross	2	Fine and stunningly acted unpeeling of the story (possibly true) of an illiterate German woman who had been a concentration camp guard, and reaction to her of a much younger lad who has an affair with her. Only criticism was that it could have been much shorter (particularly the first 45 mins of the affair!).
Apr 09	State Of Play	Kevin Macdonald: Ben Affleck, Russell Crowe, Helen Mirren	3	OK thriller. Good there was minimal car chasing and blood and guts. Tale of US congressman allegedly getting leant on by a company bidding for govt business – in an enquiry he was chairing.
Jun 09	Looking for Eric	Ken Loach: Steve Evets, Eric Cantona, Stephanie Bishop,	3	Gritty tale of slightly out-of-it postman with very troubled step kids and broken marriages. Kids drag him into local gangster's grip, but his own idolisation of Eric Cantona conjures the great man into his life with some good attitude- and lifestyle-changing advice, which in the end brings everything good.
Jun 09	Anything For Her (Pour Elle)	Fred Cavaye: Vincent Lindon, Diane Kruger	3+	Good thriller. French, which always helps. Woman mis-emprisoned and respectable husband who goes criminal to rescue her.
Jul 09	Frost/Nixon	Ron Howard: Frank Langella, Michael Sheen	2	Entertaining docu-drama on the famous interview. Langella particularly believable as Nixon, though the sudden collapse and "confession" was odd (but, presumably, accurate). Wasn't quite convinced of Sheen/Frost's motivation or what kept him going when he couldn't raise the finance ... he came over as a much more fragile character than he must have been.
Jul 09	Sunshine Cleaning	Christine Jeffs: Alan Arkin, Amy Adams, Emily Blunt	3	Quirky US film about two sisters starting a cleaning-up-crime scene business to make money. Lots of wrinkles (Mum committed suicide they have to clean up some; one armed friend) dribble out, during a too (for me) slow moving film. No real story, just a series of watch-able vignettes.
	<i>Dinard 2009 Film festival</i>			
Oct 09	In Bruges	Martin McDonagh: Colin Farrell, Brendan Gleeson, Ralph Fiennes	2	Wonderfully entertaining story of two hitmen hiding up in Bruges after a botched killing. Despite this black background, they are an endearing and entertaining pair, who all die in an appropriate shootouts with their grizzled London gangster boss.
Oct 09	Fish Tank	Andrea Arnold: Michael Fassbender, Rebecca Griffiths, Harry Treadaway, Kierston Wareing, Katie Jarvis	3	Bleak, ugly and depressing tale of youngsters on a Tilbury housing estate and two-faced local Lothario getting it off with Mum and daughter. Glimmer of hope at the end as the daughter leaves the estate for good, but not an uplifting film!
Oct 09	The Boat that Rocked ("Good Morning England")	Richard Curtis: Bill Nighy, Rhys Ifans, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Tom Sturridge, Kenneth Branagh, Emma Thompson	3	Lightweight/hearted pastiche on Radio Caroline style pirate. Good cameo performances, but annoyingly (and inevitably) truncated pop songs.
Oct 09	She, a Chinese		4	Dreadfully dull and pedantic story of country Chinese girl getting to London via Shanghai and various exploitative men.
Oct 09	Boy A	John Crowley: Andrew Garfield, Peter Mullan	1	Bulger-like story covering one of the perpetrators' release from prison (the other, main, one having died in prison – suicide or killed left ambiguous). Excellent acting and feel, with the lad starting to make good and struggling with his awful secret. Sad end as he is uncovered and commits suicide.
Oct 09	An Englishman in New York	Richard Laxton: John Hurt	3+	Great biography of Quentin Crisp's later days in NY. Wonderful stream of bon mot's. Must see and read the preceding Naked Civil Servant. Stunning performance by John Hurt.
Oct 09	White Lightnin'	Dominic Murphy: Edward Hogg	4	Grisly semi-biographical tale of schizophrenic glue/petrol sniffing lad from dirt poor West Virginia. Frequent spells of madness and violence and period local fame as shoe-shuffle dance performer (following his murdered fathers footsteps). Horrific violence throughout ending in extensive self-mutilation and suicide.

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Oct 09	An Education	Lone Scherfig: Carey Mulligan, Peter Sarsgaard, Alfred Molina, Emma Thompson	3	Biographical story of journalist Lynn Barber's seduction at the age of 16 by handsome rogue that almost stopped her going to University. When quitting school (at 17), wonderful scene with her headmistress (ET), who totally failed to respond to CM's point that education only led to uninspiring (by ET's own admission) future as teacher or administrator. After rapid collapse of the 17-year old's affair, CM is rescued by another teacher and makes it on to Oxbridge and, presumably, a sparkling career!
Oct 09	Beyond Biba	Louis Price:	3	Good documentary on Barbara Hulaniki, who has moved into architectural and interior design since walking away from a collapsing Biba in the mid-70's. Would have been nice to have more on the Biba days – emphasising the extraordinary UK fashion desert Biba appeared into.
Oct 09	Jean Charles	Henrique Goldman: Selton Mello	3	Docudrama on Jean Charles de Menezes. Though the Police cock-ups are mentioned, it is not the expected anti-Police/UK film. Shows JCM to be a charming but slightly low-level villain – helping illegal immigrants and operating dodgy builders teams. Also shows that, though the episode may be fading in UK eyes, the lack of proper apology annoys many in Brazil.
Oct 09	Fifty Dead Men Walking		2	JC saw – IRA informer biography.
Oct 09	Boogie Woogie	Duncan Ward: Amanda Seyfried, Gillian Anderson, Alan Cumming, Joanna Lumley	4	Poor spoof on Art world madnasses.
Nov 09	The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas	Mark Herman:	2	Grim if slightly slow story of son of a Nazi just promoted to Concentration/Death camp commandant. Wife and kids don't for a while understand what it is. The 8-year old son never does, and manages to make friends with an 8-year old Jew in the camp. The two boys' naïvetés work well (despite neither being that believable an actor) as they meander to the chilling inevitable finale: son breaks into the camp to help look for his friend's recently disappeared father only to hit the next death round, and are killed in the gas chamber. Strangely effective spin on the usual presentation of Nazi horrors works well.
Dec 09	Love Actually	Richard Curtis: Emma Thompson, Hugh Grant, ... and everyone else who has ever worked with Curtis	4	Tosh
Dec 09	The Third Man	Carol Reed: Orson Welles, Joseph Cotten, Trevor Howard	3	Excellent thriller. Still very watchable despite its date (1949).
Jan 10	Up In The Air	Jason Reitman: George Clooney, Vera Farmiga	3	Always-travelling (in the air) consultant for company that does the dirty work of telling folk they're redundant at other firms (do such companies exist?). Never at home, no personal entanglements, then gets together with similar type person who offers no-complications liaisons at mutual airport stops. But then he falls for her and discovers she has a real life at home that he can't get past.
Jan 10	Mr Smith goes to Washington	Frank Capra: Jean Arthur, James Stewart	3	Naïve man posted to Senate by corrupt local businessman, and upsets things. A bit dated, but worth the watch.
Feb 10	Invictus	Clint Eastwood: Morgan Freeman, Matt Damon	2	Great feel-good retelling of Mandela's early time as President and SA's winning of the 1995 Rugby world cup. Mandela using it as focal piece for reconciliation and encouraging Francois Pienaar's team on.
Feb 10	A Single Man	Tom Ford: Colin Firth, Julianne Moore, Matthew Goode	3	Intense version of Christopher Isherwood's book. Colin Firth's gayness and misery (on his last day alive) were not 100% unbelievable; but exquisite filming.
	All Quiet On The Western Front		5	Dreadful stilted 30's film – of such a good book. Only watched a little.
Feb 10	Mrs. Ratcliffe's Revolution	Billie Eltringham: Catherine Tate, Iain Glen	3-	Easy-watching comedy about northern decamping from Yorkshire to East Germany at socialist Dad's behest. Precocious younger daughter laps it up, other one and Mum don't like it. Mum gets inadvertently involved in helping escapees and then does same for her now all disillusioned family.
Feb 10	The Crying Game	Neil Jordan: Miranda Richardson, Stephen Rea, Forest Whitaker	2	IRA volunteer tasked with killing a UK soldier they have kidnapped in honeytrap gets to like him. Soldier dies in allowed escape and volunteer has to escape IRA's wrath. He goes to London to work and meet the soldier's girl friend – who he falls for, but she turns out to be a hermaphrodite. Very touching and well crafted story.
Mar 10	The Last Station	Michael Hoffman: Paul Giamatti, Helen Mirren, Christopher Plummer, James McAvoy	4	Drawn out and thin telling of Leo Tolstoy's last days. He ended up dying at a railway station on his way somewhere – escaping from his wife with whom he had a fraught relationship. Wonderful acting and filming, but far too long!
Mar 10	Persepolis		3+	Cartoon based on book of same name by Marjane Satrapi. Iranian girl from a middle class background growing up through and round the revolution in (1978?) and vividly showing the repression of women (inter alia) and the repression of talent. Amazing how people retain their love of their country through all that.
Mar 10	The Diving Bell and the Butterfly		2	Based on the memoir of the same name by Jean-Dominique Bauby, the film depicts Bauby's life after suffering a massive stroke at the age of 42, which left him with a condition known as locked-in syndrome. The condition paralysed him, with the exception of his left eyelid, so that he could only communicate by blinking. Moving and very effective presentation from his minds-eye view of the world. Must read the book!
Apr 10	Taken	Pierre Morel: Liam Neeson	3	Estranged ex-spoof/fixer Dad hunts down his kidnapped 17-year old daughter in Paris. Lots of wham bam he's the man. Mildly gripping. Not at all challenging plot!
Apr 10	Defiance	Edward Zwick: Daniel Craig, Jamie Bell	3	True story of 3 Jewish brothers running groups of Jews hiding in Belarussian forest during WW2 and fights with Nazis. A bit silly in its action dramatics, and very reminiscent of a Primo Levi (I think) book of a similar group.
Apr 10	In the Loop	Armando Iannucci: Peter Capaldi, Tom Hollander, Gina McKee	3+	Excellent, if rather too fast and witty Political spoof.
May 10	The Ghost	Roman Polanski: Pierce Brosnan, Ewan McGregor, Olivia Williams	3	Film of Robert Harris' book. Low-key tension, great acting and scenery.
May 10	The Disappearance Of Alice Creed	J Blakeson: Gemma Arterton, Eddie Marsan, Martin Compston	2+	Excellent plot-twisting thriller. No over violence but endless menace and tension as two men kidnap girl to get ransom. First the girl turns out to be girlfriend of younger kidnapper, then both kidnappers are lovers, and on and on it unravels until the girl is the only winner. Superb acting all round, particularly from GA.
Jul 10	Moon	Duncan Jones: Sam Rockwell	3-	Sci-fi story of grunt workers on some remotish planet realising they get killed off and replaced by clones whenever they get close to completing their "contract".
Jul 10	Harold and Maude	Hal Ashby: Bud Cort, Ruth Gordon	3	Great oldie. Wonderful Cat Stevens music accompanying quirky old lady turning round the life of a morbid wealthy teenager.
Sep 10	Julie and Julia	Nora Ephron: Amy Adams, Meryl Streep	3	True story of modern day amateur foodie blogging as she follows Julia Child's recipes. Film cuts to and fro with Child's own learning (in Paris) and book writing.
Sep 10	The Secret In Their Eyes (El Secreto De Sus Ojos)	Juan Jose Campanella: Ricardo Darin, Soledad Villamil	2	Just-retired Buenos Aires cop revisits an old rape+murder case he worked on. Whilst working through the thriller as to what happened to the characters, he revives unrequited love for his then boss (the glamorous Soledad). Brilliant acting (and eyes!) and very effective makeup made all the actors believable as their 25-year-apart versions.
Sep 10	The Girl Who Played With Fire	Daniel Alfredson: Noomi Rapace, Michael Nyqvist	2	Superb Swedish film of the second book. Actors all as one would expect from the book and wonderfully natural and low key (ie: non-Hollywood). Sadly the subtitling was occasionally unreadable against the background.
Sep 10	The Good German		4	2 nd time of seeing (first ages ago, this since both have recently read the book). Film carries smatterings of the book, but is heavily altered (eg: the GG of the title isn't in the film at all, and a big part of the book – Jewess who betrayed other Jews during the war – is compressed into the last 30 secs). Both are hard to follow, but the film much more so (tho' a little easier having recently read the book).
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Films

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Oct 10	London River	Rachid Bouchareb: Brenda Blethyn, Sotigui Kouyaté	2	Parents of two children missing after the 7/7/2005 London bombings come to London (she from Guernsey, filmed in Dinard!) he, an African, from France. Trying to find out what has happened to their kids. Great slow breaking down of barriers between them (mainly hers) as they find out the awful truths: kids were killed, they were living together.
Oct 10	Unmade Beds (London Night)	Alexis Dos Santos: Fernando Tielve	3-	Young Spanish kid living around in squats meets similarly rootless girl. Charming actors and OK music but dullish.
Oct 10	Mr Nice	Bernard Rose: Rhys Ifans	3+	Docu-drama on Howard Marks. Welsh "elite" drug smuggler in 70's/80's. Excellent and hugely interesting film. Would be a 1 if it had glorified drug taking less.
Oct 10	Soulboy	Shimmy Marcus: Martin Compston	3	Lively love/feelgood film set in the (real) Wigan Casino, a mecca for soul music and dance in the 70's.
Oct 10	Made in Dagenham (We want Sex)	Nigel Cole: Sally Hawkins, Geraldine James, Rupert Graves, Rosamund Pike, Miranda Richardson, Bob Hoskins,	3	Great real story of the female fitters strike at Ford in (?) 1968 that presaged the Equal Pay (for women) act from Barbara Castle. Very Calendar Girls.
Oct 10	Skeletons	Nick Whitfield:	3+	Wonderful zany story of pair of exorcists finding out they shouldn't live in the past. Never understand (or care much) quite what the exorcism is about, but splendid loopy film. Memories of ancient Donald Pleasence film "The Rainbow Boys"
Oct 10	Sex&Drugs&Rock&Roll	Mat Whitecross: Andy Serkis	3	Excellent docu-biography of Ian Dury. Splendid mix of formats and constant high tempo.
Oct 10	Nowhere Boy	Sam Taylor Wood: Aaron Johnson, Kristin Scott Thomas, Anne-Marie Duff, David Morrissey	2	Superb bio of Lennon's early days.
Oct 10	The Killing of John Lennon	Andrew Piddington:	4	Well made documentary on the 3 months prior to Mark Chapman's murder. But do we need to know more about such a depressingly warped person?
Oct 10	Four Lions	Chris Morris:	3-	Amusing satire on 4 inept Muslim suicide terrorists.
Oct 10	Exam	Stuart Hazeldine:	2	Brilliant tale of 8 candidates for a top job sitting an exam in a sealed room, with massively cryptic "paper" and rules. One by one they are eliminated. Fantastically tight suspense. Could have been edited down just a tad.
Oct 10	The US vs John Lennon	David Leaf, John Scheinfeld:	2	Excellent documentary on Lennon's time in the US. Round and following Vietnam war and Nixon era; amazing how paranoid the Govt was, and how articulate, informed and powerful JL was.
Oct 10	Premiere Passion	Philippe Baron:	4	Documentary on the filming of the first long (silent) US movie in ~1908 on the life of Christ.
Oct 10	Exit Through the Gift Shop (Faites le Mur)	Banksy:	1	Wonderful twisting documentary on street art and Banksy in particular. Told via a supposed documentary film maker, but, like so much in the film, one never knows what is and isn't real!
Oct 10	Young Adam	David Mackenzie: Ewan McGregor, Tilda Swinton, Emily Mortimer, Peter Mullan	4	Characterless and non-believable sex fiend (McGregor) screwing various women and failing to report (accidental) death of one.
Oct 10	A Passionate Woman	Kay Mellor: Billie Piper, Sue Johnston, Alun Armstrong, Joe Armstrong	4	Dramatised version of true story where young married woman falls for philandering Pole. Latter is murdered by his pissed off wife. In older age the woman finally tells her son and husband about the life she feels she's regretted ever since.
Oct 10	Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps	Oliver Stone: Shia LaBeouf, Carey Mulligan, Michael Douglas	3	Massively sickily filmed and fast moving (and long – 132 mins) follow on from the original. Gecko older and post prison for insider trading runs almost unintelligibly complex manipulations to get revenge on someone who helped put him away – and apparently causing the 2008 financial meltdown in the process!
Oct 10	Seraphine	Martin Provost: Yolande Moreau, Ulrich Tukur	4	Beautifully filmed but rather slow biopic of strange, very humble and totally self-taught woman who eked her tiny wages from a variety of menial jobs to paint "naïve" style (making her own paints from oil, plants, blood, etc); by chance one of her employers was an art critic who appreciated her work and encouraged her. But she ended up in a mad house, where she eventually died in 1942.
Oct 10	The boys are back	Scott Hicks: Clive Owen	4	True story of Brit journalist in Sydney recovering from the early cancer death of his second lady-friend. How he manages with the 6-year old offspring with her and teenage son from his first marriage.
Nov 10	Another Year	Mike Leigh: Ruth Sheen, Jim Broadbent, Lesley Manville, Imelda Staunton	4	Very slow. Excellently acted film about rather dull people. Wonderful central role of ageing and sad woman [LM]. Showing made even more dire by ML doing Q&A afterwards and showing what a pompous self-opinionated person he is.
Nov 10	The First Day of the Rest of Your Life		5	French, family relationships, film so dull we stopped watching after about 15 minutes.
Nov 10	Munich	Steven Spielberg: Eric Bana, Daniel Craig, Ciarán Hinds	3	Woven round the known-ish facts of Mossad reprisals after the Munich killings of Israeli Olympic team by Black September. Very long film (2:40 but seemed more) and rather rambling. Not as one-sided as one would have expected. Plenty of angst amongst the Mossad killers that Jews were being so brutally eye-for-an-eye and how the process was aggravating and increasing Palestinian terror groups' powers.
Nov 10	The Maid		5	Dreadful.
Dec 10	Mugabe and the White African		2	Documentary about white farmer and family hounded by Mugabe. Despite winning a long delayed court case (in the teeth of massive brutality) ultimately they lost to the vile man and his regime.
Jan 11	The Kings Speech	Tom Hooper: Colin Firth, Geoffrey Rush, Helena Bonham Carter, Timothy Spall	2	Brilliant film based on George VI's struggle with a stammer and the Aussie speech therapist who helped him and became his friend.
Jan 11	Memento	Christopher Nolan: Guy Pearce	4	Weird chronologically backward and cut about story about (I think) a man trying to find his wife's murderer. Intriguing unreality (reminiscent of Blue Velvet and Twin Peaks) but really too far gone to recommend or see again!
Jan 11	The Certified Copy	Abbas Kiarostami: Juliette Binoche, William Shimell	5	Very pretty scenery (Tuscany) and actors (Binoche and Shimell), but nothing happens. Didn't watch thru.
Feb 11	Air Force One	Harrison Ford	4	Nonsense – US president single-handedly beating team of terrorists that hijack his plane.
Feb 11	Secondhand Lions	Tim McCanlies: Robert Duvall, Michael Caine, Haley Joel Osment	3-	Saccharine. Young boy goes to live with two old and eccentric uncles, who have an exciting past that he teases out of them.
Mar 11	The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Niels Arden Oplev: Noomi Rapace, Michael Nyqvist	3+	Great starter for the trilogy. Interestingly the story is very slow to get going (necessarily leaving out many of the sub-plots and adornments of the book); might almost have given up on it if we hadn't known what a cracking tale it is. Probably wouldn't because of the wonderful filming and superb acting.
Apr 11	Africa United		5	Didn't grab us; didn't finish. Tale of some young African lads going to the World Cup in S. Africa
Apr 11	The Illusionist		5	Cartoon of failed French magician going to Scotland and meeting a girl ... gave up on it.
May 11	The Stoning of S M		5	Grisly Iranian (?) true story – I gave up, J watched through
Aug 11	Out of the Ashes		4	Very poor, based on true story of Hungarian Jew female doctor who survived Auschwitz. Given a halfway-decent director could have been a great film.
Aug 11	The Hurt Locker	Kathryn Bigelow: Jeremy Renner, Anthony Mackie, Brian Geraghty, Guy Pearce, Ralph Fiennes, David Morse, Evangeline Lilly, Christian Camargo	3	Grim portrayal of the life of US bomb disposal squad soldiers in Iraq facing daily terror and uncertainty as they do their job.
Aug 11	Black Swan		4-	Very dull vaguely psycho/sci-fi film about an up tight ballerina.
Aug 11	One Day		3	
Sep 11	The Social Network		4	Too much on Zuckerberg/twins case (OK that's the film's object) and no feeling as to how Z inspired and grew Facebook.
Sep 11	Meek's Cutoff		4	Pretty flat but, presumably, realistic view on family trekking out to Oregon in 1845. Little dialogue, some view of the grinniness of it, but lacking any reason for their going or geography of where they were
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Films

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Oct 11	Reunion	Harold Pinter, Jerry Schatzberg: Jason Robards, Samuel West, Françoise Fabian	2	Relationship between two young boys in 1932 Germany. One Jew who was sent to USA by his parents in '33 the other a "true" German who eventually saw the truth.
Oct 11	In Love with Alma Cogan	Tony Britten: Roger Lloyd-Pack, Niamh Cusack, Gwyneth Strong, John Hurt	3	Light, Cromer-based
Oct 11	Tyrannosaur	Paddy Considine: Peter Mullan, Olivia Colman, Eddie Marsan	2	Very powerful, if a bit grim. Damaged man raging against the world and helped by a woman who initially seemed just a charity shop Christian but turned out to also have a damaged life.
Oct 11	Accident	Harold Pinter, Joseph Losey: Dirk Bogarde, Stanley Baker, Jacqueline Sassard	3	Stilted, tense flashback following car accident. Spoilt by Michael York's (particularly) very static "performance".
Oct 11	Archipelago	Joanna Hogg: Christopher Baker, Kate Fahy, Tom Hiddleston	5	Dreadful, nothing-happening family get together. I walked out.
Oct 11	Perfect Sense	David Mackenzie: Eva Green, Ewan McGregor	4	Dreadful stupid story of worldwide illness which removes peoples senses.
Oct 11	The Guard (L'Irlandais)	John Michael McDonagh: Brendan Gleeson, Don Cheadle, Mark Strong	1	Fabulously funny/wry tale of lone good(ish) policeman in Ireland against a wonderful gang of drug smugglers who have the rest of the Garda bribed.
Oct 11	The Hit	Harold Pinter, Stephen Frears: John Hurt, Tim Roth, Laura del Sol, Terence Stamp	2	Oldish suspense story of two villains kidnapping a third in Spain and due to take him to Paris to be killed by others he has double crossed. Excellent Stamp, Hurt and Roth.
Oct 11	Oranges and Sunshine	Jim Loach: Emily Watson	2	Film of true story of determined Nottinghamshire social worker exposing mass export of small kids to miserable life in Oz.
Oct 11	NFTS / Fémis – 6 shorts			
	DAMNED	Richard Phelan		
	STRAYS	Robert McKillop		
	WHITE ELEPHANT	Daniel Kanabe		
	MKHOBBI FI KOBBA	Leyla Bouzid		
	SONG	Eponine Momencaeu		
	YOLAN NO HARU	Laurent Blahay		
Oct 11	Behold the Lamb	John McIluff: Aoife Duffin, Nigel O'Neill	4	Not very interesting story of seedy drug trafficking in Ireland.
Oct 11	Boxes	Jane Birkin: Géraldine Chaplin, Michel Piccoli, Jane Birkin, John Hurt	5	Deadly dull Birkin-fest. Was also filmed in her house! I would have walked out if not in middle of row.
Oct 11	44 Inch Chest	Malcolm Venville: Ray Winstone, John Hurt, Ian McShane, Tom Wilkinson	2	Splendid tense story of cuckolded London villain being egged on by his gang to kill the offender. Superb acting, particularly by Winstone. Sadly the script was massively overfull of foul language.
Oct 11	"So Scottish" - 6 shorts			
	Ma Bar	Adrian McDowall & Finlay Pretsell		
	The Perfect Fit	Tali Yankelevich		
	PS Your Mystery Sender	Benjamin Wigley		
	The Right to Privacy	Alice Nelson		
	Twinset	Amy Rose		
	The Worm Inside	Sam Firth		
Oct 11	Lou	Belinda Chayko: John Hurt, Emily Barclay	3	Weak feel-good of Alzheimer's man plonked down with poor relations and his developing relationship with his (fantastically well acted and beautiful) grand daughter.
Oct 11	Town	Ben Affleck: Ben Affleck, Rebecca Hall, Jon Hamm, Jeremy Renner	2	Thriller with team of Boston low-life-area bank robbers one of whom gets into an affair with pretty bank manager from one of their jobs. Some silly chase/shoot-outs but a good tense film with excellent lack of Hollywood triteness and cliches.
Nov 11	Midnight in Paris	Woody Allen: Owen Wilson, Rachel McAdams	3+	Slightly slow start but delightful whimsy of 2010 American (Allen-like) going back to 1920's (and 1890's) Paris and mixing with famous artists and writers.
Nov 11	Shutter Island	Martin Scorsese: Leonardo DiCaprio, Ben Kingsley, Michelle Williams	3+	Nothing-is-ever-what-it-seems thriller of post-WW2 US marshal investigating (we believe) the escape of a female inmate from high security island used to harbour disturbed criminals. Flashbacks to his participation at the liberation of Dachau and confusions between his back-story and the alleged escapee's. Eventual uncovering as the subject of a 2-year psychiatric experiment.
Nov 11	Hereafter		5	Dreadful. Gave up after 1/2 hour.
Dec 11	Fair Game	Doug Liman: Naomi Watts, Sean Penn	3	Slightly confusing portrayal of true story of CIA agent Valerie Plame who was exposed by the White House after her husband started publicly discrediting the WMD stories that led to the Iraq war.
Dec 11	Sarah's Key	Gilles Paquet-Brenner: Kristin Scott Thomas	2	Now and then story of young Jewish girl locking her younger brother in a cupboard to prevent him being taken to concentration camp by French collaborating police. She escapes and gets back to Paris too late to save him and has a haunted life thereafter. Story interwoven with modern day journalist (KST) buying the same flat and uncovering the ghastly story.
Feb 12	Sexy Beast	Jonathan Glazer: Ray Winstone, Ben Kingsley, Ian McShane, Amanda Redman	4	London gangster pulled out retirement in Spain to do another job. Lots of swearing and viciousness, not much to recommend it (despite Viki&Mark raving about it)
Feb 12	Submarine	Richard Aycoade: Noah Taylor, Yasmin Paige	4	Schoolboy love and angst in small Welsh town. Very self-indulgent and slow-moving. Surprised I sat through it, though it did have a nice gooey ending.
Feb 12	The Siege	Edward Zwick: Denzel Washington, Annette Bening, Bruce Willis	4	Poor thriller about Muslim terrorism and undercover CIA in NY.
	Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy	Tomas Alfredson: Tom Hardy, Colin Firth, Gary Oldman, Mark Strong	3	
	Inside Job		3	Very watchable documentary on the 2008 financial collapse. Well presented, if a little one-sidedly against the banks.
	Unknown	Jaume Collet-Serra, Simon Brand: Liam Neeson	3	Yet another Neeson whizz-bang of one man against a bunch of evil. He awakes from coma to find someone has taken his identity and even his "wife" doesn't seem to know him. Despite a nice twist at the end, was reminiscent of Taken.
Apr 12	Salmon Fishing in the Yemen	Lasse Hallstrom: Kristin Scott Thomas, Ewan McGregor, Emily Blunt	3+	Delightful rom-com of Asperger-y fish academic (McGregor) trying to set up salmon sporting in Yemen. Scott Thomas as wonderful feisty ballsy PM press agent. Beautiful Blunt is the spit of Beatrice!
Apr 12	A Separation	Asghar Farhadi: Sareh Bayat, Sarina Farhadi, Leila Hatami, Kimia Hosseini	2	Powerful, but so fast moving and staccato that I'm not sure I followed it too well. Affluent couple in Tehran splitting up, daughter stays with him. He hires female help to look after his Alzheimer's father whose flat they share; help has a miscarriage shortly after he hits her because of apparent mistreatment of father; he is then possibly up for a murder charge. Characters are rapid-fire, massively un-emotional to each other – tho' happy to scream and shout at others. Allegedly also an allegory for the Iranian state. Interesting to see the (I assume correct) huge adherence to authority, religion (oaths on the Koran taken absolutely seriously) and chaos of semi-informal courts run by judges in a small offices.
May 12	Blue Valentine	Derek Cianfrance: Ryan Gosling, Michelle Williams	3	Jagged relationship between working class man and more educated woman in the US. They end up separating after a slightly difficult to follow flashback/forward over their getting together and then fragmenting – despite their young daughter. Well acted and very non-Hollywood!
Jun 12	Some like it Hot	Billy Wilder: Marilyn Monroe, Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis	4	Dated, feeble, B&W farce with Lemon and Curtis as two musicians in drag to escape villains in Chicago in 1929. Gave up after 30 mins.

Films

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Aug 12	Le Quattro Volte	Michelangelo Frammartino	3+	Dialogue-less visually sumptuous. Set in medieval Italian hill village. Very very sluggish first 30 minutes of dying goatherd's daily life. Then lots on the hugely photogenic (and excellent actors) the goats themselves. Ending with lost goat, season changes and the celebrating of a huge tree felling running into richly pictured process of making charcoal.
Sep 12	The Iron Lady		3	Thatcher
Sep 12	The Artist		3-	Dull silent movie tale. Well acted, but can't see where all the hype came from.
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Oct 12	My Week With Marilyn	Simon Curtis: Dame Judi Dench, Derek Jacobi, Eddie Redmayne, Kenneth Branagh, Michelle Williams, Zoe Wanamaker	3	True story of Colin Clark (son of unpleasant art historian Kenneth Clark) in his first job working on set with MM on film (Prince and the Showgirl). Befriended by very fragile, insecure, MM and goes off with her for platonic time out.
Oct 12	The Trip	Steve Coogan, Rob Brydon	3	Coogan and Brydon use tour of fancy restaurants in "the North" as prop to hang series of dry comic gags around. Went on a bit, but on the whole funny and lovely shots of northern England.
Oct 12	Shadow Dancer	James Marsh: Clive Owen, Aidan Gillen, Gillian Anderson	3	N. Ireland story of young terrorist woman turned by the UK govt to spy on her IRA family. Great tension and good twist at the end as one learns that the Machiavellian UK minders are using her as diversion to feed to the IRA to shield a more important source - her mother.
Oct 12	A kind of loving		4	Very dated story of young lad with (very vague) plans to escape his northern town getting a girl pregnant and having to marry her and live with her domineering mother.
Oct 12	Wasteland		3+	Excellent Hustle-like retelling of gang fight by a super-smart youth getting his own back on the local godfather/hug who'd framed him and got him jailed for drug possession.
Oct 12	Good Vibrations	Lisa Barros D'Sa, Glenn Leyburn: Richard Dormer, Jodie Whittaker	3+	Wonderful upbeat (true) tale of Terri Hooley an endlessly optimistic and disorganised music fan who started a record shop in Belfast in the face of the troubles and went on to be the main main in its (apparently big) punk scene. Excellent music - particularly Rudi and the Outcasts (Big Time) and the Undertones (Teenage Kicks)
Oct 12	The Dresser	Peter Yates: Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay, Eileen Atkins, Michael Gough, Edward Fox [1983]	2	Superb story of prima-donna actor manager taking his Shakespearean company on tour during WW2. He is kept going by his devoted dresser. Absolutely riveting acting from Finney as the act-or and Courtenay as the dresser.
Oct 12	Hunky Dory	Marc Evans: Minnie Driver	3+	Lovely true story of inspirational young teacher in s. Wales getting her class to put on a musical version of The Tempest. Excellent music - all done for real by the cast and great warm storylines.
Oct 12	The Loneliness of the long distance runner	Tony Richardson: Tom Courtenay, James Bolam, Michael Redgrave	3	Rather dated b&w of boy getting sent to Borstal and the spiting the upper-crust/military director by deliberately not winning a long-distance run competition.
Oct 12	The Scapegoat	Charles Sturridge: Andrew Scott, Matthew Rhys, Eileen Atkins, Jodhi May, Phoebe Nicholls	3	Splendid Daphne du Maurier story of two identical men who bump into each other. First has little life and was about to go look for one, Second is unpleasant upper crust part-owner of glass foundry who wants to skip his responsibilities. He gets first drunk and then leaves him to take on his (second's) place. This he does very successfully rebuilding a broken family. Twist one is when the bad one returns after a few days to see his joke has gotten out of hand (in his view). But after set-to's, first wins the day.
Oct 12	Life in a day	Kevin Macdonald	3	Compendium of pieces shot on one day in 2010 by hundreds of people (4500 hours of video submitted). Well edited giving flavours of life, death and so on around the world.
Oct 12	Now is Good	Oi Parker	3	Sentimental story of teenage girl who has weeks to live before dying of leukaemia She decides to list things to do and get them done. But also meets good looking caring, etc, boy next door who helps her through. Nicely filmed but trite.
Oct 12	Me and me Dad		4-	Dreadful documentary on John Boorman by one of his daughters.
Oct 12	Everyday	Michael Winterbottom: Shirley Henderson, John Simm, Johnny Lynch, Laurence Richardson	4	Filmed over five years showing difficulty of young family (kids start at ~3-8 years old) coping with Dad in jail. Excellently compressing the 5-year miseries and tribulations into 90 mins, but otherwise pretty dull. Superb acting from the 4 kids.
Oct 12	iLL Manors		4	Dreadful violent and swearing street gang / drugs tale, showing the futility of it all. Far too subtle to be useful to show to types who should learn from it.
Oct 12	How I Ended This Summer	Aleksei Popogrebsky: Grigory Dobrygin, Sergei Puskepalis, Igor Chernevich	4	Very very slow and long (2 hour). Two people (not sure who the 3 rd actor is) on an isolated Russian meteorological station getting on each others nerves. Great scenic but too dull in the end - morose Russian nothingness.
Nov 12	Skyfall		4	Long and un-absorbing Bondery
Dec 12	Conspiracy of Silence	John Deery: Jonathan Forbes, Hugh Bonneville, Brenda Fricker, Sean McGinley	3	Angst in Catholic church in rural Ireland (and beyond) over gay priests. Watchable but surprisingly un-hard-hitting or memorable.
Dec 12	Drive	Nicolas Winding Refn: Ryan Gosling, Carey Mulligan	3	Low-dialog menacing and gory thriller of stunt/getaway driver getting too involved in Mafia retributions on neighbour. Rather too slow moving.
Jan 13	Quartet	Dustin Hoffman: Tom Courtenay, Maggie Smith, Pauline Collins, Billy Connolly	2	Oldies soppy - four old Opera singers getting back together again in an old folks home for retired musicians.
Jan 13	Reacher			
Jan 13	Coriolanus	Ralph Fiennes	3	Well filmed modern day version of Shakespeare play. But totally unbelievable about turns as C switches from Roman defender to attacker and back again.
Feb 13	Margin Call	J.C. Chandor: Zachary Quinto, Paul Bettany, Kevin Spacey, Jeremy Irons, Demi Moore	2	Financial meltdown at the beginning of the 2008 crisis. Smart lad makes his firm realise that it has far too much overvalued property on its books waiting to be bundled and sold on. Decides it has to dump it at what the market will pay, which is still above its value - hence ruining their chance of ever trading again). Though this particular scenario was fictional it smacked well of the time and the mores of the players. Excellently avoiding jargon while giving a real feel of the scale and awfulness of the financial complexity. Irons particularly memorable as the coldly vicious boss.
Feb 13	In a Better World	Susanne Bier: Mikael Persbrandt, Trine Dyrholm, Ulrich Thomsen, Wil Johnson, Satu Helena Mikkilinen	3+	Atmospheric Danish film about "revenge". Didn't really follow it too well but highly watchable tale of two young teenage boys having problems seemingly attributable to their troubled families. One has doctor father doing long stints in trouble African situations and separated from his Mum, and also being bullied at school. The other has just lost Mum to cancer and blames Dad for not being caring enough.
Mar 13	Incendies	Denis Villeneuve: Lubna Azabal, Melissa Desormeaux-Poulin	3+	Powerful, if slightly slow and arty, French Canadian tale of ~30 year old twins uncovering their mother's (literally) tortured past. She was from a middle Eastern state riven with Christian/Muslim ethnic war. Boyfriend/husband killed and their child (born after) taken away at birth. She subsequently turned terrorist (anti-Christian we think; it got complicated!) after she (a Christian) was in a bus of Muslims all killed by a Christian faction. Final twist as twins and the first child meet in Canada and are more related than they should be.
Mar 13	Rome, Open City	Roberto Rossellini	3	B&W film made just post war about Italian resistance to the Fascist/Nazi rulers. Bit hammy and corny, but conveyed the horrors better than many modern films
Mar 13	Farewell (L'Affaire Farewell)	Christian Carion: Guillaume Canet, Emir Kusturica	2	Based on true 1981 events. KGB Colonel (given codename "Farewell") passes secrets to the USA to force change in the communist regime, which he no longer believes in. Does so via a French engineer working in Moscow. I'm not sure if this was true, but it ends when he supplies a list of all major KGB agents in the West. These are duly rounded up by the USA, and Regan then announces Star Wars. The film portrays this as a deliberate poker-like bluff - the US knowing they couldn't build SW, but also knowing that Moscow now can't figure that out because of lack of agents. Gorbachev duly triggers Perestroika. Great filming as well as story - if a bit hard to follow at times!

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir.:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Mar 13	In The House (Dans La Maison)	Francois Ozon: Kristin Scott Thomas, Ernst Umhauer, Fabrice Luchini, Emmanuelle Seigner	3+	The creative writing (? or is it all real?) of a slightly creepy and voyeuristic schoolboy is encouraged by his teacher. The written pieces (each concluding with "to be continue") tell how the boy worms his way into the life and affections (almost sexual with the Mother) of the family of one of his peers. Then spills over into the teachers life. Though KS-T (teacher's wife) is, as ever, powerful, the boy and teacher are riveting.
Apr 13	Amour	Michael Haneke: Jean-Louis Trintignant, Emmanuelle Riva, Isabelle Huppert	3+	Old couple dealing with stroke and deterioration of the once musician wife. A tad too long at 2+ hours, but riveting acting.
May 13	I am Love	Luca Guadagnino: Tilda Swinton	4	Stilted, slow and stylish Italian film of wealthy family. Initially cold/enigmatic Russian wife/mother (TS) turns lascivious with her son's friend.
May 13	Lebanon	Samuel Maoz	3	Powerful Israeli film of young soldiers (mainly) in tank in a skirmish/clean-up during the Lebanese war in 1982. Conveys the horrors, with much of the footage being through the tank's viewfinder and close-ups inside the foetid tank.
Jun 13	Leaving	Catherine Corsini: Kristin Scott Thomas	3	Thin and implausible story made watch-able by KST and scenery and locations in French/Spanish Pyrenees. Reminiscent of "I am Love" as middle aged woman falls suddenly and passionately in love and leaves her affluent husband for a workman. Husband wields influence to cut both off from work and funds so she has to return to him, and ends in shooting him!
Jun 13	Pina	Wim Wenders:	3+	Superb and beautiful documentary about the choreographer Pina Bausch's modern and dramatic dances. Started while she was alive (she died in 2009 days before filming was due to begin) it is a glorious tribute to her from her many dancers – plenty of them in their older, but still supple, age. Based round excerpts from re-creations (I think) of her most powerful pieces.
Jul 13	The Commitments	Alan Parker	4	Weak Dublin music movie. Watched it because Glen Hansard (of Once fame) first appeared in this (10+ years before Once).
Aug 13	Food, Inc.	Robert Kenner:	2	Superbly powerful and slick documentary dated 2010. It "exposes" (in rather over-the-top dramatic way) that the US food industry is controlled by a handful of super powerful companies, who have the emasculated FDA regulatory system in their pocket. Some gems / claims: - particularly topical (ref: current discussions on the EU's Plant Reproductive Material Law and the 1950's Plant Breeders Rights – PBR) is Monsanto's patent (years ago) of a disease/pest resistant gene that allows soya beans to be grown much more cheaply. They distribute seed with the gene with the (understandable) restriction that farmers cannot "save" seed from crops for re-planting next year, and must buy each year from Monsanto. But, they can apply this to any seed with any trace of the gene – even those that got it due to natural cross-pollination – and use powerful snooping and legal teams to shut down "culprits", thus they now control close to 100% of the soya seed in the US. - much mass-processed food is being sold way below cost because of government subsidies - it is cheaper to buy a Big Mac than one head of broccoli - there are only 11 abattoirs in the whole US, with associated risk of infection proliferating quickly (as per the death of a 2-year old which prompted Kevin's law) - 30% of US land mass is devoted to corn (maize) production - almost all food (and other) products rely on corn - cattle are now fed corn, not grass that they are designed to eat, which vastly reduces cost but increases risk of E-Coli etc.
Sep 13	Everything Or Nothing: The Untold Story Of 007	Stevan Riley: Albert R. (Cubby) Broccoli, Dana Broccoli, Harry Saltzman, Ian Fleming	3	Competent documentary on the James Bond franchise. Hadn't been aware that there was a competing consortium (Kevin McClory) and nasty legal disputes between him and Fleming. Also what a chancer Lazenby was!
Sep 13	I, Anna	Barnaby Southcombe (Rampling's son): Charlotte Rampling, Gabriel Byrne, Eddie Marsan	4	Slow, stylish, not-credible and pretty silly manslaughter mystery with ridiculous coincidences bringing the detective and perpetrator together. Powerful presence (acting?) by Rampling and Byrne.
	<i>Dinard 2013 Film festival</i>			
Sep 13	Anna Karenina	Joe Wright: Keira Knightley, Matthew MacFadyen, Jude Law	2	Sumptuous and wonderfully surreal cinema presented as a play, with scenes swirling in and out and round a theatre. Pretty unbelievable madly-in-love-destroys-all storyline was a side-show to the presentation, which was so good despite KK (and her pretty-boy infatuee) being such weak and implausible actors. But JL (discarded husband) and MM (rogue of a brother) both excellent.
Oct 13	Song for Marion	Christopher Eccleston, Vanessa Redgrave, Terence Stamp, Gemma Arterton	4	Dull tale of oldies couple – miserable husband and cheery, dying wife. Feel-goodery added by singing group she is with, and which he eventually joins after her death.
Oct 13	Spike Island	Mat Whitecross: Elliott Tittensor	2	Fiction of group of teenage Stone Roses devotees (who are also a believable SR-inspired group) trying/managing to get to SR's legendary 1990 concert.
Oct 13	The Sea	Stephen Brown: Ciarán Hinds, Sinéad Cusack, Rufus Sewell, Charlotte Rampling	3	Slow, scenic tale of Irish widower (CH) returning to a seaside house (now a boarding house) which he knew as a child. A wealthy and intriguing family stayed there while he, from a poorer class, holidayed in the nearby village. He was befriended by them and then discarded, after slightly Go-Between frisson's with both the daughter (his age) and her mother. Lots of to-ing and fro-ing between that time, the dying of his wife preceding the visit, and the predictable ending.
Oct 13	How I live now	Kevin Macdonald: Saoirse Ronan, George MacKay, Tom Holland, Harley Bird	2+	A young American girl reluctantly comes to stay with distant cousins in remote, effectively adult-free, idyllic/hippy farmhouse in England. Wonderful dry humour as she slowly assimilates. Then WW3 breaks out and she and the cousins hide out and (some) survive the resulting horrors.
Oct 13	The Girl	Julian Jarrold: Toby Jones, Imelda Staunton, Sienna Miller, Penelope Wilton	2+	Docu-drama about Hitchcock's last two "major" films – The Birds and Marnie – both with Tippi Hedren who he plucked from "nowhere", nurtured and fell in love with. Overpowered by him she broke her contract to escape him. Excellent acting all round. Jones particularly believable in both voice and physique/make-up.
Oct 13	For those in Peril	Paul Wright: George MacKay, Kate Dickie, Michael Smiley	4	Tediously drawn out story about young sole survivor (MacKay – who was so good in "How I live now") of NE Scotland fishing boat disaster which killed many other men from his village. He is then haunted and hounded by the village and finally does the expected.
Oct 13	Shell	Scott Graham: Chloe Pirrie	4	Dull and drawn out, if well acted (particularly the lead girl). Father and hormonal teenage girl living in an isolated petrol station / crash repair garage. Intriguingly realistic scene of an apparently live and suffering deer that had been hit by a car.
Oct 13	The Stone Roses – Made of Stone	Shane Meadows: Ian Brown, John Squire, Gary Mounfield, Alan Wren	2+	Fine documentary on the SR's tricky coming back together after 16 years, with climax of concerts in Wigan(?) and Heaton Park. Meadows was and is a huge SR fan as he tells in both the film and in his in-person intro.
Oct 13	Titus	Charlie Cattrall: Ron Cephas Jones	4	Far too drawn out and self-indulgent story of "jazz legend" being reunited with his hitherto unknown-about 18-year old daughter. Our reactions also mired by the ghastly pompous and naked-bathing behaviour at Dinard of the director and producer.
Oct 13	NFTS / Fémis – 6 shorts			
	Beach Boy	Emil Langballe	2	UK / Kenya youths paid for pleasure by wealthy old western ladies
	Borrasca	Manuel Bolaños	4	
	Les Chaussettes Mouilles	Lucas Delangle	2	FR: brilliant "8 year old" actor.
	The Magnificent Lion Boy	Ana Caro	3	UK: 2D animation
	Trucs de Gosse	Emilie Noblet	2	FR: Lovely amusing amours between two cinema attendants
	ZI	Gabriel Gauchet	4	UK: nasty supernatural stuff
Oct 13	Hello Carter	Anthony Wilcox: Charlie Cox, Jodie Whittaker	2	Easy and amusing watching spun around a young London man trying to get back in touch with ex-girlfriend. In so doing gets involved in an accidental baby snatching.

Films

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Oct 13	Jadoo	Amit Gupta: Amara Karan, Harish Patel, Kulvinder Ghir, Tom Mison	3	Light comedy of pair of estranged Indian brothers running separate and competing restaurants in Leicester. With the inevitable coming together brought on a daughter amidst tears, recriminations and eventual reconciliation.
Oct 13	Summer in February	Christopher Menaul: Dominic Cooper, Emily Browning, Dan Stevens	4	Dull, pretentious self-centred true story of artists in Newlyn, Cornwall, in early 1900's.
Oct 13	The Angels' Share	Ken Loach: Roger Allam, Daniel Portman, John Henshaw, William Ruane	3	Disjointed comedy about young wild Glasgow thug trying to go straight. He's enthused by a community service officer to appreciate Scotch – for which he turns out to have a professional nose. There's then a confused bit of derring do as he and his mates steal four bottles' worth of priceless liquor from a recently discovered barrel of aficionado's nectar on the eve of its auction for £1m+. He uses his £25k share to start a life new - with hope and a job intro from the dealer who was privy to the scam. Would have been excellent if many situations and scenes didn't appear without any logic or introduction.
Nov 13	Searching for Sugar Man	Malik Bendjelloul: Rodriguez	2	Remarkable documentary about an unknown early 70's pop star. Fantastic music on only two published LP's went nowhere except, by luck initially, in S. Africa where he was a) thought to have committed suicide (on stage!) in the 70's and b) better known and liked than the Stones (3rd only to the Beatles and Elvis).
Nov 13	Hideous Kinky	Gillies Mackinnon: Kate Winslet, Said Taghmaoui, Bella Riza, Carrie Mullan	3	A thin slow tale of young English woman and her two young (~4/5) daughters who have debunked to Marrakesh for a while to the laid back hippie world in the 70's But, stunning and charming acting by the two young girls particularly, along with glorious Moroccan scenery makes it worth the watch.
Dec 13	Storm	Hans-Christian Schmid: Kerry Fox	3+	Grim fiction (heavily based on realities one suspects) of the Hague War crimes trial of a Bosnian general. Very low key and compromised ending, with the general avoiding punishment for his worst atrocity in a legal bargain – but probably much closer to real life than Hollywood would have allowed.
Dec 13	Zero Dark Thirty	Kathryn Bigelow:	3	Long telling of a fictionalised I believe, and women-dominated, account of the lead up to and killing of Osama Bin Laden. Very muffled audio didn't help either.
Dec 13	Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence	Nagisa Oshima: David Bowie, Tom Conti, Ryuichi Sakamoto	3	Powerful and broad minded van der Post-ery. Seemed a tiny bit slower and the music (by the actor who plays the mad camp commander) less powerful than my memories of it in the cinema in the 80's
Dec 13	All is Lost	J.C. Chandor: Robert Redford	5	Dreadful solo-actor no-dialog tale of incompetent and lackadaisical sailor failing to deal with calamities on his yacht alone in the Pacific.
Jan 14	Rabbit Hole	John Cameron Mitchell: Nicole Kidman, Aaron Eckhart, Dianne Wiest, Miles Teller	2	Anguished couple reach the point where they can start living with their grief after their 4-year old son was killed when he ran in front of a car some months ago. Her process includes befriending the teen-aged driver who is working on an comic book involving parallel universes with a Rabbit Hole to cross them.
Jan 14	12 Years A Slave	Steve McQueen: Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michael Fassbender, Brad Pitt, Benedict Cumberbatch	3-	Based on true story of Solomon Northup a black musician living in Saratoga who was kidnapped and sold into slavery around 1833. Grim and presumably factual story, ruined by over-long and dramatisation full of very hard to believe details, such as: - SN's comfortable middle class home in NY - slave sale in plush house of slave dealer with some slaves naked some clothed - the worst of SN's "owners" (and he was probably lucky in all of them in truth) having all the slaves in his house to dance with him - same owner screwing one of the female slaves in the slaves quarters
Jan 14	The Insider	Michael Mann: Al Pacino, Russell Crowe, Michael Gambon	2	Powerful dramatisation of a whistle-blowing against 1990's tobacco industry in the USA. AP as CBS' 60-Minutes producer who coxes, encourages and stands by RC, the senior ex B&W tobacco technologist. Both suffer personal and job losses in the process. Rather fractured filming, but this probably to enhance the awkward and messy process as big business tries to silence both the whistle-blower and the CBS news organisation.
Jan 14	No	Pablo Larrain: Gael Garcia Bernal	2	Retelling of the No to Pinochet TV campaign in Chile in 1988. It was widely assumed that the referendum (which Pinochet had been forced into in some way by the outside world) would be won by the usual coercion. The No team started out just wanting to make a protest and re-highlight all the horrors of the disappeared and violence since Pinochet overthrew the (no doubt equally vile) Allende in 1973. But an enlightened team boss enlisted an inexpressive by savvy film commercials director (Rene Saavedra) to make the key 15-minute TV sessions shown daily in the run up to the vote. He made a positive and often funny series of films which played a big part in the No's success. Made in 2012, but in a style that could have come from 1988 which was cleverly used to mix real and fictional footage.
Feb 14	Inside Llewyn Davis	Joel Coen, Ethan Coen: Oscar Isaac, Carey Mulligan	3	Fiction of a NY folk character in 1961 (based on an actual, influential but obscure Dave van Ronk). Great music but a rather long-drawn out telling of a week of his life. Interesting how much "trad English" folk music was used – I guess maybe that was as it was.
Feb 14	Argo	Ben Affleck: Ben Affleck	3	Watchable (over-) dramatisation of the rescue of 6 of the 1979/80 Iran Embassy hostages who escaped the embassy before the rest were held for a year or more. CIA got them out by pretending they were a Canadian action film research team. The film showed the whole thing being very seat of the pants, when it must have been much more carefully prepared and not had such last minute excitements as Hollywood added!
Feb 14	Hitchcock	Sacha Gervasi: Anthony Hopkins, Helen Mirren, Scarlett Johansson	3	Hitchcock and wife Alma during the making of Psycho. Good film, but The Girl was better – both in acting and makeup. Would be interesting to know more their life over a longer period. Alma says in this film that Hitch used to work for her.
Mar 14	Into the Wild	Sean Penn: Emile Hirsch, William Hurt	3+	Based on life and death in 1992 of Christopher McCandless, an idealistic guy who gives away all his money after graduation and "disappears" to get away from his disliked parents. He hitches round the US, meeting and learning from a slew of interesting characters to whom he is clearly very special and endearing (tho' the film character belies this with his slightly distant presentation). Culminates with a long-prepared for sojourn in the wilds of Alaska. When, after some months, he decides to leave he is trapped by a flooding river and then mistakenly eats a poisonous plant which kills him. Long film, but fabulous scenery across N. America and absorbing views of a strange non- and anti-materialistic life.
Mar 14	The Lady Vanishes	Hitchcock: Margaret Lockwood, Michael Redgrave	4	Dated and corny who-dunnit Old lady disappears on train but diligent British pair find who did the derring-do. It really is very hard to understand how earlier generations liked this sort of stuff!
Mar 14	Blooded		3	"Mockumentary" about rabid animal rights group kidnapping a group of young stag hunters on Mull. They drug them, strip them to their underwear and then chase them round the island shooting at them, and get them to do video denial of their love of (fox) hunting. Great scenery and good running question mark as to whether there was any "true story" behind it (not, I believe).
Apr 14	Captain Phillips	Paul Greengrass: Tom Hanks	2	Excellent retelling (and no doubt somewhat embellishing) of the kidnapping of container ship by Somali pirates.
Apr 14	Downfall	Oliver Hirschbiegel: Bruno Ganz	2	Hitler's last days. Superb. Presumably the physical and mental decay is relatively accurate, coming from first-hand accounts of fellow-bunkered acolytes. As often, one was constantly flabbergasted how long the Germans continued fighting after the war was clearly lost many months before May 1945. This film showed that the faith/loyalty/obsession was sometimes to him and sometimes to the "fatherland" despite him.
May 14	The Girl In The Cafe	Bill Nighy, Kelly MacDonald, Ken Stott	3	Written by Richard Curtis I think and schmalzy with trite save-the-world "plot". BN (as un-believably cringing/shy political numbers boffin backing the UK Chancellor (KS), equally un-believably teams up with beautiful KM with a troubled past, who's outspoken-ness brings good things to pass at a G8 meeting in Reykjavik.

Films

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Jun 14	Le Week-End	Roger Michell: Jim Broadbent, Lindsay Duncan, Jeff Goldblum	4	Dull pretentious tale of 60-something couple on weekend in Paris.
Aug 14	The Butler	Forest Whitaker, Oprah Winfrey	4	Slow and long winded telling of US Civil Rights developments from 1950's (Eisenhower) ending with Obama. Used the vehicle of black cotton more-or-less-slave lad becoming trusted White House butler and his son mixing with every name and episode in the Civil Rights movement in 50-s-70's.
Sep 14	The Infidel	David Baddiel: Omid Djalili	3	Light comedy of Muslim man whose son wants to marry niece of manic mullah discovering that he was born a Jew and adopted. Silly ending where he exposes the mullah for similarly unexpected heritage.
Sep 14	We Steal Secrets: The Story of Wikileaks details		3	Long documentary on the demise of Wikileaks. Made in 2013 it didn't include Edward Snowden. Mainly covered Bradley Manning – clarifying his miserable treatment after his arrest for admitting leaking stuff including the video of the US's cold-blooded murder of several Reuters reporters and supporters from a helicopter gunship. Assange comes over as creepy and controlling as one would expect, with most of his earlier collaborators (in the tiny "organisation") leaving as he started using Wikileaks to raise money for his Swedish legal appeals.
<i>Dinard 2014 Film festival</i>				
Oct 14	Philomena	Stephen Frears: Judi Dench, Steve Coogan	1	Docudrama about Martin Sixsmith helping an Irish woman uncover what happened to the son who was taken from her by Irish nuns when she was a teenager.
Oct 14	IDA	Paweł Pawlikowski:	2	Polish girl in convent is allowed away for a few days before taking her vows. She meets her aunt and discovers she is Jewish and her parents were murdered in the War by Poles. Also meets and sleeps with a young musician, but in the end returns to the convent to, presumably, take her vows. Excellent filming in B&W and acting.
Oct 14	*71	Yann Demange: Jack O'Connell	3	Hard hitting story of young soldier on his first posting, to Belfast in the height of the troubles. He gets separated from his platoon and then mixed up in nasty IRA and Provo violence before being "saved" by equally nasty undercover soldiers.
Oct 14	X+Y	Morgan Matthews: Asa Butterfield, Sally Hawkins, Rafe Spall, Eddie Marsan	1	Delightful tale of autistic maths genius lad who gets on the British team for some (possibly real) International Maths Olympiad. Here he meets a Chinese girl counterpart who helps bring him out of himself. Superb acting all round – particularly young AB
Oct 14	Catch Me Daddy	Daniel Wolfe: Sameena Jabeen Ahmed	4	Grim and badly told tale of Pakistani girl being hunted down by her family. They return her to the family fold to be, possibly, honour-killed for skipping home to live with her boyfriend in a dire caravan park in Yorkshire.
Oct 14	Sunshine on Leith	Dexter Fletcher: George MacKay, Jane Horrocks, Peter Mullan	2+	Great feel-good vehicle for Proclaimers songs (Letter from America, 500 Miles, and many written for what was, I believe, originally a stage show). Two squaddies return from Afghanistan to get together or not with girlfriends and family in a glorious sunny Edinburgh.
Oct 14	Noble	Stephen Bradley: Deirdre O'Kane	3	Docudrama about Christina Noble – Irish woman who from a grinding poverty and abusive husband goes on to found and run a massive (700,000 kids helped) organisation for street kids in Vietnam.
Oct 14	Keeping Rosy	Steve Reeves: Maxine Peake	1	Excellent thriller. Film starts with city-slicker woman losing her job. She goes home, surprises her (single and probably illegal) cleaner girl and in sudden compensatory fit of fury accidentally kills her. Things spiral from worse to worse with a superb sudden and unexpected ending. Rosy is an amazing sub-one-year-old who appeared to act perfectly to camera!
Oct 14	NFTS / Fémis – shorts			
	Buruganda		3	Young Ecuadorian man wants to get away from his small town for the USA. He is persuaded to use "miracle" drug (Buruganda), that makes its taker a slave to anyone else, to steal cars. He sees the error of his ways in the end!
	Les Oiseaux-Tonnerre		4	Weird sister and brother trap birds for fun. He gets befriended/seduced by older girl. French nonsense.
	Shopping		3+	Young boy doing small supermarket shop for his Mum hasn't been given enough money for her list. She is unhelpful when he phones to say so, and he steals one of the items. He is caught and later let off by a friendly security guard. Delightful.
	The Bigger Picture		3+	(Winner) innovative animation mixing painted characters, 2D and 3D. Story is of two brothers and dying Mum.
	Honey on Wounds		3-	More or less documentary following (mainly) one Kosovan woman encouraging others who were rape victims during the war to help rebuild their confidence by tending bees.
	North		2	Assisted dying in Ireland. Young lad helping his Mum as she is given a killer drug by (apparently, but I must have got this wrong) a nun!
Oct 14	Still Life	Uberto Pasolini: Eddie Marsan	4-	Dull as ditch-water tale of council worker who organises funerals for family-less folk who die in Kennington. EM was perfect, but just not interesting!
Oct 14	Lilting	Hong Khaou: Ben Whishaw, Pei-Pei Cheng, Andrew Leung, Peter Bowles	3+	Gay part-Chinese boy dies and his partner (BW) hires a translator to help him communicate with partner's lovely Mum. Delicate and well told.
Oct 14	The Goob	Guy Myhill: Liam Walpole	4	Boring and sordid tale of teenager with dysfunctional Mum and horrid half-mad, sex-obsessed boyfriend. Set in Norfolk pumpkin-picking site where lad is part rescued by zany east-European picker girl.
Oct 14	Panic	Sean Spencer: David Gyasi, Pippa Nixon	3-	Well made but rather self-indulgent and short on story. Music journalist recovering from trauma of being attacked whilst defending someone. Has hired-in sex-woman (who turns out to be gallery owner having fun) who sees a Chinese girl in a flat across the way being attacked and removed. He tracks her down, exposing some of the people trafficking and miserable and dangerous life of the girl and others.
Oct 14	The Riot Club	Lone Scherfig:	4	Ghastly portrayal of (possibly only slightly over-the-top) Bullingdon-like club of bright, filthy-rich and hideously hedonistic Oxford undergraduates. They descend into really nasty violence – an interesting counterpoint to the low-life viciousness one often gets in other Dinard films!
Oct 14	God Help the Girl	Stuart Murdoch: Emily Browning, Ollie Alexander, Hannah Murray	3	Whimsical musical loosely ranged round a seriously anorexic (tho' I didn't work this out) girl songwriter getting together with two others to form a band in Glasgow. Zero Glasgow or Scottish aspect to it (all main characters were plummy English). SM is in Belle & Sebastian, who were founded in Glasgow.
Oct 14	One Chance	David Frankel: James Corden, Julie Walters	3	Docudrama about Paul Potts a shy Welshman with a phenomenal operatic voice. After getting himself on a course in Venice, where he froze in front of Pavarotti, he did little (partly because of many health and other accidents). But his lovely sweetheart-then-wife encouraged him onto Britain's Got Talent which he won. Mercifully the film hardly dwelt on this, so we had minimal Simon Cowell and Piers Morgan to sully a sweet and well told story.
Oct 14	In The Name Of The Father	Jim Sheridan: Daniel Day-Lewis, Emma Thompson, Peter Postlethwaite	1	Disturbing retelling of the Guildford Four pub bombing. The police and "system" cover up of vital evidence lead to the 14 years imprisonment of innocent folk – one of whom, Giuseppe the Father of Gerry Conlon, died in prison. Stunningly, none of the fabricators were ever charged.
Nov 14	Calvary	John Michael McDonagh: Brendan Gleeson, Kelly Reilly	2	Powerful and far-deeper-than-I-could-follow last week in the life of a respected and good Irish priest. Film opens with one of his flock telling him in the confessional that he will kill him the following Sunday. We see him going round doing good and ultimately despairing in drink before meeting his un-maker. Maybe each episode relates to a stage of the cross? BG as wonderful as ever and KR the spit of a young Jane Asher as his troubled daughter (he became a priest after his wife died).
Nov 14	The Way	Martin Sheen, James Nesbitt, Deborah Kara Unger	4	Tedious trite "feel good" tale of US eye surgeon walking the pilgrims' way to Santiago de Compostela after his 40-year old semi-estranged son dies on his first day trying to do the same.

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Dec 14	The Imitation Game	Morten Tyldum: Benedict Cumberbatch, Keira Knightley, Matthew Goode, Mark Strong, Charles Dance, Rory Kinnear	1	Superb telling of Alan Turing's creation of his machine at Bletchley and final humiliation and suicide.
Dec 14	The Railway Man	Jonathan Teplitzky: Colin Firth, Nicole Kidman	3	Based on true story of English railway enthusiast POW forced to work on the Burma/Siam railway in WW2 by the Japanese. He didn't talk about his horrendous suffering until years afterwards, when eventually he went and met the man who used to translate during his torture. Initially wanting to kill the man they became friends. Interesting story but failed to convey the Japanese brutality anything like as well as, for instance, Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence.
Dec 14	The Old Vic's The Crucible	Arthur Miller, Yaël Farber: Richard Armitage, Anna Madeley (Proctor's wife), Adrian Schiller (Hale), Jack Ellis, Michael Thomas, Samantha Colley (Abigail)	3-	Powerful but far far too drawn out (3.5 hours!). Good acting, though RA (Proctor, the main man) was weaker than most. But there seemed more repetition and thrusting-it-in-your-face than one would believe could be in Miller's original. With "judgements" made and reversed on title-tattle, as the sex-joy-repressed teenage girls use witch-condemnation to escape the opprobrium of being caught dancing. Sadly, this was, I believe, more or less the truth of the early 1800's (religiously) bigoted USA Salem (and what has changed since!) original as well as the McCarthy 1950's it parodies.
Dec 14	Gravity	George Clooney, Sandra Bullock	3-	Two astronauts floating in space, cut off from everything after freak debris hit; one makes it back one doesn't.
Dec 14	The Kid with a Bike		4	Dreadfully dull "arty" French (actually Belgian) film about boy in home not wanted by his young dad, fostered by a hairdresser and getting into scrapes. Amazingly this waste-of-time film won Grand Prix at Cannes in 2011.
Jan 15	The Grand Budapest Hotel	Wes Anderson: Ralph Fiennes and many many others	3	Zany mix of farce and circus set round camp (RF) hotel manager who has worked his way up from Lobby Boy to be mover and shaker and lover of many of his guests. Murder, mayhem and training up his replacement (who narrates the tale) is all very stylised but fun.
Jan 15	Blue Jasmine	Woody Allen: Cate Blanchett, Sally Hawkins	3-	Neurotic widow of dodgy financial dealer who committed suicide. Flash forwards and back between her affluent world before and struggling one after. Not a Woody Allen to remember.
Feb 15	Locke	Steven Knight: Tom Hardy	2	Excellent film with one actor in only one location – his car – as he, site manager on a major build, drives through the night juggling several crises on his car-phone and trying to do right by everyone. A woman he had a one-night stand with is giving birth 2 months early and he is the only person she knows. So he leaves a major concrete-pour job to get to her side. He has to talk his assistant through the checks and troubles for the pour. His firm fire him for leaving the pour. He also calls his wife to explain what is going on and she wants to leave him. Excellently acted with the man being calm and persuasive to all the troubled parties, and exploding between calls at his (wastrel) father's memory; his attempt to do right by everyone to spite his father.
Feb 15	Dallas Buyers Club	Jean-Marc Vallée: Matthew McConaughey, Jennifer Garner	3+	Based on true story of sharp-Alec Texan who gets HIV in mid-80's. Battles the FDA-approved drug/treatment regime at the time, ultimately living for 7 years having been given 30 days on first diagnosis. He reads up on other solutions and sets up drug buying club to circumvent FDA rules importing not-(yet)-approved treatments (not all drugs, some perfectly legal if not FDA-authorised). Wryly told as he, archetypical hetero, finds himself mainly dealing with gays.
Feb 15	Tracks	John Curran:	4	Based on true story of Australian woman walking across the country with 4 camels in 1977. Well filmed, but dull and too long
Mar 15	Untouchable	Francois Cluzet, Omar Sy	2	Delightful French film telling of true story of a sparky young black guy from the slums who becomes carer for, and friend of, extremely wealth quadriplegic and how they help each other get on with life – often in an anarchic way.
Mar 15	Suite Francaise	Saul Dibb: Kristin Scott Thomas, Michelle Williams, Matthias Schoenaerts	3	German occupation of small French town soon after fall of Paris in WW2 and incipient resistance and collaboration. Overlong and rather too pretty/"Hollywood" (tho' UK film, I think) rendering of the book by Irène Némirovsky. Good acting by MP, MS and KST, and the excitement in the final 20 mins made it bearable...
Mar 15	Tim's Vermeer	Penn & Teller: Tim Jenison	3+	Documentary of monied American inventor, computer graphics guy who thinks he has worked out how Vermeer painted such accurate pictures. Using a mirror and lens he (who had never painted before) recreated "The Music Lesson" using his clever technique. Good inputs, if slightly non-committal, from David Hockney and Philip Steadman (who wrote a book on how V must have used something like a Camera Obscura). Strangely in the 3-year project, he spent more of it recreating the Delft room it was painted in San Antonio, allegedly doing most of the (to me unnecessarily authentic) recreation of the content, windows, etc, himself, than doing the actual painting.
May 15	Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon		5	DVD subtitles didn't work and it anyway looked dire; gave up after 5 mins.
May 15	Leviathan		3	Russian tale of car mechanic being ousted from his house by corrupt official. Lots of allegorical shots of crumbling sea-side industry and a whale carcass. Slow and mournful but rather long.
Jun 15	The Wind That Shakes The Barley	Ken Loach: Liam Cunningham, Cillian Murphy	2	Emotive portrayal of the violence and politics leading up to (Brit-on-IRA) and following (IRA-on-IRA) the formation of the Irish Free State in (1922). Epitomised by one Free Stater IRA man supervising the killing by firing squad of his "pure IRA" brother.
Sep 15	Orange is the New Black		4	US female prison series. Couldn't get interested in it..
Sep 15	Gone Girl	David Fincher: Rosamund Pike, Ben Affleck	3	Man's wife goes missing and he is initially suspected of her murder. But it turns out she has orchestrated this, and another real murder for revenge on past misdeeds. Some interesting twists in the first 1.5 hours but over the last hour it peters out with no clarity or conclusion. Interesting to see RP, usually an English Rose, as sexy American!
<i>Dinard 2015 Film festival</i>				
Sep 15	The Theory of Everything	James Marsh: Eddie Redmayne, Felicity Jones	1	Stephen Hawking's life as told by his first wife. Superb acting by ER (who got Oscar) conveying the physical decline and disabilities as well as his wonderful humour and huge strength of character. His wife also a strong and massively important support as his body deteriorated.
Sep 15	American Hero	Nick Love:	4	Dope and boozed up American with superhuman powers eventually cleans up and gets to be with his long-estranged son.
Sep 15	Hector	Jake Gavin: Peter Mullan, Natalie Gavin, Gina McKee	3	Down-and-out Glaswegian pensioner hitches to London for his regular over-Christmas at a Crisis-like hostel. His back-story (wife and daughter killed in car accident after which he hit the streets/bottle in despair, along with estrangement from his brother and sister) comes out as he bonds again with sympathetic hostel boss lady, who has her own hinted-at troubles. Great to see PM (Hector) in a non-violent and sympathetic role for a change!
Sep 15	Gold	Niall Heery: James Nesbitt	4	Feeble PE teacher (surprising role for JN) hopes to make fortune with video of a new way of running illustrated by his step-daughter who succumbs to the pressure by taking performance drugs to fulfil his ideas. Her Dad, ex-pupil gone bad, returns to bond with Mum and daughter.
Oct 15	Departure	Andrew Steggall: Juliet Stevenson, Alex Lawther	3	Beautifully filmed and languid (and far far too slow) tale of Mum and precociously literary teenage son packing up French holiday house to sell. Local lad helps and has amorous encounters with both. Towards the end, distanced Dad arrives as marriage is over because he too is gay.
Oct 15	A Long Way Down	Pascal Chaumel: Pierce Brosnan, Toni Collette	3-	Silly story of four folk arriving a same suicide spot on New Year's eve. They put each other off the act and make a pact to delay for at least another 6 weeks. They become friends and everyone lives happily ever after.

Films

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Oct 15	The Ecstasy of Wilko Johnson	Julien Temple: Wilko Johnson, Roger Daltrey	2	Remarkable documentary shot after WJ had survived longer than the 10 months he was given for his pancreatic cancer. During the initial filming a fan/photographer/surgeon realised that WJ's continuing energy meant the C diagnosis must be wrong in some way and persuaded WJ to undergo surgery for its removal. The latter part of the film was after this success and WJ realised he has a less definite "sentence". But his (slightly repetitive) philosophies for living for the moment now you know you have no future were fascinating. As were the acres of images from old film clips, his beloved Carvey Island mud-and oil-refinery-scapes and other fantastical imagery. Also interesting to hear how well educated and read he is (lots of spouting of major and less known texts, including Chaucer and Icelandic tales). Lots of clips from JT's "Oil City Confidential" about the Dr Feelgood's.
Oct 15	The Violators	Helen Walsh:	4	Young girl gives herself to local Mr Big in attempt to keep her parent-less family safe from brutal Dad due to be released from prison. A second girl, Mr Big's estranged daughter, meddles in the mix.
Oct 15	Still	Simon Blake: Aidan Gillen	4	Photographer gone to booze after death of his son. Egged on by a friend to pursue local thugs finds out his son was one of them and that they are not all bad.
Oct 15	NFTS / Fémis – shorts			
	Territory	Eleanor Mortimer:	4	Dull documentary on Gibraltar monkeys.
	TGV	Emilie Noble:	3	Brief tale of young SNCF ticket collector on her first TGV run.
	After the End	Sam Southward:	3+	Wallace and Gromit style animation. Last man on earth after an apocalypse finishes writing the history of the human race and then comes across a boorish second last man with an inflatable doll. They fall out and one or both then die. I voted for this and it also won the prize!
	Wellington Jr.	Cecile Paysant	4	Messy animation something to do with old time soldiers.
	Patriot	Eva Riley:	3	Young daughter of BNP-style family bumps into local migrant vegetable picker. Despite brief friendship she returns to type and beats him up.
	Les Chercheurs	Aurelian Peiloux:	3	Good enough tale of students at slightly futuristic science lab being able to stimulate laughter and sorrow – resulting, possibly, in the suicide of a guinea pig / girl friend.
Oct 15	Mr Holmes	Bill Condon: Ian McKellen, Milo Parker	3	Easy and pretty tale of Sherlock Holmes in old age in the country revisiting his last case with the help of the young boy who helps him look after his bees, inter alia.
Oct 15	Lapse of Honour	Rayna Campbell: Tom Collins	4	Teenage Asian/Mancunian gets sucked into drug dealing to try to make a go of life with his just-pregnant girlfriend.
Oct 15	Bypass	Duane Hopkins: George MacKay	3-	Very similar to "Lapse of Honour" and "The Violators". Young man gets sucked into drug dealing to keep his parentless family going
Oct 15	Couple in a Hole	Tom Geens: Paul Higgins, Kate Dickie	4	Couple who lost only son in fire (in France where they live) shun society and live in a hole in the ground. Local Frenchman (who had something to do with the fire) tries to help, but all three die in nonsense final shootings and more fire.
Oct 15	Dough	John Goldschmidt: Jonathan Pryce, Jerome Holder	3-	Feeble tale of Jewish baker who hires a young Muslim boy who adds dope to their product, resulting in increased sales and fun.
Oct 15	La Haine		5	French 1995 film supposedly about violence in the Paris banlieu's. Lots of French posturing and little interest, gave up watching (after far too long!)
Oct 15	La Vie d'Adele (Blue is the Warmest Colour)		5	French film, seemed to be well made. 17-year old discovering her sexuality. But appeared to be a drawn-out vehicle for some titillating and explicit teenage lesbian sex.
Nov 15	Sophie Scholl - The Final Days	Marc Rothemund: Julia Jentsch	2	Grimly excellent telling of the arrest and execution (by guillotine) of the 21-year old German, her brother and a friend, for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets in 1943. They were part of the "White Rose" movement, and she won respect from her prosecutor (Robert Mohr) and the attendants at the farce of her "Peoples Court" trial (run by the ludicrous Roland Freisler) for her brave resistance.
Nov 15	The Interview	Seth Rogen, James Franco	5	Good comic idea of a trashy US talk show host being invited to go the Pyongyang and interview their fan Kim Jong-Un. The CIA then ask them to kill him. But sadly dire due to awful American humour and over-acting.
Dec 15	West	Jördis Triebel, Alexander Scheer	3	Young woman and her son escape east Germany for the west, but find suspicion and hostility there – fuelled by her previous relationship to a possible Stasi spy.
Dec 15	Finding Vivian Maier		3+	Documentary about the uncovering of the (hoards of) excellent photos taken by an enigmatic woman who worked as a nanny. Sadly the uncovering didn't manage to get all that far into understanding why she was so nervous of men, was occasionally brutal to her charges, and, despite realising that she was an excellent artist, she never exposed her work, which was only discovered by accident.
Dec 15	Electricity	Bryn Higgins: Agyness Deyn	5	Dire / dull
Jan 16	Girlhood		4	Black teenage girls in near-Paris housing estates with attitude but little believable storyline. Shame; well acted.
	The Wolf of Wall Street	DiCaprio	5	Dire.
Mar 16	High-Rise	Ben Wheatley: Tom Hiddleston, Sienna Miller, Jeremy Irons, Keeley Hawes	5	Dreadful Lord-of-the-Flies with adults in some 1980's high rise block with class equating to floor level. Walked out.
Mar 16	The Other Man	Richard Eyre: Liam Neeson	3	Man (LN) discovers his recently dead wife had been having an affair for years. He hunts the guy down and befriends, rather than confronts, him for a while.
Apr 16	Snow Cake	Marc Evans: Alan Rickman, Sigourney Weaver	3	British man (the every laconic AR) in Canada gives lift to hitch-hiking girl and they are run into by a truck. She dies he is unhurt and goes to find her Mum (who she lived with). Mum (SW) is severely autistic, but man stays a while to help with funeral and, eventually, describe his own past demons, triggered when his son was also killed in road accident.
Jul 16	Wild	Reese Witherspoon	3	Good-ish telling of Cheryl Strayed's book of the same name.
Jul 16	Eye in the Sky	Helen Mirren, Alan Rickman	3	Tame/predicable tale of angst about using drones to kill
Jul 16	I saw the light	Tom Hiddleston	4	Boring biopic of Hank Williams
Aug 16	Our kind of Traitor	Ewan McGregor, Damian Lewis	3-	Complicated thriller as Russian mafia type tries to get himself and family out to UK by using a UK academic (EM).
Aug 16	Steve Jobs	Danny Boyle: Michael Fassbender, Kate Winslet	3	Interesting summary of his personality and progress set in ludicrously time-constrained snippets before 3 product launches: for Macintosh (which flopped), NeXT (allegedly deliberately OS-less while he waited for Apple to buy him back in with it) and iMac (on his triumphant return).
Aug 16	Bridge of spies	Steven Spielberg: Tom Hanks, Mark Rylance	3+	True story of New York lawyer (TH) reluctantly drafted to defend Russian spy, who the entire country and the judge think should be executed. Lawyer reacts against this and, despite having clear legal grounds to quash the conviction because of incorrect process by the FBI, only manages to persuade judge to give non-life conviction on argument that the US may need the spy one day as bargaining chip with Russia. Sure enough, within weeks of conviction Gary Powers is shot down and lawyer is persuaded to go to East Berlin to negotiate the prisoner swap.
Aug 16	The Revenant	DiCaprio	4	Overly-gory and ludicrous tale of US soldiers and pioneers fighting Indians in the wild west. A white-man guide with Indian affections is mauled by bear but survives this and white villain trying to kill him to get his revenge. Very slightly offset by good landscape and wild life (some CGI?) shots.
Sep 16	Captain Fantastic	Matt Ross: Viggo Mortensen, George MacKay	3	Superman(ish) Dad (hence title, I assume) raising his 6 kids in the wild in Washington state. Teaching them to hunt, climb and read mounds of literature, history, politics and develop analytical minds to counter the outside world of capitalism and organised religion. But his wife, who started the process with him, is in the system with severe mental instability and kills herself early in the film. The tribe then enter the real world to (try to) attend her funeral despite her father's violent opposition to the way they live. Rather trite set of vignettes follow ending with a less-radical lifestyle letting the kids become slightly less alternative.

Films

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Sep 16	Carol	Cate Blanchett	5	Turgid
	<i>Dinard 2016 Film festival 28-Sep – 2-Oct</i>			
Sep 16	Danish Girl		3-	Beautifully filmed and well-told version of this pioneering transgender man/woman. ER was physically impressive, but hugely irritatingly by pretty much one-trick acting when in female mode.
Sep 16	Madame Bovary		5	Beautiful French scenery and period costume. But dreadful dull acting conveying a stupid woman of no interest
Sep 16	Adult Life Skills	Rachel Tunnard: Jodie Whittaker, Ozzy Myers	3+	Lovely quirky tale of almost-30-year old woman living in a shed in her Mum's garden making finger puppet movies and unable to let go of the zany filmy world she had with her twin brother until his recent-ish death. She is helped to escape back to a more real world by the inquisitiveness of an equally odd-ball 5-ish year old son of a neighbour.
Sep 16	Detour	Christopher Smith:	2	After drunken meeting with menacing smart thug, young wasp student gets caught up in murders as the two of them and thug's abused girlfriend head (apparently) to Vegas to kill wasp's step-dad. Wonderful continuing change in detail and perspective, with Sliding-Doors-like confusions as to what is real have happyish ending despite step-dad's murder due to boy's jumping to wrong conclusions. Some grim (and all too common in films nowadays) female abuse and a brief wonderfully evil Mr Big from John Lynch.
Sep 16	War on Everyone	John Michael McDonagh: Alexander Skarsgård, Michael Peña	3	Zany tale of two corrupt cops doing down some really bad drug-types. Excellent constantly witty dialog between the two as they carry on a pretty silly story.
Sep 16	Stratton	Simon West: Dominic Cooper	3-	Silly Spooks-like SAS-superhero chasing Russian super-nasty. Starts with failed attack on Iranian chemical weapons plant and gets dafter.
Sep 16	Whisky Galore	Gillies MacKinnon: Gregor Fisher	3	Lovely new version of the story. Delightful whimsy and gentle feel-good humour.
Sep 16	Sing Street	John Carney: Ferdia Walsh-Peelo	3+	Lovely fun music-based tale from the same stable as "Once". In 1980's Dublin a schoolboy forms zany "futuristic" band to hook in 1-year-old girl to join them. Boy falls for girl and she ends up leaving her current man and they both head for London (again!) for fame fortune and love.
Sep 16	Away	David Blair: Juno Temple, Timothy Spall	3	57-year old man heads for Blackpool to kill himself after death after long vegetating illness and meets young girl fleeing drug-abusing man. They form bond and flashbacks slowly uncover how they met and their pasts. Slightly silly ending with him killing the villain.
Sep 16	This Beautiful Fantastic	Simon Aboud: Jessica Brown Findlay, Tom Wilkinson, Andrew Scott	3+	Lovely tale of slightly dippy single woman living in flat with overgrown garden. She is faced with eviction unless she fixes it soon, and after starting gets to know her crusty, wealthy, old next door neighbour who is horticulturalist and slowly comes round to helping her (in return for getting his meals cooked again by his delightful Irish male cook who defects to the woman in the early scenes with his two delightful young daughters).
Oct 16	Excellent set of "shortcuts" – all English; the Femis/NFTS "competition" is no more?			
	Midnight of my Life	Phil Davis: Martin Freeman	3	Steve Marriott about to (and) playing in an East End pub at the end of the 80's (he died in 1991). Reflects on what might have been!
	Perched	Liam Harries:	3	Cartoon of a captain on a submarine perched precariously on a needle-like mountain. Seagull and chick arrive and upset the balance.
	Groove is in the Heart	Bijan Sheibani:		Schoolgirl makes cassette of songs in 1991 and man dressing for funeral 20 years later plays it. Nicely understated and leaving you to guess the connections.
	Balcony	Toby Fell-Holden: Charlotte Beaumont	2	Council estate girl (CB) befriends beautiful Afghan girl living in nearby flat, and first glimpsed with her father on fatal balcony. Opens with CB's comment that we often draw the wrong conclusions from what we see, and there is lots of that with accidental death of the Afghan being blamed on loving father.
	Oh-be-Joyful	Susan Jacobson:	3-	Welsh girl and delightfully disgraceful grandmother discuss life and (sometimes gay) loves.
	Over	Jorn Threlfall:	3+	Reverse-chronological, dialogue-less set of shots from aftermath to happening of death of someone falling from plane coming into Heathrow. Based on the actual event.
	The Deal	Ewa Smyk:	3	Cartoon describing process of arranged marriages in 1950/60's Poland.
	Bilaadi	Safwon Suleyman:	3	UK-resident Syrian cameraman documents visit to his father and second family who have escaped to Turkey. Father is helping all sorts of similar refugees as best he can.
	Operator	Caroline Bartleet: Kate Dickie	2	More or less single shot of operator at fire brigade response centre talking a frantic woman through the rescue process whilst waiting for the fire engine to arrive.
	Stutterer	Benjamin Cleary: Matthew Needham, Chloe Pirrie	3+	Young man with almost muting stutter has been talking with a girl for about 6 months on an Internet chat site and she then comes to London to meet him. Delightful finale where she appears she too can do sign language, so days of apprehension melt away.
Oct 16	Finding Altamira	Hugh Hudson: Antonio Banderas, Allegra Allen, Rupert Everett	3	Good dramatisation of the discovery of Palaeolithic cave paintings near Santander in 1879 which were declared forgeries by the high priests of archaeology, and he died shamed and ridiculed before similar ones were found in the Dorgogne (I think) in 1902, when everyone changed their minds! He also had troubles with his fiercely Catholic wife as the church also tried to denigrate him (in the film with RE's wonderfully slimy Monsignor) but came round to believe him. The finding was largely due to his daughter Maria (wonderfully played by AA) who was an ancestor of one of the film's producers.
Oct 16	Moon Dogs	Philip John:	3-	Two Shetland half-brothers team up with young feisty singer to head for Glasgow to resolve discarding Mum and tenuous girlfriend.
Oct 16	Tommy's Honour	Jason Connery: Peter Mullan, Jack Lowden	3	Dramatisation of some of the lives of father and son golfers in late 19 th century St Andrews - Old and Young Tom Morris. Dad was caddie, golf shop owner and course creator who worked on behalf of the toff's who in those days gambled lots on matches between these lower-class types. His son, probably the best golfer ever, overturned some of this tradition claiming more of the prize monies for himself, but died at 24.
Oct 16	Love is Thicker than Water	Emily Harris and Ate de Jong: Lydia Wilson, Johnny Flynn, Juliet Stevenson	3-	Young couple from totally different backgrounds – cultured Jewish and working class Welsh – fall out in love as family crises (his Dad and her Mum die on day of their engagement party) impinge.
Nov 16	I, Daniel Blake	Ken Loach: Dave Johns, Hayley Squires	3	KL movingly illustrating the inhuman idiocies of the welfare state. A sick (recovering from heart condition) man is deemed unfit to work by his doctors, but the claims system won't recognise this and he is in catch-22 situations trying to get some form of benefit until he can work. He teams up with a relocated-from-London single Mum and her two kids and the two look out for each other, though there's a suitably tragic ending as he dies in the toilet just before his appeal for common sense from the system.
Nov 16	45 Years	Andrew Haigh: Charlotte Rampling, Tom Courtenay, Geraldine James	3-	Well filmed and acted tale of couple approaching 45 th wedding anniversary when news that husband's youthful girlfriend's body has been found in a crevasse in the Alps where she died. But the pace was very slow and the film seemed to just stop with no ending.
Dec 16	Cake	Daniel Barnz: Jennifer Aniston	4	Ludicrously slow and drawn out and without a satisfactory ending. JA character is allegedly in Chronic Pain Disorder following some unspecified horrible accident which probably killed her son and severely damaged her. The acting is OK but nothing is properly revealed and her physical carryings-on bely her supposed severe pain.
Dec 16	Half of a Yellow Sun		5	Film of the book just didn't start out with any appeal!
Dec 16	The Ides of March	George Clooney: Ryan Gosling, George Clooney, Philip Seymour Hoffman	3-	US Democratic primaries drama. Bit hard to follow both the machinations and the assumptions that the audience is US-cognisant, but good acting. RG character knifes his mentor (PSH) in the back having blackmailed the senator (GC) he is campaign media manager for.

Films

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Dec 16	The Good Man	Phil Harrison: Aidan Gillen	4	Short, 2-part split story with almost no overlap 'till the final minutes. Executive-style guy in Ireland inadvertently causes death of someone he doesn't know. Huge angst until he eventually tells his wife and takes over the sponsorship of young Xhosa boy in Cape Town as atonement (guy who died was doing this). Then, independently causes his company to start building a factory in same place in SA. The 2 nd half of the story (runs in parallel) covers the Xhosa who is having troubles with forced township re-buildings. The two parts come together briefly and unsatisfactorily at the end as township clearances are stepped up for the factory and the Xhosa lad's girlfriend killed.
Jan 17	Pride	Stephen Beresford, Matthew Warchus: George MacKay, Imelda Staunton, Bill Nighy	3	Feel-good dramatisation of Lesbian and Gay London group support for Welsh miners during the strike.
Jan 17	The Lady in the Van	Alan Bennett, Nicholas Hytner: Maggie Smith, Alex Jennings	3	Film version of the book – and better than it, due to the excellent actors!
Jan 17	A Bigger Splash	Luca Guadagnino: Tilda Swinton, Ralph Fiennes, Dakota Johnson, Matthias Schoenaerts	3	Enigmatic female rock star (TS) is on an idyllic Italian island with her partner while she recuperates from debilitating throat surgery (she rarely speaks and then only to whisper) and he from alcoholism and an attempted suicide some years back. Her ebullient producer and ex-lover (RF) descends on them with his sultry daughter. It's all very moody and slow, as relationships switch. But in the end drama hits as the producer is drowned for some reason by the partner, but the remaining three outsiders clam up and the Italian police don't figure out what happened.
Jan 17	The Reluctant Fundamentalist	Mira Nair: Riz Ahmed, Kiefer Sutherland, Liev Schreiber, Kate Hudson, Om Puri	2	Great nuanced thriller. Clean-shaven Pakistani boy goes to Harvard and on to top Wall Street job. By 27 he is the epitome of a successful capitalist, with a stellar career brutally restructuring companies and a smart photographer girlfriend. 9/11 hits as he returns from an overseas trip and he brushes off the subsequent antagonism to "Muslim looking" people. But he begins to question the one-sided western approach that the death of 3000 at 9/11 was terrible while ignoring the ongoing 100's of innocents killed in US-led "reprisals". He starts growing a (modest) beard and then after a stressful breakup with his girlfriend (due to mis-communication) when he is asked to close down a publishing company in Istanbul who published his father (a poet), he quits the West. He returns to Lahore as a professor in an ill-conveyed anti-Western, but not violent, post. Here he rejects approaches from Islamic Fundamentalists (reflecting on the similar misuse of the word "Fundamental" in his Wall Street days to justify cut-backs). The story unfolds through flashbacks during an attempted debriefing/befriending by a very sympathetic CIA agent after the kidnap of a Western professor in Lahore – which ends with the prof's execution and total breakdown of trust between the agent and the Pakistani.
Jan 17	La La Land	Damien Chazelle: Ryan Gosling, Emma Stone	3	Fluffy romanticism. On/off/fantasy couple both ridiculously winsome with ambitions in LA. He a Jazz pianist wanting to open his own club she a actress.
Jan 17	Bitter Lake	Adam Curtis	3	Depressing but powerful and interesting docu-mess focussed on Afghanistan but ranting about how the West losing its way (eg: passing political power to the financial industry) and beliefs enabled Wahhabi-inspired movements to set the world scene. Interesting his contrast between ISIS's backward yearning to an imagined medieval time whereas Bin Laden wanted a Muslim enlightenment, but thought the West prevented it and so had to be destroyed. Highly annoying film because of both random jumping around in chronology and endless pointless interludes (including many from Carry on Up the Khyber!!). Title comes from location of 1945 meeting between King Saud and FDR where Americans got agreement to access Saudi oil and sell them arms in exchange for not messing with their Wahhabi faith.
Jan 17	Spotlight	Tom McCarthy: Michael Keaton, Liev Schreiber, Rachel McAdams	2	Dramatised version of the real story of how the Boston Globe uncovered massive child abuse, and cover-ups, by the Catholic church. Excellently filmed (if a bit dense with US legal and political references) and less Hollywood than "All the President's Men".
Jan 17	Manchester by the Sea	Kenneth Lonergan: Casey Affleck, Michelle Williams, Lucas Hedges	3+	Emotionally frozen man has to take on his nephew after his brother dies. The man is traumatised by the deaths of his children caused by him neglecting a fire while drunk one night. Very slow, and at least 30mins too long, but beautiful and understated filming
Feb 17	Gone Baby Gone	Ben Affleck: Casey Affleck, Morgan Freeman, Michelle Monaghan	3	Poor but powerful film about kidnap of small girl and police corruption in Boston. Bad sound/dialogue and an almost impenetrably complex police/kidnap motivations. But the final conundrum – should the little girl stay with "nice" folk who kidnapped her and will give her a "better" life, or be returned to her drug-dealing, little-caring mother – was short but telling.
Feb 17	Hidden Figures	Theodore Melfi: Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer, Janelle Monáe, Kevin Costner	3-	Corny Hollywood biopic of three black women – Mathematician, Computer programmer and Engineer – working at Nasa during the launch of John Glen's earth orbit mission in 1962(?). Background of civil rights and the ignominies of still-very-separate races, but all too pretty-pretty and scientifically/computery nonsense.
Feb 17	Still Alice	Richard Glatzer, Wash Westmoreland: Julianne Moore	3	OK tale of Early Onset Alzheimer's destroying the life, and challenging the family, of female academic from affluent New York milieu. Rather too Hollywood, and the story stops once the initial stages are over ending with a very brief scene once Alice has full-blown A.
Mar 17	My Old Lady	Israel Horowitz: Maggie Smith, Kristin Scott Thomas, Kevin Kline	3	American man comes to Paris to take over an apartment left him by his father. Finds it has 90-year-old sitting tenant (MS) who used to be his father's lover and daughter (KST) who may be his sister. Not a huge story line, but such good actors it's a fine watch.
Mar 17	Two Days one Night	Luc Dardenne: Marion Cotillard	3	Woman who has been off work for a while with depression finds work is cutting back and had a ballot the Friday before her return of the 16 employees as to whether the others want her back, or a €1k bonus and went for the latter. A second ballot is promised for the Monday, and she tries over the weekend to canvas for a change in vote. Very unemotional cinema-veritee and slightly drawn out, but great acting from MC.
Mar 17	Viceroy's House	Gurinder Chadha: Hugh Bonneville, Gillian Anderson, Michael Gambon	3	Slightly glossy/superficial coverage of Mountbatten's brief tenure overseeing the partition of India in 1947. Did show some of the Hindu/Muslim (little on the Sikh's) antagonism and brutality, but mainly trumpeted Britain's fault, and the (maybe true) story that Churchill had pre-agreed separate states with Jinnah in 1945, making Radcliffe's commission more or less a rubber stamp of that.
Mar 17	London Road	Rufus Norris: Olivia Colman	3	The story set round the killing of the five prostitutes in Ipswich, and the trial of their killer as told in the actual words of residents and other locals. Bizarrely and very successfully most of the dialog was sung, rather in the style of the Iambic Pentameter's in Yes (Dinard 2005).
Mar 17	Phoenix	Christian Petzold: Nina Hoss, Ronald Zehrfeld, Nina Kunzendorf	3	Slow but compelling German film. Jewish singer survives Auschwitz but comes back with massively disfigured face. When this is repaired she looks for, and finds, her husband who she still loves. Implausibly he fails to recognise her but befriends her to be a surrogate for herself so he can claim her wealth. For some reason she plays along with this, but then gradually finds out that it was him who betrayed her to the Nazis.
Mar 17	The Lunchbox	Ritesh Batra: Irrfan Khan, Nimrat Kaur	3	Gentle, if slow, tale set in Mumbai. Widowed man approaching retirement has his lunch sent in each day (as do all the clerks where he works). One day the lunch is way better, because a mix-up in the delivery means he now gets the lunch the sad young wife of a philandering husband thinks she is sending him. The mix-up continues, and the two start corresponding via notes in the lunch box. They never meet, but his support gives her the courage to leave her husband.
Mar 17	Lion	Garth Davis: Sunny Pawar (young Saroo), Dev Patel (Saroo), Rooney Mara (Lucy), Nicole Kidman, David Wenham, Abhishek Bharate (brother, Guddu)	3	Touching (but too long) true story of young Indian boy who gets lost (hiding on a train that takes him across India), is then adopted by an Aussie couple, and, in his 20's finds his real Mum.
May 17	Treacle Jr	Jamie Thraves: Aidan Gillen, Tom Fisher	3+	Confused/depressed man (TF) abandons his wife and child and goes to London where he starts dossing on the street. He is befriended by manic, almost down and out, Irish always positive guy (AG) sharing a flat with an unpredictable young woman, possibly a hooker. Manic man restores hope to the other and the close sees him heading back to his family having bought the AG character a drum kit he has been saving for for years.

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
May 17	Home (3MOH)	Daniel Mulloy: Jack O'Connell, Holliday Grainger	2	Backwards portrayal of the refugee crisis with couple and two young kids leaving comfortable UK and being people smuggled across the channel and a war zone to a refugee camp. Only 20 mins, but could even have been shorter and been as effective.
May 17	Woman in gold	Helen Mirren, Ryan Reynolds, Daniel Brühl	3+	Biopic of Jewish American woman, who fled Austria at the beginning of WW2, suing the Austrian government for the return of Klimt paintings (including the iconic title piece) stolen from her family by the Nazis.
Jun 17	A United Kingdom	Amma Asante: David Oyelowo, Rosamund Pike	3	Film about Seretse Khama, heir to throne/chieftanship of Bechuanaland (later Botswana) and his white wife. Despite huge social pressure, rift with his reigning uncle and huge political interference by the Brits (who were virulently against him because his white wife and ideas threatened South Africa's new Apartheid and which the UK wanted to keep on-side, for reasons such as being a bastion against Communism, banished SK from his country), he finally (partly due to nifty politicking and lucky finding of diamonds, giving wealth to the country) converted the country to democracy and then independence. A very interesting story, but told in rather too schmaltzy a way, with his wife, particularly, not being conveyed as tough as she must have been.
Jul 17	Miles Ahead		5	Miles Davies biopic. Dull
Jul 17	The Big Short	Michael Lewis, Adam McKay: Christian Bale, Steve Carell, Ryan Gosling, Brad Pitt, Rafe Spall	3-	Fast moving, but sadly not very intelligible, story based on real events and characters who separately bet on the (sub-prime) housing market collapsing before it did in 2007/2008.
Aug 17	Dunkirk	Christopher Nolan: Kenneth Branagh, Mark Rylance	4-	Dreadful dragged out thing. Whilst giving a feeble impression of the mayhem, it failed dismally to convey the scale or organisation of the saving of 300,000+ lives. Full of inconsistencies, rubbish continuity and grossly histrionic and unreal (not) near drowning scenes. KB, purportedly in charge of Naval operations, looking endlessly statuesque on the mole at Dunkirk uttering, occasional ham lines, but doing nothing at all. Loads of pretty young men gazing cinematically and also doing more or less nothing, and repeating the same actions.
	<i>Dinard 2017 Film festival 27-Sep – 1-Oct</i>			
Sep 17	Emily Dickinson, A Quiet Passion	Terence Davies: Cynthia Nixon	4	Turgid, slow, mannered bio of ED. Very sharp witty dialogue (often too smart to follow) let down by indulgent, 2-hour dragged out, too pretty presentation of 19 th century middle class life.
Sep 17	Lady Macbeth	William Oldroyd:	4-	Young woman married into northern mill-owning family. Obnoxious father-in-law and vile husband who won't sleep with her, so she falls ludicrously and unconvincingly in love with Lady-Chatterley-like servant. Bunks him overtly and then starts killing off all around. Nonsense action bits with long drawn-out interludes.
Sep 17	Hell and High Water	David Mackenzie: Jeff Bridges, Chris Pine	3+	Two brothers on spree robbing the bank that's over-mortgaged their Mum's small Texan farmstead. Being chased by about-to-retire Texas Ranger and his American Indian partner. Rangers catch up with the brothers, and the wilder of the two leads them off to a great shoot out where he kills the Ranger's partner and is then shot by the Ranger. Younger, smart, brother carries on, paying off the debt with the stolen money and gifting the farm to his estranged kids (who can live comfortably ever after, because oil has recently been found on there). Ranger and this brother meet a year later when latter promises to tell former how he managed the whole clever thing (but never does). All nicely interwoven with references to Texas history and pre-whiteman eras.
Sep 17	Hot Fuzz	Simon Pegg, Edgar Wright: Simon Pegg, Jim Broadbent	3	Great slapstick farce – London policeman (SP) has been too effective and has shown up his sloppy peers, so is posted to rural town. Here he's even more the sore thumb since the entire town is corrupt, from the police chief (JB) down. Features almost any mid-range UK actor you can think of.
Sep 17	In Another Life	Jason Wingard: Elie Haddad	3	Almost-documentary drama of Syrian couple mainly in Calais' Jungle camp as they try to get to Britain. Flash backs and forwards give history of their appalling journeys and grim sacrifices they and others make.
Sep 17	Gods own Country	Francis Lee:	4	Dull story set on Yorkshire sheep farm. Troubled son of farm is struggling to run it as his infirm Dad has another stroke. They hire a Romanian lad to help son, and they fall implausibly in love...
Sep 17	Sea Sorrow	Vanessa Redgrave:	4-	Documentary mainly full of luvvies rambling about the awfulness of current refugee crisis. Back references to UN charter of human rights and rights of the child, and herself almost equating her stint as a child exiled from London to her aunt's country house with the Calais Jungle miserati. Alf Dobbs and some academic of Ukrainian diaspora background tempered things a bit.
Sep 17	A prayer before dawn	Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire: Joe Cole	3	Grim bio of northern lad, Billy Moore, imprisoned in Thai jail for using drugs. Here he holds his own against the other vicious inmates, converting his western boxing skills to Thai kick boxing, becoming a champion. Superb filming of the endless and violent fighting.
Sep 17	The Levelling	Hope Dickson Leach: Ellie Kendrick	3-	Another dull farming tale. This in Somerset where slightly estranged vet daughter of the family returns after her brother, who has just been gifted the troubled farm, has committed suicide.
Sep 17	Their Finest	Lone Scherfig: Gemma Arterton, Bill Nighy, ... and every other UK character actor you can think of	3-	Female hired to help write script for WW2 propaganda-ish movies.
Sep 17	Patrick's Day	Terry McMahon:	4-	Disturbed young man has fantasy (or maybe not) of love/sex with troubled airline stewardess. Controlling Mum tries to hide/stop it.
Sep 17	The Killing of the Sacred Deer	Yorgos Lanthimos: Barry Keoghan, Nicole Kidman, Colin Farrell	3-	Well-off pair of doctors in N. America start being hunted and attacked by disturbed supernaturally-powered boy, Boy's Dad died as result of the husband drink-induced carelessness in surgery years before (he's been on the wagon ever since). Distinguished only by full-frontal of NK.
Sep 17	Another excellent set of (all English) "shortcuts"			
	Domestic Policy (6')	Alicia MacDonald: Lesley Manville	3	Meeting of besuited men at end of WW1 discussing what to do with the women who are no longer required in factories, etc. Lots of heavy stereotype views (with only one enlightened man) all overheard/observed by increasingly frustrated woman serving the tea, who eventually explodes.
	The Nest (20')	Jamie Jones: Vicky McClure	3	Single mum evicted from her council flat into near destitution, but at least gets some reconciliation with her teenage daughter.
	Ghosted (10')	Neville Pierce:	3	Woman on series of dates after her cheating husband has died. His ghost in the background of each having witty exchanges with the woman, who eventually finds a Mr Right, whose own ghost-wife helps put the two together.
	Edith (14')	Christian Cooke: Peter Mullan	3-	Man mourning dead wife and unclear past relationships.
	Dear Marianne (6')	Mark Jenkin:	3	Series of cine-film (in appearance at least) postcards in deadpan voice over as man tours Ireland and reports back to his girlfriend/wife.
	The Party (14')	Andrea Harkin:	3	Teenagers/youths in 1972 Belfast have party which some (being IRA-ers) have to come to in disguise. Relationships blossom but the party is wrecked when UDF assassins barge in.
	Bad Advice (6')	Matthew Lee:	3	Interesting and amusing cartoon with three talking heads discussing relationships and their failings.
	White Riot (9')	Rubika Shah:	3	Documentary with great news footage of riots leading to Rock against Racism punk reaction in 1977.
	The Driving Seat (9')	Phil Lowe: Janie Dee, James Lailey	3+	Couple trying to titivate their relationship by having (and failing to have) sex in their car in the driveway to their house.
	We love Moses (15')	Dionne Edwards:	3	Young black girl has to grow up quickly when she finds her brother and his friend she worships are having a gay relationship.
	Homegrown (9')	Quentin Haberham:	3-	Gardening father and son, puppet film.

Films

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Sep 17	Daphne	Peter Mackie Burns: Emily Beecham, Geraldine James	3	Bright witty 30-year old sous-chef troubled by life, with overbearing Mum (who's dying of cancer). She witnesses a stabbing and helps save the victim, but then becomes even more wild and disturbed. Unconvincing, but watchable due to EB's mesmeric screen presence.
Sep 17	That good night	Eric Styles: John Hurt, Charles Dance	3	Powerful performance by JH in gorgeous Portuguese mansion. Dying screenwriter sets up (possibly imaginary) arrangement with "The Society" to euthanase him to avoid his wife suffering. But reconciliation with his son and a grandchild to come helps him go for a reprieve.
Oct 17	The Death of Stalin	Armando Iannucci: Jason Isaacs, Simon Russell Beale (Beria)	3+	Great irreverent covering of Stalin's death, the sycophancy that delayed its announcement and the jostling that followed.
Oct 17	Pili	Leanne Welham: Bello Rashid	3-	Single mum with HIV in Tanzania perseveres to move from farmhand to running a kiosk in her village. Great filming, but very unemotional dialogue (only 1 professional actor involved, apparently) made it all very unconvincing.
Oct 17	It Happened Here	Kevin Brownlow:	3	Amateur film very professionally made over 8 years up to first release in 1964. Home movie and Pathe news style and based in a 1944 England that has been occupied by the Germans. Shows much of the population cooperating with them and becoming Fascist themselves.
Feb 18	Abdul and Victoria		4	Trite tosh built round actual friendship between Queen Victoria and a younger Muslim brought to UK to present some Indian gift of fealty, and who she takes to, so he stays for many years.
Feb 18	Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri	Frances McDormand, Woody Harrelson	3+	Unsmiling woman puts a message to the local police chief up on 3 billboards after no progress solving the burning and rape of her daughter 7 months earlier. Lots of guilt and anger all round. Superb acting and a more-or-less feel-good ending as spiralling angers are calmed.
Feb 18	The Foreigner	Jackie Chan, Pierce Brosnan	3	Irish post Good Friday IRA legacy. Some splinter group blows up pub in London and Gerry Adams like figure (PB) tries to get to perps, who turn out to be himself. Good believable stuff
Mar 18	Ladybird	Saoirse Ronan	3	Light, laconic, coming-of-age/daughter-Mum US teen story. Easy watch, let down by main character, allegedly 17-year old girl, looking over 30.
Mar 18	His Finest Hour	Joe Wright: Gary Oldman, Kristin Scott Thomas	4	Churchillery – set over the start of Churchill's PM-ship and ending with Dunkirk. Good acting but unimpressive and nothing new in it.
Mar 18	Breathe	Andy Serkis: Claire Foy, Andrew Garfield	4	Rather trite telling of man paralysed from neck down by Polio in ~1960. With immense support and pushing from his wife he survives and, with friends, gets wheel chair with built-in respirator so he can live at home – a first. Based on true story, and produced by his son.
Mar 18	Sweet Country	Warwick Thornton: Sam Neill, Bryan Brown	3	Brutal tale set in remote ~1920 Australian farms and rural township. Sadistic casually violent whitefella's (several mentally disturbed post WW1) raping and killing blackfella's that they use more or less as slaves. Slow and arty, beautifully filmed but too long!
Mar 18	Meru	Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi, Jimmy Chin: Conrad Anker, Jimmy Chin, Renan Ozturk	3	Documentary on the two attempts by these three telegenic Americans to climb the massively difficult eponymous Indian peak. 2 nd (successful) attempt even more traumatic because it was only 5 months after RO suffered severe brain and spine injuries in an unrelated intervening outdoor session (after which JC also somehow survived a full-on avalanche). Some amazing footage, most, presumably, taken by the three but some must have been from elsewhere (drone? Studio/mash-up?).
Mar 18	Margot at the Wedding		5	Nicole Kidman going to some East Coast wedding. Gave up after 5 mins
Mar 18	Little Men		5	Gave up after a few minutes
Mar 18	Trilogy: The Weeping Meadow		5	Turgid slow early 20 th century Greek moody mania.
Apr 18	You Were Never Really Here	Lynne Ramsay: Joaquin Phoenix, Ekaterina Samsonov	3-	Powerful and brutally violent. Ludicrously enigmatic hit man with tortured youth (lots of cryptic flashbacks, most involving breathlessness in plastic bags and a possibly dying-of-stab-wounds mother) goes to rescue under-age girl being abused by a politician. Far to arty, slow and confusing to follow. But well filmed and acted.
Apr 18	Alone in Berlin	Vincent Perez (III): Emma Thompson, Brendan Gleeson, Daniel Brühl	3	Film based on true events of Berlin couple who after losing their only son in WW2 were so angry with Hitler's warmongering they started leaving postcards all over town denouncing him and his war machine. Hunted down by a detective they were both eventually guillotined. Quite slow moving, but great acting.
Apr 18	Icarus		3	Expose of Russian athletics drug cheating
Apr 18	Extremis	Dan Krauss:	4	Fly on wall view of terminal illness wards in a US hospital.
Apr 18	The Circle	Tim Hanks, Emma Watson	4-	Ghastly vapid happy-clappy Californian high tech Facebook-like company trying to take over the world.
May 18	Lo and Behold	Werner Herzog:	3-	Documentary/reportage about the Internet. Series of not always well introduced sections on different aspects. None particularly illuminating, tho' it was salutary to be reminded what a disaster it would be for the (Western at least) world if the Internet is killed – eg: by a solar flare.
May 18	Buena Vista Social Club		3	
May 18	The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo		3	
Jun 18	Elle		5	French junk
Jun 18	To Kill a Mockingbird		5	Too slow
Jun 18	Nebraska	Alexander Payne: Bruce Dern, Will Forte	3-	Road movie with confused old Dad and 40-ish son humouring Dad in driving 800 miles to claim what he thinks he's won from a misleading marketing "you have won \$1m" flyer. On the way both find out more about each other. They also, reluctantly, visit Dad's old home town and extended family who all want in on the supposed money. Good music, acting and memorable black and white mid-west landscapes. But sadly a bit too drawn out to recommend.
Jun 18	Berlin Syndrome	Cate Shortland: Teresa Palmer, Max Riemelt	3	Aussie backpacker is seduced and then kidnapped by good looking German English teacher in Berlin. Though treated OK and despite some form of enduring lust/love relationship she manages to escape in the end. Very slow at times and TP was far too wide-eyed-ly passive when not actively flirtatious
	<i>Dinard 2018 Film festival 26-Sep – 30-Sep</i>			
Sep 18	Old Boys	Toby MacDonald: Alex Lawther, Pauline Etienne	3	Easy watching film set in public school where lovely daughter of French teacher falls for sports champ prefect who is too dumb to develop the relationship. So, he uses a nerdy younger boy to be his liaison. Nerdy boy falls for girl who eventually realises who she has been wooed by, but to no avail! Allegedly a modern-day Cyrano de Bergerac tale.
Sep 18	The Bookshop	Penelope Fitzgerald, Isabel Coixet: Emily Mortimer, Patricia Clarkson, Bill Nighy	4	Dull, terribly slow story of war widow setting up bookshop in East Anglian coastal town.
Sep 18	A good set of (all English) "shortcuts"			
	Call me Alvy (10')		3	Psychiatrist helps Bar-Bitzvah boy with Woody Allen fixation
	Robot & Scarecrow (15')	Kibwe Tavares:	3	Robot girl and scarecrow fall for each other at a music festival. Great acting

Films

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	Two Strangers who meet five times (12')	Markus Markou:	3+	Good short story with the 5 meetings well told: 2: thuggish man (TM) is abusive to Asian guy (AG) at cash machine 3: TM does well in job interview so is introduced to owner, who is AG, so doesn't get the job 4: TM down and out begging on street. AG happens to pass by and gives him money (gotten from a cash machine) 1: two kids happily playing at the beach. One Asian the other white who is removed by mother saying to stop him "getting dirty" 5: Alzheimer-y AG in home is introduced to his new carer, a reformed TM
	The Overcoat (18')	Jason Watkins	4	Dull tale of dull proof reader who gets a new overcoat only to have it stolen.
	I don't want to call it Home (12')		4	Turkish mixed cartoon / live film.
	Cabin Pressure (3')		3	Stop motion tale of two passengers in plane that crashes and go wild thinking they are going to die, but don't.
	Vertical shapes in a horizontal landscape (4')		4	Dull images of southern England
	Sasha and Joe are getting married (14')	Pier Wilkie: Josette Simon	3	Nice tale of wedding dress seamstress finding her estranged daughter (who was Sasha – now called Joe by foster family) is client.
	Cake (6')	Alan Friel: Maxine Peake	3	Something about two women wanting to commit suicide together on Dungeness sands.
	Bridge (10')	Iain Robertson: Katy Murphy, Steven Duffy	3+	Great suicide preventer talks woman out of jumping off what looks like Dean Bridge.
	The Entertainer (15')	Toby Jones	4	Dire film of dire ex-comic compeering an awful wedding party.
Sep 18	Funny Cow	Adrian Shergold: Maxine Peake, Alun Armstrong	3+	Poor northern girl brought up in abusive relationships (father, drunkard mother, brute of husband) turns to stand-up comedy. She is successful and becomes rich. Excellent acting from MP and the two girls playing her younger selves.
Sep 18	Winterlong	David Jackson:	4	Off the radar man has his son from a long collapsed marriage dumped on him to look after. He moves from dilapidated caravan to incongruously twee mobile home park and a good relationship builds between the two.
Sep 18	Jellyfish	James Gardner: Liv Hill	3+	Another abused poor family child – lots of echo's of Funny Cow. This 15-year old is looks after her two younger siblings while her drunkard mother does nothing to help. But has jobs on side to supplement social security, and gets raped at one point when needing more money after useless mother blows the rent payments.
Sep 18	Lucid	Adam Morse: Laurie Paul	4	Bizarre story of "lucid dreaming" where young man is helped by psychiatric-y neighbour to live dual life to try to help attain a girl he fancies by practising encounters in a dream world. LP looking like Alex Hartog some of the time!
Sep 18	The Drummer and the Keeper	Nick Kelly: Dermot Murphy, Jacob McCarthy	3	Autistic lad and early 20's mentally ill drummer team up to help each other live outside the institutions they are consigned to or threatened with. Pretty silly, but superb Asperger acting by JM.
Sep 18	Forgiven	Roland Joffé: Forest Whitaker, Eric Bana	3+	Powerful fictionalised account of Desmond Tutu's handling of a vicious and unrepentant AWW-like Afrikaner as part of the Truth and Reconciliation commission. Rather too neat cycle from complete stand-off to the confession and effective suicide (as his thuggish cronies kill him in prison as a turn coat).
Sep 18	Men of Honor (Journey's End)	Saul Dibb: Sam Claflin, Asa Butterfield, Paul Bettany	3	Better than I'd expected version of R.C. Sherriff's excellent Journey's End. The film was long but added a dimension of the scope, waiting and filth of the trenches.
Sep 18	Journeyman	Paddy Considine: Paddy Considine, Jodie Whittaker	4	Ageing champion boxer is severely brain damaged in his last fight. PC was hard to believe as a boxer, but acted brain problems well.
Sep 18	The Bromley Boys	Steve Kelly: Brenock O'Connor, Alan Davies	3-	About the (apparently) real events when Bromley Town avoided relegation from some league when a young lad (BOC) enthused the ir supporters club and the team to win a crucial match.
Sep 18	Scarborough	Barnaby Southcombe:	3	Two teacher/pupil couples go for a dirty/lovers weekend in a tired seaside hotel. Long teasing as to whether the couples know each other and are there at the same time. Lots of similar and parallel dialogue and events (including both women – schoolgirl and teacher) reveal they are pregnant. In the end it turns out that the two stories are ~20 years apart with the schoolgirl becoming the female teacher. Good enough story ridiculously drawn out. - would have been a 2 if 20 mins shorter (than its 84').
Sep 18	Dead in a Week (or your money back)	Tom Edmunds: Aneurin Barnard, Tom Wilkinson, Christopher Eccleston, Freya Mavor	2	Great black comedy. Young man is failing to commit suicide so hires an assassin to kill him during the next week. He then meets and falls for a delightful girl working for the publisher that wants to handle his book on suicide. The incompetent past-it assassin fails to kill him on several occasions and, despite many other fatalities we get a happy ending.
Oct 18	Cold War		3+	Arty B&W Polish film with great music and locations. Starts with youngish music director going round rural Poland recording folk music in 1949. He helps run and recruit for a cultural institute and falls for one of his sultry gifted pupils. They have an affair and, disillusioned by being forced to pollute the music repertoire with Party slogan songs defects to the west when he and his group are touring in Berlin. The girl promised to come with him but didn't in the end. They keep meeting over the years in a series of abrupt episodes, spending some time living together in Paris before both, homesick for Poland, return there. He to arrest torture and imprisonment. She uses influence to get him out and they end with a suicide pact.
Nov 18	Letters from Baghdad		3+	Documentary on Gertrude Bell which seemed very familiar. Either I've seen it before – Tilda Swinton's narration (amongst many excellent talking heads) sounding perfect – but maybe because it felt to be based on Georgina Howell's Queen of the Desert.
Nov 18	The Post	Steven Spielberg: Tom Hanks, Meryl Streep	3	Dramatisation of the Pentagon Papers affair in 1971. The papers were a secret history by the Department of Defence on the USA's involvement in Vietnam from 1945 to 1967 – containing damning info on their continuation of a war they knew they couldn't win, but which they did not want to lose. The papers were leaked to the NY Times who had one day's publication about them before being stopped by an injunction. This (long winded in starting) film covers the subsequent acquisition and publication of the papers by the Washington Post with all the legal hassles that involved (and brinkmanship as, apparently, the Post was trying to go public in the week of publication)
Dec 18	Widows	Steve McQueen: Elizabeth Debicki, Michelle Rodriguez, Viola Davis, Cynthia Erivo, Liam Neeson	3	Three widows of (apparently) failed heist by the main man (LN) and spunky girl Friday carry on main man's next heist to avoid being killed by the targets of the failed one (where the booty was supposedly destroyed in the fireball that ended it). With many a twist and turn they succeed only to find the main man set up the failure, so gets his comeuppance. Very good film, but, at well over 2 hours, was 30 minutes too long.
Dec 18	Conflict Tiger		3	Documentary retelling the end of the Siberian tiger that was eliminated after killing local poachers in John Vaillant's "The Tiger". Mainly head shots of participants and some re-enactments with them and a couple (only, I think) of actors for the two victims and too little (probably inevitably) of actual tigers. But, intriguingly, the film crew seem to have been there for the killing of the man-eater.
Dec 18	Jackie	Natalie Portman	3-	Story of (some) back history and the assassination from Jackie's perspective.
Jan 19	Denial	Timothy Spall, Rachel Weisz, Tom Wilkinson	3	Docudrama of the libel trial brought by the awful Hitler-loving, Holocaust-denying David Irving against American historian Deborah Lipstadt who said as much in a book she wrote. DI deliberately brought the case in the UK where rules of presumed innocence are the inverse of the US and DL had to prove that what she said was true, rather than DI having to prove he had been slighted. But, with DL's clever and compassionate legal team DI (who egotistically and unwisely defended himself) was defeated, being a major blow to his Holocaust-denying milieu

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Feb 19	Timbuktu		3	Surreal, beautifully filmed life of various folk living under Isis-like oppression in Mali. Hard to follow, with many characters being visually similar. Guardian write-up: French drama set in the Malian city of Timbuktu during the jihadist takeover of the country in 2012. The feature chronicles the impact of citizens living in and around the city after Islamic militants arrive to implement their extreme doctrine, which begins with the destruction of many of the inhabitants' cultural heritage sites. Amongst those that clash with the new regime are four people who are arrested for making music and have their female singer Fatou (Fatoumata Diawara) subjected to 40 lashes. The local imam (Adel Mahmoud Cherif) pleads with the intruders to abandon their crusade and spare his people but has his protestations ignored. Meanwhile, just outside the city in dunes previously free of jihadists, a cattle herder (Ibrahim Ahmed) and a fisherman (Abel Jafri) become embroiled in a struggle that brings jihadist judgement upon them
Feb 19	2001 A Space Odyssey	Stanley Kubrik	3	Amazing to see the film again and see how well the special effects were done back in the 60's before CGI et al. And some beautiful slowness and music. But ultimately a long film of pretty self-absorbed tosh.
Mar 19	Roma		4	Long, slow, stylish black&white film set in 1971 Mexico city (I think). But felt like a series of short films joined together by having the same characters, rather than having any sort of cohesion, message or whatever.
Mar 19	Camp 14 Total Control Zone		5	Documentary about "Escape from Camp 14" guy. Dreadfully slow and uninteresting compared to the book about him.
Mar 19	Everybody Knows	Asghar Farhadi: Penélope Cruz, Javier Bardem	4	Dreadfully dragged out tale of kidnapping of one of an extended Spanish family. Might have been OK if about an hour but at 2:15 it was awful.
Apr 19	Wild Rose	Tom Harper: Jessie Buckley, Julie Walters, Sophie Okonedo	3-	Schmaltzy tale of young country music mad woman just out of 1-year prison stint. Reunited with her two kids and long-suffering Mum (JW) she is much more into her music than her family. Dreadfully obvious/slow story, but good music and singing by JB herself.
May 19	The Monuments Men	George Clooney: George Clooney, Matt Damon, Bill Murray	4-	Corny tat loosely based (allegedly) around actual events. Group of art experts recruited by the US to go round Europe in the last year or two of WW2 to save/recover valuable pieces of art.
May 19	Allied	Robert Zemeckis: Brad Pitt, Marion Cotillard	3	US RAF-linked intelligence officer meets Parisian woman in 1941 Casablanca to assassinate local Nazi bigwig. She, allegedly, an Resistance leader who escaped Paris when her network was compromised. They fall in love, return to London, get married and have a kid. He is then told by his bosses that she is a German spy and they set up a "blue die" test to see if she transmits a bit of bogus secret info he deliberately leaves around. With lots of angst and his own research he realises she is the spy and comes to a bloody end. Would have been a decent film if 90mins rather than 2h.
Sep 19	Shallow Grave	Danny Boyle: Ewan McGregor, Christopher Eccleston, Kerry Fox	3	Three flatmates in lovely spacious Edinburgh New Town flat take on a fourth who soon after they find dead with a suitcase of money. They agonise over and then dismember and bury him, dragging the three of them down into more violence and death. Fun, if rather disappointing quirky end.
	<i>Dinard 2019 Film festival 25-Sep – 29-Sep</i>			
Sep 19	The Favourite	Yorgos Lanthimos: Olivia Colman, Rachel Weisz, Emma Stone	3	Costume drama of Queen Anne and her two close female aides - initially Sarah Churchill (whose biased memoirs heavily influence the story) and an impoverished cousin who usurped her. Didn't particularly care for the film and all its extravagances, but made us all read up on Anne and the late 17 th century politics and monarchy that preceded her.
Sep 19	Bohemian Rhapsody	Bryan Singer: Rami Malek, Tom Hollander	3+	Great biopic on Freddie Mercury with loads of wonderful Queen music.
Sep 19	For Sama	Waad Al-Khateab and Edward Watts: Hamza, Sama and Waad Al-Khateab	2	Grisly documentary made by journalist for her daughter born under siege in Aleppo. Much of it in the gory rooms of the last functioning hospital which her husband set up and ran. Mercifully they all got out in the end (having decided to stay on an help when they could have left earlier). Amazing that so many services (water, electrics, mobile phones) continue to work throughout.
Sep 19	Red Joan	Trevor Nunn: Judi Dench, Sophie Cookson	3	Easy-watching version of the book.
Sep 19	Cordelia	Adrian Shergold: Catherine McCormack	3-	Wierd, possibly supra-natural, tale of one of twin sisters who survived, but is traumatised by, the London tube bombings. Gets together with cellist upstairs from her delightfully dated Kensington/Chelsea flat but ends up murdering him, maybe.
Sep 19	Animals	Sophie Hyde: Holliday Grainger, Alia Shawkat	3-	Great pair of debauched whacky Dublin girls endlessly drinking and drugging. Splendid repartee but not much else as one of them (HG of Strike fame) attempts to leave (or share) their gay-ish relationship for a man as the pressure of friends having kids builds.
Sep 19	Official Secrets	Gavin Hood: Keira Knightley, Ralph Fiennes, Matt Smith, Rhys Ifans Matthew Goode	2	Excellent telling the story of a GCHQ whistleblower who copied a damning US document to the Observer in an attempt to stop the Iraq war. It happened too late - only getting out days before the US and UK went in - so did not work and meant that few people now remember it. But she subsequently want to trial under the Official Secrets act, where her brilliant (Liberty) lawyer managed to link her case to proving that the war was illegal. So the prosecution dropped the case.
Sep 19	Fisherman's Friends	Chris Foggin: Daniel Mays	3-	Pap, based on real story. Spiv music promoter gets Port Isaac folk music group into the charts.
Sep 19	A good set of (all English) "shortcuts"			
	Crashing Waves (3')	Emma Gilbertson:	3	Dance between two thuggish young men in the open area between tower blocks. Good contrast from expectations of the violence that normally happens in such an area - let down by slightly clumsy dancing.
	Widderishins (11')	Simon P Biggs:	3+	Cartoon of 19 th century looking Scottish gent in a Heath Robinson high tech world of flying cars and personal robots.
	Ambition (13')	Ryan Hooper: Simon Russell Beale	2	Attendant at toll booth somewhere in Wales is visited by various bizarre characters during his evening shift, including teenage girl triplets who rob him at shotgun-point of the £3 in the fee box and his sandwich ... which are later returned by some other enigmatic character.
	Becoming Cherrie (11')	Nicky Larkin: Matthew Cavan	3+	Hugely eloquent story of actor and performer Matthew Cavan (Belfast drag artist, Cherrie Ontop), and the difficulties of living with HIV in Northern Ireland
	In our Skin (3')	Rosa Beiroa:	3+	Sensual and animated line drawing images of females exploring every part of their bodies.
	Capital (16')	Freddy Syborn: Harry Enfield, Jon Snow (voice)	3	Great spoof on Brexit. Referendum on restoring Capital Punishment passed by 50.2% majority. New department of 4 misfits start work to implement it.
	Mash (12')	Tyro Heath:	3	Following young girl keeping herself amused in scrap yard while her disabled(?) brother is in hospital. True events filmed by family Charlotte W knows.
	All of this is Everything (4')	Noah Payne-Frank:	3-	Guy wandering though woods talking in rhyme about/to his recently dead wife/partner.
	Special Delivery (4')	Robert Hackett:	3-	Postman delivering letters to council tower blocks is given one by secret(?) admirer.
	The 1st (13')	Mark Waites:	3+	First time director making commercial film involving blowing up a wall of milk bottles screws up.
Sep 19	The Keeper	Marcus H. Rosenmüller: David Kross, Freya Mavor	3+	Biopic of Bert Trautmann, German POW who becomes goalkeeper for Manchester City after WW2.
Sep 19	Denmark	Adrian Shergold: Rafe Spall, Simone Lykke	4	Unemployed/able man living miserably in Wales sees that Danish prisoners live in better conditions than him. So goes to Denmark determined to commit crime so he can go to prison there. Meets beautiful girl who turns him round.
Sep 19	Happy New Year Colin Burstead	Ben Wheatley:	4	New Year's get-together of squabbling dysfunctional family.
Sep 19	Only You	Harry Wootliff (F): Laia Costa, Josh O'Connor	3-	Couple meet chasing same cab in Glasgow, get together and try to start family without success. All well told but somehow unconvincing portrayal of their anguish.

Films

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Sep 19	Wait & Sea	Simon Coss and Antoine Tracou	3	Well made documentary on the impending impact of Brexit on French/British fishing fleets.
Sep 19	Mr. Jones	Agnieszka Holland: James Norton, Vanessa Kirby	3+	Excellent biopic of journalist, originally foreign affairs advisor to Lloyd George, with kudos of having interviewed Hitler. Goes to Russia in early 1930's to investigate Stalin's famine inflicted on the Ukraine.
Sep 19	Little Joe	Jessica Hausner: Emily Beecham, Ben Whishaw	4	Total nonsense sci-fi-ish film about flower genetically engineered to make its owners happy at the expense of being sterile. But the plant starts controlling the humans to avoid this (in some unexplained way).
Sep 19	Hope Gap	William Nicholson: Bill Nighy, Annette Bening, Josh O'Connor	3	Break up of long-standing marriage, with son (JO'C) handling inter-parental communication.
Oct 19	The Escape	Dominic Savage: Gemma Arterton, Dominic Cooper	3	Moody story of depressed woman trapped in a marriage and two young kids in the suburbs, who ends up walking out on them all. Good tense acting by GA.
Oct 19	The Girl on the Train	Tate Taylor: Emily Blunt	3-	Film version of the book, transposed to affluent commuter line near New York. Much less impressive than the book.
Nov 19	Le Mans 66 (aka: Ford vs Ferrari)	James Mangold: Matt Damon, Christian Bale	2	Wonderfully telling of Ford deciding to get into racing cars, and building the GT40 to win the 1966 Le Mans 24 race, and beat Ferrari. Lots of (true I assume) drama off and on the track and it's difficult to see how they could have compressed the amazing tale down to less than the slightly gruelling 2½ hours. The two main characters are Carroll Shelby (MD) and his British driver, Ken Miles (CB). Also involves Ford execs Lee Iacocca, who championed them, and Leo Beebe smarmy marketing type who championed other driver/designer teams and demanded the weird slow down by Ken Miles at the end of the race so three Fords could cross the line together.
Dec 19	Responsible Child	Sean Buckley, Nick Holt: Billy Barratt, James Tarpey, Michelle Fairley, Tom Burke, Owen McDonnell, Stephen Campbell Moore	2	Superb film of 12-year old boy on full adult jury trial (along with his older brother) for murder of his Mum's violent and abusive partner. Focus mainly on the incongruity of a child being subjected to such a trial, rather than the event details and extenuating circumstances. Based on true story of similar murder in 2014.
Feb 20	Trumbo	John McNamara, Jay Roach: Bryan Cranston, Helen Mirren, John Goodman	3	Story of Dalton Trumbo, hugely successful Hollywood scriptwriter hit by the Communist/McCarthy frenzy in the late 1940's, including being jailed for a year. Amazingly this House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) nonsense continued until 1975, though the Hollywood side petered out in the early 1960's partly because some brave directors started crediting Trumbo on their films after a decade of him writing with pseudonyms or via other acceptable writers.
Feb 20	1917	Sam Mendes: George MacKay, Colin Firth, Benedict Cumberbatch, Dean-Charles Chapman, Andrew Scott	4	Far too long tale of pair of corporals traversing WW1 enemy lines to deliver a vital message to cancel a British assault into a German trap. The making with, apparently, very long continuous shots was way over-egged by the publicists and made little difference to this viewing public.
Feb 20	Free Solo	Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi, Jimmy Chin: Alex Honnold, Sanni McCandless	2+	Stunning film of AH free climbing massive face of El Capitan in Yosemite - 3000 sheer and overhang feet in 4 hours in 2017!
Feb 20	Once upon a Time In... Hollywood	Quentin Tarantino: Leonardo DiCaprio, Brad Pitt	4	Nicely filmed, but dull and far too long self indulgent movie-folk film. Casting an alternate fiction to the Sharon Tate / Charles Manson 1969 killing.
Feb 20	Franz	François Ozon: Paula Beer	3	German family and fiancée of killed-in-WW1 son in picturesque Quedlinburg town touched and troubled to meet young French ex-soldier who says he was best friend of the young German. But, it turns out he wasn't; he had killed him and is come to try to assuage his guilt. Fiancée hides this from her (to have been) parents-in-law to save their distress. The two youngsters fall for each other but that is not to be as he is now to be married to a French girl. All rather dragged out.
Feb 20	Cracks		5	Set in picturesque 1934 girls boarding school ... dull
Feb 20	A Date for Mad Mary	Darren Thornton: Seana Kerslake	3-	Confused young woman comes out from 6 months in jail for beating up another girl in time for what was her best friend's marriage. Everyone pressures her to get a plus-one date for it, which she tries in her sulken way, ending with a brief platonic liaison with another woman - which may or may not be back on from the enigmatic final scene.
Mar 20	Maiden: War of the Waves		2	Superb 2018 documentary on mid-20's Tracy Edwards putting together an all female crew for the 1989 Whitbread round-the-world race. Contrary to the massive chauvinistic antagonism and scepticism, they not only completing it, but won the two hardest legs in their class. Great actual footage with lots of talking-heads from the articulate and photogenic team and some of the, at the time, nay-sayers. TE herself is now the spit of Green party Caroline Lucas!
Mar 20	The man with the iron heart	Cédric Jimenez: Jason Clarke, Rosamund Pike	3	Biopic of the assassination of Hitler's chief man in German occupied Czechoslovakia, Reinhard Heydrich in Prague in 1942. Interesting lead up background including the (presumably true) detail that he, having been court-martialed from the Navy and not a Nazi, was persuaded to become one by his more rabid wife (RP). Also covering the extensive and brutal reprisals. Slightly drawn out / Hollywood, but not too much so.
Mar 20	Film Stars Don't Die In Liverpool	Paul McGuigan: Annette Bening, Jamie Bell, Julie Walters, Kenneth Cranham, Stephen Graham	3	Engaging, superbly acted, telling of (ex) Hollywood star Gloria Grahame's last few years. In her late 50's and after 4 children and 4 marriages (last to her 2 nd husband's son) she meets Peter Turner, a 26 year old bisexual actor, in Camden boarding house and they fall in love. He moves to the US with her. An earlier cancer recurs, but she won't tell him about it and throws him out in fit of anger. Some months later she's working in the UK and the C comes back big time. She asks to be taken to Turner's Liverpool home where he and his family care for her. Against her will they contact her oldest son, who comes and takes her back to New York, where she dies hours later.
Apr 20	The Lost City Of Z		4-	Dire, feeble, film based on the much more interesting book.
Apr 20	The Greatest Showman		5	Dire schmaltzy musical supposedly about P.T. Barnum
Apr 20	Balloon	Michael Bully Herbig:	3+	Dramatisation of the escape from E. Germany in 1979 by two families in a hot air balloon. Astonishing how they got hold of and fabricated the thing. They had one failed attempt, before a successful one. The film over-eggs the drama (cf: the info on Wikipedia, but who knows which is true!), which included one failed attempt - but it's a thrilling watch.
Apr 20	Odyssey	Jérôme Salle:	3	Biopic of Cousteau and his oceanic and wildlife work based on his Calypso boat. Rather trite and personality-based, but with some decent, if brief, underwater bits.
Apr 20	Stan & Ollie	Jon S. Baird: Steve Coogan, John C. Reilly	3	Telling the later days of Laurel & Hardy as the struggled for work and health. Excellent acting, but rather a sad and thin story.
Apr 20	The Dawn Wall	Josh Lowell, Peter Mortimer: Tommy Caldwell, Kevin Jorgeson	3	Another amazing climb up Yosemite's El Capitan in 2015. The a 19-day epic of "Free Climbing" the subtleties of definition I don't really understand, but allows ropes, belays, endless overnights in hanging platforms and repeats of pitches until done. Incredible climbing, but somehow less impressive than Alex Honnold's "Free solo" of a less demanding route. TC is the driver, with a rich back story of reluctantly killing their hostage captor in Kyrgyzstan in 2000 when he and his then girlfriend (to become first wife) were teenagers. Also, losing half an index finger a few years before this climb.
Apr 20	Legacy	Pete Travis: Charlie Cox, Simon Russell Beale, Romola Garai, Andrew Scott	3+	BBC adaptation of Alan Judd's Cold War spy novel. Reluctant spook (CC) persuaded to befriend an old Russian Uni friend to get secrets because CC is told his father was a Russian spy (which I think one finds at the end is a ruse by his bosses to "motivate" him). He sort of does so. Excellent concise show (only about 90 mins) with no unnecessary extrapolation of the many plot lines. One could imagine many productions would have puffed it out over several episodes (and, confusingly, Amazon shows it as "Episode 1", as if there is a series with more episodes, which there aren't).

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Apr 20	Knives Out	Rian Johnson: Daniel Craig, Ana De Armas, Jamie Lee Curtis	3	Good fun Agatha Christie like death mystery. Rich old American author found with his throat cut the eve of his birthday party with all his horrible offspring present in his gothic-y house. Every one has a motive for his "murder", which is solved by the wonderfully laconic DC as a southern sleuth, hired by one of the assembled to solve it, with indirect assistance from the author's bright immigrant nurse, who has a condition where she pukes if she ever tells a lie. Endless twists until the last. Would have been better if a bit shorter than its 130 minutes.
May 20	The Deer Hunter	Michael Cimino: Robert De Niro, Christopher Walken, John Savage, Meryl Streep	3	Three young Pittsburgh men go to Vietnam war. Almost 50% (of long film) covers the day or two before they go, with the wedding of one and a final hunting trip. They end up captured and subjects of a grim Russian roulette gambling game by their jailers - a sort of proxy for the horror of the war. One of them remains after the other two return home injured, opium-controlled and continuing the RR until the leader (RdN) returns to try and fail to retrieve him.
May 20	The Conversation	Francis Ford Coppola: Gene Hackman	3	Massively slow-moving and thorough surveillance expert hired to record conversation between a couple walking round a small square during a lunchtime rush. Discovers that a murder is planned and agonises over what to do. Ends with the instigator of the snooping as the victim, though portrayed in such a mysterious way it's hard to know exactly what happened.
May 20	Love & Mercy	Bill Pohlad: Paul Dano, John Cusack, Elizabeth Banks, Paul Giamatti	3+	Brian Wilson biopic in two era's. First in 1966 with making of Pet Sounds when BW's eccentricities / madhnesses coming out as he's introduced to drugs. Then in 1980's under 24-hour domineering medicated almost-imprisonment by crazy psychotherapist (PG), from which he is rescued by his later 2 nd wife. Great acting from the two BW's conveying his disturbed states.
May 20	The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society	Mike Newell: Lily James, Tom Courtenay, Penelope Wilton	3-	Very schmaltzy tale of folk on this island during the German occupation and teased out by young authoress visiting a few years later.
May 20	The Company You Keep	Robert Redford: Robert Redford, Shia LaBeouf, Julie Christie, Susan Sarandon, Brendan Gleeson, Nick Nolte	3	Trite story of domestic US 70's political terrorists (modelled on the Weathermen) being uncovered in their various later lives in 2011. Main man (RR with a very unconvincing 30-year old's hairdo and 80-year old's wrinkles) was mis-charged with murder during a Michigan bank raid that he wasn't at. His then lover, JC, eventually gives herself up and admits this.
May 20	Educating Rita	Willy Russell, Lewis Gilbert: Julie Walters, Michael Caine, Maureen Lipman	3+	Wonderfully funny and moving. Sassy young Liverpudlian hairdresser enrolls in Open University English course to improve herself, and is assigned an ageing alcoholic tutor at the local posh-looking University. He is entranced by her fresh and original views, which will not get her through the exam system. She demands to be taught to modify them so she can graduate, which he reluctantly does, fearing that he has tutored her originality away. But both she and he manage avoid their likely fates and walk off in different directions to a better future! Wonderful JW if unconvincing MC.
May 20	Good Vibrations	Lisa Barros D'Sa, Glenn Leyburn: Richard Dormer, Jodie Whittaker	3+	Just as good the second time!
Jun 20	Les Diaboliques	Henri-Georges Clouzot: Simone Signoret, Véra Clouzot	4	Corny 1955 B&W French thriller. Ghastly ham acting of the era with a ridiculous plot involving murder, by drowning in a bath, of unpleasant husband by his wife and lover ... but he comes back to life and wife dies of shock leaving lover and he happy!
Aug 20	Reacher	Christopher McQuarrie: Tom Cruise, Rosamund Pike	3-	Weak version of one of the Lee Child books (apparently - didn't ring any bells with me). First half was OK-ish and low key for LC, but the second was nonsense car chases and shoot outs without the benefit of the background narrative usually in the books.
Aug 20	What we did on our holiday	Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin: Billy Connolly, David Tennant, Rosamund Pike, Celia Imrie, Annette Crosbie, Emilia Jones, Bobby Smalldridge, Harriet Turnbull	3	Delightful easy watching, schmaltzy tale of in-process-of-divorce couple and their three winsome and super-articulate young kids going up to the highlands for grandpa's 75 th birthday party. The adults bicker and try to avoid letting the others know of the situation while setting up for the grand party. Grandpa (who is dying of cancer) takes the kids to the beach for fun and lots of wise words, including his wish to be sent out to sea on a burning boat like a Viking, instead of a funeral and more family fights. He then dies on the kids, who do just what he wanted. Excellent acting all round, particularly the young threesome.
Aug 20	In between	Maysaloun Hamoud: Mouna Hawa, Sana Jammalieh, Shaden Kanboura	3+	Three Palestinian girls in Tel-Aviv suffering from the male/patriarchal society. One, a traditional Muslim with a fiancée whose urgings to marry sooner rather than later she resists, and then he rapes her in frustration. But he expects this not to affect their future, until the other girls help nail him and make him withdraw his marriage proposal (but all still under the say-so of her, understanding, Dad). The other two are wild modern girls. One a lawyer seems totally in control (despite endless joints, fags and booze) but whose longish-term boyfriend also starts to come on heavy about marriage and subservience. The last is gay and, when discovered by her family has to flee from their fury and endless attempts to arrange a marriage. A depressing story (are there any positive tales of relationships that work in this medieval-like society) but wonderfully and subtly filmed.
Aug 20	Sully: Miracle on the Hudson	Clint Eastwood: Tom Hanks, Aaron Eckhart	3+	Docudrama about the landing of a plane (both of whose engines failed in a bird strike minutes after leaving La Guardia) on the Hudson with no casualties. The subsequent investigation was presented as being extremely adversarial, blaming the pilots for failing to return to the airport. They were in the end exonerated and applauded (all the 155 passengers on board and the rest of the world having done so from day one) after getting erroneous engine monitoring data exposed and showing that the many simulations supporting a safe return to any airport were severely flawed. Somehow the eponymous pilot (Chesley Sullenberger) kept calm and in good humour during and since.
Sep 20	Molly's Game	Aaron Sorkin: Jessica Chastain, Idris Elba, Kevin Costner	3	Well-made story of super smart and competitive young woman who built a business running high stakes poker games (after a very unfortunate accident stopped her getting into the US Olympic ski team). She was then brought down for some modest illegality by an FBI prosecution which her excellent lawyer (IE) managed to mitigate, but she steadfastly refused pressure to name her (very high profile) players. Rather too rapid dialogue and action (no doubt mimicking the behaviour of poker players).
Sep 20	Zodiac	David Fincher: Jake Gyllenhaal, Mark Ruffalo, Robert Downey Jr, Brian Cox	3	Docudrama about the hunt for a serial killer active in California in late 1960s and early 1970s. He was finally tracked down in the 1990's (but died before he could be charged) largely because of the persistence of a newspaper cartoonist (JG) chasing the police with new ideas and evidence. A similar scenario to Michelle McNamara's "I'll Be Gone in the Dark"
Oct 20	BlackkKlansman	Spike Lee: John David Washington, Adam Driver, Harry Belafonte	3	Biopic of early 1970's undercover investigation into the KKK by the Colorado Springs police where a new black officer impersonates a KKK enthusiast on the phone with his (Jewish) partner playing him in person. Released in 2018 with short finale of clips of actual white supremacist horrors in Trumpland.
Oct 20	North by Northwest	Alfred Hitchcock: Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint, James Mason	4	Corny vehicle for two well know but also corny scenes - CG being buzzed by a crop duster plane and the finale fight-out on Mount Rushmore.
Nov 20	Detroit		5	Uninspiring drama set round the 1968 riots.
Dec 20	If Beale Street Could Talk		5	Sloppy tosh
Dec 20	The Beguiled	Nicole Kidman, Colin Farrell	5	More sloppy tosh in Civil War girls school
Dec 20	The Mercy	James Marsh: Colin Firth, Rachel Weisz, David Thewlis, Ken Stott	4	Slow, unimpressive biopic of Donald Crowhurst. Almost no information on the man and motives (cf: Tomalin and Hall's book). In the pre-launch, he was shown as a dilettante with no practical or other sense, and in the (inevitably conjectural) voyage bits he was just shown as anguished, slovenly and always in a flat calm.
Dec 20	Wadja	Haifaa al-Mansour: Waad Mohammed	5	Saudi woman director's optimistic tale of 10-year-old and bike. Rather humdrum and uneventful. Well acted, and horribly reinforcing of the rabid religiosity and female suppression But just not interesting enough to watch through!
Jan 21	Contagion	Steven Soderbergh: Matt Damon, Laurence Fishburne, Jude Law, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Winslet	3+	Stunningly prescient and accurate 2011 Hollywood take on a deadly virus pandemic. Would not have noticed or appreciated many of the details in pre-Covid days!

Films

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Jan 21	Pieces of a Woman	Kornél Mundruczó: Vanessa Kirby, Ellen Burstyn	3	Harrowing and well filmed story of woman losing her first child just after home birth. She initially goes to pieces, her partner leaves her, and a court case starts to prosecute the midwife for the death (this being America). But the woman sort of pulls through and goes on with life.
Jan 21	Who You Think I Am	Juliette Binoche	4	Creepy tale of 50's French woman dumped by her younger lover. Then wants to get back at him online and impersonates a younger woman to contact his best mate, who she then falls for and it all goes silly.
Feb 21	The Dig	Simon Stone: Carey Mulligan, Ralph Fiennes	3	Weak schmaltzy telling of Sutton Hoo excavation.
Feb 21	A Private War	Matthew Heineman: Rosamund Pike, Jamie Dornan, Tom Hollander	3	Good biopic of Marie Colvin from, more or less, loss of her eye in Sri Lanka to death in Homs.
Feb 21	News of the World	Paul Greengrass: Tom Hanks, Helena Zengel	3	Well-acted Western set in 1870, just post-civil war, US. Ex-captain making his living reading newspapers in Southern towns picks up young girl, originally of German descent, who's had all her family killed by Indians who adopted her into their tribe, and she now speaks only their language. For some reason she's now to be relocated to a distant (white) uncle, and captain takes her on, eventually for good.
Feb 21	The White Tiger	Ramin Bahrani: Adarsh Gourav	3	Unconvincing and drawn-out tale of poor Indian becoming driver to rich couple. She kills a kid while drunk driving, he is forced to take the rap. Then he turns on his corrupt (but hitherto friendly and enlightened) master, kills him stealing a bag of bribe money, and sets himself up as a boss man.
Mar 21	Edie	Simon Hunter: Sheila Hancock, Kevin Guthrie	3	Old lady about to move into a care home deciding to head to Scotland and climb a mountain her Dad was keen on. She had had a miserable life, locked in a repressive marriage since a young girl, and the challenge of the ascent makes her wildly happy. A bit surreal and very implausible, but a heart-warming tale. Would be good Dinard fare.
Mar 21	A Lonely Place to Die	Julian Gilbey: Melissa George	4	Dire gratuitously and ridiculously violent story of group of climbers who stumble into the middle of a ransom/kidnap of the daughter of a powerful Balkan Mafioso baron. Set in great Scottish highland scenery but total rubbish.
Mar 21	Narrow Margin	Peter Hyams: Gene Hackman, Anne Archer	3	Woman on blind date with smart lawyer sees him murdered by his mafia boss. She goes into hiding, but LA prosecutor wanting to get her to testify in court goes to get her. Action packed chase scene across South Western Canada, mainly in a train sees the two of them finally and ludicrously outwit villainous pursuers sent by the mafia boss to kill them.
Mar 21	Mum's List	Niall Johnson: Rafe Spall, Emilia Fox	3	Well acted, but gooey (true) story of woman dying of cancer and her chocolate box kids and husband surviving.
Mar 21	The Trial of the Chicago 7	Aaron Sorkin: Sacha Baron Cohen, Eddie Redmayne, Mark Rylance	2	Entertaining (and presumably reasonably accurate) telling of the trial of a collection of young activists and anti-war protestors (including Abbie Hoffman of the Yippies and Tom Haden) who wanted to protest at the 1968 Democratic Convention against LBJ's ramping up of the draft and the Vietnam war. In the face of viciously biased judge (also called Hoffman) who originally had Bobby Seale with the others (hence renamed from the "Chicago 8") and had him beaten up in court and made to attend gagged and bound and without a lawyer.
Apr 21	Colette	Wash Westmoreland: Keira Knightley, Dominic West, Fiona Shaw	3	Thin partial biopic of the French authoress. Rural girl married very young to a well known older author who when they were in debt (as often due to his profligacy) persuaded and then forced her to write books that were published in his name and were hugely successful. She eventually divorced him and continued her salacious and successful writing and acting career.
Apr 21	First they killed my father	Angelina Jolie:	4	Dreadful slow film based on experiences of Loung Ung a Cambodian who survived the 1970's killing fields. Gave a feel of the mindless communistic nonsense of Pol Pot's acolytes but little or no history and ridiculous minutes of anguished gazing into the distance by the young (and good) actresses and actors. Only merit of the film was in sending us to Wikipedia, realising how little we knew about the events.
May 21	Rocketman	Dexter Fletcher: Taron Egerton	3	Biopic of Elton John, majoring on his (presumably accurate) unloved background (ever wanting and failing to get a hug from his Dad) in comfortable Pinner and being something of a child prodigy, getting a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music. Music in the film not as impressive as, for instance, in the Bohemian Rhapsody one.
Jun 21	I Care a Lot	J Blakeson: Rosamund Pike, Peter Dinklage	3+	Wonderfully evil bitch (RP) wangles herself as court-appointed guardian for a series of (wealthy) old folk, whose assets she milks. She gets her comeuppance when she lands an apparently family-less very rich lady, but who turns out to be Mum of an excellent (dwarf) gangland boss. They have a decent spat, but the ending is a bit weak as they agree to join forces in continued hate and massive money making, and she finally gets what she deserves.
Jun 21	One Night in Miami	Regina King: Kingsley Ben-Adir, Eli Goree, Aldis Hodge, Leslie Odom Jr.	3	Fictionalized account of Feb-1964 meeting of Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali (still Cassius Clay), Jim Brown, and Sam Cooke, celebrating Ali's surprise title win over Sonny Liston. Originally a stage play (which it was probably better suited to) with interesting debating about Islam, black suppression and civil rights. Malcolm X was mentoring Clay and persuading him to join the Nation of Islam (which M was having disagreements with, and left soon afterwards). Malcolm X (assassinated by follower of Nation of Islam) and Cooke (shot by woman) were both dead within a year.
Jun 21	The Dissident		3+	Gruesome expose on the murder of Jamal Khashoggi
Jun 21	Dark Waters	Todd Haynes: Mark Ruffalo, Anne Hathaway, Tim Robbins	3	Teflon water poisoning bu Dupont and one lawyers long process of suing them. Very drawn out
Jun 21	Jane Austen Book Club		5	Dull for the few minutes we watched
Jun 21	Parasite		5	S. Korean family something or other
Jun 21	Phantom Thread	Paul Thomas Anderson: Daniel Day-Lewis, Vicky Krieps, Lesley Manville	3	Pernickety self-centred haute-couture dressmaker secretly in thrall to three women, his dead Mum, his prickly sister and a new model/muse who becomes his wife.
Aug 21	Yesterday	Richard Curtis, Danny Boyle: Himesh Patel, Lily James, Ed Sheeran	3	Norfolk-based musician who somehow comes out of a weird world off/on being the only person who knows who the Beatles (and Coca Cola, Harry Potter, ...) are. Starts playing their songs and becomes world famous.
Aug 21	Comfort and Joy	Bill Forsyth: Bill Paterson	3	Weak, but we watched it, 1984 film of 40-ish Glasgow popular radio show host ditched by his girlfriend and gets mixed up as middle man between to rival ice cream sellers.
Aug 21	Memento	Christopher Nolan: Guy Pearce	3	Weird movie with constant complicated and confusing chronology shifts. Some guy is apparently trying to revenge the murder and rape of his wife...
Aug 21	This Beautiful Fantastic		3+	As good as the first time at Dinard.
Aug 21	Derstroyer	Karyn Kusama: Nicole Kidman	3	Then and now story. Rough background female LAPD cop goes undercover to chase villains. Goes horribly wrong, with her (also undercover) partner (as cop and lover) getting killed. 17 years later she's a wreck but still chasing the main villain. Grim makeup to distinguish the older version.
Sep 21	The Green Book	Peter Farrelly: Viggo Mortensen, Mahershala Ali	3	White (originally reasonably prejudiced) NY bouncer gets job driving super smart and talented black pianist round the deep south in 1962 and both of them get to deal with Negro discrimination and prejudice. Based on true story with Tony Lipp driving Don Shirley. Title comes from book listing hotels in the south where Negroes could stay.
Sep 21	An Inspector Calls	J. B. Priestley, Aisling Walsh: David Thewlis, Ken Stott, Miranda Richardson, Chloe Pirrie	2	Great mystery written in 1945 and set in 1912. Small upper class dinner celebrating engagement of factory owner's daughter to son of a competitor is interrupted by "an inspector". He reports that an attractive young working girl committed suicide a few hours ago. He knows all about her and her history of descent into poverty, which turns out to related to each of the diners. The inspector leaves saying that, contrary to the way the diners treated the girl, everyone is intertwined in one society and that "If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish" (a reference to imminent WW1, but an ageless comment). They then hear first that he does not exist and there has been no suicide, then that there has.

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Sep 21	Silence	Martin Scorsese: Andrew Garfield, Adam Driver, Ciarán Hinds, Liam Neeson	5	Uninspiring tale set round Jesuit priests in 17 th century Japan.
Sep 21	On the basis of sex	Mimi Leder: Felicity Jones	4	Weak Hollywoodised biopic of the early years of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's career up to her first landmark trial success defending a single man who had been denied a tax break for caring for his ageing mother. The break was only available to women, and, ironically, RBG used this as the first step in contesting hundreds of US laws discriminating against women (mainly).
Sep 21	Bitter Lake	Adam Curtis	3	Can't believe I saw this 4 years ago and didn't realise it!
Oct 21	Stephen	Alick Riley: Steve Coogan, Sharlene Whyte, Hugh Quarshie	3+	3-part docudrama on the Stephen Lawrence re-trial that finally managed to convict two of the five known killers, 13 years after the murder. Due to both his tenacious parents and that of Clive Driscoll who doggedly lead the enquiry.
Dec 21	Finding Alice	: Keeley Hawes, Joanna Lumley	5	ITV. Woman's partner falls down stairs on first night in super-smart home he's build. But degenerates into endless KH angst and nonsense.
Dec 21	All the Presidents Men	Alan J. Pakula: Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman	3+	Good movie on the Washington Post uncovering of Watergate and related illegal shenanigans from Nixon's White House.
Jan 22	Brubaker	Stuart Rosenberg: Robert Redford	3+	Fiction based on work of prison reformer Tom Murton. Starts with RR, the new governor of an Arkansas state prison, entering disguised as an inmate (a total fiction), and witnessing the brutality at first hand. He achieves some improvement, but the film ends with the uncovering of mass graves of "disappeared" inmates (a true event, and so like the true story behind Whitehead's The Nickel Boys) and him being ousted by the entrenched and corrupt local politics (as was TM).
Jan 22	Mark Felt: The Man Who Brought Down the White House	Peter Landesman: Liam Neeson	3	2018 docudrama about Watergate's Deep Throat. Assuming it's roughly true he was #2 at the FBI, expected to take over from Hoover who died in office shortly before Watergate, but didn't. MF portrayed as scrupulously loyal and legal part of an organisation that, under Hoover, had been up to all sorts of dodgy things, who in desperation briefed the press - the film majoring on his doing this to Time (who also had some form of key role in triggering Nixon's resignation) more than the Washington Post.
Jan 22	Empire of the Sun	Steven Spielberg: Christian Bale, John Malkovich, Nigel Havers	3	JG Ballard's fictionalised version of his own experience in Japanese detention camp in Shanghai during WW2. Rather drawn out.
Jan 22	A Town Like Alice	Jack Lee: Virginia McKenna, Peter Finch	3	Bit drawn out and sentimental set in WW2 Malaya just after the Japanese invasion. Main aspect, the based on true events, is the marching of British women from pillar to post is poorly and hammy done.
Jan 22	Shadowlands	Richard Attenborough: Anthony Hopkins, Debra Winger	3	Slow but moving telling if CS Lewis' late marriage to American woman who died a few years later of cancer.
Jan 22	Belfast	Kenneth Branagh: Jude Hill, Caitriona Balfe, Jamie Dornan, Judi Dench, Ciarán Hinds	3	1969/70 Belfast as troubles begin. Set loosely round KB's own background. Wonderfully acted but I just couldn't get into it. But I was much put off by the religious bigotry and thuggish violence of both sides that were the backdrop to the Branagh's eventual departure for England
Feb 22	Transit	Christian Petzold: Franz Rogowski, Paula Beer	3	Enigmatic and intriguing tale of man trying to escape France as German Fascists move in and start transporting people. Confusingly it is a) set in modern times, not WW2 which the originating book was and b) he, and others trying to escape are Germans. But the bureaucratic process of chasing for visas and transit papers and the relationships that slowly develop are strangely absorbing. Having taken the ID of a writer who committed suicide he meets up with the writers estranged wife who is also trying to get out.
Mar 22	Magic Trip	Ken Kesey, Neal Cassady	3	Documentary cobbled together around 2011 from the filming KK and co did on their bus trip from Oregon to New York in 1964 with voice over commentary from the (remaining) participants.. Fascinating to see the hyper-active NC in action and a brief glimpse of a pretty out of it Kerouac.
Mar 22	Snowden	Oliver Stone: Joseph Gordon-Levitt	3	Rather unimpressive and muddling telling of his stealing and exposing of NSA secrets.
Mar 22	The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Niels Arden Oplev: Noomi Rapace, Michael Nyqvist	3+	2-episode version with, perhaps, different lead in credits
Mar 22	The Girl Who Played With Fire	Daniel Alfredson: Noomi Rapace, Michael Nyqvist	3	2-episode version with, perhaps, different lead in credits
	The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest	Daniel Alfredson: Noomi Rapace, Michael Nyqvist	4	2-episode version. Very silly plot - none of the complexity or richness of the book.
Apr 22	Promising Young Woman	Emerald Fennell: Carey Mulligan	3	Woman getting revenge on men for many years after her best friend is gang raped whilst blotto at University, and then dies or commits suicide. The woman poses as totally drunk, lets herself be picked up and taken home by a guy before confronting/shaming him as fully sober. After years of this she decides to stop doing so and falls for (we think) one of her wider Uni crowd. After a bit of a lovey-dovey hiatus someone gives her a video of the original gang rape implicating her new squeeze. She reverts to type, shaming him and getting full revenge on the main perpetrator, but only after allowing herself to be killed by him!
Apr 22	Whiplash	Damien Chazelle: Miles Teller, J. K. Simmons	4	19-year old jazz drummer student driven to extremes by bullying teacher / perfectionist.
May 22	Wildlife	Paul Dano: Carey Mulligan, Jake Gyllenhaal, Ed Oxenbould	4	Fairly inarticulate teenage boy in small town in Montana moved from pillar to post by his somewhat feckless Dad. His dysfunctional parents split leaving him with Mum and lots of time to give soulful stares into the distance.
May 22	Ordinary Love	Lisa Barros D'Sa and Glenn Leyburn: Lesley Manville, Liam Neeson	3	Gruelling but well done covering of wife and husband after she gets breast cancer, leading to chemo and double mastectomy.
May 22	The Two Faces of January	Hossein Amini: Viggo Mortensen, Kirsten Dunst, Oscar Isaac	3-	Set in early 60's Greece where young American conman picks up on wealthy couple. He, it turns out is on the run from unforgiving creditors and inadvertently kills a private detective sent to get him. Young conman gets sucked in by events and also some similarity between the man and his dad who he did not get on with but died recently.
May 22	Cape Fear	Martin Scorsese: Robert De Niro, Nick Nolte, Jessica Lange, Juliette Lewis	4-	Silly horror story of violent/psychopathic convict released from prison after 14 years getting revenge on his lawyer who buried evidence that would have mitigated his conviction.
Jun 22	Jackal	Michael Caton-Jones: Bruce Willis, Richard Gere, and Sidney Poitier	4	Nonsense super-killer (Bw) out to get someone in the US ultimately foiled by ex-IRA guy (RG with dreadful accent) released from prison to help hunt him down.
Jul 22	Thelma and Louise	Ridley Scott: Geena Davis, Susan Sarandon, Brad Pitt	2	Two women avoiding repressive husband / other half, kill a man in a bar who tries to rape one of them. Great road movie follows as they try to escape to Mexico before the iconic fatal car leap into a canyon.
Oct 22	The Courier	Dominic Cooke : Benedict Cumberbatch	3	Biopic of Greville Wynne, small time businessman recruited by MI6 in 1962 to carry information from senior Soviet spy Oleg Penkovsky, which included important info identifying Cuban missile build up early. On final, self volunteered mission to set up OP's escape both GW and OP arrested in Moscow. OP shot. GW spent 2+ years in prison before being swapped for Gordon Lonsdale.
Dec 22	The Swimmers	Sally El Hosaini : Nathalie Issa, Manal Issa	3	Biopic of two Syrian girls fleeing Damascus for Germany. One with Olympic swimming hopes, which were realised later as part of the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) which helped when the two jumped out of the ropery dingy they were in going from Turkey to Lesbos and swam much of the way to reduce load on the dingy.
Dec 22	Inside Man	Spike Lee: Clive Owen, Denzel Washington, Jodie Foster	3	Wall St heist with apparent baddies taking hostages turns out to be more complicated and twisty (some so much so that I didn't follow them). Main "villain" plays with cops, killing no-one, and is really after document that incriminates bank chief of Nazi cooperation during war.
Dec 22	Glass Onion	Daniel Craig	5	Follow on to "Knives Out". Too full of itself. Gave up after dreadfully dull 30 mins introducing the un-enticing characters who would, not doubt, be suspects in the murder of their luxury island host.
Jan 23	1939	Helene Egelund	3-	Very long (3+ hours), nicely filmed tale set in WW2-time Sweden. Disappointingly the war references were slim and not developed and the story was mainly of a girl leaving her rural home to go to Stockholm where she married a man who then became a nasty bully.
Jan 23	No Time to Die		4-	Dreadful shoot-em-up Bond nonsense. None of the panache and style of the old ones

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Feb 23	Glória (Gloria)		3	10-part strung out series ("based on real events") of cold war spying round US radio station in Portugal rebroadcasting radio/propaganda to the Soviet bloc. Hard to follow politics and too many trite scenarios.
Feb 23	All Quiet On The Western Front	: Felix Kammerer, Daniel Brühl (Bruhl)	3	Too much Hollywood gory trench war horrors and little of the power of the book.
Feb 23	Munich - The Edge of War	Christian Schwochow: Jeremy Irons, George MacKay, Jannis Niewöhner	3	Decent rendering of the Robert Harris book (possibly better than it!).
Feb 23	King of Thieves	James Marsh: Michael Caine, Tom Courtenay, Michael Gambon, Charlie Cox, Jim Broadbent, Paul Whitehouse, Ray Winstone	3	Based on the Hatton Garden safe deposit burglary of 2015. The old geezers don't quite seem villainous enough, but a good film wonderfully acted.
Mar 23	The Father	Florian Zeller: Anthony Hopkins, Olivia Colman	2	Disturbingly excellent film on dementia - clearly showing the confusions with the (slightly confusing to the watcher) "plot" running round with different presentations of the same events, illustrating the sufferer's view point.
Mar 23	Rogue Agent and The Puppet Master	: James Norton	3	Drama and documentary about amazingly patient clever and evil conman, Robert Freegard, who pretended to be an MI5 agent and got millions from many folk whose lives he took over.
Mar 23	Traitors		5	Dull as ditch water end of WW2 series, something to do with OSS and ex-SOE folk.
Mar 23	Anatomy of a Scandal	: Michelle Dockery, Sienna Miller, Rupert Friend, Joshua McGuire	3-	6-part series of the book, even more drawn out than it. Forewent some of the book's nuances in favour of endless anguished gazes by the pretty actors (male and female).
Mar 23	The Last Vermeer	: Guy Pearce	3	Uninspiring film based on real Dutch art forger, Han van Meegeren, who persuaded Goering (amongst others) to spend a fortune on his fakes.
Mar 23	Catch me if you can	Steven Spielberg: Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Hanks, Christopher Walken	3	"Based on true story" of con man whose "true story" is largely fake too. As, mainly, teenager, impersonating airline pilots, lawyers, doctor and forging loads of (high quality) phoney cheques to fund his lifestyle. Told in slightly comic-book style, and a bit too long.
Mar 23	Entebbe	José Padilha: Rosamund Pike, Daniel Brühl, Eddie Marsan	3+	Decent telling of the 1976 Palestinian/German hijacking of an Air France flight from Israel to Paris. Many wasted minutes for a bizarre modern dance session used in parallel to, as far as I can see, save having to work out how to portray the denouement.
Mar 23	Funeral in Berlin	Guy Hamilton: Michael Caine	3	Rather stilted 60's film of the Len Deighton Harry Palmer novel. I suspect the book would be better.
Apr 23	Kursk: The Last Mission	Thomas Vinterberg: Matthias Schoenaerts, Colin Firth	3	Dramatisation of the 2000 disaster where the Russian nuclear sub blew up, killing all crew - some of whom survived a few hours. Heavily concentrating on Russia's inept and faulty navy and kit.
Apr 23	My Old School	Jono McLeod: Alan Cumming	3	Interesting telling the weird story of (poorish) lad who went to Bearsden Academy in the 1970's. Desperate to get into medical school (which you can only do up to mid 20's I think) returned, at the age of 32, to the same school under a different name (Brandon Lee). He got away with this for at least a year. Film went on a bit long, but was a clever-ish mix of animation, talking heads (lots of his 1990's school mates) and his own voice over lip-synched by AC.
Apr 23	Children of Men		4	Very poor film released in 2006 of semi-apocalyptic England 18 years after all women in the world stopped having kids. Then one pregnant woman found which different factions tried to preserve. Mildly redeemed by Michael Caine modest role as ageing off-grid hippy.
Apr 23	Bank of Dave		3+	Delightful feel-good film (in the vein of Local Hero) based on the true story of Burnley self-made millionaire battling the system to set up a small bank supporting local business and passing profits to charity. Tho' the end result wasn't a full "bank" he is up and running as https://www.burnleysavingsandloans.co.uk
Jun 23	Hell and High Water	David Mackenzie: Jeff Bridges	3+	
Aug 23	Ammonite	: Kate Winslet	5	Turgid tale of real life fossil collecting woman and her (gay I think) lusts and relationships.
	Walk the Line	: Joaquin Phoenix, Reese Witherspoon	5	Biopic of Johnnie Cash. Dull and nothing explaining where his musical abilities came from (Wikipedia doesn't have it either!).
May 24	may Black Box			Obsessive forensic analyst Mathieu Vasseur is disappointed to be sidelined in the examination of the black box of an Atrian 800 airliner which has mysteriously crashed in the Alps. When his boss goes missing, Mathieu is asked to step in, and he concludes that there was an unauthorised entry into the cockpit. A press conference is held to announce the findings, but Mathieu is subsequently presented with conflicting evidence.
I				
	To see			Recommended by
	Four Horsemen			2012 British documentary film directed by Ross Ashcroft. The film criticises the system of fractional reserve banking, debt-based economy and political lobbying by banks
	A World Not Ours	Mahdi Fleifel:		Portrait of three generations of Palestinians in exile in the Lebanese refugee camp.
	The Lady in Number 6			Pianist who survived Holocaust
	Generation War: Our Mothers, Our Fathers	BBC		
	Paradise ?	TV?		
	10 Rillington Place			
	The Act of Killing			Sunday Times
	Her			
	The Rocket			Oz/Laos drama
	It's A Free World	Ken Loach		
	Where you're meant to be			Documentary about Scottish folk music up-dated by Aidan Moffat
	Dressmaker			NO!
	Muriel's wedding			
	The Castle			
	Travelling Birds			Seen with Margaret. Fantastic
	Absolutely Anything	Terry Jones		
	The Fencer			
	Half Way			Homelessness documentary
	Fire at Sea			European migrant crisis
	Fences			
	Nocturnal Animals			
	Graduation			Romanian film
	The Spirit of '76	Frank Montgomery:		Silent film about American War of Independence – but no prints survive!
	Deep Water			Donald Crowhurst
	Good Morning Vietnam	Robin Williams		
	Ulster American	Play at Edinburgh Festival 2018		
	Les Uns et Les Autres	Claude Lelouch:		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Uns_et_les_Autres
	Mouthpiece	Kieran Hurley		

Films

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
	Happier Times, Grump			
	The Painter and the Thief			Available on Hulu and to rent in the US on 22 May and in the UK at a later
	The Bureau			TV series. "Le Bureau des Légendes" ("The Bureau", pictured), a cult hit from Canal+. Starring Mathieu Kassovitz as Guillaume Debailly
	AKA Jane Roe			Documentary of the woman who was Jane Roe, her switch to anti-abortion stand and then later renunciation of that.
	The Duke	Jim Broadbent, Helen Mirren		Biopic of art thief
	The Burnt Orange Heresy			Art shenanigans with cameo's from Mick Jagger and Donald Sutherland
	The Americans			Russian / US spy series on Amazon Prime
	The Capote Tapes			
	Zappa the Movie			https://www.amazon.com/Zappa-Frank/dp/B08P2D9G52 NOT?: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Frank-Zappa-Mothers-Roxy-Movie/dp/B07PS2PPKL
	Judas and the Black Messiah			
	True Blue			Sporting drama based on a true story. In the run-up to the 1987 Oxford-Cambridge boat race, American members of the Oxford crew attempt a mutiny. Based on the coach, Daniel Topolski's memoir. 1996
	Super Frenchie			Like Oscar-winning documentary Free Solo, follows the unusual life of a daredevil, this time ski base jumper Matthias Giraud
	The Big Lift			
	A Foreign Affair			
	Germany Year Zero (in Italian)			
	The Murderers Are Among Us (in German).			
	Kiss the Girls	Morgan Freeman		
	Double Jeopardy			
	Wit	Emma Thompson		Cancer
	Spitting Image			ITV
	King Richard			Williams sisters Dad
	Don't Look Up			Netflix
	Coda			
	Come and See	Elem Klimov		Soviet anti-war film (1985)
	Glengarry Glen Ross			
	Dead Ringers			Prime Video
	A Beautiful Mind			about the American mathematician John Nash, film from Waleed book

Plays

Date	Title	[[Author,]Dir:][actor[, actor]]	Rating	Notes
Nov 08	Piaff	Elena Rogers	2+	Fantastic singing and seemingly perfect voice-likeness. The telling of her story was a little scrappy, not coming across as well as many a west-end show.
Dec 08	Wicked		4	Poor musical on the origins of Oz's wicked witch of the west.
May 09	The School for Wives		3	Excellent light and witty; amazing how Moliere is so watch-able 460 years after this was written.
Nov 09	The Habit of Art	[Alan Bennett,] Richard Griffiths, Frances de La Tour	3	Surprisingly witty and complex play within a play. The cast are rehearsing a play about WH Auden and Benjamin Britten meeting towards the end of their lives. Can't say I followed all that much of the in and out of the outer and inner play and lots of art/literature references but the thing was hugely enjoyable at the surface as well!
Dec 09	High Society		3+	1930's American musical. As ever excellent.
Dec 10	A Slice of Saturday Night		3+	1960's themed musical. Again, excellent.
Dec 11	Guys and Dolls		3	Not quite as slick as usual. A great evening but just below the excellent standard we've grown used to.
Feb 12	La Traviata	Kit Hesketh-Harvey	3	Wonderful as ever. Great singing, lovely tunes powerful duet as Violetta's lover's father persuades her to leave him (I think!)
Mar 12	The Ladykillers	Peter Capaldi	4	Not nearly as good as the films.
May 12	The Hound of the Baskervilles	www.venividtheatre.com	2+	Brilliantly funny play within a play of the radio production of the Sherlock Holmes story, full of enthusiasm and intrigues between the "actors".
May 12	Babel		4	Trite "if we all cooperate the world will be wonderful" peripatetic happening. Quite effective start – processing round the park's paths with actors amongst the surrounding undergrowth doing ordinary things in the candlelit falling evening. After tedious hiatus then a music and acting all over the park story of a tower and downtrodden people coming together. Music good, story feeble occasional effective scene – as in the "people" walking through the audience towards the end with their candles lighting the dark.
May 12	Slow Air	David Harrower: Lewis Howden, Susan Vidler	3	Powerful two-person story of Edinburgh estranged brother and sister. Sadly devoid of action. Each character had 1/2 the stage and was spotted and talked in turn. Absorbing acting in a totally action-less play.
Jun 12	Chariots of Fire		2	Play of the film. Fantastic. Ever so slightly over-long first act.
Oct 12	Jumpy	Tamsin Greig	3	Fraught Mum and teenage daughter. Amusing but that's it.
Nov 12	The Upstairs Room	David K. O'Hara,	4-	Dreadful pretentious unintelligible
Feb 13	Di and Viv and Rose	Anna Maxwell Martin, Gina McKee, Tamzin Outhwaite	3-	Disappointing tale of three girls who meet at Uni, share a house, then go their separate ways but keep in touch. All three actresses poor on stage, little voice projection or diction, and no ability to time to the audience laughs (of which there were many); so we missed some of the witty and sharp repartee and almost missed one of the key dramatic moments (announcement of a death). AMM particularly unbelievable as man-hungry, getting pregnant but unable to narrow the father down beyond one of six. GM powerful as ever, but really doesn't have the voice for the theatre. For some reason I wasn't convinced by TO's lesbian.
Feb 13	Glasgow Girls	Cora Bissett: Callum Cuthbertson, Amiera Darwish, Roanna Davidson, Stephanie McGregor, Joanne McGuinness, Myra McFadyen, Amaka Okafor, Patricia Panther, Dawn Sievwright	1	Superb, moving, lively and well-told musical of the real-life stories of deportations of Glasgow-settled asylum seekers. Seven lively young actresses play the name parts and others. Two, also excellent, older actors play other roles such as the Drumchapel school teacher who helped the girls get their message out and the tenement block wifey who got up at 5am every day to scan for border police raids.
Mar 13	The Audience	Stephen Daldry: Helen Mirren	2	HM fantastic as HRH in her weekly meeting with various PM's. Most giving a sideways glimpse into a few personal or world-stage issues (Suez/Eden, Churchill/hanging-on in 1952?, Wilson (her favourite allegedly) / Alzheimer's, Major / Charles&Di divorce. Only slight disappointment was the Maggie T caricature (tirades about Palace briefing press against her).
Mar 13	Trelawny of the Wells	Pinero	4	Sentimental classic about (Rose) Trelawny of the (Saddlers) Wells. 19 th century romance, pretty trite. Didn't live up to Peter's memory of seeing it in the '70s
Mar 13	Quartermaine's Terms	Simon Gray: Rowan Atkinson	5	Dull as dishwater. Left at the interval, would have gone sooner if we'd been nearer the doors.
Apr 13	Old Times	Harold Pinter, Kristin Scott Thomas, Rufus Sewell, Lia Williams	3	Reunion of couple with wife's (only) friend from young days. Good acting but all very actor-ly/stylised and full of meaningful pauses.
May 13	The Weir	Conor McPherson, Josie Rourke: Brian Cox, Ardal O'Hanlon	3	Woman arriving in back-woods Irish pub adds vim to the bar-side ramblings of the regulars.
May 13	These Shining Lives	Melanie Marnich, Loveday Ingram: Charity Wakefield, Honeysuckle Weeks	2	Based on true story of young women poisoned by Radium which they used to paint luminous dials in a Chicago watch factory. One triggered a landmark legal case which she won (after 7 rejected appeals by the Company) a few days before she died, and triggered the making of companies responsible for their worker's safety. Good acting, if unnecessarily protracted (it's a short and simple story, with no real additional plots added). To my ear the American accents of the (I assume) British cast were impeccable. Good first production in this brand new theatre. Hope they sort out some air conditioning before the weather warms; it was very sweaty inside on a chill May night.
Jun 13	Once	John Tiffin: Declan Bennett, Zrinka Cvitešić	1	Fantastic version of the film. The two leads almost better than Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova. Full-on music more powerful. Storyline a little lost within it. We wondered whether someone who'd not seen the film would follow the "plot" as well (not that that is that important!).
Jul 13	Relatively Speaking	Alan Ayckbourn: Felicity Kendal	4	Dull farce, weakly acted.
Jul 13	Nude with Violin	Noel Coward	5	Dreadfully slow play with excruciatingly awful cast. We left at the interval.
Jul 13	Daytona	Oliver Cotton: Maureen Lipman, Harry Shearer, John Bove	2	Very powerful 3-way story of 70-year old Jewish couple and long-estranged brother who arrives suddenly saying he's just killed a concentration camp guard in cold blood, 40 years after they all survived WW2. Should have been edited down by at least 20 minutes, when I'd give it a 1!
Sep 13	The Book of Mormon		3+	Very funny if crude musical of Mormon lads proselytising in Uganda.

Plays

Sep 13	The Confessions of Gordon Brown	Kevin Toolis: Ian Grieve	3+	Excellent one-man show showing the unstable unkempt persona that the press portrayed with a very believable physical presence/similarity. Though short (~80 mins) it seemed dragged a bit towards the end as more obscure and hard-to-follow philosophical views portrayed; might be good to see a second time to try and follow these.
Oct 13	Blam!		3	Zany dance/acrobatics/musical with four guys in an office getting increasingly off the wall (literally at times) as they let their comic-book hero fantasies take over. Would have been a 2 had the start not been so slow.
Nov 13	Adult Supervision		2	Middle class Mum's night organised by an up-tight white mother of two adopted Ethiopian kids to try to bond more with other mixed race Mum's in a middle class bubble on the eve of Obama's election, which they follow on TV. But things unravel as booze and truth expose the four's prejudices and hang-ups.
Nov 13	Roots	Arnold Wesker, James Macdonald: Jessica Raine	3	Powerful, rather long story of vivacious girl visiting her Norfolk family from her faster-paced and more "exciting" life in London. Heavy on the slowness of NFN's (and the play itself was far too long at close to 3 hours with intervals). But great acting and must try and read up what on earth it was all about.
Nov 13	The Lyons	Nicky Silver,	2	Very funny and powerful story of New York Jewish family assembling round first the dying father's hospital bedside and then the son's as he recovers from an attack. Rather odd and unnecessary 2 nd act all to get the (gay/friendless) son beaten up and into hospital too, but a great play.
Nov 13	Home	David Storey, Amelia Sears: Jack Shepherd, Tessa Peake-Jones	4	Dull interactions of 4+1 folk in some sort of loony bin. Long and hugely irritating partial sentence dialogues
Dec 13	Kiss Me Kate	(Cole Porter)	2	Another excellent Xmas musical in this compact theatre. Shame about the sudden and feeble ending (I assume from the underlying Taming of the Shrew) with Kate accepting the taming of womenfolk to men's demands!
Jan 14	Drawing the Line	Howard Brenton, Howard Davies: Tom Beard	3	Good telling of the 5 weeks given a UK judge, Cyril Radcliffe, to set the line demarcating India and Pakistan in 1947. Hopeless task trying to mediate between Nehru canny Hindu/Sikh alliance from Jinnah's (possibly less political?) Muslims. Seemed great staging, which came over well despite us struggling with the technology (we could only get on a PC). Would have been nice to see it for real.
Feb 14	OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR	Re-make of Joan Littlewood's original.	3+	Emotive/maudlin view of WW1 trench war told with the stirring songs of the time and a patina of music hall pastiche. Not quite as well acted and moving as I remember the film, and, yes, a one-sided 60's lions&donkeys perspective, but a really great evening out.
Feb 14	Once	John Tiffan: Declan Bennett, Zrinka Cvitešić	1	As cracking as ever.
Feb 14	Mozart Undone	Betty Nansen Teatret Cederholm & Hellemann Bros.	1	Classed "a Theatre Concert". Superb modern renditions (rock, blues, country, jazzed-up classical, ...) of Mozart tunes to a fabulous zany visual background of circus/vaudeville. Running water throughout, from a slow drip into a glass on a piano, to buckets and baths and orgasmic foam. An absolute must to see if they ever come again.
Mar 14	Red Velvet	Lolita Chakrabarti: Adrian Lester	3	Telling of true (I believe) tale of black actor who took over from Edmund Keane in 1833 production of Othello. Only lasted two performances before prejudiced critics got the theatre shutdown. Very actor-y performances.
Apr 14	Versailles	Peter Gill:	3	3 hours of sparkling and busy dialogue in a couple of settings. More a lecture than a play, covering views (allegedly at the time) of the reparations demanded of Germany in the WW1 treaty. But, slightly rambling into the horror and grief of war in general.
May 14	Bomber's Moon	William Ivory: James Bolam, Steve John Shepherd	3+	Funny (slightly lavatorial) and poignant/mystical 2-hander. JB is 80+ year old ex-rear gunner shot down in the largest WW2 bombing raid (over Nuremberg), and now on his last days in a care home. SJS is new male nurse caring for him. As they get to know each other, secrets from their past and loves/lives emerge. Excellent acting, ever so slightly thin/drawn-out story.
May 14	Sunny Afternoon		3+	Ray Davies / Kinks biopic musical. Very well done, using RD/K songs to illustrate their early-days story (mainly 1960's, but using later numbers). Some interesting info, which I think RD has largely kept below the radar (eg: his wife and child after early marriage; death of sister who gave him his first guitar on his 13 th birthday). But, as well as being a little drawn out (in the 2 nd half particularly) the audio was not great, and neither was the RD actor (the Dave Davies one was excellent). Sadly very grey audience and far too many references to Muswell Hill – but hopefully it will make it to and in the West End.
Jul 14	Hobson's Choice		3	Great production sadly rained off 30 mins short of the denouement.
Jul 14	Intimate Apparel	Lynn Nottage,	3+	Superbly acted play about ~1900's black 35 year old single seamstress (of corsets, etc) who strikes up a relationship with a Caribbean man working on the Panama canal by letter. Neither can read or write and rely on others for this. Without meeting they agree to marry and he comes to New York where he soon turns out to be wastrel, taking off with all her savings soon after the wedding.
Aug 14	Therese Raquin	Emile Zola	3-	Tedious musical adaptation of this 19 th century French tale of haberdasher girl being married to her cousin and then killing him with her lover's help. First duff Park show!
Sep 14	Les Miserables		1	
Oct 14	The Vertical Hour	David Hare: Peter Davison, Thusitha Jayasundera	3+	Wonderful, if wordy, mix of Iraq war and personal lives. Father (virulently anti-war) visited by son and new US girlfriend (ex war correspondent now prominent Harvard prof, who accepts that a country should step in when horrors happen in another one). A day of rapid dialogue, mainly between the two, uncovers how the Father, a constant philanderer, went from top notch married consultant to separated Shropshire GP after he crashed his car killing and old man (in the other car) and a girlfriend in his. The US prof also opens up, exposing a hankering for her old dangerous haunts and lovers, which in the end she returns to. All excellent acting, with TJ particularly good as the girlfriend.
Oct 14	Infidel		3	OK stage version of the amusing Baddiel film – Muslim man who discovers he's really a Jew.

Plays

Feb 15	Bad Jews	Jenna Augen	2	Very fast witty and funny. Three Jewish cousins, the only grandchildren of a buried-today grandfather, viciously fight (well two of them mostly) over his "Hy" (?). The grandfather was the sole survivor in his family of the holocaust and had managed to keep the "Hy" (a small gold thingy) during it. As his only valuable possession he proposing to his wife with it. One cousin wants to do the same to his (excellently acted) bimbo girlfriend, while his ultra-orthodox and uber-intelligent female cousin thinks she should have it to preserve their traditions.
Mar 15	Taken at Midnight	Penelope Wilton, Martin Hutson	3	Grim telling of arrest (on night of the Reichstag fire in 1933) of Hans Litten who had prosecuted Hitler in 1931 (making him appear in court to account for the brutal behaviour of some of his SA followers). His mother spent years trying to keep in touch and get him freed, making herself such a nuisance to the Gestapo that she did manage to trace him from one concentration camp to another. But in the end he was found hanged in Dachau in 1938. Well acted by PW and MH as the son. Quite a lot of dry/gallows humour, but I felt it a weak production that could have better conveyed the vileness and hopelessness of Litten's situation.
Mar 15	Hamlet	Maxine Peak	3	Powerful but far far too long.
Mar 15	A View from a Bridge	Arthur Miller: Mark Strong	2	
Jun 15	Skin in Flames		4	Photographer back in anonymous civil war country where he had taken an iconic photo of girl in flames. He's confronted by the grown up girl (maybe) and other images/instances of continuing corruption. Lousy acting and poor play.
Jun 15	Communicating Doors	Alan Ayckbourn: Imogen Stubbs	4	3*20 year time travellings by going into cupboard in fancy hotel suite lets wives/women of rich man witness each others murders at the hands of man's accomplice and business partner. Ham acting and JC not feeling great to left at the interval
Jul 15	Violence and Son	Gary Owen: David Moorst	2	Smart teenage lad (DM) with wonderfully acerbic wit struggling to live with his violent un-educated biological Dad soon after his Mum dies of cancer (and he meets Dad for the first time). He is a slightly nerdy Dr Who aficionado and brings a girl he fancies from afar round after a convention they both go to. She has a boyfriend but the lad and her get together almost in error, and partly from the Dad's drunken encouragements. She then threatens to report lad for assault and lights go down with lad dangerously ensnared in Dad's violent suggestions to silence her. Brutal swearing and no-holds-barred language and emotion.
Jul 15	Luna Gale	Rebecca Gilman, Michael Attenborough: Sharon Small	2	Surprisingly good tale of mid-west (USA) Social Worker dealing with drug-taking teenagers. She has to organise taking the new baby, Luna Gale, from one young couple. But things get complex as she passes babe to Mum's Mum who both turns out to be a rabid Christian and to have denied her daughter's abuse by her ex-husband.
Sep 15	Lord of the Flies		3	Fantastic set – fuselage of crashed plane that stranded the band of boys away from a civilisation they feared might no longer be there, having destroyed itself. But, sadly the play was a sequence of screaming shouting kids with no glimpse as to why or how they descended into savagery and murder.
Sep 15	Lady Anna: All At Sea		3	Splendid "theatrical soufflé" (Telegraph review). Intermixed story of Anthony Trollope and his wife on a liner going to Australia while he writes a new novel about Lady Anna, whose story we get as the same actors switch in and out of the novel. Excellent acting, and clever staging. The only pall on the evening was a very very thin audience – such a shame word of it had not got out.
Oct 15	Mr Foote's Other Leg	Ian Kelly, Richard Eyre: Simon Russell Beale, Dirvla Kirwan	3	Rapid-fire witty fictionalised telling of fascinating gay theatre manager/performer, Samuel Foote in the late 1700's. He was a good friend of David Garrick, renowned actress Peg Woffington, (possibly fictionally) Benjamin Franklin and the surgeon John Hunter who assisted in the amputation of SF's leg after he fell off the king's horse which he was riding for a wager with Garrick. Lots about their dodging of the still restrictive rules for theatre productions, with SF coining the term "Tea Party" (allegedly subsequently taken to the USA by Franklin) by having paid-for Tea parties alongside a free performance – thereby side-stepping the Lord Chancellor's restrictions. But the show was let down by being too fast to follow and, as so often, a bit too long.
Jan 16	Ben Hur	General Lew Wallace, Tim Carroll	4	"From the team that did 39 steps". Good enough slapstick from the four actors, but this was only lightly amusing. There being little story line, and endless very bad puns.
Jan 16	Forget me not	Tom Holloway, Steven Atkinson: Russell Floyd, Eleanor Bron, Sarah Ridgeway, Sargon Yelda	2	Harrowing telling of another story of a child taken from his single Mum in the 50's and sent to Australia. He being told his Mum was dead, she being led to believe he had been taken to a caring family in the UK. Similar ground to Oranges and Sunshine. Powerfully acted in this great small theatre.
Feb 16	Janis Joplin: Full Tilt	Cora Bissett: Angie Darcy	1	Another fantastic CB production (she of the Glasgow Girls). Superb crisp clean JJ music and AD's singing voice and JJ dirty chuckle were perfect.
Apr 16	The Dishonoured	Kali (asian women's theatre group I think)	5	Colonel in Pakistani ISI with some baggage starts running investigation into CIA agent's murder of young prostitute Though a decent story line and more than OK acting, somehow it was wooden and slow and we bunked off at the interval.
Apr 16	Bug	James Norton, Kate Fleetwood	3	Ex convict (I think) and hooker hook up in a motel room in small town USA. They become increasingly afflicted with, and paranoid about, insects and surveillance. End up in joint suicide. Decent acting and great pop-up location.
Apr 16	Right Now		4	Couple with recently lost child taken over by next door flat family who also lost a child and have a resentful surviving son same age as the first couple. Roles get switched and the two younger men swap places. Dreadful acting and too complicated story. Only spark of interest was in the last 30 seconds when a real crying baby comes on stage!

Plays

May 16	Buskers Opera	Dougal Irvine,	3+	Buzzy rant at the materialism of the 2012 Olympics and London well told in a variant of the Beggars Opera. Macheath is a busker who marries media mogul's (Peachum) rebellious daughter and gets the Boris/Mayor's (Lockitt) daughter pregnant while fronting an anti-establishment movement. It was all too fast moving to pick up every nuance but great fun. Ever-so slightly let down by the weak actor playing Macheath, the same guy we saw play Dave Davis in "Sunny Afternoon".
Aug 16	The Trial of Jane Fonda	Anne Archer	3+	Story of Jane Fonda's anti-war campaigning culminating in her 1972 visit to Hanoi (North Vietnam) with infamous shots of her smiling and sitting on a Viet Cong anti-aircraft gun, which was probably high-jacked by communist PR's, but a foolishly naïve thing to do. The setting was the (I believe true) 1988 meeting she had with war veterans protesting at a potential location that she and de Niro were supposed to shoot, which the film company set up to allow the film to be shot (not sure if it ever was). Lots of shouty antagonism from the vets is slowly mollified as she apologises and they accept that they used her as a "lightening rod" for the anger at their pain and occasional guilt of the war.
Aug 16	Our Ladies of Perpetual Succour	Vicky Featherstone:	1	Superb raucous musical tale of six convent schoolgirls going to Edinburgh from Oban for the day to sing in a concert. Touching tales filter out of each of them through their fun, funniness and vulgarity. Another National Theatre of Scotland gem.
Sep 16	The American Wife	Julia Eringer (wife), George Taylor (journ)	3	Homeland-like thriller of US Spanishy man being arrested in his home in San Diego for terrorism suspicion and rendered first to Bagram and then Egypt. His wife is adamant its a mistake and with the help of journalist follows him ... only to discover he is/was. Good tale let down a little by far too many very very short scenes, being dwarfed by the scene changes.
Sep 16	Groundhog day	Tim Minchin,	4	Dull and repetitive!
Oct 16	This Little Life of Mine	Michael Yale: Kate Batter, Greg Barnett, Caroline Deverill	3+	Young middle-class couple move in together, have trouble getting pregnant, then phantom pregnancy triggers break up and grief. Excellent series of vignettes with superb acting (particularly the main woman and the couple playing various secondary roles) and good and moving songs throughout.
Nov 16	Drones baby Drones	This Tuesday (by Ron Hutchinson and Christina Lamb) The Kid (by David Greig)	3	Two excellent short plays about the conundrums of drone warfare.
Nov 16	Deny, Deny, Deny		4	Two black runners under one coach who persuades one, against her better judgement, to use some "gene editing" technique to boost her performance to win golds in the Olympics. The decision is based on two poorly put arguments: - everyone else is doing something, so its not a level playing field, and - this technique is a) not forbidden (at the moment) and b) doesn't have any (currently known) side effects. Weak storyline and poor acting, sadly.
Dec 16	Screwtape Letters	C.S.Lewis, Max Mclean	3	Impressive 1¼ hour one man (pretty much) show. Far too full of clever satire to follow all as arch-demon Screwtape counsels his nephew Wormwood on how to keep a human ("the patient") away from Christianity. He fails for what seem to be rather trite reasons, but I think I missed 90% of the wit and wisdom!
Dec 16	Anything Goes		2	The usual frothy superficial musical nonsense brilliantly performed with huge enthusiasm by every one of the cast and band. This is Cole Porter music of goings on on a liner going from New York to Southampton.
Jan 17	Luv		4-	Dreadfully silly circular story of two men and a woman variously about to and doing it (non fatally) jumping off a suicide bridge in New York while switching partners and Luv-lives J and Lys left a ½ time, I stupidly saw it through
Jan 17	There Shall be Fireworks	Simon Day: Martin Bonger	3	Allegedly "based on real events" - American man brought up in, and entranced by, Afghanistan in the 50's and 60's, when his father was there building dams. After making loads of money as a commodities trader in Chicago, he sells his business in the late 90's and returns to Kabul to try and repair the country in the wake of the Russian invasion. Good tale, but finger pointing at Britain/England for the country's mess (which is rich from an American) and the condescending/supercilious one-man show actor detracted from its potential impact.
Feb 17	Raising Martha		3	Zany fun farce. A pair of animal rights guys are led along by a girl wanting to get her father and uncle to sell the old family home, currently been superficially run as a farm raising frogs for vivisection (also been used as a pot factory). Coupled with the disinterring (and frequent re-interring and digging up again) of 5-year buried grandmother. All strung together with almost pantomime policeman failing to solve any of it. With stronger acting could see this transfer to a more mainstream theatre.
Feb 17	She Loves Me		3+	Fun 60's frothy musical set in a perfumery in Hungary with two of the staff being romantic anonymous pen pals – but eventually finding each other out.
Mar 17	A Dark Night in Dalston	Tim Stark: Michelle Collins, Joe Coen	3	East end, good looking, ~50-ish woman finds a 20-something Jewish man beaten up in the street and takes him into her flat. They get talking (and flirting), while he spends the night (platonically) both their trouble histories come out. He has been visiting a local "slapper" to get his oats despite being engaged for a full-blown wedding to a Jewish girl he likes but does not love – an is almost suicidally wanting to get out of that and his boring job. She has a disabled husband off-stage (an ex-alcoholic now housebound with a stroke) who she talks of and to during the play, and a history of mild mental illness. In the black denouement it transpires that the husband died 10 minutes before she discovered the Jewish boy. Despite being a 90-minute, no interval show, it dragged slightly on occasion (possibly because we saw a preview) and would otherwise have been 3+

Plays

Apr 17	Chinglish	David Henry Hwang,	3+	American businessman (who turns out to have dodgy credentials, including a senior at Enron) trying to set up a business deal in China using a resident Brit teacher turned consultant who is fluent in Chinese – though there are also some nice cameos of Chinese translators producing ludicrous and/or deliberate mis-transcriptions. All kinds of dodgy dealings and politicking ensue. The Brit turns out to be an virgin consultant, the initial Chinese bureaucrat deal target is undermined by his female deputy, who has an affair with the American, but all, I think, to help her (unloved but there-for-life) Judge-husband advance his career. Ultimately the Enron crooked credentials win the day with some Chinese minister.
Apr 17	Travesties	Tom Stoppard, Tom Hollander, Freddie Fox	3	Semi-factual confection of British Diplomat (TH) stationed in Zurich in 1917, rubbing shoulders with Lenin, Tristan Tzara (Dada-ist, FF) and James Joyce. Breathless witty dialogue, far too much to follow more than a fraction of it.
May 17	Wipers Times	Ian Hislop,	3+	Good version of the film version we saw some years ago. Telling true story of Captain Roberts an officer in WW1 trenches who set up a satirical newspaper that Hislop claims inspired the creation of Private Eye.
May 17	Consent	Nina Raine, Roger Michell: Anna Maxwell Martin, Ben Chaplin, Adam James, Pip Carter	3	Slew of young slick lawyers with marriage breakups and getting back together s well oiled with all guns blazing repartee and legalese.
May 17	Eglantyne	Anne Chamberlain	3+	Short one-woman show outlining the life and work of Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children (1919 – which pioneered many forms of fund-raising) and author of the UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Plenty on her personal life, rubbing shoulders with many well known names, falling in and out of love with men and women (including nearly marrying Margaret Keynes, Maynard's sister). AC is a powerful engaging enthusiastic performer, and slipped in some parts of her own life from time to time.
May 17	The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia	Edward Albee, Ian Rickson: Damien Lewis, Sophie Okonedo	3	50-year old successful American architect admits to long-term and much loved wife that he has started a loving and sexual relationship with a goat! Further sexual taboo's are broken as he recounts someone getting an erection while dandling a baby, and he and his gay son have full-on kiss. Witty and wordy, if a bit too long.
Jun 17	Room	Emma Donoghue, Cora Bissett: Witney White, Harrison Wilding (little Jack), Fela Lufadeju (big Jack)	2	Girl and her 5-year old son have been kept prisoner (she for 7 years) in a room by abusive man. The girl teaches son to believe this is the real world and "TV" is an unreality. They escape and both find it hard to adjust to the outside world.
Jun 17	Life of Galileo	Bertolt Brecht: Brendan Cowell	2	Fantastic again. Realised this is the same play we saw years ago in the Almeida with Richard Griffiths in the lead. Whirlwind of words and ideas. Great planetarium-like ceiling projections and circus feel. Hard to appreciate how respected G was and how the world hung on his ideas and (at the end, after his force recantation) secretly published writings. Again, the ghastliness of the Church is everywhere!
Jun 17	My Country	Carol Ann Duffy, Rufus Norris: Penny Layden	3+	Britannia and representatives of countries and areas of Britain assemble to await the Brexit referendum result. Almost all the dialog is direct re-iteration of words from ordinary folk about their thoughts, fears and hopes. Mixed in with some quotes from the main political players. Great (and pleasantly interval-lessly short) theatre, albeit with no conclusion or message – as is the fact. We saw it a week after May had lost her parliamentary majority and some of the comments about leadership were even more pertinent.
Jul 17	Terror	Ferdinand von Schirach:	1	Superb piece of theatre. Audience are judges (and vote) in the court hearing on the guilt of a German pilot who shot down a hijacked civilian airliner thought to be heading to crash land into a 70,000-full football stadium. Excellent laying out of the moral and ethical choices, with references to the famous "trolley problem" dilemma, inter alia. Our audience found him not guilty by ~130-to-80
Aug 17	Our Ladies of Perpetual Succour	Vicky Featherstone: Dawn Sievwright (Fionnula), Karen Fishwick (Kay), Kirsty MacLaren (Manda), Isis Hainsworth (Orla)	1	As good as last year. Same all-female cast (with one change) and two of the three females in the band the same too. Every so slightly less joyously crude than last time, as if they're getting a bit fed up with doing it!
Sep 17	Loot	Joe Orton	2	Great farce wittily poking fun at the Police, Church amongst others. Dead Mum in coffin is hauled in and out as son and undertaker boyfriend use it to hide cash from a robbery. Slightly shouty main actors, but the Mum corpse actress was fantastically believable (even when naked).
Sep 17	Oslo	J.T. Rogers, Toby Stephens, Lydia Leonard	2+	Telling the story of the secret back-channel talks that led to the Oslo peace accord between the PLO and Israel in 1993. The action covering the back-room negotiators whose hard work was subsequently signed by Arafat and Rabin in front of Clinton (tho' the production was at pains to emphasise that the absence of American involvement was key!). Long but totally engaging. The thing portrayed as being due to a maverick Norwegian husband and wife diplomats Mona Juul and Terje Rød-Larsen.
Oct 17	Labour of Love	James Graham, Jeremy Herrin: Tamsin Greig, Martin Freeman	2	Excellent funny romp through the recent years of Labour politics. First half working backward from 2016 election where new Labour MP of 26 years is losing his seat to a Conservative to his start "parachuted in" to take over from old-school Labour man in (?) late 80's. His progress managed by his wonderful sharply witty female Agent. Second half then rolls the clock forward over the same scenes concentrating on the burgeoning and unacknowledged growing attraction between the two.
Oct 17	Heisenberg: The Uncertainty Principle	Simon Stephens, Marianne Elliott: Anne-Marie Duff, Kenneth Cranham	3-	42-year old American woman picks up 75-year old London butcher to get money to go find her estranged son back in the States. Witty dialogue as they also fall in love. Good acting but weak and implausible story. Thoroughly tenuous connection/reference to the eponymous quantum mechanics principle.
Oct 17	What Shadows	Ian McDiarmid, Nicholas le Prevost, Paula Wilcox	3	Enoch Powell's preparation for and giving of his "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968 (not an actual phrase in it – he said "As I look ahead, ... I ... see the River Tiber foaming with much blood"). This is counterpoised with his Parkinson's-afflicted self in 1990's, mainly being interviewed by on of the piccanninies he referred to, now an Oxford Academic. Good stuff and well acted, but not great drama, being mainly a series of long wordy discourses.

Plays

Nov 17	The Ferryman	Jez Butterworth, Sam Mendes: Will Houston, Sarah Greene	3	3-hour grim saga set in 1981 Ulster farmhouse. Father is ex-IRA man come good. Along with his large family his sister-in-law and her son live there (she silently in love with him) since his brother disappeared 10 years ago. Play starts with the report of the discovery of the brothers body, clearly executed by the IRA. All sorts of wrinkles and history used to elaborate on the tensions from the long running Irish struggles.
Dec 17	Ink	James Graham: Richard Coyle, Rupert Murdoch	3	The story of Murdoch buying the failing Sun in 1969, installing Larry Lamb to revamp it. This he did on a shoestring and with many (portrayed as) also-ran hacks, managing to out-sell the Mirror (the Sun's previous owner) in about a year – with much populist stuff, culminating in the introduction page 3 girls. This done after a good initial progress faltered as their coverage of the kidnapping and murder of their chairman's wife (taken in error for Murdoch's) began to backfire. Over-drawn out (3 hours incl. Interval) but included a fascinating demonstration of how hot metal typography was used every night to produce the curved print plates in the tight nightly schedule. Some reference to the ludicrously controlling unions and a brief intimation of Murdoch's move to Wapping to escape them.
Jan 18	Top Hat		3+	Usual wonderful corny stuff. Loads of tap, and other, dancing and great singing. Endless rushing round and costume changes. Story of mixed identities and love affairs that all come right in the end, as ever.
Jan 18	Tiny Dynamite	Abi Morgan.; Eva-Jane Willis	4	Rather pretentious, staccato 3-hander well acted in tiny space, with water surround and water bath they all frequently disappeared into. Guy and Girl, friends from birth, in platonic supportive arrangement joined by another girl – all Irish. Endless angst over some ill-defined event in the past when good (best?) friend of G&G commits suicide in front of them.
Jan 18	Rothschild & Sons		3	Play with music/singing telling the early history of the financial Rothschild family. Jews in the Frankfurt ghetto around 1800 (I think). Dad managed to get into the good graces of the local prince of Hesse becoming his private banker (obfuscating bonds the prince sold to other aristocratic friends and family) and became wealthy. He schooled his five sons in the same banking and trading and information supply house. The one sent to London (Nathan) made a fortune for the family house during the Napoleonic war – ultimately funding Wellington's campaigns at great profit. Sad to see the (presumably accurate) portrayal of curfew-locked life and mandatory wearing of yellow stars 130 years before Hitler.
Apr 18	Pressure	David Haig.; David Haig, Malcolm Sinclair and Laura Rogers	1	Superb telling of the weather forecasting in the days leading up to D-day. With Scottish meteorologist James Stagg persuading Eisenhower to postpone the June 5 th landing due to expected bad weather in the face of glorious calm weather outside and a US colleague who thought it would remain that way. Then seeing a possible break in the weather a day later giving the nod for the June 6 th event.
Apr 18	Happy Warriors	James Hugh Macdonald.; Simon Pontin, Neil Chinneck, Martha Dancy	3+	Delightfully witty verbal articulacy, based on true story. Randolph Churchill and Evelyn Waugh are in a farmhouse in Yugoslavia in 1943, with a wonderfully disdainful anti-toffs young housekeeper (trying to distance herself from her own privileged background), helping Tito's rebels fight the Germans.
May 18	Building the Wall	Robert Schenkkan, Jez Bond: Trevor White, Angela Griffin	2	A powerful 2-hander, 80 mins in a glass box. Convicted Texan guy who said nothing at his trial has his story teased out by a black female history professor. Set in Nov-2019, Trump's USA had gone into emergency mode after a terrorist attack in Time Square in June-2018. He, an orange jump-suited Trump supporter, became head of a privately run Texan detention centre for "illegals". It was overwhelmed and started going to pieces. First Cholera started killing inmates, then, with insufficient mortuary facilities and no back up from head office, he started mass cremations of the corpses. This descended to Nazi concentration camp like horror as he was persuaded by "head office" to start killing prisoners with exhaust fumes in a specially converted annex to the blast furnace used for cremations.
Jun 18	Monogamy	Torben Betts, Alastair Whatley: Janie Dee, Genevieve Gaunt, Patrick Ryecart	3+	Splendid black comedy farce. 50-ish female TV chef (JD) is in crumbling marriage and relationship with builder working on her house. 21-year old son has just graduated from Cambridge and furious she has not told husband (PR) yet that he is gay. Wonderful pithy female assistant (GG) chips in with lots of brutal cold truths and some pathos. All ends with gore and one death. Ever so slightly over drawn-out but a great play.
Jul 18	Machinal		4	1928(?) play based on real story of US young woman pressured into marrying her boss, who then abused her (apparently – this didn't really come out in the play) and in the end she murdered him. Poor leading lady and rather wooden dialogue But, of course, it was written a very long time ago.
Jul 18	End of the Pier	Danny Robins: Blake Harrison, Les Dennis, Tala Gouveia, Nitin Ganatra	3	Pithy, rich, sharp comedy set round a partly-estranged father and son comedians. Both of their careers were and are ruined by inopportune racist jokes or behaviour.
Sep 18	Holy Sh!t	Alexis Zegerman,	2	Funny and very pithy. Pair of middle-class families, one Jewish start going to local church to get their kid into local school. The other (churchgoing wife is "best friend" of Jewish wife, husband is black teacher) fail to get their kid in. This and other conflicts cause spiral of racial, anti-religion and anti-Jewish antagonisms, ending on a final plaintiff line of "what shall we teach the children".
Nov 18	Brexit	Tom Salinsky: Timothy Bentinck (David Archer!), Adam Astill, Thom Tuck, Pippa Evans, Lucy Montgomery	3	Satire on a world 3 years after 2018 Brexit date when there is still a transitional phase and a new Tory PM has just been elected. Lots of quips and smiles, but the tale is depressingly the same: endless politicking, no progress and in the end the PM scuttles away. Rather thin, in all, but at least it was only 75 mins!
Nov 18	Honour	Joanna Murray-Smith, Paul Robinson: Henry Goodman, Imogen Stubbs	3-	Rather wooden, over-wordy, witty story of 60-something journalist becoming infatuated with a 20-something bright attractive woman interviewing him who he leaves his wife of 32 years for. Over-histrionic acting and totally unconvincing relationships.
Jan 19	The Cane	Vicky Featherstone: Alun Armstrong, Maggie Steed, Nicola Walker	3	Rather OTT polemic on use of cane to beat boys before it was banned. About-to-retire deputy head is bearded by his semi-estranged daughter who runs an Academy school. His school has been inspected as failing and hers is likely to take it over. But the main thread is bricks-through-windows and other recent aggression as his caning history is uncovered.

Plays

Jan 19	Nice Work if you can get it	Alistair So, Abigail Earnshaw	3	Usual comy stuff. Story of love affairs, bootlegging during the prohibition, with everything coming right in the end, as ever. Not quite as good as many previous ones but again wonderful enthusiasm and crisp song and dance in a tiny space.
Jan 19	Rosenbaum's Rescue	A. Bodin Saphir, Kate Fahy; David Bamber, Neil McCaul, Julia Swift, Dorothea Myer-Bennett	2	Fast moving witty play uncovers the memories and beliefs of the (actual) escape of thousands of Jews from Denmark to Sweden thanks to a tip-off days before the Nazis were due to round up all the Jews. The two male characters were about 8 at the time and one, a Jew, should have been part of the rescue – but ran back to get some precious item. The rest of his family had to leave, being skippered by the other man's father, who then sheltered the lad, but was found by the Nazis and surrendered himself (to execution) to save the lad. The play takes place in 2001 when the Jew is now pretty right wing (one of the play's themes contrasts the support of the Danes for the Jews in 1943 and their growing hostility to immigrants now) and religious having found God at the moment of the self-sacrifice by the other's father, attributing everything to divine intervention. The other, a historian, is sure the tip-off was from a senior Nazi who disapproved of Hitler. An excellent show, enhanced by briefly chatting to a knowledgeable young man in the foyer afterwards who turned out to be the writer!
Feb 19	The Son	Florian Zeller, Michael Longhurst; Laurie Kynaston, John Light, Amanda Abington	2	Powerful and disturbing tale of hugely depressed teenager and his separated parents failing to understand how to help him and each other.
Mar 19	The Life I Lead	James Kettle, : Miles Jupp	2	Excellent one-man bio of David Tomlinson the actor who played the jolly, plummy, Mr Banks in Mary Poppins (and several other Disney films). Despite being (as portrayed) a thoroughly nice guy, DT had a very troubled real life. Dad was very unpleasant to him throughout his life. His first wife killed herself and her two boys (by a previous marriage) jumping out of a New York hotel window shortly after their WW2 wedding (he had returned to the UK as an RAF officer). He trained glider pilots for the battle of Arnhem knowing that many of them would die. He and his second wife also had a severely autistic son who they, with Disney's encouragement, managed to get help with from an "angel" in Ealing. Some time after his film successes he crashed a Tiger Moth he was flying for pleasure after blacking out – but was then prosecuted in Aylesbury courts for reckless flying, being got off by his lawyer father (the only positive experience related of Dad, who also managed to have two wives and families concurrently).
Apr 19	Intra Muros	Alexis Michalik, Ché Walker:	2	Superb tightly woven story hung round theatre director (the play's director playing this character) running a session in a prison (for the only two inmates who turn up) at organised by a young female social worker. He gets all concerned (prisoners, himself, his assistant and the girl) to tell their back stories and, at the end, to fabricate alternate ones - often leaving it deliberately vague as to which is which. They are mostly unknowingly intertwined, with murder, unknown father/daughter not as thought daughter/mother, and many other, twists.
Apr 19	Music Hall		3	Great sentimental sing-along evening. Remarkable how many music hall songs I know the words to - baked in from early radio listening, I guess. Very professional looking (but amateur, I believe) team of not so young performers milking the numbers.
Apr 19	Hell Yes I'm Tough Enough	Ben Alderton, : Ben Alderton	5	Dreadful juvenile shouty failed attempt to be funny about the 2015 election with Cameron/Miliband-alikes. Should have noticed that author and main character ("Dave Carter"). Left at interval after 70 mins and far too long, amazingly it appeared that some of the audience might return for the second hour.
Jun 19	The Last Temptation Of Boris Johnson	Jonathan Maitland, Lotte Wakeham; Will Barton, Steve Nallon (Maggie T), Tim Wallers, Arabella Weir	2	Wonderful Dead Ringers calibre versions of Boris, Gove, Maggie T and Tony Blair in witty two-part tale. First half covers Boris' Gove-aborted attempt at Tory leadership in 2016, including his Leave/Remain fence sitting until the last moment - going (purportedly) for Leave only for his egotistical ambition. Second is set in 1929 after two more attempts, an unsuccessful Brexit and continued turmoil. He is still a politician and as the Tories plan on ditching PM Dominic Raab (two A's and a B in Boris character's put down) he is approached to run for leader once more ... and again Gove (now a bishop!) does the dirty. Firmly anti-Brexit and -Boris it was timely to see it on the day Teresa May stepped down from Tory leadership and Boris survived a legal challenge to his £350m/week NHS lies.
Sep 19	What girls are made of	Cora Bissett	3	Auto-biographical telling of (mainly) her brief teenage stint fronting a rock band that went nowhere (despite tours with Radiohead and Blur) and ended being ripped off by the management. Great music and fantastic acting from herself and the three accompanying musicians. Very brief reference to her later life as theatre director (incl. Glasgow Girls) but would have liked more of that. Somehow her message that (I think) a woman can make it on her own didn't come across strongly.
Sep 19	Until the flood	Dael Orlandersmith	3	One woman giving series of one-person snippets on reaction to the shooting of (black) Michael Brown by (white policeman) Darren Wilson in the Ferguson suburb of St. Louis in 2014. Even handed discussion of the problems of both sides of a fractious but unclear situation. Excellent performance and very eloquent but somehow unsatisfactory; maybe we wanted a clear answer or way forward!
Nov 19	Touching the Void		3	Remarkable adaptation of the Joe Simpson / Simon Yates story. Clever use of Joe's sister Sarah as figment of his imagination allowing explanation of events - both in the second half on his amazingly determined 5-day struggle and crawl without food or water and with a shattered leg and other bones, and in the first half largely set round his imagined wake with Simon and Richard, their gap year "base camp manager", explaining things to Sarah. Clever set gave good feel of the climbing process, though the actual slipping that triggered the famous rope cutting didn't really come across well, and nor did Joe's belief that this was the only and right thing to do.
Dec 19	Stray Dogs	Olivia Olsen, Robin Herford; Olivia Olsen, Ian Redford, Ben Porter	3	About Russian poetess Anna Akhmatova and her interactions with the poetry-loving Stalin, who tried to force her to spout his party line - using the kidnap and torture of her son amongst other things. Fascinating story (some of it, probably not the many close encounters with Stalin, based on fact), and good, if slightly dry, bit of theatre.

Plays

Jan 20	Shackleton and his Stowaway	Richard Ede, Elliott Ross	3	Shackleton's Endurance expedition told using just Shackleton and the young Welshman (real character) who stowed away to join the expedition. Slightly laboured production and I don't think I would have understood the various stages of the amazing story if I didn't know it already.
Jan 20	Luzia	Cirque du Soleil	3-	Good spectacle in parts. But lots of padding and less dramatic (other than an amazing double-jointed young man) than our memories of other shows. Certainly not worth the £70+ per ticket!
Jan 20	42 nd Street		3	Sadly not up to the usual standard. Plenty of enthusiasm and stunning number and speed of costume changes. But the plot was very weak even for a corny comedy musical, some of the main actors unconvincing and the sound poor at times.
Jan 20	RAGS the Musical		3-	Dull musical set round an extended Jewish family, and other immigrants, in New York in the early 1900's.
Mar 20	Blazin' Fiddles	(Concert)	3	Super-slick Scottish fiddle band in slightly sterile concert hall. Memorable tunes: Union Station (?) The Nameless Clan (by Bruce MacGregor BF founder) Annie's Waltz
	Cutting Edge			Missed due to Covid (due to see 18-Mar-2020)
Apr 20	It's True, It's True, It's True	Billy Barrett: Ellice Stevens, Sophie Steer, Kathryn Bond	3+	Based on transcripts of the 1612 trial of Italian artist Agostino Tassi, accused of raping fellow painter, teenager Artemisia Gentileschi - who went on to be more famous than him with, eg, "Susanna and the Elders" and "Judith Slaying Holofernes" - both of which feature in the play. Wonderful dialogue and superb acting (by the three plus one women playing all the parts), with lots of relevance to today's continuing misogyny.
Apr 20	One Man, Two Guvnors	Richard Bean, Nicholas Hytner: James Corden	3	Based on 1743 Italian "Servant of Two Masters" comedy), slapstick of hapless man working for a girl posing as her dead gangster twin brother and the man who killed him who is in love with the girl. Very good in parts but sadly drawn out with lots of rather tedious sections.
May 20	A Streetcar named desire	Tennessee Williams, Benedict Andrews: Gillian Anderson	5	Dire screeching from GA.
May 20	This House	James Graham, Jeremy Herrin: Julian Wadham, Charles Edwards	3	Back-room (whips' offices) shenanigans during the 1974-79 political upheavals during Wilson-Callaghan-Thatcher transitions. Lots about the (often nonsense) traditions, the "pairing" system, briefly acrimoniously suspended. And hung and minority parliaments propped up by almost dead MP's being wheeled in, until, in echo's of 2019 (albeit Con-Con), Thatcher gets a thumping majority.
Jul 20	Les Blancs	Lorraine Hansberry, Yaël Farber: Danny Sapani, Clive Francis, James Fleet, Elliot Cowan, Gary Beadle, Sheila Atim, Sian Phillips	3	Decent covering of end-of-Colonialism based around white-run hospital in a fictitious West coast African country. Sometimes brutal and patronising whites contrasted with both-sides-of-the-argument (violence vs. dialogue) blacks.
Jul 20	The Deep Blue Sea	Terence Rattigan, Carrie Cracknell: Helen McCrory, Tom Burke	3-	Unimpressive tale of woman almost divorced from her (still loving) be-knighted judge husband. She fails to commit suicide after her lover-of-a-year, with whom she is besotted, forgets her birthday, he then goes on to discard her.
Jan 21	Uncle Vanya	Ian Rickson: Toby Jones, Roger Allam, Richard Armitage, Rosalind Eleazar, Aimee Lou Wood	3	Superbly acted but rather long. Set in lat1800's Russian country house. Powerful feeling (tho' I didn't really understand it beyond the superficial) of love, loss, control.
Mar 22	Clybourne Park	Bruce Norris, Oliver Kaderbhai: Imogen Stubbs, Richard Lintern	3	At heart a powerful and witty tale of a black couple moving into an all white suburb in 1959 (first half) and, in the second half, the reverse in the same house in Obama time. But sadly wrecked by some over drawn out dialogue and dreadful shouty acting. Originally missed due to Covid (due to see 2-Apr-2020)

Quotes

20 grains = 1 scruple	A life discarded, Alexander Masters
The three most important documents a free society gives are a birth certificate, a passport, and a library card	E.L. Doctorow – on wall at Central Family Court (seen at Eglantyne show)