

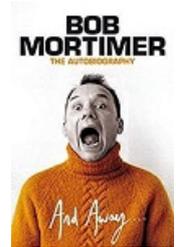
## What We're Reading - 1 October 2021

Opinion - Books Friday, 1st October 2021

*The BookBrunch team reveals what's on their bedside tables*

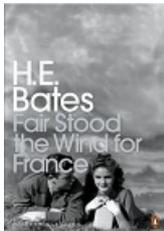
### David Roche

My latest celebrity audiobook outing is *And Away...* by Bob Mortimer (Simon & Schuster). The surprises are how shy Robert (off stage name) was as a child, his choice of turning down a place at Cambridge to go to Leicester as he thought he would fit in better (his mum in Middlesbrough was not best pleased) and becoming a qualified solicitor with the council. The back story is played out in tandem with a more recent health scare that required a triple heart bypass operation. His recovery was initiated by the insistence of Paul Whitehouse that he go fishing with him on the River Test - we are now in the fourth series of BBC2's highly acclaimed *Gone Fishing* as a result. Reading (yes) his story, Bob Mortimer does reveal a totally different persona from his madcap TV characters, and the transformation when puts on his act is remarkable. The miracle of serendipity is that he found Jim Moir (Vic Reeves) in a pub when he did.



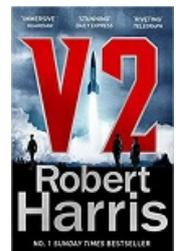
### Jo Henry

For those who only know HE Bates as the author of the Pop Larkin/*Darling Buds of May* books (I see a new series is about to be televised), *Fair Stood the Wind for France* will come as a complete revelation. The plot and the spare, staccato prose - key to brilliantly building up the tension - remind me somewhat of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but (heresy I know) I am emphatically not a Hemingway fan, and I am finding Bates' book a far more sympathetic and engaging read. He was commissioned into the RAF during WW2 specifically to write about what it was like to be a fighter pilot, and this story of a crew who have to bail out over occupied France, and try to find their way home, is compelling stuff.



### Neill Denny

In March 1945, my father's step-mother Daisy Denny was killed by a V2 on Blackheath High Street, so becoming one of the last civilian casualties of the war. Thanks to Robert Harris' *V2* (Arrow), I now know a lot more about the weapon that killed her. Plunging to earth at three times the speed of sound from the edge of space, the instrument of her destruction would not have been audible to her. The novel is a fictionalised account of the V2 launch programme aimed at London from the Dutch coast, and the (unsuccessful, sadly for Granny) British attempts to stop it. To find the mobile launch sites, and destroy them with Spitfires, a crack team of mathematically expert (and enthusiastically promiscuous) WAAFs is sent to Belgium. By using radar data from the missile flight, combined with the place and time of the impact in London, it was possible to reverse-plot the parabolic flight of the V2 and pinpoint its launch site in under six minutes. From that intriguing basis, Harris constructs a readable novel, replete with various sub-plots and even the hint of a happy ending. Not as good as *Fatherland*, but a country mile ahead of most thrillers set in the war.





## Nicholas Clee

I think that Elizabeth Day's talent is better suited to the social satire of *The Party* than to the domestic thriller genre of her new novel *Magpie* (HarperCollins): the characters, by comparison with those in the earlier novel, seem to be short of a dimension. But there are compensations. There's a partner's mother from hell; and there is an acute, raw portrayal of the aftermath of abuse, of the agonies involved in hoping for a child, and in getting a chance to have one but fearing that your plans will go wrong. You need not be afraid that anyone is going to get bumped off here, but other anxieties will keep you turning the pages.

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