

What We're Reading - 15 January 2021

Opinion - Books Friday, 15th January 2021

The BookBrunch team reveals what's on their bedside tables

David Roche

The holidays were a great opportunity to pay my respects to John le Carré and I was drawn to *A Perfect Spy* (Penguin Classics), published in 1986, that had been described as 'the best English novel since the war' by Philip Roth. It's 650+ pages and plays out over a generation from the protagonist's childhood, based on le Carré's own, and has the humour and touch of Evelyn Waugh at times. The story skips back and forth in time and the hunt for a double agent is in the best le Carré tradition. It's basically a perfect holiday read and was a great addition to my knowledge and experience of this master storyteller of his genre and generation.



Nicholas Clee

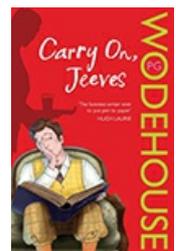


I'm a weak chess player, but I enjoy following the Power Play Chess channel on YouTube, and in common with many thousands of others I've found my interest in the game heightened by the compelling Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit*. Before Beth Harmon, the chess player that non-players were most likely to have heard of was Bobby Fischer, whose 1972 World Championship match against Boris Spassky is the subject of *Bobby Fischer Goes to War* by David Edmonds and John Eidinow. Although the authors' descriptions of games - both too brief and too technical - could enlighten neither aficionados nor novices, they tell a gripping story. Like Harmon, Fischer was a maladjusted genius whom one was inclined to cheer on, because of the awe that genius inspires; but after reading this book,

you may find yourself wishing that Spassky had retained his title.

Jo Henry

The start to the New Year hasn't been the cheeriest of times, so in my bedtime audio listening I've turned to an old favourite, P.G. Wodehouse's *Carry On, Jeeves* (Arrow), read on this occasion by Jonathan Cecil. His voice is admirably suited to the content, something that is, I've discovered, key to the enjoyment of an audiobook (I've had to give up on Russell Tovey's narration of *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, it's just wrong!). These inconsequential stories, usually involving aged aunts and unfortunate romantic entanglements, are the ideal way to drift off to sleep. The only danger is waking up whoever is in bed with you (cat, child, partner) by laughing out loud.



Neill Denny



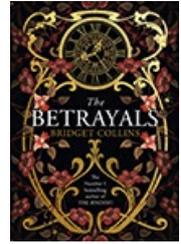
The central idea of Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (Canongate) is simple but creatively interesting: what if you could live an alternative life? To explore the premise, Haig has his protagonist Nora Seed hover between life and death (after she kills herself) in the aforementioned magical library, where every book is the story of the life she could have had if she had made a different choice. What if she had married Dan and followed his dream of running a country pub? Or followed her best friend out to Australia? Or stuck with swimming and become an Olympic star? They start off sounding like better versions of her depressing real life in mundane Bedford, but are they, really...? It's heavy ideas in a

light read and I'm racing through it.



Lucy Nathan

The Binding by Bridget Collins was one of the most blindingly excellent debuts I've read in some time, so was interested to pick up her second book, *The Betrayals* (HarperCollins). It's a perfect novel for this time of year when it's grey and awful outside - it's immersive fantasy that you can just sink into, with two really compelling main characters. There was a twist that I guessed early on (although I think I may have been supposed to), and I was fascinated by the grand jeu and wanted to know far more about it than readers are told, but it's an incredibly intelligent and layered read that has really stuck with me. It's hugely impressive to follow up a debut like *The Binding* with a book like this one, set in an equally unique and absorbing world - I could read entire series based in these fantasy universes. I'm so excited to see what else Collins comes up with..



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