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Welcome to the June edition...

There's a whole load of great events coming up over the next month – from outdoor adaptations of Shakespeare plays to jazz festivals. Fingers crossed the weather's good to us and we can get our picnic blankets out!

Or maybe you're busy getting your garden summer ready or preparing to move house. If you need help getting your garden landscaped, your drive re-done, or your bathroom or kitchen updated then have a look to see if one of the local and reliable businesses who advertise in here can help.

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community events

Shirley Weekender

19 June. Shirley Park.

To celebrate ten years of the Digbeth Dining Club they'll be bringing their usual mixture of award-winning and all-star street food with only the best line-ups, combined with a range of specialist gin, prosecco, cocktail and craft beer bars, a host of entertainment and content for children. Tickets from www.skiddle.com



Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons

26 June. Resorts World Arena, NEC

Forget the many Jersey Boys tribute shows and revel in the real falsetto as Frankie Valli performs classic hits from 'Walk Like a Man' to 'Beggin'.



To date Frankie and The Four Seasons have sold more than 175 million records worldwide. To book visit www.theticketfactory.com.

Solihull 'Sort Of' Jazz festival

14-17 July. Solihull Town Centre.

The stage in Mell Square and a number of venues across Solihull town centre will be hosting music across the weekend with a Continental Food & Drink Market via RR Events accompanying the tunes. More information from www.solihullbid.co.uk

Balsall Common Comedy Club

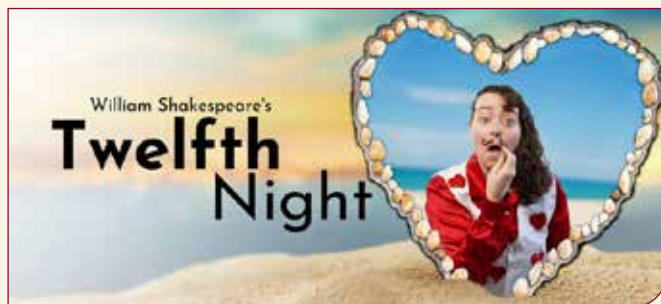
16 July. St Peter's Church Hall.

Andy Robinson, one of Birmingham Glee Club's resident MC's, will host and will introduce the hilarious "one man comedy band" Rob Deering and the breath-taking comedy magician Alan Hudson. Tickets from www.ticketsource.co.uk

Twelfth Night

19 July. Brueton Park.

Adapted for today's reality-tv focused audiences, this outdoor production keeps close enough to the Bard's to appeal to aficionados but wraps up the themes of obsessive love and its subterfuges in a Love Island meets Big Brother package. Pack a picnic and dress for the weather. Tickets from The Core Theatre Box Office on 0121 704 6962.



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Falling in Love with a Drunken Bricklayer!

My friend showed me an unusual vase he'd bought for his wife's birthday.

I was captivated by its colour and shape. 'It's a Drunken Bricklayer vase,' he said, 'I've been looking for one for ages.' I'd never heard of such a vase so when he left I looked it up.

James Powell and Sons was one of the most important manufacturers of British art glass. The company was founded in the 17th century and was also known as Whitefriars Glass. After the second World War Whitefriars became known for innovative modern design. Geoffrey Baxter was a particular star, responsible for designing recognisable



British art glass; the most notable and enduring example of this was his Drunken Bricklayer

vases, though he is also known for his 'Television' and 'Banjo' vases. Baxter's work is highly collectable and rarer pieces can fetch a few hundred pounds.

Whitefriars Glass was the Wedgwood of the British glass industry, with the same ambitious standards of design and creativity, while remaining commercially desirable. Their glassware was sold by leading department stores including John Lewis and Fortnum & Mason.

You can still find lovely original examples of Drunken Bricklayer cases. Expect to pay a few hundred pounds for the best examples.



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Are pre-nups just for the super rich?

They aren't considered to be particularly romantic, but a prenuptial agreement (pre-nup) is a way of protecting your assets, should your marriage or civil partnership breakdown.

Dipika Mistry, Legal Director at Shakespeare Martineau in Solihull explains...

A lot of people think that pre-nups are only for millionaires and lottery winners, but they are becoming more and more important as people enter blended families or marry later in life when assets are greater.

If you have significantly more wealth than your partner, personally or via a business, or have children from a previous relationship you'd like to protect, then you should consider a nuptial agreement.

What is a pre-nup?

A pre-nup is a legal agreement between a couple, which sets out how finances or assets will be distributed, in the event of divorce.

They can be used to ring-fence assets that one or both parties bring to a marriage, or be used to protect assets inherited during the marriage. Where possible they should be flexible, in order to deal with changes in the family such as children or illness – backed up by an up to date will.

Are pre-nups legally binding?

No. A pre-nup is not legally binding in English law, however, they are becoming increasingly upheld provided that they are entered into fairly and on a voluntary basis and both parties have received independent legal advice before doing so.

Pre-nups do not overrule a court's decision on financial arrangements on divorce but they do carry some influence.

I'm already married – how can I protect my assets?

It is possible to record an agreement after marriage or civil partnership; these are called post-nuptial agreements.

Similarly to a pre-nup they outline the decision reached between a couple in relation to what will happen to their finances, should it breakdown.

Some couples who have already entered into a pre-nup choose to enter into a further post-nup to confirm the arrangements still stand.

For the best chance of these agreements being upheld, as with a pre-nup, a post-nup must be entered into fairly, after independent legal advice.



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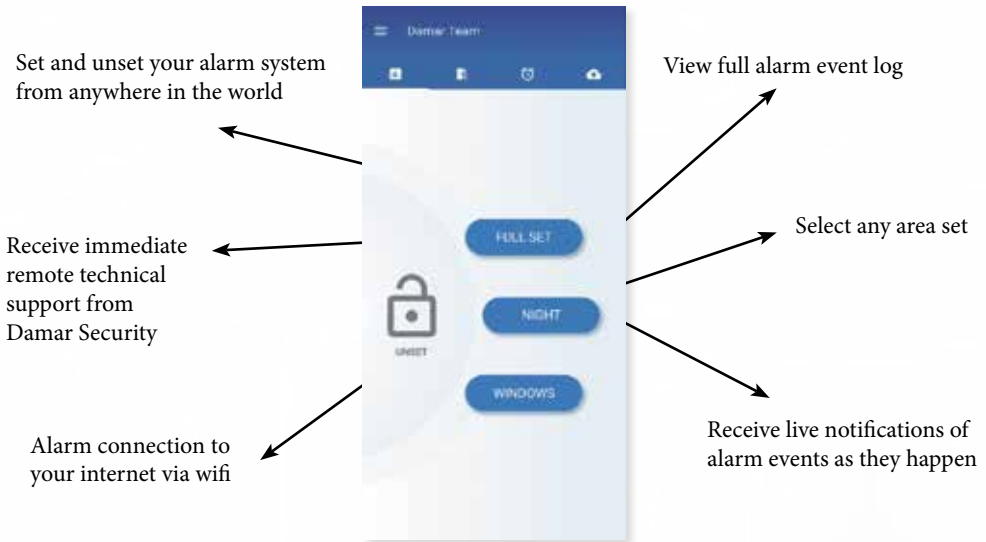
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a good read

The Quiet at the End of the World

by Lauren James

This novel is a deeply human story about a 'soft apocalypse' - what happens when humans stop being able to reproduce, and you have to slowly watch your entire species go extinct as you grow up?

Teenagers Lowrie and Shen are the youngest humans left on earth.

In February 2024, the population of the world was infected with a virus that made them all infertile. The only humans conceived after this date were from eggs frozen at fertility clinics. Now it's 2109 and the population of the earth is so small that the last people have congregated in central London. They make a proxy family to protect Lowrie and Shen. The young people are taught the life skills on which they will depend when they are the last people left alone. Alongside the remaining humans are robots working to protect the planet and the people, including lifeguard robot Mitch, who patrols the banks of the river Thames ready to save anyone in difficulty. It is Mitch who saves Lowrie and Shen when a helicopter crashes near where they are searching for treasure. The pilot had a seizure and crashed into Big Ben. Over the next few days, others start to have seizures fall unconscious, and Lowrie and Shen need to find a way to help them before they really are the only two people left on the planet.

The Quiet at the End of the World is a blend of philosophy and sci-fi. Woven through the plot is the story of Maya Waverley, told through old social media posts. Through Maya, Lowrie learns all about the past, the virus, the symptoms, and what happened to the world, and Maya.

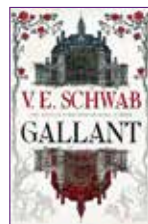
Beautiful, melancholic, and hopeful - this is a book written for the times we live in. 'The Quiet at the End of the World' might restore your faith in humanity.



Gallant

by V. E. Schwab

Olivia Prior is an orphan, and the black sheep at Merilance School for Independent Girls. She has to deal with lessons and bullies and the fact that she cannot speak, and no-one understands sign-language. She spends her free time drawing and studying her mother's old journal, which is full of strange inkblot illustrations. The journal tracks her mother's love affair with Olivia's father, his mysterious death, and her own descent into madness. The journal closes with one final, desperate entry addressed to Olivia: "The shadows are not real. The dreams can never hurt you. And you will be safe as long as you stay away from Gallant." Then Olivia receives a letter from an uncle she's never heard of, requesting that she goes to Gallant, which is the Prior family estate. At first she's entranced by the colourful surroundings, and the kind staff, and even the house ghouls. The only person who is hostile towards her is her cousin Matthew. Gallant is a place of secrets. Olivia is forbidden to leave the house at night and is strangely drawn to the crumbling wall at the edge of the garden, which holds back a menace that no one wants to talk about. This is a multi-layered modern-day gothic novel. It has it all: a haunted house, a dark, forbidding atmosphere, a tragic love story, and a rebellious heroine desperate to find her place in the world. Schwab's use of eerie imagery pairs with the illustrations to produce the magical feel of a novel which has the potential to become a classic.





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Transition Time

Is there such a thing as a mid life crisis?

We've all heard the term 'mid-life crisis.' But what is it exactly?

The psychoanalyst Elliott Jaques first suggested the concept in 1957. He hadn't completed any research though, basing his assertion solely on a few autobiographies of famous men.

He declared that men in their mid-30s go through a depressive period when they contemplate their mortality for the first time. Jaques didn't include women in this sweeping statement, citing the menopause, claiming it "obscured" women's midlife transitions!

Gail Sheehy then popularized the idea in the 70s. She based her assertions on rudimentary research from Yale, involving just 40 male subjects. In spite of this small sample, she confidently stated that the midlife crisis starts in the 40th year and ends at 45 ½, which seems oddly specific.

More recent research suggests that we all go through three to five major transitions in our lives, some voluntary and some involuntary. They might be personal, including serious illness, major career change, birth, or divorce, or they might be due to external factors such as a housefire, bankruptcy, death of a close family member or a pandemic. It can take five years or more to completely work through just one of these transitions so we could each spend 30-50% of our lives in transition. It makes a lot of sense therefore to learn some strategies for dealing with change.

First, accept that things change. Try not to fight or resist, and don't go into denial. Acknowledge the change and lean into. Embrace the fact that although not all change is bad, even positive change



brings stress. A new baby is joyful, but stressful, even if you planned for it. The same goes for starting a new business.

During transition periods it helps to stick to routines. Go for a walk or a run every day; make time to watch your favourite TV show, play five aside or practice your piano...whatever gives your life structure. These routines act as anchors to remind us that some things are still the same, and they give our brains a chance to recharge.

Eat healthily. Stress can make us crave comfort food, or alcohol. Concentrate on buying and eating healthy foods but allow a few treats too. Exercise even if you don't want to. Walking at a brisk pace clears your mind and bathes your brain in feel-good hormones. Have plenty of early nights. Set a regular bedtime and stick to it. Regular sleep really does refresh you and help you think more clearly.

Find a support group. This can be a formal group, such as a bereavement group, or the informal support of a few good friends or family members. No-one can do everything alone. Asking for help is a mature, sensible approach to coping with transition..

We can't ignore transitions and we can't will them away. When we learn to deal with change we can accept it, embrace it, and use it to move forward in our life.

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This month - Trellis

Trellis is underutilised in most gardens, yet it has a myriad of uses. It can cover an ugly wall or screen an ugly garden building, and it can be used on one or more sides of a patio to provide privacy. You can use it as a framework to support plants but can also be a decorative feature in its own right.

Strategically placed trellis can make a garden appear more interesting. Counterintuitively it can also provide the illusion of greater space by interrupting the line of sight and making people curious so drawing them out into the garden to explore.

Most garden centres have a good range of functional and attractive trellis, readymade into units. If you can't find exactly what you are looking for there are companies who will precision cut a specific design and size for you. Obviously, you will pay more for the privilege, but you will get exactly what you want. In a small space where you might only need one piece it can be a worthwhile investment, because in a small garden any structure is more noticeable and becomes a visual statement.

If you plan to grow plants up your trellis then make sure the posts or wall that it is fixed to will support the weight of the trellis plus the full-grown plant.

It can be tempting to plant a variety of climbers, but a small space often benefits from bold planting using fewer varieties. Beware of using all deciduous plants because the structure will look bare in the winter.

Vines such as *Vitis coignetiae*, which has large heart-shaped leaves and beautiful autumn colour are great for a large area. *V. vinifera* 'Purpurea' has very attractive leaves which as the name suggests are purple. It produces bunches



of dark, tightly clustered grapes.

Clematis are a good choice. *C. montana* is vigorous and might swamp a small trellis, but if you have the space they can be grown through other climbers and produce a fabulous summer display.

Ivies are good for winter colour. Don't think that all ivies are dark green. *H. Helix* 'Goldheart' has super attractive yellow leaves edged in bright green while *H. helix* 'Chester' has leaves with wide cream margins and is good for brightening up a gloomy area.

Passion flowers look very exotic and are a particularly good choice for a trellis.

Scented climbing roses are one of my favourite plants to grow up trellis which is screening a patio. I love 'Compassion', which has the most beautiful blooms in pink / apricot, and a strong, sweet fragrance. Prune every winter.

Remember to check trellis every year for broken or rotten supports and treat periodically with wood preservative to prolong its life and freshen its appearance.

Consider adding a trellis screen to your garden this summer.

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GOOD LUCK!

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It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition. You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out! Sudoku is highly addictive.

answer on page 41



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The history of instant coffee

I thought instant coffee was a recent innovation, but it has actually been around since the turn of the last century.

A chemist named George Constant Washington, developed and patented a coffee compound branded as Red E Coffee in the US. It was quite different to the instant coffee we know today, and a world away from fresh coffee. In the 1930s, the Brazilian coffee industry, wanted to develop a way to preserve excess coffee crops and experimented with liquid coffee extract. It was Nestlé, who pioneered powdered coffee, producing its iconic product in 1938. Instant coffee found popularity during the Second World War because of its convenience and long shelf life, and the fact that it could be made anywhere without the need for a coffee machine. In fact, one year, the

U.S. military bought more than one million cases of Nescafé, which represented a whole year's output for the company!

In 1963 Maxwell House developed a freeze-drying process which came to dominate the market and gave a taste more comparable with fresh coffee. The green coffee bean is first roasted to bring out flavour and aroma. The roasted beans are then finely ground and dissolved in water. This coffee solution is then dried by one of two methods: freeze drying, which is the removal of water by sublimation; or spray drying.

These modern manufacturing methods have greatly improved the taste and solubility instant coffee, allowing better aroma and complexity of taste but it can never match the taste of the freshly ground variety. However, for convenience in a busy life, it's an instant win!

Raspberry Swiss Roll

Home-made Swiss rolls are so good, and surprisingly easy to make.

Preparation time: 30 mins

Cooking time: 10 to 30 mins

Serves: 6–8

Ingredients

4 free-range eggs
115g caster sugar, plus
extra to dust (you can
also use icing sugar)
½ tsp vanilla bean paste
75g self-raising flour
200ml double cream
1 tsp vanilla extract
200g whole raspberries
For the raspberry jam
150g caster sugar
½ lemon, zest, and juice
350g raspberries

Method

Preheat the oven to
190C/170C Fan/Gas 5 and
line a 23x33cm/9x13in Swiss
roll tin with greaseproof
baking paper.

Place the eggs, sugar and
vanilla paste into a bowl and
whisk together until pale,
fluffy, and thickened to the
consistency of double cream.

Sieve the flour into the
mixture and carefully fold it
in preserving as much air as
possible. Pour the mixture
into the lined tin and spread
it evenly with the spatula.
Bake for 10–12 minutes, or
until just firm to the touch.

Place a sheet of baking paper,
slightly bigger than the tray,
onto a work surface and dust

with caster sugar. Turn the
sponge out onto the paper,
peel off the baking paper on
the bottom of the sponge
and set aside to cool a little.
Pour the double cream and
vanilla extract into a large
bowl and whip to soft peaks.
Make the jam – Heat a pan
until hot. Add the sugar, lemon
zest and juice and cook for
3–4 minutes until the sugar has
dissolved. Throw in the 350g of
raspberries and cook for 3–5
minutes until they break down
and thicken. Remove from the
heat and set aside to cool.

Spread the jam over the
sponge, leaving a 2cm gap
around the edge. Spread
the whipped cream over the
top of the jam, then sprinkle
over the whole raspberries.
Starting with the longest edge
of the sponge and using the
baking paper to help (but take
care not to roll the paper inside
the sponge!), roll the sponge
up tightly, making sure the
filling stays inside. Keep rolling
until the sponge rolls off the
baking paper. Dust with extra
caster sugar or the icing sugar
and cut into slices to serve.



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Sudoku Solution
from page 33

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