

NFOP magazine



Winter is a season of
recovery and preparation.

Paul Theroux

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Coronavirus and smell

Thankfully we can all see that the vaccination programme is having the desired effect on the country and the impact that coronavirus has had on our lives. Life is slowly starting to return to normal and the economic stimulus introduced to help the economy get through the devastating financial effects of the virus are slowly starting to be wound down.

Whilst case rates continue to remain stubbornly high, showing that the disease has far from gone away, thankfully these are less severe than in earlier stages of the pandemic. Fewer people are being admitted to hospital, fewer people are ending up seriously ill in intensive care and fewer people are, thankfully dying from the disease. Meanwhile, official figures from the Office for National Statistics shows that case rates are highest in the younger cohorts of society, and amongst those that have not yet been vaccinated against the disease.

Going forward

But rest assured, the disease has not gone away and we are likely to be living with it in one form or another for some considerable time to come.

But with a disease like this, paradoxically comes progress as well. This is because all those fabulous research doctors and scientists that are out there will be beaver away looking at the way the disease has affected us as humans, looking at its traits, looking at the way it attacks the body and looking at what can be done to both try and prevent it from happening again and to come up with treatments that can lessen its impact.

Expect to see reams and reams of research reports published over the forthcoming months and years as our knowledge and understanding of this disease continues to grow. And this research won't just help us to combat coronavirus it will also have implications for other diseases that affect us as humans as well.

Loss of smell

Loss of smell has long been identified as one of the main symptoms of the disease, but as a symptom it is not unique to coronavirus. In fact loss of smell is a common symptom of many viral infections and whilst most people regain their sense of smell after a few weeks, many people who have contracted coronavirus have been left with on-going smell disorders.

This is why researchers at the University of East Anglia and the James Paget University Hospital are looking into the potential links between Vitamin A and smell to see whether the vitamin can aid people in regaining their smell after having had a viral infection. There is a precedent in that previous research undertaken in Germany has already shown that there could be a potential benefit from the vitamin. The research will therefore examine how treatment could potentially help to repair tissues in the nasal cavity that have been damaged by viruses.

Smell loss expert Prof Carl Philpott from UEA's Norwich Medical School and James Paget University Hospitals NHS Trust, said: "The huge rise in smell loss caused by Covid-19 has created an unprecedented worldwide demand for treatment.

"Even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, smell loss was thought to affect an estimated five per cent of people, with viruses accounting for 1 in 10 of those.

"And around one in ten people who experience smell loss as a result of Covid-19 report that their sense of smell has not returned to normal four weeks after falling ill.

"It's a big problem, and our previous research has shown the impact of smell loss – including depression, anxiety and isolation, as well as risk of danger from hazards such as gas and spoiled food, and changes in weight due to reduced appetite.

"A key problem for patients and their clinicians is the lack of proven effective treatments.

"A recent study from Germany showed that people treated with vitamin A nasal drops improved twice as much as those in the untreated group.

"We want to find out whether there is an increase in the size and activity of damaged smell pathways in patients' brains when they are treated with vitamin A nasal drops. This would show recovery of the damage caused by common viral infections, including Covid-19, in the nose.

The research team will work with patients who have lost their sense of smell due to a viral infection. Participants will either receive a 12-week course of nasal vitamin A drops or inactive equivalent drops, and have their brains scanned before and after the treatment. The scans will be compared to those of a control group who have not been treated with the vitamin A drops.

Prof Philpott said: "The patients will be smelling distinctive odours – roses and rotten eggs – while special MRI brain scans are taken.

"We will look for changes in the size of the olfactory bulb – an area above the nose where the smell nerves join together and connect to the brain as well as looking at activity in areas of the brain linked to recognising smells."

Duncan Boak, Founder and Chair of Fifth Sense, said: "At Fifth Sense we have engaged with thousands of people who have experienced changes in their ability to smell or taste as a result of the Covid-19 virus. They join an already large community of people with a smell disorder that pre-dates the pandemic.

"The question we are most often asked is about available treatments to support recovery. Not being able to smell is not only physically distressing but can affect the enjoyment of social occasions and present hazards and risks that might never have been previously considered such as not being able to detect gas leaks or spoiled food.

"Research into potentially successful interventions is vital to help people feeling the impact of smell disorders that affects the quality and enjoyment of their life."

To take part in this trial, patients need to be referred to The Smell and Taste Clinic at the James Paget University Hospital by their GP. Recruitment is expected to begin in December 2021.

To find out more visit <https://rhinology-group.uea.ac.uk/apollo-trial> or contact apollo.trial@uea.ac.uk.

It's time to get your flu jab

It is the time of year when our thoughts turn to the forthcoming winter months, and with that comes the annual reminder that it is time to get your flu jab for this year. Perhaps it is even more important this year that you take the jab when offered given the ongoing crisis caused by coronavirus. Ahead of what is known as "flu season" and the roll-out of the flu jab for this year the NHS has updated its advice.

In fact this year's programme is anticipated to be the most intensive ever offered under the NHS with some 35 million doses expected to be administered. The vaccine is considered to be a safe and effective vaccine by the NHS and aims to help people who are administered it from getting seriously ill from flu which spikes each winter – so very much like the coronavirus vaccine.

The vaccine will not guarantee that you don't catch flu this winter, but again much like the coronavirus vaccine, if you do catch it your symptoms and the degree to which you become ill should be lower than if you caught the disease and were unvaccinated.

So why is it important to get vaccinated?

Many of you will have now received your two coronavirus jabs and some of you may already have been called for the booster jab. But it is also important that you get the annual flu jab as well – don't think the coronavirus booster jab will also protect you from flu – it won't. The diseases are different as are the vaccines that are used to help prevent infection.

The NHS is warning that more people are likely to contract flu this winter than normal. This is because fewer people will have built up a natural immunity to the disease during the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, should you be unlucky enough to catch both flu and coronavirus at the same time, research shows that you are more likely to be seriously ill as a result.

Even if you have already had coronavirus you should still get your annual flu vaccine when it is offered to you.

Most NFOP members will be eligible for both the coronavirus booster vaccine and also the annual flu jab and many of you may find that you are being offered them at the same time. This is a perfectly safe thing to do so don't delay one because you are being offered the other.

Where can I get my flu jab?

Most of you will be called by your GP surgery for your jab. But you can also have the jab at any pharmacy offering the service, you just need to make an appointment. You may also be offered the flu jab if you have to attend a hospital appointment. Don't worry where you have the jab – your records will be updated accordingly to show that it has been given to you.

If you don't want to wait to be called by your GP for your jab then you can always find a pharmacy close to you that is offering them. To do this just visit www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy and follow the instructions to find pharmacies near you that are offering the service.

It's free

And remember the annual flu jab is free for those that qualify for it – so if you are asked to pay for it don't – there is no need.



Some things to look out for

Most of us can have the flu vaccine each year, but many of us do suffer reactions after it has been administered. If you suffer from an egg allergy then you may be at risk of an allergic reaction because some flu vaccines are produced using eggs. If you do suffer from an egg allergy then you should ask your doctor or pharmacist to administer either a low-egg or an egg free vaccine instead.

If you already have a high temperature, or are suffering from a mild cold of infection then it is better that you wait for this to clear up before you have your vaccination.

How effective is it?

No vaccine can claim to be 100% effective. However, having the flu vaccine gives you the best protection that is available at the time the vaccine is made.

This is because the vaccine can only be made to treat known strains of influenza and as strains mutate all the time it quite simply cannot protect against each and every strain. However, research shows that even if you do catch flu after you have been vaccinated then it is likely to be milder and not last as long as it would if you are not vaccinated. Having the vaccine can also stop you from spreading the disease to other people who may be more at risk than you of serious health problems should the catch the disease.

Are there any side effects?

The simple answer to this is yes – there can be side effects after you have been vaccinated. However, in the majority of cases any side effects are mild and will only last for a day or so. Some side effects that you may experience could include you having a slightly raised temperature, aching muscles or a sore arm where you were vaccinated.

However, it is very rare for anybody to have a serious allergic reaction to the flu vaccine and if that happens it is likely to happen within just a few minutes of it being administered. People who are trained to administer vaccines are also trained to deal with severe allergic reactions as well.

And finally

There are many urban myths that do the rounds at this time of year, one of the most common being that the vaccine gives you a mild dose of flu so that your body starts to build up antibodies to help you fight future infections. That is simply not true.

The vaccines that are administered, and there are several different ones manufactured each year, quite simply do not contain live viruses so they cannot give you flu. The urban myth is exactly that!

It's time to preserve and prepare



By the time you read this the clocks will have gone back and we will all be noticing the difference. Not only is the weather getting wetter and colder, what sun there is around is very weak, whilst the amount of daylight is at its lowest, but our gardens by now have almost retreated into their winter "hibernation" state.

But that doesn't mean to say that there aren't plenty of jobs that you can be getting on with at this time of year. And let's face it, what could be better than being outside on a crisp autumn or winter's day for an hour or so, pottering about, getting some of those jobs done and boosting your heart rate at the same time?

Many jobs this time of year revolve around either tidying, maintaining or preparing. Tidying to keep your garden neat and to ensure that potential diseases do not come back to haunt you next year. Maintaining to keep not just your plants but also your tools, machinery and garden infrastructure in good condition and preparing – getting things ready for the next gardening season in spring that will be here before you know it!

Tidying

Leaf fall is a particular problem this time of year as the trees are shedding their leaves all over the place. And with autumn tends to come windier weather that blows those pesky leaves all over the garden.

Putting a bit of effort in clearing them up can pay big dividends as leaf mould is nature's fertiliser, rich in nutrients that can be used to enrich your plants in the future. You can either put them on the compost heap and leave them to break down, or if you don't have a compost heap then simply fill some black bin liners with them and pop them in an unused part of the

garden so that they don't get in the way. After a week or so just prick some holes in the liners to let air in and then leave them. Come the start of summer they will have rotted down into a rich mixture that can either be placed on top of your borders as a nutrient rich mulch or dug into your borders as a soil improver. Either way, your garden will thank you for the effort you have taken.

It's also a good time of year to get into your borders and give them a good tidy up. Remove any old, and probably dead by now, bedding plants. Cut away any dead wood from your shrubs and cut and reshape them if you find that they are taking over parts of the garden and do the same with your perennials. Don't worry about being too harsh, a good prune will encourage them to grow more vigorously next year. Once done then mulch the borders.

It's also a good time to look at your fruit trees, and once they have gone dormant again, prune and re-shape them making sure that you take out any crossing branches. Again this will encourage them to fruit better next year. You should also make sure that you remove any old fruit rather than let it rot on the tree.

December is also a good time to prune any climbing roses – you can do this up until February. It's also worth hard pruning any shrubs and hedges while they are dormant and you can see where you need to prune.

You may already have experienced your first frost by now. If so, then it's the time to lift any dahlia tubers that you may have planted direct into the ground. Once lifted you should clean them off and then store them in dry compost in a cool, frost-proof place.

Maintaining

Now that the foliage of climbing plants has died back you will be able to get a look at the underlying condition of the fence or trellis that they grow along and see if you need to make any repairs.

Your garden furniture has had a summer out in the open and has coped with everything that the elements has had to throw at it. Do your wooden tables, benches or chairs need a coat of wood preserver? If you have plastic garden furniture then it's a good idea to store it in your shed or garage if you have the room.

And talking of that shed, make sure that the roof covering is secure and not in need of repair as the added wind, cold and rain will penetrate and can cause more damage at this time of year.

You should also clean down your tools and equipment ready for storage over the winter months. Give your lawnmower a good clean removing any dead grass or dried mud, and if it is a petrol mower make sure that the tank is empty whilst storing and not in use. Oil your garden shears, clippers and other cutting tools and also give their blades a sharpen, all the use over the spring and summer months will mean they are not as sharp as they were at the start of the year.

Check your garden pots and planters and make sure that any that may suffer from frost are moved into a shed or green house to overwinter. When storing in this way you should, if possible, ensure that they are not in direct contact with the ground, even if only by an inch or so.

Your grass may well have taken a bit of a battering across the year especially if you have grandchildren who love to come and play. Now that the underlying soil is a little softer you should be able to get your garden fork into it and aerate it. You could also apply your last feed of the year as well.

And finally you might want to wrap some insulation foam around any outdoor taps or pipes that you may have – you never know how harsh the frost will be and how low the temperatures will go over winter.



Preparing

Autumn and winter is not all about preservation, it is also about preparing for next year as well. A good start will benefit your garden once the warmer weather starts to return. Now is the time to think about planting those spring bulbs in your pots, containers or borders to give you an early lift and splash of colour early next season.

If you have a greenhouse then planting sweet peas at this time of year is well worth doing as you will get healthier and hardier plants ready for planting out next year. You will also benefit by getting an earlier display of flowers.

Don't forget the birds

As the nights draw in and the weather gets colder there is less and less food about for the birds to forage and less hours in which to do it as well. Why not help by saving them the work. If you don't do it already, put a couple of bird feeders in your garden. The birds will thank you for it, and so will your garden come next year.

Make sure that it is kept topped up on a regular basis. If you do this the birds will get used to coming to the same place each day to feed, and because they know that there is food there they will return on a regular basis. This will be good for your garden come spring, because those birds are likely to continue visiting, but will then turn their attention to the predators that can damage your plants as well as the food that you put out for them.

Feeding the birds brings other benefits as well. An active bird feeder is a great way of bringing "action" to your garden when there is little else going on. Place it somewhere you can see it and you can spend a restful and peaceful few minutes watching the comings and goings from the comfort of your armchair. And don't forget, birds love to sing, so keep your ears open, a bird in full song can give you a lift at any time of the year.

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Cashing up, and cashing in

YVONNE THOMAS EXAMINES ANOTHER ECLECTIC COLLECTION OF COLLECTIBLES

When Jimmy saw this one it was getting dark. The street was empty. He took a quick look round, found half a brick and smashed it through the shop window to grab the prize.

Some years ago as a journalist writing about prisons I wanted to speak to an inmate at Pentonville gaol. I rang the prison governor for permission and he said "Yes, you can speak to Jimmy. He's a nice lad. He wouldn't mind." On arrival I was shown up to the officers' mess which had a good view over the wall, and a bar, behind which stood Jimmy, all smiles and waiting like the congenial proprietor of a public house.

"What will you have to drink?" he asked affably, with a display of bottles behind him. Reluctantly I declined and we sat by the window to talk.

What got him this prison sentence? I asked. Sheer bad luck it seems. He'd been walking home late after work one evening when he saw in a corner-shop window a big, old-fashioned brass cash machine with tiers of keys and lots of decoration. Jimmy collected those cash registers and this one was a splendid National which would be a fine addition to those he already had.

Nationals were the first of its kind, invented in 1870 by an American publican, James Ritty in Ohio to stop his bar-tenders from pilfering the profits. He called it Ritty's Incorruptible Cashier.

In London, when Jimmy saw this one it was getting dark. The street was empty. He took a quick look round, found half a brick and smashed it through the shop window to grab the prize. Almost at once from around the corner raced two policemen...

It sounds like a bit of bad luck, unless you were the owner of the shop. 'I should have looked around the corner first,' Jimmy said cheerfully. But the temptation had been too much faced with the swirls of metal and a terrace of keys that snap open the tray with a loud "ping" on the bell when the money is checked in: the amount displayed on the register, no chance of the bartenders skimming off a "gratuity".

The big, heavy thing was difficult enough to carry at walking pace and impossible to run with, but there is only so much temptation a fellow can resist, especially when faced with a National.

Those old metal cash machines have disappeared over a lifetime and now would anyone even notice the

anonymous-looking money-takers, and will anyone ever want to collect them?

Other cash machines followed, decorative registers made of brass, silver, copper, even gold plated, some smaller but the same idea, and adapted for the UK market, the cash counted in pounds, shillings and pence.

The National was one of the best known. They take up a bit of space in a collection, but they can still operate, and they look good and important.

Ritty the publican-inventor saw his takings go up, and his staff being denied self-administered "tips", must have felt deprived. Even more ornate metal cash registers followed, a Spanish machine with a handle on the side, the Paramount being offered for sale now for £5,783; a Countertop for £2,450 ... all fine-looking things with history and collectable – if you have the space.



Charles I silver seal top spoon
1641 valued at £1,450

Cash in your drawers

It was a bit of luck for the Scotsman who found a spoon when he was digging in his garden. Some people would have washed off the dirt and put it in a kitchen drawer – but not him. He took it to someone who knew about spoons which was sensible because the expert identified it as a rare Puritan silver spoon made in the 1600s and it was valued at £27,000.

Like others of the period it had a big bowl and a long plank-like stem with hallmarks at the very end that stopped any greedy silver-smiths adding an unnecessary seal or apostle. "Puritan spoons can be tricky to find," writes an expert not surprisingly.

There are probably lots of old silver spoons around where the owners do not know their age or value. Looking through the cutlery drawer for antiques how can you tell?

Well, check to see where the round part of the spoon joins the stem. If it is soldered onto the stem rather than the spoon being made in one piece from a single piece of metal, it could have been made in the 1700s or even earlier. Is the bowl rather large for the slender stem? That could be an old one, too. Is it stamped EP or A1 on the back of the stem? That means it is silver plate, which was not used until the 1820s.

The first discovered object used as a spoon was made of mammoth ivory and found in Russia. Others were made of shells and wood. The Anglo Saxons brought silver spoons to England and later, in the 1500s, a silver spoon was often given as a christening present to a baby, so the lucky one would be "born with a silver spoon in his mouth."

There are spoons with "rat tails", and "fiddle tails" (the rat tail is the thin line of silver used at the back of the spoon's bowl to strengthen it and the fiddle tail stem turns down). One made in 1440 sold for £91,000. And recently a spoon bought at a car boot sale for 20p was sold for £2,307... But collecting is not just money. One woman has collected 1,500 spoons and a man in Australia has moved house to let his teaspoons take over the entire place, while he lodges elsewhere.

There is a Silver Spoon Club of Great Britain at 4 Cecil Court, Covent Garden, London, WC2N 4EZ.

Fine and Dandy

The *Dandy* comic – remember it? Desperate Dan, Keyhole Kate, Korky the Cat ... every Friday at the rattle of the letterbox we rushed to grab *The Dandy*. My reading tastes slowly changed but *The Dandy* lived on, still with Desperate Dan who ate "cow pie" – a pie with a whole cow in it and a leg sticking out of the pastry, and Kate spying through the keyhole...

The circulation rose and rose: it was the world's third longest-running comic, printed in Dundee and two million copies sold every week in 1950. There is even a statue of Desperate Dan in the city where the comic was published.

Then *The Dandy* went digital: no more rushing to get the latest edition. It just wasn't the same and the circulation dropped like a stone from two million, then it closed eight years ago – gone but not forgotten.

As with newspapers, such things get thrown away but there are survivors and sometimes a survivor becomes valued. Even when they are not in a perfect condition and may have been used to line shelves or dumped in an attic they can be worth a glance. It is unlikely that any comic survives in as perfect a condition as when it came hot from the press but an old *Dandy* comic, a first edition in good condition auctioned for £1,250 recently, and as for *The Dandy* annual, well that was £20,350!

Good Housekeeping 1906

Some people collect books, not deliberately, but they accumulate...

Among those accumulated on my shelves is an old volume of *Good Housekeeping*, which was published in 1906 "in the interest of the Higher Life of the Household" as they say on the flyleaf – and which gives some splendid tips, not quite applicable today, but unexpectedly sensible.

Here are some of the "useful hints" – their words in capitals included – from the letters sections. It seems that great, great granny had more sense than we thought and was not as stuffy as we have been led to believe.

"Never travel away from home without a FLASK OF BRANDY for medicinal purposes", she advises. "You may never need it, but in cases of emergency it should always be available. A serious chill has often been averted by its prompt use."

"The sulphur MATCHES in almost universal use abroad are most obnoxious to many smokers. Although matches are subject to a heavy duty, it is quite worth while smuggling several boxes through the customs. I, at any rate, have never been caught."

"When you cut your finger it is a good plan to put pepper on the cut. One would imagine that it would hurt, but it does not. It stops the bleeding and relieves the hurt. This is an advance on the old method of using dirty cobwebs." (And perhaps another tot of brandy would help.)

"Do not roll your best DOYLEYS over a roll of paper and then tie the roll up in tissue paper, as I did, or your maid may throw the whole thing into the fire, as mine did." And when you are not using your pen, stick the nib into a raw potato instead of putting it on an inkstand...

Housewives were so practical in those days. Old collections of women's magazines are an education on how to treat the servants (of course you have a maid and a cook and you should knock on the kitchen door before entering) and take advice on how to control everyone else, including your husband.

Book reviews

KATE GOODMAN SURVIVES A CLUTCH OF AUTUMN'S BEST READS

All adrift in a sea of suspense

While Mitch Albom's fictional explorations of the possibility of an afterlife usually place mortals in a heavenly context, *The Stranger in the Lifeboat* inverts the model by bringing "the Lord" to earth – or rather, to sea – as He joins ten shipwrecked souls adrift in the ocean after an explosion on a billionaire's yacht.

In a clever reference to the great reset so beloved of conspiracy theorists, Lambert had brought the world's top influencers on to his yacht to explore solutions for earth's future in a project called The Grand Idea. Of these, only a few have made it into the lifeboat, including Lambert himself. Other survivors are staff from the yacht, a little girl and deckhand Benji, who recounts their adventures in letter form, in a notebook discovered by Inspector leFleur a year later when the lifeboat washes up empty on a Montserrat beach.

Between Benji's letters, leFleur's observations and news reports about the explosion on the Galaxy, different threads of the story are brought together in a tense and exciting narrative which sees the survivors of the explosion endure hunger, thirst, shark attacks and in-fighting. Will all, or any, survive?

Despite His claims, the Lord who joins them seems like

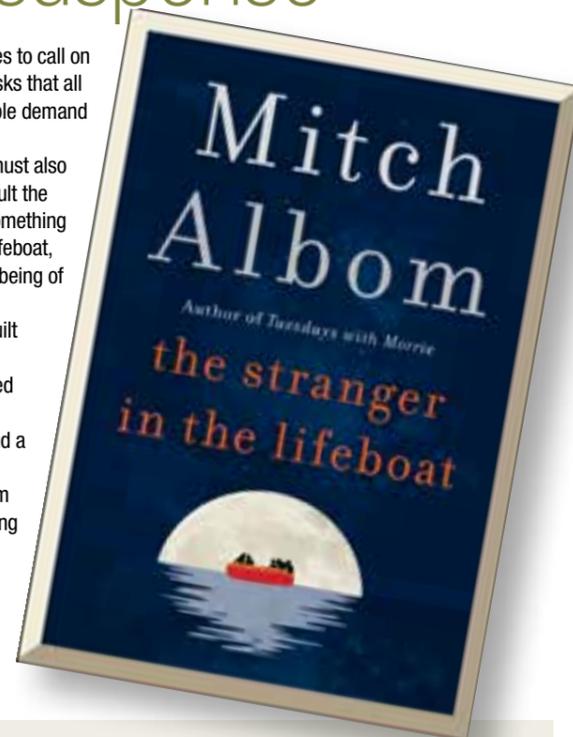
an ordinary man, an observer who refuses to call on His father to send succour. Instead, He asks that all the party have faith in Him – an impossible demand given their disparate natures.

Aside from physical privations, Benji must also endure psychological anguish. Is it his fault the Galaxy exploded? Could he have done something to prevent it? As the first person on the lifeboat, is he responsible for the safety and well-being of the other lost souls?

This story explores the questions of guilt and redemption, faith and salvation, and the meaning of life, all beautifully wrapped in a truly engrossing story of people's determination to survive a cruel sea – and a cruel world.

Is the Lord really God, come down from heaven? Well, it's Mitch Albom, so anything is possible... you'll have to make your minds up for yourself.

***The Stranger in the Lifeboat* by Mitch Albom is published by Sphere in hardback, RRP £14.99**



He ain't heavy, he's my brother

I've had to take a few minutes to compose myself to write this review, so powerful is this story, set in Sweden, of three brothers who have gathered by their childhood holiday home to scatter the ashes of their late mother. Middle brother Benjamin is the narrator, and it's through his eyes that we see the family dynamics, between the brothers, between their parents, and between parents and sons. There's an air of casual neglect about the boys' upbringing, and Benjamin's memories are good and bad as he recalls fishing, swimming and playing with his brothers, and those precious times when he could get his father or mother to himself.

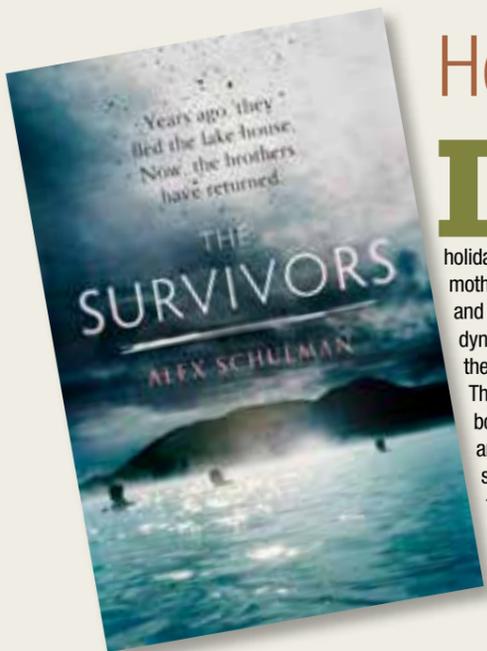
There is never any doubting the strong family unit even when the father is angry, the mother is emotionally absent, or the

brothers, as children and as adults, are physically tearing lumps out of each other.

It's all strong stuff that will resonate with anyone from a sibling group as the narrative veers backwards and forwards from present to past in a series of incidents, including one in particular that has affected Benjamin more than he can admit, even to himself.

This author has such a deep and solid understanding of family bonds, of love and grief and loss, and of how the past affects the present, that emotion leaps from every page, pulling the reader in as strongly as the current that once threatened to drown all three brothers while their parents slept the afternoon away.

***The Survivors* by Alex Schulman is published by Fleet in hardback, RRP £16.99**



A feast of Finnish festive fun!

Christmas shortages in store? Tell that to book publishers, who are ensuring that we won't miss out on festive fun with their 2021 offerings! Top of my list is this madcap adventure set in Lapland, home of all that's Christmassy.

And that suits our heroine Flora Westwood down to the ground. A Christmas fanatic, she would wear seasonal onesies, eat turkey and pull crackers all year round.

Unfortunately, she has never managed to "pull" that special cracker – every man she meets seems to want to change her ditzzy, zany, spontaneous personality.

But that spontaneity may be Flora's saviour when she loses her latest boyfriend, her job, her home and her friend (who's off to LA) in one fell swoop, and makes the decision to buy a campervan, travel to Lapland and set up a Christmas market stall.

Of course, things go wrong almost from the start, but Flora's adventurous spirit sees her finally arrive at her destination – and immediately fall foul of market manager Connor, an eco-aware Irishman who resembles a Viking god, but whose sense of humour and Christmas spirit are sadly lacking.

Egged on by her friends, Livvie in LA, and new chums Hanne and Raakel in Lapland, Flora sets out to open his eyes to the wonders of the season in operation Christmassify Connor. Because Flora knows that Christmas is more than glitter and present – she understands the hope and promise that comes with this special time of year.

This was a wonderful read! Flora is a fantastic heroine, funny and joyous, with an underlying vulnerability. And of course the setting of Lapland is ideal – snowy forests, reindeer rides, husky sledges, Christmas cabins, children singing carols, along with all the traditional Christmas fare on sale at the market – who could ask for more?

Fast-paced, festive from start to finish (or should that be Finnish?), warm and funny, this is the perfect Christmas romance to start off your 2021 seasonal reading.

***Flora's Travelling Christmas Shop* by Rebecca Raisin is published by HQ in paperback, RRP £8.99**



A truly haunting thriller!

A story that takes us into the dark world of sleep paralysis was always going to intrigue me – it's something I have occasionally suffered with, waking to feel a heavy weight pressed upon my chests, the bedclothes flapping against my neck and once, worst of all, a disembodied arm pulling my own arm out of bed!

Fortunately, the nightmares are rare and last only a second or two – but for the victims of the bogeyman who haunts the pages of this fabulous thriller, they recur night after night, becoming more and more threatening and, for poor Hannah Scott, ending in death by suffocation.

But is the perpetrator of this heinous crime truly a bogeyman with supernatural powers to travel through his victims' subconscious and realise their deepest fears? Or is he a mere mortal who gets his thrills from his victims' terror?

To solve the case, young detective constable Rose Gifford will have to keep an open mind and co-operate with the enigmatic Uncharted Crimes Investigation unit.

This was a truly gripping read. Terror, tension and traumatic nightmares stalk its every page, keeping the reader on constant high alert for what might happen next. The plot is skilfully woven, allowing us to keep an open mind but never distracting from the haunting, supernatural atmosphere surrounding Rose's investigations.

Read this book and before you go to bed at night you'll be locking all your doors and windows and checking under the mattress to make sure that you're alone. But that might not be enough to save you...

***Sleep Tight* by C.S. Green is published by HarperFiction in paperback, RRP £8.99**

