

Pick of the paperbacks

THE WORST DATE EVER

by JANE BUSSMANN

Macmillan £7.99

Imagine The Last King of Scotland written by Shazzer from Bridget Jones's Diary, and you'd still only be halfway to appreciating Jane Bussmann's funny and artlessly perceptive account of ditching the day job to pursue a chisel-jawed peace negotiator, John Prendergast, into the heart of a Ugandan war zone. Such fragile material sounds like an unpromising basis for a humorous memoir. But this is one of the funniest books I've read for a long while, and the "romance" with Prendergast is self-deprecating satire at its finest. **Camilla Long**

CHAGALL: Love and Exile

by JACKIE WULLSCHLAGER

Penguin £20

The life of Marc Chagall, the best-known Russian artist of the 20th century, as revealed in this vivid, densely detailed biography, was a series of flights and strange meetings propelled by the events of European history. As a Jew born in the Pale, Chagall was always, in one sense, in exile. Wullschlager paints a brilliant panorama of his life and times, and leaves it open to the reader to dislike him, which, by and large, we do, concluding that in

life as well as on canvas he lived cocooned in his own world.

Rosemary Hill

REMARKABLE CREATURES

by TRACY CHEVALIER

Harper £7.99

Chevalier's thoroughly absorbing historical novel, set in the 1800s, is narrated by the pioneering fossil

collector Elizabeth Philpot and by Mary Anning, whose skill in unearthing strange "crocodiles" and "turtles" (soon to be labelled ichthyosaurs and plesiosaurs by men of science) makes her famous and provides her family with an income. Chevalier takes the true histories of these two women and fashions from them a moving story of the resilience of an unusual friendship and of ground shifting beneath people's feet as discoveries force them to look at the world with fresh eyes. **Nick Rennison**

THE WORLD IN SIX SONGS How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature

by DANIEL LEVITIN

Aurum £8.99

In the brilliant This Is Your Brain on Music, Levitin unravelled the ways in which music interacts with our brains. Here, he is even more ambitious, and attempts to answer the question of why and how humans needed music to evolve as

a species. He believes that all songs fit into one of six categories, each of which corresponds to a basic evolutionary function: friendship, joy, religion, knowledge, comfort and, above all, love. Just as none of our ancestors failed to reproduce, none of them, argues Levitin, failed to love music. **Bee Wilson**

IF THE DEAD RISE NOT

by PHILIP KERR

Quercus £7.99

If the Dead Rise Not finds Kerr's regular detective Bernie Gunther initially in Berlin in 1934, with the Nazis in power and the 1936 Olympics approaching, and then in Batista's corrupt, crook-friendly

Cuba 20 years later. Two characters from the Berlin section reappear in Havana — the hero's ex-lover Noreen, a Jewish-American journalist, and Chicago gangster Max Reles, who infuriates Noreen by dating her teenage daughter. Both sleazy cities are rendered atmospherically, and Bernie — with his Humphrey Bogart-like blend of sardonic humour and sombre integrity — is among the best of current sleuths. **John Dugdale**

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