

Ripper

by **Isabel Allende**

translated from the Spanish by

Ollie Brock and Frank Wayne

(*Fourth Estate*, ISBN 978-0-00-754894-1)

A teenage sleuth, oddball computer geeks and a handful of unsolved crimes: these are the basic ingredients of Isabel Allende's latest novel. A nod to the current craze for Scandi *noir*, no doubt; but, given Allende's skill in creating warm, believable characters and setting them in a beautifully observed modern-day America, it's much, much more than a simple whodunnit.

While the main storyline rips along at a pace, the back stories, supporting cast and cultural references add weight and conviction. Allende touches on international politics (Uruguay in the 1970s; Afghanistan today), domestic issues (the US prison population; the FBI and private

military contractors) and popular culture (*Fifty Shades of Grey* and Hugh Grant are both snuck in). But all in a non-intrusive way – there is no preaching here.

Fans of Allende's previous work may be surprised that she should turn her hand to what, at first sight, appears to be a standard crime novel. It was, apparently, her agent's idea – he wanted Allende to co-write it with her husband. After 24 hours, Allende says, 'it was clear the project would end in divorce' so she decided to write it on her own. And, as the plot thickens, it becomes apparent that the magical realism for which Allende is famous still lurks in the shadows. Illusion, reality and multiple identities all play their part in this gripping read.

★★★★ JL

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BOOKS

Archduke Franz Ferdinand Lives!

by **Richard Ned Lebow**

(*Palgrave Macmillan*, ISBN 978113727853)

The premise of Richard Ned Lebow's book is a simple yet intriguing one. How would our present world be different if Archduke Franz Ferdinand had not been assassinated and the great powers had avoided the First World War? He begins by sketching out the causal chain which led to war and shows how quite small changes could have led to radically different outcomes. Subsequent chapters are devoted to laying out in detail what he calls the best and worst plausible worlds that could have sprung from an absence of war.

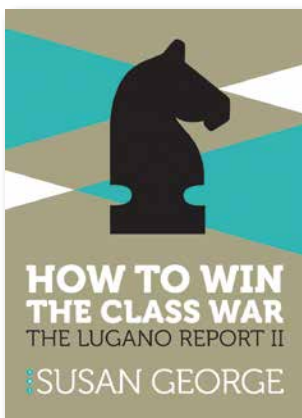
Lebow's 'counterfactual' worlds are fascinating and he paints vivid portraits of alternative realities in which neither Israel nor the Soviet Union

come into being, Winston Churchill does not become British Prime Minister, John F Kennedy is not elected US President and – in the worst-case scenario – a Cold War between Britain and Germany tips into nuclear war.

Shifting from macro to micro, Lebow considers how individual lives might have differed in a world without war, focusing on a cast of characters drawn from politics, the arts, music and science. I particularly enjoyed the description of the ex-pat jazz community in Europe in which, *inter alia*, Duke Ellington becomes a British citizen and shares the Nobel Peace Prize with Louis Armstrong. This is an entertaining and plausible series of 'what-ifs' that makes us pause and consider the contingency of what we are pleased to call the real world.

★★★★ PW

palgrave.com



How to Win the Class War The Lugano Report II

by **Susan George**

(*The Transnational Institute*, ISBN 9789070563189)

In 1999 I reviewed Susan George's original *Lugano Report*, a Swiftian satire in which a shadowy group of advisers gather in the luxurious Swiss resort to recommend the best ways to preserve capitalism in the new millennium. In **How To Win the Class War** she reconvenes her fictional working party to consider developments during the past decade and make suggestions as to how to further protect the system against people and governments.

In arid mandarin-speak, the working party assess the banking crisis, austerity measures, tax havens and the worldwide entrenchment of neoliberal economic orthodoxy. They show that, far from being disasters for capitalism,

recent events have facilitated a paradigm shift in which the Neoliberal Elitist Economic Model has supplanted a Leftist Enlightenment Model that prioritized people over systems. They write scornfully about universal suffrage and human rights, and argue that free-market capitalism is not merely indifferent to such concepts but fundamentally inimical to them.

The book concludes with the warning that the biggest danger to capitalism would be co-operation between the range of social forces opposing neoliberal control – from the Occupy Movement and the Indignado protests to trade unions, feminists, Greens and anti-cuts groups. Susan George's message is of course the flip side of this satirical 'warning': this is precisely the task faced by all who oppose the endless 'war of all against all' that capitalism imposes.

★★★ PW

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