

BOOK STUFF

#39

'The story is truly finished- and meaning is made- not when the author adds the last period, but when the reader enters.' Celeste Ng

How much do you know about Ukraine and Russia?

The war in Ukraine dominates the news. Find out what you can and test your knowledge.

1. What is the capital of Ukraine?
2. Name the seven countries that border Ukraine.
3. What are the colours of the Ukrainian flag?
4. What two seas surround the Crimean peninsula?
5. Who is the President of Ukraine and what was his profession before he became a politician?
6. Who were the three major heads of state at the Yalta Conference in 1945, where postwar Europe was re-ordered?
7. For most of the 20C, the bulk of Ukraine was part of what country?
8. In 2014 Russia annexed which area of Ukraine: Donetsk, Kiev, Luhansk, Crimea
9. What does Belarus mean in English?
10. Ukraine gained independence from the Soviet Union in which year: 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993
11. The highest point of Ukraine is the Hora Hoverla. This mountain is situated near the border with Romania. In which mountain range is it: Carpathians, Pyrenees, Apennines, Urals
12. What is the longest river in Ukraine: Dniester, Rhine, Rhone, Danube, Dniro
13. Fill in the blank: Ukraine is known as 'the _____ basket of Europe'
14. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster was a massive blow to the Russian nuclear programme. It happened in the Ukrainian town of Prypiat. In what year?
15. One of the territories of Ukraine is Galicia. In what other European country is there a territory with the same name?



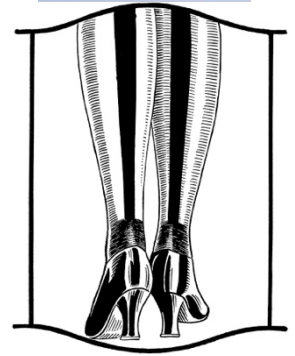
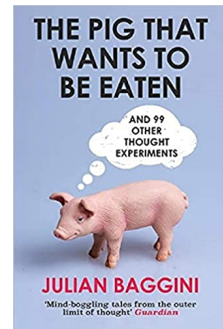
The Poppadom Paradox

As life-transforming events go, the arrival of poppadoms at the table hardly counts as the most dramatic. But it gave Saskia the kind of mental jolt that would profoundly alter the way she thought.

The problem was that the waiter who delivered the poppadoms was not of Indian descent, but was a white Anglo-Saxon. This bothered Saskia because for her one of the pleasures of going out for a curry was the feeling that you were tasting a foreign culture. Had the waiter served her a steak and kidney pie, it would have been no more incongruous than his skin colour.

The more she thought about it, however, the less sense it made. Saskia thought of herself as a multiculturalist. That is to say, she positively enjoyed the variety of cultures an ethnically diverse society sustains. But her enjoyment depended on other people remaining ethnically distinct. She could enjoy a life flitting between many different cultures only if others remained firmly rooted in one. For her to be a multiculturalist, others needed to be monoculturalists. Where did that leave her ideal of a multicultural society?

From Julian Baggini, *The Pig that Wants to be Eaten and 99 Other Thought Experiments*



Stockings

Henry Dobbins was a good man, and a superb soldier, but sophistication was not his strong suit. The ironies went beyond him. In many ways he was like America itself, big and strong, full of good intentions, a roll of fat jiggling at his belly, slow of foot but always plodding along, always there when you needed him, a believer in the virtues of simplicity and directness and hard labor. Like his country itself, too, Dobbins was drawn towards sentimentality.

Even now, twenty years later, I can see him wrapping his girlfriend's pantyhose around his neck before heading out on ambush.

It was his one eccentricity. The pantyhose, he said, had the properties of a good-luck charm. He liked putting his nose into the nylon and breathing in the scent of his girlfriend's body; he liked the memories this inspired; he sometimes slept with the stockings up against his face, the way an infant sleeps with a magic blanket, secure and peaceful. More than anything, though, the stockings were a talisman for him. They kept him safe. They gave access to a spiritual world, where things were soft and intimate, a place where he might someday take his girlfriend to live. Like many of us in Vietnam, Dobbins felt the pull of superstition, and he believed firmly and absolutely in the protective power of the stockings. They were like body armour, he thought. Whenever we saddled up for a late night ambush, putting on our helmets and flak jackets, Henry Dobbins would make a ritual out of arranging the nylons around his neck, carefully tying a knot, draping the two leg sections over his left shoulder. There were some jokes, of course, but we came to appreciate the mystery of it all. Dobbins was invulnerable. Never wounded, never a scratch. In August he tripped a Bouncing Betty which failed to detonate. And a week later he got caught in the open during a fierce little firefight, no cover at all, but he just slipped the pantyhose over his nose and breathed deep and let the magic do its work.

It turned us into a platoon of believers. You don't dispute facts.

But then, near the end of October, his girlfriend dumped him. It was a hard blow. Dobbins went quiet for a while, staring down at her letter, then after a time he took out the stockings and tied them around his neck as a comforter.

'No sweat,' he said. 'I still love her. The magic doesn't go away.'

It was a relief for all of us.

Tim O'Brien

Answers

1. Kiev/ Kyiv
2. Belarus, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia
3. Blue and yellow
4. Black Sea and Sea of Azov
5. Volodymyr Zelensky, former comedian and actor
6. Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin
7. Soviet Union
8. Crimea
9. White Russia
10. 1991
11. Carpathians



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