There is a great read for everyone this Christmas

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Leaders of the pack

Politics book of the year

ALL OUT WAR by Tim Shipman

The EU referendum was the most significant political event of modern times. This book, by the political editor of The Sunday Times, is the definitive account. (Please note: although Tim is obviously a colleague, we have never actually met.) The book is big on detail — we learn, among other things, that the Greens are beef on referendum night — but on reading it you might think how remote it all seems from everyday life. Exactly the feeling that haunted me in the Brexit years.

Mervyn King traces the origins of the 2008 banking crisis in The End of Alchemy (Little, Brown £25). The former Bank of England governor is inspired to write his book by a remark from a Chinese central banker about the western economies: "I don’t think you’ve quite got the hang of money and banking yet." King makes the argument, remarkable coming from a central banker, that money and banking are the "Achilles heel" of the market economy. Considering the subject matter, this is an easy read with flashes of unexpected wit. "If the economy had grown after the crisis at the same rate as the number of books about it," he writes, "we would have been back at full employment a long time ago." Have you forgotten who is fighting whom in the Syrian war, who is on which side, and why? In Syria Burning: A Short History of a Catastrophe (Verso £8.99) the foreign correspondent Charles Glass explains all, beginning with a chronology that takes us back to 2011 when President Bashar al-Assad brutally suppressed demonstrations in the city of Deraa.

Broken vows by Tom Bower (Faber £20), meanwhile, is a waste — and all — account of Tony Blair’s time in office and his subsequent career as a cash magnet. Mostly worthy, as you will see from some of the chapter headings: Father and Other, A Government Airlift, Everything’s Frit. The book is lively and full of interest, but it has a central flaw: there is anybody, even in the Labour Party, perhaps especially in the Labour Party, who wants to read another word about the Blair years?"