

debunked religionists? The only one I can see is that I have a choice about rejecting the latter.

The only particular criticism I would raise against the book is the general (but not universal!) acceptance that there must be human rights at all. As the report fairly includes in its own potted history of human rights, there is Alisdair MacIntyre's view that 'There are no such rights, and

belief in them is one with belief in witches and in unicorns'.

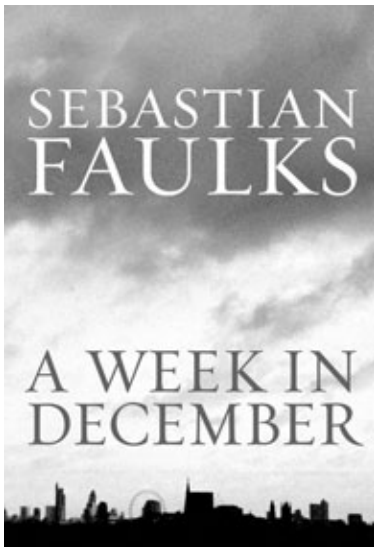
If you take the view that the effect of the committee's report has moved a bill from 'if' to 'when', then the book is a waste of money. And if you are a barrister who is opposed to the bill, your time is better spent working out how to deal with the cry of 'hypocrite' when the cab rank rule requires of you that you formulate your

client's claim against the Department of This or That for its egregious breach of your client's rights. I must confess a sadness that we regard ourselves collectively as so ignorant of the things which each of us should value that we require them to be legislated for. The proper exercise of the rule of law requires due deference to its own anonymity.

**Reviewed by David Ash**

## A Week in December

Sebastian Faulks | Hutchinson | 2009



Sebastian Faulks' latest novel is an exploration of troubling themes in the modern age. Set during the week before Christmas in 2007, Faulks focuses on a group of Londoners, each of whose

separate lives is a vehicle for a portrayal of an aspect of modern urban life. Greed, materialism, Islamic extremism and the dehumanising effects of the electronic age feature strongly. Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers are still to collapse, but the financial world is beginning to unravel and hedge fund managers and investment bankers continue to trade ever more artificial financial instruments, which they well know will cost someone dearly – some day, somewhere.

Gabriel Northwood, an almost penniless barrister, and a somewhat endearing character in the book, captures one of Faulks' central themes, when he ponders: "Somehow money had become the only thing that mattered. When had educated people stopped looking down on money and its acquisition? When had the civilised man stopped viewing money as a means to various enjoyable ends and started to view it as the end itself?"

Meanwhile, Farooq al-Rashid, a Bradford Pakistani, chutney magnate and benefactor to the Conservative Party, is preparing for his investiture at Buckingham Palace, to receive an OBE. Part of his preparation involves lessons from a literary consultant so that he may discuss books with Her Royal Majesty while she pins a gong on his chest – if the conversation happens to move in that direction. At the same time, his son Hassan, who has been drawn into extremism at his local mosque, is preparing to do what he believes the Koran commands: "Woeful punishment awaits the unbeliever".

Women who do not eat, children who take drugs, virtual reality and psychiatric imbalance constitute threads in the dysfunctional relationships that make up this disturbingly realistic novel by a master story teller.

**Reviewed by Michael Pembroke SC**