

Incendiary by Chris Cleave.  
Chatto and Windus 2005.

Incendiary is a novel whose prescience is deeply disturbing; it portrays a calamitous terrorist attack on a major football venue in London and was published before the terrorist bombings, real and attempted of July 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 2005.

The major protagonist is an inner city girl of average education whose husband and son die in the atrocity. The story is told in the form of an extended letter to Osama bin Laden, a style that is a useful vehicle for personal narrative and reflection.

As she seeks to come to terms with what has happened to her loved ones, and as she recovers from the physical injuries she herself sustained, the writer encounters several memorable individuals - notably two broadsheet journalists, made as loathsome and amoral as only another journalist could depict them, and a senior policeman who is gradually crushed by the immense burden he carries.

Though in many ways this is a grim tale it is also surprisingly entertaining with some moments of fantastic humour shining out of the darkness. But it also has a deeply disturbing dimension, as the impact of the bombing broadens to change British society forever.

This is a powerful novel that is easy to read but hard to forget, and presents an all too credible and frightening vision of what might happen in Great Britain in the event of a terrorist attack on the scale of New York on 9/11.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh