

#002

the long good read

#guardiancoffee

articles algorithmically picked by readers, writers & robots



Introduction

Welcome to the Long Good Read. This is an experimental, almost entirely automated newspaper that uses an algorithm to pick the week's best long-form journalism from the Guardian. The idea was started by developer Dan Catt, print-your own newspaper service Newspaper Club, the design team at Mohawk and the technology editorial team at the Guardian. We've put this together for you to read with your coffee. Enjoy! And please do tell us what you think - what else should we include in our experimental, automatic newspaper?

**@thelonggoodread or
hello@thelonggoodread.com**

Spend time listening to anyone in the media industry, you might think newspapers are dead. In fact it's just pulse of the big media businesses around the newspapers that is growing weaker, with readership and advertising revenues falling and increased competition from new technology just a part of that.

But newspapers themselves are a delightful, tactile, luxurious technology in their own right. The success of Newspaper Club, which lets anyone cheaply print their own newspaper, shows that newspapers have been reclaimed in a way.

Its success is partly down to our curiosity about being able to professionally print in a format that used to be hard for an individual to access, but it is also part of a wider craving for tangible, physical products to compensate for our digital dependency. Our screen lives make much of our life feel overwhelming, yet at the same time we have nothing physical to show for it. And there's a real human pleasure in being able to make and hold something in your hands.

Editorially, we get enormous satisfaction in exploring and playing with new projects. It's not about finding a future for paper, but a future for the stories that deserve telling. Where shall we go next?

Jemima Kiss
Head of technology - editorial
The Guardian
theguardian.com/tech

This newspaper is in beta. It's an experiment in combining the Guardian's readers, writers and robots with Newspaper Club's short-run printing tools, to produce a newspaper that's completely unlike the daily Guardian.

We're only printing 500 copies, and it's just for #guardiancoffee, so it needed to be quick and easy to produce. 'One person, one hour' was the goal, and achieving that required automating as much as possible, while still retaining an editorial eye.

First, the team at the Guardian wrote a small tool to sift through the most popular and interesting long form content, as driven by website analytics, comments and social media.

A selection of these are then imported into Newspaper Club's browser based tool, ARTHR, and they're quickly laid out into templates designed just for this project.

Then, it's onto one of Newspaper Club's printing presses, where it's printed, packed, and delivered straight to #guardiancoffee and into your hands.

Of course, this isn't designed to replace the daily Guardian paper. It's an experiment to see what's possible at the other end of the spectrum, using new technology and techniques to produce a newspaper as quickly as a webpage.

And if you like it, wait a little while and maybe we'll be able to generate one tailored just for you.

Tom Taylor
Co-founder and head of engineering
Newspaper Club
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Last week saw the launch of first issue of The Long Good Read (TLGR) newspaper, a newspaper publishing experiment between Newspaper Club and The Guardian. A recent Newspaper Club blogpost covers some of the whys behind TLGR, such as what happens when you play at the edges and seams of a 24 hour digital news organisation and printing presses that can print a run of just a single broadsheet or tabloid paper.

It's an experiment in which I find myself playing the role of newspaper editor, I guess it's something to put on the CV :) It's an experiment in which I put together a weekly newspaper in about an hour, "one person, one hour" as Tom says. While the 1st issue took slightly longer than that as I'm still getting used to the tools and the 2nd a bit less, it will probably still take less time than it takes me to write this. Although that probably says more about my writing than the tools.

Speaking of which, how's this whole thing put together?

Well, from an editor's points of view, it's very much standing on the shoulder of giants. We like the phrase "Editors, readers and robots" because it's pretty much true. This is how an issue is put together.

1) Newspaper Editors and Writers.

The Guardian is of course made of people, and those people together give the paper its voice, by deciding which articles to commission, which writers to hire and what topics, news and subjects they want them to write about. In the last 7 days the Guardian has published just over 3,100 articles, videos and podcasts.

2) Readers

Now it's not going to read or watch itself, so here come the readers. As it turns out some of those articles don't always get read very widely, while others unexpectedly do. Just as the Guardian chooses what it wants to publish, the readers choose what they want to read. Sometimes what the Guardian decides to put on its front page or home page matches what the users are reading, other times everyone seems to be focusing on something else, with twitter, facebook and other sites acting as a back channel.

Editors are our first filter, the readers are our second.

3) Robots

The Guardian, like all big orgs, has a number of analytics tools, including an in-house tool called Ophan which tracks what readers are looking at, where they are coming from and various other factors which it all rolls up into a handy dashboard.

They also have an API which exposes things like Most Viewed articles, word counts, sections and such like.

We plundered those tools for data and wrote our own little "robot" (a bunch of algorithms) to surface what we hoped would be good, interesting, sometimes funny, sometimes long articles. Just before I throw together a new issue of this paper I can head off to our dashboard that presents me with about 30 "top" articles, about 1% of all articles originally published by the Guardian.

A Penultimate Step

From there I cast my critical editorial eye across the selection as often there are stories that'll become out of date quickly as happens with fast moving news stories. Last week there were several articles about the latest NSA spying & bugging, but the chances are those stories would have evolved by the time they hit *our* press.

Once selected I then entrust the task of putting together the paper to Newspaper Club's robot, ARTHR.

ARTHR

ARTHR has been written by Newspaper Club to handle the job of laying out newspapers, this can range from a creator very carefully deciding where everything goes on each page, to being given a simple URL and deciding for itself where headlines, images and body text should go.

It's this last option I quite enjoy, the tool as I understand it tries out various layouts before deciding on which one it thinks is the best. Sometimes it produces some crazy looking pages, but even then at least it's only taking a couple of seconds rather than me figuring it all out by hand.

My roll as newspaper baron is to feed in several URLs selected from our "Top Stories" leave ARTHR

to do its own thing, and then shuffle the results around bit, it rather feels like cheating.

A Data Paper, the DNA of news

As we're very much relying on algorithms to create this paper, to pick the stories and then again to lay them out, we've started to think of this as a newspaper built from data, and as an evolving experiment.

We're starting to ask ourselves the question of what happens if we not only use data to pick the news but start to expose some of that underlying (or meta) data. The people, i.e. you, we're expecting to find this paper interesting are not just interested in the news, but the news about the news. What made a story a "Top Story"? Can the metadata around a weeks worth of news tell us something about the news itself.

We tried this in issue #1 with a graph of all the main tags used from all the news stories our robots picked over, there's probably still a copy around if you want to grab one if you want to compare it to this issue's.

This week I had a quick play with looking at the "DNA" of when the Guardian publishes news. The front cover shows a weeks worth of articles, 7 columns in all, Monday over on the left, the weekend on the right. Midnight is at the top of the day, midday halfway down and the evening towards the bottom.

All of these things are created with a few lines of code and then the press of a button. Hopefully by the end of this experiment once we've gotten used to the tools, producing a paper will be as simple as pressing a few buttons, sending the results over to Newspaper Club and pressing a few more.

Then if *we* can do it, then it's not a very far stretch to allowing *anyone* to do it. And once the system has learnt what you're interested in then next step is to just let it carry on for you, with the results arriving on your doorstep to read each week.

But for the moment I'd better get back to pressing a few buttons to finish this paper.

Dan Catt
Developer
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Vine: in the future everyone can be famous for six seconds

With more than 40 million users, video loop-sharing mobile phone app Vine has a global reach. How did it get so big and what does it mean for the future of creativity?

By Dominic Rushe

Six seconds doesn't seem like a long time but Vine, the white-hot video app, has made it an eternity. Created just last year, Vine now has 40 million-plus registered users uploading short videos featuring everything from waves crashing and comedy sketches to Harry Styles brushing his teeth that all loop back on themselves, again and again and again - six seconds stretched to infinity.

The infinity loop, and ease of use, has punted Vine out ahead of a competitive pack. Its instant appeal led to Twitter snapping it up, for an undisclosed sum, before it had even officially launched. Now Facebook has paid it the ultimate compliment, adding a similar service to its Instagram picture service. Andy Warhol - whose famous Factory was a short walk from Vine's Union Square Manhattan office - predicted that everyone would be famous for 15 minutes. It seems he was optimistic. In the future everyone will be famous for six seconds.

Dom Hofmann, one of Vine's co-founders, knew he was on to something but the video-obsessed 26-year-old tech entrepreneur wasn't sure how big it would be. A lot of people were talking about mobile video, not a lot of people were doing it. "We knew that people all had these smartphones with great video cameras on them but they weren't using them at all," he says, when I meet him at his Manhattan offices.

The reasons were many. Videos are hard to upload, they take a long time to make, often you have to pull it off the phone to edit it easily. "We needed to have a technique that was really easy to do, otherwise people wouldn't be able to tell their story," he says.

Hofmann and his partners Rus Yusupov, 28, and Colin Kroll, 29, came up with a simple display, touch the screen to start and stop, film upright in the square, that's it. No bells, no whistles (well not yet) and six seconds so it uploads fast even without Wi-Fi.

At first the Vine crew experimented with a range of time limits from no limit at all to 30 seconds. "We went down to one second for a day, which was interesting. Six felt like everything you needed and not any more," he says. But the abrupt ending felt wrong. "It's strange to shoot something and think about an ending." When he thought of the loop, Hofmann knew immediately that they were on to something. It took a long time to make that loop seamless but when they had done it, the videos suddenly had a new depth: "It made sense immediately," he says.

Like Twitter and its 140 characters, Vine's limitations have been its making, says Hofmann. "If you give somebody constraints, it's easier to be creative," he says. "There's a quote by Orson Welles, he was a film-maker [he adds helpfully], he said: 'The enemy of art is the absence of limitation.'"

Initially Vine was conceived as a video tool, not as a social media app. But from the start the team noticed how much their small group of test users wanted to share. They saved the videos to their phones and sent them as text. "That's a lot of work," says Hofmann. "There was just this feeling that there was something more here," he said.

The team had other projects on the go. They had met at Jetsetter, the New York-based luxury vacation company, and were considering some travel-related technology among other projects. "But we realised pretty quickly that this was it."

The service launched in January and was an immediate sensation. "We were blown away by how quickly it resonated with people and by how quickly people pushed the boundaries of creativity," he says.

Sites like Vpeeker post the latest "vines" as they come up. A sneezing puppy is followed by a man in a wheelchair shouting: "Death to all tyrants." A girl squeezing what looks like saline solution up her nose is followed by people bowling, a woman licking a pizza, a man dressed as a panda pushing over a trolley in a supermarket, someone waving a big red flag under a waterfall. Vine offers a mesmerisingly odd global snapshot, a planet at play six seconds at a time.

The content is getting increasingly professional, says Hofmann. When it launched, Vine was used by many people as a broadcasting tool to show what they were doing at that moment. Blowing out birthday candles, jumping in the pool. "Now we have another class of people looking at the world, coming up with ideas and then framing them within the limits of Vine," he says.

Comedy sketches are big. It's also provided a renaissance for stop-motion animators, some of whom are making astonishingly complex pieces using the simplest of tools.

The app has attracted the film world's attention. Matt Spangler, who oversees marketing and content at Tribeca film festival, helped co-ordinate a vine competition for this year's festival. "We were blown away by the quality of the submissions we received. And now you see all these actors and comedians collaborating on one another's stuff, turning up in one another's vines. It's like they are creating a TV network. It's really interesting."

Even the festival's co-founder Robert De Niro is a fan. Ahead of this year's festival he told the *Wall Street Journal*: "Six seconds of beginning, middle

and end. I was just trying to time on my iPhone six seconds just to get a sense of what that is. It can actually be a long time. One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand, four one-thousand, five one-thousand, six one-thousand - you can tell a whole story in six seconds."

Adam Goldberg has built one of Vine's biggest followings with a series of sketches that resemble a messed-up mix of David Lynch, Roman Polanski's *The Tenant* and Lena Dunham's *Girls*.

The actor and musician, whose credits include *Entourage* and *Saving Private Ryan*, plays himself and a blond wig-wearing, cross-dressing maniac who often appears in the same scene. His girlfriend, Roxanne, worries about what Vine is doing to him; he seems more concerned about whether he can make it through the day without the wig.

Goldberg says when he first saw Vine he thought of it as a "horror app". The jittery quality has some of the filmic qualities of horror classics such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* or *Nosferatu*. He said the second post he made, a jumpy but formally composed piece featuring his girlfriend and a chair, reminded him of Ingmar Bergman's modernist horror classic *Persona*. "I was making a joke, it's like Insta-prentension," Goldberg laughs.

At first he says he found Vine's limits "extremely frustrating". "Then I started thinking of it in terms of a haiku," he says. Whatever he did, it worked. The series took off, earning Goldberg the title King of Vine. He says it has affected some of his other work. The video for his band the Goldberg Sisters' latest record, *Stranger's Morning*, is made with the same jarring jump cuts that pepper his vines.

But uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. The King of Vine is ambivalent about what the app may represent. He is currently directing a comedy, *No Way Jose*, about a struggling indie rocker. One of the scenes is 18 minutes long, another is 11 minutes, and he worries that a new generation of attention-deficient media consumers may find that just too much. "Attention is a big issue for people growing up in this environment," he says. "It's odd to be a kind of spokesman for an app that in many ways represents everything that disgusts me."

He isn't posting as much to Vine these days, partly because he is busy on *Jose* but also because of the inevitable online backlash. "I'd get so many comments, with people saying: 'sick of this' or 'come on, move on'. Really? It's six seconds and it's free."

For less established stars Vine still offers a way to get noticed. Comedian Brittany Furlan has built up a following of more than 2.8 million people with her anarchic sketches in which she kisses strangers, stands way too close to them, steals their shopping carts and commits other random acts of comedy. Furlan's videos rack up tens of thousands of likes

and shares - known as "revines" - within hours of her posting them and have attracted the attention of stars including Jimmy Kimmel and Chelsea Handler, who have featured Furlan's skits on their programmes, a big break for any aspiring comedian.

Advertisers are also piling in. Fox recently promoted its latest *Wolverine* movies with six-second vines. Dunkin' Donuts, Trident chewing gum, Urban Outfitters - all have produced mini ads. Burberry used it during New York fashion week to promote its shows.

Making a vine that goes viral is more art than science, but when it happens it's all down to numbers. "If I choose to share something with you, it has a better than zero chance of going viral. If you choose to share that with someone else, it has an even better chance. Each time that continues, the chances increase. At some point the coefficient goes over one," says Hofmann, but the fundamental question is: "Is this worth sharing?"

The big question for Vine, as with any other service, is also is it worth sharing? The explosion of social media services is inevitably creating more casualties than winners. Remember Color? Probably not. But the investors who poured \$41m into the now defunct photo-sharing app once touted as the Next Big Thing surely do.

The biggest winner in the latest wave of social media startups is probably Instagram, the photo-sharing service that also looks set to be Vine's main competition. Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey told *Vanity Fair* he was "heartbroken" when Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg snapped up Instagram, the social media photo-sharing app, in 2012. He had been a fan from day one. "From the start, Instagram was a simple application and a joy to use," Dorsey said. "I was blown away by how much detail they put into the experience."

The close ties between Dorsey and Instagram proved no match for Zuckerberg's \$1bn offer for the company. When Vine popped up on Twitter's horizon, the company moved fast to make sure it didn't lose out again.

Last year Twitter was on the point of launching Cards - a service that offers a snapshot of other content such as a newspaper article, a photo or a video alongside the tweet. Vine's founders reached out to the company as they considered places to syndicate their service. The two sides realised they had a lot in common. "We are both focused on being public, on real time, on constraints, on free speech," says Hofmann. Very quickly talks about syndication turned into an acquisition.

Dorsey has gone on to be something of a Vine sensation himself. Posting a series of spooky selfies, standing stock-still and wearing shades in passing crowds or poised on top of a bridge, his face as ex-

pressionless as Ryan Gosling at his impassive best.

In June Dorsey's old pals at Instagram launched a 15-second video-sharing service to rival Vine. It has a couple of advantages. First, it has a more established base - 150 million active users. Second, it has Facebook's backing. Facebook has 1.15 billion users compared with Twitter's 200 million.

Hofmann doesn't seem worried: "There are quite a few mobile video products and people are hungry for it," he says. "Our goal is to build the best service. I think that if the world of mobile video is growing larger, that's a good thing for us."

For all the hype, says Brian Wieser, senior research analyst at Pivotal Research, when it comes to making money, Vine and its rivals are a long way from being the new TV. Television is experiencing the same seismic ructions that have shaken music, books and newspapers but there are few signs that - financially - social media is taking its place. "Vine has a lot of promise as a marketing product and you are seeing a lot of experimentation. But the scale is to be determined, not unlike Twitter itself or Pinterest or Instagram," he says.

The advertising dollars now going into Vine are largely coming from other, more established internet companies such as AOL and Yahoo, says Weiser. In this tech-dog-eats-tech-dog world, TV is holding its own. "TV advertising is not cheap but from an advertiser's point of view it's ridiculously effective. If you cut your TV spending when your rivals don't,

you lose. It doesn't matter how cool your vine is."

So where does Vine go from here? Hofmann says the initial idea was to get the service out and make it as easy as possible to use. Now the company is looking at ways to better promote its content. A website or partnership deals are under discussion. Channels are being added so people can filter the content they want to see. Last month two new editing tools were added; other features in the pipeline include a way to change the focus and a grid for stop-motion movie-makers.

"When we first went out, we were art. Now we're comedy and art," says Hofmann. But he says news services are also increasingly looking at Vine. A vine of the Boston marathon bombing, taken from TV, attracted 35,000 people in less than a minute when it was posted back in April. Celebrities such as Harry Styles, whose vines dominate the top of the chart, are also using the service to broadcast to their fans.

Will Vine stand the test of time? Goldberg is on the fence. "I was auditioning for teenagers to be in my movie and this girl really stood out, ad-libbing about Vine. It was hilarious." He wonders whether he should use it in the movie. "A year from now, will it be seen as an archaic reference? I don't really know." But if Vine can do this much in six seconds - who knows what it can do in a year.



Fashion photographer Meagan Cignoli took to Vine with a stop-motion film of her eating cotton-wool balls.

From fertiliser to Zyklon B: 100 years of the scientific discovery that brought life and death



Fritz Haber in 1919. Photograph: Topical Press Agency/Getty Images

It's 100 years since Fritz Haber found a way to synthesise ammonia - helping to feed billions but also to kill millions, and contributing to the pollution of the planet

By Robin McKie, science editor

Several hundred scientists from across the globe will gather in Ludwigshafen, Germany, next week to discuss a simple topic: "A hundred years of the synthesis of ammonia." As titles go, it is scarcely a grabber. Yet the subject could hardly be of greater importance, for the gathering on 11 November will focus on the centenary of an industrial process that has transformed our planet and threatens to bring even greater, more dramatic changes over the next 100 years.

The ammonia process - which uses nitrogen from the atmosphere as its key ingredient - was invented by German chemist Fritz Haber to solve a problem that faced farmers across the globe. By the early 20th century they were running out of natural fertilisers for their crops. The Haber plant at Ludwigshafen, run by the chemical giant BASF, transformed that grim picture exactly 100 years ago - by churning out ammonia in industrial quantities for the first time, triggering a green revolution. Several billion people are alive today only because Haber found a way to turn atmospheric nitrogen into ammonia fertiliser. "Bread from air," ran the slogan that advertised his work at the time.

But there is another, far darker side to the history of the Haber process. By providing Germany with an industrial source of ammonia, the country was able to extend its fight in the first world war by more than a year, it is estimated. Britain's sea blockade

would have ensured Germany quickly ran out of natural fertilisers for its crops. In addition, Germany would also have run out of nitrogen compounds, such as saltpetre, for its explosives. The Haber process met both demands. Trains, bursting with Haber-based explosives and scrawled with "Death to the French", were soon chugging to the front, lengthening the war and Europe's suffering.

"If you look at the impact of the Haber process on the planet, you can see that it has been greater than any other discovery or industrial process over the past 100 years," said Professor Mark Sutton, of Edinburgh University. "On the positive side, there are the billions of people who are alive today thanks to it. Without it, there would have been no food for them. On the other hand, there are all the environmental impacts that a soaring world population, sustained by Haber fertilisers, have had. In addition, there is the pollution triggered by the release of ammonia fertilisers into water supplies across the globe and into the atmosphere.

"And, for good measure, there have been all the deaths caused by explosives created from Haber-manufactured ingredients. These have reached more than 100m since Haber invented the process, according to one estimate. So we can see Haber's work has been a mixed blessing."

Bald and absurdly Teutonic in demeanour, Haber was an ardent German nationalist. He was happy his invention was used to make explosives and was a fervent advocate of gas weapons. As a result, on 22 April 1915 at Ypres, 400 tons of chlorine gas were released under his direction and sent sweeping in clouds over Allied troops. It was the world's first

major chemical weapons attack. Around 6,000 men died. Haber later claimed asphyxiation was no worse than blowing a soldier's leg off and letting him bleed to death, but many others disagreed, including his wife, Clara, herself a chemist. A week after the Ypres attack, she took Haber's service revolver and shot herself, dying in the arms of Hermann, their only son.

In 1918 Haber was awarded the Nobel prize for chemistry, a decision greeted with widespread indignation. Many British, French and US diplomats and scientists refused to attend his award ceremony in Stockholm. After the rise of Hitler, Haber - who had become a rich industrialist - was expelled from Germany because he came from a Jewish family, and died in Switzerland in 1934.

The ironies that afflicted Haber's life continued in death. One of the most effective insecticides he had helped to develop was Zyklon B, which was subsequently used by the Nazis to murder more than a million people, including members of Haber's extended family, including children of his sisters and cousins.

Since then, the use of Haber's process - or more properly the Haber-Bosch process in acknowledgement of Carl Bosch's work in turning Haber's ideas into a practical industrial process - has expanded dramatically. Today more than 100m tonnes of nitrogen are taken from the atmosphere every year and converted into ammonia compounds, in Haber-Bosch plants. These are then spread over the surface of the Earth, turning arid land into fields of plenty. As a result, our planet has been able to feed and sustain an unprecedented number of people. In 1900 there were 1.6 billion people on Earth. There are now more than 7 billion. Most of the extra mouths have been fed on food sustained by the Haber-Bosch process.

It has been calculated that half the nitrogen atoms in our bodies come from a Haber factory, via its fertilisers and the food nourished by them. As the Canadian scientist Vaclav Smil has put it in his book *Enriching the Earth*, the Haber-Bosch process "has been of greater fundamental importance to the modern world than the airplane, nuclear energy, spaceflight or television".

This has come at a price, however. There is the sheer strain placed on the natural environment by the number of human beings now sustained by artificial fertilisers. In addition, there are problems caused by our ever increasing appetite for ammonium chemicals. Our bodies may accumulate nitrogen atoms from fertiliser plants, but far more of these atoms fail to make it into the food chain and are instead released into the environment. The result, in many areas, has been calamitous. Nitrogen fertilisers get washed into streams, rivers, lakes and coastal areas where they feed algae that spread in thick carpets over the waters, suffocating life below.

Then there is the atmospheric release of all the excess ammonia, says Sutton. "Ammonia is released into the air from fertilisers on farms and can then be deposited on natural habitats with very unwelcome consequences," he said. "Consider the sundew ... It can grow in very harsh environments in this country because its sticky leaves allow it to catch insects, which provide it with nitrogen and other important compounds. But when ammonia from artificial fertilisers is dumped nearby other less hardy plants grow and crowd out the sundew."

Sutton believes that while the dangers of fossil fuels and greenhouse gases are well known today, those of the nitrogen cycle, which affects drinking water, contributes to air pollution and affects the health of large parts of the population, have gone unrecognised. "We need nitrogen compounds to sustain our food supply but we need to be much more careful how we use them. That is the real lesson of the Haber process centenary."

Giorgio Moroder: 'Sylvester Stallone wanted Bob Dylan to sing on a Rambo movie'

The pioneering disco producer couldn't make that collaboration happen – but he has got a new track with the late Donna Summer coming soon

By Alexis Petridis

Hi Giorgio! You're coming over to London to DJ at a festival. Does it feel strange to take up DJing at 67?

I love it. I love it! When I was first asked to DJ, I think four years ago, I thought: "No way, no way – I'm a composer." But when I first started out, I was a DJ. I was a composer and a singer and would go out at weekends with my tape and sing and then play some records. I had a contract with a disco dance organisation and would make 400 or 500 marks for the weekend. Then 18 months ago, a friend who works at Louis Vuitton asked me to do about 15 minutes DJing on a catwalk show for the men's winter fashions, and I liked it. Then Elton John's Aids Foundation asked me to DJ in Cannes for a benefit and I liked that too. Then Red Bull asked me to play in New York. It had a discotheque, but it was too small, so it moved it to a bigger one, and I had about 1,200 people. It went from there. I played in Japan: I think there were about 10,000 people there. Then I went to Mexico City and, according to the promoter, there were 40,000, although I think it was less. I play mostly my own songs. I just finished a new track with Donna Summer [who died last year], which she recorded about three years ago, just a little demo, but I've cut it up and added some new chords and stuff. Then I have two new instrumentals as well.

You started out playing bass and guitar and making schlager, German bubblegum pop. What drew you to the synthesiser?

I did one or two bubblegum songs (1), which I loved by the way. But I heard the album of Walter Carlos called *Switched on Bach*, and was intrigued that it was all done with a computer, with a synthesiser, so I researched and found an acquaintance, a classical composer, who had one of the modular Moogs, the big ones. I think it was the second Moog out. He had a great engineer, who knew how to connect the cable, so that was my intro into the synthesiser world. I think *Son of My Father* (2) was the first pop song with a synthesiser.

You also made an experimental synthesiser album, *Einzelgänger*.

I think it was in '75. I'd completely forgotten about it, but I listened to it a year ago, and thought: "Wow, this is not too bad, I had some interesting sounds." I guess I wanted to do something new. I liked all those guys: Klaus Schulze, Kraftwerk, Tangerine Dream, Jean Michel Jarre. It wasn't a commercial success, but I guess it got me a lot of experience working with a synthesiser and some effects.

And then you met Donna Summer ...

In Munich. She was not famous, but she was part of the musical *Hair*, which they performed in Germany. She spoke German quite well. Pete Bellotte, my co-producer, and I needed some backup singers with real English, no accent, and so we found her and the two other girls, I forgot who they were, and we were really impressed by Donna. We said, if we have a song that she can do, we will call her, so we had the idea of doing a song called *The Hostage* (3), and that's how it started.

Summer claimed that her entire 1977 double album *Once Upon a Time* was recorded in one three-day session, without sleep, and that she was hospitalised with exhaustion afterwards. Is that true?

No! [thinks] Maybe she sang it in three days. But it took us about two weeks. That's to compose, write the lyrics, record and mix, which compared to today is pretty fast.

You survived the disco backlash remarkably well.

Well, I was lucky to have that song, *I Feel Love*. Alan Parker, the director of *Midnight Express*, loved it. There's a thing in *Midnight Express* where the kid is running away from the police, and Parker just said: "Giorgio, give me a song in the style of *I Feel Love*, like with the bassline and things, and make it work for that scene. The rest, you use the synthesiser, just do whatever you want." That was scary, because I had never done soundtracks before, but it went well and I got my first Oscar, (4) and that opened up a new life in the film business.

There's a story that you attempted to collaborate with Bob Dylan, which seems a bit unlikely.

That's right. It was actually Sylvester Stallone who asked me to ask him to sing a song for a *Rambo* movie. So I composed a song. I wanted him to write the lyrics, of course. I went to see him in Malibu, where he had a beautiful house. He listened to it about four times. I'm not sure if he didn't like the music that much, or if he wasn't interested because of the nature of the movie, which was totally anti-Russian, anti-communist. I think he didn't feel like being involved with a movie such as *Rambo*. It was nice to meet him, and it could have worked, but it didn't work out.

Why did you wind down your musical career in the late 80s?

I wanted to get into art. I did some neon stuff. I worked in, not computer-generated, but computer manipulation of pictures. Oh God, I did so many things. I did a car. I was involved with a sports car called *Cizeta-Moroder*, which was the first 16-cylinder car, beautiful. I think we sold about eight cars, and then in '92 the economic crash came and we had to close the shop. (5) Then I started to play golf and, you know, having a nice life, half-retired. I worked for a year on a short movie where I used only pic-

tures, only photos, for which I won an award at the Festival in Palm Springs. I designed a bottle of cognac. So I did a lot of things, except music.

You also designed a pyramid.

Yeah. In Dubai. I worked with two famous architects and we came up with the idea of a residence that was a very high pyramid, hollow inside, and probably a little bit too high for the time. There was a lot of interest, but then the Sultan of Dubai decided to do the *Burj al Arab* hotel (6) instead, so I guess his attention went to that project.

You've said your appearance on the Daft Punk album *Random Access Memories* put you "back in business".

Suddenly a lot of people want to work with me. I've done a song with Avicii. I've worked with David Guetta. I just spoke to Nile Rodgers, who is reviving Chic, so I'm going to collaborate with him on one song, and hopefully we will talk about him playing on one of mine. I'm producing kind of an underground group from New York called *Class Actress*. I'm starting on that when I get back from London. So, I have a lot of stuff going on right now.

1. Moroder's schlager hits included *Looky Looky*, *Bla Bla Diddy*, *Moody Trudy*, *Reesy Beesy* and *Doo-Bee-Doo-Bee-Doo*.

2. A 1971 single by Moroder, taken to No 1 in the UK the following year by Chicory Tip.

3. This song, about a woman whose husband is taken hostage, was on Summer's 1974 debut, *Lady of the Night*. The wife pays the ransom, but the kidnappers murder her husband anyway.

4. He subsequently won two more, for *Flashdance* and *Top Gun*, as well as three Grammys. He has also been knighted in his native Italy.

5. There's one currently on sale online for \$600,000 (£374,000).

6. The fourth tallest hotel in the world.

Shaun Ryder on UFOs: 'It's not that I want to believe - it's impossible not to'

As singer with the Happy Mondays Shaun Ryder used to do a lot of drugs. But that doesn't explain the encounters with aliens he has turned into a new TV show, he insists

By Simon Hattenstone

Shaun Ryder was 15 when he first saw one. He'd just started as a messenger boy at the post office, and was walking to the bus stop on Hilton Lane, Little Hulton. It was 6.45am, pitch black when he looked up into the sky. "At first it was still, and then it went, 'Voooooooooom!' And then again: 'Voooooooooom!' Classic zig-zag, hovered, then went off at 10,000 miles an hour. Like Star Trek. Boom. Gone. Yeah!"

Another bus stop a few months later in 1978. This time he's at Irlams o' Th' Height in Salford, it's around 5pm. "Hundreds of lights going across the sky really slow, and I'm thinking, 'God, are we being invaded?' The next day in the papers it said: 'Mysterious lights in the sky - lights at Salford rugby ground have gone mad.' And that was bullshit because when the lights at rugby grounds start moving around, it's nothing like these."

Ever since, Ryder has been obsessed with ufology and extraterrestrial forms of life. The former Happy Mondays and Black Grape frontman gets narked with people who assume he was off his head when he saw his UFOs. Fair enough, he has spent much of his life off his head, but he insists that any time he's seen anything otherworldly he's been clean and sober.

Ryder, 50, defined the Madchester era of ecstasy-inspired dance music in the 1980s. He ranted his brilliant nonsense lyrics ("You're twistin' my melon man/ You know you talk so hip man/ You're twistin' my melon man") to an inspired, jingly-jangly rock-funk-northern-soul-house-hiphop backdrop, and somehow managed to combine pop stardom with crack-dealing and drug-fuelled psychosis. Then, in 2010, he found populist redemption in the Australian jungle with Ant and Dec and became an unlikely national treasure. Before that, television producers were terrified of what he might come out with before the watershed. He was regarded as a liability. After I'm a Celebrity, they couldn't get enough of the newly cuddly Ryder. With all the

drugs he'd ingested, he should have been dead; but here he was back with spanking new teeth, a family-friendly smile, and great patter. He was invited to go on numerous reality shows, but turned them down. So telly people asked what they could do to get him back on air. UFOs, he said. And aliens.

Two years after he started investigating UFOs, Ryder is back as an author and documentary film-maker, having travelled the world looking for spooky sightings. His conclusion? He's more convinced than ever that we are not alone.

Ryder makes a convincing presenter - warm, engaging, a bit bonkers, spooked, occasionally sceptical, never cynical. He has travelled to Chile, where more UFOs have been spotted than anywhere else in the world, hooked up with legendary abductee Travis Walton, and met a perfectly normal Yorkshire family who tell him about the dazzling UFO that almost blinded them on the way back from a meal out at The Little Chef.

I ask Ryder if he went out there determined to prove that his childhood experiences were real. He looks at me with stary eyes. "It's not that I want to believe, it's just impossible not to." His voice is getting louder. "We're not the only life in the universe. We're just not. It's ridiculously impossible. If you look at the way kids are being taught now ... when I was a kid at school, you was taught there was no life out there - that was it. But now kids are being taught there's water, so where there's water there will be life forms or whatever. So it's not that I want to believe, that's how it is."

He puffs hard on his electronic cigarette. No drugs these days for Ryder. He knows he can't cope with them. Funny thing is, he says, his dad can sit at home spliffing the day away, but not him. Just electronic fags, and the occasional real one. "I've gone from smoking 25 a day to about five 'cos of these. It wasn't really that I wanted to give up smoking, it's just that you can't smoke anywhere these days. The first one I got, you didn't really get the hard hit at the back, so I got these ultra ones. And these are just the best."

He inhales joyously, and talks about the road trip he went on with Travis Walton. In 1975 Walton was a logger when he and his crew came across a lumi-

nous flying saucer in a remote part of Arizona. The terrified crew raced to their wagon and got the hell out. When they realised they had left Walton behind, they went back to look for him. There was no sign of him. They went into town and reported the incident to the deputy sherriff. For days the whole town searched. Nothing. Five days later he reappeared and said he had been abducted by aliens. Over the years he and the crew have passed numerous polygraph tests. Walton, a man with heavy, bloodshot eyes and a lugubrious moustache, is still haunted by his experience. "He looked like he's got post-traumatic stress disorder, like he'd walked into Vietnam, and spent two years there and come out," Ryder says. "Just imagine, even if one appeared in front of you, it would traumatise you properly. You'd go grey. Your whole world would change. Everything. It's just day one again. So you're going to look traumatised. And you spend some time with him and you just know."

Ryder and Walton make for an unlikely team, but they strike up a melancholy rapport. As a 29-year-old, Ryder says, Walton believed he'd been kidnapped and experimented on by a malign force. But now, like so many people who have come into contact with extraterrestrials, he believes they were kind; that they probably saved his life. "Now he reckons he was hit by some sort of forcefield that probably stopped his heart. These guys then took him inside and give him some medical treatment and then let him go. That's how he looks at it now. As he's got older, he's changed how he feels about it." That's the thing, Ryder, says - for decades, everybody assumed extraterrestrials are the enemy, but it's obvious that they're not. "These guys have got technology that's millions of years in advance of us, and if you think about it, they could have took us out just like that, and they haven't. They're certainly not hostile. We wouldn't be here if they were."

Ryder is far from convinced by everybody he met. Some ufologists are just chancers out there for the fantasy ride. He knows they've not seen the real thing because they are too glib about it. "They say: 'Yes, I've been abducted, wahey! Wahoo! Some of the people I've met are mad as a box of frogs.'"

When he was young, did his interest in UFOs make him want to experience more out-of-body experiences through drugs? He answers in a typical round-the-houses Ryder way. "Well, see, here's the weird thing. From being a little kid, I've always been interested in space. Star Trek and Close Encounters - not Star Wars." He spits out "Star Wars" with contempt. "Skies, stars, the moon landing - even as a six-year-old I was glued to that. So I've always been interested in that. And then when I had my first acid trip, did it open my brain even further? Of course it did." Did his fascination with space make him interested in science at school? He laughs. "No, I was a thick kid, I didn't even learn me alphabet til I was 20-odd, I was too busy doing something else. I had a platinum fucking disc before I learned me alphabet. I grew up in the 60s and 70s, where it was still acceptable to say, 'Well, you're not academic, so that's fine, you'll do it some other way.' Nowadays it's like everybody's got to be academic. My kids are - they can spell, they can punctuate. My 11-year-old can spell anything. My lad Oliver is 19 and he's going to do music law."

It's amazing that he was illiterate and is now an author. Ah, Ryder says, well, if he's being strictly honest, the writing's not really down to him, that's his ghostwriter, the journalist Luke Bainbridge. In fact, Ryder says, the first time he looked at the proofs of *What Planet Am I On?*, the book accompanying the series, he got a bit of a shock, because Bainbridge had captured his voice too accurately. "Here's the thing," he says. "We're doing a book, and the TV show is PG - it can be shown in the day to kids on the History channel. So you want a book to accompany the TV series. So I get a draft of the book and it's, 'fucking this, fucking that, fucking dick, fuckin twat,' and I'm like, 'Luke! You can't!' I'm not very proud of me grammar, of me fucking vocabulary, but with a book here to accompany the TV series, don't be 'Fuck that fuckin' fuckin' fuckin' alien, this fuckin' here, that cunt there'. You know what I mean?" So you had to de-fuck it? He grins. "Aye, I had to de-fuck it."

Do his family and friends share his passion for UFOs? "No, not really." His manager, Warren, is sitting in the room with us. He went on the trip to Chile with Ryder. Is he a believer? "No, he's not."

In Chile his team photographed something flitting across the sky that Ryder thought was a UFO at the time, but now he's not so sure. Does that mean he



Photograph: Radford/Forstean/TopFoto

hasn't seen any since his teens? He doesn't answer. He looks at Warren for advice, suddenly coy. "I'm gonna say yeah ... even though that's not strictly true."

What d'you mean, I say. You can't lie to me.

"Nonononono." He looks at Warren, unnerved. "Should I tell him because this is just going to look like bullshit?"

We're here for the truth, I say.

His sentences become disjointed. "Well, all I'll tell you, right, is that I've seen one, really close up, about 50 foot above, and it looks like a cartoon. It doesn't look real. It looks like it's made out of Airfix kit. They look like toys. When you've seen something as close as I've seen - and bullshit drink, drugs, bollox, none of it, absolutely normal and straight - and you see it and you know they're here ..."

Tell me more, I say. "I can't go into any more detail, apart from that it was literally 50 foot above me." Did he have any contact with it? "No, no, but the thing is I wasn't frightened one bit. I was very peaceful and placid when I was looking at the

thing." He says it happened after he finished making the documentary series.

Are you not telling me the full version because you're saving it for a new show?

"No, I'm not telling you because if I start coming out with that story now, it will be, 'Oh I hear you've got a show now and you're just promoting it ...'" He comes to a stop. "I thought someone was playing a fucking joke. I thought someone had made something out of a gigantic 40-foot Airfix kit."

Has the latest sighting changed him? "Yeah, it's made me think all sorts of shit. If you've seen something 50 foot away, right, and it's as clear as daylight, it really does make you think. It was early morning. It was ironic that I go out doing this show, looking in certain hotspots, and then boom! You see it here! How no one in the Swinton Worsley bit of Salford can not have seen that craft, only me, is beyond belief."

At one point, in the TV series, he says he thinks he quite fancies being abducted. I ask him whether, if aliens had come out of this ship and taken him off, he would really have been so blasé? I notice beads of

How the 'thigh gap' became the latest pressure point on a woman's self-image

Once, only models were determined to make sure that their legs didn't touch. Now it has become a widespread harmful and often unachievable obsession. Lawley wouldn't like to be taken from any-
By Rosie Swash giving permission. I wouldn't like to be just my hair and lips. Robyn Lawley is a model who has been the cover of *Vogue* and *Elle*. When a photo of Robyn Lawley's legs on *Sunday* *Express* was published, the responses were far from complimentary. "Pig", "hefty" and "too fat" were some of the ways in which commenters described the 24-year-old. Her crime? Her thighs were touching. Lawley had failed to achieve a "thigh gap".

The model, who has her own swimwear line and has won numerous awards for her work, responded vehemently below the line: "You sit behind a computer screen objectifying my body, judging it and insulting it, without even knowing it."

She also went on to pen a thoughtful rallying cry for the *Daily Beast* last week against those who attacked her, saying their words were "just another tool of manipulation that other people are trying to use to keep me from loving my body".

The response to her article was electric and Lawley was invited to speak about thigh-gap prejudice on America's *NBC Today*. In a careful and downbeat tone, she explained: "It's basically when your upper middle thighs do not touch when you're standing with your legs together."

The Urban Dictionary website describes it in no uncertain terms as "the gap between a woman's thighs directly below the vagina, often diamond shaped when the thighs are together."

The thigh gap is not a new concept to Lawley, who at 6ft 2in and 12 stone is classified as a "plus-size" model, and who remembers learning about it aged 12. But the growth of Instagram and other social media has allowed the concept of a thigh gap to enter the public consciousness and become an alarming, and exasperating, new trend among girls and women.

A typical example is a Twitter account devoted solely to Cara Delevingne's thigh gap, which the model initially described as "pretty funny" but also "quite crazy".

Selfies commonly show one part of a person's anatomy, a way of compartmentalising body sections to show them in the best light, and the thigh gap is particularly popular. What was once a standard barometer of thinness among models is now apparently sought after by a wider public.

The thigh gap has its own hashtag on Twitter, under which users post pictures of non-touching thighs for inspiration, and numerous dedicated blogs. The images posted mirror the ubiquitous images of young, slim models and pop stars in shorts, often at festivals such as Glastonbury or Coachella, that have flooded the mainstream media in recent years, bringing with them the idea that skinniness, glamour and fun are intertwined.

There is even a "how to" page on the internet, although worshippers of thin may be disappointed to find that the first step is to "understand that a thigh gap is not physically possible for most people".

Naomi Shimada began modelling at 13, but had to

quit the industry when her weight changed. "I was what they call a straight-size model - a size 6 - when I started, which is normal for a very young girl.

"But as I got older my body didn't stay like that, because, guess what, that doesn't happen to people! So I took a break and went back in as a size 14 and now work as a plus-size model."

Shimada is unequivocal about where the obsession with the thigh gap comes from. "It's not a new trend: it's been around for years. It comes partly from a fashion industry that won't acknowledge that there are different ways a woman should look, and it comes from the pro-anorexic community. It's a path to an eating disorder."

Caryn Franklin, the former *Clothes Show* presenter who co-founded the diversity campaign All Walks Beyond the Catwalk, is quite appalled. "We now have a culture that convinces women to see themselves as an exterior only, and evaluating and measuring the component parts of their bodies is one of the symptoms.

"Young women do not have enough female role models showing them action or intellect. In their place are scantily clad celebrities. Sadly, young women are wrongly looking to fashion for some kind of guidance on what it is to be female."

Franklin, who was fashion editor of style magazine *i-D* in the 1980s, says it hasn't always been this way: "I had spent my teen years listening to Germaine Greer and Susie Orbach talking about female intellect.

"When I came out of college I knew I had a contribution to make that wasn't based on my appearance. I then landed in a fashion culture that was busy celebrating diversity. There was no media saying 'get the look' and pointing to celebrities as style leaders because there wasn't a homogenised fashion look, and there weren't digital platforms that meant that I was exposed to more images of unachievable beauty."

Asked whether the fixation on skinny thighs is a way of forcing women's bodies to look pre-pubescent, Franklin says: "This culture has encouraged women to infantilise themselves. When you are so fixated on approval for what you look like, you are a little girl: you haven't grown up."

For many, the emergence of the thigh gap trend is baffling.

"About four hours ago, as far as I was concerned a 'thigh gap' was something anyone could have if they stood up and placed their feet wider than hip distance apart," wrote *Vice* journalist Bertie Brandes when she discovered the phenomenon.

"A thigh gap is actually the hollow cavity which appears between the tops of your legs when you stand with your feet together. It also means that your body is underweight."

Other bloggers have responded with a sense of the absurd; feminist blog Smells Like Girl Riot recently posted a diagram of a skeleton to show why the ischium and the pubis cannot be altered through diet alone.

Shimada, now 26, is about to launch her own fanzine, *A-Genda*, which aims to use a diverse range of models to show young women "something

healthy to aspire to".

"When I was a really young model there were girls who used to talk about the pencil test, which is when you measure the depth of your waist against the length of a pencil, and back dimples, when the lack of fat would create concave areas of skin," she says. "But I don't even think this kind of thing is limited to the fashion industry any more. It's all a big mess. But we all have to play a role in making it better."

Franklin also wonders: "When did everyone become so narcissistic? What happened to intellect? My sense of myself was not informed by a very shallow patriarchal media that prioritised the objectification of women - it was informed by feminism."

Lawley signed off her call to arms with a similar acknowledgement of the potential power of women's bodies.

"I've been trying to do just the opposite: I want my thighs to be bigger and stronger. I want to run faster and swim longer. I suppose we all just want different things, but women have enough pressure as it is without the added burden of achieving a 'thigh gap'.

"The last thing I would want for my future daughter would be to starve herself because she thought a 'thigh gap' was necessary to be deemed attractive."



Model Robyn Lawley, who has appeared on the cover of *Vogue*, was condemned on social media for not having a 'thigh gap'. Photograph: Jon Gorrigan for the Observer

David Blunkett calls for urgent review of laws governing security services

Former home secretary urges update of safeguards over spy agencies, saying 'we have to protect ourselves from ourselves'

By Nick Hopkins and Matthew Taylor

Britain's intelligence laws need to be urgently reviewed to keep up with new technologies and provide a stronger framework for spy agencies, which can "get carried away" unless they are kept in check, the former Labour home secretary David Blunkett has said.

Calling for a commission to address the issue, Blunkett said governments were put under enormous pressure by the secret services - and he had learned to treat some of their demands with healthy scepticism. In an interview with the Guardian, he said it was human nature for the agencies and the police to push the boundaries, and that meant laws could be used in a way parliament never intended.

"Human nature is you get carried away, so we have to protect ourselves from ourselves," he said. "In government you are pressed by the security agencies. They come to you with very good information and they say 'you need to do something'. So you do need the breath of scepticism, not cynicism, breathing on them. You need to be able to take a step back. If you don't have this, you can find yourself being propelled in a particular direction."

He said a high-level review by specialists with a proper understanding of the arguments was the best way to update laws that were out of touch.

Blunkett's remarks are particularly striking because he was regarded as a hardline home secretary and once described concerns about human rights as "airy-fairy". He was appointed home secretary months before 9/11 and tried to bring in new anti-terrorism measures, including the detention without trial of suspect foreign nationals who could not be extradited or deported.

He was also responsible for reviewing the early use of a key piece of anti-terror legislation, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (Ripa), which has provided the legal underpinning for some of GCHQ's mass-surveillance programmes revealed by the whistleblower Edward Snowden.

The Labour heavyweight now concedes that Ripa is a problem law that was introduced by his predecessor, Jack Straw, "to provide a framework for what was a free-for-all in a growing but little understood area". But Blunkett said the law's limitations were quickly exposed because technology moved so fast.

"We were moving into an entirely new era. We were at the very start of understanding what we were dealing with, and understanding the potential. You have to have constant vigilance and return to these issues on a regular basis because the world changes and you should be prepared to change with it. I think Ripa needs trimming back. It is being used for things for which it was never intended."

The Guardian has revealed that GCHQ relies on Ripa to provide the legal cover for programmes such as Tempora, which taps undersea cables that carry

internet traffic in and out of the country. On Monday Diana Johnson, the shadow crime and security minister, wrote to the Home Office minister James Brokenshire to demand the "explicit legal basis" under which the Tempora programme operates.

Yesterday Privacy International filed complaints with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) against some of the world's leading telecommunication companies for providing assistance to GCHQ's Tempora programme. The group believes up to a dozen OECD guidelines, relating to companies' responsibilities to respect human rights, including the right to privacy and freedom of expression, may have been violated.

The intelligence and security committee, which scrutinises Britain's secret services, has now launched a review of Ripa, and on Thursday it will question the heads of the three spy agencies in an unprecedented open session.

On Tuesday night claims surfaced in the Independent that Britain has continued to operate a secret listening post from its embassy in Berlin even after the US halted its own operations.

Though David Cameron and the head of MI5, Andrew Parker, have defended the current intelligence laws, critics insist that they are hopelessly outdated and open to abuse. Blunkett said it was high time for the government to launch "a high-level review or a commission" to address the problems, though not one chaired by a judge.

"I don't like prolonged, highly expensive commissions, especially if they are chaired by judges. We seem to have overwhelming faith in judges.

"We need a process of finding common ground and a solution. You need people with some knowledge and expertise. In politics we tend to fight the last election, not the next. You need to be able to see the bigger picture," he said.

Blunkett said it was important to do this quickly to avert more poisonous arguments in the future. "We need to do so before rather than after a catastrophe so we can try to update in the light of day rather than with a shouting match. We should seek to retain things only if they have some usable purpose. Collecting and maintaining data that you can never use is a futile exercise that causes distress without results.

"The present coalition came into power with a remit to try to scale back the operation of the state, but it has struggled just as badly as the previous government. I think this indicates the enormity of the issue and how difficult it is."

The intelligence agencies should welcome greater scrutiny, he said, or the public would lose confidence in them.

"If the climate is such that people are ultra-suspicious, not only does it make it difficult to have a sensible debate, but it also means that the very big players in the intelligence community don't want to co-operate. Once they don't want to co-operate then you are into having to force people to do things, and

you get into much deeper water. So from the point of view of the security services it makes sense to have a greater degree of understanding and public support."

Blunkett said one of the central problems was how to protect British people from surveillance by "friendly" foreign agencies, such as GCHQ's US counterpart, the National Security Agency.

"We need to examine how we are going to provide British people with protections from friendly for-

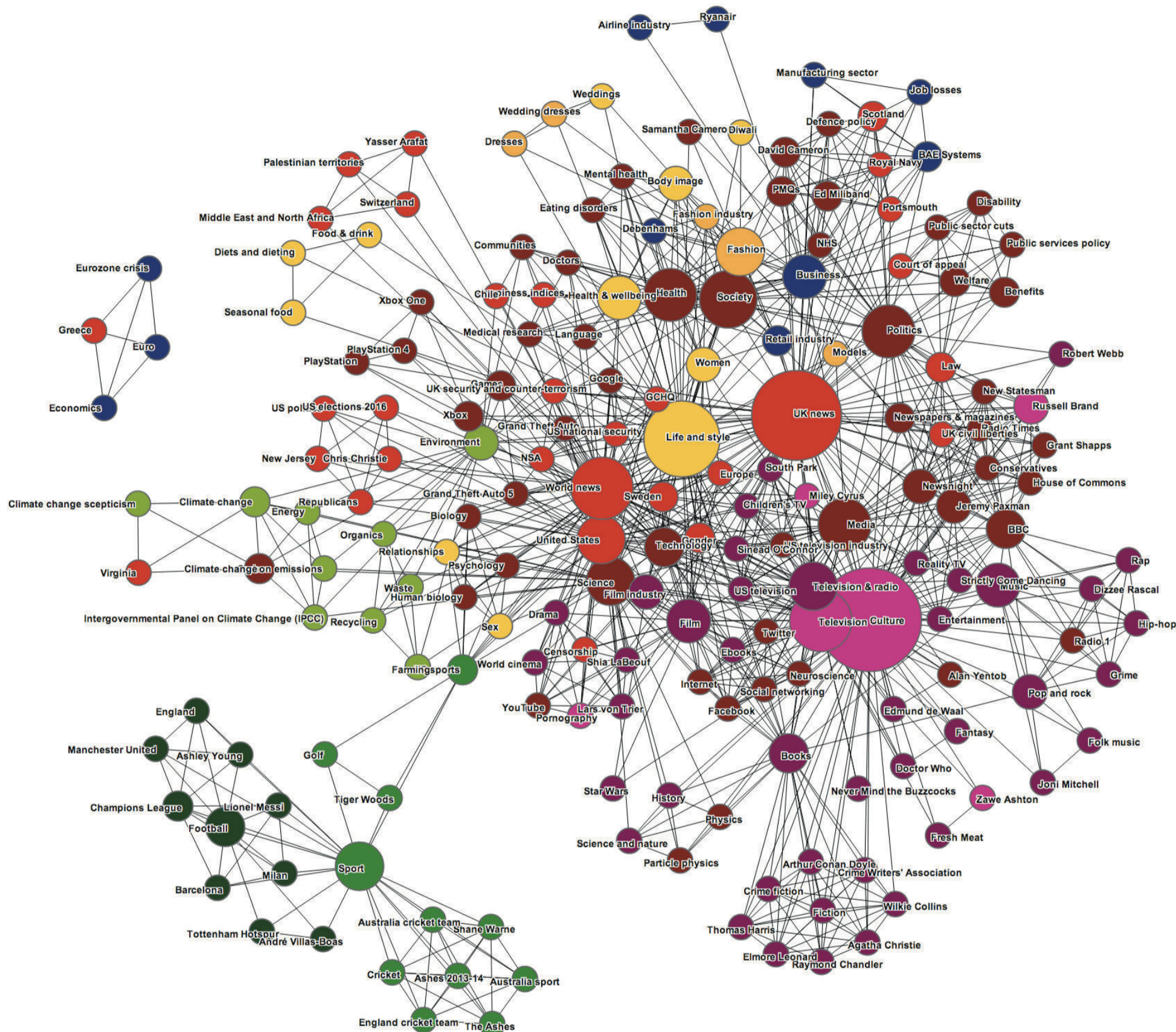


David Blunkett says Ripa, brought in by Labour in 2000, 'needs trimming back. It is being used for things for which it was never intended.' Photo: Martin Argles/Guardian

eign agencies who want to surveil here," he said. "At the moment we aren't offering the same protections that they have from our domestic agencies, in terms of sign-off and warrants. We should try to work out what our stance is and we as a country haven't made any progress on that.

"We need to ensure we don't ask external agencies to do things to our own citizens that we wouldn't do ourselves. But we need to work out if they do want to surveil here and they want our co-operation, we have some mechanism for achieving it."

The week in tags



ashley-young	hip-hop	grant-shapps
manchester-united	rap	ustelelevision
england	alan-yentob	south-park
championsleague	edmund-de-waal	us-television
football	media	childrens-tv
sport	television	miley-cyrus
lionel-messi	tv-and-radio	sinead-o-connor
barcelona	never-mind-the-buzzcocks	strictly-come-dancing
acmilan	doctor-who	entertainment
tottenham-hotspur	fantasy-tv	reality-tv
andre-villas-boas	debt-crisis	samantha-cameron
shane-warne	greece	diwali
ashes-2013-14	economics	pmqs
ashes	euro	edmiliband
england-cricket-team	ryanair	davidcameron
australia-cricket-team	theairlineindustry	nhs
australia-sport	baesystems	portsmouth
cricket	job-losses	defence
tigerwoods	manufacturing-sector	royal-navy
golf	scotland	grand-theft-auto
us-sport	disability	grand-theft-auto-5
carbon-emissions	welfare	games
environment	public-sector-cuts	xbox
climate-change	benefits	google
scienceofclimatechange	policy	gchq
science	court-of-appeal	uksecurity
ipcc	law	nsa
energy	politics	us-national-security
waste	communities	chris-christie
recycling	happiness-indices	republicans
farming	chile	us-politics
uk	body-image	us-elections-2016
organics	fashion	new-jersey
climate-change-scepticism	wedding-dresses	playstation
virginia	dresses	playstation-4
language	weddings	xbox-one
medical-research	women	uk-civil-liberties
doctors	eating-disorders	europa-news
health	mental-health	models
society	seasonal-food	yasser-arafat
health-and-wellbeing	food-and-drink	palestinian-territories
lifeandstyle	diets-dieting	middleeast
psychology	debenhams	switzerland
relationships	fashion-industry	
sex	starwars	
usa	film	
world	film-industry	
human-biology	shia-labeouf	
biology	lars-von-trier	
agathachristie	pornography	
crime	drama	
fiction	world-cinema	
books	copyright	
crime-writers-association	youtube	
culture	gender	
raymondchandler	sweden	
arthurconandoyle	zawe-ashton	
thomasharris	fresh-meat	
wilkiecollins	russell-brand	
elmoreleonard	robert-webb	
music	technology	
popandrock	ebooks	
history	facebook	
scienceandnature	twitter	
physics	internet	
particlephysics	socialnetworking	
retail	neuroscience	
business	jeremy-paxman	
jonimitchell	radio-times	
folk	newsnight	
dizzeerascal	pressandpublishing	
radio-1	houseofcommons	
bbc	conservatives	
grime	new-statesman	

Russell Brand: we deserve more from our democratic system

Following his appearance on Newsnight, the comedian explains why he believes there are alternatives to our current regime

By Russell Brand

I've had an incredible week since I spoke from the heart, some would say via my arse, on Paxman. I've had slaps on the back, fist bumps, cheers and hugs while out and about, cock-eyed offers of political power from well intentioned chancers and some good ol' fashioned character assassinations in the papers.

The people who liked the interview said it was because I'd articulated what they were thinking. I recognise this. God knows I'd love to think the attention was about me but I said nothing new or original, it was the expression of the knowledge that democracy is irrelevant that resonated. As long as the priorities of those in government remain the interests of big business, rather than the people they were elected to serve, the impact of voting is negligible and it is our responsibility to be more active if we want real change.

Turns out that among the disenchanted is Paxman himself who spends most of his time at the meek heart of the political establishment and can't summons up the self-delusion to drag his nib across the ballot box. He, more than any of us is aware that politicians are frauds. I've not spent too much time around them, only on the telly, it's not pleasant; once you've been on Question Time and seen Boris simpering under a make-up brush it's difficult to be enthusiastic about politics.

The only reason to vote is if the vote represents power or change. I don't think it does. I fervently believe that we deserve more from our democratic system than the few derisory tit-bits tossed from the carousel of the mighty, when they hop a few inches left or right. The lazily duplicitous servants of The City expect us to gratefully participate in what amounts to little more than a political hokey cokey where every four years we get to choose what colour tie the liar who leads us wears.

I remember the election and Cameron didn't even get properly voted in, he became prime minister by default when he teamed up with Clegg. Clegg who immediately reneged (Renegy-Cleggy?) on his flagship pledge to end tuition fees at the first whiff of power.

When students, perhaps students who had voted for him, rioted they were condemned. People riot

when dialogue fails, when they feel unrepresented and bored by the illusion, bilious with the piped in toxic belch wafted into their homes by the media.

The reason these coalitions are so easily achieved is that the distinctions between the parties are insignificant. My friend went to a posh "do" in the country where David Cameron, a man whose face resembles a little painted egg, was in attendance. Also present were members of the opposition and former prime minister Tony Blair. Whatever party they claim to represent in the day, at night they show their true colours and all go to the same party.

Obviously there has been some criticism of my outburst, I've not been universally applauded as a cross between Jack Sparrow and Spartacus (which is what I'm going for) but they've been oddly personal and I think irrelevant to the argument. I try not to read about myself as the mean stuff is hurtful and the good stuff hard to believe, but my mates always give me the gist of what's going on, the bastards. Some people say I'm a hypocrite because I've got money now. When I was poor and I complained about inequality people said I was bitter, now I'm rich and I complain about inequality they say I'm a hypocrite. I'm beginning to think they just don't want inequality on the agenda because it is a real problem that needs to be addressed.

It's easy to attack me, I'm a right twerp, I'm a junkie and a cheeky monkey, I accept it, but that doesn't detract from the incontrovertible fact that we are living in a time of huge economic disparity and confronting ecological disaster. This disparity has always been, in cultures since expired, a warning sign of end of days. In Rome, Egypt and Easter Island the incubated ruling elites, who had forgotten that we are one interconnected people, destroyed their societies by not sharing. That is what's happening now, regardless of what you think of my hair or me using long words, the facts are the facts and the problem is the problem. Don't be distracted. I think these columnist fellas who give me aggro for not devising a solution or for using long words are just being territorial. When they say "long words" they mean "their words" like I'm a monkey who got in their Mum's dressing up box or a hooligan in policeman's helmet.

As I said to Paxman at the time "I can't conjure up a global Utopia right now in this hotel room". Obviously that's not my job and it doesn't need to be, we have brilliant thinkers and organisations and no one

needs to cook up an egalitarian Shangri-La on their todd; we can all do it together.

I like Jeremy Paxman, incidentally. I think he's a decent bloke but like a lot of people who work deep within the system it's hard for him to countenance ideas from outside the narrowly prescribed trench of contemporary democracy. Most of the people who criticized me have a vested interest in the maintenance of the system. They say the system works. What they mean is "the system works for me".

The less privileged among us are already living in the apocalypse, the thousands of street sleepers in our country, the refugees and the exploited underclass across our planet daily confront what we would regard as the end of the world. No money, no home, no friends, no support, no hand of friendship reaching out, just acculturated and inculcated condemnation.

When I first got a few quid it was like an anaesthetic that made me forget what was important but now I've woken up. I can't deny that I've done a lot of daft things while I was under the capitalist fugue, some silly telly, soppy scandals, movies better left unmade. I've also become rich. I don't hate rich people; Che Guevara was a rich person. I don't hate anyone, I judge no one, that's not my job, I'm a comedian and my job is to say whatever I like to whoever I want if I'm prepared to take the consequences. Well I am.

My favourite experiences since Paxman-nacht are both examples of the dialogue it sparked. Firstly my friend's 15-year-old son wrote an essay for his politics class after he read my New Statesman piece. He didn't agree with everything I said, he prefers the idea of spoiling ballots to not voting "to show we do care" maybe he's right, I don't know. The reason not voting could be effective is that if we starve them of our consent we could force them to acknowledge that they operate on behalf of The City and Wall Street; that the financing of political parties and lobbying is where the true influence lies; not in the ballot box. However, this 15-year-old is quite smart and it's quite possible that my opinions are a result of decades of drug abuse.

I'm on tour so I've been with thousands of people every night (not like in the old days, I'm a changed man) this is why I'm aware of how much impact the Newsnight interview had. Not everyone I chat to agrees with me but their beliefs are a lot closer to

mine than the broadsheets, and it's their job to be serious. One thing I've learned and was surprised by is that I may suffer from the ol' sexism. I can only assume I have an unaddressed cultural hangover, like my adorable Nan who had a heart that shone like a pearl but was, let's face it, a bit racist. I don't want to be a sexist so I'm trying my best to check myself before I wreck myself. The problem may resolve itself as I'm in a loving relationship with a benevolent dictator and have entirely relinquished personal autonomy.

Whilst travelling between gigs I had my second notable encounter. One night late at the Watford Gap I got chatting to a couple of squaddies, one Para, one Marine, we talked a bit about family and politics, I invited them to a show. Then we were joined by three Muslim women, all hijabbed up. For a few perfect minutes in the strip lit inertia of this place, that was nowhere in particular but uniquely Britain, I felt how plausible and beautiful The Revolution could be. We just chatted.

Between three sets of different people; first generation Muslims, servicemen and the privileged elite that they serve (that would be me) effortless cooperation occurred. Here we were free from the divisive rule that tears us apart. That sends brave men and women to foreign lands to fight their capitalist wars, that intimidates and unsettles people whose faith and culture superficially distinguishes them, that tells the comfortable "hush now" you have your trinkets. It seemed ridiculous that refracted through the power prism that blinds us; the soldiers could be invading the homeland of these women's forefathers in order to augment my luxurious stupour. Here in the gap we were together. Our differences irrelevant. With no one to impose separation we are united.

I realised then that our treasured concepts of tribe and nation are not valued by those who govern except when it is to divide us from each other. They don't believe in Britain or America they believe in the dollar and the pound. These are deep and entrenched systemic wrongs that are unaddressed by party politics.

The symptoms of these wrongs are obvious, global and painful. Drone strikes on the innocent, a festering investment for future conflict.

How many combatants are created each time an innocent person in a faraway land is silently ironed out from an Arizona call centre? The reality is we

have more in common with the people we're bombing than the people we're bombing them for.

NSA spying, how far-reaching is the issue of surveillance? Do you think we don't have our own cute, quaint British version? Does it matter if the dominant paradigm of Western Capitalism is indifferent to our Bud Flanagan belief in nation? Can we really believe these problems can be altered within the system that created them? That depends on them? The system that we are invited to vote for? Of course not, that's why I won't vote. That's why I support the growing revolution.

We can all contribute ideas as to how to change our world; schoolboys, squaddies, hippies, Muslims, Jews and if what I'm describing is naive then you can keep your education and your indoctrination because loving our planet and each other is a duty, a beautiful obligation. While chatting to people this week I heard some interesting ideas, here are a couple.

We could use the money accumulated by those who have too much, not normal people with a couple of cars, giant corporations, to fund a fairer society.

The US government gave a trillion dollars to bail out the big five banks over the past year. Banks that have grown by 30% since the crisis and are experiencing record profits and giving their execs record bonuses. How about, hang on to your hats because here comes a naïve suggestion, don't give them that money, use it to create one million jobs at fifty grand a year for people who teach, nurse or protect.

These bailouts for elites over services for the many are institutionalised within the system, no party proposes changing it. American people that voted, voted for it. I'm not voting for that.

That's one suggestion for the Americans; we started their country so we owe them a favour now things are getting heavy.

Here's one for blighty; Philip Green, the bloke who owns Top Shop didn't pay any income tax on a £1.2bn dividend in 2005. None. Unless he paid himself a salary that year, in addition to the £1.2bn dividend, the largest in corporate history, then the people who clean Top Shop paid more income tax than he did. That's for two reasons - firstly because he said that all of his £1.2bn earnings belong to his missus, who was registered in Monaco and secondly because he's an arsehole. The money he's nicked through legal loopholes would pay the annual salary

for 20,000 NHS nurses. It's not illegal; it's systemic, British people who voted, voted for it. I'm not voting for that.

Why don't you try not paying taxes and see how quickly a lump of bird gets thrown in your face. It's socialism for corporate elites and feudalism for the rest of us. Those suggestions did not come from me; no the mind that gave the planet Booky Wook and Ponderland didn't just add an economically viable wealth distribution system to the laudable list of accolades, to place next to my Shagger Of The Year awards.

The first came from Dave DeGraw, the second Johann Hari got from UK Uncut. Luckily with organisations like them, Occupy, Anonymous and The People's Assembly I don't need to come with ideas, we can all participate. I'm happy to be a part of the conversation, if more young people are talking about fracking instead of twerking we're heading in the right direction. The people that govern us don't want an active population who are politically engaged, they want passive consumers distracted by the spectacle of which I accept I am a part.

If we all collude and collaborate together we can design a new system that makes the current one obsolete. The reality is there are alternatives. That is the terrifying truth that the media, government and big business work so hard to conceal. Even the outlet that printed this will tomorrow print a couple of columns saying what a naïve wanker I am, or try to find ways that I've fucked up. Well I am naïve and I have fucked up but I tell you something else. I believe in change. I don't mind getting my hands dirty because my hands are dirty already. I don't mind giving my life to this because I'm only alive because of the compassion and love of others. Men and women strong enough to defy this system and live according to higher laws. This is a journey we can all go on together, all of us. We can include everyone and fear no one. A system that serves the planet and the people. I'd vote for that.

Calling all comedians: stop writing tetchy open letters to each other

The public pseudo-conversation between celebrities such as Robert Webb and Russell Brand is excruciating

By Marina Hyde

Although *Lost in Showbiz* doesn't really care to have the effluent of Fleet Street in the house, it is dimly aware that Steve Coogan's been in a bit of a bade with newspapers of late. The temptation to throw the baby out with the bathwater must be immense - and yet, if only the comic and actor would heed the wise words of Andreas Whittam-Smith, former editor of the *Independent*, who once observed that to write an open letter was an act of journalistic madness.

Last weekend, you may be aware, Coogan opted to respond to a column by the *Observer's* David Mitchell by writing him an open letter, also published in that newspaper. Mitchell consequently wrote an open letter of reply to Coogan, which was itself published in the *Observer* - at the very same time at which his frequent comic partner, Robert Webb, was engaged in another, unrelated act of open letterdom somewhere across town. Webb was displeased by something Russell Brand had written to readers in the edition of the *New Statesman* the latter guest-edited last week, and has written an open letter to Brand about it all, which is published in this week's *New Statesman*.

What a thrilling turn for the epistolary public life has taken! In fact, it is to be hoped that by 2019, all political debate in this country will be framed by various comedians writing frothingly cordial letters to each other.

Even now, some funnyman or funnywoman could be dipping a fountain pen in to the special open-letter ink, and preparing to join this esteemed fray, like the various unreliable narrators of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. "My dear Vicomte MacIntyre ..." "I received your letter, Madame de Millican, but suggest on that contrary that ..." "Would you do me the immense courtesy of having a word with yourself,



Coogan, Mitchell, Webb and Brand. Photograph: Getty

Chevalier Carr?"

Before we move on to the detail of the various missive wars currently raging, it feels time to ask what on earth the open letter thinks it is. It is not really a letter at all, despite being framed as such, though it seems stagily anxious not to be seen as a column. In the end, perhaps, the biggest problem with the open letter is its condescending relationship with the readers. It does not purport to be addressed to them at all, you see, preferring instead the pretentious pretence that it is being sent over their heads. It affects not to attempt to engage them in the slightest, except perhaps in the role of admiring plebeian bystander. It's like some weirdly misguided op-ed equivalent of the fourth wall, with readers invited to press their miserable noses up against the glass and be grateful for the sight of two famous people indulging in some hot quill-on-quill action.

Perhaps in the age of Twitter, where pseudo-conversation between the well-known is increasingly public and performative, this is acceptable to some. To *Lost in Showbiz*, though, it looks like a bit of a famewank.

In the circs, it must be said that the open letter is not a million miles from that other essentially absurd and self-regarding piece of posturing, the newspaper column, of which - FULL DISCLOSURE - your correspondent types out three a week. (In fact there is only one column - it's a bit like that episode of *Bagpuss* where the mice on the mouse organ claim to have a chocolate-biscuit mill, but in fact have only a single chocolate biscuit which they keep wheeling around the back before producing it again and claiming it's new product). But at least a newspaper column doesn't affect to be addressed to someone far grander than the people doing it the favour of reading it.

Still, on with the show, and a now-overdue recap of the disagreements in question. David Mitchell doesn't back the royal charter on press regulation, but Steve Coogan does. Meanwhile Russell Brand opines you shouldn't vote, and Robert Webb disagrees and says Russell's article on the matter made him rejoin the Labour party.

And so to the open letters. There were the obligatory tetchy air kisses. "I've been a big fan of yours over the years ... you are consistently well above average," wrote Coogan to Mitchell, before observing

that the column in question was not "up there with your most rib-tickling stuff. So I can only assume it's, er, what you actually think." "I just thought you might I might want to hear from someone who a) really likes your work," wrote Webb to Brand, "b) takes you seriously as a thoughtful person, and c) thinks you're talking through your arse about something very important."

"David, if your article were a schoolboy's essay," concluded Coogan, "it would score highly for style. But it would be covered in red ink with frequent use of the word 'sloppy', finishing with 'see me'."

Mitchell's response, it must be said, felt as reluctant as it was restrained, ending with a pointed: "I don't think you're insane to think [what you do] - I just don't agree." His comic partner took a rather more sledgehammer tack with Brand. "I'm aware of the basic absurdity of what I'm trying to achieve here," he wrote, "like getting Liberace to give a shit about the working tax credit." Like Coogan, he felt moved to mark Brand's work. "You're a wonderful talker but on the page you sometimes let your style get ahead of what you actually think ... keep an eye on that - it won't really do." His signoff to Russell? "In brief, and I say this with the greatest respect, please read some fucking Orwell."

If it is unfair to pick out these faux-chummy digs as opposed to whatever was the substance of either man's argument, it is regrettably inevitable. The nature of the open letter form dictates that it is not the argument, but the cod-familiarity, the this-comes-from-a-place-of-love needling that ends up being most excruciatingly memorable thing about it.

As for the reader, maybe they are left marvelling how lucky they are to live in this golden age of comedians writing to each other, and allowing them a squiz. Or maybe they feel like adapting the old saw about eavesdroppers only hearing the worst of themselves, and observing that those forced to play the role of voyeur to an open letter only hear the worst of whoever penned it. Many who read Coogan or Webb's classics of the form might rather wish they hadn't, and could preserve a more flattering picture of the people whose other work they have long enjoyed.

● Comments on this column will remain off for legal reasons

sation that campaigns against nuclear proliferation, who said that the documents showed just how risky the cold war became for both sides.

"These papers document a pivotal moment in modern history - the point at which an alarmed Thatcher government realised that the cold war had to be brought to an end and began the process of persuading its American allies likewise," he said.

"The Cold War is sometimes described as a stable

How a Nato war game took the world to brink of nuclear disaster



Prime minister Margaret Thatcher was alarmed by intelligence reports about the Soviet Union's reaction. Photograph: Jockel Fink/AP

Former classified documents show how close the Soviet Union came to launching an attack in 1983
By Jamie Doward

Chilling new evidence that Britain and America came close to provoking the Soviet Union into launching a nuclear attack has emerged in former classified documents written at the height of the cold war.

Cabinet memos and briefing papers released under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that a major war games exercise, Operation Able Archer, conducted in November 1983 by the US and its Nato allies was so realistic it made the Russians believe that a nuclear strike on its territory was a real possibility.

When intelligence filtered back to the Tory government on the Russians' reaction to the exercise, the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, ordered her officials to lobby the Americans to make sure that such a mistake could never happen again. Anti-nuclear proliferation campaigners have credited the move with changing how the UK and the US thought about their relationship with the Soviet Union and beginning a thaw in relations between east and west.

The papers were obtained by Peter Burt, director of the Nuclear Information Service (NIS), an organi-

'balance of power' between east and west, but the Able Archer story shows that it was in fact a shockingly dangerous period when the world came to the brink of a nuclear catastrophe on more than one occasion."

Able Archer, which involved 40,000 US and Nato troops moving across western Europe, co-ordinated by encrypted communications systems, imagined a scenario in which Blue Forces (Nato) defended its allies after Orange Forces (Warsaw Pact countries) sent troops into Yugoslavia following political unrest. The Orange Forces had quickly followed this up with invasions of Finland, Norway and eventually Greece. As the conflict had intensified, a conventional war had escalated into one involving chemical and nuclear weapons.

Numerous UK air bases, including Greenham Common, Brize Norton and Mildenhall, were used in the exercise, much of which is still shrouded in secrecy. However, last month Paul Dibb, a former director of the Australian Joint Intelligence Organisation, suggested that the 1983 exercise posed a more substantial threat than the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. "Able Archer could have triggered the ultimate unintended catastrophe, and with prompt nuclear strike capacities on both the US and Soviet sides, orders of magnitude greater than in 1962," he said.

The exercise took place amid heightened international tension. In September 1983 the Russians shot down a Korean Airlines Boeing 747, killing all 269 people on board, after the plane had mistakenly strayed into their airspace. There is evidence to suggest that the Russians thought the Boeing was an American spy plane.

Earlier in the same year the US president, Ronald Reagan, made a high-profile speech describing the Soviet Union as "the evil empire" and announced plans to build the "Star Wars" strategic defence initiative. With distrust between the US and USSR at unparalleled levels, both sides were operating on a hair trigger.

As Able Archer commenced, the Kremlin gave instructions for a dozen aircraft in East Germany and Poland to be fitted with nuclear weapons. In addition, around 70 SS-20 missiles were placed on heightened alert, while Soviet submarines carrying nuclear ballistic missiles were sent under the Arctic ice so that they could avoid detection.

Nato and its allies initially thought the Soviet response was the USSR's own form of war-gaming. However, the classified documents obtained by the NIS reveal just how close the Russians came to treating the exercise as the prelude for a nuclear strike against them.

A classified British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) report written shortly afterwards recorded the observation from one official that "we cannot discount the possibility that at least some Soviet officials/officers may have misinterpreted Able Archer 83 and possibly other nuclear CPXs [command post exercises] as posing a real threat." The cabinet secretary at the time, Sir Robert Armstrong, briefed Thatcher that the Soviets' response did not appear to be an exercise because it "took place over a major Soviet holiday, it had the form of actual military activity and alerts, not just war-gaming, and it was limited geographically to the area, central Europe, covered by the Nato exercise which the Soviet Union was monitoring".

Armstrong told Thatcher that Moscow's response "shows the concern of the Soviet Union over a possible Nato surprise attack mounted under cover of exercises". Much of the intelligence for the briefings to Thatcher, suggesting some in the Kremlin believed that the Able Archer exercise posed a "real threat", came from the Soviet defector Oleg Gordievsky.

Formerly classified files reveal Thatcher was so alarmed by the briefings that she ordered her officials to "consider what could be done to remove the danger that, by miscalculating western intentions, the Soviet Union would over-react". She ordered her officials to "urgently consider how to approach the Americans on the question of possible Soviet misapprehensions about a surprise Nato attack".

Formerly secret documents reveal that, in response, the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence drafted a joint paper for discussion with the US that proposed "Nato should inform the Soviet Union on a routine basis of proposed Nato exercise activity involving nuclear play".

Information from the JIC report and Gordievsky was shared with Reagan, who met the spy and was apparently so swayed by the arguments that he pushed for a new spirit of detente between the US and USSR.

However, Burt stressed that the end of the cold war did not mean that the risks had gone away.

"Even though the cold war ended more than 20 years ago, thousands of warheads are still actively deployed by the nuclear-armed states," he said. "We continue to face unacceptably high risks and will continue to do so until we have taken steps to abolish these exceptionally dangerous weapons."

PS4 or Xbox One? A parent's guide

This month sees the launch of two next-gen consoles - here is a guide to help parents in the latest battle in the gaming war

By Keith Stuart

If you've never touched a video game controller in your life, but do have avid players in your household, you may be in for a bewildering month. That's because we're on the verge of what the gaming industry excitedly calls 'a new console generation'. In short, the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, once the most powerful games machines on the planet are being replaced - the former by the Xbox One, the latter by the PlayStation 4. No, I don't know why they called it the Xbox One either, but as a lot of people still refer to the original Xbox (launched waaaay back in 2001) as Xbox one, it's going to lead to some hilarious Christmas list misunderstandings.

Anyway, both of the new consoles are arriving in November, and members of your family may already be nagging you for one. So what are these things and what makes them different from each other, and from the consoles that you can still buy in the shops for a third of the price?

Here's a quick guide designed especially for uninterested parents and partners, hopefully avoiding all the usual jargon and assumed knowledge. Good luck out there ...

The technology

Okay, all you really need to know here is that both the PS4 and the Xbox One represent a significant leap over their predecessors. Some people in the industry are suggesting that the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 are around eight times more powerful than the current Xbox 360 and PS3 machines. Does this mean that games will look eight times better? Probably not - tech specs don't work like that. But game visuals will look noticeably more detailed, and you'll see lots of lovely lighting effects and intricate character animations, which add to the "realism" of game worlds. I've put realism in quote marks there because we're still a long way from "photo-realism". However, I think the big blockbuster Xbox One and PS4 games will have *moments* where you'll think you're watching TV, or at least a pretty good animated movie.

What about the technical differences between the consoles? Well, they're pretty negligible to the naked eye. Both are using very similar multi-core central processors and high-end graphics technologies, both have Blu-ray players and 500GB hard drives, and both have 8GB of system memory.

There are small differences in the way memory works and how graphics are handled which, *on paper*, suggest the PS4 is more powerful and will be capable of better visuals. However, developers are very clever and usually work out how to get comparable results from all the available hardware. Even if right now PS4 games look better, that might not be the case a few months down the line when game studios work out how to squeeze extra performance from the Xbox One.

Finally, both offer advanced online functionality. The use of cloud computing, which connects your console to remote servers on the internet, may mean we see a new era of games which have huge online worlds that players can explore together, and that seamlessly grow and evolve over time. We may see game processing tasks like physics and artificial intelligence being 'outsourced' to the cloud, meaning we see much more advanced simulations and

life-like computer-controlled enemies. It's a truly exciting time.

In a nutshell: Right now, it looks like PS4 is the most powerful console, but developers may well learn to exploit the Xbox One in new ways. It's unlikely you'll be making your buying decision on hardware specifications alone.

Motion controls

Microsoft is making a big deal about its updated Kinect motion controller, which uses a camera to watch player movements allowing you to control the onscreen action with arm waves, head nods and other gestures. Kinect was available for the Xbox 360, but it wasn't very accurate and required a lot of light and space to work. The new Kinect is more sensitive and more powerful - it'll be able to watch several players at once in quite a small room, it can recognise individual players, and it can even monitor your heart rate. Which isn't at all creepy. It also has a microphone, so you can actually shout instructions at your console and it'll obey. Again, Xbox 360 did this, but not very well. Oh, and Microsoft has assured everyone that the Kinect won't be watching you 24 hours a day and then beaming live footage to the NSA. Its privacy statement assures users that all footage is kept locally on the machine.

So this is all very exciting, but then, the PS4 also has a new version of its own PlayStation Eye peripheral which does a lot of the same stuff. According to Sony, it can recognise your face and voice, and it can track body movements, although it uses a different technology and there are doubts that it'll do this as accurately as Kinect.

Perhaps the key difference, however, is that while the Xbox One ships with Kinect, PS4 owners will have to buy a PlayStation Eye camera separately. This will probably mean that developers are more likely to support the Kinect as they know everyone will have one. So if controlling games by wafting your arms around and/or talking is attractive, that's a tick in the Xbox One column.

In a nutshell: both machines have interesting motion controllers that can reportedly recognise your face, your voice and your friends, though Microsoft seems to be taking Kinect more seriously than Sony is taking PlayStation Eye, and its motion technology is more advanced.

Entertainment beyond games

Xbox One and PS4 are promising lots of entertainment options that will let you watch movies and listen to music on your console, as well as playing games. We'll see deals with video-on-demand providers like LoveFilm and Netflix, and there will be "free" TV services like YouTube, iPlayer and 4oD.

Right now, Microsoft seems more ambitious in this area. It has been showing off how you'll be able to connect your cable or satellite set-top box to Xbox One, letting you control your live TV viewing pleasure through your console and also adding new social and interactive features to the experience. However, right now, a lot of those options are only available in the US - and if you don't really fancy, say, playing fantasy football while watching a real football match, it won't excite you that much anyway.

Other than that, Microsoft is also making a big

deal about how Xbox One can instantaneously switch between TV, movies and gaming without a lot of fiddling about. It can also play your CDs and MP3 files and will soon be able to stream media content from your PC - PS4 can't do any of those (although a later firmware update could well add MP3 playback and streaming capabilities).

In a nutshell: both consoles will offer tons of on-demand movie and TV options, but Xbox One seems to have a wider array of options, including the potential compatibility with your Sky or Virgin Media box. You need to think of these machines, not just as games consoles, but as all-round entertainment devices. You need to especially remember that when you're handing over your £400.

Second screens

There's a theory that the future of interactive entertainment is going to be about playing things on the your big living-room TV, while simultaneously interacting with a smaller screen on your lap. Basically, the games industry has been studying how everyone watches television these days, and, apparently, that involves sort of semi-viewing stuff like X Factor and Made in Chelsea while tweeting friends or, I don't know, looking up Phoebe-Lettice Thompson on the web. This is the second-screen theory.

The PS4 and the Xbox One are going to support this to some degree. If you buy an Xbox One, for example, you'll be able to download a new version of the SmartGlass app to your phone or tablet and then use your portable device to control certain elements of the console game.

For example, in the zombie adventure Dead Rising 3, if you have SmartGlass on your phone, you can actually use it to receive in-game mission objectives. Yes, the game will "ring you up" and a character will tell you what to do. It's also likely a lot of games will support a second screen to show players personal stuff, like what items their character is carrying or where they are in the game world. All very useful.

Microsoft has also shown how you'll be able to use your tablet or smartphone as a remote control and programme guide, as well as comparing your gaming stats with friends, and organising multiplayer sessions.

PS4 has a smartphone app that does similar things to SmartGlass, such as acting as a limited remote control and showing game information. But Sony's console also offers extra compatibility with the lovely PlayStation Vita handheld console. For example, you'll be able to remote play PS4 games on your Vita, as long as both are wirelessly connected to your home network.

Why would you want to do that? Well, say you're having a lovely time playing a PS4 game on the big TV in your living room, but then someone else wants to watch Downton Abbey - well, now you can pick up your Vita, select Remote Play and the PS4 game will appear on its little screen. You can now continue playing, while your housemate revels in a sedentary and unconvincing portrait of early 20th-century aristocratic life. Not all games will be compatible with Remote Play, but it's still pretty neat. Oh, and Vita will also be used as a second screen for lots of new titles.

In a nutshell: Xbox One has a more powerful smartphone and tablet application in the form of SmartGlass and developers are already using it in



Gamescom: a gamer tries out Kinect on the Xbox One Photograph: Oliver Berg/DPA/Corbis

very interesting ways. But PS4 has strong connectivity potential with the PlayStation Vita console.

Backwards compatibility

In the past, new games consoles would often let you play the old games released for preceding machines. That's not the case with the PS4 or Xbox One - you'll have to keep hold of your rickety old PS3s and Xbox 360s to play those classic titles. However, from next year, the PS4 will be able stream a limited selection of PS3 games from "the cloud" (i.e. a remote server network) to your PS4, so you'll have access to "retro" titles. It's likely Xbox One will eventually offer this sort of thing as well.

As for peripherals, you won't be able to use your old Xbox 360 or PS3 controllers with your new machines - both consoles have shiny new joypads with lots of new features. For example, the PS4's DualShock 4 controller has a touchpad, which provides a new form of tactile input, while the Xbox One controller has cool rumble packs in the triggers to ... well ... make the triggers vibrate. Don't ask.

In a nutshell: Neither PS4 nor Xbox One are compatible with old games or controllers.

The games

At last, the real meat of the debate. Well, both machines will have extensive lineups from launch, so a lot of it's going to be down to personal choice - what do you, your kids or your partner want to play? What do they like? You can find complete lists of the launch lists (as they stand right now) here and here. Have a quick look.

Both consoles boast a selection of exclusive titles and these are the key bargaining chips at this stage. Xbox One has super sexy driving simulator Forza Motorsport 5, gruesome zombie game Dead Rising 3 and historical hack-and-slash romp Ryse: Son of Rome.

PS4, meanwhile, is the only place you'll be able to play family-friendly adventure Knack, sci-fi blaster Killzone: Shadow Fall and hectic shoot-em-up, Resogun. PS4's ambitious open-world racing game, Drive Club, has been delayed until next year.

The Xbox One and PS4 will also offer all the major multi-platform blockbusters released this autumn, such as Battlefield 4, Call of Duty: Ghosts, Assassin's Creed 4, Lego Marvel Superheroes and Fifa 2014.

Which machine has the best versions? Well, that's going to vary quite a lot - and we don't yet know the answers for several big titles. However, there's been some controversy over the fact that Call of Duty: Ghosts runs in full native 1080p high-definition on PS4 but only 720p on Xbox One.

Don't know what that means? It's OK, a lot of people won't notice the difference - indeed a lot of cheaper LCD television sets don't actually support full 1080p HD. Furthermore, other developers *are* promising to get full HD performance out of Xbox One. Let's just say this: if graphics are the main reason you're buying a new machine, this is an issue to be aware of - especially if you've been presented with a Christmas list that says: "Dear Santa, please bring me a games console that absolutely definitely outputs in full 1080p HD at 60 frames-per-second or I'll scream until I vomit".

As for the future of games, well, both consoles have their individual strengths. Sony has an amazing collection of development studios that will work exclusively on PS4 and Vita titles. Naughty Dog, creator of the much-loved Uncharted series, and Media Molecule, the clever Guildford team behind the loveable LittleBigPlanet titles, are both working on major projects that will certainly show what next-gen consoles are capable of. We can also look forward to steampunk action adventure, The Order: 1886 by Californian studio Ready At Dawn, whose staff did lots of work on the hugely successful God of War series.

But Microsoft also has its own cabal of talented studios. Warwickshire-based veteran Rare is producing the hugely amusing Kinect Sports Rivals, and 343 Industries is now hard at work on epic space sequel Halo 5. Xbox One also has some extremely promising console exclusives on the way including Titanfall, the new sci-fi shooter from the people who brought us Call of Duty, and Quantum Break, an apocalyptic thriller set to tie-in with a live-action TV series.

Oh, as a sub-plot, it seems Sony has launched a major charm offensive on smaller indie developers. Consequently, there are quite a few idiosyncratic little treasures that will be exclusive to PS4 - at least in the short term. Microsoft is also trying to court these teeny studios too - everyone wants to find the next big crossover hit, like Minecraft. Right now, though, PS4 is definitely the console to come to for offbeat titles like Supergiant's sci-fi adventure Transistor and hilarious action puzzler Octodad: Dadliest Catch.

In a nutshell: Xbox One possibly has the stronger launch lineup in terms of big triple-A hits, although graphically it may be lagging behind its rival. PS4, meanwhile, is very strong on offbeat indie games.

Social interaction

It's all about social gaming these days, so both machines will offer video chat for up to eight people, and both will provide loads of social integration features, making it easier to find and play against friends. On the PS4, for example, as soon as you switch the console on, you'll get a news screen showing what all your friends are playing - you'll even be able to leap straight into their games.

One big new feature of the next-gen consoles will be seamless content sharing. On both, you can record yourself playing games and then post that footage to the web. This may sound daft to you, but there's already a huge online community of gamers who share videos of themselves playing games, and many of them have hundreds of thousands of YouTube subscribers. This is what kids do nowadays instead of watching television.

All of this will be jammed with parental locks so you shouldn't have to worry about how much personal information your children are broadcasting across the gaming universe.

In a nutshell: the Xbox One and PS4 are both loaded with social features such as video chatting and video sharing, allowing users to communicate and share content with friends and the wider web. Xbox has traditionally been the best platform for online multiplayer gaming, but PlayStation is really pushing it this time round.

Launch details and prices

The PS4 is launching in North America on 15 November and in Europe and Australia on 29 November. The machine will cost \$399 in the US, €399 in Europe, £349 in the UK and \$549 in Australia - that price will get you the machine, a controller, a mono headset and an HDMI cable.

The Xbox One is launching in major global territories on 22 November. It will cost \$499 in the US, €499 in Europe, £429 in the UK and \$599 in Australia. The basic package has a controller, all the essential leads, plus the Kinect motion device.

There are various other bundles available which will add extra controllers or games - it's best to check with retailers like Amazon, Game or Argos, or any of the supermarkets, to see who has the best deals. If you're buying the console as a present, check what games the lucky recipient wants - you may find a bundle deal that includes that very title, and it'll be cheaper than purchasing the game separately.

Games will cost between £45-60 each - you'll be able to buy second-hand copies, but it's likely that many will require you to pay again in order to unlock online multiplayer modes and other extras (originally, the Xbox One was designed to prevent or at least control the sale of used games, but a public outcry led to a change in policy).

Both consoles will also be offering a range of free titles, that will cost nothing to download, but will doubtless include 'microtransactions' so that players can purchase in-game items. The Xbox One has beat-em-up Killer Instinct and game creation package Project Spark, while PS4 has third-person shooter Warframe and flight combat sim, War Thunder. Free-to-play is already a common model in smartphone games, and is likely to be a big deal on these new consoles too.

'Hidden' costs

If you buy an Xbox One, you'll need to pay an annual Gold subscription to be able to play games against other users online, as well as to use Skype and most TV services. This will cost £39.99 a year. On PS4 you'll need an annual subscription to PlayStation Plus to play online games (currently it's £5.49 a month, or £39.99 for a year) - however, video chat and TV streaming options like iPlayer and 4oD will be free, and you also get a range of other subscription services like access to pre-release games and free online titles. On both machines, video-on-demand services like Netflix and Lovefilm will almost certainly require separate subscriptions.

Purchasing a next-gen console

For a while at least, this probably isn't going to be as straightforward as you'd expect. Initial supplies will be limited, so it's unlikely you'll just be able to wander into your local HMV on the launch day and grab one off the shelves. Even if you go out tomorrow and pre-order a machine, most retailers are saying that you won't get it for launch - the likes of Game and Amazon *are*, however, promising you'll get it before Christmas - but you ought to be quick.

"Finding a console at all for launch is going to be a stretch now," agrees Lewie Procter of video game retail news site, SavvyGamer. "GameStop are taking PS4 orders at £329.97, which is about £20 cheaper than pretty much everywhere else. They won't get it to you for launch, but I think it's most likely you'll get it before Christmas.

"Everywhere is charging full price for an Xbox One, and I'd say Amazon or Game (depending on whether you want the bundled copy of FIFA) would be your best bet to get one soon after launch. Also, most high-street retailers will have a small amount of stock on the shelves available on launch day. If you are eager to get it on launch day, and don't mind taking a chance, it's worth turning up first thing in the morning. Although it's a bit of a long shot."

Alternatively ...

If you're not sure, don't rush in. Give things a few weeks to settle down, see if you can get hands-on time at your local game store or chat to any early adopters you know. And of course, we'll be reviewing both of the machines closer to their launch dates, so you can always come back here.

And there are alternatives. The PS3 and Xbox 360 are great machines with vast libraries of excellent games - if you're buying your first family console, you could do a lot worse than purchasing one of these and then jumping into the next-gen era in a year or so. There's also the Nintendo Wii U, the follow-up to the hugely successful Wii. It hasn't caught on as well as its predecessor, but with its innovative GamePad controller (which comes with its own display, like a tablet computer), it offers some really fun gaming experiences, such as Nintendoland, Pikmin 3 and New Super Mario Bros U - and there are new versions of Mario Kart and Wii Fit on the way.

If you love smartphone games, there are also a couple of smaller consoles based on the Android operating system. The Ouya and the GameStick are priced at less than £100 and are extremely portable - their games are more like those you'd find on your mobile, but for a lot of people that's fine. Meanwhile, we're seeing an increasing number of 'living rooms PCs' - computers designed for entertainment rather than work. Next year, the brilliant game developer Valve is releasing a series of Steam Machine PCs that will handle gaming brilliantly, as

well as offering all the other advantages of a computer.

In a nutshell: Don't feel you have to jump into the next generation just yet. Make sure you research the alternatives.

PlayStation 4 conclusion

Pros

- Powerful, cleverly designed hardware with high-end graphics technology
- Excellent 'in-house' developers
- Really interesting new controller, with touchpad interface
- Plenty of 'on-demand' entertainment options, many of which won't require a subscription, and PlayStation Plus subscription includes free access to digital games
- Strong roster of offbeat 'indie' games
- Clever 'live' user-interface that displays what your friends are playing and lets you join them instantly

Cons

- PlayStation Eye motion controller is sold separately, which means it won't be as well supported by developers
- Launch lineup relies heavily on 'third-party' multi-platform games

Xbox One conclusion

Pros

- Advanced all-round entertainment options, allowing users to plug in their satellite or cable box (content deals permitting) and control the TV experience
- Seamless transition between movies, TV and games
- The new Kinect is extremely powerful and may well lead to some truly innovative gaming experiences
- The launch lineup is very strong with key brands like Forza and Killer Instinct
- Xbox Live is a very strong online multiplayer service which has been fully overhauled for the new generation

Cons

- Question marks over the console's ability to display full 1080p visuals when games are running at the optimal rate of 60 frames-per-second (but this may be temporary)
- The inclusion of Kinect means it's more expensive

Finally (phew!)

If you're choosing one for your family, have a good think about what you'll use it for. It may also be worth checking what consoles all your children's peers are getting. If your family is likely to be gaming online, you'll want the same machine as your friends so you can battle it out together.

If not, it's really difficult to separate the two, but right now, if you want an all-round entertainment beast that will handle all your TV and movie needs as well as playing a very decent selection of games, go for Xbox One. If it's all about graphical performance and sheer variety of gaming experiences, PlayStation 4 may be the one for you.

They're both super advanced machines with tons to offer, so in the end, it's down to personal choice. The good news is, although this is billed as a console war, neither is likely to 'lose'. Buy a next-gen console and, unless there's some sort of financial catastrophe, you're investing in at least eight years of entertainment.

Jake Bugg: 'You never forget where you're from'

At only 19, singer-songwriter Jake Bugg is a phenomenon. He's topped the charts with his inner-city blues, dated Cara Delevingne, and even found himself compared to Bob Dylan. Craig McLean spends a week on tour with the Nottingham lad as he meets his passionate fans - and avoids the police

By Craig McLean

Early afternoon in Austin, Texas, and Jake Bugg is perhaps having cause to regret one of his most famous lyrics. It's the line from "Two Fingers", one of five singles he released last year, that goes: "Skin up a fat one, hide from the feds..."

"Our bus got pulled over by the cops in Arizona," mutters the 19-year-old, freshly arrived in one red-neck state from another. Luckily his touring party had somehow "had word" in advance that they might be subject to a police search, so had taken some precautions. A sniffer dog came aboard. Twice. Its nose led to Bugg's luggage. "But they pulled it out, opened it, and all me laundry exploded out," he says, smiling, in his broad Nottingham accent. Nothing else emerged. "I never have weed in my suitcase."

At the same time, the easygoing amiability of Britain's best new singer-songwriter since the emergence of Noel Gallagher was winning the day. "I was getting on really well with this state trooper, so it would have been awkward if they'd had to arrest us." Awkward indeed. "They said: 'We know it's on here, but we can't find it.'"

In the end, Bugg thinks the friendly "feds" tipped him a wink and did the British youngster a favour. "They said: 'Well, you've just come from California, so we'd expect your bus to smell of marijuana.'"

Now, in blazing Texan heat, Bugg - dressed all in black and firmly buttoned up in a Harrington-style jacket - is considering what lies ahead. Today on the singer-songwriter's itinerary: a teatime slot at the Austin City Limits festival, another pit stop in a world tour that has lasted, more or less, for a full 18 months. Tomorrow, two flights to reach Mexico City, where the guitarist and his two-piece band are performing at the giant Corona Capital event, a few notches beneath headliners Arctic Monkeys. Then home to the UK, an appearance on Alan Carr's *Chaty Man*, production rehearsals, and straight into a sold-out British tour.

He will land at Heathrow a year to the day from



'I've aged in the past year! I went back to England recently and didn't get ID'd in the pub': Jake Bugg at the Austin City Limits festival. Photograph: Julian Broad for the Observer

the release of his self-titled first album. It entered the charts at number one, making Jake Bugg - 18 at the time - the youngest British male in chart history to debut at the top. Over the following 12 months he picked up a Brit nomination, a place on the Mercury Music Prize shortlist, Olympic ubiquity (his song "Lightning Bolt" was the obligatory soundtrack for any Usain Bolt highlights package), support slots with the Rolling Stones and Stone Roses, a celebrity girlfriend (Cara Delevingne, although the relationship was short-lived) and worldwide album sales topping 1m.

Not bad for a quiet, undemonstrative lad playing old-fashioned skiffle blues, albeit rebooted with lyrics clawed from an inner-city childhood in very modern Britain. The product of a broken home, Bugg grew up in Clifton, Nottingham, once the biggest housing estate in Europe.

As the immigration officer at Dallas/Fort Worth airport said to me: "Ah, Jake Bugg... He's the new Dylan, right?" Or, he's Gallagher writing for the La's. Either way, he's a phenomenon, and Britain hasn't seen a young artist like him in yonks.

Backstage at the Austin festival, the compact, poker-faced moptop cuts a curious figure amid the vest-wearing, extravagantly tattooed American rock fraternity. He's had two solid summers of playing Glastonbury, T in the Park and multiple fields in between. Does Jake Bugg enjoy music festivals?

"Not particularly. It's either too hot or it's too cold," he replies in his default monotone.

What about touring in general? In spring last year, not long after signing a record deal, he embarked on his first run of support gigs, with Michael Kiwanuka in Europe. "That was really cool. I'd never been out of England when I did that tour. The first place I went to was Paris. And I did *not* like it."

All that fancy foreign muck?

"That was a toughie, getting into the food," he acknowledges.

These exchanges are typical Bugg. But his scowling demeanour isn't really the whole picture, as that Arizona lawman would attest. It's partly a defence mechanism against the fannish hysteria that increasingly attends his every move. And it's partly a put-on, a grumpy-kid act that amuses him and everyone around him.

Once you get to know Bugg, he's hilarious, airily dismissive of most of his peers ("Arctic Monkeys? I love the second record. I ain't had a proper listen to the new one, but what I've heard I haven't been a big fan of") and pithily aware of the status success has brought. "I like my clothes and I like to look

smart," admits this recipient of piles of free clobber courtesy of high rollers such as Hedi Slimane at Yves Saint Laurent and Burberry's Christopher Bailey.

"But I'm not someone who gets absorbed in the fashion world, 'cause it can get very controversial," he adds. This could be him being ironic, or could be a reference to his brief experience of that scene when he went out with model Delevingne - much to the tabloids' titillation ("When posh totty meets pop grotty," snarked the *Sun*).

Today he frowns like a trooper when I bring up his ex. When we spoke earlier this year, just after their split, he was still confused by the whole paparazzi-friendly blip in his private life. "I knew, obviously, that people wanted to take photos of her 'cause, you know, she's all over the world. But it was just confusing for me - what you gonna get out of getting a picture of me? What the fuck do you want from that? I'm just gonna smoke a fag and stand here!"

When the mood takes him, Bugg can appear reserved to the point of taciturn. Left to his own devices, "I'd just be in my bedroom, writing tunes," he admits. "I try and be productive with my spare time." Yet over the last year, "I've met a load of new friends and a lot of cool people. And they introduce you to people and you learn to be more sociable. You kind of have to be, doing this," he says, gesturing to the tape recorder sitting on the table next to his ever-present packet of fags. "Especially in America - there's no point doing the promotion if you're not gonna smile your way through it. But I do have to give myself a slap every day, tell myself how lucky I am. This is what I always wanted to do."

Bugg has been in America loads this year, including a short stint making his second album. Yes, a scant year after releasing his first, and despite touring nonstop ever since, Jake Bugg has found time to write and record a follow-up.

It's called *Shangri La* and is named after the studio in which it was recorded: the oceanside California base of super-producer Rick Rubin (Beastie Boys, Jay-Z, Neil Diamond, Adele, oh, *everyone*). And it's fantastic. Two highlights: "Song About Love", a glorious ballad - think Nick Drake meets Gram Parsons - and "Messed Up Kids", another street-real account of life in his hometown: "Johnny deals a bit of blow on the side, thinks that he's invincible, hates a fight/Jenny walks the streets alone, she was fine, but she got kicked out of her home in hard times..."

"With that song," Bugg says, "I thought I wasn't gonna sing any more stuff about coming from where I come from, and being as observational as the first

record. But it was actually quite interesting to view things from a different perspective after everything that's happened. And to go back to where I'm from and have one last look."

Technically, Bugg is currently homeless. On the brief occasions he's in London he stays in hotels. He's been considering buying a flat for a while, but hasn't had time. His possessions - apart from a burgeoning collection of guitars - amount to the three suitcases he's lugging round the world, and some boxes stored in a music rehearsal space in the capital. But he did make it home to Nottingham this summer, if only to headline a local music festival, Splendour - two years after opening its smallest stage.

"In the crowd there was a girl on some lad's shoulders that I went to school with for years. And she always said to me: 'I'll never get your music - why do you listen to that crap?'" he smiles, referring to his adolescent love of Don McLean, the Everly Brothers and Johnny Cash. "And she was singing all the words to the songs. That was mad."

The visit also inspired "Messed Up Kids". "That wasn't the reason for my visit; that was just kinda what I stumbled on when I went back for one last look. That was quite interesting. And quite weird. Nottingham's a place that I know better than anywhere in the world, but I've been away from it for such a while."

Does he still feel connected to it? "Yeah, you never forget where you're from. But I spent so much time there - I lived there all my life - and there was a big world out there, and I wanted to see it."

Hence, in part, the work ethic that has produced two albums in one year. I spend five days with Bugg, in Texas and Mexico, and he's clearly a grafter, turning in quick-fire radio interviews and acoustic singalongs galore. He's also hugely entertaining company, generous and welcoming and straightforward. He likes his music, his band and crew, his football, his weed, his table tennis, his clothes, and that's pretty much it. As both a lad and as an artist, Jake Bugg is proper.

That said, "I think I can come across as a bit of a twat, to be honest," he admits with a hint of a smile. "I got a couple of tweets not long ago - 'Jake Bugg, you make great music but why do you have to be such a douche?'"

They don't think he's a douche in Mexico. At the airport Bugg is met by a proper boy-band fan crush. At the Corona Capital festival he's greeted with a deafeningly rapturous audience reaction and two offers of marriage. As he saunters offstage, I ask how that was for him.

At first Bugg gamely tries to maintain his cool. "Awright," he replies with a shrug, his T-shirt sticking to him with sweat. "Decent," he adds. Then the lips twitch into a full smile. "Pretty fucking mental. It was insane, all the singing along. Was not expecting that." He's clearly chuffed to bits.

In Texas I had asked what he cares about. He had thought for a minute before deciding on family and friends, "obviously. I think the purpose of life is for it to be lived. And sometimes I think to myself when I'm really knackered: why am I doing this? You're doing it 'cause you love travelling the world and playing music. When my time passes, I don't necessarily want to be remembered. But if there was some slight way you could make a slight change that's better for the world, then I'd feel like I've done something with my years."

Jake Bugg, then: a wise - and staggeringly talented - head on young shoulders. Although the boy himself doesn't think he's that young any more.

"I've aged terribly in the last year!" he said. "I went back to England recently and didn't get ID'd at either pub I went to. And you have to look over 25 now, which makes it even more annoying."

Shangri La is released on 18 November

I fantasise about group sex with old, obese men



Sexual healing 'I feel guilty.' Photograph: Tom Merton/Getty Images/OJO Images RF

I'm a slim, 31-year-old woman attracted to older, obese men - the uglier the better. I fantasise about being passed around by several of them. The thing that really turns me on is the idea of having to lift their stomachs and search for their penises, which are always difficult to find and a bit on the soft side. I haven't mentioned this to my fiance, because I think he would be horrified. Our sex life is fine, but I use the fantasy to help me climax. I feel guilty - what made me so sick?

Your erotic imaginings are private; you don't have to share them. Fantasies develop in different ways. Some are generated from real events or images, while others are creative imaginings that arise through need, longing or even trauma. Consider searching for the root. One aspect of your fantasy that might be relevant is the fact the imagined men are not really ready for sex. Somehow, you've developed an turn-on that keeps you safe, where despite being "passed around", you still retain control. Perhaps the men's perceived unattractiveness also helps you feel safe and releases you from the anxiety of being physically judged yourself. So your fantasy is not the product of a "sick" mind, but may be a clever creative exercise designed to help assuage sexual fear and a negative body image.

● *Pamela Stephenson Connolly is a psychotherapist who specialises in treating sexual disorders*

● *If you would like advice from Pamela Stephenson Connolly on sexual matters, send us a brief description of your concerns to private.lives@guardian.co.uk (please don't send attachments).*

I do NOT like sex with old, obese men: the perils of being a stock-shot model



Samantha Ovens: not fantasising about sex with old, obese men, apparently. Photograph: Tom Merton/Getty Images/OJO Images RF

No one was more surprised than model Samantha Ovens when the Guardian used her image to illustrate a sex advice column

It began on Twitter, of course, as these things do. A user called Craig Nunn (@hrtbps) wrote: "Why not model for stock images?" they said. "What could possibly go wrong?" they said." And he enclosed a picture from the agony aunt column in this newspaper, showing a concerned-looking young woman in expensive pyjamas beneath the headline: "I fantasise about group sex with old, obese men".

In truth, the young woman, Samantha Ovens - like all models - did know the risks. Stock shots, in case you weren't aware, are photographs illustrating general themes taken not for a specific purpose but to supply magazines, advertisers or anybody else with a library of useful images. Look up "mean boss" or "couple arguing" online and you'll get the gist. Having modelled for a few, you soon start to notice yourself looking worried about a mortgage here, or suffering from PMT there. But you don't expect this. Not this.

"I opened it up when I was with some friends," says Ovens, who had been tipped off at the weekend by the Twitter whirlwind. "In fact, I was with my

partner's mum as well. I screeched with laughter and said: 'Oh. You have to see this.' There's me looking very anxious, and I bloody well would be, wouldn't I?"

The image in question had come from a "Colds and illnesses" shoot she did two years ago, when she was 36. "I think they had me sneezing, curled up in bed, blowing my nose. There were loads of different versions," she recalls. Being gay in real life, but a specialist in portraying yummy mummies in the press and on television, she is used to a certain level of irony where all her work is concerned. But this was new.

And you do have to be careful. Ovens is a successful model, with past clients including Debenhams, Optical Express, Colgate and British Airways. At one stage she was lucratively installed as "the Harpic Power Plus girl". But big brands take some interest in a model's wider career, and can be reluctant to share them with anything too tawdry. "If I want to keep those kinds of clients, I make sure I protect my image, so to speak," she says. And has the Guardian damaged it? "It doesn't worry me in the slightest." (Indeed, she has gained around 90 Twitter followers as a result.)

There is, in any case, a certain vapidness about the world of stock shots, with all its perfect families and people who look fantastic even when they're ill, so a measure of ridicule goes with the territory. A case in point is the army of female models who are required to pose laughing with salad (a wholesome scene so popular with picture libraries that it has its own fan-site). Just yesterday Ovens was looking worried again, this time illustrating "stress" in the Telegraph.

"How can you take it seriously?" she says about the obese old men debacle. "There are bigger things in this life to get concerned about."

Luxury food shortage scares - should we believe the warnings?

Rarely a week goes by without some whipped-up panic about a food shortage that will threaten our cherished luxuries. Last week it was wine, this week it's almonds. The fact that so many of the recent examples have read like a middle-class shopping list rather detracts from the very real struggle that many households are facing as general food prices rise, but there's nothing like a threatened cheese, wine and chocolate shortage to get the better-off thinking about stockpiling - or at least that's what the headline writers appear to think. But what is the truth behind the looming shortages? And is it all China's fault?

Chocolate

"We've seen big increases in prices for cocoa butter, which drives chocolate prices up," says Liliana Gonzalez from the analysts Mintec. "There is a supply shortage in Ivory Coast [the main grower of cocoa beans], and for 2013/14 there is a forecasted decline in production of about 2%." This has been caused by dry weather conditions. Big price rises in cocoa butter have already been seen - in the UK, it is up 77% - she says. There is also rising consumption around the world "as the global economy starts to come out of recession". Headlines have warned the price of chocolate could rise by a third, while others, perhaps with a lesser grasp of maths, have said it will "triple". Gonzalez isn't convinced: "I would personally not say that. We have analysed the market and the price has gone up to 23p per 100g bar, an increase of 5p per 100g bar year-on-year. Supermarket own-brand chocolate retails at around 30p per 100g bar."

Goat's cheese

With production down - and demand up - there have been warnings that goat's cheese prices will rise over the next few months. The Grocer reports that France's production is down 8%, while the Netherlands, another large producer, is still feeling the effects of a cull of 50,000 pregnant goats and ewes in 2009 and 2010 to curb the spread of Q fever, a disease that can spread to humans. Richard Paul, sourcing director at Bradburys, a leading importer of cheese, says the demand for goat's cheese has also been rising among consumers and the catering trade over the last few years as it has become more fashionable. "It will have an impact on the price we

pay," he says, "but it's more about availability and there is a shortage against current demand. China has suddenly got a taste for dairy. So there is a shortage and a demand increase and it's a perfect storm almost." As Christmas approaches, "when you see huge growth [in sales of] cheese, I think there will just be shortages on the shelf and there will be a few people who have to have an alternative product."

Wine

Much panic ensued last week when a Morgan Stanley report warned of a coming global wine shortage, with demand exceeding "supply by 300m cases in 2012", going on to add that it was the biggest shortfall in 40 years of records. Wine consumption has been increasing since 1996, but producers in Europe have been suffering from bad weather and poor harvests; meanwhile, a growing number of wine drinkers in China and the US are adding to demand. But almost as soon as the report came out, the counter arguments started flowing. The drinks writer Victoria Moore seemed unbothered by the "news", citing the low cost of vineyards compared with the cost of wine, rising production outside Europe and the prediction that 2013 will see a seven-year high in production levels as little evidence that we're about to run out of wine. For Felix Salmon, the Reuters blogger, Morgan Stanley's report was starting to look "more like an aggressively argued attempt to put forward one particular investment thesis as strongly as possible".

Chilli sauce

Nothing to do with the cost of ingredients rising, or a sudden increase in demand, but had a factory making a particular cult chilli sauce been forced to close last week, there would have been outrage - at least according to fevered news coverage, which warned customers that it may be time to start hoarding bottles. The sriracha hot chilli condiment, made in a factory in California, is not a unique product, but is one of the most popular. However, local residents have complained about its fumes, saying it causes headaches and burning eyes. Last week, a Los Angeles court ruled that it could stay open until a hearing later this month, by which time the factory will have finished processing its chillis for the next year's supply of sauce (it produces 20m bottles

a year), though its long-term future remains in doubt.

Almonds

The decline in honey bees is having a noticeable effect on some farmers. The Financial Times reports that Californian almond farmers, who produce 80% of the world's supply, are paying three times as much to rent bees to pollinate their orchards, with the high prices due to rising bee mortality rates - and production is down 2%. Global demand for the nuts is also rising, which is fuelling high prices, with increases from countries such as China, and a rising number of people who are more aware of the health benefits of eating nuts and people switching from dairy milk to nut milk. The next two biggest almond producers, Australia and Spain, are also seeing big rises in prices. Last month, the Independent reported that some shops, including Waitrose, had run out of Green & Blacks' almond chocolate bars - possibly the very definition of middle-class panic-buying.

Olives

The crop of Greece's Halkidiki olives now being picked could be down by as much as 80% this year because of poor weather, and the Grocer reports that some suppliers could raise their prices by 50%. "Some olive suppliers will struggle to meet existing contracts, with the impact felt as soon as the next one or two months," Sam Higgins, an olive distributor, told the trade magazine. It comes on top of news earlier in the year that Spain's olive harvest had been hit by a drought in 2012, and that prices would have to rise.

Prawns

Prawns farmed in the three main countries - Thailand, Vietnam and China - have been affected by a disease descriptively known as Early Mortality Syndrome, which sent wholesale prices rising by up to 40%. The Thai Shrimp Association, the body that represents the main supplier to the UK, said exports would be down by 50% this year. Because of the rising costs, last month Jamie Oliver took prawns off the menu at his chain of Italian restaurants, which were buying 450kg of prawns a week. Still, Seafish, which represents the UK seafood industry, appears unperturbed. "Most suppliers for the UK market will have a risk strategy built into their supply chain that allows them to divert prawn sourcing away from traditional grounds into others and therefore keep supply broadly in line with demand," says a spokesperson. "If the current issues in supply continue in Thailand, sourcing could be changed to another country that is unaffected without any major impact being felt by the consumer. The UK has imported seafood from around the world for centuries, with issues in supply of one kind or another an almost annual challenge."