



Terror powers expose 'tyranny'

Terror powers expose 'tyranny' The Lord Chancellor has defended government plans to introduce control orders to keep foreign and British terrorist suspects under house arrest, where there isn't enough evidence to put them on trial. Lord Falconer insists that the proposals do not equate to a police state and strike a balance between protecting the public against the threat of terrorism and upholding civil liberties. But thriller writer Frederick Forsyth tells BBC News of his personal response to the move. There is a mortal danger aimed at the heart of Britain. Or so says Home Secretary Charles Clarke. My reaction? So what? It is not that I am cynical or just do not care. I care about this country very much. But in the 66 years that I have been alive, there has not been one hour, of one day, of one month, of one year, when there has not been a threat aimed at us. My point is, the British have always coped without becoming a dictatorship. We have coped with fear without becoming a state based on fear; we have coped with threat without turning our country into a land of state threat. But that is what the Blair government now seeks to do - create a tyranny to defend us from the al-Qaeda tyranny. I was born on 25 August, 1938. The mortal threat back then was a scruffy little Austrian called Adolf Hitler. A week after my first birthday, the threat had become reality. We were at war. My father wore a uniform for five years. After 1945 we yearned for peace at last. But in 1946 Winston Churchill told us - from the Baltic to the Adriatic an Iron Curtain has descended across Europe. Behind the Iron Curtain, another genocidal psychopath, another threat. Josef Stalin triggered the Cold War, with the Berlin blockade in 1948. My whole generation was blighted by it. We were threatened by the nuclear holocaust, the nuclear wind, the nuclear winter. We built shelters that would have sheltered nothing. We spent our treasure on weapons instead of hospitals. We took silly precautions. Some fought it; some marched futilely against it. Some pretended it was not there. The Cold War lasted 43 years, but we remained a parliamentary democracy. By the early seventies it was terrorism as well. Al Fatah, Black September, Red Brigades, but most of all for us the IRA and the INLA. Thirty more years; 300 policemen and women, over 600 soldiers, more than 3,000 civilians dead, but we won because even IRA bombs could not force us to become a tyranny. That was why the tyrants lost. Civil rights were infringed as little as humanly possible. Evidence had to be taken in secret to protect covert sources; yes, and one judge, no-jury courts had to be instituted when juries were terrorised. Informants had to be given immunity from their own crimes to win the bigger battle. But habeas corpus did not die; right of appeal was not abolished. Now the threat is Islamic fundamentalism. Its leaders want to destroy our society; so did the IRA. It is based and funded abroad; so was the IRA. It has sleeper fanatics inside our society; so did the IRA. It is extremely hard to penetrate with our agents; so was the IRA. The prime movers are not easy to bring to trial; neither were the IRA. But we did. And without becoming a tyranny. Now the Blair government proposes the law system of fascism and communism. The citizen can be arrested and held without charge or trial, not even on the careful consideration of an experienced judge, but the whim of a political activist called a government minister. To be protected from terror the government says, we must become a tyranny. But a tyranny is based on the citizen's terror. This is not victory; this is defeat before a shot is fired. An interesting article - its good to see widening participation in the debate - but I suggest we move one step further. Our own bombs and bullets will can only shatter peace, because invading foreign nations, imprisoning the innocent and 'hunting' in the 'shadows' cannot destroy an evil of the mind, and hatred within the heart. Rather than focusing upon effect, we should consider the cause, because terrorism does not begin with bombs. Why not try a foreign policy of compassion, it can only enhance our democracy, and share our freedom. I agree with Frederick Forsyth. We really can't deal with terrorism by turning Britain into a fascist state. What we really need is more honesty from our security services and our politicians. If they do not have evidence to bring these people to trial, there probably isn't any. Our security services, behave like the detective who having decided that a certain person is guilty, rakes over all kinds of obscure and flimsy evidence to try and prove it, while the real villain gets away. Remember there were no WMD in Iraq. Just because a person may have made some stupid and naive decisions in life does not make them a terrorist. In this overly 'politically correct' society, it is good to see someone like Mr. Forsyth speak out. Yes, there has been oppression by the British government in the past, and overstepping the mark in places like Ireland, but yes, we are still a democracy where it is rare to be arrested without charge/trial etc. (apart from a number of prisoners in Belmarsh goal, for example). This country signs up to human rights, and then pretends that they only apply to the people with nothing to fear, the innocent people (defined by whom?). When ID cards become mandatory, the data

collected will not be protected by the Data Protection Act, and will be readily available to people like GCHQ, with no control by the person whose ID is being checked. The threat now is new. You cannot compare the threats of past years with now. Forsyth says 3000 died over 30 years or terrorism; 3000 people died in one morning in NY on September 11th 2001. The threat today is that terrorists will acquire nuclear or biological technology. A Kilo of Semtex will flatten a building, a Kilo of plutonium will flatten a city. You now have a combination of people who will perform terrorist acts with technology that is rapidly becoming accessible. I agree, the government is probably encouraging a degree of mass-hysteria and talking up the threat; but talking-down the threat and doing nothing is unacceptable too. The problem with this issue is not that it isn't important, but the fact that in general we Brits can be so politically apathetic some times, that we will just let this go without telling the government no. However, as the nation that gave the world the common law and a true sense of the rights of individual liberty I hope this will prove to be one step too far. As somebody of Chinese origin, I can say that this country used to be a good place to migrate and start a new life. Whilst life wasn't perfect, we could make better for ourselves. Now we are riddled with red tape and be told what we can or cannot do. We have to be politically-correct and we are not allowed to have beliefs or opinions. We have a Prime Minister who spends too much time meddling in US politics and affairs which have little to do with the lives of British Citizens at home or abroad. Mr Forsyth has done a good job in voicing his opinions. Let's hope the BBC doesn't get gagged for letting people express their views. The people have the right to know and the BBC's role is to Inform, Educate and Entertain... I agree. Terrorists intend to spread fear but in reality it is the government which has spread the fear, by its constant publicising of the this invisible enemy so dangerous that we must allow them to ride roughshod over our rights and liberties. In the end, the very thing we seek to protect is what we are giving up in the name of safety from this invisible enemy. The terrorists have already won. I absolutely agree with Frederick Forsyth. Yes we have to defend ourselves against terrorism but existing laws seem to be more than adequate. The idea that the "new terrorism" demands new powers is erroneous. The evidence of any real terrorist capability in the UK is scant. Ricin, for example, is a dangerous poison but it is not a weapon of mass destruction. What is really worrying is the enthusiasm of Mr Blair and his government for authoritarian reactions and attempts to manipulate the electorate through fear. If the government has its way with ID cards, tracking and so on then totalitarianism has won and as such it then matters little whether we give in to the terrorists demands or not. We will have lost the precious freedom which Bush and Blair constantly tells us we have and that they seek to bring to others. I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Forsyth. I am shocked at the ease with which this government is prepared to wipe out a major portion of the liberties that British people have enjoyed for centuries - the right not to be deprived of our liberty without a trial in open court. That goes right back to Magna Carta, and ordinary people have spilled their blood to enforce that right against governments who thought they "knew best". When you look at today's Britain, you realise George Orwell was only wrong about one thing: the date. Frederick Forsyth puts it beautifully. The government is seeking to introduce a police state. The new powers of home internment without trial follow a pattern which includes the introduction of surveillance via compulsory ID cards and the linking of data bases, together with the un-British idea that we will have to swear allegiance to the state at the age of 18 years. We are sleep-walking into this. Wake up! An interesting view but missing two crucial facts of this new threat: 1) If these terrorists acquire weapons of mass destruction they WILL use them without fear of Mutually Assured Destruction that kept the cold war in a state of tense balance. These people will use devastating force against us without fear of ANY consequence. 2) The terrorists are prepared to use suicide bombers which means they could kill innocent people on the London Underground and we could do very little to stop it. Because these terrorists are potentially SO deadly, we have to come up with new, tougher responses. It will be a little late in the day when people outside London wake up one morning to find out that London has been nuked. We won't have much of a society left to debate ! He's correct in most of what he says. Mind you he does seem to have forgotten that disgraceful internment policy in Northern Ireland which probably caused many idealistic if misguided young Catholics to join the IRA. Administrative detention of Muslims could have a similar effect now. Surely we the public would be better protected if the security services, rather than alerting a suspect terrorist by placing them under house arrest (and for how long?) They were to place suspect terrorist under surveillance and maybe acquire sufficient evidence to prosecute or even better prevent a terrorist attack. I don't usually have much time for Mr Forsyth's largely right wing views but this time he has got it spot on. There is no doubt that there are terrorist organisations who would like to do harm to the U.K. but it is very doubtful whether al-Qaeda is a global organisation co-ordinating this. The rise of surveillance cameras, ID cards, the plan to charge for road use by tracking every vehicle at all times, this is the stuff of nightmares. Add to this this new legislation which effectively means that the protection of the law will be removed from anyone at the whim of the Home Secretary, and I genuinely wonder what sort of world my two children will inherit. Where will this end. As it stands terrorists do not need to attack the U.K. it's government will soon have it's people terrorised more that they could very achieve with a few bombs. Mr Forsyth has expressed exactly what my gut fears and reservations were about this proposed legislation, but could not verbalise. Thank you. Mr Forsyth seems to forget that killings in the Troubles occurred on both sides of the religious divide and was carried out by killers from both sides. He also forgets basic Human Rights were suspended then as now. Experienced Judges sat over some of the greatest miscarriages of justice during those times. For very little return and maximum alienation. These laws and the emphasis on the Islamic threat will just do the same. Forsyth is wrong. The nature of the current threat is new. It is no longer to our armed forces, as the Soviet threat in the Eastern bloc was. It is to you and I. The terrorist aim to kill indiscriminately. The best comparison is therefore the blitz, 1941. At this time, let us not forget, suspects (foreign and British were routinely rounded up and interned for the duration of the war, without any complaints from the public. We must not forget we are at war. I'd say that that the likelihood of an attack by a sleeper cell of fundamentalist lunatics against a major UK target is a "When" not an "If" probability. I'll bet any money you like that the day after any such attack Freddie Forsyth will be saying that the government didn't do enough to protect the UK. People like Forsyth can only see one side of any argument and for him it is the side that is opposite New Labour and Tony Blair. I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Forsyth. The very reason this country has been such a wonderful place to live, is under attack, not from terrorists, but from this government. The perpetuation of the perceived terrorist threat is not because of what the 'alleged' terrorists are doing, but from our own government. I believe what this government is doing, is, at the very least, highly questionable and at worst, sinister. At what point will they feel they have enough control over every single person in the British Isles; when we are all tagged and monitored constantly? Our freedom is being craftily and surreptitiously whittled away by this government and we are gaining nothing. It should be of great concern to everyone. I am slightly older than Mr Forsyth and therefore have lived through the same history as him. I am against a police state and would not like to think that I lived in one. I think that the attack on Iraq made the international situation worse and

may have provoked further acts of terrorism. How true. There are extremely worrying parallels between Britain now and Germany during the 30's. I never thought it would be so easy to take over a country from within. Mr Forsyth has forgotten one key point; the terrorists who threaten Britain today are well aware that Hitler, Stalin, and the IRA all failed. As a result modern day terrorists are willing to do things their predecessors did not. That does not mean that the civil liberties of modern Britain must be eroded to counter the threat; that should always be the absolute last resort. But to meet the new threat, to defeat the sinister fanaticism of today's terrorists, we may need to do things a little differently. Let us hope not. Frederic Forsythe's comments seem to me to be a well-thought-out analysis of why we (human society as a whole, and Britain in particular) should resist the temptation to over-protect through fear. It is this fear which enables terrorists to succeed in the end, and terrorists can come in all forms, as Mr. Forsythe's opening comments suggest. I am reminded of a quote attributed to Thomas Jefferson. "A nation that limits freedom in the name of security will have neither." The government are faced with an incredibly difficult task, and have made a policy to deal with it. It's all very well criticising that policy, but if Mr Forsythe can't draw on his years of experience to offer an alternative, I say 'So what?' to his opinions. Frederick Forsyth's rhetoric is absurd and his conclusions laughable. He distorts reality to serve his own prejudice against New Labour. This government seeks to balance protection of our democracy with minimum loss of civil rights. It is Frederick Forsyth who is the extremist, because he does not appreciate the need for balance. I rarely find myself agreeing with Mr Forsyth, but in this instance I think he is correct. The rule of law must prevail, civil liberties are worth defending. If the government can hold 'suspects' without charge or trial, what's next? I agree absolutely. By introducing fascist type laws we lose the moral high ground in our fight against terror. Our democratic system is not perfect, but as Churchill points out it is "better than all the others that have been tried". Terrorist attacks will take place but for many reasons we should take that personal risk in return for personal freedom. I do not usually agree with Mr. Forsyth, but he is spot on here. The single biggest threat we face is that of a government dedicated to acting illegally and manipulating international and national law to suit its own purpose. Totalitarianism always requires an outside threat, justifying a range of extraordinary powers leaders want. The British government is a far greater threat than any terrorist organisation. Although, in principle I agree with him, Frederick Forsyth fails to address one key point- al-Qaeda attacks (though obviously there have been none yet in the UK) seek to kill the maximum number of people. The IRA wanted to limit the death toll of their attacks so as to maintain support among the republican movement. Yes, I agree with Mr. Forsyth's views. I do not believe the government's plans are justified. There is over reaction to and the negative influence of the US President's interpretation of democracy and freedom. He uses the same arguments that were current before the WWII, the Wars to "liberate" Iraq, Afghanistan with Syria and Iran to come. We are leaving a poor inheritance for the future generations. Mr Forsyth is a wonderful writer and should keep his fiction where it belongs. The British Government is not going down the road that Mr Forsyth suggests. Sadly comments such as his will make a lot of people believe that they are governed by people who are fast becoming tyrants instead of being genuinely committed to stopping tyranny, even if the method employed to do that is at the moment alien to the British people who have lived in a democracy protected by Tony Blair and others of like mind who, Mr. Forsyth seems to be putting along side the 'scruffy little Austrian.' Thomas Hobbes would be smiling in his grave at Labour's propositions. Like New Labour, he called himself a libertarian. Like New Labour, he believed he was promoting the people's best interests. But as Forsythe criticises this government, Hobbes has been criticised by most subsequent philosophers for arguing his way into the hands of the totalitarians. Simply put, he argued that in favour of the ultimate liberty - the liberty to live - man should be prepared to surrender all other liberties to a supreme sovereign, as protection against his fellow, barbaric, man. Hobbes has been roundly condemned by posterity, and rightly so. I hope New Labour suffers the same treatment. I agree with Mr Forsyth's views. The government's approach is totally against the spirit of British democracy. They must not be allowed to get away with it. Of course Frederick is wrong about Britain winning the war against the IRA and he's wrong too about the country not becoming a tyranny. Has he forgotten about shoot to kill, torture, internment without trial, collusion with loyalist death squads etc? My background is somewhat similar to Freddie's so I am persuaded to agree with many of his sentiments. We can have no moral justification for imposing our system of government on anyone while we are systematically depriving our own citizens of basic individual and collective freedoms. Whilst the principle of keeping potential terrorists under house arrest might seem superficially attractive, it is, unfortunately, also the first step towards totalitarianism. Who is to decide whom is a suspect? Why should we believe them? Who can have faith in the honesty, integrity, and competence of our intelligence services and politicians in light of the events of recent years? What is to stop false denunciations? What of those falsely accused who will lose their careers? Who will support their families? Will their children still go to school? It smacks to me of the methods of Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia, Ceausescu's Romania - the list goes on. It looks as if a new dark age is coming. I see that opinion on Mr Forsyth's remarks are divided. The problem I see is that those who support imprisonment without trial believe it will never happen to them or their family, only to people they don't like or are scared of. But history has shown that if you have laws like that, they always get abused by those in power. After all, today you may be scared of the same people as those in power but someday those in power may be scared of you! And that day, you'll be the one imprisoned without the chance of justice. Our laws are such that you cannot just be imprisoned at the whim of our police forces, you have to be shown to be deserving of it. If we imprison people without trial for an indeterminate period, we are no better than those we are fighting. I never thought it possible for me to agree with a single word uttered by Frederick Forsyth, but I'm in wholehearted agreement with him on this one. We, as a nation are in grave danger of being duped by pro US propaganda, which of course also means we'll inherit most, if not all of their total paranoia, and allow our governments, of any political persuasion incidentally, to gradually, and insidiously, impose a police state by well tried & tested back door methods. I grieve for the future of my children, it's no wonder they're adamant they don't ever want any of their own. This government, with much fanfare, signs us up to the European Convention on Human Rights but now wants to introduce indefinite house arrest without trial. This puts it on a par with the government of Burma. Like many of your respondents, I wouldn't usually think of Mr Forsyth as someone whose views I share, but in the instance of opposing Charles Clark's proposals for house arrest, I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Forsyth/ I agree with Mr Forsyth. Just look at the facts - our government (along with the US) invaded another sovereign country (Iraq) by selecting intelligence that backed its case based on fear. The facts turned out to be very different. If individuals are treated in the same distorted way, then we've done ourselves more damage than any terrorist organisation could with bombs. We become animals too. I agree in many ways with what Mr Forsyth has said - if we are to be respected and have influence within the world we must be seen to be walking the walk as well as talking the talk - how can we accuse countries such as Zimbabwe and Burma of human rights abuses when we are locking up people who may be totally innocent, it is hypocrisy of the highest order. Mr Forsyth links "Islamic

fundamentalism" to the new "threat". However it appears that he has misunderstood the term "Islamic fundamentalism". It should be pointed out that a Muslim who adheres to the true fundamentals of the Qur'aan and the teachings of the last Prophet Muhammad is an Islamic Fundamentalist. This person does not commit suicide in any shape or form, nor does she/he kill innocent women, men and children. This person is self-reflective and constantly tries to better her/his actions by being good to others. The people who Mr Forsyth labels the new "threat" are those who do not follow the correct teachings of Islam. They have arrived at their own interpretations and assumptions with regards their actions. On top of that, they claim to be following Islam in its true form! I accept that the intentions of these policies are to make Britain a safer place but I cannot think of a single example from history where doing this sort of thing has ever made any difference - in Northern Ireland internment certainly didn't achieve anything - the bombings didn't stop, and it could be argued that all it achieved was to just supply the IRA with yet more angry and resentful republicans willing to take up arms against the British. Being eight years older than Frederick Forsyth and a survivor of the Blitz on London, it is easy to agree with him, he is absolutely spot on. During the IRA bombings there were massive explosions in Canary Wharf, to the right of where I write this, and also to the left in the City of London. Notwithstanding these and the attempted and nearly successful assassination attempts on Prime Minister Thatcher in Brighton and on later occupants of 10 Downing Street, there was no retaliatory blitz on Belfast or Dublin as there has been on Afghanistan and Iraq. Even when England was in true peril in 1940 apart from some detentions there were no wholesale derogation of habeas corpus and the like. We have to see off these latest attempts on our liberties including ID cards, which Winston Churchill decided had to go since, he said, the average Bobby on the beat could not be relied on to not be tempted to take undue advantage against the citizen going about their lawful activities (incidentally I can still remember my old ID card number). Hence it is clear that the far too great police state powers set for the statute books have to be resisted and neutered. What can I add to Mr. Forsyth's eloquently put arguments... except applause! Well done that man for standing up and being counted in the "war against tyranny".

Scissor Sisters triumph at Brits

Scissor Sisters triumph at Brits US band Scissor Sisters led the winners at the UK music industry's Brit Awards, walking off with three prizes. The flamboyant act scored a hat-trick in the international categories, winning the best group, best album and best newcomer awards. Glasgow group Franz Ferdinand won two prizes, as did Keane and Joss Stone, who was voted best urban act by digital TV viewers. Robbie Williams' Angels was named the best song of the past 25 years. Scissor Sisters frontwoman Ana Matronic collected the best international album prize from singer Siouxsie Sioux. She told the audience: "If you told us a year ago we would be getting these awards today we would have called you crazy. You guys made our dream come true." The band - whose self-titled LP was 2004's biggest-selling album - thanked "all the members of the sisterhood", adding: "We wouldn't be here without you." The US band, who opened the show with Take Your Mama, won the best international act and newcomer awards, as well as best international album. Franz Ferdinand, who were shortlisted in five categories, won best rock act and best British group, an award they dedicated to late DJ John Peel. But they missed out on best British live act, which went to Muse. Keane won best British album and breakthrough act. Will Young won the best single prize for Your Game. McFly won the best pop act prize, and Gwen Stefani picked up the best international female artist award. Eminem won the male prize. Best British male artist winner Mike Skinner - aka The Streets - does not usually attend award ceremonies, but the Birmingham hip-hop artist performed his hit Dry Your Eyes at the ceremony. However, he did not collect his prize. A bandmate informed the crowd Skinner was "in the toilet". After beating Amy Winehouse, Jamelia, Natasha Bedingfield and PJ Harvey to the best British female prize, Joss Stone said: "I don't know what to say. I don't like doing this at all. I'd like to thank my family for being really supportive and everybody that made my record with me." "I don't even know what to do right now. Thank you all you guys for voting for me, I feel sick right now." Viewers of digital music TV channel MTV Base voted Stone the winner in the best urban act category. Little Britain comedy duo Matt Lucas and David Walliams presented the best song prize to Robbie Williams dressed as his former Take That colleagues Gary Barlow and Howard Donald, leading him to quip he was "always the talented man of the band". Williams' track beat songs by Will Young, Queen, Kate Bush and Joy Division in a vote by BBC Radio 2 listeners to mark 25 years of the UK music industry ceremony. It is his 15th Brit award, having already received 10 solo awards and four with Take That. He told the audience: "I'm just amazed that my career keeps going." Keane frontman Tom Chaplin thanked fans for enduring "rubbish gigs" after they won the British breakthrough act prize. He added: "A lot of people don't think it's cool that we've had the guts to be ourselves but it's a vital part of who we are as a band and receiving this is recognition of that." Natasha Bedingfield - in the running for best British female and best pop act - performed with her brother Daniel for the first time at Wednesday's event. The chart-topping siblings duetted on the Chaka Khan hit Ain't Nobody. Meanwhile, Joss Stone performed Right To Be Wrong backed by a gospel choir, while Lemar and Jamelia performed the Robert Palmer track Addicted To Love. Bob Geldof won a prize for his outstanding contribution to music. Of the 15 Brit awards for achievements in 2004, 10 were won by artists tipped in the BBC News website's Sound of 2004 list of artists to watch, published at the start of last year. Scissor Sisters, Franz Ferdinand, Keane, Joss Stone and McFly were all in the Sound of 2004 top 10. The other five Brits winners were already established before Sound of 2004 was compiled. The ceremony will be televised on ITV1 on Thursday. I'm speechless. Best song of the last 25 years? Yeah right. I very much doubt that 'Angels' was even the best song of the week that it came out. Like every track Robbie has released as a single, it's a blatant but poor facsimile of something that someone else has done better before. Give us a break...!!! Best song in 25 years, you must be joking. Its good if you like that sort of thing, but really! Listened to Angels on Radio 1 this morning when I was driving into work. Had not heard it for a while. I love Robs voice, the lyrics and tune. Perfection! As usual, the public have short memories when it comes to voting for "the greatest". There must be more than a dozen songs in the last 25 years that deserve this award more. It's not exactly groundbreaking. Presumably, the age range that could be bothered to vote is is pretty low... I'm actually embarrassed to be British if that is the best song we have produced in the last 25 years!! What about The Specials - Ghost Town, The Buzzcocks - Ever Fallen in Love With Someone... Happy Mondays - Kinky Afro, McAlmont & Butler - Yes, Joy Division - Love Will Tear Us Apart...

Angels is middle-of-the-road rubbish. Angels is a awful piece of sentimental claptrap. It's musically and lyrically inept; and fantastically overrated, a bit like Mr Williams himself. This result isn't very surprising though, The Brits has a long history of celebrating rubbish music! Best of the last 25 years? Maybe. Cunning to make the timescale not include Stairway to Heaven or Bohemian Rhapsody, but it does kind of make it a bit of a hollow award really. Not much competition in the last 25 years after all. It's alright for a pop song - but the best song of the last 25 years??? There is no way on earth that song should have been voted the best of the last 25 years....it's a travesty. Rubbish! Who voted it for it to be included in any list? I am a regular listener to Radio 2 but I don't recall the invitation to vote for this bland, slushy rubbish which might appeal to the masses who wouldn't know a good song if it jumped up and bit them on the nose but is certainly NOT the best song of the last 25 years. How depressing and just when we thought manufactured 'pop' was on the way out - where on earth did this dreadful list appear from? While I am biased in that I thought Love Will Tear Us Apart should have won, in all seriousness, I think that the best song of the last 25 years should not include songs less than 5 years old as that would exclude songs which are popular because of novelty. Then again, well done Robbie, good show. You've got to be kidding. Angels is a great song, but not the best song of the last 25 years. Only the best song to be up for nomination at the Brits. I think Angels is a great song and deserved to be in the run up for this award but I don't think its the best song from the past 25 years! Right enough, it is better than some of the others in this catergory, for example, what was Will Young doing being nominated in the first place - he is alright but the song isn't that good! I'm happy for Robbie himself though! Best song in the last 25 years? What a Joke! Think of all the great rock and pop songs released in the 80s and pretty much all of them are better than Angels. Phil Collins doesn't deserve awards for all the good songs he wrote? Angels is an overrated song, that got tiresome even before you had finished listening to it. Soppy rubbish at best. Hopefully manufactured rubbish will die down soon, and let the real artists who worked hard for there glory receive awards. So boringly obvious and typical of the bland nature of mainstream music in Britain today, for me it's proof that music and democracy just don't mix. Still, at least it wasn't Will Young... Oh it's all just a bit of fun. People take these awards too seriously! Robbie has millions of loyal fans, while even non-fans know the words to angels. Him winning obviously reflects who votes in these awards. Personally I wanted Will Young to win, but that was not really due to his musical talent! I hate the song, all it brings back is memories of school discos and no-one to slow-dance with! I agree about Angels. I never get fed up hearing it. Whenever the song comes on the radio I turn the radio up, smile and sing along (very badly, that is why the radio has to be turned up to drown my voice out). The song makes me calm and serene and happy. Well done Robbie. I think that although Robbie Williams is a good performer, that Angels isn't really that good a song. It certainly isn't anywhere near as good as Love Will Tear Us Apart by Joy Division or Wuthering Heights by Kate Bush. Angels is a fantastic song. All credit to Robbie Williams and Guy Chambers. It's a song that will be played forever and bridges all age groups. Robbie did in no way deserve that mantle. Whenever we have these awards it is always 'artists' from the past five years that seem to win the best of the best...We forget about the late 80s and early 90s for example. They weren't cool at the time, but because they are cool again now shows that the songs have greater longevity than people think. Yes Angels is the best song since the past 25 years, because it touches the soul as it carries a lot of meaning. I've always disliked Angels intensely. I believe it to be symbolic of the general capacity of British pre-teens, teens and middle aged women to accept low quality/ low aspirational music as "classic" songwriting. It's 'orrible. It seems obvious to me that people who like Robbie are people who don't particularly like music all that much. Folks without collections; folks who have never engaged in that madness one experiences when falling under the spell of pop music. Angels adds nothing - it is merely an irritating distraction - a wasp that refuses to go away on a summer's afternoon picnic. What a dreadful result. If you voted for it - you should feel ashamed of yourself - you probably only know a dozen songs or so don't you - so where do get off applying this uninformed filter and casting this ridiculous vote. Booo hisss Angels, best song? You are kidding, right? Last five years I might be willing to accept, but 25, no way. Did whoever voted for this actually have ANY music knowledge prior to, say, 1995? Really quite insulting to the British music industry of the past quarter of a century. No surprise about Robbie Williams considering the list. Where on earth did the nominations list come from???? Compiled by an eleven year-old girl perhaps?? I mean, Will Young? Come on. What a load of crap, best song in the last 25 years - I don't think so!! What about all the REAL artists out there over the last 25 years - the list is endless, but Robbie Williams doesn't even come close. What a joke. That song has become such a bane to me that I have developed a Pavlovian response to the word 'Angels' where I thrash around, and scream "no no no no no" until someone tells me "the radio's off". Why a half-baked cheesy ditty like Angels, which has become the anthem for millions of romantic sops (think how many times it was sung on Pop Idol for example, and by whom), should be voted the best song of the past 25 years, is beyond me. If this is the song against which all others are judged, then musicians may as well give up. Why do we reward mediocrity so highly in this country?? The initial list was very weak anyway, but Angels the best song of the last 25 years!!!! I think not, I didn't realize Radio 2 had so many listeners under the age of 10!! People have such short memories! A great song yes, but the best of the last 25 years? Not a chance. I think the person as opposed to the song has been voted for here. The Great British Public at work again. It's a mediocre, sentimental and safe song. Granted, it's not too bad, either. But can it stand up against ANYTHING by The Smiths (in particular "How Soon is Now?") or anything from the Stone Roses' first album? Nope. No, Because I'm not female and I'm not 10! Ok I like Robbie and Angels is a decent song. But it is no way the best song of the past 25 years! The shortlist wasn't great but him winning it is a joke! Predictable and laughable. The success of Angels at this years Brits reflects poorly on the state of British music over the last 25 years. The British public are brainwashed by the corporate pulp that is presneted to them as cutting edge music and true talent is being sadly missed. Whilst Angels is a popular song it is not even the best song in Robbie's repertoire never mind best song of the last 25 years. I am a huge Robbie fan and love that song. But I think there are a lot more outstanding songs / music out there that influenced music today, unfortunately they were left out of the list. Have Radio 2 listeners even heard of Joy Division? A band who, through two albums, have had a bigger impact on music, and continue to do so, over the last 25 years than Robbie Williams ever will. No doubt about it. There's not a song done by anyone with more emotion and feeling. Some people will adopt their slightly snobby stances, but Angels has hit home with a far larger audience than any other song. It should have been Joy Division.Those guys have played an influential part in shaping modern day music while Angels remains yet another pop song. I sincerely do not believe that in 25 years from now, the most influential artists will argue that Robbie Williams inspired their art in the way that the Byrds, the Beatles and Nick Drake have done for music today. Yes!! I think its a brilliantly written song with different meanings to different people. There were other great songs in the category... but somebody had to win! Robbie was a deserved winner. I am astounded that such a second-rate record has beaten such a line up of amazing songs! it's a terrible song, voted for by the masses who don't have the brains to

appreciate innovative and exciting music. The best song of the past 25 years? Really? Come on, this is surely a joke? No? I think I need a long lie down... It just goes to show that the british public do not have a clue about good quality music when they pick Robbie Williams over the beautifully talented Kate Bush and Joy Division. I suppose it's confirmed one thing - the British public are consistently dull :- <(No offence Robbie, but pleeease! There must be a thousand better songs than a formulated cheesy pop song for kids. No one agrees with this and quite frankly it is an embarassment to the integrity of British music, and a further nail in the coffin! I think Robbie deserves it, he has been the most iconic of any stars we have had in Britain since John Lennon and is an idol to millions worldwide. Anybody who says he doesn't deserve it is jealous of his success. The only real challenger was Queen but hey, Another One Bites the Dust!! Obviously all the Karaoke singers in the UK voted for it. If this is the best song of the last 25 years then the British Music industry is in trouble. Sure Robbie is talented and produces excellent material, but this is not the best record. A sad day for music It's not the type of music I normally like, but even as a diehard rock fan, I recognise that it is a good song and appelas to most people. That's why it has been voted best song of the last 25 years. It's a good all-rounder. Just like Robbie. Best song in 25 years? Since 1980? I'm confused. "Angels" isn't a bad song. It's a nice, catchy, formulaic anthem that ticks all the boxes. But this is not great music. If anything it's regressive. Bland even. I suppose it's just more evidence of how redundant the Brit Awards have become. Granted angels is a good song, however it really wasn't up against any other proper competition. The Queen's song was lackluster, and apart from Kate Bush, the other choices were pathetic! Also, why weren't the Stones there, David Bowie, etc, there are so many greater songs than Angels...I wonder if it was simply the fact that Robbie wasn't getting more awards so they had to make one up for him! Best song of the last 25 years? What a ridiculous concept, and an even more ridiculous winner. Sigh. On the upside, at least it wasn't Bohemian Rhapsody, for which we should all be thankful. Angels is without doubt a great song but I really don't think it deserves the title of best song in 25 years.perhaps the vote had more to do with teenage opinion on Robbies' goodlooks than the actual song!!! Don't get me wrong, I'm not disputing his looks, but there are more deserved winners. It would have been a travesty had Angels not won. Without Angels, Robbie Williams may well not be where he is now, and Britain would have been deprived of one of its most charismatic and talented performing artists. It has to be seen performed live, with 125,000 people singing along to be fully appreciated. Well done Rob. I find it hard to believe that 'Angels' is the best we have to show for the past 25 years! I'm rapidly redefining 'best' in my own head now to mean 'most gratuitously played at weddings and funerals because people think it has deep meaning'. What about Britpop? Blur, Oasis, Suede, Pulp... not only making fantastic songs but also making changes, doing something different. Why must 'best' always come down to most commercially popular? I've nothing against Robbie, I actually like his music, but how can this possibly be the best song from the last 25year? The Brits has proved to be nothing more than a bargaining tool between the pop moguls to boost band profiles and record sales. The same goes with the Scissor Sisters, I think this is a superb record and thoroughly deserves the newcomer award, but the album comes no where near U2's new record, neither are they in the same league. Once again there have been some baffling discisions made, they are not for artisic reasons, but for profit. No surprise really, it's voted for by the general public. Since when did they have taste in music? Personally I find Angels by Robbie Williams to be one of the most irritating songs I have ever heard! It absolutely deserved to win. It is a song that has united the generations and will continue to be played for many years to come. It's an absolute joke, however most of the original 25 were very poor choices as well. All in all a pretty pointless exercise ! The song is overplayed and oversentimental. Out of the rather poor five choices that were left, it should have gone to either Joy Division or Queen. I suppose we should be thankful that it didn't end up in the hands of Will Young though. Although it has nostalgia value, there is no way it deserved to win. Everybody knows the words to Bohemian Rhapsody, Nothing Compares 2 U, etc. Much better songs and more timeless. Give it to someone with real talent. Although Angels is a good song I think that anyone with the slightest musical taste will realise that this is not the best song of the last 25 years. This is just another example of record company manipulation to keep an artist in the public eye. Why not give him an award for the greatest pair of trousers if that's all it means!

Minimum wage increased to B£5.05

Minimum wage increased to B£5.05 The minimum wage will rise in October, benefiting more than 1m people, the government has announced. Adults must be paid at least B£5.05 an hour, up from B£4.85, while 18 to 21 year olds will be paid B£4.25. The recommendations came from the Low Pay Commission which said the number of jobs had continued to grow since the minimum wage was introduced in 1999. Businesses wanted it frozen, warning more rises could damage competitiveness but the unions want a B£6 rate. A further increase in the adult rate to B£5.35 an hour is provisionally scheduled for October 2006. According to the commission, many businesses had found the last two significant increases in the minimum wage "challenging". "We have therefore recommended only a slight increase above average earnings, and concentrated it in the second year to allow business more time to absorb the impact," said chairman Adair Turner. The government says most of those on the minimum wage are women - with many working in cleaning, catering, shops and hairdressing. Unveiling the latest increase, Mr Blair said he wanted the minimum wage to become a "symbol of decency and fairness". "For too long, poverty pay capped the aspiration and prosperity of far too many hard-working families," he said. "Too often, people were told to make a choice between the indignity of unemployment or the humiliation of poverty pay." Chancellor Gordon Brown and Transport Secretary Alistair Darling promoted the news in Edinburgh, Wales Secretary Peter Hain and Welsh First Minister Rhodri Morgan in Cardiff and Northern Ireland Minister John Spellar in Belfast. The government has not accepted the commission's recommendation that 21-year-olds should be paid at the adult rate, but says it will look again at the rate later on. Mr Brown said: "We want to do nothing that can damage the employment opportunities for young people, particularly young people entering the labour market for the first time." The government has said it will look at tougher action against the small number of employers who consistently refuse to pay the minimum wage. The national minimum wage is currently set at B£4.85 per hour for those aged 22 and above, and at B£4.10 for those aged 18 to 21. A B£3 per hour minimum wage was introduced last October for 16 to 17-year-olds, but apprentices are exempt. The Trade Unions Congress welcomed the increase, but

has called for a B£6 minimum wage by next year. But the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) called for a "pause year" to assess the impact of the above inflation rise in the minimum wage in October. And David Frost, director of the British Chambers of Commerce, said: "The level of increase each year has increased by rates far outstripping the rates of inflation. "What employers are saying to us now is that it's at a level where it's starting to bite into the competitiveness of companies right across the country." The Liberal Democrats' economics spokesman Vincent Cable said he supported the move to raise the minimum wage. "It's not just good for the workers themselves but it lifts them out of benefits and therefore is good for the Exchequer too," he said. Conservative leader Michael Howard said he accepted the principle of the minimum wage and would not "seek to disturb" the increase. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, Mr Howard hinted the Tories might go into the general election with a promise to cancel income tax for the lowest-paid workers. "There are people on very low salaries, very low incomes indeed who really shouldn't be paying income tax," he said. It would be better to decrease taxes on earnings below B£12,000 a year, with say no tax on below B£6,000. The losses in tax can be recouped by having a 50pc tax band for people making over B£100,000. Our minimum wage is going to be effectively almost twice the US minimum wage, yet our economy per person is only 2/3rds of the US! Perhaps, we have to really starting questioning why some products cost 50-60% more here than they do in the US. This combined with the tax decreases would make the pounds the low-paid people do make go much further. It's still not good enough! I got a part time Job at 16 when I was doing my A-levels in an attempt to get a little money saved for Uni. This was only 2 years ago and I was getting paid B£2.75 an hour, and working as hard as any of the older staff, maybe it's about time 16 - 21 year olds got a fair wage! We must remember that the minimum wage is only part of the picture and must not rise to a level that makes employing people unattractive and encourages businesses to send work and therefore jobs abroad. Still government and local councils employ staff via their contractors that pay at the minimum wage or very close to it. An easy way for the government to do as it preaches would be to insist on floor pay levels for all government workers and take tens of thousand of civil servants out of the social security system all together. Any increase is certainly welcome news. However for all those whining about the pressures of an increase in the minimum wage I would simply ask them: "Would you be happy to work for less than B£5.05 an hour?". Thought not ... so then, don't expect others to either. I can't believe that so many of these comments are against the minimum wage! Also I personally take great offence at the insinuation that people earning minimum wage were lazy at school if everyone went to university then who would serve you in the supermarkets and clean up after you? It's about time that these hardworking people are rewarded with only what they deserve and have earned fair pay and a bit of respect wouldn't go a miss either. br /> This is good news. The minimum wage has put a sense of equality back into a worker's relationship with their employer. Wages are supposed to be a fair reflection of an employee's efforts. For too long wages were a point of exploitation - what could an employer get away with. In very simplistic terms this put a pressure to keep low-paid wages low. With the minimum wage this downward pressure is at least partly removed. It is also interesting to read the comments from so called business leaders. They are the first to defend the rights and privileges of boards to award fat-cat salaries, bonuses and pension rights to the select few but they are the first to attack policies that are put in place to merely defend the rights of those that really make those fat cats purr! I feel there are both negatives and positives to the increase, on one hand some businesses will struggle to stay afloat but on the other hand in today world many young people can't afford to move out as property costs too much and only by earning more will they be able to get on in life. Its true many may get complacent but the minimum wage could be looked at as more of a stepping stone rather than a hand out. Here come the usual whines about how difficult it will be for businesses! We all remember Michael Howard's protestations that the minimum wage would cost a million jobs when it was introduced - funny how he's gone quiet on that one! Jobs have continued to increase since this humane legislation was brought in. I think if any job is worth doing then it's worth being paid a fair wage for, and B£5.05 is hardly a fortune. If your business cannot pay its workers a decent wage then maybe it's not being run properly and if it folds, a better-run company will take over its duties and employ more people, so everybody wins except incompetent business owners! Great keep at it Tony, I remember the despair of the 80s and the low wages employers got away with. At last we can make a difference to people and reward them for working. We can't afford not to pay a decent wage. It's not a jobs at any price economy, goodbye sweatshops hello decency. The increase in minimum wage is a good thing. Living in the southwest where house prices and rent have increased hugely (like the rest of the country) over the past 5 years has made living for you average 18-21 years old very difficult. In the south west the increase in living costs have not been matched by an increase in pay, for example a job I did in Plymouth was underpaid to an equivalent worker in Exeter by 75p an hour. Hopefully the increase in the minimum wage will bring in to balance pay on a regional and national level, and in turn allow people like myself who do work hard, but might never earn a 6 figure salary the chance to branch out on our own. I work at a large Hospital where the contractors providing all ancillary services - domestic, catering & portering etc - pay the minimum wage of B£4.85 as the basic rate. Someone has to do these unglamorous jobs and earn enough to live decently. How dare people suggest we are lazy or complacent for accepting these jobs and these wages? Who do they think will be carrying out these public service jobs if contractors are allowed to pay as little as their consciences allow? This is definitely the right step in the right direction. It shows that this government cares for the low income earners as well. This is a million votes more. Good strategy isn't it? Although I would not deny people the minimum wage increase, its timing stinks. I am quite prepared for a raft of 'bribes' to come from the government before the election and a raft of taxes afterwards, they are playing us for the fools they think we are. This is extremely bad news for any business - whether they are small and medium enterprises or even large companies. By increasing overheads, for business, there will be an almost certain rise in costs to the consumer who while they openly welcome the idea of an increase in the minimum wage are the same people who still want to buy that shirt, or that pair of trainers for next to nothing. The extra cost this increase will bring, will only be reflected in the price of the goods we buy, which, in turn will only serve to discourage companies from setting-up business in the UK, or encourage those companies already based here to look elsewhere. The jubilation felt by "low-paid" workers here will soon give way to misery as they lose their jobs. This will only lead to a reduction in jobs. Why have many of the call centre jobs gone to India. Blair say's the economy is "strong and stable economy" however consumer debt and the country's debt is at its highest and now they heap this onto businesses, that will have no choice but to cut the workforce. The timing cannot be coincidental. This is blatant electioneering and should be exposed as such. Andrew in Derby complains that raising the minimum wage is 'blatant electioneering'. I don't mind if it is. In our degraded democracy, elections are the one time when elites really have to worry about doing something concrete for the majority. My only complaint is the paltry figures being discussed. If my maths is right, a 35 hour week at B£5.05 gives you an annual income just over B£9,000 and raising it to B£6 leaves it under B£11,000. The unions should be putting the Government under

pressure for much more. Businesses complaining might like to take a look at corporate pay, shareholder payouts and profits before wondering if paying a living wage is really a controlling factor in the viability of their firm. I am all for lifting the minimum wage of workers to a reasonable level, but we have to accept that with this will come competition from overseas workers. Also small businesses will have to be able to afford this manpower cost. We are already seeing a sweeping change in IT work being lost to India where people are paid much less. It is difficult for me to understand that only five years ago cheap labour abroad was classified as 'sweat shop', but now we are told it is global competition. With our manufacturing industry in serious decline the country cannot be entirely service industries without something tangible to serve. There has to be something at the top of the food chain and that is manufacturing. The whole picture needs to be looked at. This is great news, but that might be because I work for minimum wage. Seems a good idea and will hopefully be an incentive to those who live to claim to actually get a job. When you can "earn" more from claiming than you can from work, there is no incentive. Perhaps a step in the right direction. If the TUC get their way a very large number of SMEs will have to close - this will put more people out of work. How then will the government fudge the unemployment figures! The government know it is not big business that keeps the economy going but the SMEs but we always get overlooked, they will only take notice if these large corporations close and move to other countries, after all they are predominantly owned by foreign companies. We are a specialist company but with these increases have already had an effect on us and we have lost work another one will close us. While I'm delighted for those on low pay that this increase is being put forward, I am extremely concerned at the implications for small businesses. As an employee for a small nursery, I know this increase will cause great hardship for my employer, who has been unable to increase salaries for higher paid employees because of last October's increase for the lower paid employees - who were originally being paid slightly above the minimum but are now on the minimum. This latest increase of 20p an hour will cause even more financial hardship. If the rate rises to B£6 then I can foresee many small businesses having to pay off employees. The increase in minimum wage will have a serious effect on my business. Although we pay above the minimum level we will have to increase our pay rates to maintain the differential. The raise is well above inflation and without significant increases in sales, it will mean that I will not be taking on a new member of staff as planned and I will be looking to reduce the total hours worked by the other members of staff, overtime being the first to go. I currently employ 42 staff whose wages mirror the national minimum wage. Increases above inflation are fine but all of my business is conducted with local authorities who will not accept above inflation rises in my service delivery. 80% of my costs are labour. The other aspect that is always hidden is that the thresholds for tax credits do not move in line with these increases so that all that happens is that employees tax credit support is reduced by the amount of the increase, thereby saving the government money but increasing the financial burden on small to medium businesses. It is very good that the government has decided to increase the minimum wage - this should hopefully motivate people to undertake the "lower status" jobs. I know about this great idea - don't bother getting qualifications, laze about at school, no need to do anything other than attend so your parents don't get fined because remember, when you do eventually start working, doesn't matter how lazy you are, you'll be guaranteed a decent wage. The ones who suffer are the employers. I hope that if industry and business have to pay this new rate that Mr Blair and Mr Brown will increase tax allowances and raise national insurance thresholds so that the treasury won't take some of this increase off the people they say they are helping, or is this just another form of stealth tax on business through the back door? I don't believe in the minimum wage at all! I think jobs should create their own wage value and that if people want higher wages they should earn them. Now, before everyone thinks that I am some "rich-kid", I can assure you I am not. I came from a very much working class background and started work 20 years ago on a Youth Opportunity Program earning B£25 per week. I worked hard, went to college part time, got my A-levels and degree & bettered myself. I now earn a 6 figure salary. I did that through hard work and getting off my backside. A minimum wage just makes people complacent. To Ashley, of Swindon: when you earned B£25 per week, it was worth something. These days that B£25 would need to be near to B£60 to have the equivalent buying power. I might add, that thanks to successive governments holding down the tax allowance threshold below inflation, people earning the minimum wage are paying taxes that they never would have done 10 years ago at equivalent wages. "In my day" type arguments are a view that belong in the 'your day' - 20 years ago! As a graduate working for minimum wage, I welcome any increase of pay I can get. I disagree with Ashley, Swindon saying I have to work harder to get more pay. I have my GCSE's A-Levels and A degree and have chosen to work for a small business that can't afford the wages I should be getting, I should be on at least 3x what I'm getting but they can't afford it. We all work hard but the money is just not there. But on the plus side I love my job and wouldn't change it just to get more pay. As an employer of staff in several shops the last rise in the minimum wage cost my company an additional B£5000 per year. These next rises will cost me more. I have to get the money from somewhere so pass it on to customers. So no one really wins in the end. In answer to Emma from Sleaford regarding no one really wins in the end... on the contrary Mr Blair wins - he wins because he obviously has announced this to be a vote winner and his treasury wins because as an employer you will know that the amount of tax and national insurance that the government will receive from all the minimum wage increases will rise and of course not only will be paying out higher wages but as an employer higher Employer NI Contributions as well. If the minimum wage increases again and if it hits anywhere near the B£6.00 mark there will be 12 more people on the employment line and one more small business going bankrupt - namely mine. Think of us employers as well Mr Blair, we are not all big corporations earning millions. All workers should be entitled to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. How many people on the minimum wage have any hope of obtaining a mortgage or saving towards retirement? It is good news for many Asians living in UK. Students who do odd jobs can increase their income and can help there family in their home country. I thank Mr. Blair and his government for increase in the national minimum wage.

Losing yourself in online gaming

Losing yourself in online gaming Online role playing games are time-consuming, but enthralling flights from reality. But are some people taking their fantasy lives too seriously? When video game World of Warcraft hit the shops in Europe last week fans wrote in to the BBC website to express their delight - and to offer a warning. "An addiction to a game like this is far more costly in time than any substance could impair - keep track of time," wrote Travis Anderson, in Texas. Some of the comments were humorous: "This game is so good I'm not going to get it, there's no way I could limit the hours I'd spend playing it," wrote Charles MacIntyre, from England. But some struck a more worrying tone about the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG): "'You need to get out more' could be the motto of any MMORPG. Shame they are getting more popular, as you know this problem is just going to mushroom," wrote Stuart Stanton-Davies, in Huddersfield. Scare-mongering articles about "addictive video games" have existed since the days the first game of Pong stopped everyone from working at the Atari offices. Gaming is like any other pastime - it can quickly become an unhealthy obsession, whether it is spending too much time in the gym, in front of the television, or reading poetry. Unfortunately, gaming and addiction is a far too easy association to make. However, stories about gamers spending 10 to 15 hours a day in front of some video games are becoming more frequent. And the impact that is having on their families is quite distressing for some. Massively multiplayer online role playing games - MMORPGs - allow thousands of gamers to share a common experience of sharing fantasy or science fiction worlds. The scope of these games - like Warcraft, EverQuest, Ultima among others - is epic, and exploration and adventure is almost infinite. Part of the "problem" is grinding - by which gamers have to perform long-winded, mindless tasks, to bring up their levels and gain access to more adventure. Such open-endedness brings with it a desire to keep playing; not for no reason is EverQuest (EQ) nicknamed EverCrack. E Hayot, writing in the culture blogzine Print Culture, said recently: "I used to play the online role-playing game EverQuest a lot. "By 'a lot', I mean probably 15 to 20 hours a week on average, and on weeks where I didn't have to work, as many as 30 or 40 hours." He says that in the world of online gaming such behaviour "wasn't that unusual; lots of people I knew in the game played EQ that much". "You lie; you don't go into work because you "had stuff to do at home"; you cancel or refuse invitations to dinner, you spend much less time watching TV (a good thing, presumably)," he wrote, explaining how EverQuest took over his time. He quit the game, he says, because he realised life was more fun than EverQuest. Let us be clear - such obsession is rare. But the huge growth in online gaming means a growth in the numbers of people who take their passion for a hobby too far. Almost 400,000 people bought a copy of World of Warcraft in the first two days on sale earlier this month. Only a fraction will descend into obsessives. The thoughts of families and friends of gamers who have been affected by EverQuest can be found on one blog EverQuest Daily Grind. Jane, who runs the website, compiles a chronicle of heart-rending stories. "I am actually convinced at this point that there are more than 'some' people who spend more times in MMOPRGs than in reality," she said. One unnamed correspondent - all are anonymous - wrote: "On the rare nights when my husband does come to bed at the same time as I do, I find that I am so used to sleeping by myself that it is difficult to get to sleep with another body laying next to me. "I can't talk to him while he is playing. There is absolutely no point as he doesn't hear me or is so distracted that I get a 'ummm... ya' a few minutes after I ask him a question." "Gaming widows" has become a comedic term for women who have been shut out by male gamers. But for some it is not in the least funny. Another correspondent wrote: "I believe that he is addicted to the online gaming, and that is the cause of his depression and restlessness." And some of them are even sadder: "Today our son was five days old. "The sad truth is my husband spent 11 hours today playing his Warcraft game. He did not interact with our sweet tiny baby because there were important quests waiting online." Video game fans often complain that their hobby is misunderstood or marginalised. But as gaming becomes ever more mainstream, and games ever more immersive, there will be no hiding place for social problems. I wish 30-40 hours a week was unusual but I think it probably isn't. An 11 hour stretch isn't that surprising - I've known people to play 15+ hours at a stretch. I know of people who are spending their week's holiday from work playing Warcraft. I know of people who would play Ever[Crack] in shifts...waking at 3am to take over from their friends and resume waiting for an item they 'needed' to appear. I understand that the key sign of an addiction is if you alter your life around it rather than fit it into your life. By all standards many of us are addicts. So is the solution to force ourselves to stop playing..or do we just need to make real life a bit more interesting? Sadly with all the talk of people becoming obsessed with gaming, I find myself longing to have the time to join them. I have been in a long term relationship for over 4 years - since that began, games have become more and more complex. And more and more so I find I have less and less time to play them, with and marriage and work being the main drag on my time. I think the line between playing a game a lot and a gaming addiction is really quite distinct. I play games a lot, definately over 20 hours a week, but I don't go missing work or other commitments in order to play games. I have, about a year ago, deleted every game on my computer. RPGs are the worst - the real world fades and all your worries sorround a new magic staff or mighty sword. Unlike books, or perhaps even TV, you gain absolutely nothing. When you stop playing you're at the same point as when you started; all the achievements of your 10 hour session are irretrievably locked in the game and, since you've gained nothing in the real world, you may as well pile on more achievement in the fake one. Despite having little monetary value, the "rewards" and encouragement offered by these MMORPGs is enough to hook games for hours daily. If only business could learn to leverage that very simply human need for easily measurable progress and recognition. Perhaps the unhealthily obsessed simply need more recognition for their achievements in reality? My advice to gaming widows is "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em". That is, try playing it yourself. If he wants to play as well, well at least you'll be together somewhere... I was an addict and it cost me my relationship. I still play now, but without the guilt , hehe, How long have i played in one sitting? From morning till the early hours of the next day, the birds were singing out side and i had to hobble to the bath room cos my bladder was so full i was in pain, i would hardly eat, perhaps some toast, smoke endlessly and drink. Now, thankfully the fascination has worn off and I have a girlfriend but still no job. For the most part online gaming give me an adiction to illusory achievement, and as there is no end in sight you keep going for the mirage of the ultimate. Obsessive behaviour is, of course, always cause for concern, but it always bothers me when articles about gaming talk in terms of "reality". Obviously, somebody who spends thirty hours a week playing EverQuest has a problem. This problem, however, has nothing to do with a dysfunctional sense of reality. An obsessive EQ player does not consider the game to be "real" any more than - for example - an obsessive automotive tinkerer considers their car to be human. If MMORPGs have a unique danger, in terms of encouraging obsessive behaviour, it is not that they create an absorbing virtual world, but rather that they can be easily accessed 24/7. The problem here does not lie with the nature of gaming, but with the nature of modern 24 hour culture. The problem with these so called MMORPGS is that you can never really complete them, there's always another quest to do. A few of my friends have only had about 10 hours sleep since it was released friday... Championship Manager consumed my life for years. One particular

session started at about 2pm on a Sunday, paused for a brief sleep at 5am on the Monday and after visit to University for classes restarted at about midday for another 10 hour session. The people who tend to hark on about about the problems of "hardcore gaming" seem to be those who have rarely allowed themselves to become immersed in a game. I would expect their perspective to change if they were to do that. I used to be an EverQuest addict while I was in college. It came to the point where the gaming world felt more real than the real one. I failed alot of my courses and was able to barely graduate. I was lucky that I came to my senses when I did, others were less fortunate and dropped out of college. Now that I am holding a job, I avoid online RPGS like the plague. When I was made redundant I told my partner I had a new job for three months whilst every day I played EverQuest from 7:30am till 5:pm. When She came home I pretended I had just got in as well, hence justifying playing it all evening. I have since quit playing MMORPG and have a good job. When I got to the point where I was eating my dinner in front of the PC I realised things were getting silly so I'm trying not to spend so much time on there. It's not easy. I feel as if I've got a real addiction going on here. For me the problem is that I love to complete a goal. Once it is completed that is it, I am finished, time to move on. I become obsessed to complete the goal, so from that standpoint it is an addiction. In a game where you will never complete an "ultimate" goal, well it would be like falling into a black pit. It is easier to escape into a controlled fantasy world than face reality at times - in other words the goal offered in the PC game are "easier" and more fun than the real world. Pretty scary implications if you think about it. I can't buy World of Warcraft as it would destroy my marriage, I just know it!! I played Star Wars Galaxies for about a year and can attest to the addictiveness of these games. They are all engineered in such a way that early on in the game you progress quickly, but this progress becomes exponentially slower, requiring more and more time to reach the next level. I'm sad to say that at the peak of my addiction I was spending entire weekends in front of my monitor, slowly building up my character, stopping only for food and toilet breaks. Thankfully I made a clean break, and actually managed to sell my Jedi account for B£800 - which is my only sanity check in an otherwise completely unproductive time vacuum. Seven years ago, I began playing Ultima Online. This game dominated 2 years of my life. They were 2 wonderful years and I still have vivid memories of the experiences and friends I had. Online gaming can be a world of escapism where you can be yourself without fear of the thoughts of others. Something that cannot always be achieved in the day to day running of a normal life. Whilst I would warn against people giving to much of there life to these games, I believe they are a better way to spend your time than say watching TV. Gaming is addictive and should be made a recognised addiction. When I was single I used to play upto eight hours a night after work every night for about a year, building up my stats, completing evermore quests and battling ogres. But somehow I found time to get out, even met someone and got married! Has my life changed? Hell no! I still cast spells and battle till the early hours of the morning. On with the fun! Online gaming should be enjoyed just as much as you would enjoy watching television, or going to the cinema or the pub with your mates. Many people use recreational drugs on an occasional basis and are able to lead succesfull lives with families, relationships and good careers. A minority allow drugs to take over and destroy their lives and become addicted. According to this article the same is true of MMORPGs. The message to the government is clear, either legalise drugs, or outlaw online gaming!! Sounds like there are some sad stories here - and I can believe them all. I play alot of Warcraft myself, and know full well how addictive it is. I am resolute that it will not take over my life. It certainly gets in the way though. I think that some people simply do not know how to draw this line, or lack the willpower to stop themselves stepping over it. I think I'm obsessed with gaming in general, I spend far too much time playing games like Everquest 2 and Football Manager rather than going out and interacting with real people and when I do try to, I'm always thinking in the back of my mind that I'd rather be in front of the computer winning the league with Cambridge United. I am obsessed with online role playing games. It's not so much quests but it has the adrenaline of a real life situation - goals to achieve etc. I spend about five hours per day online playing it and I rarely get more than four to five hours sleep before getting up for work the next morning... As many of the players spend their time in MMORPGs rather than in front of the TV I fail to see how it will affect players social lives negatively. Furthermore these types of games contain a huge social aspect, whereas other games and some other pursuits (such as being a couch potato) the players could be indulging in are solitary by nature. These games are like most things -- too much of anything is a bad thing, but as long as you can walk away from the computer to do other things too, they can be great fun. Living in Korea at the moment, they have lots PC Bangs (Internet Cafes). Nearly most of South Koreans are addicted to online games, and one Korean died because of the lack of food and water he had through playing online games. I play xbox live every day. I find my self lying and rescheduling everything around my gaming fix. The longest I played was a 24 hour straight session. I know I play for to long but it's an obsession that I can't control. Can you reccomend a counsellor - this is not a wind up... but something I'm increasingly concerned with... Me and my mate play online for an hour or two a day, we're both aware of how much time can disappear by sitting in front of a TV, trying to 'frag' some individual. It's getting the balance between getting home and relasing the stress of a day by an hour or so gaming, and enjoying 'real' life... I bought the US version of World of Warcraft when it came out. The longest period I played was 23 hrs straight. I gave up the game after a month because it was so addictive, but have subsequently just bought the European version (couldn't help myself). In future, I'm going to regulate my time far more strictly. Great game! Having played MMORPG games for some years I agree that these type of games can be life sucking. But my concern is for the younger generation of gamers that play for hours on end in an adult enviroment. Most MMORPG games you need a credit card to play but I dont think parents know just what they are letting there children into. Unless there is undeniable medical proof that staring at a computer screens for hours at a time can damage a person's health, you can expect this not to decline but to get worse. These people are pathetic. They need to get off their machines and notice that our world is being swiftly overcome by issues and troubles that make the trifling worries of and "online universe" absolutely meaningless. 24hours, when i was a kid at school and i was on half term, Ultima Online was the game, ahhhh them was the days ! LOL

Kilroy launches 'Veritas' party

Kilroy launches 'Veritas' party Ex-BBC chat show host and East Midlands MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk said he wanted to "change the face of British politics" as he launched his new party. Mr Kilroy-Silk, who recently quit the UK Independence Party, said "our country" was being "stolen from us" by mass immigration. He told a London news conference that Veritas - Latin for "truth" - would avoid the old parties' "lies and spin". UKIP leader Roger Knapman says he is glad to see the back of Mr Kilroy-Silk. Mr Kilroy-Silk promised a "firm but fair" policy on immigration and said they hoped to contest most seats at the forthcoming general election. He said Veritas would also announce detailed policies on crime, tax, pensions, health and defence over the next few weeks. Labour campaign spokesman Fraser Kemp said Veritas was joining "an already crowded field on the right of British politics". On Thursday Mr Kilroy-Silk is due to announce which constituency he will run in at the next general election - that will come amid speculation he has his sights set on Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon's Ashfield seat. He was joined in the new venture by one of UKIP's two London Assembly members, Damien Hockney who is now Veritas' deputy leader. UKIP's chairman Petrina Holdsworth has said the group will just be a parody of the party the men have left. Mr Kilroy-Silk quit UKIP last week after months of tension as he vied unsuccessfully for the leadership of that party. He said he was ashamed to be a member of a UKIP whose leadership had "gone AWOL" after the great opportunity offered by its third place at last June's European elections. "While UKIP has turned its back on the British people, I shall not," he said. "I will be standing at the next general election. I shall be leading a vigorous campaign for the causes I believe in. "And, unlike the old parties, we shall be honest, open and straight." Mr Hockney also left UKIP saying Mr Kilroy-Silk would "deliver better" as the leader of a Eurosceptic party. A spokesman for UKIP called on Mr Hockney to quit the London Assembly. The party asserts that Mr Hockney "has a moral obligation, if not a legal one" to stand down. Its leader, Roger Knapman, has said he is glad to see the back of Mr Kilroy-Silk. "He has remarkable ability to influence people but, sadly, after the [European] election it became clear that he was more interested in the Robert Kilroy-Silk Party than the UK Independence Party so it was nice knowing him, now 'goodbye'," he said. UKIP officials also argue Mr Kilroy-Silk has not been "straightforward" in attacking the party he once wanted to lead. Veritas? It's the BNP in an expensive suit! It's all well and good Robert Kilroy-Silk claiming, that 'Veritas' is a party that doesn't believe in "lies and spin", but the truth of the matter is, its completely useless, due to proportional representation, there is no chance that 'Veritas' will have any chance in claiming power, and change the two-horse race trend. In my opinion this is just a publicity stunt which has just been used as a smoke-screen for his anti-Islamism slurs which got him sacked from the television. I think that his views regarding immigration are shared by many. It really is time that the UK government ceased to be a paper tiger on this issue. In addition as an Ashfield constituent I would be more than interested in Kilroy -Silk opposing Geoff Hoon!! Good to see the parties of the right splintering in the way the parties of the left have always done. Let's hope Kilroy-Silk, UKIP and the euro-sceptic wing of the Tory Party all fade further into obscurity so we can have some truth in the debate about Europe. We benefit enormously from our membership of the EU, we need to be at the heart of Europe, leading it and driving it to where we as a country want to go, not running away from it. All mouth and trousers. A clown. Trouble is, any votes he collects may just end up helping New Labour into a third term. Whatever Kilroy-Silk and UKIP do, none of their anti-European policies have any relevance outside middle England. This new party might gain support from right-wing England, but will have little impact in Wales or Scotland. Hopefully this all this fighting within euro-sceptic parties will allow them to slip out of the way and get people voting for real political parties which address more than one issue. England needs Europe to survive and as soon as people realise this the better, we can't rely on the USA forever! At last an impetus for increasing the likely 40% turn out for the election. The electorate is disillusioned with British politics. Kilroy has one agenda - the UK - and I'll be voting for him. Both UKIP and RK-S are representatives of small-mindedness and a lack of vision for the whole of humankind. The interests of humanity and the world lie so much beyond the scope of these people's bickering that who, in the overall scheme of things, really cares about their petty tiff? Many people believe you Kilroy. You may even believe yourself but switching horses midstream and then bad mouthing the steed that got you halfway seriously diminishes your credibility. The very idea of political parties born out of such negative feelings as Euroscepticism or British Supremacy is nauseating. One can only hope the public recognise these extremists for what they are and shun them at the polls. I've always thought that Kilroy-Silk was a self-publicising, egotist and this news does absolutely nothing to alter my opinion. Brilliant, about time this country had a plausible party! Having seen the recent BBC 3 documentary and witnessed the thoroughly disgraceful chauvinistic behaviour of a number of senior UKIP figures I can well understand why Kilroy-Silk feels embarrassed to be associated with such people. Hopefully the UKIP members who are interested in the political debate will support his action. Fantastic news. Pro-Europeans now have far less to worry about from the right. The Conservatives are as confused as they have been since the mid-1990s, and the extreme anti-Europeans are fracturing themselves into splinter groups that split any votes they might get in local, European and general elections. Robert Kilroy-Silk's ego and vanity are his own (and his supporters') worst enemy. As a euro-enthusiast I could not be more delighted by Kilroy-Silk's behaviour. He took a party that was just building up a head of steam, and having exposed it to ridicule by attempting a coup-d'etat, he is now setting about the serious business of dividing it in two. The closer to straight-down-the-middle the better, as far as I am concerned, but in any eventuality, the two sceptic parties will exhaust their energies fighting each other. If every politician with ambitions to lead their party resorted to forming their own for that purpose, we'd have ballot papers a mile long! You've got to hand it to Kilroy-Silk for his sheer arrogance and supreme self-belief. Whilst not being a great fan of Kilroy I do agree with his comments about the UKIP leadership, and like him I am also leaving UKIP. I believe countless opportunities have been lost to discredit the EU and to show our people what belonging to the EU really means. The EU's comments last week about Michael Howard's plans to reform immigration show how little we govern our own country when they can turn round and say immigration is a matter for the EU and not individual member states. The sooner we leave this corrupt super-state the better Does anyone else think that it is ironic that Euro-Sceptic Kilroy-Silk has used a Latin name for his new party, rather than a 'good old British' name? Is this indicative of the man - contradictory, vain and pompous? I think Mr Kilroy-Silk has got a very good point. British politics has become too PC and as a result has no straight talking honest strong politicians. They are all interested in their own careers and not the people who put them in power. As a result I feel our democracy is being abused and I want it stopped. If Mr Kilroy-Silk lives up to half his promises he will get my vote. Honestly, who really cares? Man with tan leaves party with no plan, to set up party with no idea. As one of Kilroy-Silk's East Midlands constituents I hope those who voted for him are proud to have been taken in by such charming vacuity. I feel insulted by having him represent me in the European Parliament. UKIP tried hard to accommodate Robert Kilroy Silk, but he made it clear that only control of it would satisfy him. Someone so keen on complete control was bound to fall foul of UKIP's democratic nature. Kilroy is an able communicator and a capable politician, in exactly the way those who lead UKIP are not. He tried to make it work, but they

didn't seem to want to grow up. He was left in the position of having to defend their gaffes to the media. This new party seems a logical next step for Kilroy. Good luck to the man, I say. Oh please! This is an amusing irrelevance. There is absolutely no chance of either of these parties communicating a sensible and constructive 'Euro sceptic' argument. They will play a key part in winning the country round to the idea of a reformed, more democratic, more dynamic Europe Union. Future generations will thank him for his ridiculousness. The refreshing thing about Robert is that he is open, honest and straight. What other politician can claim this. I have a suspicion that he talks for a larger part of the electorate that his critics would like. I shall be voting for him. The electorate of the East Midlands voted not for Kilroy-Silk but for the UKIP. Kilroy-Silk was made an MEP because of his position on the UKIP's party list. He has no mandate to represent the area and should resign from the European Parliament. I wouldn't write off Kilroy-Silk. While he's a clown and a one man band at the moment, he's a populist and that's always dangerous. The man clearly has an enormous ego and looking at our current political masters, that seems to be one of the factors in success. Good luck to Kilroy though I think he is doing more harm than good for both his new party and UKIP because their vote base is not strong enough for both parties to be successful and at the moment UKIP have the upper hand while Veritas are starting from square one and fighting a somewhat uphill battle. The man I once found cringe worthy on Day time TV, could well turn out to be my country's knight in shining armour. He expresses views which are now more than common amongst society today - but people are almost too scared to express them. Kilroy Silk has secured my vote, and many more like me. What's more, I look forward to the day when he claims victory, wrecks the EU, and rescues my great nation... without a hair out of place and his tan as perfect as ever! Great Stuff. The longer the UK dithers over Europe, the richer we in Ireland become, as the only English-speaking country fully committed to Europe. Oh and send us over those hard-working immigrants - our economy needs them. This is just what the Europhiles pray for. As the main Euro sceptic party, UKIP should try to resolve its differences with Kilroy to show a united front and give the UK public a serious political voice against Europe. Having multiple parties with the same view point just splits the vote further. Thank goodness that Kilroy-Silk has gone - now UKIP at least has a chance in the election! It is very sad to see the cause of Britain regaining its proper relationship with Europe damaged by this split within UKIP. Robert Kilroy-Silk could have a lot to offer. Instead we have a split party and a damaged cause. Under the present electoral system, people must work together, and small parties have no hope of representation. Last summer, UKIP achieved a major advance, partly and only partly due to Kilroy-Silk. It is a great shame this has been dissipated in in-fighting. UKIP has a wide platform of policies, not just withdrawal from the EU. This Kilroy-Silk conveniently ignores in the comments surrounding the launch of his own party. Neither the English Democrats nor the New Party were interested in letting him join them and take over their leadership speaks volumes. Veritas is the beginning of the end for Kilroy-Silk. If he believes in truth and democracy then he and the two assembly members should resign and force a by-elections to stand on their own platform rather than this backdoor approach to politics of being elected for one party then defecting to another. So UKIP was good enough for him to lead, not good enough for him to follow! Interesting that a party committed to plain speaking should have a Latin name! Every opinion poll points to an overwhelming anti-Europe feeling in this country. Kilroy-Silk could be on the verge of something huge if he can broaden his appeal beyond this one issue. He is an extremely able communicator with years of political experience. We want quality schools, top hospitals, clean and efficient public transport, punishments that fit the crime, limited asylum, a purge on bureaucracy and less taxes. It needs courage and honesty, two qualities sadly lacking in our politicians. Kilroy-Silk may just have those very qualities. Recruit the right colleagues, Robert, and your time may have come! Well if you cannot get enough limelight being an ordinary MP then go out and start up your own Party. It's all flash and no real policy here Let's hope this is the start of both UKIP and Kilroy-Silk slipping into obscurity. Veritas? The name will doom it. But perhaps I am wrong for surely all modern schoolchildren will understand it since they do still learn Latin in the classroom do they not? The whole essence of what RKS represents is Euro scepticism, so explain to me how the too-twee label of Veritas symbolises that?

Roundabout continues nostalgia trip

Roundabout continues nostalgia trip The new big-screen version of The Magic Roundabout, released in the UK on Friday, is the latest attempt to turn children's television into box-office gold. Recent years have seen a less-than-successful adaptation of the 1960s puppet show Thunderbirds and a moderately successful version of E Nesbit's Five Children and It, previously filmed by the BBC in 1991. He-Man and Transformers, which were cartoon favourites in the 1980s, will soon receive their own costly makeovers. With screen versions of The A-Team, The Dukes of Hazzard and even Blake's Seven on the cards, nostalgia is clearly big business. But some critics complain that these expensive takes on iconic series of yesteryear do not match up to our fond memories of the originals. The new version of The Magic Roundabout, which will be released as Sprung! in the US, replaces the stop-motion models of the 1960s TV show with polished, computer-generated animation. In a similar fashion, the 2004 Thunderbirds used human actors and special effects in place of the original's puppets and models. The films are squarely pitched at younger audiences. Pop stars Robbie Williams and Kylie Minogue provide voices in The Magic Roundabout, while the now-defunct boy band Busted performed the Thunderbirds theme song. But while some reviewers have been won over, there has nonetheless been a significant backlash. "This CG-animated adventure airbrushes the sly charm and trippy otherworldliness which made the 60s stop-motion Roundabout a cult hit," writes Stella Papamichael on the BBC Movies site. And the recent puppet comedy Team America: World Police was in part provoked by its directors' outrage that Gerry Anderson's Thunderbirds was remade without its signature mannequins. Dan Jolin, reviews editor of Empire magazine, says classic children's TV shows have a built-in audience that make them ideal for reinvention. "I can understand why people are taking these intellectual properties and repackaging them for the kids of today. "But I think it's backfiring. What's next - The Clangers on some distant planet, with some giant CGI Soup Dragons chasing after them?" Despite Thunderbirds' disappointing global box-office performance - the film cost \$42m (£22m) but only recouped \$21m (£11m) - the nostalgia craze shows no signs of abating. It can therefore be only a matter of time before some other TV favourites receive the Hollywood treatment. After the success of Garfield: The Movie, Britain's shabby tabby surely deserves his own film vehicle. With only 13 episodes

made of the 1974 series, there is plenty of room to explore the lives of the pink cat, Professor Yaffle and the Mice of the Marvellous Mechanical Mouse Organ. Furry recyclers have already had one big-screen outing - 1977's Wombling Free. But with environmental issues still occupying our thoughts it is high time they made a comeback. Advances in special effects technology could do wonders for the BBC's supernatural comedy . And the success of Pirates of the Caribbean must surely herald a comeback for TV's most popular cartoon buccaneer, . It might also remind viewers the lewd character names often associated with the show never actually existed. The Magic Roundabout is out in the UK on 11 February. How about bringing Catweazle to the big screen? He could give Gandalf a run for his money! Thundercats!! I loved it. Should be fun to see on the big screen, if some effort is put in! it will bring my youth back! Get your hands off the Clangers! Is nothing sacred? Make a movie version of the Banana splits! What about Keanu Reeves and Richard Gere in a remake of The Wooden Tops? Or perhaps Robbie Williams could get his much mooted acting career off the ground by taking on the role of Andy Pandy. You forgot to mention the grearest of them all, Danger Mouse! But then again, it couldn't be better than the original series, could it? It's always nice to see these old toons re-released, but after the abysmal Thunderbirds movie (and the song!) I think I've been completely put off. Just leave these classics alone as good memories. I think remakes are a good idea. As the world moves on people tend to look more and more into the past to things that make them feel safe. I believe this is the whole reason "retro" has become so popular. As long as a remake does justice to the original then all it can do is create a wider audience and possibly entice a new generation of persons to enjoy and revive and old series. Personally i'd like to see cartoons such as Transformers, Thundercats and M.A.S.K. get full Hollywood remakes. Leave them alone, why ruin something that we all have very fond memories of in the first place? The thunderbirds film was appalling, not a patch on the puppet series I grew up with and the Magic Roundabout will never be the same without the voice of Eric Thompson. Love to see Transformers with real actors and CGI. And make it at least a 15 rating. Part of the reason for the success of such classics as the Magic Roundabout was that the characters were not the sweet and cuddly creatures that you would expect. They were moody, sarcastic, and rather human. Just looking at the pictures of the animations for the new film show that these characteristics have not been preserved. Dougal never smiled like that! Films of this sort have an unfortunate habit of Disneyfying everthing, and they just lose the real magic that made the show special in the first place. I have fond memories of Bod (not least of which because I look like him) and would like to see someone attempt to make it into a film. It's got all the right material for an american blockbuster - no plot and no story. Bod would likely be played by Tom Cruise and would undoubtedly have a girlfriend or two. It's all very well and good remaking these classic TV shows and films with all the latest technology for a 'new' audience, but for me a lot of the original charm is lost when they do this, and seems more like a money making exercise to cash in on the original success of the programme than reinventing or improving it. It maybe that to an audience who have never seen the originals they can watch them without prejudice, but to people who have grown up with all these shows such as Thunderbirds and Magic Roundabout which are part of our childhood, they are never going to live up to expectation. It does pose the question though that with all the long line of remakes being made, are film-makers running out of original ideas? All I can say is bring back Danger Mouse, probably the greatest kids' show ever. I recently re-watched some episodes and realised that there was a level of humour shown in Danger Mouse that was completely lost on me when I was a child. There WAS a new Captain Pugwash cartoon made a couple of years back. Again, like so many of these nostalgia programmes, the animation - this time computer created flat-cell like animation - failed to match the original's cut out paper technique for inventiveness, and was woefully inadequate. We live in a sampling world - the music industry has been pluderling past decades for inspiration, clipping sounds from 20 years ago is much cheaper and easier that doing something new. Seems that the film and TV is doing the same now - it's just cheaper to take ideas from the past and rework them, rather than being daring and trying something new. It got to be Mr.Benn. The story line about a man who changes in a fancy dress shop, steps into a door way and appears in another time and place would be amazing! If they got a decent producer and writer the story line could be great. And who to play the lead role? Well if it was a comedy then it would have to be someone like Steve Martin. If its going to be an adventure then Johnny Depp playing a role similar to the Pirates Of The Caribbean Character. Muffin the Mule perhaps ? After all, grannies and grandpas go to the cinema as well you know! Why can't the British film industry try making Gerry Anderson's UFO or Captain Scarlet, or Saphire and Steel, or The Tomorrow People. In today's media, it seems the past is the future. TV shows such as Battlestar Galactica have new remakes, DJ's are sampling or re-working 70's and 80's music. Even computer games from 10-15 years ago are getting modern re-workings. Personally, I think it shows that no one has any originality any more! Why not just leave our misty-eyed nostalgia alone. Mary, Mungo and Midge. But of course for most of the episodes the lift would be out of order and they would have to use the stairs. Plus would Mary be more of a Vicky Pollard character as she lives in a high rise council block? Yeah but no but I wasn't even there! I'd like to see Mr. Benn, with Brad Pitt in the title role. Sean Connery could play the mysterious costume shop owner. It demonstrates a profound lack of imagination in today's film-makers that they continually try to remake and remodel the past in an effort to cash in on nostalgia. There are plany of modern children's book that would make excellent films or TV programmes, why not use them instead of rehashing the past? Mr. Benn with Rowan Atkinson as the lead. Would have loved to see Dungeons & Dragons made, but unfortunately the film that it was made into didn't come up to scratch. The only one that isn't to be remade as yet is Thundercats, which I'd like to see. I'm an expat living in Norway, and I recently went through a period of buying the DVDs of many of my favourite children's programs for my 2 daughters. My dearest wish, however, is to see a feature length version of Noggin the Nog appear on The Big Screen!! Very Scandinavian... Rainbow! I believe that Childrens classics should be left well alone, and I will not be surprised if the Magic Roundabout does not do well at the Box Office, especially since it will be going up against The Spongebob Squarepants movie, popular among children because it's original, witty, and modern. The Magic Roundabout will never appeal to the children of today as it did all those many years ago. How about classics like Chorlton and the Wheelies, Rentaghost, Terrahawks, Bod.....oh the list could go on and on!!! If a Transformers movie is indeed on the cards then I'll be the first one on Amazon buying a copy, eagerly waiting at the front door with a frothy mouth and a nervous twitch. Repackage my childhood and sell it to me at an extortionate price! I don't care! Till then I'll have to make do with the Citroen C4 advert. I'd luv to see Willow the Wisp on the big screen but sadly without the late Kenneth Williams doing the voices it wouldnt be the same. And who remembers Trap Door voiced by the late Willie Rushden, superb children's programme. Could Morph hold his own in a big screen movie??? Or even Jamie and the Magic Torch....hmmmmm, I could go on and on. Danger Mouse? At 34 I'm showing my age. :-)

Noggin the Nog was one of the best children's programs. The problem with bringing it to the big screen is that no-one could approach Oliver Postgate's wonderful voices. So in general leave well alone. The originals are good because they are of their time

and the methods used are an integral part of the story. Just imagine what could be achieved by using CGI in a remake of Fingerbobs... the already disturbing hand antics of the bearded hippy, Yoffi could take on a whole new level with a more life-like Fingermouse Bob the Builder, Postman Pat and Fireman Sam together in an epic adventure of fire, post and bricks. In the ultimate struggle to save the women they love from the evil clowns, Krusty and Gobo. Will they triumph or will they fail miserably? Find out this Fall. One puppet show that I personally would love to see made into a live action movie is Joe 90. It would be worth the price of admission alone to see the large screen version of Joe's car. Of course, Gerry Anderson's Supermarionation is a rich seam of material worthy of big-screen, big-budget action. It was only that Thunderbirds The Movie was targetted as a children't movie that really let it down. After all, the children that remember those shows with such affection are now the parents of children themselves. It's only because the people who were children when these programmes were first shown have grown up and are plundering their childhoods, isn't it? I'd hate to see Bagpuss with perfect animation - I love that 'done in a shed' clunkiness and you couldn't recreate the magic. Perhaps if the remakes were done in a 'Look Around You' mock-authentic style I might be interested ... Horton And The Wheelies or Jamie And His Magic Torch; that would be mega! This re-gurgitation of old films and TV shows makes me angry - it is corporate laziness resting on the safety of other people's ideas, because it guarantees to bring in the \$\$\$\$. The same can be said of modern day pop bands who release other peoples material, Will Young etc. The sad fact is nostalgia sells big bucks in the short-term. The fact that they will be forgotten in 6 months time is irrelevant (e.g. Starsky & Hutch) Hence, the market is saturated with this mindless drivel, but it can only be stopped if people stop buying it! I pray they never do a remake of Chorlton And The Wheelies. I'm only 27 and don't remember the series from when it was on TV, but have the set on DVD and it's a classic. The fact it's so great comes from the fact that there were very few special effects involved and compared to today's stuff it looks amateurish. Thats the appeal though, it's so innocent (like Chorlton himself) and it would be a real shame if they did remake it.

Brits debate over 'urban' music

Brits debate over 'urban' music Joss Stone, a 17-year-old soul singer from Devon, beat Dizzee Rascal, Jamelia, Lemar and The Streets to win best British urban act at the Brit Awards. Her victory has reignited the debate about what urban music is. I'm not really comfortable with the word urban. It's a word that's been manufactured in this country and America to describe black music. The word urban seems to cover such a broad range of black music that it's wrong. How far are the Brits removed from inner-city music and what people are doing? It's so far removed that I don't expect them to get it bang on. The music industry isn't championing music from our particular genre very well anyway. People don't feel like that's anything to do with us. I don't feel like urban music's just been celebrated by [Joss Stone] winning or her being nominated, or by the Brits acknowledging that there's an urban music scene because it's all a kick in the teeth at the end of the day. It's not really relevant. If Joss Stone is the closest thing that they feel comfortable championing because of what she looks like and how she sounds and who she's signed to, then so be it. It's got nothing to do with what's really going on. Urban as a genre is very broad. If you look underneath urban, there are a number of core elements that include hip-hop, R&B, garage and into that obviously comes soul. Joss Stone is a soul artist. Her first album was called The Soul Sessions. So urban is a very broad brushstroke that is the umbrella over the top of sub-genres, and there are offshoots of all of those. Joss Stone has had amazing success [in the US] given that she's a UK artist. What has really captured everybody's imagination is that here you have a 17-year-old from Devon with a voice to die for and a bunch of really, really good tunes and she looks good - I think that's what's done it. The award for best British urban act was voted for by viewers of MTV Base. I don't think Joss was not a worthy winner. She makes soul music and that definitely comes under the category of what we describe as urban. The fact that she's from Devon is the interesting thing because most of the music we cover is made in large cities and she's literally rural. The great thing about urban music is that there's a big range. If there is some sort of root with black music or dance music in Britain, I think that's where you can call it urban - that's where this new sub-category, or uber-category, has come from. Joss Stone is certainly not old enough to have had some of the experiences of an older soul singer, but you couldn't argue that she was being inauthentic with her emotions - it is coming from somewhere genuine. It has to come across as real. That's the only cut-off point we have here and that's the only way by which we judge people. What urban means to us as an organisation is the politically correct term to describe music which originated from a black background. Music should become inclusive and if we are fighting for a multi-cultural Britain, then we should be fighting for inclusion rather than exclusion. If Joss Stone can be accepted within the urban music community, I think acts from other ethnicities doing classical music and rock should be accepted too. Race doesn't make a difference if everyone is included. Out of all the awards dished out yesterday, I'm still trying to find out what people of other races received any sort of recognition or award. A type of music (especially street music) that originates from a city, and typically reflects or is characteristic of urban life. She might not be urban, but when did R&B become the hip hop tainted thing it is now? R&B stands for Rhythm And Blues, remember! That Joss Stone is rubbish is certain. If anyone deserves to win an award for urban music (I think probably should include Hip-Hop, Soul & Funk at least but not rock or pop) this year its the Streets, although Dizzee Rascal stakes a good claim She definitely deserved to win a prize, Joss Stone's albums are quite simply amazing, easily better than anything else that was released last year. This whole debate about what is urban, what isnt urban is completely pointless and probably fueled by urban artists who weren't nominated or didn't win. I cant see why people can't just congratulate her for the talent that she is. She did deserve it, but I agree with the comments about urban music. Its a stupid phrase, and particularly British. In the states they tend to use hip hop and R&B, if I say hip hop here a lot of people have no idea what I'm talking about. Very strange. What's in a name? A rose by any other name etc... If people want to call it urban, why not? If we really analysed it, the term 'dance music' is misleading because it doesn't describe everything you can dance to. Whilst I agree that the term 'urban' is open to interpretation, it strikes me as simply weird that Joss Stone has won. 'Urban' to me is what I hear being played in parties in the inner cities - I live in Brixton and have never heard The Soul Sessions pumping out of of a bass heavy sound system in any parties I've been to. Good luck to Joss Stone, let's celebrate her victory - let's also question why, with artists so successful and talented as Jamelia, Lemar, Kanye West, Dizzee Rascal, Alicia Keys and Outkast

- we didn't see a single black artist on stage collecting an award. So, what you're saying is that any music that has black heritage is not allowed to be sung by anyone who isn't black. And, if it is, then they shouldn't be acknowledged for it even if they're pretty damn good at it? She's 17, has an amazing voice, and won. Good on her. Oh, but she's not "black" well, let's make her feel real bad about it then. How dare she! Though hang on, didn't the so-called 'public' vote on this one? This idea of pigeonholing whatever is popular at the time is no different than what was happening in the 1940s and 50s in relation to what "Jazz" was. The media then called anything that had a swinging beat, syncopated melody or soulful feeling "Jazz", much to the chagrin of the artists. It would mean that "blues" would be put in the same mould as "bebop", "cool" and "ragtime", all very different styles at that time. Jazz was and remains such a massively misunderstood term. And so what of "Urban" music? In truth it's a lazy term to categorise music that you don't really understand. Soul and garage are worlds apart musically (Marvin Gaye v Tuff Jam?), but no doubt have their connections. If we just let the music speak for itself and not judge the success of an artist by the number of awards won, then maybe we can enjoy the music for what it is, rather than what it represents. I demand a prize for rural music! Sucks to the cities- it's way better out here. We have hay, for one thing. Excluding her from what has become known as urban music would be as bad as excluding Lenny Kravitz or Hendrix from rock music for being black surely? I don't understand the point that Ty is making. If Lemar, who makes music which is less soulful than Joss' work won, he might have said nothing. (btw i'm black too) How can she be "urban" if she spent most of her life in the Devon countryside? Nonsense. I love Joss to bits and don't care what her branding is - it's amazing music, full stop. Stop putting it all in brackets and let's just call it music, and let's especially drop the black / urban tag - nearly all music came from black origin, this just sets an example that it is ok to pigeonhole people and their music by their colour. Surely the point of having an urban music category is simply to acknowledge artists that are making what is (historically) considered urban music, irrelevant of the colour of their skin, or where they originate from. Joss Stone is simply singing a certain type of music that can be considered urban in style, just as someone from an inner city, and indeed not from the USA could sing country music. If that person was good at it and authentic in sound, would we criticise it being referred to as country music or the artist for representing that style? The term urban in reference to a music genre in UK has developed, in part, from the controversy surrounding the branding of the MOBO Awards. The very term 'Music of Black Origin' has confused and offended many people. This is particularly strange given the existence of the Asian Music Awards. It appears that the use of 'black' or 'white' in relation to music makes people feel uncomfortable. The term 'urban' therefore, has been invoked to sidestep the debate of which type of music came first 'black' or 'white' thereby rendering the issue colourblind. The result is now a redundant new debate as to what 'urban' also means. Perhaps we should have created a new term altogether to describe the various strains of soul/RnB and Hip-Hop, one which does not also mean something else - as we have done with 'Crunk'. Urban is just a word that's come about recently to describe "black" music that's become popular now. The word wasn't even in use, or common use five or six years ago. It's just a way of the industry clumping it all together without having to call it black music, because some people are oversensitive and might call them racist for it. I'm in a band that has been called "urban", and I despise the label. I'd hate to think I belonged to any neat marketing niche, because that's all it is. Ever since the music channels and record companies tried to fracture what they consider 'music of black origin', these labels have been used to undermine the status of good music into a commodity. Look at all the TV broadcasters, unable to reach young people without condescending, they simply play some 'urban' music on the soundtrack as if it's some dreadful cheap lift music. Ignore the labels, it is what it is, just music. As a black man, I think I agree with some of the statements at least the statements made by the key executives. Black people should lead the music they invented. We should stop calling a genre meaningless, nothing is meaningless. The real question is would Joss Stone have been that successful doing the music she was doing if she were black? Same thing, with Streets, Amy Winehouse, etc. Who's ever heard of Terri Walker or Rhian Benson.. They are both 10 times better than Joss Stone and both of them have won Urban Music Awards and I think Mobos, but why not Brits???? So what if Joss Stone won the Urban awards. Her music is great soul and surely that is under the 'Urban' banner? What if The Streets had won? Would people be whining because Mike Skinner is white... It seems that a lot of the fuss is about race where the real issue should be music and nothing else. Urban is PC version for saying black music. I'm not doubting Ms Stone's talent, but why didn't Jamelia or Lemar get a Brit? This reminds me of what happened to Craig David and Soul II Soul in the past, getting nominations are easy to get, but picking up a Brit seems to be the hardest thing. Refreshing to see people making reasonable, intelligent comments on any topic these days. More power to you, people! You have said it: there is music you like and music you don't like - who cares what label you put on it? That entire category was a mess. How can you have people like Dizzee Rascal up against Joss Stone? It's like putting Eminem against Bob Geldof. She should have been nominated for Best British R & B act. Joss Stone deserved to win an award for her talents, but I don't think it was very 'urban' of her to sing angels with Robbie Williams. Urban is a nonsense term - music of black origin? Well doesn't that include rock? Music made in the inner cities? Well almost all bands end up making music in London/Manchester etc. And doesn't that make some weird implication that all black people live in cities? It doesn't make any sense. Why does music have to be put into a genre? It's music, you like it or you don't. Simple as that. I play in a heavy metal band. We are urban music as far as I'm concerned. We live in cities and spend our working life in an urban environment; It therefore directly shapes what we write musically. "Urban" seems to be the new name for all styles of black music. Why it needed a rebrand I don't know as the name is misleading. Oasis originate from a city and characterise the urban life they know, therefore more than fit the term "urban" yet as they're a white rock band they won't be described as such. Joss Stone has a fantastic voice and great timing and delivery - what other reason do they need to award her the Brit? All this "urban" and other such categorisation is just the red-tape of the music business and is best ignored. Yeah, she deserved it. She is talented. Urban is a crap, meaningless, politically correct and probably actually racist marketing term though. There's only two kinds of music: good and bad.

All Black magic: New Zealand rugby

All Black magic: New Zealand rugby Playing colours: All black The Haka and more! The All Blacks Charles John Munro discovered rugby at London's Christ College, and on his return to Nelson he staged New Zealand's first game. Nelson Town met Nelson College on 14 May, 1870, the Town triumphing by two goals to nil, instigating a game that would become a national obsession and come to dominate the country's sporting passions. The game appealed to the Kiwi psyche and quickly spread, the native Maoris finding a particular empathy with the sport's warrior ethos. In 1888 a British team led by AE Stoddart toured New Zealand and Australia, and soon after a Maori named Joe Warbrick and an English ex-pat called Thomas Eyton decided to gather a combined New Zealand team. Twenty-two Maori and four 'pakiha' formed the 'New Zealand Native Team,' who played a total of 107 matches in New Zealand, Australia and the UK. The integration of white and Maori was a reflection of enlightened New Zealand rugby and society, even if the British press were somewhat mystified by the pre-match tradition of the Maori war dance, the Haka! The other great symbol of New Zealand rugby, the all black kit with the silver fern on the breast, was proposed by Tom Ellison at the first annual meeting of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union in 1893. New Zealand played their first international against Australia in 1903, the Kiwis triumphing 22-3 in Sydney, and the following year an official British touring team came to New Zealand for the first time. The tourists had gone through Australia undefeated but their captain, David Revell Bedell-Sivright, created animosity in New Zealand with his patronising attitude. The Kiwis shocked the rugby world with a 9-3 triumph in Wellington, sparking great celebrations across the country, but Bedell-Sivright churlishly suggested that the victors would have no chance when they visited the UK. Their opportunity to prove him wrong came in 1905 with the first official New Zealand tour to Europe. The tourists won their early games with a quick-thinking, inventive approach, but press criticism began to grow over their 2-3-2 scrum formation that left a 'roving' forward free to disrupt opposition attacks. The tactic was effective, two late tries seeing the Kiwis to a 12-7 win over Scotland, before Ireland were despatched 15-0 in Dublin. A huge crowd at Crystal Palace convulsed with laughter at the sight of the Haka - but the smiles were soon wiped from their faces when the tourists ran in five tries in a 15-0 hammering of England. New Zealand headed to Wales to meet a country in the midst of its first 'Golden Age,' and the encounter would be the first in a series of controversial clashes between the sides. An excellent try on the left wing by Teddy Morgan sealed a 3-0 win in a hard-fought encounter at Cardiff Arms Park, but post-match talk was dominated by a Bob Deans try that was ruled out by Scottish referee John Dallas. Dallas said that Deans was tackled short, but the Kiwi said he was dragged back into the field of play after grounding a try - on his death-bed three years later he exclaimed: "I did score that try in Cardiff." Four of the 1905 All Blacks went over to the newly formed 'All Golds' rugby league side soon after the tour, but New Zealand were strong enough to crush an Anglo-Welsh touring team in 1908. The first South Africa tour of New Zealand in 1921 saw honours shared in a three-Test series, starting the greatest rivalry in rugby - and the long-running controversy between the countries over the All Blacks' inclusion of Maori players. The awesome 1924-5 All Black tourists became known as 'The Invincibles' after winning all 30 of their games in France, Britain and Ireland, including a crushing 19-0 victory over Wales at St Helen's. Despite their success, the All Blacks' 2-3-2 scrum formation left them somewhat short of possession at times, and the flaws were exploited by the Springboks in South Africa in 1928. Employing the modern 3-4-1 scrum line-up against the New Zealand 'rover' system for the first time, South African teams defeated the All Blacks in five games and the Test series was drawn two-all. The controversial New Zealand scrum method finally disappeared after the 1930 Lions tour (a series won 3-1 by New Zealand), the Lions manager describing the tactic as 'cheating,' prompting the International Rugby Board to rule that three men had to pack down in the front row of the scrum. The All Blacks' 1935 European tour started inauspiciously with an 11-3 loss to a Swansea side inspired by teenage, schoolboy half-backs Hayden Tanner and Willie Davies. A thrilling Test at Cardiff Arms Park went to Wales 13-12, although the winning try from Geoffrey Rees-Jones was controversial following an illegal Claude Davey tackle in the build-up. New Zealand's next visit to Wales in 1953 proved difficult as they lost 8-3 to Cardiff and drew 6-6 at Swansea. The All Blacks were on top in the Test with Wales at the Arms Park, but the teams were locked at 8-8 when a Clem Thomas cross kick was gathered by Ken Jones for a famous, match-winning try. The tourists made some amends with wins over the other home nations, before a 19-5 success over the Barbarians in an Arms Park thriller. New Zealand built from that tour, and by the time they returned in 1963-4 they were undoubtedly the leading side in the world. That made the shock all the greater when a drop goal by student John Uzzell gave Newport an unlikely 3-0 win over the tourists at Rodney Parade. Wilson Whinneray's side rallied to beat Wales 6-0, their first win at the Arms Park in four attempts, and went unbeaten through the rest of the tour, but when they returned home the first question put to them was: "What happened in Newport?" The only blemish on the record of the awesome 1967 tourists was a draw with East Wales, as they beat the full Wales team 13-6 in Cardiff to take the lead in the series between the countries for the first time. That lead was increased with two comfortable wins for the home side in New Zealand in 1969, the first time Wales had toured the country as an independent team. A ferocious game at the Arms Park in 1972 was edged 19-16 by the All Blacks, a measure of revenge for the defeat inflicted on New Zealand by the Carwyn James-inspired Lions of 1971. James guided Llanelli to a famous 9-3 win over the tourists at Stradey Park, though, and in the final game of the tour the Barbarians defeated the All Blacks 23-11 in Cardiff in a game regarded by many as the greatest ever played. New Zealand defeated a Wales XV 12-3 at the Arms Park in a non-cap game in 1974, but it was the 1978 game in Cardiff that would reignite the history of controversy between the two countries. Wales were leading 12-10 with one minute left when Andy Haden flew to the floor from a line-out. Television pictures clearly showed that he dived, but English referee Roger Quittenton was fooled and awarded a penalty, duly converted by Brian McKechnie for a 13-12 win. Since that infamous game, the competition has largely left Wales v New Zealand fixtures as the men in red have slipped from the pinnacle of the world game. A crushing 23-3 win for New Zealand in Cardiff in the Welsh Rugby Union's 1980 centenary game was a sign of things to come. The new professionalism in the southern hemisphere game that had left Europe behind was shown as the All Blacks swatted Wales aside 49-6 in Brisbane in the semi-final of the inaugural World Cup. The Kiwis went on to claim the Cup, and would inflict further misery on Wales on their ill-fated 1988 tour of New Zealand. A young, talented Wales side left Britain full of confidence as Triple Crown winners, but one of the greatest ever New Zealand teams demolished them 52-3 and 54-9. After also taking some fearful beatings in the provincial games, Wales captain Jonathan Davies returned home calling for urgent change in the national game, but as his views were ignored he - along with a generation of Wales' best players - chose to head north to rugby league. A 34-9 win in Cardiff followed for New Zealand in 1989, and at the 1995 World Cup Wales' big talk was made to look embarrassing as the All Blacks eased to victory in Johannesburg. A crushing 42-7 Kiwi triumph in Wembley followed in 1997, and as Wales' misery increased they turned to New Zealand for their salvation in the shape of coaches Graham Henry and Steve Hansen. There was a temporary resurgence in the Welsh game, but when an experimental New Zealand side came to Cardiff's new Millennium Stadium in

2002 they left with a 43-17 victory. A bruising 55-3 defeat followed for Wales in Hamilton in 2003 as Hansen built towards the World Cup, but in Australia it was a remarkable performance against the All Blacks that gave his side renewed hope. Wales were given no chance going into the game, but in the course of the match they rediscovered the value of attacking flair to lead 37-33 early in the second half. New Zealand rallied to a 53-37 win, but the style shown by Wales has been used as an inspiration as they look to a better future. They now face an All Blacks team led by Henry and Hansen, coming to Europe with a weakened squad at the end of a long season. An encouraging display against South Africa has inspired a confident Wales camp to believe they can claim their first win over the men in black for over 50 years. They have a chance, but clearly history is not on their side.

Apple laptop is 'greatest gadget'

Apple laptop is 'greatest gadget' The Apple Powerbook 100 has been chosen as the greatest gadget of all time, by US magazine Mobile PC. The 1991 laptop was chosen because it was one of the first "lightweight" portable computers and helped define the layout of all future notebook PCs. The magazine has compiled an all-time top 100 list of gadgets, which includes the Sony Walkman at number three and the 1956 Zenith remote control at two. Gadgets needed moving parts and/or electronics to warrant inclusion. The magazine staff compiled the list and specified that gadgets also needed to be a "self-contained apparatus that can be used on its own, not a subset of another device". "In general we included only items that were potentially mobile," said the magazine. "In the end, we tried to get to the heart of what really makes a gadget a gadget," it concluded. The oldest "gadget" in the top 100 is the abacus, which the magazine dates at 190 A.D., and put in 60th place. Other pre-electronic gadgets in the top 100 include the sextant from 1731 (59th position), the marine chronometer from 1761 (42nd position) and the Kodak Brownie camera from 1900 (28th position). The Tivo personal video recorder is the newest device to make the top 10, which also includes the first flash mp3 player (Diamond Multimedia), as well as the first "successful" digital camera (Casio QV-10) and mobile phone (Motorola Startac). The most popular gadget of the moment, the Apple iPod, is at number 12 in the list while the first Sony transistor radio is at number 13. Sony's third entry in the top 20 is the CDP-101 CD player from 1983. "Who can forget the crystalline, hiss-free blast of Madonna's Like A Virgin emanating from their first CD player?" asked the magazine. Karl Elsener's knife, the Swiss Army Knife from 1891, is at number 20 in the list. Gadgets which could be said to feature surprisingly low down in the list include the original telephone (23rd), the Nintendo GameBoy (25th), and the Pulsar quartz digital watch (36th). The list also contains plenty of oddities: the Pez sweet dispenser (98th), 1990s toy Tamagotchi (86th) and the bizarre Ronco inside the shell egg scrambler (84th). Almost everyone has a mobile phone, how many people own a Powerbook? or an iPod? The findings of this magazine are not very convincing. What about the magnetic compass? We still use it 1,000 years after it was invented. I am amazed by the obsession with individual gadgets rather than genre. For example the Sony walkman was the first truly portable way of listening to your own music on the move whereas Minidisc, Flash MP3, portable CD players etc. are really just improvements in technology. My favourite 'true' gadgets are probably my portable MiniDisc player and the little battery powered whizzy thing I use to froth up my coffee! Calm down it's only in their opinion, and any list that includes the Taser in the top 100 gadgets has to be suspect.... Swiss army knife and no question about it. How many of the other items are still relatively unchanged from the original idea and still as useful/popular? You don't need a laptop or even a pocket calculator to work that one out! This list merely illustrates interesting cultural divides between the American authors and the overwhelmingly British responses. Brits see no further than mobile phones and the over thirties Sinclair; whilst the Americans focus on Apple, TV remotes and TiVO (which probably is rather obscure in Europe). What about the Soda Stream. This gadget changed my pre-teen life. Lap tops may enable you to "think different, but you cant use them to "get busy with the fizzy" How about Astro Wars, one of the pioneers for computer games, i remember spending many an hour playing this and it still works today! However tried it the other day and it was rubbish, still a great gadget of its time. Why worry about mobile phones. Soon they will be subsumed into the PDA's / laptops etc. What about the Marine Chronometer? Completely revolutionised navigation for boats and was in use for centuries. For it's time, a technological marvel! Sony Net Minidisc! It paved the way for more mp3 player to explode onto the market. I always used my NetMD, and could not go anywhere without it. A laptop computer is not a gadget! It's a working tool! The Sinclair Executive was the world's first pocket calculator. I think this should be there as well. How about the clockwork radio? Or GPS? Or a pocket calculator? All these things are useful to real people, not just PC magazine editors. Are the people who created this list insane ? Surely the most important gadget of the modern age is the mobile phone? It has revolutionised communication, which is more than can be said for a niche market laptop. From outside the modern age, the marine chronometer is the single most important gadget, without which modern transportation systems would not have evolved so quickly. Has everyone forgot about the Breville pie maker?? An interesting list. Of the electronic gadgets, thousands of journalists in the early 1980s blessed the original noteboook pc - the Tandy 100. The size of A4 paper and light, three weeks on a set of batteries, an excellent keyboard, a modem. A pity Tandy did not make it DOS compatible. What's an Apple Powerbook 100 ? It's out of date - not much of a "gadget". Surely it has to be something simple / timeless - the tin opener, Swiss Army Knife, safety razor blade, wristwatch or the thing for taking stones out of horses hooves ? It has to be the mobile phone. No other single device has had such an effect on our way of living in such a short space of time. The ball point pen has got to be one of the most used and common gadgets ever. Also many might be grateful for the pocket calculator which was a great improvement over the slide rule. The Casio pocket calculator that played a simple game and made tinny noises was also a hot gadget in 1980. A true gadget, it could be carried around and shown off. All top 10 are electronic toys, so the list is probably a better reflection of the current high-tech obsession than anything else. I say this as the Swiss Army Knife only made No 20. Sinclair QL a machine far ahead of its time. The first home machine with a true multi-takings OS. Shame the marketing was so bad!!! Apple.. a triumph of fashion over... well everything else. Utter rubbish. Yes, the Apple laptop and Sony Walkman are classic gadgets. But to call the sextant and the marine chronometer 'gadgets' and rank them as less important than a TV remote control reveals a quite shocking lack of historical perspective. The former literally helped change the world by vastly improving navigation at sea. The latter is the seed around which the couch potato culture has developed. No competition. I'd also

put Apple's Newton and the first Palm Pilot there as the front runners for portable computing, and possibly the Toshiba Libretto for the same reason. I only wish that Vulcan Inc's Flipstart wasn't just vapourware otherwise it would be at the top. How did a laptop ever manage to beat off the challenge of the wristwatch or the telephone (mobile or otherwise)? What about radios and TVs? The swiss army knife. By far the most useful gadget. I got mine 12 years ago. Still wearing and using it a lot! It stood the test of time. Psion Organiser series 3, should be up there. Had a usable qwerty keyboard, removable storage, good set of apps and programmable. Case design was good (batteries in the hinge - a first, I think). Great product innovation. The first mobile PC was voted best gadget by readers of...err... mobile PC?! Why do you keep putting these obviously biased lists on your site? It's obviously the mobile phone or remote control, and readers of a less partisan publication would tell you that. The Motorola Startac should be Number One. Why? There will be mobile phones long after notebook computers and other gadgets are either gone or integrated in communications devices. The Psion series 3c! The first most practical way to carry all your info around... I too would back the Sinclair Spectrum - without this little beauty I would never have moved into the world of IT and earn the living that I do now. I'd have put the mobile phone high up the list. Probably a Nokia model. Sinclair Spectrum - 16k. It plugged into the tv. Games were rubbish but it gave me a taste for programming and that's what I do for a living now. I wish more modern notebooks -- even Apple's newest offerings -- were more like the PB100. Particularly disheartening is the demise of the trackball, which has given way to the largely useless "trackpad" which every notebook on the market today uses. They're invariably inaccurate, uncomfortable, and cumbersome to use. Congratulations to Apple, a deserved win!

Franz man seeks government help

Franz man seeks government help Franz Ferdinand frontman Alex Kapranos has called for more government help for musicians, while taking part in an Edinburgh Lectures discussion. "For any cultural output to thrive there needs to be some kind of state input to that as well," he said. But Kapranos warned against musicians being too closely linked with MPs, at the University of Edinburgh event. "I think the role of musicians is to question politicians rather than to go to bed with them," he said. Kapranos joined the prestigious lecture series to discuss Scotland's role in making 21st Century music. "There are elements of our musical output which require sustenance because they aren't self-sufficient," he said. "But so-called commercial music would benefit from investment as well." He warned musicians against being allied to a particular party, however. "I don't know if having tea with politicians is always a good idea." Kapranos and his Glasgow four-piece band have been nominated for five prizes at next week's Brit Awards, including best group and best album. Their self-titled debut album won last year's Mercury Music Prize and spawned three top 20 singles. He told the 300-strong audience at the University's Reid Hall that musicians should listen to a wide range of music and should not be restricted by stereotypes. "We say 'I like this'. Because I listen to Nirvana and Korn I am a troubled individual, I'm riddled with angst because I listen to Chopin and Debussy, I listen to Kylie Minogue and Scissor Sisters because I'm upbeat and I like to party, I listen to Wagner because I like the smell of napalm in the morning." Kapranos said there was a general "hostility" towards classical music, adding: "There is very little done to break that hostility other than Classic FM." He concluded: "We define ourselves as a nation by the way we encourage our creativity." Fellow speaker and classical composer James MacMillan agreed: "We need to rediscover our ability to listen." Previous speakers at the Edinburgh Lectures series have included former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and author Professor Stephen Hawking. Kapranos described his appearance on Wednesday as "more daunting by a long way" than their upcoming Brits performance. "I don't really care about the Brits," he said. "It's going to be great to go down but I have actually had to exercise part of my brain tonight." I think the government should do more to help up-and-coming artists be discovered by scrapping the entertainment licences for live venues. Also they should do more to help independent record labels have a louder voice within an industry dominated by commercialised major labels. Rather than expecting the government - i.e. the taxpayer - to fork out, why don't some of the megastars put something back in? Some of Britain's wealthiest people are musicians who have raked it in from albums, concerts etc. There are far more important demands on government funds. If they can fund football, why not fund music? Areas of the arts are funded by government and lottery grants, so why not music? We already have the opera receiving huge grants and it would clearly be beneficial for diversity in music to have the same opportunities in other areas of the music. The only problem would be how to judge what merits state cash. The government has enough problems funding schools and health services. If Alex Kapranos genuinely thinks a multi-billion pound industry should also have government funding then his own education was seriously lacking and more money should be put into that. As a Scot living in England, I appreciate the value of Scottish music and culture being a success, so I can see no problem with it! Franz Ferdinand, Travis and Snow Patrol are just recent examples of the success Scottish music can have in the world, so we should do what we Scots are good at and support our own goods! I think the issue is more fundamental: should the government be spending money on subsidising a multi-million pound industry when health and education are in such a sorry state? The answer is most definitely no. Those people who are lucky enough to pursue their passion to get their pay cheque shouldn't be looking for government subsidies. I know that if I was lucky enough to be able to pursue my dream of show jumping I would want to finance myself until I was in a position to pursue corporate sponsorship. Yes the government should fund music - it brings joy to the masses. There are already thousands of state-funded musicians out there sitting around, twiddling their thumbs on the "new deal". Getting the government even more involved would only waste money that could be put to better use. As long as the Government was funding real talent it would be a great move. I would hate to see more Pop Idol-type funding of music though, as it would only serve to reinforce the stereotypes that Alex talked about. Only if the proposals make financial sense. Franz Ferdinand must be paying serious amounts of tax on their record sales - if they'd had a government grant to get started they'd have more than paid it back by now, so the Treasury would be making far more than it paid out. However, the government has better things to spend its money on than to give charity to everyone who decides they're a musician. The government shouldn't "fund" music - it should "invest" in music and those investments should be treated like any other investment. I think the government needs to provide facilities and for young groups and bands to form and practise. The equipment is not cheap

and can be well beyond the means of many people. However, I do feel this should be the extent of their role, to provide the conditions for the talent to flourish and let it go from there. I do agree that the government should help to fund music but there is also a responsibility held by record companies! They generally always opt for the tried and tested and tend not to want to break any moulds or risk losing any money which ultimately, the directors are in the business for! If labels were more willing to put money forward towards smaller breakthrough acts then the government wouldn't have to fork out a great deal. Yeah, why not? Music should be government funded, particularly the work of modern composers and veteran bands/artists and stuff. Pop music pretty much rules the earth, so more attention should go to the other fraternities I agree with funding the arts to make it more accessible to the public but I am not convinced that pop music requires financial support from the taxpayer. There is a great deal of money generated through pop music - perhaps a tax on pop could be ploughed into the public performance of other forms of music for everyone to enjoy. Perhaps we could financially penalise really bad Pop Idol-style music - that is, the music industry sector without any artistic merit or originality whatsoever and that which is specifically designed to line the pockets of music producers. Call it a tax on music "pollution", if you like. Though I really like Franz Ferdinand, I have to disagree with Mr Kapranos. Once government gets their hand into the private sector, it will destroy the creative and possibly controversial avenues the artist pursues. Many years ago, this was the case with the US NEA, when the government started to question what was considered art for the money they were allotting. The solution Mr Kapranos should pursue would be privately-funded organizations, like Save the Music in the US.

Call for action on internet scam

Call for action on internet scam Phone companies are not doing enough to warn customers about internet "rogue-dialling" scams, according to premium phone line regulator Icstis. It has received 45,000 complaints in recent months about dial-up internet connections diverting to premium rate numbers without users' knowledge. Phone companies refuse to pay compensation because they say calls must be paid for. They must warn people earlier about possible fraud, Icstis said. People who use dial-up connections can be affected by the scams. Without realising, a program can be downloaded which diverts internet calls via a premium phone line. Victims often fail to notice until they receive an unusually high bill. Icstis spokesman Rob Dwight said: "Phone companies should get in touch with their customers sooner. "If my bill goes over the usual B£50 a month I want to know about it straight away - I don't want to be told when it's hit B£750." Phone companies had the systems in place to spot fraudulent activity and artificially-inflated traffic, he said. "We alert them to the numbers that we have under investigation and they should be looking out for these numbers," he added. Telecoms ombudsman Elizabeth France said: "Certainly I would not be surprised to find my credit card company phoning me if I do something out of the ordinary. "So I would expect phone companies to be looking to see if they can have a similar approach." The biggest phone company BT says it is doing what it can to monitor fraud and warn people about rogue dialling. Its advice to customers is to use call barring if they want to prevent calls to premium lines because, under the current system, once the call has been made there's little that can be done. Gavin Patterson, group managing director for BT Consumer, said "We do look at customer's calling patterns and we do make interventions when they are out of the ordinary. "We're looking at the moment at whether we can improve this." But as BT handled 180 million calls a day monitoring was "quite a task in itself", he added. The government has ordered a review of premium line services and is likely to say Icstis should have more power to deal with rogue diallers in future. At the moment, it cannot demand pay-outs on the behalf of customer - it can only close illegal services down. I use free anti-virus software (AVG) and free firewall protection (ZoneAlarm). Both of these tools have prevented unauthorised access and outgoing calls inadvertently and innocently caused by my daughter's love of music sites. How about ISPs informing all customers of such facilities? The responsibility clearly falls with the customer but many fall prey through simply not knowing how to avoid these issues. Ignorance is and always has been an expensive business. Does any one know what happens once this fraud has been committed and recognised? The phone companies pay the people who obtaining money fraudulently, so are these people followed up and prosecuted ? These diallers are mainly downloaded from sites offering illegal MP3s, porn and pirated software. If people didn't visit such sites they'd be considerably less at risk. Whatever happened to personal responsibility? It seems everyone has to be a 'victim' these days! Part of the blame has to rest with the manufacturers of home computer operating systems. A secure system should not allow a web page or email to download and install anything without the user's knowledge. These scams are illegal and telephone companies should have nothing to do with them. They should refuse to pay money over to the perpetrators. Or are they themselves receiving such good returns that it is in their interest to keep the scam going? Why don't BT et al block all premium numbers by default and only turn it off at the customer's request? To anyone who falls foul of this scam - refuse to pay your telephone provider for these calls. After you notify your telephone provider of these fraudulent transactions, they cannot insist on you paying the bill. To do so would be to knowingly assist the fraudsters to commit the fraud. No customers have yet been taken to court for refusing to pay these bills. Disable or remove your modem and use broadband instead - then you have nothing to worry about. Or buy some decent firewall software and anti-virus. You would not walk out in the freezing cold without a coat - you would not drive your car without any insurance - so why not protect your PC? Stop blaming the phone companies - it's not their fault! I was very impressed with our phone company recently. I had kept ringing a hotline number for Kylie tickets and next day they rang back to ask if I was aware there were 40-odd calls to the same number. Great service. And I got the tickets as well! I have a colleague who has fallen victim to this kind of scam. He informed the phone company about it, they subsequently put a block on premium rate numbers. Three months later another huge bill of over B£1,000 came in - the block apparently didn't work and he still has to pay for it, even though a block was in place. Phone companies are probably quite happy for their customers to be hit with a huge bill, otherwise they'd be taking extra steps to prevent this kind of problem. I have been scammed of B£139. The operator will do nothing about this and, to add insult to injury, I was charged VAT by the government. Premium rate numbers have been subject to various scams ever since they were invented. One example was where thieves would set up a premium rate number and then dial it day and night from phones whose quarterly bills were never paid. The telephone company was the victim here and you can bet that loophole

was blocked very quickly. I know people who have run up large bills, despite being IT-literate. From talking to BT in Belfast, I believe that they will shortly be giving out a free application that can stop you dialling expensive numbers without knowing. It's not the fault of phone companies, and at last they are doing something about it. It's about time that the profiteering by the 'legitimate' phone companies came to an end, mainly by doing away with dial-up altogether and bring broadband down to the same price as dial-up! Not only will this ruin things for the dialler scammers but also allow people to update and upgrade their security more easily and quickly. I haven't "fallen victim to a rogue-dialling scam" but I think you're seriously remiss in not pointing out that the vast majority of these scams arise from people trying to access services purporting to provide free pornography. In most cases the user is entirely at fault, which is probably why the telephone companies are rightly unwilling to refund them. My telephone supplier did not inform me that my monthly bill had risen from its normal B£3 to B£5, to B£320. This was because of the scam. They simply billed me. What particularly galls me, over and above having over B£300 stolen, is that the supplier and the government (through VAT) are profiting from this crime and will not reimburse me their portion of my losses. How about an automatic monthly cap of say B£20 on premium rate calls that you would have to contact your provider to have lifted? That way you could use legitimate premium rate numbers while limiting fraudulent usage. At least any disputed amount would be limited, far easier for a telecoms operator to write off B£20 than it is B£750. A few years back I was also the target of such scams but thank God I have already upgraded to broadband and nothing was connected to my modem so all I heard was the sound of an attempted connection. How about home users take some responsibility and ensure their anti-virus and firewall software is up to date? That should prevent the vast majority of these scams.

Parry puts Gerrard 'above money'

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There have been several highs and lows during his time in charge at Anfield - and he had a busy summer, overseeing the arrival of new manager Rafael Benitez and managing to hold on to Steven Gerrard. On the subject of Liverpool's captain and prize asset, Parry revealed Real Madrid did ask for an option on the England midfield man during negotiations for striker Fernando Morientes. He said: "They were looking for ways of saying they got more out of the deal for Fernando Morientes, but the response to Real Madrid was the same - Steven is not for sale." But when asked if Gerrard would be a Liverpool player on the first day of next season, Parry said: "I sincerely hope he will be. Steven knows my views. He knows Rafa's views. "We have re-affirmed recently to Steven that we are trying to build a team around him. We crave success as much as he does. We know he's ambitious and nobody can argue with that. "I think Steven would dearly love to win things with Liverpool more than he'd like to do anything else. "We all want to see progress by next season. He's not alone in that. There are a lot of other players who feel the same, so we all have a common aim." It is expected Chelsea will test Liverpool with a B£30m-plus bid in the summer - but Parry claims he will be in no mood to listen. "There have been a lot of open secrets about Steven, most of which have been complete myths. It is suggested we had a deal tied up last summer. We didn't had an offer last summer," Parry explained. "We had told Chelsea that as far as we were concerned he was not for sale and we didn't want to sell him. In reality it didn't go beyond that. "Maybe there will be an offer in the summer. Maybe there won't. "Our position is we want Steven to stay, but we are also realistic enough and have enough respect for Steven - and he has enough respect for us - to know that it is his decision that will be crucial. "You are not going to keep a player like Steven against his will. That just doesn't work, but any idea we are going to accept offers for Steven and then tell him 'by the way we've decided to sell you' is not on the agenda. You can forget that." Parry is currently in the process of finalising funding for Liverpool's new stadium in Stanley Park, which is set to open in 2007. And he confessed Arsenal's B£100m deal with Emirates to sponsor their new ground - complete with naming rights - has given the Anfield club serious food for thought. He said: "I have to say historically it is something I have been against, and I have been on record as saying that, but I think the size of the Arsenal deal is a real eye-opener. "I would say in the past deals have been done frankly far too cheaply and it just hasn't even been worth contemplating. "But the Arsenal deal is the sort of deal that causes you to draw breath and say 'wow - that's interesting.' "My personal point of view is that I would find it a hell of a lot more palatable than a shared stadium." Some Liverpool fans would find such a move highly controversial, but Parry countered: "I recognise it would be an emotive issue for many supporters, but you look at the amount of money available and it could go into the team. "If it was the right partner how strong an issue is it? Time will tell. "I think the stadium will always be Anfield, not least because of where it is, but do we need to investigate the possibilities of sponsorship? I think it would be remiss not to. "That's not to say we have made a decision that we will go down that road, but I think it is clearly something we have to explore." On the subject of possible new investment, Parry revealed Liverpool are still in negotiations with a mystery investor, with rumours of interest from the Middle East. That prompted the withdrawal of tycoon Steve Morgan, who got frustrated by failed bids and what he claimed was indecision by the board. He also accused Liverpool of using him as "a stalking horse" to attract other bids, but Parry explained: "Steve has never been used as a stalking horse. There's no need, and that is not the way we do business. "We had discussions with Steve over the course of 2004. I think we came close to concluding a deal in the summer but it didn't happen. "Quite genuinely, the new interest did appear relatively late in the day just prior to the AGM in December, and as I have said it was of such potential magnitude, and that potential is so exciting, we felt we had to evaluate it. We are still evaluating it. "Steve's interest was taken very much on its own merits. His enthusiasm for the club is there for all to see and who knows what the next few months will hold? "The door isn't closed on anything. We had a perfectly sensible dialogue with Steve

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Apple laptop is 'greatest gadget'

Apple laptop is 'greatest gadget' The Apple Powerbook 100 has been chosen as the greatest gadget of all time, by US magazine Mobile PC. The 1991 laptop was chosen because it was one of the first "lightweight" portable computers and helped define the layout of all future notebook PCs. The magazine has compiled an all-time top 100 list of gadgets, which includes the Sony Walkman at number three and the 1956 Zenith remote control at two. Gadgets needed moving parts and/or electronics to warrant inclusion. The magazine specified that gadgets also needed to be a "self-contained apparatus that can be used on its own, not a subset of another device". "In general we included only items that were potentially mobile," said the magazine. "In the end, we tried to get to the heart of what really makes a gadget a gadget," it concluded. The oldest "gadget" in the top 100 is the abacus, which the magazine dates at 190 A.D., and put in 60th place. Other pre-electronic gadgets in the top 100 include the sextant from 1731 (59th position), the marine chronometer from 1761 (42nd position) and the Kodak Brownie camera from 1900 (28th position). The Tivo personal video recorder is the newest device to make the top 10, which also includes the first flash mp3 player (Diamound Multimedia), as well as the first "successful" digital camera (Casio QV-10) and mobile phone (Motorola Startac). The most popular gadget of the moment, the Apple iPod, is at number 12 in the list while the first Sony transistor radio is at number 13. Sony's third entry in the top 20 is the CDP-101 CD player from 1983. "Who can forget the crystalline, hiss-free blast of Madonna's Like A Virgin emanating from their first CD player?" asked the magazine. Karl Elsener's knife, the Swiss Army Knife from 1891, is at number 20 in the list. Gadgets which could be said to feature surprisngly low down in the list include the original telephone (23rd), the Nintendo GameBoy (25th), and the Pulsar quartz digital watch (36th). The list also contains plenty of oddities: the Pez sweet dispenser (98th), 1980s toy Tamagotchi (86th) and the bizarre Ronco inside the shell egg scrambler (84th). Why worry about mobile phones. Soon they will be subsumed into the PDA's / laptops etc. What about the Marine Chronometer? Completely revolutionised navigation for boats and was in use for centuries. For it's time, a technological marvel! Sony Net Minidisc! It paved the way for more mp3 player to explode onto the market. I always used my NetMD, and could not go anywhere without it. A laptop computer is not a gadget! It's a working tool! The Sinclair Executive was the world's first pocket calculator. I think this should be there as well. How about the clockwork radio? Or GPS? Or a pocket calculator? All these things are useful to real people, not just PC magazine editors. Are the people who created this list insane ? Surely the most important gadget of the modern age is the mobile phone? It has revolutionalised communication, which is more than can be said for a niche market laptop. From outside the modern age, the marine chronometer is the single most important gadget, without which modern transportation systems would not have evolved so quickly. Has everyone forgot about the Breville pie maker?? An interesting list. Of the electronic gadgets, thousands of journalists in the early 1980s blessed the original noteboook pc - the Tandy 100. The size of A4 paper and light, three weeks on a set of batteries, an excellent keyboard, a modem. A pity Tandy did not make it DOS compatible. What's an Apple Powerbook 100 ? It's out of date - not much of a "gadget". Surely it has to be something simple / timeless - the tin opener, Swiss Army Knife, safety razor blade, wristwatch or the thing for taking stones out of horses hooves ? It has to be the mobile phone. No other single device has had such an effect on our way of living in such a short space of time. The ball point pen has got to be one of the most used and common gadgets ever. Also many might be grateful for the pocket calculator which was a great improvement over the slide rule. The Casio pocket calculator that played a simple game and made tinny noises was also a hot gadget in 1980. A true gadget, it could be carried around and shown off. All top 10 are electronic toys, so the list is probably a better reflection of the current high-tech obsession than anyhting else. I say this as the Swiss Army Knife only made No 20. Sinclair QL a machine far ahead of its time. The first home machine with a true multi-takings OS. Shame the marketing was so bad!!! Apple.. a triumph of fashion over... well everything else. Utter rubbish. Yes, the Apple laptop and Sony Walkman are classic gadgets. But to call the sextant and the marine chronometer 'gadgets' and rank them as less important than a TV remote control reveals a quite shocking lack of historical perspective. The former literally helped change the world by vastly improving navigation at sea. The latter is the seed around which the couch potato culture has developed. No competition. I'd also put Apple's Newton and the first Palm Pilot there as the front runners for portable computing, and possibly the Toshiba Libretto for the same reason. I only wish that Vulcan Inc's Flipstart wasn't just vapourware otherwise it would be at the top. How did a laptop ever manage to beat off the challenge of the wristwatch or the telephone (mobile or otherwise)? What about radios and TVs? The swiss army knife. By far the most useful gadget. I got mine 12 years ago. Still wearing and using it a lot! It stood the test of time. Psion Organiser series 3, should be up there. Had a usable qwerty keyboard, removable storage, good set of apps and programmable. Case design was good (batteries in the hinge - a first, I think). Great product innovation. The first mobile PC was voted best gadget by readers of...err... mobile PC?! Why do you keep putting these obviously biased lists on your site? It's obviously the mobile phone or remote control, and readers of a less partisan publication would tell you that. The Motorola Startac should be Number One. Why? There will be mobile phones long after notebook computers and other gadgets are either gone or integrated in communications devices. The Psion series 3c! The first most practical way to carry all your info around... I too would back the Sinclair

Spectrum - without this little beauty I would never have moved into the world of IT and earn the living that I do now. I'd have put the mobile phone high up the list. Probably a Nokia model. Sinclair Spectrum - 16k. It plugged into the tv. Games were rubbish but it gave me a taste for programming and that's what I do for a living now. I wish more modern notebooks -- even Apple's newest offerings -- were more like the PB100. Particularly disheartening is the demise of the trackball, which has given way to the largely useless "trackpad" which every notebook on the market today uses. They're invariably inaccurate, uncomfortable, and cumbersome to use. Congratulations to Apple, a deserved win!

Parry relishes Anfield challenge

Parry relishes Anfield challenge BBC Sport reflects on the future for Liverpool after our exclusive interview with chief executive Rick Parry. Chief executive Parry is the man at the helm as Liverpool reach the most crucial point in their recent history. Parry has to deliver a new 60,000-seat stadium in Stanley Park by 2007 amid claims of costs spiralling above B£120m. He is also searching for an investment package of a size and stature that will restore Liverpool to their place at European football's top table. But it is a challenge that appears to sit easily with Parry, who has forged a reputation as one of football's most respected administrators since his days at the fledgling Premier League. Liverpool have not won the championship since 1990, a fact that causes deep discomfort inside Anfield as they attempt to muscle in on the top three of Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal. Throw in the small matter of warding off every top club in world football as they eye captain Steven Gerrard, and you can see Parry is a man with a lot on his plate. But in the comfort of a conference room deep inside Liverpool's heartbeat - The Kop end - Parry spoke to us with brutal honesty about the crucial months ahead. He only dodged one question - when asked to reveal the name of the mystery investor currently courting Liverpool, a polite smile deflected the inquiry. But to his credit, he met everything else head on in measured tones that underscore the belief that Liverpool still mean business. By business he means becoming title challengers again, and locking the pieces together that will help return the trophy to Liverpool is Parry's mission. Parry has already successfully put one of those planks in place in the form of new manager Rafael Benitez. And his enthusiasm for the Spaniard's personality and methods is an indication of his clear feeling that he has struck gold. Benitez's early work has given Parry renewed optimism about the years ahead. But it remains a massive task at a club with a unique history and expectations. This will not come as news to Parry, a lifelong Liverpool supporter, but his quiet determination suggests he is no mood to be found wanting... Captain Gerrard is central to Liverpool's plans and Parry's insistence that all offers will be refused is a firm statement of intent. As ever, the player will have the final say, and Parry acknowledges that, but he is determined to provide the framework and environment for Liverpool and Gerrard to flourish. In terms of the search for new investment, Hawkpoint were appointed as advisors to flush out interest in March 2004. Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin Shiniwatra came and went, while the most serious statement of intent came from tycoon and lifelong fan Steve Morgan. Morgan had a succession of bids rejected, having come close in the summer only for talks to break down over potential costs for the new stadium. BBC Sport understands Morgan is still ready and willing to invest in Liverpool, and Parry has kept the door ajar despite currently seeking investment elsewhere. Morgan, however, has had no formal contact with Liverpool or their advisors since last December, blaming indecision at board level as he publicly withdrew his B£70m offer. He was also convinced his interest was being used to lure in others, so any new approach would now have to come from Liverpool. Morgan will certainly not be making another call. So speculation continues about the new benefactor, with trails leading to the Middle East and America, but all met with an understandable veil of secrecy from Anfield. Parry meanwhile sees the new ground as crucial to Liverpool's future, but is refusing to become emotionally attached to the idea. He is determined the ground will only be built on an affordable basis and will not make future Liverpool management hostages to the new stadium. Parry will pull back the moment the figures do not stack up, but there has been a vital new development in North London that has re-shaped Liverpool's thinking. Liverpool have publicly refused to entertain the idea of stadium sponsorship and potential naming rights - but the realism of Arsenal's stunning B£100m deal for their new Emirates Stadium at Ashburton has changed the landscape. Parry labelled the deal "an eye-opener" and admits Liverpool would be missing a trick not to explore the possibilities. He knows some traditionalist Liverpool fans will reel at any attempt to call the new stadium anything other than just 'Anfield', but the maths of modern-day football decree that multi-millions for stadium and team could ease the pain. I would take B£50m if we had no investment, but if we did, keep him. As for the stadium, if it gets us cash what difference does it make really? B£50m for Gerrard? I don't care who you are, the Directors would take the money and it is the way it should be. We cannot let that sum of money go, despite Gerrard's quality. Through a cleverly worded statement, the club has effectively forced Gerrard to publicly make the decision for himself, which I think is the right thing to do. Critical time for Liverpool with regards to Gerrard. Ideally we would want to secure his future to the club for the long term. I am hoping he doesn't walk out of the club like Michael Owen did for very little cash. B£50m realistically would allow Rafa to completely rebuild the squad, however, if we can afford to do this AND keep Gerrard we will be better for it. I would however be happy with Gerrard's transfer for any fee over B£35m. Parry's statements are clever in that any future Gerrard transfer cannot be construed as a lack of ambition by the club to not try and keep their best players. Upping the ante is another smart move by Parry. I would keep Gerrard. No amount of money could replace his obvious love of the club and determination to succeed. The key is if Gerrard comes out and says that he is happy. Clearly, if he isn't, then we would be foolish not to sell. The worrying thing is who would you buy (or who would come) pending possible non-Champions League football.

Be careful how you code

Be careful how you code A new European directive could put software writers at risk of legal action, warns former programmer and technology analyst Bill Thompson. If it gets its way, the Dutch government will conclude its presidency of the European Union by pushing through a controversial measure that has been rejected by the European Parliament, lacks majority support from national governments and will leave millions of European citizens in legal limbo and facing the possibility of court cases against them. If the new law was about border controls, defence or even the new constitution, then our TV screens would be full of experts agonising over the impact on our daily lives. Sadly for those who will be directly affected, the controversy concerns the patenting of computer programs, a topic that may excite the bloggers, campaigning groups and technical press but does not obsess Middle Britain. After all, how much fuss can you generate about the Directive on the Patentability of Computer-Implemented Inventions, and the way it amends Article 52 of the 1973 European Patent Convention? Yet if the new directive is nodded through at the next meeting of one of the EU's ministerial councils, as seems likely, it will allow programs to be patented in Europe just as they are in the US. Many observers of the computing scene, including myself, think the results will be disastrous for small companies, innovative programmers and the free and open source software movement. It will let large companies patent all sorts of ideas and give legal force to those who want to limit their competitors' use of really obvious ideas. In the US you cannot build a system that stores customer credit card details so that they can pay without having to re-enter them unless Amazon lets you, because they hold the patent on "one-click" online purchase. It is a small invention, but Amazon made it to the patent office first and now owns it. We are relatively free from this sort of thing over here, but perhaps not for long. The new proposals go back to 2002, although argument about patentability of software and computer-implemented inventions has been going on since at least the mid-1980s. They have come to a head now after a year in which proposals were made, endorsed by the Council of Ministers, radically modified by the European Parliament and then re-presented in their original form. Some national governments seem to be aware of the problems. Poland has rejected the proposal and Germany's main political parties have opposed it, but there is not enough opposition to guarantee their rejection. Early in December the British government held a consultation meeting with those who had commented on the proposals. Science Minister Lord Sainsbury went along to listen and outline the UK position, but according to those present, it was embarrassing to see how little the minister and his officials actually understood the issues concerned. The draft Directive is being put through the council as what is called an "A" item and can only be approved or rejected. No discussion or amendment is allowed. So why should we be worried? First, there is the abuse of the democratic process involved in disregarding the views of the parliament and abandoning all of their carefully argued amendments. This goes to the heart of the European project, and even those who do not care about software or patents should be worried. If coders are treated like this today, who is to say that it will not be you tomorrow? More directly, once software patents are granted then any programmer will have to worry that the code they are writing is infringing someone else's patent. This is not about stealing software, as code is already protected by copyright. Patents are not copyright, but something much stronger. A patent gives the owner the right to stop anyone else using their invention, even if the other person invented it separately. I have never, to my shame, managed to read Lord Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. If it was pointed out that one of my articles contained a substantial chunk of the poem then I could defend myself in court by claiming that I had simply made it up and it was coincidence. The same does not hold for a patent. If I sit down this afternoon and write a brilliant graphics compression routine and it happens to be the same as the LZW algorithm used in GIF files, then I am in trouble under patent law, at least in the US. Coincidence is no defence. The proposed directive is supported by many of the major software companies, but this is hardly surprising since most of them are US-based and they have already had to cope with a legal environment that allows patents. They have legal departments and, more crucially, patents of their own which they can trade or cross-license with other patent holders. Even this system breaks down, of course, as Microsoft found out last year when they initially lost a case brought by Eolas which claimed that Internet Explorer (and other browsers) infringed an Eolas patent. That one was eventually thrown out, but only after months of uncertainty and millions of dollars. But small companies, and the free and open software movement do not have any patents to trade. Much of the really useful software we use every day, programs like the Apache web server, the GNU/Linux operating system and the fearsomely popular Firefox browser, is developed outside company structures by people who do not have legal departments to check for patent infringements. The damage to software will not happen overnight, of course. If the directive goes through it has to be written into national laws and then there will be a steady stream of legal actions against small companies and open source products. Eventually someone will decide to attack Linux directly, probably with some secret funding from one or two large players. The new directive will limit innovation by forcing programmers to spend time checking for patent infringements or simply avoiding working in potentially competitive areas. And it will damage Europe's computer industry. We can only hope that the Council of Ministers has the integrity and strength to reject this bad law. Bill Thompson is a regular commentator on the BBC World Service programme Go Digital.

How the Academy Awards flourished

How the Academy Awards flourished The 77th annual Academy Awards are taking place on 27 February with the stars of the movie-making world once again holding their breath to discover who will be showered with the honours this year. But from humble beginnings, how did the modern day extravaganza become the behemoth it is today? HOW IT ALL STARTED The first Academy Awards were handed out in 1929 at a comparatively low-key dinner held at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel - just over the road from their modern day home. Just 250 guests attended with ticket prices at \$5. The first film to win was Wings, which starred Clara Bow in the only silent movie to win the big award. For the first 10 years or so, the winners list was handed to the newspapers so they could publish them at 11pm, but in 1940 the winners were published in the Los Angeles Times at 8.45pm meaning guests entering the ceremony knew already knew the results. As a result the sealed envelope system was introduced, leading to the secrecy and suspense-filled night that happens today. WHEN AND WHERE The tradition of holding the awards at a banquet continued until 1942 but with increasing interest came a growing guest list and it became impractical to host it as a dinner. The ceremonies were then transferred to theatres with the famous Grauman's Chinese Theatre the first to host the expanded event. Other venues included the

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and the Shrine Auditorium. They are now held at the Kodak Theatre, which opened in 2002 just across the road from its original home and holds 6,000 people. Until 1954 they were held on a Thursday, then swapped around from Monday to Wednesday before Sunday night was settled on, although the month swapped from May to April to March and now its current month of February. The first televised ceremony was in 1953, with Bob Hope as the MC. WHO WAS OSCAR? There is no solid evidence as to how the trophy became to be known as Oscar. One popular story is that Academy librarian Margaret Herrick said the statue looked like her uncle Oscar. A journalist apparently overheard this conversation and used the phrase in an article. The first time it is thought to have been used in print was when columnist Sidney Skolsky used it to describe Katherine Hepburn's first best actress win in 1934. The Academy officially adopted the nickname in 1939. The trophy was designed by MGM art director Cedric Gibbons. Since its inception 2,530 Oscars have been handed out. In support of the war effort, the Academy handed out plaster Oscar statuettes during WWII. After the war, winners exchanged the plaster awards for the real thing. Fifty-five statues were stolen in en route to the awards in 2000, 52 were recovered nine days later. Winners were unaffected as a new batch was rushed out. WHO SITS IN JUDGEMENT? The Academy was set up in 1927 as a non-profit organisation with 36 members from different film disciplines. Douglas Fairbanks Sr was the first president and oversaw the first awards. There are now 5,700 members of the Academy - with membership by invitation only to those who are seen to have achieved distinction in the movies and are therefore seen as fit to judge their peers. Some of the criteria for admittance includes: film credits that reflect the high standards of the Academy, receipt of an Academy Award nomination, achievement of unique distinction, earning of special merit, or making an outstanding contribution to film. THE STARS WHO LEFT EMPTY-HANDED While many of the biggest films and movie-makers have been honoured by the Academy, there is still surprise at those that did not receive any nominations that later went on to become classics. Among the overlooked films were Hobson's Choice, Dirty Harry, The 39 Steps, The Searchers and King Kong. Actors that failed to win for their iconic roles included Al Jolson in the Jazz Singer (1927), Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca (1944), Gene Kelly in Singing in the Rain (1952) and Henry Fonda in 12 Angry Men (1957). Alfred Hitchcock also failed to win an award despite five nominations. His enduring influence on the horror genre was finally recognised with an honorary gong in 1968. THE SHOW ALWAYS GOES ON Not even war has halted the glittering Hollywood event. There were calls for it to be cancelled in 2003 during the war in Iraq, but as it didn't stop during World War II or the Vietnam war. Documentary winner Michael Moore ensured nobody forgot about the Iraq war though and used his acceptance speech to criticise the American invasion. The ceremony was muted with the glitz turned down and many female stars opting for demure dark dresses. The ceremony has been postponed on three occasions. Los Angeles floods in 1938 saw it put back a week. The death of Martin Luther King saw it postponed for two days in 1968 as a mark of respect and there was a 24-hour delay following the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan. CONTROVERSIES AND OTHER GAFFES Three people have refused Oscars, including actor George C Scott who said the whole thing was "demeaning". Writer Dudley Nichols refused his Academy Award in 1935 for his screenplay for The Insider because the Writers' Guild was striking at the time. Marlon Brando turned down his best actor Oscar for The Godfather in 1973 in protest as Hollywood's apparent discrimination against Native American people. He sent along a woman called Sacheen Littlefeather to collect his award. She was later revealed to be Native American actress Maria Cruz. The following year Robert Opal interrupted proceedings when he streaked, flashing a peace sign as well as everything else. The TV network managed to pan away and avoid too much nudity. Opal was murdered in 1979. Frank Capra was the butt of one major gaffe in 1934 when the host opened out best picture envelope and declared "come on up and get it, Frank" to which Frank Capra bounded up to the stage before realising that he had meant Frank Lloyd had won for Cavalcade. Capra vowed he would never to go the awards again but went the following year to collect his award for It Happened One Night.

What the election should really be about?

What the election should really be about? A general election is the best chance most pressure groups get to make a real impact on government policy. Here is how six leading lobbies plan to make sure their cause is being debated ahead of an expected Spring poll. We've called for the state pension to be increased from B£79.60 to the pensioner credit guarantee level of B£105.45. That's what we're calling for. Many pensioners are disadvantaged by the current system. If we've got one in five pensioners below the poverty line, we've got to make it more generous or have these people living in poverty. We've drawn up a pensioners' manifesto. This will be sent to each of the candidates in the 659 constituencies. They will be asked which of the top five issues, including the pension issue, they would support. Once we've got their responses we will publish the results within the constituencies and nationally as well. It's our way of putting the politicians on notice. We are trying to get across the fact that there are 11m voters over 60 in the country, they are more likely to vote than other sections of society and thirdly they are true swing voters. Before 1997 most pensioners voted Conservative. In 1997 and 2001 they voted Labour. But there is no guarantee they will vote for a Labour government this time around. They cannot take that vote for granted. Pensions generally will certainly be a big election issue even though the government has postponed the publication of Adair Turner's full report into the issue. He said the UK had one of the least generous pensions systems in the developed world. That the government takes seriously the impact of aviation on the environment. We haven't worked out specific plans but I imagine we will lobby political parties and incumbent MPs. Various local groups will do that in their particular areas and we will provide a national briefing. We don't have any large demonstrations planned but they can't be ruled out. It is hard to say whether we will be successful. We have got the issue in the public consciousness to an extent, but it is difficult to say whether an election will raise its importance in the public mind or whether it will be pushed out by big issues like Iraq. Repealing the Hunting Bill. We are challenging the use of the Parliament Act 1949 in a High Court action. We are hoping to hear in the New Year. Whichever way the court rules the other side will appeal so we expect it to fall plumb in electioneering time. When the ban comes into force on 18 February we will be going to the European Court because no compensation is being paid. So there's a lot of legal territory to go. We are trying to engage with the ministers by demonstrating and talking. Whatever intelligence we get we will try to turn up and speak to whoever it is. (Rural affairs minister) Alun Michael has avoided us and cancelled engagements so that makes it difficult. It is

not intimidatory - on the whole it is groups of angry housewives. Of course there is an element of shouting because people are angry but there is no violence because that does not achieve anything. It will fall plumb in the run up to the most important general election Tony Blair will ever face. It's exactly what the prime minister did not want. He wanted the issue off the table until after the election. People using live animals as targets for sport both here and abroad. The reason for including abroad is because of trophy hunting. It is another sort of form of shooting for sport. The principle is the same whether it's a tiger or a pheasant. We will widely publicise what's happening in relation to trophy hunting. We will publicise the darker aspects of the target animal industry the UK. We will seek to get pledges from individual MPs and would-be MPs saying that they are against the use of animals as targets for sports. We would like the support of political parties but I think a general election is very much to do with pledges MPs make to their electors. With hunting we had many MPs who were happy to say they were against it. I think what we will get is a very real climbing up the agenda. Whether or not we will get a ban I am not sure. But it will mobilise public opinion. Everything we do will reduce animal suffering and in time that will lead to a ban. The issue that we think is the most important for this election is choice. The language of consumerism is very commonplace in government and across the political spectrum. Choice as an ideology is beginning to be the privatisation of this decade. It's become an issue in itself but what's really missing from the debate is the consumer's choice in that. Choice is not choice at all if all you have to choose from is two failing schools. We have seen so many pensions mis-selling scandals and in the pensions industry there's a maximum of choice but a minimum quality in that. We want choice on the consumer's terms - that means clear and accessible information to operate that choice. Firstly, we have our website. It features our campaigns and changes every day. Secondly through our 700,000 members who communicate with us. Thirdly through the media and also what we will be doing is holding a pre-election conference. We will invite the opinion formers, MPs, journalists and others. The idea is that we open up communications between members of the public and the politicians. I think we will be successful. It's very much the language being used by the main political parties. Politicians on all sides are very sensitive to this issue they want to be seen to be responding to this issue. Fuel duty is a large part of operational costs for road haulage workers. We have been hearing about this proposed increase of 1.92p per litre that Gordon Brown has been postponing and postponing. Tuppence does not sound like a great deal but every year if you operate one vehicle that's an increase of about B£750. If you're running 10 vehicles it's obviously 10 times that. If fuel duty does rise we will be absolutely horrified. There will be a huge effect throughout the industry and I would not be surprised if you see widespread demonstrations. What it will mean is there will be a number of firms going out of business. We will continue to do what we have always done we keep the issue in the trade press. Regrettably it's one of those stories that it is getting harder to get into the national press. Whatever we do, the public don't like lorries - they see us as a complaining minority. But they don't realise that when you see a car on the road it is probably going to work, when you see a lorry it's already at work.

New consoles promise big problems

New consoles promise big problems Making games for future consoles will require more graphic artists and more money, an industry conference has been told. Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo will debut their new consoles at the annual E3 games Expo in Los Angeles in May. These so-called "next generation" machines will be faster than current consoles, and capable of displaying much higher-quality visuals. For gamers, this should make for better, more immersive games. In a pre-recorded video slot during Microsoft's keynote address at the Game Developers Conference, held last week in San Francisco, famed director James Cameron revealed he is making a game in tandem with his next film - believed to be Battle Angel Alita. The game's visual quality would be "like a lucid dream," said Mr Cameron. But numerous speakers warned that creating such graphics will require more artists, and so next generation console games will be much more expensive to develop. The first new console, Microsoft's Xbox 2, is not expected to reach the shops until the end of 2005. Games typically take at least 18 months to create, however, so developers are grappling with the hardware today. According to Robert Walsh, head of Brisbane-based game developer Krome Studios, next generation games will cost between \$10-25m to make, with teams averaging 80 staff in size taking two years to complete a title. Such sums mean it will be difficult for anyone to start a new game studio, said Mr Walsh. "If you're a start-up, I doubt that a publisher is going to walk in and give you a cheque for \$10m, however good you are," he said. Mr Walsh suggested that new studios should make games for mobile phones and handheld consoles like the Sony PSP and the Nintendo DS, since they are cheaper and easier to create than console games. One developer bucking the trend towards big art teams is Will Wright, the creator of the best-selling The Sims games. The founder of California's Maxis studio surprised the conference with a world exclusive preview of his next game, Spore. Spore will allow players to experiment with the evolution of digital creatures. Starting with an amoeba-sized organism, the player will guide the physical development of their creature by selecting how its limbs, jaws and other body parts evolve. Eventually the creature will become capable of establishing cities, trading and fighting, and even building space ships. Advanced players will visit the home planets of creatures created by other Spore players. These worlds will be automatically swapped across the Internet. Mr Wright said that enabling players to devise and share their creatures would make them care more about the game. "I don't want to put the player in the role of Luke Skywalker or Frodo Baggins - I want them to be George Lucas or Dr Seuss," explained Mr Wright. Few games have hinted at the scope of Spore, but Mr Wright explained that he has nevertheless kept his development team small by hiring expert programmers. Instead of employing lots of artists to create 3D models of the digital creatures, Spore generates and displays the creatures according to rules devised by the programmers. "The thing I am coming away with [from the conference] is that next generation content is going to be really expensive, and creating it will drive the smaller players out of the market," said Mr Wright. "I'd like to offer an alternative to that." New development tools will be another important aid in making next generation games, and dozens of companies demonstrated their latest products at the conference. Oxford-based Natural Motion launched Endorphin v2.0, which enables artists to direct a 3D 'virtual actor'. The actor is realistically modelled according to the laws of physics. Endorphin simulates how the actor falls down stairs, for instance, or crumples up after a gunshot. Artists can blend together these visual sequences, and include the results in their games. The process is much quicker than having an artist animate each movement by

hand, and so lessens the need for larger art teams. Another British company aiming to reduce the workload of artists is Manchester start-up Genemation. Its latest tool, GenCrowd, enables artists to create unique, photo-realistic human faces for games involving lots of people. GenCrowd works by blending together elements of an in-built supply of stock faces of differing ages and ethnicities. The software can create up to 2,000 new heads an hour. One area not yet dominated by graphical blockbusters is mobile phone games. Even the latest phones are not as powerful as the consoles of a decade ago, so smaller teams of half a dozen people can still create complete games for the devices. The Game Developers Conference included a special two-day summit dedicated to creating mobile games. A niche attraction for a few dozen conference attendees when it began five years ago, GDC's Mobile summit this year drew several hundred delegates. Mobile games are a fast-growing sector because newer phones have better graphics and sound, and are thus more suitable for playing games. Furthermore, the adoption of mobile phones continues to spread across the world. It's predicted that by 2006 two billion people will own a mobile phone. The growing importance of mobile gaming was reflected by a keynote given by John Batter, general manager at EA Mobile. EA Mobile is a division of Electronic Arts, the biggest games publisher. Until recently Electronic Arts had been dismissive of games for phones. "The last time you checked, EA wasn't in this business," Mr Batter admitted. But he said EA now planned on dominating the market by releasing mobile versions of its most popular franchises. EA plans to release up to 20 mobile games over the next 12 months. The first will be a version of its Need for Speed racing game, created by EA Mobile's 30-person development team. Mr Batter predicted that by 2006, mobile phones would be capable of running games of comparable quality to those on Sony's upcoming PSP handheld console. Owain Bennallack is the editor of Develop magazine.

No half measures with Half-Life 2

No half measures with Half-Life 2 Could Half-Life 2 possibly live up to the hype? After almost two years of tantalising previews and infuriating delays it's safe to say that this is the most highly-anticipated computer game of all time. Fortunately, it doesn't merely live up to its promise, but exceeds it. No-one who plays the finished product will wonder why it took so long. The impression is of a game that has been endlessly refined to get as close to perfection as could realistically be hoped. All the money - or indeed time - is on the screen. The player sees things through the eyes of Gordon Freeman, the bespectacled scientist who starred in the original 1998 Half-Life. Having survived that skirmish in an desolate monster-infested research facility, he's back in another foreboding troublespot - the enigmatic City 17. It has the look of a beautiful Eastern European city, but as soon as your train pulls in to the station, it's clear that all is not well here. Sinister police patrol the unkempt streets, and the oppressive atmosphere clobbers you like a sledgehammer. A casual smattering of the nightmarish creatures from the first game makes this an even less pleasant place to be. You are herded around like a prisoner and have to mingle with a few freedom-fighting civilians to gather information and progress in your task. It is not immediately explained what your objectives are, nor precisely why everything is so ravaged. Finding out step-by-step is all part of the experience, although you never fully get to understand what it was all about. That does not really matter. HL2 does not waste energy blinding you with plot. Underplaying the narrative in this way is gloriously effective, and immerses the player in the most vivid, convincing and impressive virtual world they are likely to have seen. There are no cut-scenes to interrupt the flow. Exposition is accomplished by other characters stopping to talk directly to you. Whereas the highly impressive Doom III felt like a top-notch theme park thrill-ride, wandering through Half-Life's world truly does feel like being part of a movie. Considering its sophistication, the game runs surprisingly well on computers that only just match the modest minimum specifications. But if ever there was an incentive to upgrade your PC's components, this is it. On our test machine - an Alienware system with an Athlon 3500+ processor and ATI's Radeon X800 video card - everything ran at full quality without trouble, and the visual experience was simply jaw-dropping. It is not simply that the surfaces, textures and light effects push the technical envelope without mercy, but that such care and artistic flair has gone into designing them. The haunting, grim landscapes become strangely beautiful. Luckily you get time to pause mid-task and marvel at the awesome graphical flourishes of your surroundings. So impressive are the physics that you'll find yourself hurling bits of rubbish around and prodding floating corpses just to marvel at the lifelike way they move. There are puzzles to be solved along the way, pitched at about the right difficulty, but most progress is achieved by force. Freeman is quickly reunited with the original game's famous crowbar, and an array of more sophisticated weapons soon follow. Virtually anything not nailed to the floor can be interacted with, and in realistic fashion. You will be wowed by the attention-to-detail as you chip bits of plaster off walls, chase a pigeon out of your way, or dodge exploding barrels as they ping around at deadly speed. At times Half-Life 2 feels like one of those annoying people who are unfeasibly brilliant at everything they turn their hand to, and in a curious way, its unrelenting goodness actually becomes almost tiresome. Running around on foot is great enough, but jumping into vehicles proves even more fun. Human foes are rendered just as well as alien ones. The stealth sections are as exhilarating as the open gun battles. In gameplay terms, HL2 somehow gets almost everything perfect. And without resorting to the zombies-leaping-out-of-shadows approach of Doom III, it's all incredibly unsettling. The vacant environment is distinctly eerie, and at one point I even caught myself hesitating to go down a murky tunnel for fear of what might be inside. The game does have a couple of problems. Firstly, the carefully-scripted way that you progress through each level might irk some people. A lot of things are meticulously choreographed to happen on cue, which makes for exciting moments, but may be an annoyance to some players and limit the appeal of playing again once you've completed it. If you like things open-ended and free-ranging, Far Cry will be a lot more pleasing. But the real downside is the hassle of getting the game to run. Installing it proved a life-draining siege that would test a saint's patience. Developer Valve has rashly assumed that everyone wanting to play the game will have an internet connection and it forces you to go online to authenticate your copy. The box does warn you of this anti-piracy measure, but does not say just how many components have to be downloaded. The time spent doing this will depend on your connection speed, the temperamental Valve servers and the time of day, but it can take hours. It would take

a mighty piece of work to feel worthwhile after such annoyances - but luckily, Half-Life 2 is up to the challenge. It is surely the best thing in its genre, and possibly, many will feel, of any genre. The bar has been raised, and so far out of sight that you have to sympathise with any game that tries to do anything remotely similar in the near future. Half-Life 2 is out now for the PC