

Killer Clowns, celebrity deaths and Pokémon GO: Why 2016 has been the worst year yet

In the year that saw the murder of an innocent ape named Harambe, there's been a lot to moan about. It seems the world is becoming an increasingly dumb, depressing and dangerous place, making for a truly terrible year.

From fads and fails to terrorism and tyranny, the signs that the human race has finally lost it are everywhere. There have been ups and downs, of course. But mainly downs. So here, in no particular order, are 12 reasons why 2016 has been the worst year yet.

Celebrity deaths

There's been something of a cull in Tinseltown this year. Not limited to any particular profession, it's claimed actors, musicians and even sportspeople. It started in January, when musical superstar David Bowie sadly passed away after a secret battle with cancer.

Less than two weeks later, beloved actor Alan Rickman also died. This set a worrying precedent for 2016, which also claimed the lives of Prince (musician), Muhammad Ali (boxer), Gene Wilder (actor) and David Gest (music producer).

More British greats were also taken from us, such as Kenny Baker (actor), Sir Terry Wogan (broadcaster), Paul Daniels (magician), Pete Burns (musician), Ronnie Corbett (comedian) and Frank Kelly (actor). However, it was only when 2016 took the life of British comedienne Victoria Wood that things had got completely out of hand.



Sex robots are set to take over the planet

As a fictional setting, the “dystopian future” is becoming somewhat redundant. If you’ve ever had to update the downloader to download the updater then you’ll know what I mean. We’ve arrived at a time where you have to charge your toothbrush, your earphones and even your cigarette. In fact, thanks to Fitbit, we can no longer breathe without technology telling us we’re doing it wrong.

As if this wasn’t dystopian enough, the modern world is now home to fully-functioning \$15,000 sex dolls who can sense heat, react to movement and tell their nerdy millionaire spouse if they’re doing a good job. Available in both sexes, they will soon have sweat glands and a pulse.

This is, no doubt, the starting point from which robots will slowly conquer the human race. However, to be truly realistic, they should have to consent. But this begs the question - how long until your sex doll can claim to have a headache, roll over and power down for the night?



Which Pokémo(ro)n are you?

Having prised video game fans out of their bedrooms and into parks and playgrounds, Pokémon GO claimed to have done more for children than books, toys, board games, parenting, God and the joint education systems of the world.

However, there is of course one issue with that claim. These awkward 10-year-olds were now wheezing 25-year-olds, lumbering towards their next PokéStop. Like a well-marketed boy band, the Pokémon franchise had matured with its fan base. Only it hadn't. It was still about imaginary monsters with super powers, like some form of prepubescent psychedelic nightmare.

With pointless quizzes and endless hacks, social media saw Pokémon piggybacking aplenty. Furthermore, the app created a breed of person so hopelessly glued to their phone that they became a hazard to themselves and to others. In an effort to avoid the scores of Pokémon GO fans swarming the streets, I took up stamp collecting. It's incredibly dull.



The Brangelina breakup

As much as we idolise the plucked, preened and painstakingly perfected residents of Hollywood, life there is confusing and uncertain. Amid the swirling, kaleidoscopic array of red carpet events, prescription pills and camera flashes, relationships rarely last.

In this sea of uncertainty, the one thing we could hold on to was the steadfast marriage of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. So when it all sadly fell apart, more than 10 years after it had begun, the masses were shocked.

Ignoring the fact that Pitt was still with Jennifer Aniston when they first fell for each other, scores of people took to social media asking: "What hope do the rest of us have if Brangelina can't make it work!?" Of course, the more upsetting celebrity breakup news of the year was that of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard, if only for the abusive details of the relationship.



The Great Barrier Reef is dead

In October, it was reported that, along with Prince, Bowie and Victoria Wood, the Great Barrier Reef had also popped its clogs. More than 25 million years old, this was the oldest household name to pass away in 2016.

Of course, a lot of the speculation was over the cause of death. While it may be more precisely pointed at climate change deniers, the finger of blame was aimed squarely in the direction of mankind. With ocean temperatures too high, algae on which the coral feeds produce a toxic amount of oxygen - meaning the coral rejects it. Killing the coral and turning them white, it's a starkly visual representation of the damage we're doing to the planet.

Absolutely vital for a plethora of interlocking ecosystems, the demise of the Great Barrier Reef is truly a sad story. The Barrier Reef is, of course, still dying. Its purported death was a campaign run by Outside Magazine. Nonetheless, it's certainly on the way out.



Apocalyptic international tension

It seems that the world is a more dangerous place than it was last year. Kim Jong-un, North Korea's "supreme leader", first carried out a nuclear test in January. Then, with a colossal magnitude of 5.3, North Korea carried out its largest ever nuclear test six months later.

As relations between the US and North Korea continued to deteriorate further than ever thought possible, tensions between Russia and the West were growing faster than poison ivy on Miracle-Gro. This was only made worse by the international scrutiny which came with the investigation of their Olympic athletes for doping.

Further inflated by differing tactics on Syria, Putin and Obama seemed to be regressing back to Cold War levels of tension. Diplomatic relations became increasingly frayed and just last month, Russia executed a nuclear drill involving 40 million people. Like a standoff between male porn stars, it's a dick-swinging contest of epic proportions.

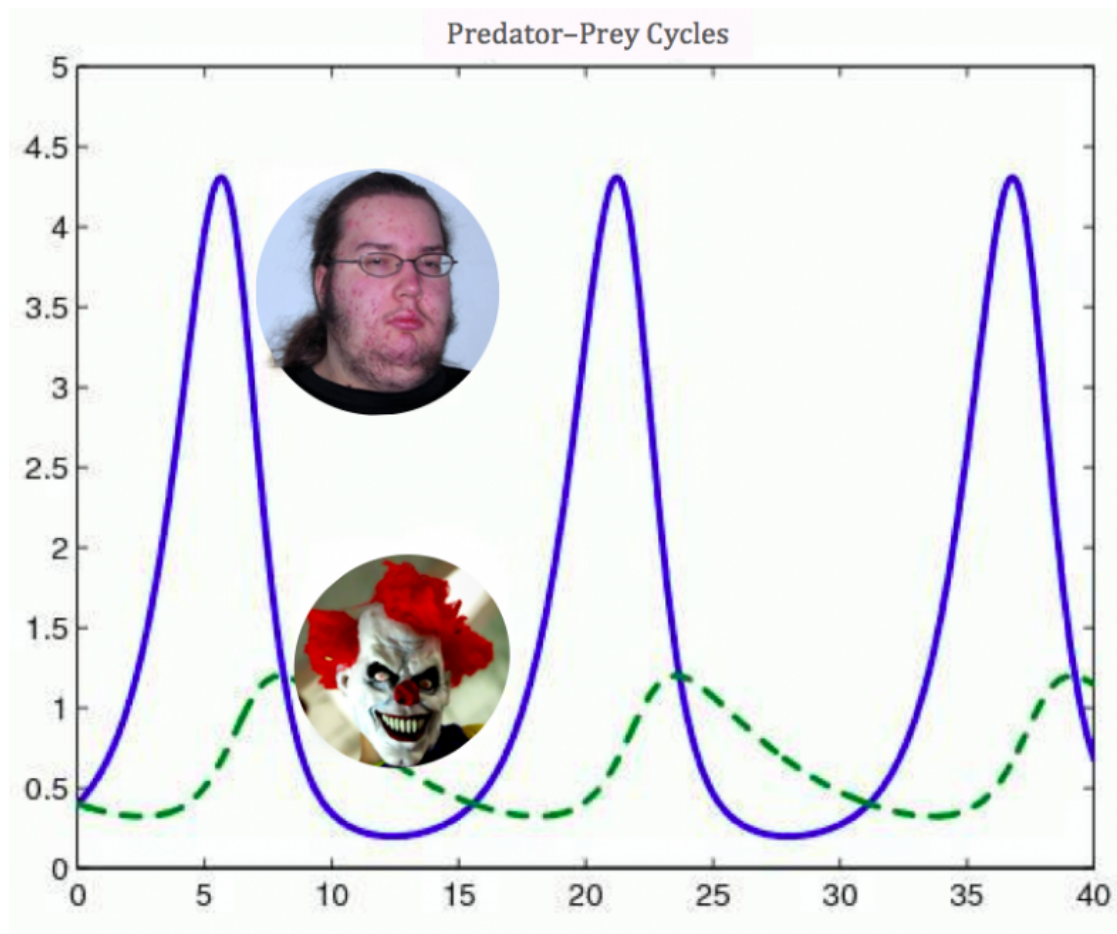


The killer clown craze

In further evidence that men aged 18 to 30 were really beginning to lose it completely, some of them decided to dress up as clowns and leer at people. However, some of the creepy clowns clearly hadn't got the memo (which I imagine was written on 4chan letter paper) and began actually attacking people.

In mass hysteria the likes of which hadn't been seen since the thirties, people were scared to leave their homes in case they were set upon by one of the masked madmen. While social media was full of killer clown pranks, tabloid news sites were awash with panic.

Unlike the Mods and the Rockers, there didn't seem to be much crossover between Pokémon GO fans and killer clowns (unfortunately). Like an undulating predator-prey graph, one could have kept the other in check.



Brexit

The organisation which preceded the European Union, the European Economic Community, was set up after WWII not only to increase trade but also to improve international relations. With this in mind, Britain voted to leave the EU in June. Key issues were immigration, trading laws and EU taxes (read: membership fees). Having received Britain's letter of resignation, Europe sent an email to the other countries explaining that Britain was leaving to seek other opportunities, that it would be missed, and that there would be leaving drinks on Friday.

On the day that the news was announced, the prime minister quit, the pound plummeted, and everyone breathed sighs of disappointment or relief which merged into one collective cloud of confusion. Furthermore, having voted for a political party to make decisions, we were now having to make them ourselves. (Needless to say, I'm still waiting for my cheque from Her Majesty's government.)

Thus far, the decision definitely seems to have done more harm than good. Rich and well-connected, Europe is the guy you wish you had stayed pally with. As an estranged friend, he is now just someone you might see on Facebook from time to time, sipping champagne and living the high life.



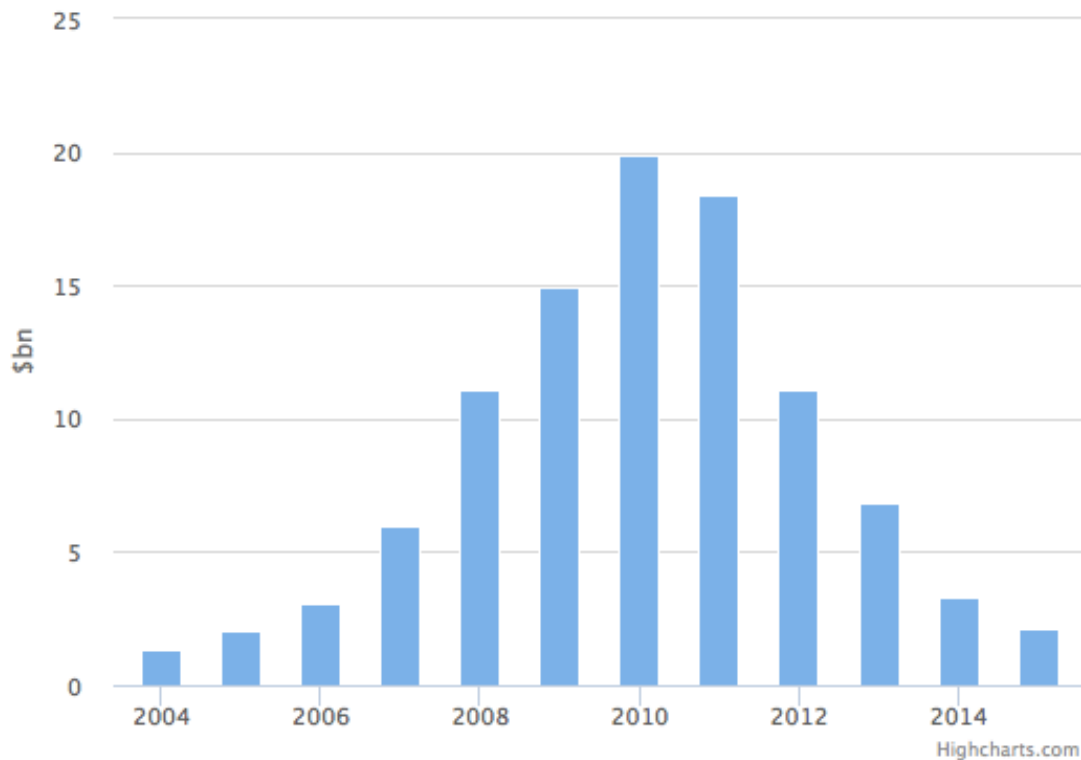
The death of BlackBerry

Look up and down any busy subway carriage and it's painfully obvious. The iPhone has now asserted itself as the quintessential entry-level status symbol. Consequently, the businessman's one-time favourite, the BlackBerry, is now a thing of the past.

In September, after 14 years in the mobile phone business, the Canadian tech company announced that it was to stop making handsets. As the market increasingly favoured touch screens, their signature Qwerty keyboards became increasingly undesirable.

The BlackBerry was officially history. In this massively monopolised market, there's simply no room for two fruit-based brands. As a fat-fingered traditionalist who likes his gadgets to have buttons, this is worrying news.

BlackBerry revenues



Police shooting black men

In July, unarmed African American Alton Sterling was killed by police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He was shot at close range as officers believed he was carrying a gun. Known locally as "CD Man" there was an outpouring of support and anger both in his community and across the US.

The very next day Philando Castile was pulled over by police in St. Anthony, Minnesota. Having explained that he had a weapon he was licensed to carry, he was shot dead. Diamond Reynolds, Castile's girlfriend who was travelling with him and her four-year-old daughter, live-streamed her boyfriend bleeding to death on Facebook.

The next day, at a Black Lives Matter rally, Micah Xavier Johnson killed five innocent police officers by way of revenge. A spate of police shootings of African American men then followed, each one framed and magnified by those which had gone before. It seems that sadly, where discrimination and police accountability is concerned, we are going backwards.



The War in Syria

For anyone wanting to believe the world is a nice place full of predominantly happy people, Syria has been a problem for a while now. As civil war rages between multiple sides, this one-time normal country has also become the new battleground between democracy and dictatorship. The US, the UK and France (among others) are continuing an assault from the sky on ISIS targets. Meanwhile, Russia has predominantly focused its efforts on attacking Syrian rebels in favour of the country's current leader - President Bashar al-Assad.

When you consider that in neighbouring Iraq, around 3,000 to 5,000 ISIS troops are occupying Mosul - a city of some 1.5 million people, it's worth remembering that perhaps the hearts and minds don't lie with the foreign invading forces.

The war in Syria has also created millions of refugees. Of those who escaped the war, many perished trying to find their way to Europe. The migrant camp in Calais was home not only to Syrian refugees but also to those from seemingly obscure countries like Eritrea, from which an estimated 5,000 people flee every month. The camp's closure in October served as a reminder that Britain - though only a few miles away - has really done very little to tackle the long term problem.



Terrorism

As ISIS continues to remain a worryingly powerful organisation, 2016 has seen some of the worst attacks on record. In March, terrorist bombings took the lives of 35 people in Belgium's capital, Brussels. In June, 29-year-old security guard Omar Mateen killed 49 people in Pulse - a gay club in Orlando, Florida. Meanwhile, the death toll from terrorist incidents in Iraq remains in the thousands.

As the distinction between terrorism and mass shootings becomes increasingly confused, it seems poignant to mention some other incidents of the year. In June, the Pike County shootings in Ohio claimed the lives of eight family members. The very next night, Wayne Anthony Hawes, of Appling, Georgia killed five people before turning the gun on himself. In fact, America has already matched last year's record of 332 mass shootings. So, sadly, this is nothing new. Instead it's just another point on an exponential curve.

Of course, the number of fatalities from these incidents pales in comparison to the constant terrorist attacks in the Middle East. Rarely reacting outside of retaliation, the West continues to perpetuate an endless cycle of vengeance and counter-vengeance. It seems you just can't win a war on an abstract noun.



Behind the war, the terrorism and the death, Britain's breakup with Brussels still somehow manages to be one of the worst events of the year. It's a bit like moving your stall outside the market because you refuse to pay the pitch fee. Only here, in the delivery bay, your cries about Scottish salmon, Cadbury's chocolate and cheddar cheese can only be heard by the pigeons.

While a further parliamentary vote is now needed for Britain to actually begin to leave the EU, the public have spoken and its departure is inevitable. Furthermore, the far-from-unanimous decision is symptomatic of a fractured country. But then, I can hardly complain considering the recent developments in America.