

Greg Williams

Editor-in-Chief, Wired UK

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Greg Williams, editor of Wired. Starting at the magazine as deputy editor in 2009, he took on his current role in 2017. Greg oversees print and online content for one and a half million readers in the UK, and nearly four million across the world. He also curates their live conferences and events. He has also written six novels, two of which are to be made into films.

Greg, thank you for joining me.

Thank you for having me.

Six novels?

Yes.

Is that your hobby, then?

It's something I do early in the morning, because it's something that is for me. I feel like the rest of the day I'm doing things that are very, very interesting and I'm very passionate about, but...

But for others.

Yes. But fundamentally, just having that hour or two in the morning where it's my project, and you can kind of get lost in it, and really there's very little jeopardy. If I don't get anything good done, it doesn't really matter. It's actually just, I think it's sort of like a version of meditation for me. So if I can just get that hour or two done in the morning, I feel good the rest of the day. It's like I've achieved something, so I don't feel on the back foot. You know when you start your day and you feel like, "Hmm, hang on a second, I've got a massive to do list"? If I start the day feeling like I haven't achieved anything, for some reason that sets me up for a day of anxiety of, "I need to tick things off the list."

Yes, working through that to do list. I start the day every day with a morning cry. So that just gets all the negative emotions out of the way. I cry myself to sleep every night and I cry myself awake, then I'm ready to go.

Oh, that sounds like the best kind of therapy, Paul. Saves you some money anyway, from the psychiatry.

I know people will be listening to this because you are editor of Wired, but I'm very intrigued by your career as a novelist. If you can indulge me, chair's prerogative – presenter's prerogative, I should say – tell us about the novels.

I started writing novels really, it's funny, I was just thinking about this programme. I was thinking, "Actually, when did that moment start, what was the genesis about?" I definitely started writing fiction and tortured plays as a kind of tortured teenager. I started writing books, I guess, in my late teens, early twenties. They were all terrible of course. I've written, as everyone will tell you, six terrible novels that have been published. I think that it was just an impulse, and it's an itch you have to scratch. People only write books, I feel, if they're compelled to do them. It is a miserable, hard process. It takes you forever. You're setting yourself up for failure. Really, part of it was also just circumstantial. It was serendipitous. I went to uni, and was in a few drama shows with somebody who ended up becoming a book agent. I just happened to be walking past, he was having lunch one day in Pret in Leicester Square. I happened to be walking past, and I just went in and said hello to him. I said, "I'm working on this thing." He was a very junior agent at the time. He said, "Well, let me take a look." and he managed to sell it, which was just remarkable, and I think speaks more to his ability as an agent than mine as a writer. So that was it, I was off and running.

Are they part of series? Tell us about the actual novels themselves.

The first one was called Diamond Geezers, and it was a crime-y, thriller thing. Then I wrote something similar as a follow-up. Then, as I matured and had a family, I wrote something more Dad-lit about having kids, that kind of thing. Then there was another follow-up. Then as I matured even further, I decided what I really wanted to do was write thrillers. So I wrote two thrillers. One called The Nero Decree, the other one called... I forgot the name of the book.

I love that.

I can't believe I just did that. Oh yes, Berlin Day Zero.

I was once on hold for so long a few years ago, some customer service thing, and then this lady came on. I must've been on hold for about an hour. She asked me my name and I'd been on hold for so long, I actually genuinely forgot my own name. I'd lost the will to live.

I haven't lost the will to live for this podcast, Paul, but it was called Berlin Day Zero. It's my bit of therapy, really.

Wow.

And the same goes with the screenwriting. I do it with a good friend of mine, Matt McAllister, and funnily enough, a movie we wrote eight years ago is finally getting made this month in Romania starring Jean Reno and Ruby Rose, so that's fun.

Well, if there's any characters that are 5 ft 7 and a half and a bit tubby, then I'm available.

Plenty of room.

Excellent.

We don't typecast Paul.

So let's go to the day job then. I'm a huge fan of Wired. It must be a great time to be editing a publication that's at the cutting edge of how technology, science and ideas are changing the world.

You're absolutely right, I'm very fortunate in that things have moved towards us. You just look at the news cycle. I was looking... on the way into work I look at all the newsletters from the publications that I like, and pretty much all of them this morning, I was just running down thinking, "Yes, that was a story we could do in Wired," or, "That's something we've covered already." There was a sort thing morning about Burger King doing a plant-based burger. Whether we're talking about Brexiteers talking about a technology solution on the Irish border. Pretty much every story now in the mainstream news agenda is related to Wired; so how the world is changing, what's coming next. So whether we're writing about... whether that's security or it's transportation, or healthcare; there is a Wired angle to that. In some ways we're fortunate, but I think also that just gives us the most enormous opportunity to offer our expertise and authority in these areas. Because the team at Wired does have genuine expertise and authority in these areas. And the other thing I'd say is that we are very international in our outlook and I think despite what's happening in the UK at the moment, and there are obviously other forces at play in terms of a retrenchment, shall we say, of some nations, but I do think the future clearly is global. Issues like climate change are global problems. Issues like migration are global problems, we will only solve these by operating with other nations. So I think the Wired perspective, which is to really look beyond our borders and think about how the world is changing, is a really relevant one. So we're having an event this week and I was just trying to figure out how many places we'd reported from last year, and outside of Europe and the Nordics we'd reported from 17 countries.

Wow.

Yes. Which was quite an achievement. Some places like Peru and some more obvious places like China, where you would expect tech reporting and business and ideas reporting to come from. So I think that what's exciting is that we're able to tell these stories in multiple platforms. So we are pretty much... while print is very much at the heart of our brand, and we produce this beautiful thing that... our creative

director wins multiple awards pretty much every year for how the photography and the design looks. We are able to tell stories in so many different ways now, whether that's online or whether that's through various other platforms and channels... live events now. I know that you have many magazine editors sitting in this chair talking about their live events, but I'd like to think that we were one of the pioneers. We were one of the first to get into this.

You've been doing it for ages.

We have. I think our first one was 2011, and we've just finished our annual health event last week, and it was just... it's great to do these things because you bring all these incredibly diverse people together who are all working on really important challenges. So people really thinking about what healthcare is going to be in the future and trying to solve really significant problems around multiple illnesses and conditions that are really blighting millions of people across the world. And what was really exciting was that on that stage we had a guy called Pierce Keane, who's an ophthalmologist at Moorfields Eye Hospital. And he'd read a story about a company called DeepMind, which is part of Google, the artificial intelligence, part of Alphabet I should say, in Wired a few years ago. And he's contacted them and said, "Look I spend a lot of my life looking at 3D renders of people's eyes, looking for various conditions they might have. Is there a way of automating this? What can we do with computer vision?" And they worked together, and they published a paper in Nature Science last year, and they've figured out a way of a machine looking at those 3D eye scans with 94% efficiency. Which is around the same level as human beings.

Will it get better?

It will get better.

It'll get more accurate than human observation, human decision?

Exactly right. So we had those two on stage talking about the work they've been doing. And later on in the afternoon we had an amazing 19-year-old woman who won our startup competition, and she's using data and visual imagery to identify early stage Parkinson's in people. Incredible effort and incredible vision. The nice thing about editing Wired is just the sheer amount of positive stories that we're able to cover about how the world's changing for the better.

Well, I know the magazine began as a champion of the utopian power of technology, but are we all a bit more sceptical about technology now? Has social media savaged our attention span? People seem to be a bit more jaded nowadays.

Yes.

People are worried about their data being hacked for example. Whilst there's some incredible things about technology... obviously I'm a huge fan and a

reader. But the man on the Clapham omnibus now seems to view technology with a bit more suspicion.

Yes, the man on the Clapham omnibus is absolutely right. The man or the woman on the Clapham omnibus should be checking their privacy settings in every single social network they're on. Yes, that's an interesting point, Paul, you're absolutely right. I think things have moved. They have changed. I do think that there is a beginning now of an awareness amongst consumers that some of the brands they're using are maybe not to be trusted, that have used their data in ways that maybe they've not liked to have them used. And we're seeing the beginning of a shift, which is something that we're reporting on quite significantly, from these large tech companies extracting data and monetising it. We're seeing a shift now pretty much led by Brussels, certainly not led by Silicon Valley, or Washington, I should say. Whereby there are going to be big questions asked about how individuals data is used, who's actually benefiting from this? Now the big five make about \$150 billion from European markets every year. And I think that this could really actually have an impact on their business. And I think that's the only way to get any kind of level of change, is to actually look at the incentives for these large companies. So I think that increasingly, European lawmakers will be looking at this and I will not be surprised if we see some significant changes in the next few years. I'm not talking about breaking up, but I'm talking about much more focused on genuine competition, because to your point, Wired very much champions entrepreneurs, and to a degree the underdogs. And large tech companies stifling innovation is not a good thing for anyone. It's not a good thing for consumers, and obviously it's not a good thing for entrepreneurship. So we're going to follow this very closely. And we've had a couple of stories just in the past week that I think were stories that were picked up in the mainstream press that really accentuate this shift, I think, in public opinion. And certainly the way that we're reporting these things. First of all one of our fantastically talented young reporters, Matt Reynolds, wrote a piece about the fact that on Amazon you are able to buy so called autism cure kits, which were kits that parents would give their children with autism, they were effectively... they would advocate that they would drink or get them to bathe in a bleach-like substance. Matt published the story, Amazon took down all those accounts, all those sellers.

Good.

Yes, absolutely right. Another piece of journalism we did, I think it was probably about three or four weeks ago, revolved around YouTube and the way that paedophiles were using timestamps on videos of young children.

I saw it.

Yes. And advertisers were putting their content up against this stuff. And the paedophiles were communicating within chat groups allowing each other to... encouraging each other to watch these particular videos. So I think that we're at a point now where titles like Wired can be part of helping to make people more aware of what's happening to the content they're putting up online, and also the way that large organisations are actually monetizing it.

How important is Wired's mission, when a kind of really dangerous anti-science rhetoric is on the rise? You've said that Wired will always stand with the experts, unlike Michael Gove of course, who says that the British people have had enough of experts.

Yes, that was one of the more questionable things that he's said. Look, we believe...

You get these new age parents that are proud that their kids aren't vaccinated. It's criminally negligent and reckless.

Yes.

With everyone's health, not just their own children.

Yes I agree, and I think that one of the challenges that particularly YouTube has, is the fact that it's optimised for virality rather than truth or editorial quality.

It's the clicks.

It is the clicks. And if you are simply basing your business on attention, you will serve people things that create dopamine release in their brains, and when they're excited they'll continue to click. So I do think that we're in a situation now where increasingly people are going to start thinking about, "Okay, what is it that is being done to me? How am I being influenced?" How am I being manipulated, frankly, by social platforms that are really maybe not good for my health, good for the way I view the world, and help to shape my opinion in a quite a dangerous way. Let's not beat around the bush about the public health threat of people not having their children vaccinated, it's a really significant thing. In Italy they've just made it illegal, I think.

Good.

Yes, and I think that's smart. Peter Piot, who has spoken at many of our events, he was one of the people who first identified the HIV virus. He wrote a piece for us last year talking about these movements, and the way in which they could have a significant impact on public health. So anything we can do to stand with the experts, to offer factually based journalism, we'll always continue to do.

My niece is 15 years old, and I was chatting to her on a family holiday a couple of months ago, and she was telling me how she was convinced that the moon landings were fake because she'd seen YouTube video that someone had linked to her.

Yes.

And of course it then said at the bottom people who've watched this have watched other video clips saying the moon landings are fake. So by the time she'd got through six or seven of them on an idle Sunday night, she was convinced that we'd never landed on the moon. Why doesn't YouTube have

some kind of link at the bottom that says, “This is not accurate, click here to see the rebuttal video.” It’s just about the clicks, isn’t it?

It’s about the clicks... and also your point about the rebuttal video, there is no... I feel like we are living also in a culture now where there is this... we’ve got to have the other side of the argument. When you’re dealing with facts there is no argument, and I think that’s where we stand. We’re not going to give the anti-vax movement a platform, because it’s not the truth and our readers rely on us to be truthful. One of the things that I bore the team rigid with is going on about the three things that we always have to consider, whatever platform we’re working on, whether that’s one of our events or whether that’s print or digital, whatever, is to really think about the quality, the authority, and the integrity. Those are the three things that, I hope, go into every single piece of work that anyone on the Wired team does. Whether they’re on the commercial team but also, obviously, especially on the editorial team.

Well, the old saying about journalism goes is that the job of the journalist is not to report that someone says it’s raining and someone else says it’s sunny. The job of the journalist is to look outside the effing window.

That’s right. And we spend a lot of time looking outside the window to really verify our facts. It’s something that’s so important because every media brand now, I think increasingly in this era of fake news, every media brand, particularly if it’s a news-based brand like Wired, trust is key. Without that you have absolutely nothing. You really are going struggle to convince readers, or your commercial partners, that you are a valid platform. The way that we build trust, obviously, is to have a long history of reporting that is verifiable and fact based, and ensuring that everything we do adheres to those qualities.

Tell us about how you put a typical issue together. Do you have a formula in your mind’s eye about what the ideal issue would be? Like a pie chart that would say a third of it will be tech, and a third of it will be society, and so on? How do you balance light and shade? In a sense you’ve got a beat; how do you keep that fresh and interesting?

Yes. That’s a really good question, because I think some editors do edit with a strict formula in mind. I tend not to. I tend to feel that something’s right, but you always have to think about the mix, obviously. So we’re one of the few remaining publications that runs longform stories to around four or five thousand words.

Great.

Yes. And it’s a shame that we are, but those are the facts of media these days.

Reading seems to have gone out with fashion. Everyone wants a quick 400-word hit on BuzzFeed, don’t they?

Well, thrillingly, our readers are, and we can see this through the data and what they’re reading online, our readers respond most, and our loyal readers, who are the ones who we are most interested in making happy, they are spending enormous

amounts of time reading longform content. Just before Christmas we published a... we run online only features. One of our writers, very talented, a guy called Gian Volpicelli, wrote a story about an online hitman, which was scam, but there were other kinds of ethical implications around it that he really dug into. It was one of those great stories that as an editor you love, because it broke the internet. But what was interesting was when Gian first submitted it was around 8,000 words. It was long. We ran it around 4,500-5,000 maybe. But the amount of time people spent on it was quite amazing. What I see increasingly – actually not increasingly, it just happens all the time – is that our longform features from the magazine tend to, not always, but tend to traffic incredibly well on the website. What that suggests is that there is this appetite, if you're going to do this longform work, and you're going to put resources into it, and you're going to put care and love into it, which we do, then people will respond to it. That's good. Equally, the newsy stories that we do, we very rarely publish anything under 800 words, simply because our readers don't seem to respond to that. They do want things that are involved, that have strong reporting, and do have a real sense that they've been worked through and properly done. I think that those are all very positive things. Certainly, I think probably seven or eight years ago, a lot of people would be sitting in this chair saying, "Well, the future's all about snackable content." For us, of course, there are other platforms that we think about this on. We think about that on Instagram. We think about how we're going to tell stories on Twitter. But what we do throw out, all the editors, they now are aware that pretty much everything we do in print is going to be seen in digital in some form. We don't really necessarily think about a huge difference between print and digital in the sense that, "Oh this is the kind of story we do in digital. This is the kind of story we do in print." We just assume that everything in print is going to go into digital, and we can tell stories in different ways in those different formats. We will a story on Instagram in a different way than we would on a podcast, for instance. People talk about the challenges of media brands now but, wow, that's really exciting. So I'll sit outside my, sit in my office and I'll see one of our team, say for instance Victoria Turk, one of our editors. In a single week she will be... because she runs our video channel, she also runs our culture channel on the website. She also writes longform features. She also hosts some of our events and she appears every week on the Wired podcast. When I was starting out in journalism, you never really had all those opportunities. A lot of people talk about how challenging it is for young people entering this business now, and that is true. But I also think that there are so many really exciting ways that they can tell stories.

They can make a name for themselves and get noticed.

Absolutely right. Some of our young reporters are, their stories are getting picked up by the nationals. Young people who are doing great work, and the internet means that you can do that pretty quickly... I mean, you could always do that I guess with newspapers but magazines it was always a bit harder to have that immediate impact. They're doing it every week now and that's thrilling.

Do you have a reader in mind?

Yes.

Is that a daft question? Because they're not just a reader, they're online, and they're listening to podcasts and so on.

Yes. But I think that the person is a really interesting thing.

Do you have a person in mind?

A person.

Is there a Wired person?

There is a Wired person. All the bits of research we do show that they tend to be pretty highly educated. They tend to be incredibly busy. They are hard to reach. They tend to want content that... they're very interested in news. They're really interested in how the world, obviously, is changing. And that's what we deliver, I think. We give them a sense of how things might look in the next two or three years. Most importantly, they are decision makers, and that's what I think is interesting about Wired readers, when you meet them – because they are in a position to make change. I think possibly that's why the brand appeals to them. Because they're thinking about what they can take from Wired and what they learn in our pages, on our websites, and on our podcasts, and actually apply it in the real world. That's when things get really interesting I think. When you see the impact you might have in the real world.

It must be incredibly interesting for you to meet your readers then, or your people, at these live events and all the various other things that you do.

Yes. It is. It really is. What's lovely is that we do events internationally as well, so we have a consulting business. We've done events in Singapore. We've done events in Bangalore. Obviously London. We have dinners in various European cities. Paris, Berlin, Tel Aviv. We did an event in Seville last year. One in Cologne. We obviously do events in places like Berlin. What's interesting is that our readers are pretty international as well. They don't really necessary think... so it could be, I don't know, an Italian who lives in Berlin who actually is thinking about moving to Tel Aviv to do an artificial intelligence startup or something. They tend to be really thinking about how Wired can inform them about the really significant changes that the world is undergoing. They tend to be pretty passionate as well about the brand. We do hear back from them. We get feedback. They want to feel involved. They want to feel like they have a voice. Live events is one way of doing that. We do... how many are we going to do this year? We're going to do five of them across this year, and every time I meet someone who is a reader and I think, "Wow. They're doing something incredibly interesting, and I'm really glad to know that Wired had an impact on their life."

I mean, all your readers are tech evangelists, they're tech change-makers. Why do any of them even take the paper version? Why don't they just get an USB stick and stick it in the back of their head? Why do you have a print edition?

You know what, we're always thinking about rolling out new products, Paul, and I think you just came up with a great idea which I'll present to my boss!

I mean, I read the print version of Wired, which should disqualify me, surely.

I think, well, no, you're forgiven because the print version is something that is innovative in its own way in that I think it is incredibly beautiful.

It has a different feel on the texture of the cover.

Oh, I'm glad you noticed that.

It's like a special lacquer or something. But it's like mottled. It's not smooth.

It's sand. That's what it is.

Is it? I thought it was something like that.

It's very fine grain sand. Our creative director, Andrew Diprose, that was one of his ideas. So you really have that tactile sensibility.

It's a physical differentiator. I could pick up a copy of Wired in the middle of the night, and know it is a copy of Wired.

Well, good. Hopefully because it's well thumbed through as well. I think that what print can do is very different, obviously, from any other format. And I think that the beauty of print is that you can open up a spread of a magazine and it really just makes you feel, "Wow." This is a really interesting form of storytelling. It allows us to go into great depth with various stories that we think are impactful and are important. All the research suggests that our readers spend between two and three hours with the magazine over the course its lifetime. This is something that is kind of a lean-back, it's a cliché, but it really is something you do when you're really in your moment of relaxation. We tend to sell very high volumes when people are getting on airplanes and on trains. I think that that's because people actually have the time, they're unplugged, they'll actually really get into the brand and really think about how the storytelling might impact their life. And how it might impact the world in the future. I think what's great also about print is that you can just do things in ways that are surprising. One thing that we started doing recently is just giving it a little bit more room to some of our longform stories. Maybe half, say it's a 12-page story, maybe halfway through we just put in a double page spread of a beautiful photo, just because we can.

Well, why not.

Yes. Exactly. If you have the kind of level of photography that we have, then it's a wonderful thing to be able to do.

But aren't you complicit in the senseless murder though, of several baby trees?

We are, obviously, very aware of the impact we have on the environment, and we do encourage all our readers to recycle Wired or have them in lovely binders on their shelves.

Do your readers, or your people, do they have multiple touch points? Because I do go on the website as well.

Yes.

I subscribe to various newsletters. I listen to the podcast. Is that the typical dynamic of a person?

Yes, it is. We obviously have our 'super-loyals' who maybe consume all of our various products. Then we have others who maybe dip in and out, maybe they'll visit the website once or twice a month. Then we have people who maybe only come to our events because they love our events. My job as editor is to try and connect those dots so they're doing everything. They listen to the podcast. They're getting the newsletters. They're following us on Instagram. They're also buying tickets for our events. I think that if you can encourage people to really buy into that brand and be passionate about the brand, that's the best thing you can do as an editor. The biggest challenge for all editors is maybe someone doing something that they hadn't thought about doing. One of the things that maybe we don't talk about enough with the media is that it is about emotion. Fundamentally, you are trying to provoke an emotion in someone so they feel strongly about what you do, and then they will invest time and their resources into your brand. We've had multiple really extraordinary moments at our events where people have shared their stories. Whether that's someone escaping from North Korea and telling their story of escape, or a guy who had become paralyzed and stood up and walked at our event using an exoskeleton. These are really impactful moments. It's another way of telling stories and inspiring people, and making people really connect with the Wired brand. Equally, we might do a story on, I don't know, SoftBank, which is our cover story at the moment, which is the world's biggest investment fund. They might have an emotional reaction making people really connect with the Wired brand, so we can work across these different platforms, whether that's Instagram, or whether that's a podcast, and just try and touch people's lives in a way that they find valuable.

You've highlighted the imminent arrival of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and driverless cars into the mainstream. How will our lives change over the next decade? That really fascinates me. I've got a Tesla and I press the auto steer and it's just like Knight Rider. It's incredible. It'll even change lanes for me on the motorway. My car is already driving itself.

Yes. Certainly autonomous vehicles will have a huge impact. When, finally, we manage to get through all the various bits of legislation and policy, and insurance companies agree that they are allowed on our streets.

And the power of metadata as well. We can kind of see it in traffic with Waze where you are informing, you're contributing to the live traffic pictures which helps Waze be better for everyone.

Yes.

When autonomous cars truly do connect with one another in a joined-up way, then we'll see an end to traffic maybe.

We ran a story, it was a cover story, on a company called Didi last year, which is the version of Uber in China. Dominates the marketplace there. Run by a woman called Liu Qing, and what's intriguing about that company is if you talk to her about the future, her business is entirely involved with not just thinking about how people are going to move around cities, but actually it's a data business. Her aim is to make moving around cities pretty much seamless, so that you'll be in your Tesla moving around and you won't even have to worry about traffic lights. It'll move through the city streets completely seamlessly, because it'll know where every other vehicle is in real time. Those are the kind of changes that I think that we'll see. Probably not in the near term. That might be... you might not get to see that, Paul, I'm afraid to say.

So not within our lifetime?

I think that we'll have autonomous vehicles within our lifetime, certainly. Will we have no traffic lights? I find that hard to imagine. Especially in European cities given how complex they are. However, there's the old saying about we overestimate the significance of technology in the short term and underestimate it in the long term. Look at the businesses that have grown in the last 10 years. Your Ubers, your Airbnbs, all these services that we use. WeWork. There are so many of them now that are these fast growth businesses that are part of our lives, and there will be many more. There's a venture capitalist called Benedict Evans, and he always says, "Look, technology never arrives at a point where it suddenly stops." We are at the end of the beginning, if you like. So all these consumer applications have been invented. We're now going to be applying technology to the real world in really interesting ways in the future. Healthcare being a really, really interesting example. I do think technologies like artificial intelligence are going to have a significant effect on healthcare in the next few years. Whether that's going to be predictive, or whether that's enabling doctors to spend more time with patients, whether that's in drug discovery, whether that's in various therapies that we can consider. That, and a combination of genomics and artificial intelligence, are going to be very powerful. That's something to get excited about. Certainly we're excited about it at Wired.

Which figures in tech do you most admire?

Oh, that's a really good question. I think the figures I most admire in tech are people who are trying to do something because they believe that it will have a positive impact on the world. I think that there are a lot of people in tech who are very much driven by ambition and driven by getting an exit, and building a business and selling it.

There's no shame in that, inherently.

There's nothing wrong with that. I think that a lot of people who maybe would have gone into banking and gone into other areas now are thinking about going into startups, because they want to make money. However, the people I think are really going to make a difference in the world are the people that I admire most. So when you talk about figures in tech, I think it's probably people that no one has ever heard of that you know are working... you know, like Moorfields is working with artificial intelligence, or like people who are working in the background to help people gain access to credit. Something like a fintech app in Africa could potentially enable someone, an entrepreneur, to borrow a little bit of credit to build their business, give them additional identity. Those kinds of things really could have an impact in the world. So I think that there are all these businesses whether they're fintech businesses or healthcare businesses, whatever that might be, that are really adding to the greater good.

Tell us about Wired Consulting.

Wired Consulting very much has grown out of the editorial side of the magazine and the brand. It's a way of us working with some of our key commercial partners to help them futureproof themselves, to really understand how the world is going to impact their business in the coming years. We've worked with some incredibly large brands. People like Shell, people like Ford, to produce programmes that will help either in education or in futureproofing, or just giving them a sense of where the landscape is. That could be a white paper, that could be a workshop, that might be introducing them to people within our network who can then give them deep expertise in a particular area. I think why that's powerful is that they look to Wired as a trusted brand, in the way that we are an objective voice. We have a large network of journalists out in the world who are looking at whatever vertical they happen to be in, whether that's energy or that's retail. We can offer real insights into how the world is changing, and how that will impact their business and what the opportunities are coming out of that. That's the main thing. I think it's so easy sometimes to think about disintermediation of every industry, pretty much. Whether that's fintech, or whether that's health or education, there are enormous opportunities out there, and I think that's something that we're able to identify. That's certainly something we're able to work with commercial partners on.

Now, before Wired, you edited the sadly now defunct men's magazine, Arena.

Yes.

Do you think we'll see many more media brands, print brands like that, disappear?

I think that print brands do have a lifespan sometimes.

I mean, I loved FHM back in the day, but I wouldn't buy it now, and that's obviously the reason why it's closed.

Yes. I think that men's, the men's market is a really good example of that. Look at the men's weeklies, that kind of... they were phenomenally successful for two or three years. Sadly, now they're all gone. I don't think anyone who works in media really wants to see any brands disappear, but I think that there are lifetimes for brands. However, there are also brands obviously that have great longevity. Look at a company like Condé Nast. Some of their brands have literally been around for hundreds of years, in the case of Tattler. But obviously brands like Vogue have got this incredible resonance throughout the world. I think that what we'll see probably is some titles go to the wall if they don't have any relevance any longer. I think that's the key to it. Late 90's, birth of desktop publishing, huge proliferation of new print brands. Huge proliferation. That lasted for a few years really, until the instant the consumer internet became very powerful. Then we saw a dropoff. So I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing. It's just that some brands work at a certain time, and they don't at another time. I'm afraid that's just consumer taste.

You were executive editor of Details magazine in New York. How different is the publishing experience in US?

That's a really good question. It is very different, I think. First of all, the resource in New York is significantly greater than in the UK. I think that sometimes you can see that on the page. You can see the fact checking, and you can see the care and attention to detail. Top publications like the New Yorker are extraordinary. I also think that what the UK does really well is that scrappiness of getting things done. We can turn things around very, very quickly in the UK. It's slightly harder to do that in New York, simply because there's so much more process to go through. What I absolutely loved about working there was just working with people who were – and this is true of the UK as well, but in New York there were people who really were working absolutely at the top of their game – and you would get to see people... you know, the fact checker who'd been there for however long.

Donkeys.

Yes. Just everything. I'd send through my copy I was editing, maybe a cover story, whatever, and I would think, "This is pretty good. This is pretty clean." And it would come back through the publishing, the content management system, and would be just...

Ripped to pieces.

Ripped to pieces by the copy editors. Ripped to pieces by the fact checkers. It really was a great education!

Did you have a bottle of bourbon on your desk to get through it?

Yes. Sadly I wasn't quite that, sort of like a 1960's journalist, but it was a fantastic experience to be able to see how they operate in New York, and I hope that some of those experiences I've been able to bring back and employ back here in the UK.

What's next for you? Are you going to upload your consciousness into the cloud and just become some kind of meme?

Well, actually there's about five...

That's the most ridiculous question I've ever asked in the entire history of the podcast. And I hope it doesn't get edited out. So please answer it.

Actually there's about five of me, Paul. I've managed to locate most of them.

I'd love to clone me.

Yes.

I'm awesome.

Yes. I'm actually...

If there were more of me that would be brilliant.

Imagine how much you'd get done.

Absolutely.

What's next? You know what, I absolutely love what I do, and I know that's not the answer you're looking for.

Everyone says that.

I know, but I really genuinely do. I was thinking about this this morning as I walked up the steps to the floor where Wired is. I was thinking, "How fortunate am I to have this job?"

Well, you've earned it. You work hard.

Well, thanks for that. I appreciate it. But lots of my contemporaries work incredibly hard as well, and they haven't always had the opportunities to stay working in media, or in magazines and prints I should say. Or even online. So I feel incredibly fortunate, and also I work at a company that still invests in journalism, still invests in amazing visuals, that really cares about the products. So I do feel like I will be doing this as long as I possibly can, because I love it. Every day I walk in and there's an amazing team there, all of whom want to tell great stories, all of whom are thinking about new ways to get the brand out into new marketplaces and new platforms. And I'm incredibly happy and thankful where I am.

Last question, then. There's a tradition among US presidents that whenever they depart the Oval Office they leave a letter on the Resolute desk to their successor, so the first thing a brand new president reads is a letter from his

predecessor. Sometimes they're made public, sometimes they're not. Eventually, when you do want to move on and you're writing a letter to leave on the editor's desk for the next guy, what would it say in it?

That's a bit like the letter that the prime minister has to write to the submarine commander, isn't it?

That's right. The Trident one.

The one with the Trident.

I just say, "Kill them all." That makes me sound murderous, sorry.

What would be in the letter? If this should ever occur, so obviously this is not going to occur, but if it ever did, what would be in the letter I think would be protect the culture. I think that's the most important thing. Be entrepreneurial. Really think about how you can get the brand to people in as many ways as possible. Believe in the story telling. Believe in the mission – because I think we do believe in telling complex stories, and making them vibrant and alive for our readers – but I think a big part of my job is to protect the culture of Wired and to encourage people to do their best work. I think there's a few of us who've been around for a while, and the number one thing we do is we want people to come into that office every day and do their best work. Because, in my opinion, editors and writers are a bit like strikers. You've got to look after them, because it's a confidence game. If an editor and a writer feels good about what they're doing, they feel that they are doing work that they find stimulating, and they're finding an audience, then they will perform incredibly well. It's when people feel like they're not valued, like they're not doing work that they really care about that they clearly are not going to feel valued, and they'll move on. So the best way to get great work out of people is, I think, just ensure that they feel valued and to support them in the good work they do.

Greg, you're a legend. Thank you for your time.

Thank you, Paul. Really enjoyed it.