Say 'hello' to your new lodger – Google is moving in

The much-vaunted Ironman franchise, fronted by the mercurial Robert Downey Junior won hearts and minds for all kinds of reasons. The sharp-witted patter of protagonist Tony Stark, the joyful CGI, Gwyneth Paltrow, and an agreeable peppering of guns, fist-fights, and wild explosions.

Pivoting and oscillating in the background, providing helpful insight laced with quintessential British sarcasm was another reason to watch till the credits rolled; Stark's AI robot Jarvis. Managing Stark's technology, data and even his personal life, Jarvis acted more as a butler than a tool. A fixed position Robocop with a kettle and a flash drive, rather than a spiked fist and a semi-automatic pistol. Jarvis, at least for time being, is an improbably advanced personal assistant, but his predecessor is already sitting in the corner of some living rooms the world over.

In September of last year, the Amazon Echo hit UK stores and a new relationship dynamic with technology was born. People, whilst curled up on their sofas, or dicing onions in the kitchen, began talking to a black cylinder with a gently glowing blue light, and instructing it to give weather updates, headlines and put the best of Cliff Richard on repeat. The Echo, up until now, has remained largely unchallenged, but it's about to get one heck of an adversary. On April 6th 2017, Google enters the fray with their Google Home AI personal assistant system.

The arrival of Google Home marks an important stride forward towards the 'Internet of Things', or as Wikipedia defines, '*the interconnection via the Internet of computing devices embedded in everyday objects, enabling them to send and receive data.*' If that sounds a bit futuristic, bear in mind that it's already been happening. By tapping a few buttons on tablets and smartphones, people are able to heat their homes, record their favourite TV shows, play music in their cars, and have kebabs delivered to their front door. AI personal assistants remove the need to open apps and tap buttons, and does it all for you with a spoken command. They essentially bring all your Internet dependent technologies together and operates them on demand. Cool eh?

Believed to retail at around £130, the plant-pot shaped and sized Google Home device will sit patiently, primed for instruction, and activate when it hears 'Hey Google', or 'OK Google', whereupon the microphones are triggered and the familiar primary colours glow through top-mounted LEDs. Compatible, at least for the time being, with fewer third party applications than the Echo, the Home's key USP appears to be its ability to store pre-set commands and link them to follow up questions. For example, when the morning alarm rudely wakes you from your dream of sitting naked in an exam hall, users will be able to request 'five more minutes', and the alarm will reset accordingly. This stands in contrast to the Echo which requires a full new 'alarm set' command to be issued. Google also spent a lot of time working on voice recognition intricacies which means only the most impenetrable of regional accents may run into difficulties.

Further to the Home's ability to carry out more perfunctory duties such as turning the telly on, with user permission the device can scan emails, calendars, files, and personal media held in other Google products. Giving the Home such permission greatly enhances its ability to effortlessly manage one's day-to-day life, but more cautious purchasers may feel some unease at how much of their information Google will have access to.

The Google Home, Amazon Echo, and other similar devices represent a move towards our lives becoming ever more dependent on the Internet. Understandably, this draws criticism

from some, but these developments are driven by demand. The counter-argument to the criticisms is that the more technology carries out basic tasks for us, the more time we have to spend doing the things we enjoy.

These AI personal assistants aren't quite Jarvis just yet, but they're a crucial milestone in getting there.