

All of this was gilded by the wonderful Peter Capaldi, who tiptoed through the hour, whispering encouragement to viewers to "act like a fox" (Shag loudly? Take other people's chickens? Oh. Be wily. I see) and accept that "evil things" must be carried out for the good of the realm. And how every prince needs a second-in-command to carry out the vilest deeds. And how lightning bolts of "good fortune" are needed for a true prince to rise to power. In a macabre section - but then the essence of the *The Prince* is panto-macabre - the early death of the Labour leader John Smith and the rise of Tony Blair was used as an example of "good fortune". Alastair Campbell was on hand to describe Blair's early lessons in handling power, and how during his first cabinet reshuffles, Blair would almost be sick with nerves caused by guilt and anxiety. Yet by the third, he was fast, clipped, ruthless. "He did the big beasts face to face," said Campbell, "And the others by phone."

George RR Martin, the creator of *Game of Thrones*, was wonderful chatting about the difficulties of power and how *The Prince* relates to the trials of Ned Stark and Cersei Lannister. He also revealed how, while teaching at a remote all-girls school in America, the quest for the prized head-of-department role was as ruthless as anything in Medici Florence. At one stage Alan Yentob took himself off for a "How Machiavellian are you?" test. Yentob answered questions such as "Should powerful people be flattered?" reasonably, indicating no real urge for power. He was awarded the mark of "average Machiavelli". "But then if I was a true Machiavellian, I wouldn't have told the truth would I?" he said. "No" admitted the man marking the test. I enjoyed this brilliantly entertaining hour spent celebrating arch-eyebrowed beastliness. That Mochyvullim, he totally had a gameplan.