

The Talking Toilets

By Charley Davies

Stage 1

The day the toilets started talking was a fairly normal one. Wars were going on, the price of everyday objects was steadily going up, the price of the pound was going down, people gained and lost jobs. Some were going on dates, falling in love; others were having fights and breaking up. The sun rose, as it always did, and would, eventually, set. Babies laughed and old people laughed at the babies. People slept in or went on 6am runs. Breakfasts, lunches and dinners were all prepared, presented and consumed. Sex happened. Death happened. Even some births, too. All this is to say: nothing too extraordinary happened that day - the day of the first communication. Sure, there were a couple of news items that might have caught the eye. A team of researchers in the Arctic discovered a long-slumbering parasite that had the ability to wipe out various insect/amphibian species. A man, who most deemed crazy or suicidal, climbed a very tall building in a popular metropolitan city with no harness and minimal equipment. A new species of fly was found and named; the 'Cultiusiuna' had navy stripes on its back, three sets of eyes and had a lifespan of around 35-40 days (slightly longer than the average for a typical fly). These slightly unusual or unique occurrences may have raised a few eyebrows or intrigued a couple of folk, but they didn't raise much commotion, in comparison.

The First Incident, as it became known, occurred on the 5th of March. Or, at least, this was when the first *recorded* incident happened; a few attention-hungry people claimed after the fact that actually *they* had been the one to discover the noise, they just hadn't told anyone for fear of being labeled 'a nut'. Most of these claims were later debunked or dismissed due to a lack of concrete evidence. But Mr. Mallows had proof.

He called the police first, as he wasn't exactly sure who else to call, and this seemed like a good starting point. "Hello, I'm sorry to bother you, I just needed to - No, no, I'm not reporting a crime. At least I don't *think* it's a crime. I wouldn't consider it to be - Hello? Sorry, yes, yes. Well, um, this might sound a little strange, it sounds strange to even say it nevermind hear it, but I didn't know who else to call and - No, yes, sorry, I'll get on with it. I'll just say it, get it out of the way. That'll be better. Well, okay, so, the thing is... Well, the thing is that - my toilet is making a noise." That was his side of things.

Rather unsurprisingly, Mr Mallows - or *Marty*, as he liked to be called - was dismissed as a prank-caller, no matter how much he assured the person on the other end of the line of his seriousness. He was told to stop wasting police time, and that if he called again he would be committing the crime of 'Harrasment' (Marty didn't really believe that, but figured the officer was just trying to scare him off).

Next he called a plumber. Some may suggest that this should have actually been his first port of call, but everything had happened so fast and Marty had panicked. The plumber seemed disinterested at first - he assumed it was just a regular, old noise, perhaps the flusher was broken or the tank needed looking at - and told Marty the earliest they could fit him in was next Thursday. Then Marty described the noise and the plumber laughed. He asked him if he was 'being taken the piss out of', and Marty said, 'No, this is serious. I'm not lying.'. The plumber seemed no more convinced, but figured he could make an easy bit of money pretending to check out the bog of some loony-tuned, mad man, and agreed to be there right away.

'I was shocked, completely shocked,' the man later told news reporters. 'I mean, I just thought maybe the flusher was broken, or the tank needed looking at, something like that. But, fuck me - sorry, language, I know - but, *god*, when I got there and heard the noise this guy was talking about - well, I thought I'd lost my mind.'

Some described it as a sort of clicking noise, a bit bird-like in nature. Others likened it to a hum, not like that produced by machinery but more like the kind a human perusing a magazine in a dull waiting room would make. A couple enthusiasts insisted it was morse-code, or some other code-related system, and that the toilet was trying to give out a hidden message.

It's hard to relay the noise, as, in reality, it was infrequent and inconsistent. Depending on who you ask, you'd get completely differing accounts of it, but the general consensus amongst the Toiletry Audio Analysis Team (or 'TAAT', for short) was that it went like this:

'WOOOO, woooo... click, click, tut tut tut... weyohhhhhh, way... click, tut, mahhhhhh, meeeeee, woou... click, click... baaaaar'

After the plumber arrived and 'checked' the toilet, he told Marty they needed to call 'The News'. 'Which News?', Marty asked and the plumber just said 'all of them'. They tried the bigger branches at first - nationwide broadcasts, global media outlets - but had trouble getting a hold of anyone. They kept just being left on hold for varying durations of time, so decided to scrap that plan and focus on local outlets instead.

The first place to get back to them was the East Riding Gazette (Marty lived in a small town just outside of Wakefield). The person who answered the phone was an intern, who was immediately intrigued by the whole thing and said she'd send a reporter out within the next hour. While Marty and the plumber waited, they had a light lunch and numerous cups of coffee/tea.

The reporter came - a dishevelled-looking man in his mid-forties who seemed inconvenienced by the whole thing and refused Marty's offer of a beverage or a snack - and took some pictures (which were pretty pointless, as the toilet in question looked like any other in its price range and photographs failed to capture the uniqueness of the situation). He didn't seem that shocked by the noises that were being emitted. Even when the plumber *insisted* this was completely out of the ordinary, and that he'd never come across a toilet that made that noise in his entire 35-year career, the reporter barely lifted an eyebrow. He was there a total of 30 minutes, and didn't ask either Marty nor the plumber many questions about the situation.

Feeling a little put-out, Marty and the plumber considered their next move. For Marty, this whole thing had made him feel uncertain and a bit disassociated - he just wanted answers and to figure out what was going on. The plumber's motives were, by his own admission, primarily financial. He figured if this ended up gaining traction or going viral or something, that Marty would give him a cut of whatever profit they made. He *had* been only the second person to witness this whole thing, after all, and had validated Marty's (rightful) shock over the situation.

They began calling local stations again, this time being careful of their language. Whereas before they had said, 'We have a toilet that's making an odd noise, like *really* odd.', they now emphasised the human-like nature of the sounds. They claimed it was almost like the toilet was trying to speak, or communicate in some way. Though this did make them sound crazier and a dash fanatical, it did the job of attracting more attention. Three outlets were interested, and two of them said they would send their own reporters out that same day (the third said they could send a team out the following day as they were all booked up, a decision they later regretted, as by then coverage had gone global and this particular outlet couldn't even get a look-in).

The two sets of reporters arrived at the same time, both a little breathless and seeming a little shell-shocked. Marty offered them both a glass of water (or squash, if they preferred, he had many different flavours and brands), which they both declined. When they finally caught their breath and made themselves a little more presentable, they informed Marty and the plumber that

two other reports of similar incidents had been made in the surrounding area. One in Skipton, another in a little village outside of Castleford. Same general story - odd, humanistic noises seemingly coming from a household toilet - with both occurrences reported within half an hour of Marty and the plumber's call.

The two men were shocked. Marty looked at the plumber, and the plumber looked at Marty. One of the reporters, though quite excited at this apparent local phenomenon, tried to quell her shock somewhat, trying to overshadow her initial frantic arrival by retelling some of the theories bouncing around the networks. 'For all we know, this could all just be some weird, never-seen-before malfunction, or possibly an issue with the waterworks' she suggested. She was tall and had quite a stern face, giving off the impression of a school teacher trying to suddenly calm a rowdy class. She said that they were trying to confirm whether all of the reported toilets were made by the same manufacturer, and there was even communication with the waterboard to see if there were perhaps similarities in the plumbing or sewage networks in the areas. It was all very up in the air at the moment. The second reporter - he was a bit tweedy, wearing a jacket a couple sizes too big for his short, slender frame - seemed to not agree with her sudden conservative attitude, but suggested it be best to just carry on with the process as normal until they heard anything from their contacts. Take some pictures, record some footage, get a few words from both Marty and the plumber - the usual procedure for small-time news.

They were in the middle of this very process when the stern-faced reporter got a call. When she answered her phone (not even bothering with a 'Hello', which Marty thought was quite rude), her face dropped. '*Pardon?!*' she shrieked, the shrill gasp exaggerated by the acoustics of Marty's bathroom. The tweedier reporter was in the middle of setting up his microphone to capture some of the noises coming from the toilet, and he looked up at the other reporter with a mix of concern and excitement. The stern-faced reporter excused herself by waving frantically at the men, all cramped together in the bathroom, but her bewildered tones could be easily heard through the house's thin walls. Mentions of 'numerous cases' and 'national reporting' were heard. Marty, the plumber and the tweedy reporter all stopped what they were doing to eavesdrop. They kept looking at each other, eyes-wide and mouths agape, straining to hear.

After about ten minutes or so, the woman returned. Her face mirrored each of the men's wide-eyed, fanatical stares. She seemed to have lost some colour in her face, making her seem less serious and more ill. She gulped.

"There have been over 50 reports in the last hour.' She said, "All over the country, all saying the same thing: the toilets are talking."

Stage 2

There was a wide-ranging spectrum of noises. Some were similar to Marty's toilet - an inconsistent mixture of animal-like calls and vaguely-mechanical sounds - but not all. Some were more monotone and consistent; regular and repeated patterns of the same noise over and over again (such as 'ooooooh, ooooooh, ooooooh...' and 'bar, bar, bar, bar...'). Others were more musical, with a bit of a rhythm to them. Some whispered. Others shouted. The volume of the noises varied just as much as what was being said/emitted. Same with the pitch; a few poor souls had been woken in the middle of the night to banshee-like screeches. An older woman living in Devon, upon being torn from sleep by the high-pitch screaming of her toilet, had a heart attack

from the shock (she survived, and later told a reporter that for a moment she thought she had died and woken up in Hell). There were no official fatalities (at this point), but at least three reported broken arms, two hip dislocations and one unfortunate incident in which a man, brushing his teeth, had startled when his toilet began what became known as its 'Initial Sounds'. He slipped on his bath mat and knocked his face so hard against his own (dirty) toilet seat that he lost four teeth (one of which was sadly flushed down the noisy toilet, in all the chaos).

That was the majority of the 'Initial Sounds' - a range of inconsistent patterns, monotone repetition and musical, but simple, tunes - but there were others. A select few were more complex and distinguished. Less than ten toilets across the UK were found to emit clearly formed sounds that were almost words and sentences; not quite understandable, more like a baby learning to speak. There were an even fewer amount that began to speak almost completely - disjointed words and a lack of grammar, sure, but fully formed in their expression. Though Marty Malloys became briefly infamous for being the first reported case of 'Inter-Object Communication', his experience was quickly overshadowed by these more complex cases.

One such occurrence happened to Gloria 'Glo' Mittens, a retired schoolteacher living in a small bungalow off the coast of Cornwall. Occurring just two days after 'The First Incident', it is believed (though, again, strongly contested by some) that Glo Mittens was the first person to communicate directly with a toilet. Tragically, Glo passed away just a few months after the ordeal with her downstairs loo occurred, and before her untimely death she point-blank refused to do any interviews regarding her experience. No profiles, no exposes. Nothing. She shot to immediate fame and recognition - named in *The Times*' 'Top 100 Most Influential People in the World', the subject of hundreds of unofficial memoirs and academic writings - then simply fizzled out of public memory (for the short amount of time that the public still *had* a memory).

The following recollection of the events that took place on the 7th of March was compiled by various researchers interested in Glo's tale, with the end goal being to publish a book on the matter. This, obviously, never happened, and only the following brief passage was ever fully drafted. It ends abruptly, presumably due to the disintegration of the TAAT association just before 'The End Days'. What is recovered is just a brief glimpse into that infamous day. Diary entries, news reports and fairly reliable witness statements were all cited as referenced sources. The specific details of the event are not, and never will be, fully known, but this research was believed by those in the field as the most extensive and accurate on the subject. It is as followed:

'Gloria Mittens spent most of her time at home, alone, tending to her garden and experimenting with various dessert-based recipes, and was, therefore, present when 'The First Contact' was made. While she prepped a rhubarb and cherry pie (her grandmother's original recipe), she heard a hushed mumbling coming from another room. Assuming she had left her television set on, she left the pie and went to her living room, only to find the TV screen blank and the sounds appearing more distant. She retraced her steps and concluded they were coming from her small downstairs loo. As she edged closer to the door, now worried a troubled intruder had broken in and was waiting for her, the sounds became clearer.

"Telephone, courgette, metal handrail", the first words a human being ever heard spoken by a toilet.

"Come again?" Glo asked, uncertain. For a brief while, these two words were cemented in human history; they were drafted up to be put in textbooks, suggested for exam questions, cited in essays. After everything that was yet to happen happened, they became completely irrelevant and were forgotten - not getting the longevity or iconic status they perhaps deserved,

being a part of the first Inter-Object Communication - but, for a time, Gloria Mittens was a part of history, whether she wanted to be or not.

After hearing no reply to her call, Glo pushed on, cracking the door open, ready for an altercation (she had picked up an old tennis racket of her late husband's she had never thrown away). Her heart was pounding; her palms sweaty as they clutched the racket. With a shaky hand, she slowly pushed open the door.

The room was empty. Everything was as it always was; the tiny space was neat and tidy, stocked up with extra toilet roll (just in case), the teal aquatic-themed wallpaper glimmered in the mid-afternoon sun which cascaded in through a small, open window. When Glo had opened the door, the noises had stopped for a brief moment, as if startled.

After a second, they began again.

'Hockey, beach ball, red and green, raisins...' More seemingly unconnected, random words.

Glo was frozen to the spot. She rarely watched the news, and didn't bother reading the local paper anymore (she thought it had become more of a gossip rag, prioritising celebrity drama over current events), so had no knowledge of the recent reports of 'The Talking Toilets' (as one news outlet had dubbed them). Even if she had been, these reported cases were all of toilets emitting the kind of unintelligible mumblings and inconsistent squawkings that Marty's toilet had made. None of them mentioned actual *words* being said. What Gloria Mittens was hearing was completely unprecedented. Never experienced by a single human being in the world - let alone the country.

Quite understandably, she fainted.

She was unsure how long she was out for. It felt like a long time, but when she awoke the sun was still high in the sky. She had dreamed of fire and strange landscapes; deserts covered in blue sand, barren fields with no wildlife and a limited amount of trees. She felt woozy, her mind a tad blurred; faint, tiny stars faded in and out of her vision. She didn't move, concerned that she had broken something in the fall and worried an eruption of blinding pain was imminent. That was, until she felt a rush of nausea in her throat.

She darted up, no longer caring for her possibly broken bones, and threw herself over the toilet bowl. A wave of clear vomit filled the bowl. She must have hit her head on the way down, possibly on the radiator. Perhaps it was a concussion.

That was the only way she could explain what happened next.

"Why?"

Gloria stopped vomiting at once. She froze, her mouth agape and her eyes as wide as seas. Not a single cell in her body dared to move.

"Why is it?"

Slowly, she moved backwards, attempting to stand but clumsily slouching against the wall. She knocked a framed photograph of the Devon coastline to the ground. It smashed, but Glo did not even notice. She was looking down. Looking at her toilet, which was covered in sick and talking.

"Why is it on me?"

Glo had to fight the urge to faint again. She gripped the toilet roll holder for support.

"Please, do talk back about it." The toilet said. It had no mouth, obviously, and Glo couldn't figure out where the words were coming from. Her breath came out in quick, shallow gasps as she lent forward and lifted up the tank lid, checking for a tape recorder or a microphone or something, she wasn't completely sure.

Nothing - the inside of the toilet looked completely normal, nothing suspicious or out of the ordinary. Glo closed the lid.

"PLEASE?!" The toilet *screeched*. Glo shot back, terrified. Her mouth flapped as she attempted to spit words out - words that could help her understand the situation at hand. Something she could say that would, somehow, snap her consciousness back into gear. Stop all this nonsense. She didn't think she was dreaming - was sure of it, in fact, though she couldn't exactly say *why*, but everything felt very real.

"I don't - I can't -" She stuttered.

"Hamburger, cheese, weapons with bullets?" The toilet said, in a way that suggested it was asking a question, not just reverting back to spitting out unconnected and random words.

"No?" Gloria replied, "No, I - I don't - I don't understand."

"A chill is across. The window is ajar." At this, Glo's skin became covered in goosebumps. How did it know that? How did it know that the window was open? It had no eyes, in the same way it very much didn't have a mouth. And yet - it knew. It knew that a light breeze was now coming into the room, cooling some of the sweat on Glo's brow.

Gloria Mittens was afraid, very afraid. Whereas Marty was more in a state of awe and confusion - excited by the chaos that was caused when his toilet began making unintelligible patterns of sound - Glo immediately felt a hot fear strike her heart. She couldn't tell you why, beyond the obvious. It wasn't just shock or confusion - feelings anyone would have if their downstairs toilet started speaking in full, if disjointed, sentences - no, it was an otherworldly kind of fear. It struck her to her core. Perhaps this immediate and all-encompassing terror was part of the reason she refused to discuss the happening with anyone after the fact.

Barely able to move, Gloria mustered up enough air in her lungs to ask one simple question. That was all she could manage.

"How do you know the window is open, sir?" Why she said 'sir', she had no clue. Panic, probably, or maybe the built-in politeness she tried to give to anyone she had just met.

"Well..." The toilet said, "I know because I can feel it. Can't you feel this also, Mrs Mittens?"

There was no more -'

Stage 3

The period of time between The First Incident and what is referred to by The International Toilet Commander Party as 'The Judgement Days', is all a bit of a blur. There was so much chaos and excitement; people were confused, exhilarated. A small percentage were terrified and unhappy with how the situation was being handled, feeling as though those in charge were not taking the matter seriously enough and were caught up in the overall madness of it all. But even if there were some tripidations, the general feeling amongst the public was one of intrigue. Most lacked the inherent fear that Gloria Mittens had experienced, instead embracing the apparent magic of the situation. They wanted to know *more* about these toilets - wanted to know everything they could know. They wanted all of their questions answered, preferably by the toilets themselves.

Worldwide, over 400,000 toilets were reported to be of the 'Talking' persuasion. As mentioned, these ranged from those emitting disjointed and unintelligible mumblings, to the select few speaking full-blown sentences. There was no apparent biological or geographical pattern regarding the more 'Complex Communicators'. It was a random mix - three Complex Communicators were found in the UK, four more in mainland Europe, from thirteen to fifteen

(some reports were contested and claimed to be false findings) in the Northern and South Americas.

As usual with any groundbreaking development in nature/technology, the toilets were rinsed by the public. 24-hour livestreams were had. Mass amounts of social media covered the topic. You couldn't find a news article not about 'The Talking Toilets' in any of the major or minor publications. Rumours and conspiracies spread online - some claiming it was all an elaborate mass-prank designed to show the gullableness of the human race, others suggested it had links to terrorism. Fan groups, conventions and mass meetings were all arranged on the topic. People were obsessed - they couldn't get enough. It seemed everyone - or, at least, *almost* everyone - saw this discovery as the biggest and most exciting event to ever happen in human history. It was a frenzy, and no amount of knowledge on the matter (given by either the government, media or academic institutions) could quench the thirst people had.

This world-wide obsession lasted approximately three months. Three months of international meetings conducted on the matter. Three months of trends and viral videos focusing on the topic. Three months of questions, suggested answers, proposed theories. Three months of (almost) the whole Earth-bound population being completely consumed by anything and everything to do with 'The Talking Toilets'.

After those three months, it all ended. Everything - or, rather, everything relating to humanity and its child-like curiosity - gone. No more cities, no more communities. Barren buildings and housing estates. Not a single soul left on planet Earth.

If you *could* ask anyone what happened (and, given that, after those three months, there was no one around *to* ask, such a feat was impossible), they likely would have no idea how it all went so wrong.

One day there was excitement and confusion. Then - in the blink of an eye - it was all over. Everything was gone.

Perhaps the toilets were treated with too much idolisation and not enough concern. They were, after all, celebrities. Their every communication was noted down and publicised. Every sound respected and revered. It all felt like something groundbreaking. It was as though humans, after all the time spent worrying that they were the only intelligent lifeform in the whole universe, were just so relieved to not be alone in their sentient ways. Instead of making intergalactic contact with some alien species, they had found it in their own back yard (or, more accurately, their own lavatories).

They let their guard down, no one can deny that. Every single country involved reacted with a lack of concern or a protective instinct. We - or, should I say, *they* - got all caught up in research and celebrity. In asking the toilets questions, and waiting with utter thrill for their answers. In knowing more - in knowing it *all*.

Throughout the whole thing - The First Incident, The First Communication, even during The Judgement Days - not a single person asked the question they should have asked. It was all 'What is it like being a toilet?', 'Can you feel emotions? Or pain?', 'What's your opinion on (Insert Current Viral Trend Here)?'. All silly, really. All without substance.

What they should have been asking was 'What is it you want?' and 'Why have you waited until now to try and get it?'.