



Thanks to you, our [Bugged](#) experiment is going brilliantly so far. More than halfway through, we can share with you some of the new work we've commissioned from our ten core writers. Here's a selection of work from Mil Millington, Ian Marchant, and David Gaffney (two of a sequence of three short stories – tune in on Thursday for the last one.)

There is more to come, and the anthology will include further work from them which won't be seen on the blog. For more information on all these writers, click [here](#). Thanks for supporting Bugged – keep reading, keep writing and enjoy this sample of great writing inspired by overhearings.

Jo Bell and David Calcutt

The Select
Mil Millington

Steve, Son of Tim: It is time! It is time! It is...

Crowd of The Faithful: Time!

Steve, Son of Tim: Signs and portents illuminate the hour. God's wrath...

Crowd of The Faithful: long foretold, patiently awaited,

Steve, Son of Tim: ...is come to sweep away the swarming evil of this sinful world. Only the Select shall enter the Ark. Only the Select shall see another sunrise. Only the Select shall return when the waters and the fires and the fiery waters have passed. Only the select shall build God's world anew.

Crowd of The Faithful: [Cheers. Applause.]

Steve, Son of Tim: The Ark awaits!

Crowd of The Faithful: [Cheers. Applause. A single vuvuzela – mass 'Shhh's – vuvuzela stops. Cheers. Applause.]

Steve, Son of Tim: So, all the women, follow me!

Crowd of The Faithful: [Cheers. Applause.]

Steve, Son of Tim: Goodbye!

[Cheers and applause gradually falter, fragment, and stop.]

Man #1 (shouting from The Faithful): And when shall the men of the Select begin to board the Ark, Steve, Son of Tim?

Woman #1 (shouting from elsewhere in The Faithful): And the two of each animal?

Man #2 (shouting from the back of The Faithful): Two? Wasn't it seven? It says seven.

Woman #1: It says two as well. And... you know, two makes sense, doesn't it? I thought the 'seven' bit was a typo.

Crowd of The Faithful: [General murmuring of agreement.]

Man #2: A typo? It's inerrant. If it says seven in there, then it's seven. Or am I just being too Faithful? Because I followed the actual

word of God, and I've been shovelling seven horse's worth of dung off my lawn for six months to prove it.

Man #3 (shouting from elsewhere in The Faithful): You got horses? I got horses too. Wasn't somebody collating this?

Man #4 (very distant): I got two horses, then another seven. I thought that's what it meant. Nine horses, in two stages.

Man #2: Oh, for... what did everyone else get?

[Voices from the Crowd, building up – "Horses", "Horses", "Horses", "Ants", "Hamsters", "Horses again – sorry", "Geese", "Badgers", "Woodlice", etc. – until it's a roaring cacophony.]

Man #1: Excuse me...

[Crowd voices continue.]

Man #1 (very loud): Excuse me!

[Crowd voices fall silent.]

Man #1: Excuse me. Sorry, but could we just return for a moment to when the men of the Select are to board the Ark? Steve, Son of Tim, when shall the men of the Select embark?

Steve, Son of Tim: Only women are in the Select, brother. Now, I think I can clear up this confusion about whether it's two horses or seven--

Man #1: Hold on: just the women?

Steve, Son of Tim: Yes.

Man #1: Just the women. And you.

Steve, Son of Tim: I was surprised too, when God told me.

Man #1: I understood men and women would be among the Select.

Steve, Son of Tim: It doesn't say that anywhere.

Man #4 (testily): It does imply nine horses, though.

Crowd of The Faithful: Shhh.

Man #1: OK, no, it doesn't say it, explicitly...

Steve, Son of Tim: There you go, then.

Man #1: Well...

Steve, Son of Tim: But God's voice, in my head, did tell me it was, "All the women, only!"

Man #1: Only.

Steve, Son of Tim: Only.

Man #1: In your head.

Steve, Son of Tim: In my head. That's right.

Man #1: When?

Steve, Son of Tim: Tuesday. No – wait. What's today? Wednesday, it was Wednesday.

Woman #1: Shall we bring our two of each animal beside us, Steve, Son of Tim?

Man #1: Wait a minute, wait a minute. I still have a few questions about the Select being only the women and Steve, Son of Tim.

Steve, Son of Tim: It's not for us to question God, brother. But it might have simply been logistics. Imagine if I had to call out the names of each of the Select, one by one. It'd take ages, wouldn't it? And the clock is against us here, let's remember - what with it being Time, and God's wrath being come. God would have foreseen that issue, would he not? And his design would have included the solution. By all the Select happening to be women, it's a quick division and the whole process of boarding the Ark is simplified.

Man #1: Simplified down to you, Steve, Son of Tim, and all the women. God could have chosen some other distinction, surely? He could have said, um, "All the white people,"

Woman #1: Nazi!

Man #1: Actually, I'm black.

Woman #1: Oh, I see – and that makes it all right to be a Nazi, then, does it?

Man #1: It's not about—Ugh. Look: I'm just saying that I find it really quite odd that Steve, Son of Tim, gets to go off alone with all of the, and only the, women.

Woman #1: It's not only the women. There's a lot of animals too.

Man #4 (even more testily): Especially horses.

Man #1: If you bring up your nine bleeding horses once more I swear I'll come back there and--

Woman #1: Horses, women, white people – is there anything you don't hate? I think we know why you weren't among the Select.

Man #1: I do not—!

Steve, Son of Tim: Calm! Calm... calm. Can't you see what's happening here?

Man #1: What?

Steve, Son of Tim: It's obvious. Satan is testing you.

Man #1: Testing me?

Steve, Son of Tim: Yes. Listen, brother, you joined The Faithful because you read the Book and heard my words and knew that it was true, correct?

Man #1: Well... yes.

Steve, Son of Tim: And you've known that I have revealed the true will of God when I've talked to you about sin?

Man #1: Yes.

Steve, Son of Tim: And about the causes of all the problems in the world?

Man #1: Yes.

Steve, Son of Tim: And about what kind of shoes were pious and what kind God hates?

Man #1: Yes. That particularly.

Steve, Son of Tim: Then, brother, were not Satan sowing doubt in your heart, why would you question this? Let me ask you, what is more likely: that you're wrong to question this one thing, or that you were wrong about everything you've believed was true, for all these years?

Man #1: Hmmm...

Steve, Son of Tim: Everything you've believed, or this?

Man #1: Hmmm...

Steve, Son of Tim: It's this, isn't it?

Man #1: OK... I s'pose.

Steve, Son of Tim: Of course it is! Praise be to God, for re-opening our brother's eyes!

Crowd of The Faithful: [Cheers. Applause.]

Steve, Son of Tim: Now, as I said, all the women, follow me! The younger, prettier ones at the front and the older, uglier, richer ones towards the rear, please.

[Mil adds: The phrase I overheard, as I'm sure you've guessed, was, "All the women, follow me." It made its way into my ears across a school car park, and was an entirely innocent instruction. At least, I think it was.]

The last I heard

David Gaffney

My prawns texted me to say that they would be out of date in 12 hours, so I rang Alfie, but he was grumpy and didn't seem to care. If your shellfish sent you a message, he said, it means they are still thinking about you, so you shouldn't worry.

But I do. Now I will have to rush home and stuff down a warm mound of degenerating seafood – alone, because Alfie prefers Morecambe bay shrimps or scampi. And freezing them is out of the question because stocking up on supplies makes me feel like I'm preparing for a post-apocalyptic dystopian future.

The prawns talk to me, everything talks to me. Each one of my household objects is in constant communication all day long and for some reason Alfie, who works at home since the cafe concession failed, finds this annoying. It's not that I'm all that desperate to know everything he is doing all the time; the information the objects send me is useful in other ways. For example if Alfie eats a tin of tuna I get a text saying we're down to one can, or if he flips on a light I get a notice that power usage is increasing, and if he lies down on the bed I get a message from the duvet about cleanliness. It helps my planning. But I must admit that I do also find it comforting to receive minute by minute accounts of his every move. It's a little like being God. And what weirdo doesn't want to be God?

As I got closer to home the urgent, red-coloured messages from the prawns dried up and my mind flooded with horrifying images; Alfie may have covered up the microchip with a tea-towel – he'd done that before - or worse, chucked the whole thing into the waste disposal where the communication chip would be minced up with fish flesh and nothing would be heard from it again.

When I got home Alfie was waiting in the hall, wearing his chef's hat and black and white check trousers. He kissed me on the lips.

'It's all ready for you,' he said, and took me into the kitchen.

Rumours
Ian Marchant

I live with my wife and stepdaughter in a flat above a hippy gift shop on a busy High Street in a small town on the border between England and Wales.

If I lean out of the window, I can see my local pub, all of two minutes' walk away. It's great if you want a quick drink, but it makes our bedroom catastrophically noisy at chucking out time; especially in the hot weather when we have to have all the windows open. It's a bit like living in a Soho loft apartment, though it's not a direct analogy, as our town has a population of just over 2000, and a high percentage of them are retirees from The Black Country. Still; this is the busiest part of our little town, and it can be noisy, in its own way. Overhearing chatty neighbours, local shoppers, and rowdy drinkers is our everyday and all night lot.

Last weekend, for example, a girl was standing in the street screaming at her boyfriend. Her screaming woke me up. I looked at my watch. It was 3am,

'Why did you fucking text her to say that we were splitting up?'

I didn't hear her boyfriend's reply, as I rolled over and buried my one good ear in the pillow. But I expect that whatever his answer was, it contained a high degree of untruth.

We are in Wales, but only just. Opposite our flat is the Post Office, which declares itself the Last Post Office in Wales, though it could just as well be the First. Except to the west, where the Radnor Forest rises up from the valley of the River Lugg, we are surrounded on three sides by England. We get Channel 4, not S4C, our TV news comes from Birmingham, and our local newspaper is the Hereford Times. Hereford is our nearest city; it's where we go shopping, where we catch the train, and where we go for our hospital appointments. And our church is C of E, not Church in Wales, one of only four Welsh parishes which looks to Canterbury rather than Llandaff for spiritual guidance. The border is a five minute walk away from us. But our neighbours feel themselves to be just as Welsh as someone from Merthyr Tydfil or Blaenau Ffestiniog. They support Wales at the rugby, they get misty-eyed when they hear a male voice choir, and they are huge enthusiasts for marital infidelity. As far as they are concerned, they are as Welsh as laverbread and Pot Noodles. I'm just not sure that people from other parts of Wales agree.

It's their voices which are the problem. They speak with a beautiful burr, much as you might imagine people on the Archers would speak if the actors really came from the countryside, rather than Solihull. Anyone round here who speaks with a Welsh accent is just as much an incomer as the retirees from Brum or the English arty farty hippies (of whom I am proud to count myself one). There is only one Welsh speaker, and that's Llynos, and she's from Cardigan. And she says she's forgotten most of it anyway.

The guy in the flat next to us is a proper Radnorshire lad, and he speaks with the local accent. His little place, not much more than a bedsit, is above a café, and is sandwiched between us and the flat above the local chip shop.

On nights when he staggers back pissed from The Farmers Arms, he likes to play his Fleetwood Mac Greatest Hits CD at industrial volume. I have to get out of bed and lean out of our kitchen window and bang on his kitchen window with a stick to get him to turn it down. Sometimes this works; and sometimes it doesn't, and then we lie awake while 'Rhiannon' or 'Tusk' throb through our bedroom wall into the small hours.

'I used to like Fleetwood Mac', said my wife at half two-ish a few nights ago. She's lucky. I never did.

Mr. Mac we call him. He came up to me in the street last week to apologise after the latest such incident.

'You know what it's like, ' he said in his East Radnorshire burr, 'sometimes you've just got to crank it up and bang it out.'

I've tried to guess how old he is; I reckon 23. I don't think I'd mind so much if he played drum 'n' bass or dubstep like a proper 23 year old coming back pissed from the pub. At least it would seem appropriate. But Fleetwood Mac? Who ever cranked up and banged out Fleetwood Mac? And only ever Fleetwood Mac?

Pav, the chip shop owner. is going mental. His flat is on the other side of Mr Mac, and he and his wife have a new baby. I've heard Pav at two in the morning out in the alley screaming obscenities up at Mr. Mac's window; again, sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. Pav and I were talking about it last week.

'Why fucking Fleetwood Mac?', said Pav. 'What's fucking wrong with him?'

'I dunno. Maybe his mum liked them, or something. Perhaps he heard it in the womb.'

'I tell you what.' said Pav to me this morning after another night listening to 'You Make Loving Fun' through the walls, 'I've got a really good mind to make him a Pink Floyd CD. At least I like Pink Floyd.'

It felt like my worst nightmares might be coming true. Not just lying awake all night, but lying awake all night listening to selections from 'Wish You Were Here'. I realised this afternoon that I needed to act, and quickly.

Tonight, at just after one, the music starts up.

BOM BOM BA BOMBOM, BOM BOM BA BOMBOM

I'M A MONSTER! GOT A REVVED UP TEENAGE HEAD...'

My wife sits up and clicks on the bedside lamp.

'What!' she says. 'What now! What's this? This isn't Fleetwood Mac!'

TEENAGE MONSTER! CALIFORNIA BORN AND BRED!'

I smile at her, only half awake.

'This, my love, is 'Teenage Head', by The Flaming Groovies.'

'I can't believe it! Are you going to bang on his window?'

'Perhaps in a bit....'

'What?! Why not now?'

'Well... this afternoon, I burnt a seventies compilation CD and stuck it through his letterbox. He seems to like seventies stuff. This is track one. I want to hear what the rest sounds like.'

'You did WHAT?'

'Well, if I didn't, Pav was going to do him a Floyd CD.'

'Go and knock on his window!'

'But... it's the Flaming Groovies.... It's a million times better than Fleetwood Mac... ten million better than Floyd.'

'Just go and make him stop...'

I get out of bed, pull on my dressing gown, and head towards the door.

'Stpd anka' says my wife.

'What did you say?' I ask.

'You heard.'

How to develop new audiences

David Gaffney

Alfie and I met one year five months and two weeks ago. At that time he was the chef at Ballet Rambert's cafe concession and I was head ballerina in a production of Swan Lake with tractors. Before Swan Lake with tractors Alfie used to complain about the cafe concession all the time.

'These fuckers in tights eats nothing all day,' he would moan. 'A Mars bar, a diet coke and three fags is their entire daily diet.'

'But I'm a fucker in tights,' I told him.

'I thought you were with the tractors.' he said.

The addition of tractors to the production was a massive boon for Alfie's cafe concession because the tractor drivers, six heavy-set men with faces like boulders, rocked up every day and ate like rats. They started on full English breakfast with black pudding and fried bread, then at lunchtime they had liver in gravy with chips, or steak and kidney pudding the colour of a dirty vest with mashed potato and a viscous green sauce. Now and again they even had an evening meal as well, sometimes Lancashire hot pot followed by baked Alaska, once three bean chilli with half-and-half rice and chips and a chunk of Arctic Roll. Alfie really had a chance to shine. The other ballet dancers and I would watch the six tractor drivers ladling down gristle, fat, sugar and pastry while our tongues lapped in and out of unfeasibly tiny portions of yogurt. It was like watching a dirty film.

But Swan Lake with tractors was only a moderate success and although Alfie tried to persuade the artistic director to employ heavy machinery in other productions, it turned out to be a blip.

Alfie, however, stayed on, and every day he fed me oat and cranberry slices, chocolate coated flapjacks, Fentiman's ginger beer and French pink cloudy lemonade. One day I bought him a tatty old ladybird book about tractors from Save the Children and he laughed. 'We both need big strong men in our lives,' he said, and placed the book on the counter for everyone to see.