

The Binary Illness

It struck in the wee hours of Tuesday morning. A man was trying to do his tax returns when suddenly, all he could write were long strings of ones and zeroes. He ran out of paper in 117 seconds. Or, as he thought,

1010100101010111010010101010101011100001011010 seconds. He instantly rang his GP.

“Get some sleep.” The GP advised.

So, the man went back to bed and tried counting sheep but his brain couldn’t handle the long strings of 1s and 0s that would appear in his mind’s eye.

That is how it began. The illness may have gone unnoticed for a long time if it wasn’t for Jim at the Public Transport Bureau developing it. Jim was in charge of putting the route number identification on buses. The problem was noticed by public transport users as soon as the buses went into rotation. It turns it is very hard to distinguish between route 11010101010, route 11010101101 and route 11010100011 in fifteen seconds before the bus speeds past.

Jim was retired and the problem was thought fixed, but within 17 days nearly everyone in the Public Transport Bureau had contracted the illness, including the treasury department.

The whole organisation fell apart in less than a week.

And that wasn’t the only place having problems: the post office was getting in dire straits too, due to postcodes becoming 20 digits long. However, this didn’t stop them. A handy quick postcode reference guide was published (you can also get it as an app) so people knew what to put in the bottom corner.

Of course, the next problem was sorting them quickly. Postcode Reading became a notoriously difficult university subject, achieved only by those of unusual minds.

Suddenly, mothers were proudly proclaiming of their children,

“Oh yes, Edmund is so smart he’ll get a job at the Post Office by the time he’s twenty five.”

This was obviously a real illness that was spreading rapidly. What was it? How did it spread? How did you treat it? Will the government give us money for having it? These questions needed answers (the answer to the last one was, No.)

Scientists were given grants and started work. It was soon being known by the name “Binary Disorder.” Then they discovered there was a slight difference in some, so then became Binary Type 1 and Binary Type 2 Disorder. So, it had a name, now it needed a treatment.

The initial treatment was opioid drugs, because they were so popular with the general public. That bought some time to find something that would actually work.

The initial trials were promising, but soon quite serious side effects began to appear.

These included:

- Mathematical Power Lust – the uncontrollable attempt to achieve power purely by using maths. In university this was a bonus. In Shakespearian Theatre, less so.
- Algebraic Tourette’s Syndrome (you can guess)
- Uncontrollable Grammar Correctiveness (the mere name caused problems for people with this side effect)
- and simply running around in circles screaming.

Most people said they found these 'unpleasant', and soon holistic and alternative therapies were appearing. Vitamins, massage and stroking specially-made green spikey toys all became popular, but only briefly. Reading-number dogs were suggested but very few dogs passed the training.

What was to be done? Society entered a new dark age. Huge amounts of bits of scrap paper and old biros filled landfills and overflowed in streets, which in turn caused terrible illnesses. Many died without hope or even a useful calculator. A decade passed and society withered, then an amazing discovery: the disease was spread by small yappy white dogs. A breakthrough!

A law was rushed through that banned the ownership of small yappy white dogs, punishable by hanging or firing squad, leading to much celebration. Within 6 months, not only had the disease stopped spreading but people started to recover. The dark age ended, public transport was viable again, and being in the post office was once again a dead-end job.

I always knew those little yappy things were truly evil.