

Down the Tubes

by

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Finally, thank you for taking the time to read my work.

MRS. TAGGART SAT down at her desk and sipped her coffee while going over the day's lesson plan. When the clock struck eight, she set down her coffee, reached behind her ear and synced herself to the network.

White, snowy static filled her eyes, and when she blinked, she found the virtual classroom before her. A group of thirty students sat at their virtual desks, some attentive, some not so much. She cleared her throat.

"Good morning, class."

"Good morning, Mrs. Taggart," they said.

She took the morning attendance, going over the connection log embedded in the virtual desk, and frowned when she saw Dave Johnson had not yet connected. When she looked over at his desk, she saw his outline filled with the repeating text of "Error 404." She frowned. This was his fourth absence in two weeks.

Mrs. Taggart flagged his name, marked it "Schedule conference" and minimized her registry.

"Today we will continue our lesson on human technology and the early 21st century. Sarah Billings, from your homework, what can you tell me about the year 2012?"

A young, blonde-haired girl sat up. The surface of her desk flickered to life. Mrs. Taggart grinned.

"Without your personal Wiki, Sarah."

"Sorry, Mrs. Taggart," Sarah frowned. Her desk dimmed. "2012 was the year worldwide bandwidth consumption surpassed available bandwidth resources."

Mrs. Taggart nodded.

"Good. What came next? Um, let's see . . . Phillip? Can you answer that question?"

Phillip fought back a yawn and answered, “The Bandwidth Crisis.”

“Which is?”

“Uh . . .”

“Can anyone help him out?”

Another young man smirked and raised his hand.

“Yes, Darian?”

“The Bandwidth Crisis was a period of twelve years when civilization went down the tubes.”

Some of his classmates chuckled. Mrs. Taggart paused, thought it over and then nodded.

“I suppose that’s true, Darian, but what did it mean, exactly, to civilization?”

“It meant we’d overlooked the fact that bandwidth was a vital resource. We ignored it, and when the tubes were clogged, our entire information structure collapsed.”

“Good. And to what did this lead?”

A dozen hands went up. This delighted her. After a moment’s deliberation, Mrs. Taggart called upon Maggie Simmons.

“It lead to the invention of the NeuralNet.”

“That’s correct, Maggie. Can you tell the class how this amazing invention works for us?”

Maggie beamed.

“Well, it means that we all sort of broadcast our own wi-fi signal via brainwaves. All of our neural bandwidth is shared with the help of the transmitters implanted just behind the ear.”

“Right,” Mrs. Taggart said. “And this is exactly how we’re able to have class without leaving our homes. Using our brains as our own personal computers has revolutionized our way of life, and helped pull civilization out of an otherwise dark period. This doesn’t mean the bandwidth issue has been resolved. Since we all share our neural bandwidth, we must be sure not to exceed our daily allotm—”

The classroom shifted. One of the students—Jeremy Daniels—was in the process of raising his hand, and continued to do so repeatedly. Mrs. Taggart checked the students’ bandwidth stats. She frowned and terminated Darian’s processes.

Jeremy Daniels stopped raising his hand. Someone in the back of class said, “Major lag.”

“Darian,” Mrs. Taggart shouted. “What did I tell you about looking at pornography during class time? You know your bandwidth is to be used only for school. Principal’s office. *Now.*”

She initiated transfer protocol. Darian vanished from his seat before he could say a word.

“Right,” she said. “Back to the lesson.”