AN INSOMNIAC'S RESEARCH REPORT

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Among the many afflictions of my old age is insomnia. I do have extended periods abed when I'm conscious of being asleep, but I am more often aware of being awake.

I don't take pills, count sheep, or drink warm milk, but I have a companion in my wakefulness--a digital clock, which provides me with no end of comfort and entertainment.

Its basic material is simple: ten digits and a colon:

1234567890:

Every twelve hours, it runs through its repertory of 12 x 60 = 720 different sets of numbers. Most of these I find lacking in character, e.g., 5:17 6:52 2:39. I suppose some more sophisticated or nocturnally more alert person might find messages in them. What keeps me from getting up to look for a good book is the chance of seeing a set of numbers with a nice pattern. All digits the same:

1:11 2:22 3:33 4:44 5:55 11:11

Rising sequences:

1:23 2:34 3:45 4:56 12:34 (I'm at my happiest when a four-digit series pops up.)

Falling sequences:

6:54 5:43 4:32 3:21 2:10

The first two numbers add up to the third:

1:01 3:58 6:17 and many others.

Palindromes:

1:01 1:21 1:31 5:15 10:01 12:21 and many others.

Three- and four-digit squares, complete:

1:00 1:21 1:44 2:25 2:56 3:24 4:00 4:41 5:29 6:25
7:29 8:41 9:00 10:24 11:56 12:25

Reduplications:

10:10 12:12

Powers, beginning with the zeroth;

12:48 1:39

I'm also slightly bemused by familiar sequences, such as pi and the Fibonacci series:

3:14 11:23

Usually, I don't have to lie in wait too long for one of these patterns. At times like 2:21, I get pretty keyed up waiting for the minute to turn.

But at a certain point, these numeric patterns have told me about everything they have to say; they no longer offer much reward. So here I turn to the idea of converting the numbers into letters, which may offer some surprise words, abbreviations, or the like.

I have to confess that my more serious research into letter equivalents was done in the soberness of daytime, and with a few looks into reference works.

I suspect that there are many potential ways of making the conversions. An obvious one is to read each number before the colon as one letter, and each after the colon as another. As the numbers after the colon are more than the alphabet's 26, you can reduce the numbers from 27 to 59 modulo 26. 00 after the colon gets lost, or is it to be read as a 26?

The result is 12 x 26 = 312 different two-letter combinations. A lot have meanings:

AC ad AF ag ah AI am . . . lo LP

But I have a problem: I can't remember the letter numbers higher than no. 5 (e). And I don't want to have to count higher than that every time I have to make a conversion. So I don't ordinarily use this method. I am curious in the middle of the night, but I don't go to bed in order to do work.

What attracts my greater attention is that most of the digital numbers are perfectly good letters the moment you look at them upside down.

1234567890 become 068L95hE21

Now, all you have to do is ignore the colons and read the letters. There is the problem that 2 6 and 9 upside down don't make letters. So there are hours at a time when no proper words are to be seen.

Yes, the h is lower case, and the capital 8 isn't quite right; but nothing on earth is perfect.
But the words now have three letters, and are more interesting. (I haven't yet found any words with four; they would have to end in oi or ii, which not many English words do.)

Words include:

LEI hOE hIE SEE LEE 8EE ShE hIS SIS ESS SOL

OIL EEL 8EL h08 S08 L08 808 S18 L18 818

Abbreviations and acronyms:

ESE SSE ISL ESL LIB

Roman numerals:

III LII LIII

Variations on emotive expressions:

Ohs hOS OOS Shh hEh EEh OOh OOII

There's more, but it's time to roll over and hope that sleep will come now.