

The BOOK OF WANDS



NEIL SLADE

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Illustrated by BRIAN GIES

Sample Chapters:
Jua Lee Noodle

Author's Note:

This is a memoir and a recollection of some of the more notable events of my life from my youth to the present. Some of the names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals as needed. Although the chronology of some of the events has been slightly juggled in a few spots to aid comprehension, with minor exceptions the stories in this book are literal and accurately reflect true events.

The Book of Wands

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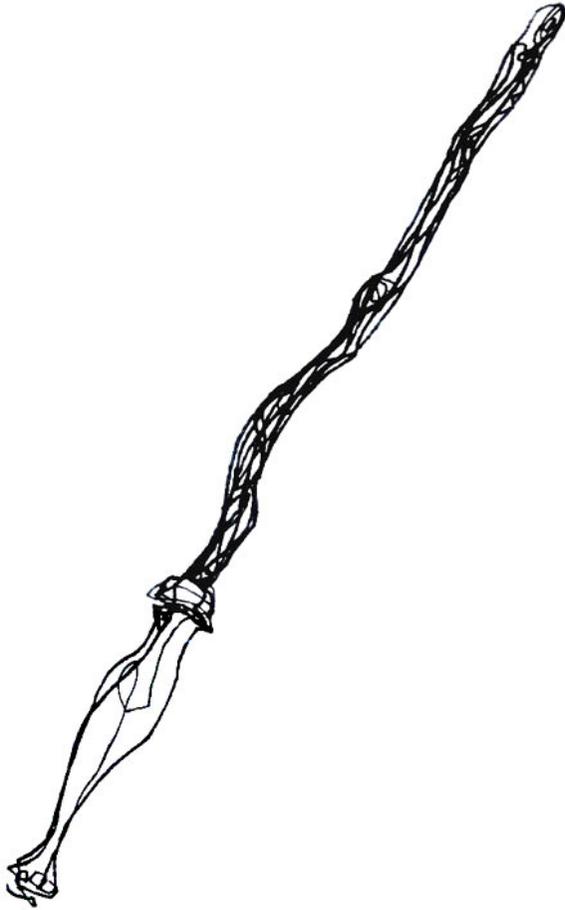
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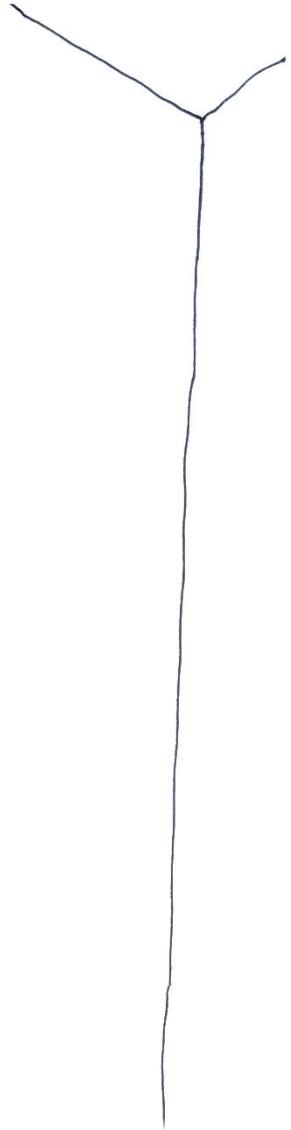
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**PART FOUR:
ADVANCED
LESSONS**



Chapter 36

Jua Lee Noodle

I met the love of my life, my girlfriend, through the Internet. This is not surprising since many people assume from my rapid email responses that I never leave my computer except to go to the...

Wait. I better not write that in the same paragraph which I mention my girlfriend in. Let's just leave it at

"I met my girlfriend on the computer through the World Wide Web."

I had already been teaching music lessons for decades. But for a good while I had been selling my books and CDs online and was gaining notoriety for not only my own original music but for my writing as well.

In time, I had moved away from exclusively making my living teaching private music lessons full time and instead just kept my best students along with a higher percentage of my sanity as a self-published musician and author.

This new freedom was largely the result of spending countless hours building my web site, then consisting of a thousand or more pages and articles, and building a network of interested readers and listeners across the globe, and providing them with right brain musical inspiration and left brain written instruction. I.e., *The Amazing Brain Adventure*.

Of course, self-publishing comes at a price itself. When you do all of the writing, then printing, promotion, selling, distribution, and shipping of your music and books, in my case, my apartment often looked more like a warehouse than a home.

I was born on Benjamin Franklin's birthday, two hundred years later of course, and I sometimes wonder if part of him reincarnated into my flesh and bones. He started out as a printer too. But then, I don't speak French.

Two or three times a year friends visiting me at my house could hardly get much past the inside of my front door from the boxes that lined the floor to

the ceiling, somewhat reminiscent of Stingo and his own cabin walls stuffed with books.

I didn't mind using my apartment as a book warehouse from time to time however. It certainly was better than any slave labor I could envision.

Although the change in my life might seem to an outsider to have occurred overnight, this wasn't the case at all. I had begun recording at the age of fourteen, continuing for the next thirty years and building a catalog of music and written material that got relatively little attention beyond my own home town.

Despite this, for years and years I had slowly created a detailed web site that I one day had hoped to attract the attention of hoards of people dying to learn more about their brain as an alternative to dying of boredom from commercial TV, music, and books. But it was like a business hidden in some back alley that nobody knew existed.

Then the radio shows started and that changed everything.

I had sent a plain email to national radio personality Archie Bellpepper who hosted a nightly talk show that was broadcast across North America. His show focused on the unusual, the controversial, the unknown, and the just plain weird. I felt right at home listening to him.

Although I have long lost the original email, it read something like this:

Dear Mr. Bellpepper

I worked for eleven years at a brain and behavior laboratory located high in the Colorado Wilderness. We discovered methods that would allow any person to consciously increase intelligence, creativity, and pleasure in the brain. These techniques are such so that anyone can easily learn and apply them as simple as clicking on a light switch.

In addition, employing these techniques would very frequently have subjects reporting access to intelligences and entities invisible to ordinary people, including beings who might reside in other dimensions and/or other planets.

Perhaps you would like to have me on your show.

Sincerely,

Neil J. Slade III, Jr.

That got his attention.

Within a few weeks I made my first appearance on the late night show and began teaching brain self-control to people listening in via microwave radio transmissions as they soaked in their tub in Bath, Maine to guys on the Interstate at 1 A.M. driving their trucks through Winnamucca, Nevada.

The attention and the work came in waves however with each show only about twice a year. I would be invisible for six months and then after a national broadcast I would suddenly become as obvious to the uninitiated as a UFO hanging over the White House.

Millions of listeners in every corner of the continent and beyond would momentarily want to know everything about “What was that Ah-Mig-Dolly thing whatchamacallit?” This invariably caused a surge in my web site visitor numbers, which would jump from a trickle to a tidal wave overnight.

After a good show I would be stuck in the house for a solid month or more printing and shipping books myself. Fortunately I would employ an occasional pretty girl that I would steal part time away from behind the Das Fog coffee counter or from behind the health juice bar at my local natural food store, another one of my few places to engage in social interaction with others of my species.

One day I went to my mailbox a few weeks after a big radio show and was surprised to see a large brown envelope sticking out the top of it. I pulled it out, and it must have weighed three pounds.

I brought it inside and anxiously tore into it. I wasn't expecting anything and I hadn't mail ordered anything recently. To my complete surprise and utter bewilderment it was a two inch thick manuscript, all in handwritten Chinese characters.

Of course, I couldn't understand a single bit of it and I had no clue as to what it was, flipping through the pages. That was until I came across a copy of one of my own drawings. And then another, and then another. These were drawings from my very own number one brain book.

"Uh oh," I thought. "They are cloning my books in Peking already."

The envelope was on the floor and I picked it up and looked for a note. Sure enough, inside was a handwritten letter in neat English cursive, written on that pulpy gray lined paper they give to you in grade school.

"Dear Mr. Slate" it read. "I heard you on the raddo and enjoyed you very much. Thank you. I ordered you book on the brain science you talked about and I enjoyed this also. I decided to copy it in my own Chinese language, and I want you to have this. Thank you very muck. Sincerely, Jua Lee Noodle."

I wasn't sure if she had problems spelling, or if I just wasn't reading her handwriting accurately. Probably the latter.

"Gee whiz," I said to myself out loud. "I guess word is getting around."

I picked up the envelope to inspect the return address and had completely expected it to be from Hong Kong or from a time zone fourteen hours away. Instead, it had come from a place not nearly as far distant, and in fact just on the other side of Kansas, two states away. It said, "J.L. Noodle, Rolla, Missouri.

This was something I would not have expected to receive in a million years. My first Chinese fan letter. And it was two inches thick to boot.

It wasn't long before my curiosity got the best of me and I contacted Ms. Noodle. Before long we were emailing and phone calling each other every week, and then every other day.

You know how it goes.

I made sure to ask her to send a photograph of herself early on.

You know how it goes.

When the first photo showed up in my email horribly out of focus, I asked her to please send another, which she did.

It was also out of focus.

I repeated my requests several times, and each time her self portrait came in crooked and out of focus. Either Jua Lee was completely nearsighted or was incapable of managing to take a single photograph un-blurred.

I sent her a tripod.

That didn't help.

I then sent her an auto focus camera.

That didn't help either.

She was a genius at taking bad photos and even outsmarting the most advanced auto focus mechanisms that Japan could offer.

This was fairly curious because she had expressed a keen interest in oil painting. Perhaps she WAS as nearsighted as Monet, or about as technologically savvy as he might be himself operating a cell phone.

It turned out it was both.

For a while I was afraid she was doing it on purpose, but when she arrived at the airport in Denver to visit me in person for the first time, I discovered she was as lovely in person as she was in electronic communications.

Whew.

You know how it goes.

One of the first things I learned about her came about when we were on our way back from the airport. I think we were both kind of nervous and my

brain's language center was somewhat disconnected from my brain's logic circuits.

“So are you hungry after your flight?” I inquired. “Where would you like to go eat? I don't really have that much in my house right now. How about Italian food? Do you like spaghetti?... Oh, sorry.” I stopped in mid-sentence. I had thought about her name and pasta naturally was on my mind. I tried to change course- no pun intended- in mid paragraph.

She turned to me in the darkened car and glared at me.

I tried to make light of the faux pas. “Um, That's an interesting last name you have, Noodle. I love Noodles. Haha.”

Then she let out a burst of laughter and it relieved the tension. “Yeah, it's ironic. My name is Noodle and I hate eating them.”

It was a good thing we had gone out to eat, something we would frequently do over the course of her first visit and many subsequent visits. Although I had not pinned her down on this in advance, I had secret culinary fantasies that she would in time be sharing with me authentic Chinese cuisine prepared by her own delicate two hands and served on my very own plates in my very own dining room.

Jua inferred that her sister, still living back on the mainland, was a great Chinese cook. Apparently this talent was not genetically encoded into her own DNA.

In fact, Jua turned out to be no cook at all except for three things at which excelled. But these three solitary items were no closer to the wok kitchens of the Far East than was the Leaning Tower of Pisa or the Eiffel Tower: Lasagna, pizza, and baked French Fries.

And no, contrary to popular urban myth, pizza was not invented in China. That was gunpowder.

I soon learned that although Jua's attempts at Pan Fried Tofu and Vegetables did not literally blow my head apart, it felt that way as such dishes would invariable cause fireworks in my mouth. Among other gastronomic

disconnects and incompatibilities, she seemed completely insensitive to the amount of hot seasoning she would employ in making her dishes “tasty”.

“You think that’s hot?” she would innocently ask me, as I did my best to douse the flames coming out of my nostrils. Gradually I learned better than to experiment with my own taste buds in her own personal cooking test laboratory.

But sautéed vegetables aside, we got along wonderfully. Within a few years she moved out of her home in Rolla and transplanted herself and her cat to Colorful Colorado and into her own place just two blocks down the street from Erfie, Chloe, and your’s truly.

Before long I would anxiously await the hot pan coming out of her oven, jumping up and down singing my own lyrical appreciation of the somewhat limited menu with strains of “Zanya zanya zanya!!”

At this juncture a little bit of her family history is in order to understand how Jua fits into this jigsaw puzzle of Wands.

Her mother was chief surgeon at her home town’s hospital, the first female chief surgeon in that region. Her father was also a physician, but he was color blind, and therefore resigned to being the president of the same hospital since he could not tell the color difference between a healthy piece of liver inside someone’s gut that should be left intact, and a rancid slab of chopped meat.

Her parent’s occupations are important. Please note: Jua’s mother ruled her surgical court as an expert with Knives and Needles, while her father presided over his administrative domain with Pens and Pencils.

This was a double genetic whammy for Jua, though she didn’t realize it for decades.

Long after we discovered each other’s talents Jua would confess to me, “My mother mentioned Lu Xiang, Bang, and Zhang to me from time to time, and mostly just to my father and sister, but I never knew what she meant. Only until I was an adult did I make the connection.”

Translated, Lu Xiang means to Travel.

Bang is interpreted as Stick.

And Zhang? Take a wild guess. It rhymes with Bond, James Bond.

Jua couldn't sit still growing up, and to some extent this was both to her detriment and to her advantage. She was conscripted at an early age to train in athletics, and soon gained notoriety as a fast runner. In doing so, she developed strong legs and feet. But her manual dexterity? I forgot the Chinese word for "Fumble Fingers."

She was also easily distracted. These days over here we call it Attention Deficit Disorder. Back in China when she was young they called in Red Ants In Your Pants.

It wasn't that there was anything really wrong with her, it was just that she moved so quickly from one thing that captured her attention and enthusiasm to the next that it seemed to her like everyone else was just moving in slow motion by comparison.

None the less, attempting to follow in the footsteps of both of her parents, both Jua and Shoe, her younger sister, began studying medicine after high school. Her sister immediately went on to a successful medical practice that included acupuncture. But Jua was not quite so skilled.

"Didn't they give you the wrong name?" I asked her.

"What do you mean?"

"Weren't you the one with the fast feet? Why didn't they call you Shoe instead of your sister?"

"I don't get it." Jua said.

"Shoe, you know, feet, what you put on your feet."

"No, not that kind of shoe- "Shu"- S-H-U, Morning Sun, you don't spell it like shoe."

I will spell it the way I like.

In any case, Jua actually started out accumulating a great reputation even as a student for being able to fix up people. That is when she could keep

her mind on things. Unfortunately while she was giving this particular gentleman an acupuncture treatment one afternoon, she left him sitting up in a chair and went walking away out of the room before having him actually lie down, as was the safer procedure. She was a little too anxious to move on to the next thing down the hall.

A short way down the hall she heard a loud THUMP! behind her and upon running back into the treatment room discovered her patient lying prone flat on the floor with a needle sticking out of his head. He had passed out unconscious from her treatment of his illness.

“You need to study something else,” Jua’s mother told her the next day. “You’re going to kill somebody making them healthy. Go study science instead.”

And so Jua’s parents sent their daughter off to the University to study and practice science in test tubes and books rather than to practice and experiment on living tissue.

Jua proved to be a better student than a doctor, and this began a decade’s long career as a professional student, that like myself she was hesitant to give up.

Before long she earned a full scholarship to come to the United States where after many years she this earned a Ph.D. in the Philosophy and History of Science, and this she did without killing anyone.

Shortly after she came to the realization that she would rather continue being a professional student than actually go to work, she then enrolled in Law School in Columbia, Missouri, where she eventually earned her license to practice law and began working for a law firm.

Jua could only put off work for so long.

Before long she set up her own practice when she realized she was doing most of the work for her boss, and he was taking home most of the money.

“So wasn’t going to law school hard,” I asked her one day while we were driving to pick up some pomegranates, her favorite fruit at the Asian

market across town. “Wasn’t it difficult memorizing all those laws and rules and things?”

“Oh no,” she answered. “I hardly studied at all. I never read the text books because I hate to study. I would just to go class and remember what the professor said. I have a perfect memory, Jua.”

“No you Jua. Me Neil.”

It is a little bit hard to convey in writing, but it’s an ongoing challenge trying to figure out what she means. She tends to jumble words and sentences like a gymnast on the tumbling mat.

Add this, the fact that Jua still has quite a thick accent despite having been in the United States for twenty years. But in spite of all of this, I would recommend that everyone have a mate that is from another country altogether, someone you actually have a hard time understanding when they talk. It puts real spark and fun in a relationship.

In fact, it seems to me when I look at all of my friends who have partners that are so much like themselves, that kind of arrangement looks so dull and boring to me any more.

By contrast, my relationship with Jua is continually amusing and entertaining. Being with her is a continual riddle. It’s like hanging out with someone from another planet.

“Do you know what amnesia is?” she asked me one time.

“Yeah, sure. It’s when you forget who you are, even though everybody else knows you.”

“Well, when I came to the United States, it was like I was the only one who knew who I was, and everybody else had amnesia.”

“Huh?” I asked.

“Sure. I remembered everything about me, and my whole life, and where I came from, and what kind of foods I liked, and what my whole life was like before I came over here. I remembered everything. But it was like everyone else had absolutely no idea about me at all. No one knew anything about me. I could describe what my life was like in China, and everybody

looked at me like I was crazy. I remembered everything, but everybody else knew nothing about me at all. I knew who I was, but nobody else did. It was reverse amnesia.”

When Jua and I first met, I would spent time every day trying to figure out what she was saying, like a perpetual word game in the newspaper. She was a walking talking word puzzle.

One time we went to the movies and afterwards in the car we began to discuss one character in the film.

I said, “That guy Jack, he was hard to like.” I was trying to put my finger on what it was exactly about this character that I didn’t care for. “He seemed to me to be a poser,” I speculated, “He was too angry. Or maybe it was that he just wasn’t an original thinker.”

“Or owie de bow,” Jua replied.

“What?”

“Owie de bow,” she repeated.

I thought maybe there was something stuck in my ears. “Say it again, I can’t understand what you’re saying.”

“Owie de a bow!” she said emphatically.

I shook my head. This was a tough one. “Say it slower, please. I STILL don’t get it.”

“OWIE DE UH BOW!!” she yelled.

I sat there for a minute and thought, wait a second. What letters does she have trouble with... lets see, “L’s” and “V’s” ... Owie de abow...owie de abow.... “OH!! EUREKA! *All of the above!*”

“That’s what I said,” she insisted, “Are you deaf? You said he was a poser, or angry, or unoriginal. And I said ‘Or owie de uh bow!’”

I would not go as far as to say that Jua and I are polar opposites, far from it.

The old adage that “Opposites attract” is only true if you are an inorganic ferrous mineral. An iron magnet. Otherwise people need to have more in common than they have opposing.

None the less we are different in many respects.

She lives with a cat. I live with two dogs.

We did live together for a year when she first came to Colorado, but we soon learned that arrangement was about as practical and comfortable in my little apartment as bowling in a pencil box. At that time, the differences between us were amplified and tended to drown out our similarities.

For example, my dogs liked to lie down on my clothes and take a nap. Her cat liked to use my clothes as its favorite place to relieve itself.

Speaking of cats, it is no coincidence that as I write down these notes, I just received a call from Bobby Spaghetti.

“Hey Neil, I just have to tell you this story.”

“What?”

“I just went out on our front porch to get the newspaper, and looking through the door I see this cat up there, and it hears me and runs away.”

“Yeah, so.”

“Well, I go to get the paper, and it’s wrapped up in a plastic bag, and I notice that the cat just went all over the bag. Think about it. This cat has all of outside to pick from, all of Denver. But it decides that the best place to pee is to come up on our porch, and use our newspaper for a bathroom.”

“Sounds familiar.” I said. “That’s a cat for you.”

I will not accuse Jua of exactly that. But otherwise, like a cat, she has a sleep gene and can fall asleep any time, any place.

I am a night owl, and if a mouse scratches its nose on the other side of the wall, that wakes me up.

I like some things to stay the same: I like the same food on a regular basis; how I clean my house remains as predictable as the clock returning to the same numbers every twelve hours; and I like to go on the same walk with my dogs every day.

She likes to try new kinds of food all the time, she makes a game out of cleaning and will never use a mop the same way twice.

She likes to travel- and I mean that in the more traditional sense. I never go much past the city limits- and I mean in a motorized vehicle.

I've lived in maybe five different places in my entire life.

Jua seems to move every other year or more.

My career has been the same for most of my life: musician, music teacher, and writer.

She has never been able to settle on a career. In fact, it wasn't long before Jua Lee Noodle got ants in her lawyer pants too. Just as she ran from one finish line to the next in grade school and high school and even in college in her running shorts, once she crossed the finish line to her law degree and bar exam, she realized she didn't really care for being a lawyer that much either.

And that's where Wands comes into her story.





Chapter 37

Noodles In Hot Water

At the ripe old age of—wait, I’m going to get myself in trouble again.

Let’s just say that after a long protracted career as a professional student, and after going to law school and playing ball in the courtroom court, Jua decided that law wasn’t exactly her thing, which started her off playing with Knives. In this way she began to take after her mother at long last.

But Jua’s Wands were not Knives that released liquid crimson to flow from patients flat lying on a horizontal cutting table.

Jua’s Knives were used put crimson oil medium on flat boards of canvas.

She now wanted to be a painter. An artist.

It was over the course of many phone conversations that I began to encourage her in this direction.

“Practicing law is *nothing* like painting. Painting is *fun*. I could paint all day long,” she told me.

“So, be a painter instead of a lawyer,” I encouraged her.

And it was only when she began to paint with Knives that everything that had been skirting the circumference of her consciousness about the reality of Wands began to make itself undeniably real.

She hadn’t understood what Wands were, and I certainly didn’t think that she knew either.

I didn’t know for sure until one night when I went out to meet her halfway between our two houses, but let’s put that story on hold for the moment.

Back in Rolla, Missouri Jua had been doing the dishes underneath the kitchen window around sunset one evening. She had too many pieces of

silverware in her hand. She dropped a couple onto another plate and heard a little “Ding!” So she thought that was the sound.

But as Jua held onto one Butter Knife in particular, something caught the corner of her eye. When she looked up, she saw a man walk by the trees about a dozen yards away outside. At the time she lived about ten miles out of town, alone on thirty acres of land with no one else around her except her cat Tiger, and her dog Puzzle.

“Hey, who was that?” she first thought. But the second thought was, “He looked just like my father!”

This was extremely peculiar because her father had been dead for a year. Beyond that, there was no reason at all for anyone to be walking around on her property. No one lived close by, and she shouldn’t be having any visitors.

She let the wet Knife plop back down into the hot soapy sink water and went outside to investigate, not even taking off her apron.

Walking around her entire house and back and forth to the small lake that bordered on the edge of the property she saw no one at all. “That’s really strange,” she said to herself, leaning up against what she thought was the side of the house. But it wasn’t.

She, in her own interminable way had started to lean up against a dressing mirror that she had some time ago set up against the side of the back porch, and naturally with the pressure of her whole body, the mirror broke and shattered into dozens of pieces.

She fell down onto the ground in among all of the pieces of glass. To great miracle, she escaped injury and cutting herself into shards as well. But she did sustain one cut, right on her right butt cheek.

The implications of this entire event went for the most part completely unnoticed and she forgot all about until her next visit to her sister in China.

“When did you get that?” Shoe asked her, pointing to the newly acquired scar on her rear end.

“Oh that?” Jua remarked, and then proceeded to tell the story of the mysterious figure in her yard, precipitated with the washing of the silverware.

“That’s interesting,” Shoe said. “Didn’t you know? Dad had exactly the same scar, in exactly the same place.”

This episode was just the first of many Jua had. The next time she Traveled was with a Pen in her in hand instead of a plane ticket.

It was months later hard at work studying for exams, one afternoon she fell asleep in bed clutching her favorite ball point Pen. But this time, she distinctly heard a strange springy sound that would become familiar over time...

PAAAAHHHHHHNNNNNNGGGG!!!!

And then suddenly

POOF!!

The next thing she knew, she was back in China in her home town of Jin Zhou.

She found herself in the railroad station square. The place was deserted except for a few people quickly hustling home. She looked up at the big clock that was at the top of the railroad station tower. It read 2 A.M.

“How could I get here?!?” she thought, experiencing lucid consciousness, completely aware of herself and her predicament, a half a world away from her school in the United States.

She looked across the square to take in the scene and immediately noticed two new large buildings facing the station, each 20 stories high. But the buildings were completely dark, where as all the others in the area and beyond were completely lit up as usual. “Why no lights?” Jua thought. “All the other buildings are lit. Maybe I’m dreaming...”

With that thought that perhaps she was just in a dream, she recalled something that her grandmother once told her.

“Jua, if you are someplace and you don’t know if you are having a dream or not, bite your finger. If it doesn’t hurt- you’re dreaming. If it hurts- it’s real!”

“Ah ha!” Jua realized, “That’s easy then!”

Jua began to try to raise her finger to her mouth. “That should settle it...”

The only problem was, she couldn’t find her finger.

She couldn’t even find her arm.

She had no finger. She didn’t even have an arm for that matter. Her whole body was missing.

She felt completely terrified. Here she was standing a world away in China where she wasn’t supposed to be, and it felt measures worse than being in a public place naked. She just didn’t have any clothes on- she didn’t even have any skin on.

“Calm down,” Jua reminded herself as she began to remember the sequence of events. “My mind just separated from my body. I just took a nap. I just need to go back.”

As soon as she thought that, she found herself skimming along the top of clouds, soundless. And in another timeless fraction of a moment POOF! Again.

She was right back in bed, clutching her Pen, papers scattered to the side of her body.

The first chance she had, she called her sister and told her about the strange occurrence.

“Wow,” Shoe commented. “You had a Pen, eh?”

“Yes, why?”

“Well, I don’t think you would believe me. But you knew what you saw. It wasn’t your imagination. There really are two new buildings by the railroad station.”

“What? What are they?”

“It’s a new hotel,” her sister explained. “The developers thought it would be a busy new place, but after they got it all built they discovered there weren’t enough people to open it up. It’s never opened. They haven’t turned on the lights, there’s no light on there at night. What time did you say you fell?” asked Shoe.

Jua thought for just a second. “It was noon, it was twelve noon here.”

“Interesting,,” said Shoe. “There’s exactly a 14 hour difference between us. When it’s noon there, it’s 2 A.M. here. You got it right. You got the time exactly right..”

These and other incidents began to accumulate, and this intrigued Jua to no end. It prompted her write down her dreams, and she regularly kept a Pen next to her bed.

One night she had a dream of her late father. The dream was simple. He appeared in front of her and said, “Your sister didn’t pay her bill.”

This was unusual on two accounts. One, in her family no one every talked about money or bills. Her parents just took care of things, but it was as close to a prohibited topic as anything. The family had regular discussions about everything around the dinner table, about politics, about world news, about medicine, about philosophy, even about neighborly gossip. But the topic of money and bills never came up at all, ever.

But beyond that, in China, no one got bills for anything. You paid for something when you got it. For things like household utilities you would simply go to the company office and pay in person each month when paying for your service was due. No bills were ever sent.

Jua called her sister without delay to explain the strange dream and visitation by her dead father.

“No bills here,” said Shoe. “You know that.”

But the very next morning, Shoe went to the farmers market to do some shopping. Immediately upon her return she found an envelope pinned to her front door. And it was from the electric company.

This was the first and only time she had ever gotten such a thing from them. She opened it up, and it said, “You owe 30 yuan underpaid from last month. Please come in and take care of it. Thank You. – Red Star Loyal National Electric Company”

It was an electric bill.

I could go on and tell other tales of Jua and her budding paranormal occurrences. But let us continue onwards to her search to find some answers. Her sister wasn't yet offering any further clues for the time.

Jua was a dyed in the wool rational thinker. She had a PH.D in the History and Philosophy of Science. Her very own dissertation was on “Science As A Method”, the logical and special way that the scientific method was applied to study the world.

Despite hints dropped by mother growing up from time to time, after all, her mother and father practiced medicine, not witchcraft. They worked in a hospital. They weren't witch doctors.

All of Jua's peculiar experiences were adding up. But this mostly just added up to confusion in her own mind. She did her best to dismiss them as mere coincidence. She told herself over and over, “If you can't reproduce random events under controlled environments, then you can't say what it is.”

But the experiences kept occurring. She began to think she was going crazy. The experiences she was having were uncomfortably changing her entire outlook of the world, and she wanted answers. And she began looking.

One place she began to look was on her radio dial.

She began to regularly listen to one show in particular, none other than Archie Bellpepper and his middle of the night radio show.

She listened to stories of UFOs and ESP, and on one night she listened to one particularly strange guest who was talking about changing the weather with one's mind and brain.

Jua had turned in to the show where none other than your's truly was talking about the seeming bizarre phenomenon of Cloud Busting, where upon you concentrate your brain focus energy and make clouds disappear.

This was a good twelve years before the handsome superstar actor George Clooney would portray a top secret military army officer doing exactly that, where upon they conveniently renamed this cloned idea "Cloud Bursting" for the big screen.

Anyway, Jua listened to me teach a couple million or more listeners how to vaporize clouds with brain focus energy. And then she continued to listen in to the wee hours as I then for the first time that I know of led the same massive number of people in history through a mass brain-thought focus experiment.

Hey, when you are a starving artist you will try anything.

The idea was to have millions of listener's click their collective amygdalae forward, and use advanced frontal lobes creative energy to make it rain, thereby putting out the ongoing raging fires that were gobbling up northeastern Florida during one particularly nasty drought. She thought to herself, "Now that's an interesting sounding guy."

Incidentally, three days later, the completely unpredicted downpour began and didn't stop until the fires had been doused with ten inches of rain, exactly what we had intended.

Before long, the handwritten Chinese translation of my number one brain book showed up in my mailbox.

And as they say, the rest is history.

Well, almost.

Wands, this all leads to Wands.

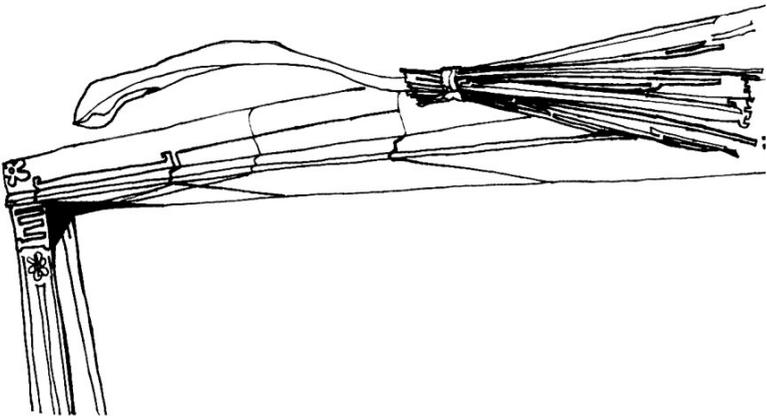
Let me fill in a few more spots on the map.

I never did discuss Wands with Jua even though she knew me for all the nearly as strange references I had made to brain power over all that time and from the radio. Jua was a scientist after all at heart. I really didn't want and scare her away too soon.

However, Jua and I got our first collective inkling that we had more in common than a liking for lasagna during one of her early visits to Colorado.

But The Broom Incident began to change things. More than anything else, this began to cement in Jua's own mind that invisible forces and parallel universes was something that could literally bop her on the head.

I had mounted my new Brooms on my wall and above the arch in my living room just the year previous. I had already been long learning from *The Book of Wands*, and I was quite adept at many of them. I was somewhat familiar with Brooms and their qualities, but for a large measure I was still in the learning and experimental stage. This event would teach me even more.



We were in my bedroom, asleep in bed, and it was the middle of the night. I am a light sleeper, but I know the difference between a mouse that wakes me up, and an explosion.

It was about 2 A.M. and suddenly out of nowhere, as startling as if a sonic boom had occurred over the roof of our house, we were both woken awake by a sudden...

BANG!!

I bolted up in bed. This wasn't just your typical harmless Wand Pahhnnngg! kicking in. This sounded like the ceiling had collapsed in the kitchen.

“What the heck was THAT?!!” I yelled, looking over at Jua, herself usually a sound sleeper, but now completely alert and wide eyed herself as well.

She said nothing but shook her head, the look of fear on her face.

I didn't want to, but I got up to investigate, thinking that someone had tried to kick in my back kitchen door.

When I got to the kitchen I found the door intact. But I was perplexed by a similarly unexpected sight. That was the sight of my large folding cutting board table on its side in the middle of the kitchen. I had moved it to the wall next to the widow, and I had thought it was stable there, as it had been uncounted times before.

I picked it up and moved it back to its place then crawled back into bed.

“What was it?” Jua asked. “A burglar?”

I turned out the night lamp. “No, just the cutting board table. Go back to sleep It was nothing.”

It seemed like nothing.

Until the next night.

Again, two hours past midnight I was again shocked into rude conscious awareness by the sound of not just one, but three

BANG!! BANG!! BANG!!

I instantly pulled at the chain switch on the night table light and looked over at Jua. This time the sound had seemed to come right from over my head.

“WHAT WAS THAT??!” I yelled. “What are you doing NOW??!!” somehow forgetting that she had not been responsible for the noise the night before

This time Jua was much closer to being sound asleep as she usually would be. It didn’t stir her at all. In fact, the only thing that had stirred her then was me yelling at her.

But this was even more perplexing since the noise had been even louder than the previous night, and seemed to emanate from within the very bedroom.

“What are you doing?” I demanded. “Are you beating against the headboard with your arms? I’m trying to sleep! GEE WHIZ!!”

“Wha?...” she groaned. “I didn’t hear anything.” She turned back over and pulled the pillow over her head.

I immediately got up and went into the kitchen to investigate.

The table was right up against the wall where I had left it.

I returned to the bedroom this time convinced that Jua had indeed been guilty of slamming against the headboard with her arms like a sleepwalking zombie unable to actually sleep walk past the covers.

“SHEEESH!!” I remarked, turning out the light, and pulling the covers up over my head.

Everything seemed perfectly normal until I got up the next morning. Then I wandered into the living room on my way to my office.

What I beheld was something a dozen times more perplexing than the cutting board on its side in the kitchen.

It was the sight of my big red Broom in the middle of the living room floor.

“Jua! Come in here!” I yelled. “Look at this!!”

Everyone has heard of flying brooms before, but I certainly had not expected one in my own house. I had acquired my Brooms to Travel, but that was another matter. I certainly didn't expect them to start Traveling on their own.

"Oh my god," Jua said looking down at the Broom. She seemed to instantly contemplate what happened. "How did that get there?"

Neither of us had any explanation for it at all. We had now heard two loud sonic burps in the middle of the night. The first time we thought the careening table was just a coincidence. When we saw the Broom six feet away from the wall hook that it had been wedged into, the Broom immovably and tightly secured to the wall, we began to realize we had a pattern on our hands.

The next night we got into bed rather apprehensively. I put in my ear plugs. Before going to bed I checked the Broom, and had made sure it was securely in place. It would take a 5 point Earthquake to knock it out of its hook this time.

We watched TV until 1 A.M., suffering from a tiny bit of nervous insomnia. But as it turned out, we slept the entire night through without interruption.

The next night however, things were different.

Jua had some trouble getting to sleep, so in the middle of the night she moved herself onto the living room couch and pulled a couple of my grandmother's afghans over her.

I slept through the night completely soundly. I had again stuffed foam earplugs into my ears.

For Jua, it was a completely different story. At about four in the morning, with the Broom safely in place twelve feet away, she had been instantly woken awake with a very loud

BANG!!

I had not heard a thing.

I got up the next morning and found her hiding underneath the crocheted blankets.

And the Broom was back in the middle of the floor again.

“What’s this doing here again?” I asked, shaking her awake, and pointing to the Broom just a few feet away.

Jua peered over the end of the cover. “Oh noooooo....” She groaned, hiding again a second later. I heard her voice under the covers. “Did you do that? Are you playing a trick on me?!?”

“What happened? What happened?” I asked.

She resurfaced. “I got woken up again in the middle of the night. I looked and saw that the Broom had come off again. Do you have some sort of thing hooked up? Is this a joke?”

“What? Are you kidding? Of course not.”

“I thought maybe you rigged up some sort of button in the bedroom. Some kind of magnet thing, and if you pushed it the Broom came off. I thought you were playing a trick.”

I pulled Jua off the couch and took her over to the wall and showed her that the hook that was SUPPOSED to hold the Broom in place was nothing more than screwed into the wall. “I haven’t rigged up anything. But I sure am going to set up my video camera tonight and point it at this thing!”

We pondered the situation for the rest of the morning and later that day. I decided to call my friend Broz Rolanchorus and see what he thought.

Broz was another one of my friends that I had shared discovery of *The Book of Wands* with many years earlier. He was a fantastic guitar player, and before long he had begun to use this very instrument for Travel himself.

I told Broz what had been going on at my house with the Broom and he came up with the solution in an instant.

“Do you have any ghosts in your house?” he asked me as we walked through the neighborhood trying to puzzle out the solution to this riddle.

“Ghosts? Ghosts...” I began to think and search through my mind. “Oh gee- There was this woman who committed suicide in my apartment.”

“Yeah? Really? Wow.” Broz said.

“Yeah! My neighbor Karl told me about it a bunch of years after I moved in. He told me that woman killed herself right in my office. I don’t know anything else about it. My landlord never said anything about it to me, but yeah, it’s true. Maybe she’s still there, maybe she’s a ghost. But why would that have anything to do with the Broom?”

“She’s jealous,” Broz stated plainly.

“What? What for?”

Broz asked me, “Has your girlfriend stayed at your house before?”

“No.”

“Well, you’ve lived there for a long time. This woman never left the place, even after she died. This woman thinks she’s your girlfriend. She’s been in the house with you all alone until Jua showed up. Now she’s jealous.”

“Oh man,” I said.

“She’s trying to get rid of Jua, with the Broom.”

We both stood there in the middle of the sidewalk. I contemplated what he had come up with. It sounded like he had hit the mark, exactly.

“Pretty smart, eh?” Broz smiled. “Isn’t that what you use your Broom for? Cleaning up stuff you want to get rid of?”

Broz was right. I had learned that Brooms were a Wand that I could use to move things out of my life that I didn’t want around, the same way that you use a regular plain broom to clean up dirt and toss it into the trash bin. I could cause an unwanted situation or thing to Travel to another You-niverse, outside of my own. A Broom was perfect for that.

It had never occurred to me that a Broom could be used to get rid of people.

I went home and told Jua.

“You never told me somebody DIED in here!” she shuddered.

“Well, my landlord never told me either!”

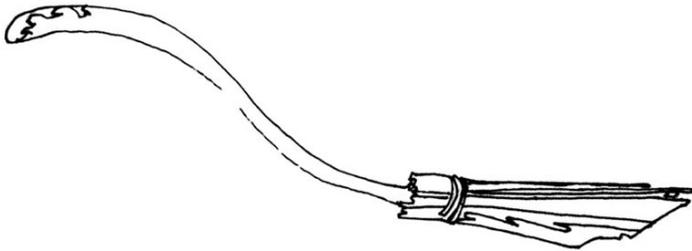
Jua decided to handle things in her own way. I never did catch the Broom flying around my living room with my video camera while she was visiting. Darn. It would have been great publicity.

Jua explained to me later, “I closed my eyes and I told her I was going home soon. I made a peace pact with your ghost.”

After Jua made a deal with the ghost, the Broom stopped flying around the room.

Things were peaceful until another old girlfriend of mine, Christine Biteamiller, came by just for a friendly chat nine months later. My first serious girlfriend, we had been close in college. While she visited, I recalled many of the great times we had spent playing music and hanging out. She went home to her own family after we visited for an hour or so in my living room.

But sure enough, that night, the Broom flew off the wall again.



Jua returned home after her run in with my Broom and she immediately called her sister and started to describe what had happened.

“I think it’s time to tell you something,” Shoe started. “It’s about Mom and Dad and me. Did Mother ever talk to you about Bang?”

Shoe of course was using the Chinese word, referring to “Sticks”.

“Yes, a little. But I never knew what she meant,” Jua replied. “I thought she was talking about the trees outside.”

“Well, you are not the most coordinated person I know,” Shoe confessed to her only sister. “We all thought you would hurt yourself. But I’ve got something to tell you about Mother and her Knives.”

But it wasn’t just Knives Jua heard about during that long phone conversation. It initially came as a huge shock, but before long, Shoe was telling her about Swords, Needles, Pens, Pencils, and even Brushes. Shoe had learned much from her parents that was kept from her clumsy older sister.

In particular, Shoe had a distinct preference for Knives and Brushes. Her love of Knives came from her Mother, but her familiarity with Brushes came out of her love for traditional Chinese water color painting.

Of course, she didn’t just use Brushes for painting.

Before long, Shoe sent Jua a beautiful set of painting Palette Knives and a big assortment of Brushes. And she also sent Jua a set of Spoons in a box. Of course, these were not ordinary Spoons. I suppose that might explain her failure to use them as cooking utensils.

Jua would soon be on her way, both as an artist, and as a Traveler.

All of this was a secret to me for the longest time of course, since we had not even discussed the matter. We were both now practicing with Wands, and neither knowing what the other was doing.

This suddenly change one night after Jua had finally moved to her own apartment two blocks down the street from my own place.

At first, she became suspicious of me when her garbage disposal and porch light stopped working one evening. I threw my favorite battery powered light up Screwdriver in my pocket. This was an unusual item from the 1950’s that I had discovered at a garage sale. The base of the screwdriver blade was surrounded by a clear plastic dome that lit up like a flashlight to illuminate whatever it was you were working on. I merely showed up at her front door,

with the thing in my hand. Without turning a single screw, both her disposer and porch light immediately became fully operational.

“How’d you do that?” she asked through a piercing gaze.

But the real tip off came one night after she called me up to get together.

“You want to watch a movie?” I asked her over the phone.

“Yeah, come on over,” she replied. “I’ll leave in about five minutes.”

Jua’s house is immediately and straight down the very same street that I live on. To get to my house, she walks out her front door of her house, which is on the corner, then walks straight down two blocks to my house. There are no corners to turn, no other streets to venture on. The path is as straight as an arrow.

Jua tends to be a little nervous however walking on the street at night. It’s not that my neighborhood is unsafe, but one of the towns she lived in Missouri for a time had a very high crime rate.

Just to make her feel better, I gave her one of my more powerful Wands to keep at her side for a little extra comfort. I didn’t tell her it was a Wand, or what it could do. But it is a Chinese Dragon Sword Cane, and I learned that it had remarkable potential.

Of course, I didn’t tell her this. I figured the way she trips over things, having a plain sword with her was enough.

“Okay,” I said, “I’ll put my coat on and meet you halfway down the street. I’ll leave in a couple of minutes.”

I put away a couple of things in my office then let the dogs out in the back yard. After a minute or two I let them back in and put on my coat.

I locked my front door and began to walk towards Jua’s house. The streets were well lit with those brightly obnoxious sodium vapor lamps. I wouldn’t have any trouble seeing her.

I kept my eyes peeled and walked down the middle of the street. I didn’t see her.

I kept walking and finally got all the way to her house two blocks away. “What the heck is keeping her?” I wondered.

I walked up her porch and looked inside. All of her lights were out. I knocked on her door. No answer.

I knocked again.

Not a sound.

“What the heck? Where on earth did she go?” I wondered as I started back towards my own place.

This was really weird. I had looked carefully all the way and there was not a trace of her. I couldn’t help but wonder, as remote as the possibility might be, that someone had kidnapped her in their car as she walked to my house. “That’s crazy.” I had to admit to myself. After all, she had my Sword Cane. She could have clobbered anybody that gave her trouble.

Unless they had a gun or something.

I had my eyes peeled out as I quickly scurried back home as fast as my feet would take me. As I caught sight of my own porch I saw a figure standing outside my door. As I got closer, I was relieved to see that it looked like Jua.

She came out into the middle of the street in front of my house and we finally met up.

“Where were you?” I asked. “Where’d you go?”

“I didn’t go anywhere. I’ve been right here.”

“What are you talking about? I just went to your house and you weren’t there. What street did you go down?”

Jua looked at me like I was crazy.

“What are you talking about? I walked down the middle of the street,” she pointed behind me with the Cane in her hand. “I don’t like to walk in the dark, so I went down the middle of the street, looking for you the whole time!”

Did I hear her right? “Wait a second. *I* walked down the middle of the street. I walked down the middle of the street looking for you. How could we miss each other?” I looked up at my front door. “Did you go inside?”

“Yeah, she said.”

Oh, that was it. She had come in my house while I was somewhere else in my apartment, and somehow, as ridiculous as it seemed, we missed each other and she was already inside before I left. “You must have already been here when I took off for your place.” I said.

“No you weren’t. When I got here, the door was already locked. I had to use my key to get in. I came inside looking for you. But you were already gone. That’s when I came outside.”

I stood there suddenly realizing the totally improbable.

But not the impossible.

We both looked at the Cane. I now knew that she knew more than I thought she knew. And maybe she knew even more than she thought she knew herself.

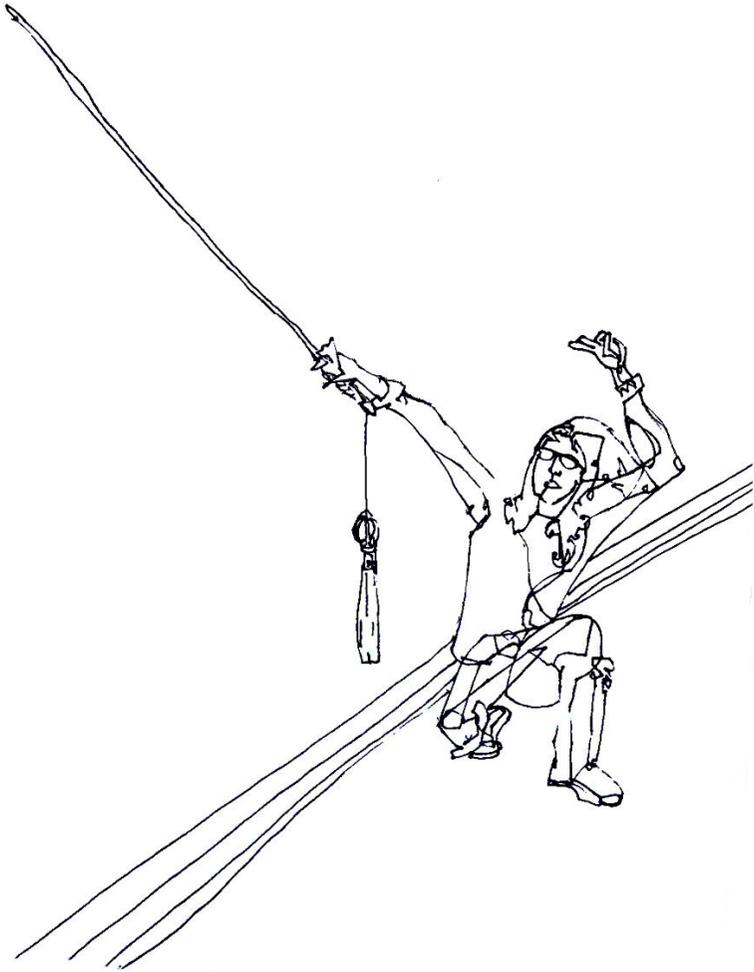
Jua did not want to be seen walking the streets at night.

She *never* wanted to be seen walking the streets at night.

She had my Wand in her hand.

She had made herself

Invisible.



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