

Chapter 6

Buckets and Brains

I started climbing up the brain lab mountain in the direction of the hoot owl call that I had heard just moments before. I slowly wound above the clearing via a steep curving path cut into the side of the hill that threaded its way past fallen pine trees and small boulders. Finally, about a hundred or so feet ahead and above me at the point where the trail vanished, there stood D.A.T. Stingo, waving.

“Up here!” he shouted. “Come on up,” he added as he turned and walked beyond my line of sight.

As I made it to the top of the trail, I could just see Stingo disappear inside another cabin that sat precariously on the side of the hill a little further back.

This cabin also had a roof that went from its peak down to the forest floor, but this was only on one side of the building. This roof side was completely covered with dirt and sod, and one haphazard skylight.

On the opposite side, the cabin faced the south with nearly a full wall of crooked slap-dashed glass windows. I imagined that with the spectacular view that I now saw in front of me, this was as much for scenery as it was for solar rays.

On this cabin, the door was painted bright red with a large nicely quartered glass window in the center. As Stingo came back outside, I noticed that he had to crouch down to get through. He looked like a giant leaving a cottage that belonged to the seven dwarves.

“Sit down, sit down,” Stingo instructed as he pointed to one of two large split logs situated a few feet from the cabin’s entrance.

I started to sit down and he held my arm. “Not here, you sit on that one,” he pointed, “So you can have the view.” One bench sat at a ninety

degree angle to the other, the second bench with a clear view of the range of mountains that lay grandly across the valley.

He started buttoning up an old flannel shirt that he had obviously just put on for guest company. Underneath he wore an old pair of boxer shorts.

I had not said a word. I don't know if it was telepathy or not, but Stingo knew that I had noticed the door.

He pointed behind himself at the cabin without turning to look at it. "When I started out, I brought up kids from juvenile hall down in the city, and they'd never seen a pine cone in their life. They helped me build this cabin as part of their outdoors training. But they made the door for somebody their own size," he lightly chuckled.

He finished buttoning his shirt, and then smacked and licked his lips, like a hungry wolf about to devour his innocent prey. He then looked me straight in the eye. "What are you doing here?" he suddenly asked quite sternly.

I was taken aback as this was really not the genial tone I had expected at all. He wasn't smiling at all now.

I reached into my pocket and took out the letter and the map he had sent to me in the mail.

"Um, I'm Niles Abercrumby, and you sent me this." I held up the letter somewhat sheepishly for him to see. "I came up to see what you do here. At the lab."

Stingo rubbed his eyes, scrunched his mouth, and paused for a moment as if irritated. Then he continued with a decidedly unforgiving tone, "The first thing you learn around here is to READ and follow the instructions." His gaze was piercing, and he spoke slowly and deliberately, "*You didn't follow the instructions.*"

"Huh?" I answered quietly. I started pouring over the sheet I had brought with me to see what I had missed. "It said between noon..." He didn't let me finish.

“We don’t have visitors *today*,” he glared. “READ THE INSTRUCTIONS.”

I frantically scanned the letter. But before I finished, Stingo scolded, “Today’s Saturday, not Sunday. Sunday is for visitors. NOT Saturday.”

I started to get up to leave. “Oh, sorry...”

“No, no, sit down, sit down,” he reluctantly insisted. “You’re already here.” He waved me back down towards the log.

He continued, “On Saturday I’m completely in my frontal lobes flow. Visitors bring all their city chaos with them, and if I’m not ready for it, it’s a mess. Their entropy slops up everything. I have to be ready for all their confusion.” Stingo then dusted off his legs with his hands.

He sighed, and then seemed to relax a bit and consign himself to the situation, i.e., *me* disturbing his “flow”. He grabbed up a little twig off the end of his log, and started to casually pick his teeth.

There was a decidedly awkward pause in the conversation. I didn’t know what to say, although I now realized I had gotten the day wrong. Otherwise, I had hardly understood what he was talking about.

He went on, starting anew, “Okay, so tell me, what do you need?”

“Oh gosh,” I thought for a moment, then blurted out the obvious, or so I thought. “I just wanted to see what you did up here, and what this place...”

He quickly interrupted me again. “No, no, no. What do you *need*?”

I didn’t understand the question.

“What do you *NEED*?” he asked again, “Tell me what you *NEED*.”

My mouth hung open slightly as I tried to figure out exactly what he was getting at. I didn’t say I needed anything actually. If I didn’t come there to check out the grounds, he must have been referring to something else. And I was missing it.

“What do I *need*?” I questioned half under my breath. I nervously started to chew on my index fingernail.

Suddenly I heard this rustle and noise in the trees nearby, and a gust of wind began to blow things around. It came out of nowhere.

Stingo picked up his chin and looked around. He seemed to be noting something that I could not perceive. Suddenly, something darted through the brush near the back side of the cabin. Was it one of those odd creatures I saw on the road coming darting out again?

“What was that?” I exclaimed.

“Nothing, nothing,” Stingo dismissed, and he looked around a bit, almost like an owl pivoting its head and observing

I suddenly had the feeling that the forest wind was mirroring back my own inner nervous discomfort.

Stingo silently bobbed his head as if in recognition. “Mmmmm,” he said quietly.

Then he faced directly back towards me.

“Come on, what do you need? Again...”

Stingo sat there studying me. I felt like an insect under a magnifying glass.

I tried to concentrate on an answer. “Um... I need to be happy?” I suggested, holding my breath.

“Good, good.” Stingo said. “That’s a start. What else?”

I was a bit relieved and exhaled. “Let’s see,” I pondered with a pause. Finally I blurted out again, not quite sure, “I need to be a good musician?”

“Are you certain?” he asked.

I lifted my eyebrows.

“You would *like* to be a good musician. But are you absolutely certain you *need* to be?”

This question stopped my thoughts. I had simply taken this assumption for granted after playing music all of my life. “I *think* I need to be a musician. I *like* being a musician,” I answered.

“Not the same,” he said. “Go on.”

I had to think for a few moments. Then with hesitation and some embarrassment I admitted, “Um... I want to be loved... by this girl. This girl I broke up with... ?”

I said this, hoping it was the right answer. But with a sinking gut I knew the chances of that was about as slim as one of the blades of wild buffalo grass trapped under my foot.

Stingo shook his head like he had already anticipated my reply. Did he know that I was talking about the girl who had ripped my heart out just months ago? Or had he heard this confession so many times that it didn't matter who the girl was...

“Do you love *yourself*?” Stingo struck back.

“Huh?”

Then I began to feel like an even smaller insect captured under a microscope, never mind under a harmless magnifying glass. I could sense a mounting pin poised above my quivering thorax. Here I was getting a full psychological examination and the wood log under my butt wasn't even warm yet. I squirmed in my seat.

“*Do you love yourself?!?*” Stingo emphatically asked again

“I guess. I suppose I do,” I replied meekly.

“I suppose? How do you expect anyone to love you if you don't love yourself?”

Well, it was obvious to *him*.

Dr. Sigmund Stingo was giving me a third degree barbequing and pouring on the hot sauce. He relentlessly hammered on, “Go on, what *else* do you need?”

I just sat. I couldn't think of anything. I was speechless. I was more in shock than anything. Stingo had completely dispensed with the common cultural oilings that strangers generally engage in upon first meeting. This was not whiffle ball. This was hard ball.

I just arched my eyebrows in helplessness.

“Okay,” he said. “That's fine for now.”

I breathed a sigh of relief.

He went on, “If you want to control your life, you must first learn to control the thinking meat inside your skull. And to do that, you must first learn how your brain works. Follow me.”

“Uh oh,” I thought.

Stingo pushed himself up.

I followed him through the tiny door and into the cabin.

Inside the cabin, I looked around. It was at most about fifteen feet across in either direction, and about the same in height. There was actually very little free floor space. A full sized bed with an old mattress covered by an old faded spread out sleeping bag took up nearly half of the place.

In one corner was a large sky blue enameled wood stove with the name “Universal” in big letters on the front. In two other corners were several file cabinets. Against the inside of the glass walled side of the cabin was a mimeograph machine and shelves with supplies of all sorts; tape, paper, Pens, Pencils, ink, Staplers, and so on.

Smack dab in the middle of the cabin were two standing tree trunks, one in the corner with its bark intact, the other smack in the middle of the cabin with all of its branches and bark stripped down smooth. It was obvious that both trees helped to supply support for the roof. The trunk in the middle was a virtual bulletin board, covered with more magic marker notes, notably names of people. These names were all in the same handwriting, unlike the cook’s cabin graffiti, and presumably the work of Stingo.

And then there were the walls. In a few vacant spots were nails upon which hung a wide variety of knick knacks like Rulers, a protractor, a few aluminum pots, and eating utensils. Again, as on the outside of the cook’s cabin, there was writing everywhere. But here all the writing was pinned to the inside walls upon scores of index card notes. Some of it was in plain English, but much of it was in some cryptic foreign tongue with fancy curly cue letters in all colors and oddball symbols that could have passed for chemistry and physics formulae.

Beyond all of this, the great majority of wall space inside from the ceiling rafters all the way down to the stone floor was completely covered in books. There was shelf after shelf of books and books and books of all shape, color, and sizes.

Every couple of feet scattered here and there on the front part of each shelf was stuck a hand written label, each apparently describing the content of the reading material above. Again, many of these labels were in strange lettering.

Stingo picked up a foot-high hand-made pine footstool from the corner and placed it on the dusty floor in front of me, then motioned me to sit down. He fluffed up a couple of old pillows on the bed and reclined back down himself, hands and fingers laced behind his head.

“What’s that language?” I asked, pointing to the numerous labels and writing.

“Oh that?” Stingo smiled. “I learned Russian in World War II. Our allies then, you know? Now I use it to keep sharp. It makes me work to remember what I wrote. I continuously challenge myself. I don’t want to grow cobwebs in my ears.” He took his pinkie, stuck it out at a right angle, and scratched the inside of his ear.

“Oh,” I nodded.

“Besides, I need to keep some things to myself, especially when I have people up here that I don’t know very well, and people I don’t trust.” Stingo nonchalantly glanced out the big picture window.

Was he referring to me?

I looked up and spotted a couple of what looked like guitar cases above me in a little bunk loft high up. On the edge of the loft platform was a particularly ornate and cryptic label. I thought that these items must have been something particularly special.

“So, Niles, my good new friend, where did you go to school?” This seemed to be moving in a deliberately more casual tone.

“Downtown. Metro State College,” I answered.

“Uh huh. And what did they teach you about the human brain?” he asked.

“I took a biology course, but we didn’t study the human brain much,” I said.

“Of course, of course,” Stingo replied, my answer apparently expected.

“When you go to college, your brain is like a ten-cylinder motor running on two cylinders. You graduate, you get a diploma, and they never even bother to teach you how to connect the other eight spark plugs.” He sucked on his teeth.

I was trying to imagine having spark plug wires inside my head.

Stingo went on, “That’s what we do here. You teach yourself how to connect all the cylinders. You’ve been crawling along like a snail most of your life because nobody took the time to help you learn how to use the most important organ in your body. Your friends didn’t tell you, your parents didn’t show you, and your teachers at school certainly didn’t help you with it.”

He scratched his head. “Actually, now that I think about it, I’m wrong. You go in with two connected, and in college they pull off the last two. Hahah!” He laughed heartily.

Stingo swept across the air with his arm, “The human brain has infinite potential. Yet, despite everything we know, the human brain remains 90% dormant.”

I saw the space inside my own head as one big vacuum, then retorted, “Hey, I thought that was just a myth?” I answered. “I’ve heard that’s just a saying, it’s not really true.”

“No, no,” Stingo closed his eyes and shook his head. “Here,” he said as he suddenly sat up. He stood up upon his bed, which sunk even further with his standing weight, and began rifling through some loose papers high on one of the shelves above the mattress. A few narrow little sticks were knocked off the shelf. They looked like fancy chop sticks, with colorful designs painted on them, but I couldn’t figure on Stingo bringing much Chinese take-out up

there. Stingo quickly scooped them up and put them back up on the shelf, tucking them out of sight.

“Let’s see, where is that... Ah ha!”

He removed a small pile of papers, leafing through them. “Uh huh...mmmmm...ah!”

He pulled out one sheet then sat back down on the mattress cross legged, then pointed to the page, printed proof as to what he would next declare.

“We do not know what human beings are fully capable of. This is what Sir John Eccles said, and he won the Noble Prize.” Stingo began reading the quotation,

“All indications point to the conclusion that the brain and its powers are endless.”

He turned the page towards me for emphasis, then exclaimed with loud drama, “If the human brain has endless capacity, how do you measure a percentage of infinity?!”

I had to work this out in my head, and I was having a little trouble on my own. Maybe it was the altitude.

“Even if you are using 99% of your brain, what is 99% of infinity? It’s nothing! It’s an infinitely small slice of an infinitely big pie!” He continued to fling his hands and the flapping pages around in exclamation.

“The whole idea that you are using all of your brain or any percentage for that matter is completely absurd. Heck, even the idea that you are using 10% of your brain is too generous. The point is,” he said pointing again to the papers, “The folksy notion that you are using only a smidgen of what you are capable of is intuitively *correct*. People correctly intuit that they are not even getting out of first gear!”

He leaned closer towards me. “Tell me Niles... *exactly what are you capable of?*” His eyebrows lifted high.

“If you can tell me that, I’ll tell you that you’re using more than 10% of your brain!” He pointed in the air like an orator making an important point.

“People don’t have a clue about how their brain works. And if you don’t know how the motor works, where the brake is, where to put the key, where to put the gas and the oil, how to change gears- you’re not going to get anywhere, *no matter what other TOOLS you might have in that trunk.*”

He emphasized this last fact by gently poking his fingertip right on my forehead.

“Tools? What tools?” I had the feeling he was talking about something I didn’t quite get yet. What tools was he referring to?

Ignoring my question he continued unabated, “Once you learn how this engine works, once you learn a few brain basics and apply them, then...”

Stingo slapped his hands together ten inches from my face and moved one hand zapping off like a rocket sled-

“Then...BANG! ZOOOOOMMMMM!!!!”

He relaxed, and reclined back in his bed.

He laughed and spoke in an assured jolly tone, waving his hand leisurely in the air, “No more grinding gears, no more flat tires. Life becomes an infinitely interesting game with the universe. It flows from one moment to the next, like a well oiled machine.”

My heart was beating fast. This guy was *good*. Stingo had delivered with impressive panache, like a well rehearsed actor. My mind was racing with the mere idea that my brain, my very own brain was boundless. Nobody had suggested that to me before.

“So,” he said gazing at the ceiling, “Do you want to learn?”

“Oh yeah... yes,” I said excitedly, “This sounds great!”

“Alright then.” Stingo sat back up and stepped off the bed and over to the stove. Next to it sat a galvanized steel bucket with a handle.

“This is your second lesson.” He sat back on the bed in front of me, bucket in hand.

“My *second* lesson?” I asked, perplexed. “I’m confused.”

“Yes, your second one. What was your first lesson?”

I had to think.

“Oh yeah,” I admitted. “Always read the instructions.”

“Correct,” Stingo lightly agreed. “Now this is part deux.”

I anxiously waited, and couldn’t for the life of me figure out what the bucket was for. Maybe I was supposed to go out and gather some special rocks outside. I had no idea.

Stingo spoke as if he had said these lines a thousand times, perfectly rehearsed and repeated to countless students. “The human brain is three brains in one. It is known as a Triune brain, tri- meaning three, -une meaning one. Three in one. Three brains in one.”

“Okay, I get that,” I said softly. That was easy.

“It is a reptile brain seed surrounded by a mammal brain core. Then these two parts are further enveloped by a thick advanced primate brain.”

“Okay.” I was following this elementary brain physiology lesson without too much problem. So far so good.

“Here,” Stingo said, putting the bucket down next to me and then reaching over to grab a fresh green apple that was sitting on the edge of a shelf next to an old worn copy of *Fun With Dick and Jane*, the original elementary school reader that I had myself used in the first grade. Perhaps quite an appropriate coincidence.

He grabbed an impressive looking 10-inch long antler handled Bowie knife that was hanging by a thick piece of rope on a nail hammered into the log wall.

Stingo carefully cut the apple in half as I looked on. He pointed to the inside of the apple with the tip of the huge knife, and said as he first indicated to the seeds, then to the core, and then to the big juicy white flesh of the apple, “Reptile brain, mammal brain, primate brain.”

He first offered me one half of the apple and took a loud crunchy bite out of the other half himself.

“Thanks,” I said, and I took a bite myself.

Stingo put his piece of the apple down on the bed. “In order to control your brain and get the most out of it you must understand how each of these independent parts of the brain work. Each layer has specific functions, but each can work together to one extent or another with the other layers.”

He again seemed to emphasize this next point, “What ever you do in life, what you do with other tools that you use, no matter how unusual that tool, it always comes back to what part of your brain is actually wielding such a Wan...” He stopped in mid sentence, then cleared his throat. “It always comes back to what part of your brain is actually manipulating such a *tool*.” He held up the knife in front of me and paused as if wanting me to contemplate the last sentence. “You got that?”

“Sure,” I responded hopefully. “I think so.”

But I wasn’t really quite exactly sure what he meant. I was actually more pre-occupied with the big knife.

“The reptile brain can do nothing but kill as a murderer with the same knife that the frontal lobes will use to heal, like a surgeon.” He hung up the knife while I pondered what he had just said. I actually was relieved that he was putting the weapon away out of immediate reach.

“The reptile brain- It computes basic survival: Feeding, Fighting, Fleeing, and you know, basic stuff.”

“Oh yeah,” I scoured my mind, “Basic. Stuff.”

Stingo continued the lesson. “The mammal brain layer adds on rudimentary social interaction, nurturing, emotion...”

“Warm fuzzies,” I added.

“Exactly. Cooperative consciousness. But that’s just half of the time. The other half of the time the mammal brain clicks backward into full *competitive* consciousness, back into the reptile brain. Then it’s pure dog eat dog.”

I nodded my head agreeably, apparently with my mammal brain.

“Alright then. The problem for most humans is that they barely click much past the first or second layers, the reptile and the mammal brain. And

that's a shame, because the juiciest part is right here, in the primate brain." Stingo poked my forehead with his finger with distinctly more pressure this time. I was glad he wasn't poking at me with the tip of the knife.

"This is your *frontal lobes*, click your amygdala forward out of your reptile brain and into your frontal lobes, and that's when the magic happens. You pop your frontals."

Now he was starting to lose me again. "Amygdala?" "Click?" "Pop?" I thought to myself. This sounded more like a demented Rice Crispies cereal commercial. Was he going to wire me up? Was he going to put an implant in my brain with a toggle switch connected? Was my brain going to explode? The images in my own brain were starting to make me nervous.

Stingo then held out his palm in front of me. "Now, take your hand like this and grab your whole forehead... spread out all your fingers." Stingo turned his palm around grabbed his own forehead, and waited for me to imitate him, which I did.

He went on, "Everything under your hand is the most advanced part of your brain, your frontal lobes. It does things no other part can do. It's the cosmic cranial treasure chest. The Big Kahuna. It's where the infinity jackpot is found."

"Uh..." I grappled with the concept as I grappled my head..

"But the cosmic joke is that it's mostly dormant. It's turned off. It's locked up. The electricity hardly ever gets that far. ZZZZTTTT! The road's blocked. Short circuit, broken connection." Stingo made a quick cut-throat gesture with the side of his hand in front of his own throat.

I lurched back reactively.

"Good," Stingo nodded. "Now, put your thumbs in your ears."

"Eh?"

"Put your thumbs in your ears, like this..." Stingo stuck his thumbs, one in each ear, with his palms facing forward, fingers extended. It looked like he had big mouse ears. I copied the motion.

Stingo then grasped his head between his fingers, the thumb in the ear, the middle finger in the side corner of each eye. Again, I copied his hand work.

“Now,” he said, “Drape your pointer finger down the side of your head, like this,” which he did, “...’Till its right in between the other two fingers- and POINT!” At the word ‘point’, Stingo dramatically pointed in at his temples.

But I didn’t follow suit. “You didn’t say Simon Says.” I smiled.

Stingo smiled sarcastically. “Okay wise guy... Simon says... Point!”

I pointed.

“One inch inside your skull, right smack in the middle of your meat motor, one for each side of your brain is your main brain gear shift lever...” Stingo pretended to shift a car shifter. “Your internal wizard’s staff.” Stingo then motioned as if he was holding a Wand.

I shook my head from side to side and indicated, “I don’t get it...”

He elaborated, “Your Magic Master Click Switch... your *amygdala*.” Again, he reached behind onto the shelf right above his bed. Next to another well worn ragged copy of a book that had “Tesla” on it’s spine he grabbed a big brown plastic electrical toggle switch. He held it up and clicked it back and forth several times, making a loud clicking noise.

“Ah-mig-doll-uh,” he said slowly.

“Migdolluh,” I responded.

“Click click click. You click energy forward from where it is stuck in your primitive reptile brain forward to the most advance part of your brain, right behind your eyebrows. Click your amygdala. Do that enough Mr. Abercrumby, and when you do, you’ll pop your frontals.”

Again, I raised my eyebrows with my fingers still in my ears. I didn’t get it. Amygdala, click, pop- Stingo sounded more like a mad elf and a whole lot less like a brain researcher. Stingo reached up and gently pushed my hands down.

“Okay, okay,” he said, noting the confusion on my face.

“Um, I’m not sure... frontal lobe, mammal brain, reptile brain... I’m a person...” I admitted my puzzlement.

Stingo put the switch back carefully on the shelf. He put the unfinished apple over on the stove and picked up the bucket that he had sat down on the floor next to me. “Put this on your head.”

“Huh?” I exclaimed.

“Put this over your head.”

I slowly took the bucket from Stingo and reluctantly held it above my head.

“No,” he said. “Not above your head. Turn it around and cover your head. Everyone who comes up to the lab does this. This is your catechism. Go on.” He grabbed the bucket, flipped it over, and gave it back to me.

Suddenly I nervously felt that things were decidedly taking a turn for the worst, and I began to seriously doubt my decision to trek up to this place. He seemed as mad as the Mad Hatter.

“Go on. Or go home,” Stingo drew the line. He meant business.

I paused for a moment and thought, “What have I gotten myself into...” I then slowly lowered the bucket over my entire head and held on to the edges. It was nearly pitch black.

“Say, ‘Me me me!’” Stingo commanded.

“What?” I answered, my own voice metallically reverberating inside the bucket. I was convinced that this had now all turned crazy.

“Say it! ‘Me me me me me.’ ” Stingo immediately struck side of the bucket with his knuckles making a resounding loud clang.

I thought to myself, “Oh man. He’s got a knife...” I could already feel a few tears welling up in my eyes. I was completely mortified.

“Me me me me me!” Stingo reiterated as he hit the side of the bucket again for emphasis.

Terrified, I barely uttered the words, “me me me.”

I wanted to go home.

“Louder!”

“me me me.”

“Again!”

“Me Me ME!”

“Once more, LOUDER.”

I shook as I answered,

“ME ME ME ME ME!!!”

Silence.

Then Stingo took the bucket off my head and set it back down next to the stove. I wiped a few errant tears off of my face.

“That,” Stingo stated, “Is your Reptile Brain.”



Chapter 10

Brain Radar

I was on a swing, silently flying back and forth, looking past my legs and watching the ground scoot past me, first in one direction then the other. My feet were extended straight out in front of my blue tennis shoes like the nose cone of a rocket.

I was getting ready to launch myself off of the seat as I had countless times before as a kid. Suddenly I heard the sound of the old school bell, “clang clang clang”, and thought to myself, “Oh man, recess is over already?! I’m just starting to have fun!”

Wait a second, my school didn’t have *that* kind of bell.

Then I opened my eyes. I wasn’t in the school yard at all, and the bell I had been hearing wasn’t an modern electric school bell, but rather the bell on top of the kitchen cabin at the brain lab. I had been dreaming.

I sat up and thought, “Who’s that?” listening carefully. But the bell had now stopped. I got up, left the cabin, closed the door behind me, and started off in the direction of the main part of the lab property. It was starting to get dark out, and I knew that I had better hurry as it would be too easy to get lost off of the main trail.

I looked up and realized that I must have been asleep for at least a couple of hours. The sun had vanished and was not visible between any crack of treetop limbs. I had lost track of time. Whether or not I remembered all of the details of my hike to the top of the peak, around all the cabins and property, then falling asleep in the guest cabin- it had taken up the whole day.

I came to the kitchen cabin and looked around in the dim light. Nobody there. Then I saw that Stingo’s jeep was back. Placing my hand on the warm engine hood I knew it must have been him ringing the bell to announce his arrival back home. I started up the trail back to Stingo’s place and shortly

stood at his red door and saw him inside unloading some grocery sacks. He had lit a couple of lamps that stood on the filing cabinet. The cabin was filled with a subtle flickering yellow light that cast a few dancing shadows on the log walls and on the books upon the shelves.

“Hey Stingo,” I said knocking then pushing open the door.

“Niles, my good man, come on in. How was your day?” he replied.

“Fantastic- I walked around everywhere, snooped around.” I searched my mind, which strangely came up a bit blank. “I can’t even remember everything, actually...Haha.”

I scratched my head.

“Good, good. Find anything interesting?” he asked nonchalantly, preoccupied with his shopping bounty, counting to himself a survey of all of the goods he had set out from the bag.

“Oh gosh, yeah...” I said haltingly, trying to remember the details of the day, but drawing nothing but a fuzzy approximation. “Saw a million ladybugs... and what else... um...” I shrugged my shoulders.

Stingo walked over and grabbed the stool from the corner without saying anything. I knew to sit down. He then plopped down on the bed which I then noticed had a large pile of unopened envelopes on it of all sizes and colors.

Stingo took his hand and then spread out the envelopes so they nearly covered a square yard on his bed. Then he just sat there and gazed at them.

I immediately forgot about myself and noted Stingo’s strange behavior. “What are you doing?” I asked quizzically.

“I’m figuring out which ones to open first,” he replied. “I get so much mail, it’s easy to open up the wrong letter and have a good consciousness flow wrecked.”

I tilted my head to the side because I didn’t quite understand why it would matter which letter you opened first when you got your mail. “What difference does it make?” I asked him.

Stingo looked me in the eye. “Do I ever leave my cabin door wide open?”

“No, I don’t think so,” I said.

“Why not?”

I sat there and thought about it for a few seconds. “Because you don’t want the flies to come in?”

“That’s only part of the reason,” Stingo answered. He looked at me and tapped his finger tips together gently. I knew he wanted me to think about it some more.

I sat for a good thirty seconds and scratched my head, again. “I dunno, I give up.”

“It’s to keep the squirrel brains out.”

Stingo sat there, still looking at me. I knew this was some sort of lesson.

“Yeah, okay...” I said, hoping he would fill in the completely blank slate that was my mind at that moment.

“If I just leave the door open, the squirrels come in, and they wreck the place. They tear everything apart looking for nuts. Next thing you know all my papers are all over the place.”

I slowly nodded my head. I’ve seen how squirrels have shredded the seat cushions on my mother’s back yard chairs. And I’ve seen how they have delighted in absolutely torturing and teasing her dogs from the trees and fence top. My ex-girlfriend Sarah once called squirrels “Nothing but rats with furry tails.” This seemed a bit extreme, but might have been fairly accurate according to taxonomy. I hope she hadn’t be referring to me.

Stingo continued, “I like to keep my brain nice and tidy. Peaceful. When I get a letter from a person whose brain is complete chaos- you know, not much more brain power than a rodent looking for peanuts- I have to be ready for it, otherwise it’s like a squirrel coming into my cabin and creating a complete mess.”

“Ah ha.” I understood.

Stingo turned to one of the shelves behind his bed and started rummaging through an open Jar that contained a jumble of Pens. He selected an old fancy maroon fountain Pen, removed the cap, and then loosely held it in his left hand. He then turned back to the letters and waved both of his hands over the letters on his bed, his right palm open and facing down. He halted this process then looked and spoke to me to explain.

“To know which letters are safe to open first, I use my *Brain Radar*. The ones that are filled with a lot of entropy I put away for last. I make sure I’m good and ready for ‘em.”

Stingo turned back to the assortment of mail and closed his eyes tight, pointing his nose up in the air melodramatically. He shuffled the letters one more time.

He began to pour over the letters, slowly passing both hands over them all. His hands moved back and forth for a few moments like the white plastic pointer from a Ouija board. I saw the loose fountain pen bob and dip a little, but I was fairly certain that this was just because how he was holding it.

For a moment I envisioned somebody using a dowsing rod to find water. As a kid I had played with forked tree branches in that manner, but of course my parents wouldn’t have approved of me digging up the back yard to find an underground stream to verify my hunches. Besides, all of our faucets worked perfectly well. (Note the pun.)

Stingo cocked his head to the side as if he was hearing something. I certainly couldn’t hear anything, the cabin was dead silent. Eventually he slowed and settled over one plain manila envelope, secured with multiple layers of tape.

He suddenly darted down and plucked up the envelope. He opened his eyes, and turned to me, “This one!” he exclaimed, and then carefully used the pen to mark three neat plus signs and an exclamation mark in a row on the top of it. He then handed it to me. “You open it.”

I hesitated for a second then took the envelope from his hand and worked it open, engaging my teeth to do so. I then removed the tightly folded

stationary inside and tossed the empty envelope back on the bed. Stingo urged me, “Go on, open it up.”

I unfolded the letter and something green slid out to the floor like leaves dropping off of a tree. I looked down to see what had fallen out. My mouth fell open as I bent down to pick them up: Three crisp new \$100 dollar bills.

I showed Stingo the money and handed it to him. He quietly folded the money into his shirt pocket. “Go ahead and read it,” he instructed.

“Dearest D.A.,” I read. “Thanks for all of the encouragement two months ago regarding the film offer. As you suggested I took the opportunity and it was to my distinct advantage. I hope this will in some way compensate you for what has been continuing support and good guidance over many years. My best to you, Anthony.”

Stingo was looking at the return address as I read. As I finished, he pointed to it and said, “Anthony Zerba. Hollywood. He’s an actor.”

Stingo gathered up the remaining envelopes into a pile. “I’ll look at the rest later. That was the best one of the lot.”

My first thought was that this was a pretty amazing demonstration, picking out an envelope among a large pile, more or less blindfolded, to find one of such importance, not to mention cold hard cash.

He gathered up all of the letters and rose from the bed, starting towards one of the file cabinets.

Then my second thought was, “Wait a second- was this a trick? Some clever slight-of-hand?”

At that thought Stingo turned and looked straight at me and squinted at me. I hadn’t said anything out loud. “Hold on a second...” he uttered.

Stingo threw the letters all back down on his bed again including the empty one that I had just opened. He tossed the loose pile like a little kid playing with a pile of leaves, then spoke.

“Energy flows in two directions, actually it flows in all directions. But for our purposes here, I’m trying to pick up on the positive energy stored in these envelopes.”

Stingo grabbed my arm and said, “Switch places with me.” He got up and gestured me to sit on his bed in his place as he moved over to the stool.

“You know how you use Healing Hands?” he asked. He was referring the practice in which one clicked into increased frontal lobes sensitivity and then uses the hands to “comb” entropy out of another person to promote healing.

This was a basic brain lab exercise that novices learned fairly early on. In this brain exercise, one student would lie down and completely relax while another would perform non-touching motions, moving the hands slowly over the “patient’s” body, as if one were brushing the hair on a pet dog or cat. Anyone watching this would think it was total insanity or fake mumbo jumbo voodoo. But the fact was, it was very easy to detect some kind of subtle energy movement during this practice.

Nutty as it might seem to some, this Healing Hands practice eventually was corroborated as a factual and legitimate method of reducing the healing time for wounds in at least one serious legitimate double blind laboratory experiment. Years later when I was researching numerous claims Stingo had made decades earlier, I had read about such techniques in a periodical published by ISSEEM, The International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine.

“Here, take this,” he said as he put the fountain pen in my left hand and closed my fingers around it. “Don’t hold the pen too tight, you’ll cut off the flow. You’ll also get ink all over everything.”

His hands felt unusually warm. It immediately reminded me of the mother of one of my students, Muffy Dornknob. Once after we had been talking about biofeedback, she showed me that she was able to consciously raise the temperature of her hands simply by concentrating on them. It was so quick and startling that I could see her hands turn beet red right in front of my eyes. They felt just like they had been under running hot water.

“I use the Pen as an antenna, but don’t concentrate on it too much. It’s your brain that has to amplify the raw signal. Hold your hands like this over

the letters,” Stingo said as he moved my hands in a clockwise flat rotating motion. “Close your eyes and see if you can sense a feeling of expanding warmth.” This was actually the first time he indicated to me that an ordinary looking object could be used to do something extraordinary.

I shut my eyes and slowly moved my hands as he instructed. I felt nothing. “I dunno,” I said. “I can imagine what you are saying, but...”

“That’s fine,” Stingo replied. “That’s a start, just go with that, that’s your frontal lobes starting to kick in, your imagination circuits. Just go with that for now. The Brain Radar will bleep in on its own without you forcing it to.”

He let go while I continued for another minute. I then began to feel a distinct feeling in my hands, a pleasant tingling, a sensation of warmth, a kind of gentle magnetism.

He elaborated further, “The Pen is like a fishing pole, and you’re trolling for a bite. Feel for a little bobbing, that’s all. You’re not spearing a whale.”

Then Stingo spoke in a softer voice, “When you start to get something, follow it, let it draw your hands down, don’t force anything. You follow IT, not the other way around. And it’s not a race, take your time.”

I continued to move my hands, and within a couple of minutes I felt as though I could sense a number of almost imperceptible vortices on the bed sheet, like little warm jets of current moving up from below my hands. The current actually felt like it was drawn to the Pen and then radiated to the other hand, then up through my arms and into the rest of my body. It was a remarkable, yet very subtle sensation. If I had a bad itch, which I didn’t, I would have missed it.

I opened my eyes a crack to see if it was actually vibrating, but to my surprise I really couldn’t see anything physical at all.

“Try again,” Stingo urged. “And no cheating this time.”

He took his hand and brushed my eyes closed. With my eyelids sealed I could hear Stingo noisily reshuffling the letters on his bed.

“Find the warmest one, the strongest one, and move towards it...” Stingo seemed to know exactly what I was feeling. I then kept my eyes tightly shut and was closing in on something with both hands, about a foot above the bed.

“Go for it!” Stingo suddenly urged, and I quickly plopped my hands straight down onto an envelope. I opened my eyes and lifted up the letter. It was the very same envelope from Zerba that had contained the thank you note and the money.

Stingo smiled broadly and nodded his head, then patted me on the back. “Impressive,” he complimented me.

He took the envelope from my hand. “That was amazing,” I remarked. “How is that possible? I mean, the money’s not even in there any more.”

“Simple,” Stingo said. “You know how when you rub a balloon against your shirt you add a charge to it, static electricity makes it stick to a wall?”

“Sure.”

“Whenever you do something, your energy and your intent infuses the objects you touch with that same energy, for a while at least. If you have positive survival enhancing intent and energy, it’s stored in the things you touch at that moment, like a battery. It stays there until something discharges it, or reverses the charge.”

“I see,” I said, thinking about the stack of rechargeable batteries I kept in my kitchen drawer at home.

Stingo pointed to an empty Mason jar with a screw-on cap sitting on the bookshelf nearby. “If you knew how, you could store positive energy in that Jar over there, just like a piggy bank.”

He arched his eyebrows in a comic motion, just like Groucho Marx in one of his comedies. “Was he serious?” I thought.

Stingo went on, “When you approach such an object with a positive charge, it feels like something growing, like a seedling coming out in the sun.”

“Oh yeah!” I blurted out. “I know, when I charge up one of my batteries in my recharger, it gets warm, sometimes even hot to touch.”

“Exactly. In the same way, if a person is clicked backwards into their reptile brain and computing “me me me”, then they infuse an object with negative *entropy*. If you train yourself to be sensitive to these forces, when you get near such an object you’ll feel like you’re peering over a chasm, like you’re going to get sucked down the toilet bowl.” Stingo motioned his hand like he was pulling a chain, “Whoooooosh, down the drain into the sewer.”

I laughed.

“Everybody does this to things whether they know it or not,” he said. “But hardly anybody can sense these charges. It can be done here in wilderness without too much effort. Down in the city there’s so much interference it’s harder.”

He pointed to the pile of letters. “Now do it again. This time feel for a hole, a void, move your hands in the opposite direction, counter clockwise, counter intuitive and against the grain. Your brain is like a radio receiver, you can tune into any station you want.”

I closed my eyes again and held my palms above the letters as before. It was easier to sense the subtle but distinct feeling of energy rising up from the bed, but this disappeared quickly as I reversed the motion of my arms. I moved my hands for about twenty seconds, and then finally I felt something different.

“Hey, there’s a couple of cold spots,” I remarked. I hovered above one and it sent a shiver up my spine.

“Precisely,” Stingo answered. “Find a good popsicle.”

There were a few luke-cold creamsicles, but there was one definite subzero icicle that I focused on. It made a prickly needle sensation on my right hand and felt like someone stuck a frozen thorn there “Yuck!” I said as I instinctually scratched the bottom of my right hand for relief, like a dog with a flea bite. Without thinking about it too much, I again plopped my hand down and opened my eyes.

I saw that my hand was on top of a couple of letters, but I knew the one I wanted was on the bottom. I dug down and plucked it up, then held it up like

the winner of an Academy Award for Worst Movie of The Year. “This one!” I exclaimed.

Stingo took the letter from me and looked at it. He slowly nodded his head in recognition. “Perfectly done,” he said.

He turned the letter around for me and pointed at the return address. I read it, and although the address didn’t ring a bell, the initials did. It said, “L.B.” I knew who had sent this letter and I had heard more than one story about the guy who left his paw print there. Lyin’ Badmouth was his name.

“Bulls-eye.” Stingo held out his hand for me to shake in congratulations, then he looked back at the letter. “I won’t get fooled again, no sir-ree. Give people the benefit of the doubt, but not twice. You ever seen one of those angler fish?” Stingo wiggled his finger in front of my nose.

I knew what he was talking about, a fish that sits on the bottom of the ocean that has a long appendage attached in front of its big mouth to lure its prey.

“Here’s a nice big juicy worm for your dinner, yum yum yum...” Then Stingo opened up his hand like a jaw and instantly clenched it tight. “Then GULP!!! You just became a nice meal.”

Stingo smiled again. “The smiling predators are the worst kind. Wonder what he’s offering this time, wonder what he wants? Probably the deed to the brain lab in exchange for a few hours work.”

Stingo gathered up all the letters off the bed. “This one goes to the bottom of the pile. Got to be very careful.” He went over to one of the metal filing cabinets, slid open a drawer and deposited the remaining letters into a folder. He shut the file drawer with a metallic clank. Then he turned back to me. “I want to show you something.”

Stingo stepped over to the foot of his bed and kneeled down. For a second it looked like he was going to fold his hands and start saying a bedtime prayer. But I figured that such a thing wasn’t very likely.

He looked up at me and said, “You never know when an emergency comes along. You can be a grasshopper, or you can be a smart ant,” he said.

I felt the top of my head for antenna sticking out, thinking briefly of the famous Aesop's tale.

"If there's ever an emergency, you should be prepared. I know I can count on you to help me if it comes to that, so I want to show you something that you might need to know about, or maybe not."

Right at the foot of his bed he started messing with the stone foundation that he had built under the base of his box spring. It consisted of an assortment of irregular flagstones all about the size of a book, all mortared together with rough cement.

I had always looked at it and thought it was a nice decoration. Suddenly he grasped a section of the rocks and he pulled out a couple of long, flat stones. These two weren't cemented in place, but were only held in place by the sheer friction of stone against stone.

Stingo stuck his hands inside the dark hole and with some effort began to slide out a large gray metal tray. The handle appeared to be made from what was probably a bent piece of wire clothes hanger.

It looked like a safe deposit drawer. It was about a foot across, maybe two feet long and a few inches deep. It took quite a bit of effort for him to move it out completely onto the floor. It made a scraping noise against the flagstones on the floor as he did this. Obviously it contained something of considerable weight.

He unlatched and then swung open the lid. I gasped.

The entire box was stuffed full with large shiny metal coins, rows and rows of them.

Stingo pried a couple of them out and handed me one.

"Here, you can have one now, take it." He said.

"Have one?" I asked unbelievably. I held the coin up to my face and carefully inspected it. It was a 1921 silver dollar. I turned it around in my hand. "Wow, thanks, but you don't have to," I said, still in awe glancing down at the treasure chest that lay in front of me.

“No, take it. Money doesn’t matter to me except to buy things I need to survive, and things for work. Stamps and paper.” Stingo said. “Just keep it as a token of friendship and trust.”

“Thanks D.A.,” I replied. “Wow, thanks.”

Stingo removed the money from his shirt pocket and neatly tucked the hundred dollar bills into the drawer. “Now, you’re to keep this drawer a complete secret to yourself. I’ve only told a couple of other old staff about this, and that was years ago. They’re long gone doing their own thing. I don’t expect them to come around much and I can’t count on them in an emergency.”

Stingo closed the lid and began to move it back under the bed. I helped him because it was harder to put back than it was to slide out. Stingo carefully fit the granite slabs back in place.

Stingo didn’t stand up nearly as easily as he had kneeled down. He had to lean on the bed, and pushed himself up with his hand on one of his knees.

“What do you mean, what kind of emergency?” I asked.

Stingo sat down on the bed. “When I started this place I was young. That was almost thirty years ago. I’ve been very lucky, but you never know what is around the corner.”

I was wondering if he knew something I didn’t.

“Your Brain Radar will keep you out of harms way most of the time, but sometimes you’ll get distracted. You need redundancy backup. Always have backup.”

He brushed some dirt off his blue jeans and continued. “An emergency. You don’t know. You can predict what will happen half of the time. The other half of life is a complete surprise. Predictably chaos.”

For some reason I had long misinterpreted Stingo and his work to imply that brain self-control meant that as you learned to control your brain, you eventually controlled everything that happened to you. I naively thought that becoming Master of Your Own Brain was equivalent to becoming Master of

the Universe; that eventually you learned to manipulate the universe so that only “good” things happened in your life.

Stingo walked over to the wide window panes that made up the entire south wall of his cabin and looked outside and up towards the sky.

“The universe is half light and half dark. Half of the time it’s light outside, but the other half of the time it’s night, and the sun is hiding. Some times it’s spring and the flowers are popping up. Other times it’s fall and things are dying. You can’t change that.” He gestured with his arm and hand to motion like leaves falling.

I looked outside and saw the wind blow and scatter some leaves which fell from the aspen trees just yards away. The falling leaves illustrated his point, perfectly in sync with his statement. It was like magic, like he brushed the leaves off of the trees by waving his hand. Of course, I consciously dismissed the notion as quickly as it occurred to me. Such a thing seemed preposterous to me at that moment. I never thought of him as Merlin.

“Winter lasts from September until May around here. The trees are bare half of the time. That’s how life is too. Easy times come and go. I used to make \$2000 an hour on TV, and now I don’t make squat. But I manage with squat- using my brain.” He tapped the side of his head.

I laughed with the way he delighted in juggling words. “But you’re happy, right?” I asked.

“Sure, of course! I don’t need a lot of money, it just gets in the way.” Stingo smiled as he nodded his head enthusiastically. “I wouldn’t have it any other way. Using your brain means that you recognize how the pendulum swings. Sometimes you’re rich, and sometimes you’re poor. Sometimes things are easy, and sometimes things are hard as hell. When you tickle your amygdala and use your frontal lobes, it means you know how to surf the waves, and how to keep the inside of your head from turning into mashed potatoes. It doesn’t mean you can avoid the white water entirely.”

I thought of a few people who had instant potatoes where their brains used to be. I could see them now, applying salt and butter to their ears.

“If you land hard on your rear end too much, life is no fun. The game is to land with your feet on the ground, and that’s a tricky business no matter what. If you can stay on your feet most of the time, life is a lot more fun. WAY more fun. You gotta’ be a Cosmic Surfer.”

Stingo did a funny little pantomime of a surfer keeping his balance, arms straight out to his sides.

“You have to wrestle with your own humanity, and with the rest of humanity. Unless of course you want to live in a cave. Then life’s easy, then you don’t have to worry about anyone, not even the barber.” Stingo combed his hand through his hair, exaggerating the motion.

“You got a hair cut today!” I exclaimed. I hadn’t even noticed it until that moment.

“No. I didn’t get a hair cut,” he said dead seriously. “I got thousands of them cut, probably ten thousand! Was wondering if you would notice... Haha!” he laughed.

Stingo typically let his hair grow long, often nearly down to his collar and sometimes even longer. But now he looked as neat as a school teacher. Well, a teacher at an alternative school anyway.

He then abruptly continued his previous line of thought and looked me square in the eye. “Some things you leave to chance, but the important things you control as best you can. Some things are too important to gamble. But gamble, that’s what people do, every day.”

I stepped back and folded my arms to contemplate all of these things he was saying. And then I stepped right back into the tree trunk that held the roof up in the middle of the cabin. “*OW!*” I had knocked my head into the short knob that remained from of one of the sawn off branches.

“Hey, be careful when you’re walking backwards,” Stingo suggested as he examined the back of my head. “No blood, you’re okay.”

I rubbed my head.

“You see this tree trunk here?” he asked.

“Yeah, sure.” I turned and looked up and down the bare and shiny trunk, of course covered with typical brain lab graffiti.

“Didja ever look at this?” Stingo said as he examined the writing up the trunk, gliding his hand down the surface.

I turned around and started examining the smooth tree trunk. It was funny, I had looked, but I hadn’t really SEEN what I had looked at before. I looked carefully this time. It consisted of nothing but names:

“Jones”

“T. Weiner”

“Smith”

“J. Hinkley”

“Badmouth and Guyardo”

“Mills”

There were over a dozen in all.

“See the names here?” he asked. “These are people- brain lab flunkies, drop-outs that never transcended into their frontal lobes. They thought that clicking their amygdala forward was a big joke. They never calculated the consequences of their actions, committing sins of omission and sins of commission. They were gamblers, forever trapped by their reptile brain. Insanity.”

One name in particular caught my eye. “Is this who I think it is?” I said, pointing to one recognizable name.

Stingo nodded, “Yep.”

This was a criminal that had once been on the front page of every newspaper around the world. It was the name of the guy who had shot president Reagan.

Stingo moved his hand contemplatively down the trunk. “These are the names of former brain lab students who refused to grow up.” Stingo sat down

on his bed. “They are victims of The Cosmic Mafia. Most of them are in prison. Or dead.”

I had never heard him use that term before, The Cosmic Mafia. I instantly found it frightening, sinister, and very creepy.

Stingo scooted back onto his pillows which he fluffed and propped up behind his head. He looked content and comfortable and a complete opposite from the picture and point he was making about the people on the tree trunk. I shuddered.

“You can learn how to use your brain and control it, or you can gamble with your fate.” Stingo laced his hands behind his head and shut his eyes. “But remember, the universe plays hard ball. The Cosmic Mafia keeps score. You get away with *nothing*.”

Read
**Secret Of
The Dormant Brain Lab**

At

www.BookOfWands.com

Learn how to turn on your own
Brain Radar as easy as flipping a light
switch with

[The Frontal Lobes
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Tickle Your Amygdala at
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