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Écrit par NHA

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There are no translations available.

[Previously on Beyond TPT: The Rebel base is on a moon on the far side of the planet but will be in range in five minutes. Instead of blowing away the planet that is in the way with the Death Star, the Imperials are going to sit there waiting just long enough to get kicked right up the ass by the Rebel fighters. None of us can figure out why. Now read on:]

Beyond The Porcelain Throne

Series 3, 2

Bridge Building for Beginners

...Now we need a health and safety mention here, because there is no rabbit hole anywhere that is deeper and darker than that into inner space. We're going down that hole quite soon and we've never lost an astronaut on my watch and we're damned well not going to lose one now. So remember that if you get lost, you can always get out by following the white rabbit [the trail of analogical thought] that led you there. I'll explain some more about this because it's important.

If you get lost on a mission, here is what you must do: [1] recognise when you are confused, out of your depth, a bit lost and failing to understand things, or being troubled by sentiment. [2] Stop, and don't panic. This is the hardest bit to learn, and it means going away and doing something totally different, preferably eating and sleeping, then [3] remaining calm, follow the rabbit back to a turning you recognise -in other words, trace the story back to wherever you got confused.

In the Wonderland of the unconscious mind, as we heard from the Darragdomians, the rabbit hole is a wormhole that stretches between the real material [known as 'concrete'] planet Earth and Imagination [known as the 'abstract' world of ideas, which is in Darragdomian space].*[see footnote]. Right in the middle is the middle of your brain, the unconscious mind where you can step through the looking glass from one side to the other and back again if your ship is capable of warp speed. First, we're going to go to the bottom of the hole on this side and have a look at the physical concrete side of what's happening when you learn.

Okay, you need your hard hat on to explore what goes on in the depths of the rabbit hole. [We know this is only a video, but how about a bit of interaction here, hmm?] You also need to have a careful look at the cake the Darragdomian is handing around. It's labelled 'eat me', it has a red pill on top of every slice, and we have to warn you that if you do eat a slice of this cake you will get very, very small. But it's cool to be small in this chapter because bridge building begins on a microscopic level and if you were the normal size, you wouldn't, like, be able to see it. So if you want to come along, you're going to have to eat that slice of cake and shrink away.

...And find yourself inside a living machine of amazing complexity and beauty, lit by glows and flashes like fireflies or meteors across the skies. Following the Darragdomians, you'll come to the cliff-edge of a landscape where many more are gathered. In the distance, you can see a light flashing whenever the lights on your side flash.

"This is the building team," says Conan, introducing you to a gang of Gnomes, "and this" –he points toward the distant flashing light- "is the gap we have to bridge. We can't see exactly

what's on the other side very clearly yet, but it's quite exciting because the messages flashing over there are in time with those over here. However, we never take anything for granted, so we only ever build half way. If we've got our interpretations right, the gang on the other side will meet us halfway doing their half, and if we haven't, it doesn't matter because we can just dismantle the bridges and build elsewhere.

"These bridges are not just links, nor are they just hyperlinks. Hyperlinks only allow one-way communication. These are metalinks; they carry input as well as output, so there's feedback, which is, well, why you're intelligent, yeh? While this is going on in here, you see, out there in Reality you're getting to know something. It might be a person, a thing, or a place, or a skill, but as you explore it we're making the bridges between the input you're getting and associated memories, to speed up your progress. Every bridge we build makes another connection as you take another step between one point of known stuff and one point of what was unknown. If you think about two different things as being connected, we'll build a literal connection for you between their memory associations in your brain. That's where the saying came from, "Cells that fire together, wire together" –well it's our job to direct the wiring. Slowly, we gain 'known' territory, and that's how we build the city of light that is your memory, increase the density of your brain, and make faster thinking easier. I guess I don't need to stress the importance of all this to learning, right? -We run the information highway.

"I ought to point out the use of words here, because it's counter-intuitive...we're used to thinking of "dense" as meaning someone who's a bit thick, right? Well in reality, the denser your brain gets, the smarter you are. Density here is about physics, okay? The more the merrier. When the routes are stressed by a lot of new activity, we put in extra bridges and your association net improves. Call them what you like; routes, wires, links, bridges, but if you take a look at some over here that we prepared earlier, you'll see that there are already broad routes and narrow routes. Every time you use a pathway of thought through a series of links, it lights up as your thoughts pass, and that's our signal to make it stronger, broader, easier. Familiar broad routes become 'habits', because we assume they are things that you have to do often, so we make the roads navigable automatically at greater speed. So you see, the phrases "narrow minded" or "broad minded" really do literally apply –some people have only narrow routes throughout their brains, and can't think very flexibly. Our building materials are proteins, and the more you keep up that stress-relaxation thing of thinking and then relaxing & feeling groovy, the more chemicals to build more materials you provide us with. If you work with nature's learning cycle you make it much easier for us and for yourself.

"If you get anxious, or guilty, or aggressive or anything like that, the hormone packets you're sending stop the production of the proteins we need to build bridges, and unfortunately poison some of the workers, so we have to stop work until the pollution's clear. It's not too dangerous for the workers down here, but the Vulcans and Orlians up front are particularly susceptible to

pollution damage. They're the first in line for radiation damage, too. If we're ever down here and you eat a load of junk and we see a mushroom cloud go off up front, we just down tools and run like hell, which is kind of why your mood goes all to rat shit if you eat loads of rubbish.

"If we only have to down tools for a short time, that's fine, but if any routes are unused for a long time, the Gnomes steal cells from them to use on the more important routes. That means pathways can get narrower and slower as well as bigger and faster. The Gnomes are big on recycling, see; they hate redundancy. The problem of course is that if you don't use a network enough, bits of it get nicked to build up the bits that you're using most, and there's no way we can stop them doing that. It's a bit like going through all your stuff and throwing out for recycling anything you haven't used for 6 months. That's another good reason to keep a balanced crew and make sure they all regularly get something to do. If the whole brain gets a regular workout, the Gnomes won't see the need for any recycling. If you're running at optimal, it shouldn't be necessary; remember they won't steal anything that's in good regular use.

"Obviously our building work changes the internal shape of your networks, your actual hardware, and unlike in a computer, in a human this is always changing, to accommodate new skills needed by any changes in your environment [i.e. anything new]. This is what scientific dudes call "plasticity", because the physical form of the brain is 'plastic' as in 'mouldable', and it's why humans are so very good at surviving and thriving in so many different circumstances and being good at such an amazingly diverse variety of things. Your brains are moulded by experience just as much as by original development; by nurture just as much as genetics.

...Incidentally, just out of interest, there are Muscle Gnomes as well as Brain Gnomes. If you don't regularly stress and relax your muscles, the Muscle Gnomes steal bits of them away. If you exercise, they'll manufacture more. [And because the Gnomes enjoy recreational drugs, if you feed Muscle Gnomes steroids they go completely hyper and you end up looking like Arnie.]

In the brain though, instead of getting bigger and taking up more space with exercise, the networks get denser with more connections, so the problem of having to grow an enormous head as you get smarter fortunately does not arise. The more your imagination can stretch and relax, the more versatile our materials become. If you're interacting with people on the outside, we make copies of their states of mind and bridge cells together inside your own brain to enable you to increase your empathy with those people, so that you become able to understand more and more different kinds of people, ideas, or things. This is called "muscular mindedness" and it makes you a very fast, adaptable creative thinker.

"By 'stretching your imagination', I don't mean being able to imagine the wildest freaky things like big slimy aliens or people turning into flies or flocks of crows going mental. I mean stretching to accommodate some information or an experience you do not quite understand; something which is not quite known, and, through exploring it and comparing it to new combinations of old experiences, incorporating it into the known body of knowledge. The best stretching pulls us into territory that makes us feel excited, makes us think about things in new ways, or seems just a little daring.

"Obviously you can also now see what habits are –they are the routes through the brain that are the most often used. It takes us a while to get the hang of using a route for something new, because that's what we must do if a habit is to be broken; the route that a train of thought was taking across the networks must be changed. Habits are hard to crack not only because any well-worn routes have been made automatic, but also because new habits are often not made available. I'm telling you this so that you can give up bad habits of thought much more easily by just providing beneficial ones instead and making sure that they are used. As the old ones fall into low use, the Gnomes will do their stuff and clear away all the dodgy routes for you. Doing this is the best strategy for rapid change for the better without any hard work. This is another superpower that others will call "willpower", but you know the secret: never 'give a habit up'; always replace it with a better one. I don't just mean stuff like smoking or drinking –although that's also best done by these methods- I mean habits of thought. Slipping into gloomy, depressing, apathetic, aggressive or worried thoughts can get to be a habit. You have to think about optimistic stuff and use the new routes if you want to optimize beneficial pathways, then all the work will be done for you. All you have to do, is play. The game is to find, watch and copy good examples of beneficial behavior. The prize is an extremely fit and healthy mind and an intelligence capable of benefiting itself, the planet and humanity.

"You need good habits of thought because only a healthy mind, running clean emotion and creative intelligence without sentiment, can encounter the Toilet Lords' shit without getting shit all over itself. It can watch the Empire's news against the background of a clear, calm overview of Reality, focusing only on ideas that are part of the solution, a mood of determination to remain part of the solution, and strategies for how to do that. A mind in which doom and gloom and despair [Floyd] or anger, pomposity and outrage [Margaret] arise in response to bad news can never change the future because it cannot change the present; it cannot interact. It's action / reaction protestings and complainings will be heard as an us-against-them philosophy; controllers versus victims. A healthy mind knows there is no us-them. There's just us. Even in circumstances where we can't think of creative solutions that work with nature straight away, we can still remember that working on improving the wisdom of our own minds is part of the solution too."

Interactions always build bridges. This story is one. It is bridging the gap between fact and

fiction, which is exactly what you do every time something from fiction [your imagination] changes something in the real world [through your creative play] and alters the facts. One day, you can't ride a bike but you can imagine doing it. As you pick up the details [these are the pedals, those are the brakes], bridges are built in your knowledge database in network 5. As you get onto the bike and start to play about with it, bridges are built in network 4 that store the procedural skills. When you sleep, you bridge the two together, join them to any previous similar experiences relayed through network 3 [like learning to walk or dance or swim] and then all you need is practice with a bit more playing around. Then suddenly Reality has changed –both inside the brain and outside. Once, you did not have those networks and you could not ride a bike, now, you have, and you can. You learn the skill without having to work very hard at all, which is how it should be with everything. Flying a starship is no different. Again, all you have to do is play.

Like nature and nurture, we need both fact and fiction to either explain or affect Reality. Fact & fiction are, in Reality, the two halves of a yin-yang. The white part 'Yang' is light because it is the known; the outside world, the conscious, factual concrete manifestation of matter and energy. The black part 'Yin' is the unknown [and hence in shadow], the unconscious inner world of the analogical abstract imagery of time and space. In this map, the idea of the white rabbit is represented by the little spots of alternate color upon each side of the symbol. The point where things change, from one side to the other.

So, here's one out of the guidebook for you: Entelechy [and easy learning] always proceed from the concrete to the abstract, bottom-up, and pop into concrete reality like a rabbit from a hole. And the thing that first comes through first –your intent- will shape what eventually comes out. If your intent is to learn something, then what comes out will be the ability to do it. You don't see what's going on underground; all that the Darragdomians are showing you; this bridge-building stuff. All of that takes place automatically, as you just play with things [explore them]. Humans were designed to learn by playing, which is why healthy children are so awfully keen on doing it. Most grown ups have forgotten how to play, and the closest they get to it is reading fiction. Consequently they can only learn things the slow way –fed in from the top-down [school fashion]. And it's slower by orders of magnitude.

...A musician who's used to 'playing along' with stuff can get the basic hang of a song s/he's never heard before within about ten minutes and be playing it reasonably well in thirty without even knowing what the chords are called or how to spell 'theory'. A musician working from the top down has to learn the whole of musical theory in order to be able to read the sheet music, and will still be unable to improvise a solo or make anything up on the spot. Learning things the hard way is a bit like trying to get your nutrition by shoving food up your ass...it works, eventually, sort of, but it's a long, painstaking [and painful] process. Shoving information the wrong way up the rabbit hole becomes a habit because that's the way humans are currently

taught in the Toilet Empire's schools [despite the fact that people obviously learned to walk and talk without being given any lectures on locomotion or grammar.] Top-down knowledge is meant to augment the natural kind; it is there for exploring the details, not for grasping the basics.

The Toilet Lords replace intent –nature's own motivation for learning- with intentions. Intentions are pushed upon people from without, whereas intent arises from within.

"Intention" is a Margaret term. It is about ideas pushed upon people, places or things. It is about telling people what to do 'for their own good'. It is about correcting errors with solutions that later turn into errors. I would swap any number of friends with good intentions for just one with good intent. The latter is working in harmony with nature, the former against it. The results of the latter's actions will work, the results of the former's actions will make things, overall, worse. The intent to learn –that nature gives you- is replaced by the intentions of eager 'educators' with heads full of Toilet Empire contents, and educators are often Margarets [including political and spiritual leaders]. Margarets, on the whole, are very fond of the past, and like to tell us that times were better then. [Owners of Floyd ships are quite the opposite, and believe that better times are to come in the future. They take no creative part in change and are often given unpleasant surprises by it.]

A good starship knows exactly where potential for improvement lies; it is always here, and the time is always now. You can only ever achieve a Rush outcome operating in the here and now.

Woops, quick –better catch the Darragdomians up in the here and now- I think they're leaving! I just got a message to meet them in the next chapter. See you there.

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*Footnote: The wormhole accesses Darragdomian space, which may have extra dimensions. There's a whole universe connected to it containing all the homeworlds of the other species. This is where we'll go later for some adventures, so it's a good job you read this footnote or you

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might have been taken totally by surprise!