

THE BOOK OF WANDS

SAMPLE
CHAPTER

NEIL SLADE

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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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Chapter 23

Rendezvous With Fink

“So how long is this gonna’ take to find me a bike to take on my trip?” Bobby asked.

I thought I would ere on the optimistic side. “Oh, I don’t know. Twenty minutes? We’ll find you a bike, maybe it’ll take twenty minutes.” I privately took a little gulp, as I worked my way out on this metaphysical limb.

Bobby bobbed his head, “Sounds good.”

I locked the back door behind me as Bobby slowly walked ahead of me through the house, gazing around him from spot to spot. This time through he took a long hard look at the big strange straw gold straw bristled broom that was fastened above the drywall arch that separated the living room from my dining room.

He then walked ahead of me into the dining room and paused at the additional two brooms that hung like sentinels on either side of the arch.

“Can I see this one?” he asked pausing by one of the fancy brooms.

“Sure, you can SEE it.”

“I mean, can I touch it,” Bobby reiterated more clearly.

“Sure, here,” and I lifted one to hand him. It was rust colored with perfectly long straight solid bristles cut at an angle at the end, connected with two brass rings to the long French S curved shaped handle.

“What’s this for?” he asked.

“What do you think?” I responded quite naturally. “Cleaning, what else.”

“No, come on.” Bobby examined the bristles of the broom which were exceedingly stiff and straight as thick bamboo dowels. The broom only vaguely looked like a broom, and certainly would not be mistaken for a kitchen broom. He looked at me, “You couldn’t sweep the floor with this, it wouldn’t pick up anything!”

“Who said anything about sweeping the floor with it?” I took the broom back and hung it back up on the wall.

“Does it fly,” he joked.

“Yes. Three times I know of.”

“WHAT?.”

“We’ll talk about it some other time.”

He stood there, looking like he was trying to catch flies with his mouth open.

“Later,” I said as I pushed him out the door. “Concentrate on your bike.”

I knew Bobby was anxious to find a bike, as I was to show him exactly why I had taken an umbrella out into the back yard and had swept the sky with it like a radar dish. I knew that there was plenty to sidetrack him in my house. I also knew that if we did get sidetracked, we would lose the signal I had tried to pick up in the back yard.

We walked outside and got into my old beat up hatchback car and started down the street without saying much more about the umbrellas or the brooms. Bobby sat there chewing on his fingernails, quite certain I am sure because he was having doubts about how sane I was outside of his regular guitar lessons.

Music, even weird music, was safe. This was a little weird for him. It was in fact getting slightly chilly.

I tried to break the ice a little bit. “You want me to turn off the air-conditioning?” I asked.

“Sure, I’m not big on AC,” he said as he rolled down the passenger side window. “So where are we going?”

“Oh, I thought we’d start down by Colorado Boulevard and just work are way back till we find something.” I had hoped that we would spot what he needed in the alley. I wasn’t sure, but I had been exceptionally lucky in finding bikes in my neighborhood again and again. I had used the umbrella to supercharge my luck, and as insurance.

“So tell me about this thing you’re going to, what you want a bike for,” I inquired. I was trying to stay on course, trying to prime the bike finding engine.

“Oh yeah,” Bobby chimed in. “I’m really excited. My older brother Alex and a couple of his buddies are driving out to Nevadato the Flaming Bean Man Festival, and my folks said I could go.”

“Flaming what?”

“It’s the Flaming Bean Man Festival. It’s in the middle of the desert and they do it every year. All these freaks get together- they expect something like forty-thousand people to show up this year.

I tilted my head, “Oh, like a dry Woodstock without the music.”

“No, they have music- they just don’t have any real organized bands or anything commercial. It’s all anti-corporate. You don’t use money, except to buy food in the center of the thing- nobody’s selling anything. People just show up, and bring their own instruments, bring their art and have a good time

looking at everybody else. I mean, people create these huge bizarre works of art, set it up in the middle of nowhere, and you just Wander around seeing what everybody else has brought.”

“Cool.”

I got to the end of my street, and turned up an alley. I kept laying the foundation for meeting his goal through casual conversation, sneaking in the back door of his mind, without rousing too many defenses. Subliminal positive suggestive reinforcement meant to help whatever I stirred up with my Wand. “So what are you bringing besides your bike?”

“Oh. I don’t know. Nothing I guess. You don’t have to bring anything. I just want a bike to ride around in the desert.” He took the bait. I wanted to make sure both heads were working on this.

Bobby hung his head out the window. “Are you sure we’re going to find something?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I used my very best umbrella.”

“You’re crazy,” Bobby said, and laughed.

“We’ll see.”

I had planted the seed, and the umbrella was the hoe.

People in my neighborhood were fairly consistent about leaving things they weren’t using for other people in the neighborhood to collect. The alleys were like a giant thrift store, except that you didn’t have to pay for anything. We just needed to find ourselves in the right place at the right time.

Brain Radar amplified with an Unusual Tool.

However, lately, folks from across town could be seen driving their old pickup trucks up and down the back ways. Word was getting around that the pickin’s were good around here. I can’t say that I was 100% sure we would score.

I could indeed look like Crazy Neil before the hour was up.

My plan was to cover all the alleys within a mile of my house. I would start in the far corner of my neighborhood, drive up one alley, then down the next one over, zig-zagging up each alley back towards my house.. So far we had driven several blocks, but we hadn’t seen anything but cardboard boxes, plastic bags filled with grass clippings, and dented old aluminum garbage pails filled with carnivals of refuse.

“So where’d you get this idea about the umbrella, I don’t even know what you were doing,” Bobby at last said.

“The umbrella picks up signals that your brain is too distracted to hear or see. It’s like a homing device. You’ve seen those big radar dishes out east at Buckley Air Force Base, haven’t you?”

“Oh, you mean those big golf balls? Those domes?”

“Yeah, right. But the golf balls just cover up what’s inside. Inside are these giant radar dishes that look like my umbrella when I’m holding it upside down and opened up. They can track stuff clear across the country with those things.”

“Okay, so if you picked up bike signals, where’s the bike? Why are we just driving around?” Bobby thought he had me.

“It’s not that clear cut,” I explained. “You do two things: First, you TRANSMIT, like ‘Hello, I need a bike, send out a bike locator signal. You use the umbrella to transmit. Second, you RECEIVE. The way radar works is by echo location. You send out a signal then it bounces off something. You look at what comes back.”

“Yeah, I get it. So what came back? Why are we just driving around. You don’t seem to know where you’re going, where anything is.”

“No, not consciously I don’t. The conscious mind is for things like grocery shopping, watching a TV program, or seeing what’s right in front of you, like that bug on my windshield. Only my subconscious mind knows where you’re bike is. I’m just following a very faint beep beep beep. The umbrella gave me a feeling about whether or not there’s anything out there to find. And if there is, we’ll stumble upon it, our subconscious will steer us in the right direction..”

“Oh man. Haha!!” Bobby laughed. “You’re pretty good Niles. Pretty good.” He snickered a good healthy snicker.

“We’ll see.” Silently to myself I said, “I sure hope so, or I’m going to look like an idiot.

So far we had turned up four alleys already, and had come across nothing any better than an old suitcase, and a stack of exercise video tapes, and a bunch of old National Geographic magazines. I was started to get a little nervous.

Bobby was hanging his chin out his window like a dog who was on his way to the veterinarian. Sudden he picked up his head and pointed up the alley, “Hey! What’s that?!” he suddenly exclaimed.

I saw a pile of junk on the right side of the alley about fifty yards up, and quickly pulled over next to it. Bobby popped the door open and jumped out of his side of the car. “Look at this!”

Bobby up righted a big padded office chair that had been lying next to someone’s garage door. It was next to a bunch of other boxes filled with three ring notebooks, pads, and boxes of used pens. It looked like someone’s home business had taken a nose dive. The chair itself was not one of those cheap ones you get at the office supply store for fifty bucks, but rather a very fancy one, and executives chair with a half dozen knobs and levers sticking out from the back and from underneath the seat.

“You want that thing?” I wondered out loud.

Bobby slid the chair halfway into the middle of the alley, then with a good backward leap, sat down in it, and placed his elbows on the arm rests, and his chin in his hands. “Take a memo, Miss Jones,” he said in a deep voice, however deep a fifteen year old kid’s voice can go.

“What are you going to do with that thing?”

“I don’t have a good chair in my room,” he replied. “This is great. I bet it’s worth a couple of hundred bucks.

“No, come on.”

“Listen, my dad has got something like this in his office, and I bet it cost two or three hundred dollars.”

I was skeptical, but he was pretty excited about it. “Will it fit in the back?” he asked, walking around to the back of my car.

“Probably,” I said. Moments later we were on our way again, with the chair sticking halfway out the back.

“Man, that was great. Now I can get rid of that piece of crap I’ve wanted to throw out. I’m going to check around we get back and see what it’s worth...” Bobby was beaming.

We drove around for another ten minutes, and the alleys seemed to be pretty empty. I was starting to have some doubts. We weren’t finding any bikes, not even some bent up bicycle wheels.

“You know, if we don’t find anything, we can always call up those ads you saw.” I was trying to figure out how I was going to save face.

“Uh huh. So, Mr. Wizard is flunking out, eh? Wands. It’s a good story.”

“No, no...” I was trying to think of something. It always figures, whenever you try to prove something to someone, it always backfires. Try to impress someone with something really special, and doesn’t it always seem to blow up in your face? Hmmm, a change in course might be appropriate.

“Hey! I know! Did I ever show you that weird telephone pole near my house?” I said. I thought I might be able to keep this sinking ship afloat for a little while longer.

“No, what pole?”

“Oh, well, there’s this telephone pole in an alley a couple blocks from my house, and someone nails all kinds of junk on it. It’s covered with electronic equipment, and tape recorders, and ham radios and stuff.”

“Okay, sure, that sounds cool,” Bobby said.

“Alright!” Okay, at least I was certain I could actually show him *something*.

I made the first turn out of the alley we were on, then skipped to an alley about four blocks from my house. "I think it's down here...yeah, there it is," I gestured with my upturned chin.

Right in the middle of the block down the alley was this big bizarre looking olive green camouflaged Swiss army vehicle. In front of it was the telephone pole I had been telling Bobby about. It was covered from top to bottom with a junk yard's full of electronic gear, plus a pair sneakers for good measure. Walking Ernie and Chloe down this alley I had stumbled upon it long ago.

Remarkably, it was even more interesting than that because periodically the items posted on it changed. A radio would be missing, and in its place suddenly would appear a portable TV set fifteen feet up. I didn't know who was doing all of this, and I assumed it was whoever was living in the house in front of the pole. But whoever it was, he had to have had linemen's climbing cleats to get up there and decorate the thing. It looked more like something that belonged in a modern art gallery than something that transmitted telephone conversations.

As we slowly came up to the Swiss van, we noticed that the garage next to it was wide open, and it was all lit up. We came to a squeaky stop just outside the open door to get a better look. Inside were three people, two of them standing around watching the third one work. He had a welding mask on his head and was holding a lit acetylene torch welding several iron rods together.

On the floor of the garage was an almost indescribable contraption. It looked like a go cart with an uncovered teardrop shaped frame-shell over it. Connected to this front car, were three more carts, like little train cars following behind, each one having a little pointy little tail as well.

"Hi!" Bobby yelled. "What are you doing?"

The two people, a guy and a woman, looked at us, then looked at the welder, who put his mask up and turned down the torch flame.

"Hi!" he said. Bobby launched right into conversation. He was naturally gregarious and had no problem striking up an instant exchange with anyone. "So, that looks interesting. What are you doing?"

"I'm making a sculpture," the man said. He looked about sixty years old. He was unshaven, was wearing an old full length carpenter's apron, blue jeans, and a pair of ratty sneakers. "I'm making a spermatozoa train to take on a trip."

Bobby and I looked at each other. "Did he say what I thought he said?" Bobby said. Then he turned back to the man. "That's pretty cool. Where are you going?"

“Flaming Bean!” he shouted, as he vigorously animated his statement with a big burst of flame from the torch, cranking up and down the gas lever.

Bobby turned around and looked at me, then turned back to the guy again. “Oh man, I can’t believe it! That’s exactly where I’m going!”

“Far out,” said the old guy.

“What’s your name? My name’s Bobby.” He was practically half out the window now.

“Al. Al Fink. You ever been to the Bean before?”

“Nope, this is my first time. My brother’s taking me. I can’t wait. How about you?”

“Tenth year. I wanted to bring something real good this year, so I’m making this: The Human Tadpole Mobile.”

“Alright!” Bobby said, a impish grin on his face, then turning to me, “You know what he means, don’t you?” Then he turned back to Fink. “It looks impressive. I hear there’s gonna’ be a lot of art and sculptures there.”

“Oh, not just art. Haha.” he laughed. “It’s a whole city that springs up out of nothing. A *crazy* city.”

I was half leaning over Bobby in the passenger seat by this time, getting a better look at Al’s creation. It was certainly the last thing I expected to see cruising the alleys that afternoon. But even Freud would probably agree that Al and his biological go cart was a perfect mate to go with the telephone pole only yards away.

Al nodded. “Yep. If you’ve never been before, you’re gonna’ love it. This is really nothing,” he said pointing at the half finished vehicle with his torch. “You’ve never seen anything like Flaming Bean in your life. I’m hooked.” Al went back to fiddling around with the controls on his tool and turned back to his work.

Bobby turned to me, and repeated, as if he almost couldn’t believe this was mere coincidence, “Niles, I can’t believe it, he’s going exactly to where I’m going!”

I felt somewhat vindicated and relieved. Wands can be unwieldy things and the results will more often than not take you on unexpected turns. So is the experience of an explorer and a Traveler. We hadn’t found a bike, but we had hit somewhere on the intended target, even if it was on an outside ring.

Bobby went on talking to Fink like he was an old acquaintance and effortlessly continued the conversation. He’s like that. I’ve seen Bobby talk to anybody about anything at any time, as natural as a trout- well heck, as natural as a spermatozoa swimming upstream.

“So, um, we’re just driving around the alleys. I’m trying to find a bike to take with me to the festival. I don’t want to wreck my good bike on the rocks and sand.”

“Oh yeah,” Al said stroking his chin. “I’ve got a bike you can have. It’s behind that door over there. You can have it. Go on and take it.”

Bobby turned around and looked at me with this look of total disbelief on his face. “Oh my god...”

I looked at my watch. “Let’s see, fifteen minutes. Five minutes quicker than I figured,” I said.

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