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Nervous Breakthrough

Sample Copy

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Human Made Content - NO AI

AI is only used as a dictionary, thesaurus, and information search and reference tool.
Absolutely no part of the written story is ever copied into AI for editing, revision, or comments.
Absolutely nothing generated by AI is ever pasted into the story.

Matt has developed a unique style and writing method. Removing all age, gender, ethnicity, physical appearance etc… only leaving words and actions to define a character.

This story, like all of Matt's stories, was written out of home, never at a desk, never stationary.(Matt's original rule was 'only while walking outside' but was revised into 'must be moving through earth based coordinate space' this allows occasional exceptions for trains, buses, etc..). Everything is written with pen and paper, then put into a document with voice-to-text, and finally edited and polished by Matt alone, no other human or AI is involved.

Matt is fascinated and enjoys using AI, but is a firm believer that we should label content.
Human only, AI generated, AI assisted, AI collaboration, etc…

Matt does play with AI in some writing content, like AI assisted poetry (great practice and learning tool to improve writing skills, vocab, cadence, etc..), or AI dialogues as artistic experimentation.
Any works that involve or include AI composition, revisions, or editing are clearly labeled as such.

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Do you ever feel stuck? Not the metaphorical kind, I don't mean conceptually stuck or unable to think your way through a problem. But I'm not talking about being physically stuck either, this is different from being stuck in a position or location. I suppose I'm trying to describe feeling trapped everywhere, not in a cage, trapped in a system, trapped in a world.

Maybe I'm crazy, but it feels like there is something uncomfortable about this life. Is it just me, or are we all just getting by, barely holding on to our lives? Is everyone else itchy all the time, but unable to pinpoint where the itch is? Every time I think I sense where the itchiness is coming from, I scratch it a bit, but then realize it wasn't there, not in that spot anyways. The itch is still there, I just can't find it.

I want to blame something – this community or others, organizations or society as a whole – but I'm not that naive anymore. The discomfort isn't caused by any –one–, no –one– is responsible, it's everyone, it's us, it's just the way we are. Every single itch is rooted in connection and interaction with others. I've tried making new connections and exploring new places, but it's always the same, there is always an unsettling feeling, an unidentifiable sense of lacking, like I'm missing out on something. I keep misinterpreting the sense of lacking as cravings, I try to satisfy them, but no matter what I try, no matter where I scratch, I can never find the itch.

I describe this feeling as ‘stuck’ because it doesn't matter what I do, I can't escape. I could cut all my ties and rebuild a whole new network of connections, but it would still be there. Interacting with my neighbors or reaching out to far away strangers, nothing makes it go away, it's always there. We are all individual nodes interconnected in this crazy social network. I think we are all infecting the network with our own insecurities, fears, and desires, so any interactions or relationships inevitably infect you with an unscratchable itch, the irritations from the network and everyone else become your own.

There isn't really any choice, it's not like I can disconnect myself and live in complete isolation. I'm not naive. Obviously, if I tried to live alone then I would probably starve or die from exposure to the elements. My distant primitive ancestors could brave the elements on their own, but I'm soft, specialized, and coddled, I only know how to live in a modern civilized society. And so… I'm stuck.

This crowded world is like a dense network. We are all bombarded by the thoughts, values, and beliefs of everyone we interact with, and we all react to that barrage of stimulus. We need to react and respond, however instead of reacting to the source, we often just listen, experience it politely. But when we don't respond in the moment, then the memory of that experience echoes in our mind, it infects our thoughts, until it bubbles up in an interaction with someone else. We all just pass stuff around unintentionally. So not only am I stuck, but I'm also part of the problem.

I'm a flawed individual in this world of billions of flawed individuals. We are all tangled up together, one giant network of individuals who are just surviving and reacting to each other. The world is so big, and there are so many of us, we infect each other with our own insecurities and prejudices. And if that's not enough, we broadcast trends and form consensus, trend chasing and conformism run rampant. We collectively try to determine what everyone should do and what we should all strive for. There is no escape, we are all stuck, we are all stuck with each other.

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I was wrong… so –very– wrong! There is something so much more going on. I had convinced myself that we are just a giant scrambled network of entangled individuals. When the behaviors of others seemed random, that was only because it was messy, confounded by many confusing and overlapping echoes from everyone's previous interactions. I thought things that appeared inexplicable actually had explanations, I just assumed that the causes were somewhere in their past interactions with others. But then I began to see the patterns in the noise. I started paying attention and aggregating the seemingly inexplicable and irrelevant bits, I intended to exclude and ignore them, but upon inspection– I realized that my ‘waste pile of randomness’ was not random at all

This life – everyone and everything – it's not made of nodes. The world, including everyone in it, everything acts as a whole. The coincidences are too many. There are ‘feedback loops’… that's the only way to describe it.

If I do something in some place, then sometimes I get a reaction somewhere else, but that reaction had no way it could have been provoked by or propagated from the original action. If I say something to someone, then I often find a response in a conversation with someone else, even though there was no way those two individuals could have communicated within that time.

Perhaps I'm just seeing patterns that aren't really there, after all, they say we evolved to be great at pattern recognition, but if that were true… Then how did I live so long without seeing feedback loops before? Why now?

I know two things. The first is– these feedback loops are there, they are definitely real. The second is– I don't understand what they are or what they mean. They aren't instructions, and my interpretations of them often conflict with each other. The feedback loops are tangible, but that's all I have so far, for now I can only pay attention and hope this eventually makes sense.

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This feels like a twisted game of hide and seek or marco-polo. The feedback loops are there, like a constant commentary on my behavior, usually critiques. I don't get feedback on every little thing I do, but significant interactions with others easily provokes a response.

These feedback loops love pointing out my mistakes, most of what they say are condescending remarks. I describe them as condescending because they never give me the benefit of the doubt, and seem to ignore any mitigating circumstances. Quite often I will have recognized my mistake in the moment, either from seeing how others reacted to me or by just noticing my own behavior. The feedback is most infuriating when I've already sensed that my actions were inappropriate, I don't need my screw-up pointed out to me when I've already noticed it myself.

The absolute worst is when I'm already aware of my mistake and also feel that there was reasonable justification for my behavior, being lectured when you have a good excuse is infuriating. These critiques are undoubtedly coming from a living universe, the awareness it has of everything, plus the scale and scope of its coordination, it all leaves no other possibility. So there is no way that it does not see the full situation, it undoubtedly sees everything, yet it criticizes me the same regardless of context. When I'm provoked, misled, or manipulated by others, why doesn't it seem to consider the circumstances?

And to top it all off, it hides. I try to talk to it, but it almost never answers, and when it does… it 'pinches' me! Not literally, a metaphorical pinch. It hits me with feedback that is obviously meant to sting, it tries to make me feel bad, presumably to discourage me from trying to interact with it directly. This seems to be a one-way street. It can comment on my actions, but I'm not allowed to respond, defend myself, or critique it.

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This new awareness can be so stressful, I often miss the simplicity of when I was oblivious to it all. Back when I saw life as a noisy network of individuals, it was messy and irritating, but at least I had some simple and effective coping mechanisms. It was easy to ignore noise, I just became desensitized and it washed over me. But these feedback loops are personalized messages, they demand my attention and are resistant to being tuned out.

It has become increasingly obvious that this living universe can speak through anything or anyone. The more I listen the more I can hear… and the harder it becomes to resist paranoid impulses. I don't remember a specific moment when my worldview switched, but now I catch myself acting under a whole new paradigm, now I'm interacting with the whole instead of the individuals. The feedback loops arrive through conversations with others, the messages are slipped in through completely unrelated exchanges, and I guess over time I just started treating everyone as members, ambassadors, or puppets of this universal whole. I don't want to go down rabbit holes into realms of conspiracy, but if they speak for it and act for it, then they must all be part of it too… Right?

My ongoing conversation with the universe is fluid. Whatever it is, it has an awareness of context, I'm definitely communicating with something, our exchange evolves like a dialogue. It speaks through individuals, but they themselves are ignorant of what's happening. I tried responding directly when I caught others acting as conduits for the whole, I tried approaching

the subject gently, but they always reacted with confusion. They are either oblivious to their participation, or they are deceptively concealing their involvement.

I can't just start confronting or accusing everyone of lying, or of somehow being unwittingly involved in a conspiracy, but I do leak my responses to the whole when I speak with them. Sometimes it's intentional, the universe is always listening, so I speak to it through my daily interactions and conversations, and other times it's unintentional, it just slips out. Everyone speaks for the universe, so I can't help perceiving them as being the whole itself. I just instinctively act or respond to individuals as if they are the representatives of the whole, but they never acknowledge any awareness of my ongoing conversation with the living universe.

So now I'm even more stuck than before. Inescapable connections to a messy network of individuals was one thing, at least I could try to isolate myself from the most upsetting influences. But a living universe? One that speaks through everyone and everything, even the atmosphere and weather echo its words– it's impossible to disconnect from the entire universe! I'm trapped in a conversation, there is no end or escape from this. I'm stuck in a stressful dialogue with the whole universe.

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Rock bottom has a basement. What's worse than being constantly confronted by a critic who dictates the terms of engagement and refuses to show themselves? The answer is multiple critics in disunity.

I first noticed it with my neighbor, we talk frequently, usually it's quite smooth and pleasant, then one day there was a very obvious feedback loop. I instantly recognized a response to something I had done earlier that day, there was no doubt, the message was clear, and yet… Something felt off about it, the meaning didn't match the universal attitude I was used to. I've become very familiar with the universe, I can't claim to know how it thinks or what it wants, but there is a general vibe to its feedback. I didn't think much of it at the time, and that feedback just slipped into the context of my conversation with the universe. It wasn't until much later, I felt the prick of sharp criticism, and I realized that my instincts had been correct, there was something odd about what had happened– the feedback that came through my neighbor was influencing my behavior, and that behavior is what the universe was now chastising. Why would the universe guide me and then slap me for following its guidance?

Learning to listen to the voice in the background of this noisy world was a bumpy road. There were plenty of misinterpretations, sometimes I would miss something or fail to notice details, other times I thought I heard something that wasn't really there. But I was way past that learning curve, misunderstandings of this degree had not happened in a very long time. The incident bothered me profoundly… but life moves on. And if that was the end of it, then I probably would have just forgotten all about it.

But that was just the beginning

My neighbor did it again, and again. I started trying to probe for motives. The first time I was caught off guard, but every time it happened I would obsess over the memories more and more. Each time I became more prepared to confront and respond. I tried inquiring delicately with euphemisms and metaphors, but they were either refusing to respond, ignoring the signals I put between the lines, or just plain oblivious.

There is no evidence of intention to imitate the voice of the universe, but now whenever this happens I am overcome with an uncontrollable resentment, I see a pretender, I see someone trying to inject their voice into my dialogue with the whole. Just as my animosity towards my neighbor was reaching a tipping point, when my ability to resist directly confronting them was hanging by a thread, that's when it happened with someone else.

I was stunned silent, I didn't respond at all. When the shock wore off I couldn't stop overanalyzing it, but before I had enough time to process the stimulus, it happened yet again with another acquaintance. I kept getting surprised by imitations popping up in both old and new relationships.

I was always one step behind, I never had enough time to properly deal with the previous corruptive injection. My dialogue with the universe was stalled, I needed to clean the pollution out of our communication, but unexpected contaminations were constantly injected before I could ever purify our conversational context.

And that's how it has been, a non-stop onslaught of covert misinformation. I can still hear the voice of the universe, but it is so distorted and corrupted that it's no longer a conversation. Even when I can filter out the injections it takes too long, by the time I've cleaned the context it's already much too late to reply. I bet from the perspective of the universe it must look like I've become erratic and unresponsive. We had developed a smooth dialogue, but now I'm responding to things it didn't really say, answering stuff that was just imitations, or I'm not responding at all because I can’t clean the context fast enough. It still tries to talk to me, even though I've become a partially deaf and incoherently babbling buffoon. I can feel its frustration with me.

I miss our conversation. The universe only wanted me to improve myself, it only advocated harmony, it encouraged healthy relationships and collaborative interactions. I had finally learned how to listen, and just as I began to enjoy and cherish our dialogue, right when I get my first taste of it, that's when it is taken from me, dragged beneath a sea of noise, drowned out. I miss our conversation…

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There are tribes!

After constant frustration and endless struggling to identify and filter out the pretenders, I had already given up hope, just barely hanging on. Then patterns started to emerge.

When I first began noticing the voice of the universe within the random noise, back then I wondered ‘why now?’, I didn't understand why it suddenly became obviously noticeable. I now know that it was because I had started filtering out the random noise. I pulled out the noise and tossed it aside to be ignored, like throwing out trash, but when it started piling up that's when obvious patterns became undeniable. This time I was pulling weeds out of the garden of my dialogue with the universe, now the weeds have piled up and I can see that there are patterns and many distinct species of weeds.

I call them tribes because they aren't grouped together physically or regionally, their unifying qualities are their motives and values. I was classifying them all as individual pretenders, but now I wonder if the individuals are only conduits for the voices. Is there more than just the voice of the universe? Are there also many smaller voices? It was tempting to start grouping the noise by source, but it quickly became obvious that doesn't help at all, classifying by source or individual just muddies the waters. But everything becomes crystal clear when classifying by message. When the universe speaks, it speaks through anything or anyone. These other voices are like that too, it doesn't matter ‘who said it’, all that matters is ‘what was said’.

Once I started labeling messages by content then these ‘not-the-whole’, these ‘sub-voices’, they started to fall naturally into tribes. Most individuals echo the voices of several or many tribes. The more I categorize and analyze these tribal voices, the more it feels like the voices are just as real as the individuals who channel them, like there is some kind of symbiosis. I think voices choose their tribal members as much as the individuals choose their tribes.

As fascinating as this is, the reason I'm so motivated to sort this out isn't because I want to learn about the tribes. I'm desperately hoping that if I understand the nature of these confusing distractions, if I can describe and identify the noisy imitations and corruptions, then maybe I can filter them out quickly and efficiently. Maybe then I could isolate and hear the voice of the universe again. Maybe, just maybe, I can have a dialogue with the whole again.

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Learning curves are so frustrating, you never really know what's in front of you. Sometimes it's a classic curve of increasing difficulty that starts out easy and gets harder. Other times it starts out hard then gets progressively easier as you go. You can only really see the shape of the learning curve after it has passed.

I wager there is a good chance that you think a ‘steep learning curve’ means something is hard to learn, that's the common misinterpretation of learning curves and why they can be so confusing to describe. The horizontal axis is time and effort and the vertical axis is knowledge and proficiency. So a steep angle represents learning quickly, whereas gradually climbing lines represent very slow learning. Everyone is confusing learning curves with climbing hills and

interpreting the meanings backwards. In reality, steeper curves are fast progress, and plateaus are stagnation.

In my experience, learning curves are usually complex alternating curves and plateaus, like uneven serpentine steps. It's always impossible to predict which way the snaking of the learning curve will turn. Will it continue its current slope? Curve up sharply? Flatten out? You never know. But that's not the irritating part, my own overconfidence is what frustrates me most. Somehow I always seem to trick myself into thinking that I've reached the peak of understanding.

When a burst of rapid learning occurs, that is represented by the learning curve rocketing upwards. Sense of accomplishment is a very strong reward pathway, I get so high on pride when I'm progressing up a steep learning curve, but it's impossible to maintain that kind of momentum. Eventually progress has to slow down, or even stall. For me, bouts of explosive learning often end when I hit a wall, I get stuck on something and my learning curve plateaus. It's ironic… If someone climbs a steep mountain, then when the slope plateaus that means they've reached a peak, or at least a new higher level. Climbing a difficult cliff and reaching the top, now that's something worth being proud of. But a steep learning curve usually indicates that the subject of study was easy, and you reach the plateau when the material actually becomes challenging. When your learning curve plateaus, that should be when you humble yourself, buckle down, and ramp up your effort. This is where the irony comes in, I mix them up. The pride of that rapid progress through easy material convinces me that I have made a great accomplishment, and I treat that plateau as a peak. I convince myself that I'm at the top and I stop trying.

So yeah… I tend to get drunk on easy success. Then – when things get difficult – I just declare that I've reached the top so I can bask in self-satisfaction. I don't do it intentionally. I'm not even aware I'm doing it when it happens. My progress only really continues after I've lazily or accidentally broken through the wall and crossed the plateau. This is why I find learning curves so frustrating, it's not the learning curve itself, it's my own foolish behavior. Foolish and gullible! I fall for it nearly every time.

All this time, I've spent most of my life on plateaus, always clinging to whatever my current paradigm was, and only begrudgingly moving forward when evidence piles up so high that it becomes undeniable. I wait until I'm forced to admit that I wasn't seeing the whole picture.

I shouldn't be too hard on myself. I did get here eventually. It was a long road, but I did reach this point… Well, I guess it's more accurate to say that ‘I passed through all these points’. They say that you can't connect the dots until you've seen them all, and that's exactly the case here, because I finally get it. I realize I've claimed that several times, proclaiming epiphanies over and over, the difference this time is that I've had a ‘meta epiphany’. All those plateaus, every one of those paradigms, they are dots, they are all part of a bigger picture. I was wrong when I thought we are just a bunch of interconnected individual nodes, but I was also wrong when I thought that everyone else was just part of a holistic living universe. The reality is that both are equally true.

I was always interacting with the whole, it was always there from the beginning. I was just being a petulant child, refusing to listen. I labeled it as random noise. It tried to advise me, but I called it an itch. It tried to guide me, and I said it was just the insecurities, fears, and desires of others.

But I was also always interacting with other individuals. They spoke of their own life struggles and experiences, I called them noise too. They shared their wisdom and observations of this world, and yet I gave no credit to the individual. I attributed their insights to the universe speaking through them, as if they were just inanimate puppets.

Worst of all…
It's so obvious now…
How did I not see it before…

Everyone has a relationship with the whole, not just me. When I respond to the universe, I do it by embedding my answers into my daily life. I speak to the whole through my words and actions with others, I did it unintentionally before I believed in the living universe, and I do it intentionally now that I am trying to have a dialogue with the whole. And everyone else does it too, the universe speaks to them– whether they listen or not, and they all respond– intentionally or not.

Everyone else is talking to the universe too. They were not trying to pretend to be the voice of the universe, nor were they trying to inject messages into my dialogue with the whole. I now realize that we all have the same kind of dialogue with the universe – intentionally or not. The universe speaks to us embedded in our interactions with everyone and everything, and we respond in the same way.

We are a massive tangled network of individuals. We all speak with each other directly, while simultaneously maintaining ongoing global conversations beneath the surface. And if that's not complicated enough, all of those tribes and sub-voices emerge from all the diversity and organization of individuals.

I'm pretty sure those tribal-voices are emergent, yet also just as ‘alive’ and ‘real’ as any of us individuals. That would be easy to understand – the tribes being separate – if a group of individuals began coordinating and a collective voice emerged as a result of their unification, that would seem simple and straightforward. But reality isn't simple. Those voices are not physically embodied in a group, they aren't tethered or localized. The voices appear and move like ephemeral ghosts, unbound by the physical world. They manifest wherever they want then phase into another dimension and move around, or at least that's the best way I can describe them.

I choose to believe that the tribal voices are emergent because I'm trying to avoid an unsettling alternative explanation… Maybe the voices are fundamental and we individuals are emergent, maybe without the voices we would just be meaningless shells.

Yet I also choose to believe that the whole – the voice of the universe – is real. I choose that the global voice is fundamental, while simultaneously believing that the smaller sub-voices are emergent. I'm fully aware of my double-standard. It's not cognitive dissonance if you are aware and not bothered by it… Right?

I justify my hypocrisy by blending the two together. I believe smaller voices are connected to the whole as well. Just like we individuals have our own unique interactions with the universe, it seems obvious that the sub-voices would have relationships of their own with the universe. Tribal voices are more individual and selfish than the universe, but they are more universal and selfless than an individual, making them something in between the universe and an individual.

So I think the voices have a stronger relationship with the whole, stronger than an individual does anyways. I feel like they are the diverse facets and various interests of the whole, this view can even explain why they often have conflicting and mutually exclusive agendas. The universe makes decisions by arguing with itself, the voices embody the various positions and options, and the debate is played out in our world. The voices use us individuals like game pieces and avatars to compete with each other.

Well… that's how I choose to see things. I don't know if it's accurate, but it's how I cope, and this way everything feels like it finally makes sense. This perspective has even helped me get over my obsessive chase for a pure dialogue with the whole. I realize that my dialogue never was pure. I was slowly identifying the multi-faceted nature of the universe, and I mistakenly thought the diversity was intruders and pretenders. My dialogues with individuals, tribes, and the whole are not distinct, they all blend together. It can be ambiguous and I make mistakes, but that's okay. We are all just doing the best we can with what we have, and I'm at peace with that.

Life as a neuron is so confusing. I wonder if this universe appreciates everything we go through just so it can enjoy being a human. We work so hard in this complicated brain full of ambiguity and conflicting interests, but this person can just experience being the universe. I bet from their perspective all of this confusing complexity is invisible.

It must be nice…

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“Of course you think that. It's the same kind of thing you always say.” Anit responds, playfully teasing in a provocative way.

“And what's that supposed to mean?” Stac responds with crossed arms, trying to act offended, but failing to contain a playful smile.

“Ha!... Feigning ignorance! Quick to confidently toss around fuzzy ideas, and just as quick to turn fuzzy yourself.” Anit pokes, a bit more serious now. “Of course you take that side, it fits

perfectly with all those new age philosophies you can't stop talking about, but as soon as anyone tries to ask for concrete tangible answers you immediately become evasive."

"I suppose you're right, hahaha. I can't argue with that." Stac laughs long and hard, then settles down a bit and jabs back. "I guess I would rather be nebulous than always planting flags on melting ice. It's just as characteristic for you to choose the side of discrete units. You are always drawing lines in the sand. You love those lines, drawing, erasing, and revising them, over, and over, and over… Haha."

"Excuse me?!" Anit is genuinely ruffled for a moment before realizing that was actually a perfectly fair tit-for-tat. "Okay, but at least I'm trying to figure things out. I analyze, classify, and describe this world– things, systems, people… everything is discrete units that can be understood. Yes, I have to make occasional slight adjustments to the models based on new information, but that doesn't invalidate the methodology. Quite the contrary, acknowledging and accepting contradictory evidence is the hallmark of good scientific inquiry."

"Wow! So much to unpack there.. Hehe. " Stac snickers "Where to begin?... How about when you said that you occasionally make slight adjustments to the models? That's a very interesting conceptual distortion. Was that a strategic misstatement with plausible deniability?" Stac flashes a smirk with firm eye contact. Anit returns a look of mild confusion and pensive reflection, clearly trying to decode the meaning of that accusation. "Looks like it's unconscious delusional fusion, haha. You make 'frequent slight' adjustments and 'occasional profound' paradigm shifts. You have fused occasional-profound with frequent-slight to create the comforting falsehood of occasional-slight."

"What?... No… I don't…" The knee-jerk rebuttal stalls as Anit is hit with an unsettling realization. "You are right." That acknowledgment lingers, Stac waits patiently for the eventual follow up. "...But that's because I'm learning, I'm just a tiny fleeting insect and science is a colossal generational megastructure. My learning curve and my struggle to learn does not reflect the nature of the science itself. I admit that you are right, I do take constant incremental steps, and when I have acquired the prerequisite pieces then my whole understanding does occasionally undergo earth-shattering paradigm shifts. But that's my meager attempt to catch up in a race that I am centuries behind in."

"I'm sure that is a good description of your learning process, I wouldn't know though, it's not like you regale us with your experiences of learning calculus and abstract algebra, haha." Stac chuckles, then adds a bit more weight to the next part. "You are always talking about the latest experiments and hot new discoveries, it's a non-stop stream of new exceptions to existing rules, challenges to previous theories, and the occasional groundbreaking discovery that reveals a whole new paradigm."

"Well of course the cutting edge is always in flux." Anit sounds a bit defensive, but then a way to turn the tables comes to mind and quickly shifts to jovial teasing. "And at least it's better than your top-down approach. You adopt grand holistic philosophies of life, the universe, and

everything. Then you toil and struggle to force and twist reality to fit into those molds, until inevitably abandoning them for some whole new framework. You are a never-ending stream of mutually exclusive paradigms."

"I can understand why it would look that way to you, but just because I embrace holistic philosophies and frameworks doesn't mean I have to abandon one in order to pick up another. " Stac realizes this might not make sense to Anit without a bridging analogy. "Classical physics wasn't just abandoned when we developed quantum mechanics."

"Actually, it kinda was. We used to think things were fundamentally made of particles, now we know that waves are the fundamental building blocks of reality, not particles." Anit started with a calm and instructive tone, now slipping into an attentive and inquisitive mode. "Is that how you've been progressing? Have all those paradigms you've talked about been progressively refining lower level interpretations? Because it always seemed to me like they were all completely fresh top-down frameworks. But I have to admit, I wasn't paying close enough attention to be sure."

"Your impression is accurate, most of the paradigms I explore describe things by starting with universal holistic principles. But I don't have to abandon previous ones in order to adopt a new one." Stac pauses to search for an appropriate analogy. "Crystallography and mineralogy are ridiculously complex, even identical elemental compositions and ratios can create a mind-boggling diversity of forms, colors, and physical properties. Under the right conditions and time scales those same rocks experience plastic deformation. They retain their crystal or mineral identity but they can also be described by fluid dynamics. Crystallography and mineralogy are such deep rabbit holes that a person could spend lifetimes exploring them. Fluid dynamics is arguably just as overwhelming and complex as quantum mechanics, it is also a realm that someone could spend their whole career on and only wade around on the beach of its ocean." Stac can see that Anit is following and has no objections. "I'm sure that you've studied or dabbled in those topics a bit, even if just to satisfy some curiosity or fascination, right? " Anit confirms by nodding. "Well that's basically the same thing. I don't dedicate my whole life to any single holistic interpretation, I see them as multiple facets of a life and world that is too complex to be described. They are all just different lenses for looking at the same thing."

"Okay, I get the gist of what you are saying. I do enjoy acquiring conceptual familiarity with topics, even if I don't intend to deep-dive them. And it's more than just fun, ideas and models from diverse fields can be great inspirational material." Anit says expressing genuine appreciation for the value of skimming diverse topics "…However, I hate to be a stickler, but… Crystallography, mineralogy, and fluid dynamics can all be derived from fundamental physics. They are all models of larger scale emergent phenomena, so it's very different from your holistic stuff, these scientific fields are all built on common underlying physics."

"Really? If you discover a testable and provable quantum phenomena, if it fits into quantum mechanics perfectly and passes all tests, but if it also implies that diamond crystal structures should not be stable, then which field needs revision?" Stac watches as Anit's face contorts.

“Quantum mechanics is derived from higher level fields, it is designed to match the empirical evidence of larger scales. Quantum mechanics is not based on an intuitive model of reality, it is force-fit into the mold of what we observe.” Stac lets that hang overhead in the air, then softens the position. “I'm not trying to undermine physics, it's obviously the most accurate model of reality we have, its predictive power is amazing. I'm just suggesting that nothing – not even science – is truly and completely ‘bottom-up’.”

“Okay, you got me. I drew a false dichotomy.” Anit admits, then smiles and continues. “I've also realized that you are not entirely top-down. In your attempts to communicate your perspective and use terms I can easily digest you have referenced so much science. There is no way you could have crafted those ideas and arguments so well without a significant understanding and appreciation for science. I'll bet that the details and models of science influence your interpretations and application of those holistic paradigms quite a bit, don't they?”

“That is definitely true. I'm not a purist of any one universal description, and how could I not incorporate the wonder and beauty of science into my worldview.” Stac grins before responding in kind. “And you! In the time we've known each other, I've seen you adapt rapidly to unexpected situations without any detailed knowledge or understanding. You clearly have instinctive reflexes that are not tied to dissection and analysis. I've watched you engage with people who hold alternative worldviews and you smoothly navigate the interaction without friction or collision. On some level you have an intuitive understanding and appreciation for holistic perspectives. I dare suggest that those intuitions and instincts bleed through into what you might call inspiration and abstraction in your scientific learning and thought processes.”

“Well…” Anit hesitates very briefly, then responds with a hint of pride, and a lot of playful exaggerated smugness. “How can I argue with such flattery, haha.”

Anit and Stac both laugh merrily until they are interrupted by Blee. “Yes yes, what a charming philosophical exchange. But this tangent hasn't helped me with my conundrum at all.”

“Oh right, hahaha.” Stac laughs in response. “You were asking for suggestions about your new AI project.”

“Yeah, something about neural net design.” Anit chimes in. “Global models versus local node models, or something like that. That's what sent us off into our little debate. We'll… I guess you know which side of the fence we fall on, one on each side. Looks like it's a tie, hahaha.”

“You've both already forgotten what I explained, haven't you?” Blee asks, frustrated but not angry or surprised, these two always end up taking over the conversation and running off in endless debate.

Anit and Stac look at each other, then look back at Blee. Anit makes a coy expression, and Stac speaks up, admitting. “I forgot most of it, sorry. But we promise to stay on topic if you try again.” Anit nods in agreement.

Blee sighs, then begins explaining. “So it's modeled to be a closer analogy to a biological brain. There is a big population of neurons, they can connect freely to any other neurons, but they do have coordinates in a volumetric space. They can grow or trim axon-like extensions to facilitate long-range signal transmission. Simple enough, right?”

Anit says “Yep” and Stac nods.

“Each neuron is a virtual-machine, like a container running an emulation, each one is made of procedural programs and its own neural net. Basically, you know how we use AI tools that are neural-nets wrapped up in procedural programs? Well each neuron is a kind of like a mini version of that. Still following?”

They both nod, Anit grunts in confirmation.

“But I'm stuck. No matter how I train, I get useless results. First I tried reinforcing the neurons directly, by correlating their individual behavior against the recorded system results when they had behaved similarly. But the best results ended up being a full system that was outperformed by some of its individual neurons. I wasn't training a brain, I had only made a system to train neurons as individual AIs. But when I tried reinforcing the whole network instead of individual neurons, then the network did begin optimizing as a whole… But it's insanely inefficient, the whole brain wastes massive resources to produce the simplest results. It's many –so many– orders of magnitude away from being efficient enough to be useful. Do you understand?”

They both respond “Uh-huh” in unison.

“These experiments use a lot of resources, the hybrid neural net and procedural training emulations are slow and chew up a ton of processing power. Plus I spend so much time designing and testing the specifics of the training model, and there are infinite possible training methods to choose from.” Blee speaks with an exasperated tone. “I can't decide where to allocate my time and resources, I don't know where to start. Should I reinforce individual neurons based on how each behavioral pattern correlates to desired results? Or should I reinforce globally based on overall system results?”

Blee looks at them, they're both thinking quietly.

Eventually Stac speaks up. “I'm not going to pretend to have any insights. This isn't a subject I have any experience with, and there's no way that the things I study are relevant.” Jabbing Anit in the shoulder. “You've done some coding. Why don't you weigh in?”

“I'm not going to be any more useful than you, hahaha.” Anit laughs. “I've only dabbled in basic scripting, this is way out of my depth. I wish we could help out, but I think…”

Anit is cut off by the waiter. “Sorry to interrupt. We're closing the kitchen. We will still serve refreshments, but if you would like any more dishes then please order them now.”

The friends all glance back and forth at each other shrugging, then Blee speaks up. “No, I think we're okay. Thanks.”

“Very good.” The waiter puts away the pad, then follows up. “We are cashing out the kitchen till, would it be okay to settle the current bill now. You can start a new tab on the other system, they will still be open for several hours.”

“Of course, no problem.” Anit pulls out a credit card and offers it up.

“No no. It's my turn to pay.” Stac shoves another card at the waiter.

“Didn't you pay last time?” Anit asks.

“No, Blee did.” Stac replies.

They both keep waving the cards at the waiter who looks at them awkwardly, unsure what to do.

Suddenly Stac grabs Anit's card and slips both cards into the waiter's hand, then looks at Blee. “If they charge me, then use global training. If they charge Anit, then use individual training.” Stac beams a cheeky Grin.

“I love it, Yes! Hahaha.” Anit bellows. “Roll the dice and let the universe decide.”

The waiter walks off to the till and starts talking to a casually dressed figure behind the counter, occasionally gesturing and pointing back at the three of them.

“Ohhhh!... Asking the manager.” Stac coos. “Looks like the universe is delegating the decision to an individual, haha.” Stac and Anit both start giggling.

The manager looks over, arches one brow and grimaces. Being quite familiar with the group the manager attempts to hold an ‘Are you serious?’ expression, but breaks into a smirk, then gives a wink and proceeds to start working the till. It takes quite a while, the whole time chatting with the waiter, finally organizing things and sending the waiter back to the table.

Arriving at the table with one card in each hand. The waiter returns the cards to their owners, then just stands there, awkwardly silent.

“So?” Anit erupts impatiently. “Who did you charge?”

Pulling out two receipts and handing one to each of them, the waiter continues standing there rigid and visibly uncomfortable.

“Haha.” Stac starts chucklin. “Of course.”

“Wait!” Anit interrupts “How much did they charge you Stac? I was charged the full price for the whole table.”

Looking at the receipt Stac replies. “Me too.” They compare receipts, they were both charged the same price, the full bill was paid twice, once on each card.

Everyone turns to look at the manager, who is back there at the till smirking and trying to contain snickers. Stac looks confused and Anit is flashing frustrated disapproval, the manager bursts out laughing.

The waiter now hands something else to Anit and Stac.

They each look and see that they are being given gift certificates, each gift certificate worth far more than the total paid by both of them combined. The manager had double charged them, but then gave them back more than double-the-double.

The waiter timidly says. “I was told to keep my mouth shut and play along.” Then slips away with a smile.

The table is quiet, then contagious giggling snowballs into laughter.

“Okay… Okay… So, Blee, I guess it's undeniable.” Stac looks over at Anit.

“Yep… Both!” Proclaims Anit.

Blee looks annoyed. “Oh stop it!!! You guys are…”

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This is getting ridiculous, the tribal voices won't stop arguing. One implies ‘universal is best’, another insinuates ‘individual is superior’, what's going on? Is the universe arguing about itself? I'll just stay out of it. I don't…

Another… please, no… I won't take…

Erg!... Got to resist responding… Just don't participate in this ridiculous…

Arg… You just won't stop!

Fine! You are all being ridiculous!

Both… Both… Both!!!

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Blee freezes, eyes locked in the distance. As moments drag out and Blee remains motionless, eventually Stac and Anit start exchanging glances of curiosity and concern.

Anit can't take it anymore and starts snapping fingers in Blee's face. “Earth to Blee! I know you're alive, you're still breathing.”

“Huh?” Blee blinks a few times and looks around a bit, then replies with a few head shakes. “Yeah… Yeah…”

“Where'd you go?” Stac asks intently.

“… Binocular rivalry…” Blee mumbles and starts staring out into space again.

Anit starts snapping fingers in Blee's face again. “Oh no! Get back here! You got my attention now, you have to explain that.”

“The perceptions from both eyes are processed – and from what we can tell – the brain resolves them into a single experience by oscillating between the most dominant perceptions…” Blee zones out for a moment, then comes back and continues. I –could– do both… I could give each neuron a pair of neural-nets, and train them independently with separate training methods. I would need a layer to assign a weighting, so that the most salient, confident, and accurate results are used…” Pausing for a second, then eyes widening. “Or… maybe let them compare and evaluate each other, like two people arguing until they find a compromise or common ground…”

Blee drifts off again with a dumbfounded look.

Stac chuckles. “Haha, it's funny how epiphanies can look so similar to nervous breakdowns.”

“Breakdown… Hahaha… up, down, through, hahaha.” Anit starts slapping the table.

“Are you going to let me in on that joke?” Stac inquires.

“You are top-down, you break down the world. I'm bottom-up, I break up reality… hehehe…” Anit giggles uncontrollably a bit, then catches a breath. “Blee's not having a nervous breakdown…”

Stac smirks, already sensing a punchline.

“Our breakup-breakdown argument gave poor Blee a nervous breakthrough hahaha.”