only better
For Superior Health, Greater Perspective, and Peaceful Living

OUR INAUGURAL ISSUE

FIVE-PART HARMONY

Pioneers of Possibility: R.U. Sirius & Jay Cornell

At the Home of Poe
Dear Reader,

We all want to be better—better in our relationships, better at balancing our crazy busy lives, better at giving the environment a helping hand, better about the foods we eat, or better at cutting ourselves some slack—we can all stand a bit of improvement in one area of life or another. We have what it takes within us to become better. Sometimes we just need a little nudge. Enter: You Only Better.

Because better manifests differently for each of us, we’re offering a wide array of content, covering areas that will inspire superior health, incite greater perspective, and nurture more peaceful living. We’re positive you’ll find something in these pages that speaks to you, provokes you, or informs you.

In this inaugural issue, you’ll find an interview with our Pioneers of Possibility R.U. Sirius and Jay Cornell, authors of Transcendence, “a refreshingly pro-human report on transhumanism and the ‘Rapture of the Nerds’” as Douglas Rushkoff put it. Knocking On Heaven’s Door includes a piece from Robert Kopecky’s How to Survive Life (and Death)—he’s someone who died three times and came back to share some pretty wild stories. Life coach M.J. Ryan offers five instant happiness boosters and Mark Nepo provides a meditative exercise—both of these New York Times best-selling authors appear in our Five-Part Harmony column. Laura Bond helps us clean up our act in Holy Holistics, Mandy Mitchell whips up a tasty recipe in A Seat at the Table, and At the Home of Poe might be best enjoyed After Midnight. We have two Heads-Up columns this month: one provides an overview of lucid dreaming—what it is and how to identify your own—courtesy of lucid dream specialists Robert Waggoner and Caroline McCready, and the second from an agoraphobe who kicked anxiety to the curb and now helps others do the same. In Embrace Your Inner Monster, Sarah Christiansen Fu alerts us to the bad, the worse, and the downright nasty characteristics of those under the Aquarius and Pisces zodiac signs (all in good fun).

We want to hear from you! Give us feedback on articles we’ve published or ideas about ones you think we should. Let us know any random acts of kindness you’ve witnessed or about folks that are giving back in unique ways; we’ll be selecting reader contributions for future issues.

Reach us at youonlybetter@rwwbooks.com. Better is... better. We’re in this together.

Bonni Hamilton, Editor
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Throughout the issue you will find Ignite the Light featuring poems from Rumi, Day by Day by Maryam Mafi or from Death Poems by Russ Kick.
When you nearly die three times, you learn a thing or two about how to live. … An Emmy-nominated art director for television, Robert Kopecky never dreamed he’d end up writing a book about how to survive life and death. But what else could he do? In a few short years, Kopecky had not one, but three near-death experiences. Here is an excerpt from his book How to Survive Life (and Death).

You may have noticed that I’ve been dancing and dancing with this one wonderful partner since we came in—namely the idea that what we call dying is really just the transition that takes place when the bodies we currently inhabit wear out and our spirits exit and move on along. I’m secure in personally bearing witness to that phenomenon. I’ve exited my body a little, I guess, a few times. But if you haven’t experienced that disembodiment that some people have, it can be pretty hard to come to terms with the idea of being two separate parts—an expansive, timeless spiritual self and a material, physical self that’s got a somewhat flexible expiration date.

We experience the events of our lives—we experience time—simply as a function of our bodies’ biology, it seems. The more important it is to us how our bodies look and feel and work, the more anxiety we tend to experience with the passing of time. Naturally, how we look and feel is important, but when we overly identify our sense of self with the appearances and functions of this body, we can make all our inevitable changes and life transitions more
complicated or difficult, or both. It doesn’t matter whether the appearances and functions I’m talking about are the very pleasant and gratifying ones, or not-so-pleasant and plainly embarrassing. It goes back to the idea that the more self-centered we are, the less we flow within the sustaining medium of Love, and the less comfortable we feel.

If we hold on to the enhancement of our physical being as the focus of our lives, we tend to feel as if we’re somehow never enough (especially as we get older). But if we keep Love as the focus of our lives now (and it’s always now), it won’t really matter nearly as much what stage we occupy in our chronological “body-life.”

I’ve been talking about “life after life,” about reincarnation and karma and all, as if I just expect you to buy right into it. But it does require something like a giant leap of faith for those of you who haven’t experienced any profound glimpses behind the curtain, so to speak. So how about a not-so-profound glimpse? A lengthy peek we all get on a daily basis, our whole lives long.

Every night when we sleep, we’re experiencing a little bit of what dying was like to me. Our present bodies are not really in the picture, at least not so as to notice them much. This doesn’t mean we aren’t ourselves, whoever the heck that may actually be, when we’re asleep. The main sensation for most of us in “dreamland” is that we’re pretty detached, and subject to whatever we may find there, or whatever may find us. But then, sometimes all life seems to be a bit that way, doesn’t it?

Strange and funny things do happen in our sleeping dreams, however—and not necessarily “ha-ha” funny. We’ve all had weird dreams—some very disturbing, others fantastically beautiful. Or we may experience deep dreamless sleep, but when we awaken we’re right back in the same place—proof of a kind that our deeper selves exist independent of our waking lives, with or without the sense of control that this waking consciousness seems to give us.

The presence that I had in my experiences of “dying” wasn’t like either that I find in these states of sleep. Not the nothingness of dreamless sleep, because I was definitely awake; and not as crazy or uncontrolled as my dreams often can be. In fact, nothing “in death” seemed really crazy or random at all. As unusual and even dreamlike as it may have been, it all felt totally under control and actually had a kind of enhanced sanity—even beyond that of “real life.” Definitely ethereal, like a dream, but completely without any dreamlike craziness.

Many of us have experienced at least some degree of unconsciousness, whether we got “knocked out” accidentally, had some surgery, or perhaps had our wisdom teeth yanked out under anesthesia. Where did we go then?

Did you know that so many people have accurately reported the details of their experiences while they were deeply unconscious or even “dying” in hospital operating rooms (usually about “floating” up by the ceiling as I did) that, in some hospitals, they’ve actually put symbols or numbers on top of the tall cabinets in case their patients can see them while they are not
in their bodies? People have been able to report accurately on what they have seen up there, even though it was never visible from where they were lying and while they were completely “out”—as in out of their bodies.

Isn’t it amazing that, although awareness of these phenomena exists to the degree that it should be the subject of ongoing studies, none of it has been very well publicized? It’s as if it suggests something that’s scary, when it doesn’t. On the contrary, it suggests something very beautiful, and very important.

And who were you ten years ago? Or twenty? Have you ever been exactly the same person that you are now? There are only interior traces of the child you once were. The teen, the young adult—they’ve both “passed on” into memory. All of us live and die many different lives within this one. I am never quite the same as I have been—except in that one eternal me that I have always been at this moment.

So you see, the music will always be there, waiting for us to listen and to play along with it. But unless you’ve requested that a loved one actually play a recording of your favorite aria at your passing, the Fat Lady never really sings. But she is a marvelous dancer.

I’ve a pocketful of emptiness for you, my Dear.
I’ve a heart like a loaf was baked yesteryear.
I’ve a mind like ashes spilt a week ago,
I’ve a hand like a rusty, cracked corkscrew.

Can you flourish on nothing and find it good?
Can you make petrification do for food?
Can you warm yourself at ashes on a stone?
Can you give my hand the cunning which has gone?

If you can, I will go and lay me down
And kiss the edge of your purple gown.
I will rise and walk with the sun on my head.
Will you walk with me, will you follow the dead?

—A Grave Song, Amy Lowell
Enjoy this interview with two of our Pioneers of Possibility, R.U. Sirius and Jay Cornell, authors of *Transcendence*
Q & A WITH R.U. SIRIUS

Q: How would you describe transhumanism in a few words?
A: Transhumanism is a movement that is broadly in favor of humans altering themselves using technology and technique.

Q: Your book is sometimes sarcastic yet you seem to be in favor of transhumanism. Are you, in fact, in favor of it?
A: Any ism makes me sarcastic. I view most human behavior as absurd and group behavior is particularly absurd. I’m generally in favor of humans altering themselves. We’ve been doing it since we started wearing glasses or taking birth control pills. I become excited about the possibilities of becoming a different kind of being through biotechnology and neural upgrades and so on and then a giant wave wipes out the Philippines. So my optimism about transhumanity is more contingent than most “true believers.”

Q: Why make a “User’s Guide”?
A: That A–Z approach goes all the way back to Voltaire’s *The Philosophical Dictionary*. It’s a good way of disciplining the organization of information and also encourages a sort of concision. You’ll see that I acknowledge how many of the topics tend to bleed into one another with the “See Also” notifications.
Q: What aspect of the transhuman world of technology makes you most optimistic?

A: For 27 years, since I first read the book *Engines of Creation* by K. Eric Drexler, I’ve believed that molecular machines that can make almost anything conceivable out of dirt and sunlight (including more dirt) and keep our insides running in tip top shape were the greatest hope for a future where we don’t struggle with scarcity and disease... if we can only get it to work!

Q: Is there a leader of the transhumanist movement that you admire?

A: There are some good folks like Ben Goertzel and I appreciate the ubiquitous Ray Kurzweil. He’s a nice fellow, but I wouldn’t call myself a follower of anybody. I was influenced by Timothy Leary and the cult writer Robert Anton Wilson. They were both transhumanists and their influence remains with me.

Q: What do you think about people who reject technology in favor of nature?

A: Everything is natural or it couldn’t exist. Still, as I get older, I understand the longing for life in the slow lane. I think most people think of the natural life as bucolic, but most farm labor is so harsh that people actually move to urbanized areas and work in sweatshops. Some of that may be the effects of food colonialism, but living off the land is really tough, as lots of hippies discovered in the 1970s. The ideal is for technology to get good enough where we can live the bucolic life “all watched over by machines of loving grace” as a famous Richard Brautigan poem put it.

Q: What’s The Singularity and do you believe in it?

A: The idea of a technological singularity was first presented by the science fiction writer Vernor Vinge. His idea is that artificial intelligence will supersede human intelligence and that whatever happens after that is way beyond our comprehension. Since then, “singularitarians” have come along to tell us what will happen. There has been talk since of different singularities—a social singularity, a psychedelic singularity. I don’t believe in it and I also don’t believe that it will not happen. I remain agnostic regarding many things and I hope my readers will come away from this book with a healthy regard for uncertainty.

Q: What should people do if they want to live longer?

A: We don’t know yet, other than the usual stuff about getting exercise and watching your eating habits. There’s a company selling nutrients based around Resveratrol (the stuff in red wine that’s good for you) that they sort of claim (only sort of because of government regulations) that...
taking this substance might get you past the generally acknowledged limit of around 120 years. Of course, you also have to have a lot of luck. The problem with this is that we have to wait for a bunch of people who may now be in their 30s or 40s to turn 130. By that time, hopefully something better will have come along.

Q: You have your own website titled “Steal This Singularity.” What’s that about?

A: Unlike some technotopians, I think the present will play a big role in defining the future. And right now, there is a rise in plutocratic class domination and authoritarian mega-surveillance governance. I think we need to fight that off now so that the corporate/finance oligarchy doesn’t install their pre-programmed exo-neocortesxes in our sad little meat brains as the price for immortality (or even survival)?

Q: What does the R.U. in R.U. Sirius stand for?

A: Reginald Ubermensch

Q: Is it all really going to happen?

A: There are no guarantees, but I’m cautiously hopeful. As I said in my introduction, history is filled with great ideas and future plans that didn’t pan out or ended in disaster. In the 1960s, we thought we’d have flying cars and a Moon colony by now. We laugh about it, but some people thought that inventions like the telegraph, dynamite, and the airplane would end war. So when a starry-eyed transhumanist claims that nanotechnology will end scarcity, or that we’ll be able to upload our brains to computers and be happily immortal, it’s only sensible to raise an eyebrow. As promising as these developments are, we should keep in mind the history of similar claims.

Q: What got you interested in transhumanism?

A: I’ve read science fiction since I was in elementary school, and both are concerned with technology and the future. The idea that humans can and should use science and technology to improve our bodies and brains and direct our own future evolution, is intriguing and appealing. While science fiction is ultimately fiction, and often not intended to be predictive, transhumanism really is happening now. Scientists are working on synthetic life, self-replicating robots, artificial intelligence as smart as humans, and many other “science fiction” ideas.

Q: Which developments do you think will happen soon and which won’t?

A: There’s little doubt that materials scientists will turn graphene and related carbon-based materials into amazing things in the near future. Of course computers will continue to get faster and more powerful, though whether we’ll reach the Singularity any time soon is more arguable. Robots are progressing pretty well, so I believe we’ll be seeing those on battlefields and elsewhere. Medical knowledge and breakthroughs continue to accelerate, so we will see cures for diseases and longer lives. Farther out, while private industry is making strides in getting people into orbit, permanent space colonization is still farther away than I would like, because the economic
Mind-uploading, while a fascinating concept, still seems to me to be either unlikely or far more difficult than some transhumanists think. If that happens within 30 years, I’ll be (pleasantly) surprised.

Q: Isn’t a lot of this dangerous, or at least socially disruptive?

A: There are real dangers, which we don’t ignore, but everyone is already aware of many of them, because we’ve seen the movies! Thanks to Hollywood, when we think of intelligent computers, we think of HAL from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Intelligent robots? *The Terminator*. Talk about increasing intelligence, and people think of the movie *Charly* and maybe *Planet of the Apes*. Genetic engineering has destroyed civilization or turned people into zombies in more movies than I can count.

Progress is always socially disruptive, but usually the positive effects outweigh the negative ones, or at least balance them out. Take surveillance: government use of computer databases and surveillance cameras can make it seem like 1984 was prescient, but it’s being counteracted by “sousveillance,” citizens using cellphone cameras and the internet to keep track of police.

Q: So overall, you’re optimistic.

A: Yes, and I think it’s important to talk about the positive. Too often we take technology for granted. You see it all the time online: people using their laptops and smartphones to complain about technology. Note that they’re not writing these complaints with a fountain pen in a letter they mail to the newspaper. Focusing too much on problems and potential dangers can be counterproductive when technology can make people in wheelchairs walk again, cure Alzheimer’s, and alleviate poverty around the world.

On balance, I’m a techno-optimist.
Do an appreciation circle. It takes only a few moments, and it’s a great spreader of happiness. You can do it with family or coworkers, any group of people who know one another fairly well. Choose one person as the focus. Then everyone else, as they feel moved, speaks of what they appreciate about that person. When everyone who wants to has spoken, choose another person until everyone has received appreciation. There are only four rules:

(1) Remarks must be positive (no sarcasm or backhanded compliments).
(2) No cross talk—no one else may speak when someone is talking.
(3) No one has to talk if he or she doesn’t want to.
(4) The focus person says nothing. This may be a challenge, for we tend to want to deflect or minimize compliments. But try to take them in, as much as you can allow yourself.

Become aware of your negative mental habits. Here’s a practice from Wayne Muller. When something goes wrong, say to yourself, “It’s just as I’ve always known: ____.” What phrase leaps in to fill the blank? Most of us have an unconscious negative thought that we use to keep ourselves unhappy. Mine is: “I’m going to end up as a bag lady on the street.” My friend’s is: “Nothing good ever happens to me.” Once you figure out what yours is, practice saying it a few times in different voice tones—angry, sad, teasing. The more you bring this thought into awareness, the less effect it will have.

An ancient Buddhist list offers four ways to experience physical joy or exhilaration:
(1) eating; (2) sleeping; (3) meditating; (4) taking care of your body through bathing, grooming, moving.

You can probably think of a fifth—it was most likely celibates who came up with the list.

Practice accepting others as they are. Try it just for today. When you notice yourself judging someone as bad (the screaming child, the insensitive clerk), pause, take a breath, and say to yourself, “They want to be happy just as I do. They’re doing the best they can.”

Find yourself stuck in worry mode? Figure out if you can do something about it—like planning for the presentation you have to give—or if it’s out of your control, like waiting for test results. If there is something you can do, great—do it. If not, make a list of all the possible good outcomes.
Being a Pilgrim
To journey without being changed is to be a nomad. To change without journeying is to be a chameleon. To journey and to be transformed by the journey is to be a pilgrim.
We all start out as pilgrims, wanting to journey and hoping to be transformed by the journey. But, just as it is impossible when listening to an orchestra to hear the whole of the symphony for very long before we are drawn to hear only the piano or the violin, in just this way, our attention to life slips and we experience people and places without being affected by their wholeness. And sometimes, feeling isolated and unsure, we change or hide what lives within in order to please or avoid others.

The value of this insight is not to use it to judge or berate ourselves, but to help one another see that integrity is an unending process of letting our inner experience and our outer experience complete each other, in spite of our very human lapses.

I understand these things so well, because I violate them so often. Yet I, as you, consider myself a pilgrim of the deepest kind, journeying beyond any one creed or tradition, into the compelling, recurring space in which we know the moment and are changed by it. Mysteriously, as elusive as it is, this moment—where the eye is what it sees, where the heart is what it feels—this moment shows us that what is real is sacred.

Want more meditative essays and exercises from Mark Nepo? Click here.
When journalist Laura Bond’s mother Gemma was diagnosed with ovarian and uterine cancer, they hit the ground running to research Gemma’s options, only to quickly discover that chemo and radiation were themselves found to be cancer causing (leukemia is listed as a side effect of one common cancer drug) and they were compelled to explore alternatives. They traveled to over 60 of the world’s cancer specialists and holistic healers who are getting remarkable results through cutting-edge therapies.

In Laura’s recently released You Can Say No to Chemo, she documents their experience and provides a thoroughly researched exploration that includes alternative options to build the body’s own ability to heal and restore itself, along with ways to supplement conventional care. Here is an exercise from her book that is easily actionable for prevention as well as for “getting clean” during treatments.

IN YOUR HANDBAG
Did you know there is likely to be lead in your lipstick, mercury in your mascara and arsenic in your antiperspirant deodorant?, Or that some sanitary pads are lined with a dye that contains lead and that tampons routinely contain traces of dioxins from bleach? These known carcinogens have been linked to hormone disruption and endometriosis.

Mum has always considered herself fairly well versed in the art of cosmetic chemical avoidance. As long as I can remember she has used shampoo free from sodium laureth sulfate, toothpaste free from fluoride, and natural roll-on deodorants. Most products in our house, from the hand gel to the dog wash, are made by an American company that uses non-toxic ingredients. But like most women mum has her blind spots: the designer perfume she wore for twenty years, the occasional half a head of highlights, the anti-ageing face-creams. ... All that changed last year, of course, when every potential carcinogen came under scrutiny, but for decades, mum practised a more relaxed policy when it came to her favourite beauty products.

I vividly remember standing at a beauty counter in Selfridges ten years ago as mum eagerly popped SK-II creams into her bag. These luxury skin-care products promised smooth, wrinkle-free skin, just like Cate Blanchett’s. The secret ingredient, apparently, came via a Japanese monk who ‘noticed that the workers in the sake brewery had extraordinary smooth hands’. Like millions the world over, mum was sold.

Fast forward to 2006, however, and a mob of smooth-skinned women were smashing doors at an SK-II branch in Shanghai, having just learned that their coveted products contain the...
WHAT YOU CAN DO

• SWAP SYNTHETIC PERFUME FOR NATURAL FRAGRANCE The Organic Pharmacy recently released a range of 100 per cent natural and 85 per cent organic fragrances, containing coldpressed essential oils. Mum stocks up on her favourite essential oil blends from Living Libations.

• KEEP NAILS NATURAL Next time you visit your high-street nail bar, BYO polish. ‘Nail treatments are among the most toxic products on the Skin Deep base,’ says Stacy Malkan. The brand, Butter London, has a covetable range of colours free of the ‘evil three’ (formaldehyde, toluene and DBP).

• DITCH TOXIC TAMPONS ‘There are feminine care options free of bleach, pesticides and toxic chemicals, including organic, unbleached tampons and pads,’ says Malkan. Natracare is one non-toxic brand that’s sold globally.

• MAKE YOUR OWN Janey Lee Grace’s book Look Great Naturally . . . Without Ditching the Lipstick is packed with easy-to-follow recipes.

• READ LABELS Check any suspicious ingredients on the Skin Deep website.
When we apply products to our skin they are absorbed immediately into our cells.

products, and were safe at the low levels found in the products,’ says Stacy Malkan. ‘A few months later, the products were back on the shelves.’

The ‘safe at low levels’ argument has been trolleyed out by industry for as long as clued-up women have been asking questions. But it doesn’t add up: ‘The cosmetic companies typically don’t consider the sometimes surprising impact of low-dose exposure, impacts on foetuses, chemical mixtures, interactions between genes and chemicals, or how deeply these products can penetrate,’ says Malkan.

When we apply products to our skin they are absorbed immediately into our cells. Transdermal medications, like hormone creams, depend on this fact. A recent piece in the New York Times highlighted just how powerful skin products can be. The feature revealed that dogs and cats are now experiencing swollen breasts and hair loss thanks to their hormone-cream-wearing owners.

In 2010 the US President’s Cancer Panel report added fuel to the fire by suggesting that hormone-disrupting chemicals could be the source of many more cancer cases than previously thought. Scary when you consider that more than half of cosmetic products contain chemicals that can act like oestrogen or disrupt hormones. The perfume bottle is where you’re most likely to get your hit. At least 900 ingredients used to make fragrances have been identified as toxic, and a synthetic musk called galaxolide has recently been singled out for scrutiny: ‘Trace amounts have been found in the fat, blood and

1. You are not a helpless victim of your genes.
2. Your emotions matter more than you think.
3. Knowledge is power; do your research, then choose what feels right for you.
4. Follow your intuition—it’s your body talking.
5. Play detective: is there an element you’ve overlooked that is sabotaging your health.
6. Remember, cancer loves sugar.
7. Detox: pull out the poisons and give your body the best chance of healing.
8. Find a doctor you respect and who respects you.
9. Work with your body, not against it.
10. Where attention goes, energy flows: fill your mind with stories of survivors; if they can do it, why not you?
breast milk of women who wear perfumes,’ says Lee Euler. ‘It’s a known hormone disruptor, and some studies show that it may in fact contribute to the development of breast cancer.’

You might read all this with a knowing nod of the head, thinking, ‘It’s good to know, but I’m not going to change my beauty routine.’ That’s fine; we all have our sacred cows. But I would add that making changes isn’t always about denial and compromise. When I discovered that my favourite beauty indulgence—fake tan (I’m ashamed to admit)—had a dark side, I was devastated. But on learning that diabetes, obesity, birth defects and cancer have been linked to the ‘cocktail’ of chemicals in bronzing lotions, I decided to look into alternatives. The upshot? I found Eco-Tan—an innovative new brand that contains no synthetic food colouring, GM ingredients or petrochemicals. And it’s the most natural looking (and smelling) spray tan mum and I have ever had.

In You Can Say No to Chemo, Laura Bond is quick to point out that every cancer and every body is different, she does not offer a one-size-fits-all approach but simply opens the door to thinking about prevention, cancer, and treatments for cancer in a whole new light. Conari Press, eISBN: 9781609259662

Why are we never satisfied?
In summertime we pray for the coolness of winter, and when winter finally arrives, we long for the smothering heat that comes with summer.

—Rumi, Day by Day
At the Home of Poe
FRANK BELKNAP LONG
The home of Poe! It is like a fairy dwelling, a gnomic palace built of the aether of dreams. It is tiny and delicate and lovely, and replete with memories of sere leaves in November and of lilies in April. It is a castle of vanished hopes, of dimly-remembered dreams, of sad memories older than the deluge. The dead years circle slowly and solemnly around its low white walls, and clothe it in a mystic veil of unseen tears. And many marvellous stories could this quaint little old house tell, many weird and cryptic stories of him of the Raven hair, and high, pallid brow, and sad, sweet face, and melancholy mien; and of the beloved Virginia, that sweet child of a thousand magic visions, child of the lonesome, pale-gray latter years, child of the soft and happy South. And how the dreamer of the spheres must have loved this strange little house. Every night the hollow boards of its porch must have echoed to his footfall, and every morn the great rising sun must have sent its rays through the little window, and bathed the lovely tresses of the dream-child in mystical yellow. And perhaps there was laughter within the walls of that house—laughter and merriment and singing. But we know that the Evil One came at last, the grim humourless spectre who loves not beauty, and is not of this world. And we know that the house of youth and of love became a house of death, and that memories bitter as the tears of a beautiful woman assailed the dreamer within. And at last he himself left that house of mourning and sought solace among the stars. But the house remains a vision out of a magical book; a thing seen darkly as in a looking-glass; but lovely beyond the dreams of mortals, and ineffably sad.

In his seventy-plus years of writing, Frank Belknap Long (1901-1994) garnered more than his share of awards, foremost of which being the World Fantasy Award for Life Achievement (1978), the Horror Writers Association’s Bram Stoker Award for Lifetime Achievement (1987), and the First Fandom Hall of Fame Award (1977). His prodigious output of works included comic books, non-fiction, fantasy, science fiction, gothic romance, horror, and fantasy.

The Weiser Book of Horror and the Occult, Edited and Introduced by Lon Milo DuQuette. If you’re looking for more thoughtful frights, click here!
In very simple terms, lucid dreaming means realizing that you are dreaming while in the dream state. The American Psychological Association has a more official definition in its 2007 Dictionary of Psychology, defining a lucid dream as “a dream in which the sleeper is aware that he or she is dreaming and may be able to influence the progress of the dream narrative.”

Both of these definitions identify the fundamental paradoxical quality of lucid dreaming: the knowledge and realization that you are consciously aware within the dream state. In fact, when you become lucidly aware within a dream, you may even find yourself announcing: “Wait, this is a dream. I am dreaming!”

My very first lucid dream occurred spontaneously around age 11 or 12 when I found myself in the book stacks of the public library and saw a Tyrannosaurus rex walking through the aisles. At first, I felt alarmed, but then I thought: “Wait a second, dinosaurs are extinct.” And at that moment, I realized: “This must be a dream!” I knew I was dreaming, even as I dreamed.

- Even in this short example, you see the active components of most lucid dreams: Observing or experiencing something unusual (e.g., Tyrannosaurus rex)
- Critically reflecting on or analyzing the experience (e.g., dinosaurs are extinct)
- Concluding that “dreaming” represents the most likely explanation (e.g., “This must be a dream!”)
You lack higher levels of critical awareness and analysis. So when you see Tyrannosaurus rex, you normally feel fear and run away. In regular dreams, you accept incredible situations because of your diminished critical awareness.

Tibetan Buddhists have a wonderful metaphor for dreaming. They liken the experience of regular dreaming to that of a blind horse with a lame rider. In this metaphor, the lame rider is the person’s largely unaware mind, which sits on a blind horse that dashes around with little control. If the rider (the person’s mind) overcomes its lameness and becomes lucidly aware, then it can begin to direct the blind horse (the energy of the dream) and use it for personal transformation and spiritual growth.

Much of *Lucid Dreaming Plain and Simple* focuses on techniques and practices that you can use to elevate your awareness and critical reflection about your waking experience. By doing the practices given here, you can increase your chances of becoming lucidly aware in the dream state. In fact, many people report that just reading and thinking about becoming aware in the dream state has been enough to prompt them to become lucid in tonight’s dreaming.

Although these examples hint at lucid dreaming’s possibilities, the greater potential of lucid dreaming for individuals, science, and society seems truly staggering.

**EVIDENCE FOR LUCID DREAMING**

The scientific evidence for lucid dreaming reveals an amazing story of insight, talent, and ingenuity. In the mid-1970s, Keith Hearne, a graduate student studying sleep and dreams at the University of Hull in England, met Alan Worsley, who claimed to have frequent lucid dreams. Hearne listened to him and was intrigued. Being a scientist, he spent time pondering how he could create an acceptable experiment to provide scientific evidence for lucid dreaming.

When you realize in a dream that you are dreaming, you have become lucidly aware. At that moment, you can do many amazing things:

- You can consciously decide what actions to perform.
- You can become free of waking-state limitations. You can fly like Superman, perform magic like Harry Potter, walk through concrete walls, breathe underwater, seek creative solutions to waking issues, and much more.
- You can interact and converse with dream figures.
- You can conduct personal and scientific experiments.
- You can begin to explore the dream space and the contents of your unconscious.
- You can work on improving waking skills for sports, business, and more.
Later, a brilliant solution came to him. During sleep, our bodies become functionally paralyzed. But while dreaming, researchers have shown that we usually have rapid eye movement (REM). Hearne wondered whether a lucid dreamer could use his eyes to signal that he was lucidly aware and conscious while dreaming. If this were possible, it would create a major breakthrough for the sciences of dreaming, consciousness, and psychology.

So Hearne brought Worsley into the sleep lab and put polygraph pads on his eyes to record his rapid eye movements while dreaming. He then instructed Worsley to move his eyes left and right a pre-determined number of times when he became lucidly aware in a dream.

In April 1975, it happened. Sleeping in the lab, Worsley realized he was dreaming and became lucidly aware. Then he recalled the experimental design and moved his eyes left and right a pre-determined number of times to show that he was consciously aware and lucidly dreaming. Other measurements in the sleep lab confirmed that his body remained asleep, although his mind was consciously aware and signaling with the prearranged eye movements. When Hearne saw the hard evidence of the pre-arranged REM eye movements, he later remarked: “It was like getting signals from another world. Philosophically, scientifically, it was simply mind blowing.”
Separately, in the United States almost three years later, Stephen LaBerge, a Stanford University doctoral student and lucid dreamer, wondered how a scientist could provide evidence for lucid dreaming. Like Hearne, he realized that a lucid dreamer could signal by moving his eyes in a pre-arranged pattern. Placing himself in the sleep lab in 1978, LaBerge became lucidly aware in a dream and signaled his awareness by moving his eyes left to right a few times, which was recorded by the laboratory equipment. He replicated this eye-signal verification technique in twenty subsequent nights in the sleep lab. After the scientific paper he wrote describing his research was rejected by the prestigious journal *Science*—one reviewer adamantly refused to believe it possible to become lucidly aware in the dream state—and then by *Nature*—which did not review the study, but judged the topic “not of sufficient general interest”—LaBerge succeeded in getting his research published in an acceptable, peer-reviewed journal. He then became closely connected to this fascinating new area of scientific exploration and headed much of the subsequent research into it.

**HOW TO IDENTIFY LUCID DREAMS**

Now that you understand the definition of lucid dreaming, have you had a lucid dream? If so, take a moment to write out your first lucid dream or a lucid dream that you remember. Now, write down a typical dream. Compare the lucid dream to the typical dream. How do the dreams differ after you become lucid?

*Ignite the Light*

Day and night may seem like warring opposites, but they share a dual purpose; they need and complete each other. Without the night we have no respite and will be spent on each new day.

—Rumi, *Day by Day*
If a load of people jumped off a bridge, Aquarius would stand on the edge of that bridge, looking down, wondering why people are so dumb. To the Water Bearer (Aquarius’ zodiac representative), other people just seem like sheep following along with what everyone else is doing most of the time, hopping on bandwagons, getting with the latest craze, going with the flow. Where’s the originality? Where’s the individual thought? Aquarius proudly stands out from the crowd, a jet-black sheep amongst a sea of dusty, white wool. It’s near impossible to fit Aquarius into any sort of mold and it’s useless to encourage them to do anything they don’t want to do.

Because of your Arian refusal to conform, you might have been the victim of some serious bullying as an adolescent, by less progressive peers, and as an adult you may find it difficult to shake off the feelings of being an outcast. Rest assured that you will laugh last in the end, when you’re living the dream, working for an environmental company up in Alaska, sleeping in a shack with spotty heat, or getting paid the big bucks to be a court-appointed social worker.

Water Bearer, you consider yourself to be quite the intellectual, and you get wisdom and inspiration from all different walks of life. For example, you might take as much insight away from a five-minute conversation with a philosophical junkie on a street corner than a full-semester college course. Granted, your parents might not be thrilled with your creative use of their tuition money, and less-than-excited to hear about your budding friendship with the wise old drug addict. Best not to tell them.

Aquarius, you have this certain, boundless energy that can really, acutely bug the people around you. It’s not fair to you, especially because you have other peoples’ well-being in mind at all times, though that doesn’t change the fact that it’s astoundingly annoying to be around you. You can be outspoken, judgmental, self-righteous, and unrelenting. You also use unnecessarily big vocabulary words. You give brutally honest feedback instead of comforting little white lies. When you’re interacting with other people about issues that you care about, you come on with about as much subtlety as a Mack truck. Honest, truthful, and clear is the way of the Aquarius. And to be honest, a lot of people wish Aquarius would just get out of the way.
No one understands a Pisces... not really. If you are born under this rather fishy sign, you can accumulate friends and lovers, be close to your family, seek out a meaningful career, and yet still feel sickeningly alone most of the time. As a Pisces, you have automatically contracted a case of the human condition on steroids and can feel extremely insecure when you encounter life’s contradictions and injustices. There is little comfort from the constant churn of Piscean emotions and the sheer weight of your inner tumult makes you a perpetual underdog.

It’s not that you don’t know the difference between right and wrong. You know the difference; you just refuse to choose. You let the people around you steer your life, so the caliber of people around you determines whether you will end up in jail or on easy street. Since Pisceans aren’t always the best judges of character, you might not even be able to see when your entourage is headed up shit creek, but if they say paddle, you’ll keep paddling.

Pisces feel that they’ve gotten a raw deal in life, and they’re mostly right. They’re starting out handicapped because they’re paralyzed by their own confusion, depression, and faulty intuition. For other signs who are trying to understand the Piscean experience, just imagine wearing headphones that are screaming constant, conflicting advice, and that you have little bitty alligator arms that prevent you from doing anything for yourself. Those who are high-achieving usually had someone (probably a Virgo or an Aries) kick their ass all the way to the top.

Pisces have a few things going for them, despite their many impediments. One thing is that they’re incredibly tuned in to the psychic side. You shouldn’t be surprised if a Pisces "knows things" before you tell them. They’re sensitive and feel others’ losses, absorbing the sadness and carrying it around in their own heart-shaped basket. It’s a trade-off, though, because while they carry others’ pain, they also expect that others will do things for them, such as forgive them for negligent behavior and support them financially. Sometimes they get lucky and find a partner willing to be in an extended, codependent relationship, but
it is not unusual to find a Pisces sitting in the dark alone, drinking away their consciousness, because a loved one didn’t do “their part” in this cosmic bargain that the Pisces feels he or she deserves.

Excerpted from Bad Birthdays: The Truth Behind Your Crappy Sun Sign by Sarah Christensen Fu. Learn more about the quirks, oddities, and unpleasantries that characterize your unlucky sign like who you should be dating, who you should be ditching, the worst jobs (or the ones you won’t screw up), stars of your sign, and more. Hampton Roads Publishing, eISBN: 9781612833323

your incompatibility rating

AQUARIUS’ INCOMPATIBILITY RATING

ARIES—they think you’re playing hard-to-get, so won’t go away.
TAURUS—they want to possess your soul; have you got one?
GEMINI—is it you they love, or your enviable penumbra of cool? Like you care.
CANCER—suspect your absentmindedness may be a front.
LEO—textbook delusions of grandeur: fascinating.
VIRGO—dull case of obsessive-compulsive disorder centered on matching up your socks.
LIBRA—seduce all your friends and colleagues; you take notes.
SCORPIO—textbook delusions of power: you’re writing a paper.
SAGITTARIUS—one sniff of commitment and they’re off; you’ve all ready left.
CAPRICORN—they want you to get a proper respectable job.
AQUARIUS—balanced equation: you don’t care; they don’t care.
PISCES—wet and clingy and have to be frozen off, like warts.

PISCES’ INCOMPATIBILITY RATING

ARIES—they take it out on you when the world confuses them.
TAURUS—you despise people who have no control around addictive substances (cake).
GEMINI—they cheat on you with your best friend, then disappear.
CANCER—it’s just all mood swings and self-pity with them.
LEO—they demand unconditional attention; so unreasonable.
VIRGO—try to organize your life, so you are forced to run away with their best friend.
LIBRA—just so unreliable.
SCORPIO—they make spiteful remarks and try to control you by manipulating your emotions.
SAGITTARIUS—spend most of their life hanging around in bars.
CAPRICORN—won’t pay off your credit card bill, so you are forced to turn to a life of crime.
AQUARIUS—sneer when you say the stars are God’s daisy chain.
PISCES—blame you for every little thing that goes wrong.

Incompatibility ratings courtesy of Darkside Zodiac by Stella Hyde.
Once upon a time the witch held a place of esteem in the village; her knowledge of local plants and wayside herbs was used to heal; her wisdom and empathy made her the village matchmaker and marriage counselor; and her ability to commune with nature and animals gave her a place of revelry and wisdom. She was the Hedgewitch. Enjoy this simple, but delicious recipe from Hedgewitch Book of Days: Spells, Rituals, and Recipes for the Magical Year.

### OATY EASY BREAKFAST ROLLS (MAKES 12)

#### INGREDIENTS
- 400 g./14 oz. whole-meal flour
- 100 g./3.5 oz. oats, plus some for sprinkling
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 300 ml./10 oz. water
- 150 ml./5 oz. natural yogurt
- 4 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 4 portions of cooked bacon
- 2 tbsp. chopped chives

#### METHOD
1. Preheat the oven to 190°C/375°F.
2. In a bowl, mix together the flour, oats, baking soda, and salt.
3. Chop the bacon and add this to the dry ingredients, along with the chives.
4. In a separate bowl, mix the yogurt, oil, and water.
5. Mix the wet ingredients into the dry, until the mixture is thoroughly combined.
6. Split the soft dough into 12 sections and shape roughly into rounds.
7. Place on a baking sheet lined with waxed paper.
8. Sprinkle the top of each roll with a few flakes of oats.
9. Bake in the oven for around 15 minutes, or until golden brown and hollow-sounding when tapped on the base.
10. Leave to cool slightly and serve warm with plenty of butter.

### OATS AND FLOUR

Oats and flour are two staples that everyone should have in the home. They ground us in the earth element and remind us of the turning of the Wheel of the Year. Here is a simple recipe for breakfast rolls that can bring magic into your day.

Journey through the wheel of the year with Mandy Mitchell. Weiser Books eISBN: 9781609259389
Psychology Today blogger, social worker, and amateur actor Hal Mathew knows exactly what it’s like “to fear fear,” which is how he describes the dread feeling that sometimes kept him from leaving home (or at least leaving sober) for nearly 30 years. Here’s his personal history in his own words.
Three little words transformed my life on a bleak day in early March over 20 years ago and I continue to benefit from their effect on me. I answered the phone that morning in the kitchen of my house in Helena, Montana and heard a low and husky woman’s voice say, “Dress for Butte.” Then she hung up.

It took a few nanoseconds for me to orient to what was happening and then a bolt shot through me. I nearly dropped the phone, momentarily stunned by the sudden realization that something of enormous import was occurring. The words, “dress for Butte,” uttered by my longtime close friend and nearby neighbor Kris meant that I very well might be about to break out of the prison that contained and confined me for 30 years—the prison called Agoraphobia.

My 40 years with panic attacks and 30 years of confinement, of not being able to travel freely, began dramatically and ended dramatically. I liked the ending much better than the opening feature when at age 10 I burst out the front door of our apartment while I was babysitting my brother and ran screaming down the snow-covered street, barefoot in my pajamas, convinced some monstrous force was pursuing me. Something apparently startled me and I discovered I was one of those unfortunate people who have a hair trigger “fight or flight” response system that can go off unexpectedly. Only I didn’t know that; I thought I was crazy even though family matriarch Aunt Eunice said if you think you’re crazy you’re not.

My fears were very disturbing to me, but I wasn’t able to explain the fear well enough to get help; I saw one doctor who pretty much dismissed whatever I had as childhood fears—common variety. My clusters of panic attacks seemed to occur every 2 years, with episodes when I was 10, and at 12 and 14 and at age 16, when I made the near fatal discovery that alcohol can subdue and control panic attacks. More about that. The recurrence of panic attacks I had at age 19 frightened me so thoroughly that I could no longer travel freely, even within town. Many people with chronic panic attacks have cycles of varying severity. I think of agoraphobia as having 3 levels: Level 1 is homebound or mostly so; Level 2 is partially mobile; and Level 3 is mobile with a wall. I ran the gamut more than once in my 30 years with agoraphobia, but had enough years when I could manage that I was able to finish school and have a career as a journalist. There were several discouraging interruptions during that time and I had to quit a couple of good jobs because of recurrence of panic attacks.

After I lost a great job in Helena because I could no longer make the trip of less than a mile, I turned more and more to alcohol for relief from panicky feelings. My future seemed bleak; I had no income and was using up my savings making house payments. Luckily I qualified for Social Security disability income which was enough to pay housing and food. My depression increased and I eventually found myself in near derelict condition and even homeless for a while. It was a frightening, unsettling period of my life when darkness prevailed. I was close to death when the above mentioned Kris called my family who got me into treatment and sobriety.

I recall lying on my narrow bed in the medical
wing of the treatment facility that first night, tears pouring down the sides of my face and into my ears. I was desperately sick and exhausted, but so profoundly grateful that my drinking had ended that I cried myself to sleep. The treatment program demands a lot of self-examination and writing about your discoveries and talking about them in groups. I daresay I was the happiest and most thoroughly self-examined person in the entire treatment group that included eating disorders and drug addiction. Sobriety was giving me an opportunity to finally overcome my paralyzing fear of traveling.

Sobriety and my treatment program gave me enough confidence to be able to fly on a commuter airline back from treatment in Billings to Helena, to the home where I’d come so close to death. It was early January and I was feeling confident and almost anxiety free, determined to overcome my fear of traveling beyond, say, 30 miles from my home. I would plan a trip and when the day arrived I would be in such a nervous state, that each trip ended with panicky feelings.

After more than a month of trying little trips and failing, I started getting dark feelings again. It seemed I would never succeed because anticipation was killing me. It’s called “anticipatory anxiety” and is a well-known phenomenon. I didn’t want to risk testing myself to the point of having a panic attack because I knew by history that a major setback would be formidable.

What to do… what to do…

And then the phone rang!

I put on a down jacket and shoes and raced down to the street, where I opened Kris’s car door as she skidded to a halt. “Okay, but I’m driving,” I said. About 20 miles into the 60-mile trip I blasted through something, some barrier made up millions of very strong figments of my imagination. I knew instantly that I was free forever from panic attacks and all that comes with them.

Within 3 months I had moved by driving over and over back to my favorite city, Missoula, and within the year would begin a second career as a mental health social worker. After 17 years of daily contact with seriously disabled mentally ill adults and mental health professionals, I retired sort of and wrote the self-help recovery book *Un-Agoraphobic*. 

*Un-Agoraphobic* by Hal Mathew

Random Acts of Kindness

**Vertigo**

I used to suffer from vertigo. My fear of heights was not something I ever anticipated; it would just come over me. I never gave it any thought until suddenly I found myself reeling with dizziness or paralyzed and unable to move. One day I was walking to an appointment when I came to an overpass. It wasn’t even that high, but I could not cross it. I stood there feeling foolish and helpless. I wanted to keep my appointment, but there I was, frozen, unable to proceed.

A woman crossing from the opposite direction with her small son noticed me standing there in obvious distress and came over to me. “Are you all right?” she asked. “Oh, I feel so foolish,” I said, “but I have a fear of heights and I can’t cross this bridge.” “Would it help if I crossed with you?” she asked. Taking my arm, she and her son walked back across the bridge with me. That happened twenty years ago, but I’ll always remember that woman.

**Words of Comfort**

I grew up in what we would now call a dysfunctional family. My parents materially were quite well off, but we lived amidst emotional chaos and confusion in a wealthy suburb of Philadelphia. As with most children, I simply assumed that this was the way it was and that the problems, the undercurrents of anger and hostility, were somehow my fault. One day when I was still very young, after a particularly painful and confusing series of interactions with my parents, our maid took me aside to talk to me. She told me that she did not care if it cost her her job, she just could not continue to be a silent observer. She told me that my parents were crazy, that they were acting badly, and not at all like good loving parents should act toward their children. She told me that I was a good, sweet girl and that the situation was not my fault. It must have taken a lot of courage for her to do that. Not only to overcome the natural hesitation to intervene between parents and children, but to take the risk that I would not say something about our talk to my parents. I never did talk about it. It was an incredible gift. Her words gave me the explanation I needed, a way to stop blaming everything on myself.