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Chrysalis, Cerebral Safari, and More About Me

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Chrysalis, Cerebral Safari, and More About Me

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
Of Bard College

by
Harley Mitchell

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2023

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to child-me, who didn't know where they were going in life.
We found it.

Thank You!!!!

Gideon Lester: My advisor, who put up with all of my assignments being late, and me missing meetings because I forgot they existed.

Geoff Sobelle: For teaching those two classes at Bard that made me a little bit crazy but in the best way possible.

Mason Forman: For sitting through me reading my script to him all the time, and watching me act, and then stepping up to be a goose in my performance.

Erica Infanger: For being my roommate, reading through my drafts, putting up with all of my shenanigans, and getting robbed by a goose puppet!

Colin Zachariasen: For being self control and looking fabulous in a rainbow cowboy hat.

Frankie McNerney: For stepping into my show when I really needed a puppeteer.

Silas Bravo: For driving three hours to get robbed by a goose with no other context!!!!

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THE INTRODUCTION:

This paper will be about identity, insecurity, theater, everything in between, and everything interconnected. Then, perhaps things not connected at all. It will be about making mistakes, fixing them, and making those same mistakes again. It will be about collaboration, frustration, and learning. It will, over anything else, be utterly, and inconceivably All About Me.

I simply cannot seem to stray away from work about identity, my identity to be specific. My identity and sense of self wriggles itself into the pages whether I let it in or not. I didn't plan on making my second piece about me, I had big ideas with big casts, and I wasn't even going to be onstage. (Un)fortunately, things change. Way in the beginning, when I had come up with ideas, I shot them down simply because I had no true *connection* to them... Then I asked myself what I really wanted to put forth into the world, what I wanted to *explore*, and a mirror stared back at me. I turned the mirror around, so I didn't have to see my reflection. I tried desperately to write literally anything else, but kept coming back to the mirror. So when thinking about what I really *cared* about, I settled on... Myself. As utterly conceded as that sounds, it's true. I excel in talking about myself. It's a blessing, it's a curse, it's most likely one of the quirky amalgamations caused by my neurodivergence.

THE PROCESS:

My show in the fall, *Chrysalis*, was very different from *Cerebral Safari*. This came about accidentally. At first glance the two performances may seem completely independent of one another, but in actuality, *Cerebral Safari* would never have been what it came to be without *Chrysalis*. My focus on the fall was to make a performance about my gender identity through time. The journey started when I first realized gender was really a *thing* as a child, and ended where I was in my journey the very moment I started writing the script. *Chrysalis* was a way to express myself and my queer identity, a piece about *putting myself out there*. The core of that show was me, letting the audience in to see me at very different points in my life, and inviting them to watch me change over time. The imagery and writing was meant to be reminiscent of metamorphosis, how a caterpillar moves through a chrysalis and turns into a butterfly. *Chrysalis* was almost entirely about the script, and creating a space through acting. The movement during the performance was curated to build three separate worlds for the protagonist to move through. The first beat was childhood, or the caterpillar, the second was adolescence, or the chrysalis, and the third was now, or the butterfly. The world was rich even though the stage was mostly barren, and location ambiguous, since the fall Senior Project Festival had very simple technical components. However, the built-in SPROJ process meant I got valuable one-on-one time with production, and learned how to communicate with the crew during the fall. This ended up being a crucial skill to have, and was very valuable to know while working with production during the spring.

When thinking of the next semester, I was originally going to continue with the through line of queer identity, while also expanding it into a full-cast play. This choice was made because

I was interested in going from *actor* to *director*. The intimacy of *Chrysalis* scared me back a bit, making me nervous to do another solo performance. I both desperately needed and didn't want to do something that personal ever again. Simultaneously. So naturally, the only things I could actually write were deeply personal. I tried to write characters that weren't me but shared similar experiences, by expanding on a piece I had written for Intro to Playwriting my first year at Bard. It was a play about a queer friendship/relationship over time, a similar concept to how *Chrysalis* was about my gender expression over time. It was going to be a sort of "look where I was, look where I am now" to highlight how my writing has improved. But the writing... *wouldn't happen*. So I backtracked, right back to the beginning, and tried gender again. I wrote three whole pages before I realized tackling my gender identity again was something that would be too emotionally taxing. I truly think that art doesn't have to hurt to be good, and vastly prefer that it doesn't, so I recalibrated and tried again. Looking back through all of my mad-man snippets when thinking about Senior Project, I came across the following thing written in all caps, the only thing written on the page:

MY ART HAS TO SPARK JOY. OR *FEELINGS*. MY ART CAN'T. MEAN. NOTHING.

This sentiment was the catalyst for that major change in the direction of my Senior Project. It was the start of a long, very important, and very rocky journey. I went through a significant amount of half-drafts before finding my new through line. I realized I wanted to - more accurately needed to - explore a *new* facet of my identity. I already explored gender expression in the fall, so I hunted for a new part of myself to pick apart next. The seemingly never ending struggle to choose a new topic caused me a lot of anxiety, which was the beginning of the end for

my Senior Project. *Mental illness*. Maybe it was fresh on my mind after seeing Allie Sahargun's piece, *Stuck Like Glue*, but the idea of manifested mental illness inspired me, and I couldn't shake it. It was a half formed thought in my head at this point, not much to go off of. I had to keep developing and shaping the thought. I needed more *Feelings*, like that inspirational quote I jotted down depicted. This is the moment my ADHD started getting in the way. My neurodivergence caused me to procrastinate, and procrastinate, and... procrastinate... I didn't write, or think, or do anything because- *That's it!* One day before I was supposed to have a draft into my advisor... my script went through a radical change. I scrubbed through my entire thing, deleting four whole pages to narrow my idea, and writing three more. I needed to make this trip into my brain more concise, because the piece before felt like it was lost. I needed to make it about the neurodivergent brain, *MY* neurodivergent brain. It was simple after that. The script poured out of me because I know myself well.

This paper is meant to be about major discoveries, and to anyone else, this period of struggling may not seem important to talk about, but it ended up being essential to the craft. Without the winding path of writing, deleting, and frustration, I never would have ended up where I was in the process. The jumbled mess that came before *Cerebral Safari* was just as important to my process as the fall show was, *Cerebral Safari* felt like the opening scene in the Power Puff Girls. The title screen of the cartoon always starts with Professor Utonium experimenting to create the perfect daughters. He adds sugar, spice, and everything nice, and then spills chemical X in the batch. Without chemical X, the powerpuff girls would just be normal human daughters. With chemical X, they became something extraordinary. In this circumstance, I am professor Utonium, the *Cerebral Safari* is the experiment, and the struggle to succeed is my Chemical X.

Working with a cast was a very different experience to working completely on my own in the fall semester. It was a new experience for me to rely so heavily on other people in order to make my vision come to life. I had never put something so close to my heart in other people's hands, hoping they wouldn't drop it. That is sort of why I ended up casting my friends to be puppeteers and actors in *Cerebral Safari*. I had an immense amount of trust in them to work with me as a cohort and to carry my ideas to the finish line with me. Of course, things don't always go as planned. It was horrible to have things completely out of my control because the cast is composed of *human beings*. My friends are both the bane of my existence and my saving grace, whom I am so thankful for and also **extremely stressed out by**. One of my cast members couldn't make it to the Saturday matinee, and another fell ill right as we hit the final dress rehearsal and had to be replaced. Just as I felt my project was falling apart, I was consoled by production saying that these things unfortunately happen, and options were revealed on how I can carry forward with my project. Thankfully, the senior cohort showed their support as well, and tried to help. I wasn't the only senior this year with an unfortunate cast member dropping, so everyone in the room felt a sense of understanding and connection. A cast member, and friend of mine, who was performing in a different show, stepped up and my cast shifted around. That, and I had a wonderful friend from back home volunteer to drive three hours, just to come get robbed by a goose in my audience.

THE BRAIN:

The focus of my new show: Neurodivergence. Great. Now what? I decided to explore the phrase: “What’s going on inside your head?” This phrase was used against me a lot throughout my life. No one understood my unique thought process, or why I did certain things the way I did. So I decided to take it and run with it. *What **was** going on in there? and why?* Thus, my research on neurodivergent vs. neurotypical brains began.

Neurodivergent brains function atypically in comparison to a neurotypical brain. What is considered neurodivergent? The term “neurodiversity” was coined in 1998 by an Australian sociologist, Judy Singer. The term was meant to describe how everyone’s brains develop differently as they grow. This was eventually turned into “neurodivergence” or a way to describe brains where their difference in development affects how the brain works as a whole (Cleveland Clinic). It isn’t technically a medical term, but rather a descriptor. Anyone with a disorder or developmental difference in the brain can be considered neurodivergent. In my own brain this constitutes my ADHD and Autism, as well as, to some capacity, my anxiety disorder.

The next step was to apply this research, under the context of my own brain, to the stage. I decided early on that when translating the brain to a theatrical space, it would need to be a rather neutral space, the purpose of it to be interacted with and changed by its inhabitants. Treating the stage like this paralleled what a real brain would be like, as the brain - especially while still developing because I’m only 21 - is a very elastic organ. That is why the characters representing these differences are physical objects in the brain that have the capacity to touch, and change their surroundings. The Silly, representing ADHD, makes several changes throughout the show. He robs an audience member, his presence makes the conversation topics

go haywire, he spawns in “brainworms”, and he requires the character ME to call for backup. He also sets off a sensory overload, tying THE SILLY to Autism as well, since a lot of ADHD and ASD traits and symptoms overlap.

How did neurodivergence affect the world of the play? One great moment that shows how neurodivergence manifested on the stage is when ME is experiencing sensory overload. MENTO points out that the crowd is still there, and ME, already in a stressful situation, doesn't know how to deal with this in a healthy way. A jumbled and echoey sound begins playing, growing louder, representing what I would be hearing during a real sensory overload. The lights brighten to reveal the audience. Everyone is staring. This is often what it feels like during a sensory overload for me, which is very similar and can be tied to my panic attacks.

One of the first things I had to establish was that the entire theater was my brain for the duration of the piece. I attempted this by making use of space, onstage, backstage, and in the audience. My first idea was to enter from the audience, but after listening to feedback from the senior cohort, I decided to surprise the audience by joining them after the show had already started. I established the fact I could see them first, then bridged the gap to them by strolling right out to stand among them. THE SILLY goose chase helps establish this as well, by directly touching the planted audience member, and having an interaction right beside the audience. Backstage was made useful as well. I emerge fully engaged from stage left onto an empty stage. This was a deliberate choice. My meandering into the space shows that the character of ME existed before they stood before the audience, and my exit house right shows that they will still exist after. The world is expanded backstage when ME takes MENTO backstage and talks. I considered making that a voice over, then production asked if I wanted a microphone backstage, but I inevitably decided to project my voice from backstage. I didn't like the idea of playing the

voice over the speakers because I thought it pulled the audience a bit out of the world, but having them overhear me, whether they caught every word or not, was much more natural.

The second way I established that the theater was my brain was audience interaction. I hoped to foster a connection between myself as a performer and the audience by talking directly to them, never being shy of looking all the way into the back of the house. Although some of the things I was saying were maybe not the most welcoming (i.e. telling children they would be left behind in the event of a train crash), I had still hoped that by opening my eyes to the audience the entire time, they would feel like part of the journey. Did they feel like part of the journey? Did they learn anything? These were the questions that would decide if *Cerebral Safari* was successful or not, at least in my mind. If an audience member felt like a guest in my brain, or at least a guest to ME, then that was a success. It would also be a success if the audience member had a thought about their own brain, an aha! moment about my brain, or critical thinking about neurodivergence.

Neurodivergence also helped me come up with other light looks throughout the show. The train of thought was in a rainbow array of colors to show how disjointed and varied the thoughts there are. The opposite happens for Interaction Station. All of the color bleeds from the stage because the station is meant to feel sterile and off putting, which is how social interactions feel because of my autism.

THE CLOWN:

“Why a clown?” Now, deciding to be a clown isn’t out of character for me, it is more of a “Why now? Why this?” A fair question. My answer? The clown is the most authentic self. This is a rhetoric I have been clinging to since the 2021 fall semester, when I took a class that changed my perspective of theater, and quite honestly changed the trajectory of my time as a theater maker. The class? THTR 252 0. Advanced Acting: Clown, with Geoff Sobelle. I was still terribly shy and socially awkward at the time that class came into my life. Am I still terribly shy and awkward? For sure. However, Clown taught me that it was okay to be laughed at. It felt good to laugh *with*, to find the *joy* in making a fool of yourself. It was less scary then.

I kept one class assignment in my head while I was writing. It was the act of *discovery* through the eyes of the clown. That day we all laid flat on the floor, and were guided by Professor Sobelle to discover the world for the first time. Empty minded, every little thing is new and unknown. I remember seeing everyone light up during that activity, exploring Resnick studio with childlike wonder. This is another thing that spurred me into choosing the form of the clown. The clown is genuine, and joyful, and everything I wanted this “inner me” to be. I wrote it from this mindset, that the clown was constantly making discoveries, even as an entity that has lived in the brain forever. There are things that the clown knows, but everything happening within the world of the play is something they are experiencing for the first time. The first time with the tour for every performance. The first time chasing THE SILLY. The first time giving their speech... etc. It made the acting of the piece feel more real to me, like ME was genuinely giving a tour that gets derailed.

The idea of “discovery” ended up being the second throughline, tying *Cerebral Safari* and *Chrysalis* together. One purpose of the main character in both scripts was to make discoveries, either about themselves, or the world they live in. The discoveries made by the protagonist in the fall fueled the piece in a way that made the scene changes more natural, the character learning and growing right before the audience. This contrasts the discoveries made by the protagonist in the spring, as many of their discoveries were hindrances on them. All in all, it tied nicely to the theme of identity, allowing for character growth and decay on the stage.

I had originally planned on sewing myself a vintage clown suit. I chose a vintage clown suit instead of a modern one because I enjoyed the silhouette more and the more muted color palette. I found a pattern, had chosen my materials, was ready to start hand sewing... until I had a thought. I decided it was more important to build a clown ensemble from my own clothing, as the character ME was supposed to be well... me. So I put my sewing stuff away and dove into my closet instead. I have a surprising amount of clown-esque clothing already, and put together an ensemble rather quickly. This decision made the character of ME feel more authentic, and made it possible for me to carry the character out with me at the end of the performances. ME was able to leave the space, and dissolve back into my wardrobe like they never really existed to begin with.

THE PUPPET:

Another huge part of the process was deciding on the usage of puppets. I became intrigued by puppets in high school. I met a man and a woman who made puppets professionally, and a girl a couple years older than me went on to be a puppetry major in college. It was the first time puppetry was introduced as something that one could do professionally that wasn't *the muppets*. Yes, we all love the muppets, but I had never experienced **theater** with puppets before then.

The play we had our cast of puppets made for was *Fight Girl Battle World* by Qui Nguyen. A sort of strange... space opera version of Adam and Eve, chock full of colorful characters, special effects makeup, and **puppets**. Some of my inspiration for my own puppet designs came from a production my highschool put up my senior year, particularly a beautifully crafted snake puppet made for a character LC4. LC4 was a huge part of the main cast, and this rendition of LC4 was British, sassy, and voiced by me. I had grown quite an attachment to him by the end. The character and design ended up being the brain-child-basis for MENTO in *Cerebral Safari*. Qui Nguyen is also the playwright of *She Kills Monsters*, a play where several of the characters, being non-human, are played by puppets. In reading through the scripts for the two plays, looking at concept art, and watching production clips, I began formulating how puppets fit into an on-stage world. I didn't want the puppets to seem completely out of place, but rather use them as a tool to help build the universe and story.

In 2017, I saw the RJ Kinsella Magnet School's rendition of *Antigone*. Their design choices made it so the Gods were depicted using huge, beautiful puppet heads. They were hand made by the cast, and stood out against the rest of the characters in a way that clung in the

recesses of my mind. These puppets demanded an attention and respect that a human body on stage could not. Human bodies on stage are not surprising, but a puppet so big it requires multiple puppeteers is. A talk back with the cast revealed they made the decision to puppet the gods in order to emphasize that the gods were “too big to be played by humans.” I was reminded of this when I was coming up with characters for *Cerebral Safari*. The characters felt too *personal*, too *big*, to be played by people. They are quite literally the components of my brain, what makes me, *me*. So they became puppets. Vessels to become whatever is needed from them.

It felt right that my mental illness and neurodivergency be depicted by something sewn by my own hand, or drawn and cut by my own hand in the case of the EYES. They became a true extension of myself. My characters could be manipulated by someone else, by anyone really, but it was important that the visual components were made by *me*. The puppet to me was a parallel to parent and child, wherein I played the part of life bringer. My neurodivergence and mental illness wouldn't exist without me, so the puppets aren't allowed to either. This theme is only broken by the character of SELF CONTROL, and for a very specific reason. Self control is part of my “typical” brain. He was meant to represent the “typical” section of my brain that was essentially battling for control over the “atypical” components. This is just how I view my own brain however, this is not a generalizable statement on the brain of other neurodivergent individuals.

I don't think it surprises anyone to find out that Geoff Sobelle had a hand in reigniting my love of puppetry. Spring 2020. THTR 256 0. Making Theater Out of Trash. He and Julian Crouch created a space for me to explore this interest, even as we moved into the digital world at the end of the semester. I learned how to breathe life into a puppet without thinking too hard about it, because overthinking is where the magic dies. There was one particular assignment

where we were given nothing but a sheet of newspaper, and talked through the steps of breathing life into it. You learn how to make a puppet an extension of your hand, an extension of yourself for you to control. But you also make the puppet its own being. It took me a while to figure that out with MENTO, because while he was literally a part of ME, he was also his own entity.

The process of making the puppets was probably the hardest part. I didn't have any sort of pattern, just a vague idea and a dream. I made the first mock up of MENTO out of an old dress, an ibuprofen box, and spare buttons. I was trying to stay true to his concept sketch in regard to his shape, just at a much smaller scale. This mock up's purpose was mostly to figure out how to make his mouth work in a way that I wanted. It didn't end up going as planned because scaling that version up made the mechanisms too big to move fluidly. I had to improvise by reinforcing his mouth with a bunch of pipe cleaners and going back to the drawing board to figure out how to get his mouth to move. *Eureka!* I kept working at it and adjusting so it was the top jaw that moved, inspired to make him look as far from *natural* as possible, and thinking about the movements of an elephant shrew. I was building the wiggly floppy nose, little eyes, and brainless expression that could only belong to Mental Illness itself.

THE SILLY was even harder. I had no idea how to make the shape of a goose, or how I even originally wanted the puppet to be operated. The first idea was two puppeteers, one for the head and one for the legs. This ended up being discarded to a wearable puppet, and changed again when puppeteers changed, because the legs I made wouldn't fit the new puppeteer. We adapted and overcame this by making THE SILLY more of a floating puppet, just a head, a neck, and a wing.

The third puppet in this show is THE EYES. The first draft of *Cerebral Safari* explored an area I named the "Gender Vortex" and called for GENDER as the third puppet, who is

included in my concept art. However, after narrowing in on neurodivergence as my theme, I cut the Gender Vortex entirely, and GENDER's existence was modified to become THE EYES. THE EYES ended up being difficult to introduce. The requirement of a new puppeteer to play THE EYES after the dropping of a cast member changed my play during the dress rehearsal, the impact of the cast being composed of people, as I had touched on previously. The puppeteer didn't remember the right cue to leave the stage, and ended up in the way during the chase scene between ME and THE SILLY, and the audience **loved** it. As soon as we were back in the dressing room I told them to do that again. Another script revision due to cast reasons required me to drop the idea of a mouth puppet. I wanted to include it, but after giving myself a reality check, I cut it entirely in order to make my workload a more reasonable amount. The only reason I decided on this was because I felt there was nothing gained or lost by having the mouth puppet on stage.

THE AFTERMATH:

Taking a step back after finishing the performance... There are several things I would change if I were to do this again. First off, I would force myself to be more organized. I recognize my own shortcomings when it comes to getting things done in a timely and organized manner. I am quite frankly, very bad at it. I'm sure my advisor, Gideon Lester, can attest to this. It is never intentional, but things constantly slip my mind (MENTO'S line "YOU FORGET LOTS OF THINGS" was a reference to this). My forgetting is unfortunately so bad that immediately after learning a due date, I forget it. I try to write things down so I will remember, but sometimes I forget before I have a *chance* to write it down. It's an uphill battle. So if I could restart my Senior Project, I would be more on top of things. Both because professionally, I should be more organized, and for my own sanity. I imagine I could have saved myself a lot of stress if I didn't forget deadlines, and meetings, and had my entire project planned out in a more timely manner.

On a more positive note, I have learned that it's okay to need a support system when working in theater. It is, in fact, encouraged to have a support system and build a cohort for yourself. Theater in my high school was a very different environment from my experience at Bard in this regard. High school theater was very "everyone for yourself" because of typical highschool drama, and managing to be an outcast even within a group of outcasts. Working with other artists at Bard gave me a better sense of true theater, and is definitely something I will be doing again. It has majorly helped me grow my confidence as a theater maker, and helped place some stable ground underneath my feet. This was especially memorable in the fall semester, where we had our appointed member of the senior cohort to help us on our journeys. I know

there was a bit of backlash over that decision throughout the graduating class, but I personally found it very helpful. As an artist with anxiety, it made me work with someone I otherwise would not have talked to, a very good practice for working theater professionally. This gave me access to the perspective of someone outside of myself and my immediate circle as well. It was genuinely useful for my artistic process.

I have decided to continue writing after my time at Bard, likely more pieces about myself, and identity, until I can get it out of my system. If I were to conceptualize a third installment of this, I would focus on my queer identity again, but more about my sexuality. Maybe a fourth installment would be tying all of it together, how the different facets of myself relate to one another and create a bigger picture. That bigger picture being me.

I hadn't realized that my play would be something people would relate to. I had an audience member come up to me after the show and say "Your show... was so ME. I get it, I really do." That sentence in itself bewildered me. I have a hard time relating to others, so someone relating to my very personal work... It felt like fireworks were going off. It is like a big neon sign lighting up and screaming "YOU'RE NOT ALONE IN THIS!" It felt good to be relatable when I am so often misunderstood, or left confuddled by social interactions. Maybe being conceited is a way to connect to the audience, displaying yourself in its entirety for people to pick and choose what they relate to personally. Another audience member approached me and told me the puppets were their favorite part, especially THE SILLY. My personal antagonist brought someone else joy, which in any other context, would be greatly upsetting. In the context of my Senior Project, I felt like I had done exactly what I wanted to do. I aimed to explain the goings-on in my brain, and depict my struggles in a funny, relatable way.

Was it successful? I can say, based on these interactions, and referring back to the questions on what made *Cerebral Safari* successful, “Did they feel like part of the journey? Did they learn anything?” *Cerebral Safari* was a success for those audience members, and in turn, a success for me.

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Appendix

Cerebral Safari Script

[Lights up on an empty stage. After a brief moment, ENTER ME, looking around the space]

ME

Oh wow, it's kinda empty in here, isn't it? Even with all the... guests.

[ME sits center stage, leaning to look at the audience]

ME

Welcome one and all to the Cerebral Safari! An exclusive look into the mind of... me!
You've all booked the...

[ME looks at a notecard]

Neurodivergency tour! That's... a fun one..

Hold your neighbors hat, secure your socks, and get ready to Fuckin rock n roll. Now boarding: the train of thought!

[train sounds.]

ME

Now as we take off there are a few safety measures I have to go over. Legally. I personally don't care about your safety, but the Cerebral Locomotive Regulations... require that I do this. First off: In case of an emergency there are several exits located around you! Look for the big signs that say EXIT. If you can't read. Follow everyone else. Second: In case of a crash we have imaginary life vests under each chair. We didn't have the budget for oxygen masks so you can imagine those as well. If you came here today with a child, or are yourself a child, you will be left behind. Survival of the fittest baby! Now we can proceed with the tour.

The train of thought boards daily from the moment the eyes are open, to the moment... the body is knocked unconscious. There are several. Hundred. Trains of thought running at any given moment. This is because of a funky little thing called:

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. OR ADHD. Typical brains have neat tracks but this one...? The tracks run under, around, and over each other through the brain.

Nothing makes sense. Not really. They're mostly off schedule and only about half even make it into Interaction Station. They mostly run through the brain aimlessly. Sometimes they crash. Get all jumbled. Or the wrong train makes it into the station. Or no trains. Or-

[MENTO reveals himself from under ME'S jacket. ME slowly turns to look at him. He looks back. They both look back at the audience. Then back at each other. Then back at the audience.]

ME

Anyway. The uh. Trains. Half of them are passenger trains, and half are cargo. They are sometimes a-

[MENTO turns to look at ME, just staring.]

ME

WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU WANT?

MENTO

It's Mento Iwness innit? Can't have a train of thought without little ol' me!

ME

I am going to throttle you. I told you not to-

MENTO

I'm going to make you think about your worst nightmares daily and nightly until you go utterly insane.

ME

WHY ARE YOU BRITISH?

MENTO

Why aren't you? What if you're faking being American?

ME

That's not even-

[ME holds MENTO's mouth closed for a moment.]

ME

As I was saying... the train of thought is sometimes a dangerous place. The one we have currently boarded *should be* taking us to Interaction Station. As you should all know, it should've said so on your train ticket! You... all brought your train tickets... right? We'll be losing a LOT of money if you didn't...

[Squinting and leaning forward, looking at the audience. MENTO whispers loudly in ME's here]

MENTO

Yeaaaah not a single one of them has a ticket. You forgot to sell them.

ME

MOTHERFUCKER! I mean- haha! That's not a problem... I guess the tour is free today... UM... One moment please! ENJOY SOME SMOOTH JAZZ WHILE YOU WAIT!

[Pulling MENTO to the side, slipping backstage.]

ME

Ohhhhhmygod. What am I supposed to do? Can I get fired from my own brain?

MENTO

You're a bad enough worker to. I wouldn't be surprised if you figured it out.

ME

You're so mean. I forgot ONE thing.

MENTO

You forget a lot of things-

ME

SHUT- It's the ADHD!

MENTO

ADHDeez nuts-

ME

Oh my god. I'm going to lose my job and then I'm going to be kicked out of the brain entirely. Then I'm going to have to busk in the streets for cash, and I'm only going to have YOU for company?!

MENTO

Bit dramatic, aren't we love?

[ME yells dramatically. Beat.]

ME

...Are they still here? Maybe they got off the train and I don't have to worry about it anymore.

[Beat.]

MENTO

Oh yes, the entire group jumped off the moving train. Very plausible.

ME

JUST CHECK!

[MENTO peeks onstage and looks around, then goes backstage again]

MENTO

Still here. The whole lot of 'em. You should probably go back out there. You're doing a terrible job.

ME

SHUT IT. I'LL GO WHEN I'M READY...

[Beat]

...Okay. I'm ready.

[ME and MENTO return. The Jazz stops abruptly.]

ME

HELLO AGAIN! Hope you enjoyed the music.

[Awkward silence]

MENTO

Ooooh. They don't like yo-

[Shutting MENTO'S mouth. One last train sound.]

ME

...Moving on. We are now pulling into the station. Interaction Station is where the body is piloted during social interactions. Every social interaction the body has ever had was piloted riight here. It's a very important job. There are three major components to each interaction. The eyes, the mouth, and the braaaain.

[ME sits on a box like they are in a cockpit.]

ME

I will be playing the part of the brain during this demonstration. Mento will be playing the mouth... And I will need a friend to play the eyes... EYES!

[EYES ENTERS]

ME

Perfect. Step 1. Eyes on the target.

[EYES look around, then lock in on AUDIENCE MEMBER]

ME

Target acquired. Step 2. Call out to target.

MOUTH/MENTO

HEY YOU!

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Me?

MOUTH/MENTO

YEAH!

[The eyes begin drifting away from the target. ME directs them back each time, growing more frustrated.]

MENTO

If we have to make eye contact for one more minute we are going to explode.

ME

I don't care. EYES. ON. THE. TARGET.

[EYES, afraid, lock in on the target]

ME

Step three is... *interaction*.

MOUTH/MENTO

Um. So... Hello...?

ME

This step is always the hardest for the brain... See... *This brain is... autistic*. The Interaction Station is a scary place, and we... didn't prepare a script so... This should be interesting. Let's reach for a conversation topic.

[Me produces a hat? Or bag? Box? Bowl? Of some kind, full of scraps of paper. They pull one out. THE SILLY should sneak in right before this.]

ME

The biology of a Marsupial. Uh... lets try again.

All Seventeen years of Ghost lore from the hit swedish metal band. Ghost. No. Minecraft. Shit.

Every warrior cat book in existence... YEaaah no.

Vampires and how they would be able to digest blood if they were real.

MENTO

NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR ABOUT THAT ARE ANY OF THESE NORMAL?

ME

You pick one.

MENTO

The entire backstory and current story of every one of my DND characters.

[ME tries one last time, pulling out a handful of worms]

ME

UGH. BRAINWORMS. Wait...

[Goose honk sounds. ME stands on the box and points to THE SILLY.]

ME

YOU!

[The silly creeps across the middle of the audience behind the pit]

ME

IT WAS YOU! My NEMESIS. THE *SILLY*.

[THE *SILLY* honks and then tries to steal a bag from a planted audience member. AUDIENCE MEMBER shouts at THE *SILLY*. They fight over the bag and ME hops off the box, running over. EYES and MOUTH exit.]

ME

I'M DOING A DEMONSTRATION! WHY DO YOU STRIKE AT THE *WORST* TIMES?

[ME approaches and THE *SILLY* steals the bag. ME, then chases THE *SILLY* onstage.]

MENTO

Hey, they're still watching you know.

[Me freezes. The honking increases. The lights get super bright and unnerving. Me chases THE *SILLY* in little circles, doing one more lap before returning to the stage. Audience noises™ amplify over the speakers until ME is overwhelmed.]

ME

STOP!

[Everything freezes. SELF CONTROL enters while ME speaks.]

ME

Everything is going *WRONG*. *NONE* of this was like I had planned! You always *RUIN* things! Just! *GO!* *AWAY!*

[THE *SILLY* drops the bag. SELF CONTROL lassos THE *SILLY* and tugs it stage right, honking in protest]

SELF CONTROL

You have the right to cease honking. Anything you say can and will be used against you in cerebral court. You have the right to a confetti cannon. If you cannot afford a confetti cannon, one will be provided for you. Do you understand the rights I have just read to you?"

[THE *SILLY* honks one last time before disappearing off stage]

MENTO

You've really fucked this one up, huh?

ME

Shut up.

[ME sits center stage, not facing MENTO. ME acts quite childish for the rest of this.]

MENTO

I'm sorry to everyone here that things went so wrong, and that this one here is so bad at being a tour guide. At least you got some free entertainment out of it!

ME

I tried.

MENTO

Did you?

ME

YES. I did. I'd been rehearsing this over and over! And nothing was to script!
NOTHING! I spent- I spent so long planning that and, and the eyes wouldn't look, we had nothing to talk about, and the SILLY ruined my LIFE! I FAILED.

MENTO

Is any of this *actually* new for you?

[ME looks at the audience]

ME

There's not usually... this many people there to see me fail.

[Beat]

MENTO

Alright. Tour's over. Let's go.

[Mento starts moving stage right. ME doesn't move]

MENTO

OH come on. We have to GO.

ME

I can't. I'm pouting.

MENTO

You are a child.

ME

I'm not a child. I'm UPSET.

MENTO

Same thing.

ME

SHUT IT.

[ME stands and stomps to AUDIENCE MEMBER, bringing the bag back. ME goes to leave but is stopped by MENTO.]

ME

Uh... sorry about the goose.

[ME turns to leave]

MENTO

You should've said sorry for being you.

[ME freezes, slowly takes MENTO off and throws him onstage.]

ME

I NEED A MINUTE! I'm.... I'm sure you can show yourselves out.

[ME picks up and reprimands MENTO as they pack up to leave. EXITS through the house right door]

END.

Concept Images



Mento Concept Sketch



The Silly Concept Sketch



Gender Concept Sketches 1 and 2