

SECRETS  
OF A  
MIND-GAMER

How I trained  
my brain and became  
a world-class  
memory athlete.

By Joshua Foer



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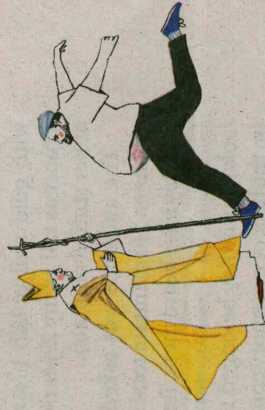
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commit to the page, goes a long way toward explaining the unexpected spot in which I found myself in the spring of 2006. Sitting to my left was Ram Kolli, an unshaven 25-year-old business consultant from Richmond, Va., who was also the defending United States memory champion. To my right was the lens of a television camera from a national cable network. Spread out behind me, where I couldn't see them and they couldn't disturb me, were about 100 spectators and a pair of TV commentators offering play-by-play analysis. One was a blow-dried mixed martial arts announcer named Kenny Rice, whose gravelly, bedtime voice couldn't conceal the fact that he seemed bewildered by this jamboree of nerds. The other was the Pelé of U.S. memory sport, a bearded 43-year-old chemical engineer and four-time national champion from Fayetteville, N.C., named Scott Hagwood. In the corner of the room sat the object of my affection: a kitschy, two-tiered trophy of a silver hand with gold nail polish brandishing a royal flush. It was almost as tall as my 2-year-old niece (if lighter than most of her stuffed animals).

The audience was asked not to take any flash photographs and to maintain total silence. Not that Kolli or I could possibly have heard them. Both of us were wearing earplugs. I also had on a pair of industrial-strength earmuffs that looked as if they belonged to an aircraft-carrier deckhand (in the heat of a memory competition, there is no such thing as deaf enough). My eyes were closed. On a table in front of me, lying face down between my hands, were two shuffled decks of playing cards. In a moment, the chief arbiter would click a stopwatch, and I would have five minutes to memorize the order of both decks.

**The best mental athletes can memorize the first and last names of dozens of strangers in just a few minutes, thousands of random digits in under an hour and any poem you hand them.**

I asked Ed Cooke, a competitor from England—he was 24 at the time and was attending the U.S. event to train for that summer's World Memory Championships—when he first realized he was a savant.

“Oh, I’m not a savant,” he said, chuckling. “Photographic memory?” I asked.

He chuckled again. “Photographic memory is a detestable myth. Doesn’t exist. In fact, my memory is quite average. All of us here have average memories.”

That seemed hard to square with the fact that he knew huge chunks of “Paradise Lost” by heart. Earlier I watched him recite a list of 252 random digits as effortlessly as if it were his telephone number.

“What you have to understand is that even average memories are remarkably powerful if used properly,” Cooke said. He explained to me that mnemonic competitors saw themselves as “participants in an amateur research program” whose aim is to rescue a long-lost tradition of memory training.

Today we have books, photographs, computers and an entire superstructure of external devices to help us store our memories outside our brains, but it wasn’t so long ago that culture depended on individual memories. A trained memory was not just a handy tool but also a fundamental facet of any worldly mind. It was considered a form of character-building, a way of developing the cardinal virtue of prudence and, by extension, ethics. Only through memorizing, the thinking went, could ideas be incorporated into your psyche and their values absorbed.

Cooke was wearing a suit with a loosened tie, his curly brown hair cut in a shoulder-length mop, and, incongruously, a pair of flip-flops emblazoned with the Union Jack. He was a founding member of a secret society of memorizers called the KL7 and was at that time pursuing a Ph.D. in cognitive science at the University of Paris. He was also working on inventing a new color — “not just a new color, but a whole new way of seeing color.”

Cooke and all the other mental athletes I met kept insisting that anyone could do what they do. It was simply a matter of learning to “think in more memorable ways,” using a set of mnemonic techniques almost all of which were invented in ancient Greece. These techniques existed not to memorize useless information like decks of playing cards but to etch into the brain foundational texts and ideas.

It was an attractive fantasy. If only I could learn to remember like Cooke, I figured, I would be able to commit reams of poetry to heart and really absorb it. I imagined being one of those admirable (if sometimes insufferable) individuals who always has an apposite quotation to drop into conversation. How many worthwhile ideas have gone unthought and connections unmade because of my memory’s shortcomings?

At the time, I didn’t quite believe Cooke’s bold claims about the latent mnemonic potential in all of us. But they seemed worth investigating. Cooke offered to serve as my coach and trainer. Memorizing would become a part of my daily routine. Like flossing. Except that I would actually remember to do it.

IN 2003, the journal *Nature* reported on eight people who finished near the top of the World Memory Championships. The study looked at whether the memorizers’ brains were struc-

**T**he unlikely story of how I ended up in the finals of the U.S.A. Memory Championship, stock-still and sweating profusely, began a year earlier in the same auditorium, on the 19th floor of the Con Edison building near Union Square in Manhattan. I was there to write a short article about what I imagined would be the Super Bowl of savants.

The scene I stumbled upon, however, was something less than a clash of titans: a bunch of guys (and a few women), varying widely in age and personal grooming habits, poring over pages of random numbers and long lists of words. They referred to themselves as mental athletes, or M.A.’s for short. The best among them could memorize the first and last names of dozens of strangers in just a few minutes, thousands of random digits in under an hour and — to impress those with a more humanistic bent — any poem you handed them.

*Joshua Foer is the author of “Moonwalking With Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything,” from which this article is adapted, to be published by Penguin Press next month.*



# QUICK!

You have three minutes to memorize this chart of random numbers.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |        |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------|
| 9 | 1 | 7 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 9 | 2 | Row 1  |
| 7 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 3 | Row 2  |
| 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 7 | Row 3  |
| 5 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 9 | Row 4  |
| 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 1 | Row 5  |
| 4 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 0 | Row 6  |
| 3 | 7 | 9 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 4 | Row 7  |
| 8 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 5 | Row 8  |
| 9 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Row 9  |
| 6 | 4 | 0 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Row 10 |
| 3 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 3 | Row 11 |
| 5 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 7 | Row 12 |
| 4 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 9 | 8 | Row 13 |
| 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 1 | Row 14 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 3 | Row 15 |
| 7 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 6 | Row 16 |
| 0 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 6 | Row 17 |
| 7 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 | Row 18 |
| 5 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 2 | Row 19 |
| 2 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 6 | 7 | Row 20 |
| 4 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Row 21 |
| 3 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 9 | Row 22 |
| 7 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 9 | Row 23 |
| 8 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 3 | Row 24 |

## Numbers

Mental athletes use a variety of elaborate mnemonic systems to remember numbers. One of the most basic techniques, known as the Major System, was invented in the 17th century. It is nothing more than a simple code to convert digits into sounds. Those sounds can then be turned into words, which in turn become images for a memory palace. The code works something like this:

|          |        |       |
|----------|--------|-------|
| 0        | 1      | 2     |
| S        | T or D | N     |
| 3        | 4      | 5     |
| M        | R      | L     |
| 6        | 7      | 8     |
| Sh or Ch | K or G | For V |
| 9        |        |       |
| P or B   |        |       |

The number 32, for example, would translate into MN; 33 would be MM; and 34 would be MR. To make those consonants meaningful, you're allowed to freely intersperse vowels. So the number 32 might turn into an image of a man; 33 could be your mom; and 34 might be the Russian space station Mir. Similarly, the number 86 might be a fish; 40 a rose; and 92 a pen. You might visualize 3,219 as a man (32) playing a tuba (19) or maybe a person from Manitoba (3,219).





turally different from the rest of ours or whether they were just making better use of the memorizing abilities we all possess.

Researchers put the mental athletes and a group of control subjects into f.M.R.I. scanners and asked them to memorize three-digit numbers, black-and-white photographs of people's faces and magnified images of snowflakes as their brains were being scanned. What they found was surprising: not only did the brains of the mental athletes appear anatomically indistinguishable from those of the control subjects, but on every test of general cognitive ability, the mental athletes' scores came back well within the normal range. When Cooke told me he was an average guy with an average memory, it wasn't just modesty speaking.

There was, however, one telling difference between the brains of the mental athletes and those of the control subjects. When the researchers looked at the parts of the brain that were engaged when the subjects memorized, they found that the mental athletes were relying more heavily on regions known to be involved in spatial memory. At first glance, this didn't seem to make sense. Why would mental athletes be navigating spaces in their minds while trying to learn three-digit numbers?

The answer lies in a discovery supposedly made by the poet Simonides of Ceos in the fifth century B.C. After a tragic banquet-hall collapse, of which he was the sole survivor, Simonides was asked to give an account of who was buried in the debris. When the poet closed his eyes and reconstructed the crumbled building in his imagination, he had an extraordinary realization: he remembered where each of the guests at the ill-fated dinner had been sitting.

Even though he made no conscious effort to memorize the layout of the room, it nonetheless left a durable impression. From that simple observation, Simonides reportedly invented a technique that would form the basis of what came to be

known as the art of memory. He realized that if there hadn't been guests sitting at a banquet table but, say, every great Greek dramatist seated in order of birth — or each of the words of one of his poems or every item he needed to accomplish that day — he would have remembered that instead. He reasoned that just about anything could be imprinted upon our memories, and kept in good order, simply by constructing a building in the imagination and filling it with imagery of what needed to be recalled. This imagined edifice could then be walked through at any time in the future. Such a building would later come to be called a memory palace.

Virtually all the details we have about classical memory training — indeed, nearly all the memory tricks in the competitive mnemonist's arsenal — can be traced to a short Latin rhetoric textbook called “*Rhetorica ad Herennium*,” written sometime between 86 and 82 B.C. It is the only comprehensive discussion of the memory techniques attributed to Simonides to have survived into the Middle Ages. The techniques described in this book were widely practiced in the ancient and medieval worlds. Memory training was consid-

ered a centerpiece of classical education in the language arts, on par with grammar, logic and rhetoric. Students were taught not just what to remember but how to remember it. In a world with few books, memory was sacrosanct.

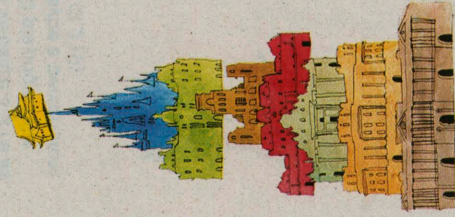
Living as we do amid a deluge of printed words — would you believe more than a million new books were published last year? — it's hard to imagine what it must have been like to read in the age before Gutenberg, when a book was a rare and costly handwritten object that could take a scribe months of labor to produce. Today we write things down precisely so we don't have to remember them, but through the late Middle Ages, books were thought of not just as replacements for memory but also as *aides-mémoire*. Even as late as the 14th century, there might be just several dozen copies of any given text in existence, and those copies might well be chained to a desk or a lectern in some library, which, if it contained a hundred other books, would have been considered particularly well stocked. If you were a scholar, you knew that there was a reasonable likelihood you would never see a particular text again, so a high premium was placed on remembering what you read.

To our memorybound predecessors, the goal of training your memory was not to become a “living book” but rather a “living concordance,” writes the historian Mary Carruthers, a walking index of everything read or learned that was considered worthwhile. And this required building an organizational scheme for accessing that information. When the point of reading is remembering, you approach a text very differently from the way most of us do today. You can't read as fast as you're probably reading this article and expect to remember what you've read for any considerable length of time. If something is going to be made memorable, it has to be dwelled upon, repeated.

In his essay “First Steps Toward a History of Reading,” Robert Darnton describes a switch from “intensive” to “extensive” reading that occurred as printed books began to proliferate. Until relatively recently, people read “intensively,” Darnton says. “They had only a few books — the Bible, an almanac, a devotional work or two — and they read them over and over again, usually aloud and in groups, so that a narrow range of traditional literature became deeply impressed on their consciousness.” Today we read books “extensively,” often without sustained focus, and with rare exceptions we read each book only once. We value quantity of reading over quality of reading. We have no choice, if we want to keep up with the broader culture. I always find looking up at my shelves, at the books that have drained so many of my waking hours, to be a dispiriting experience. There are books up there that I can't even remember whether I've read or not.

**ATTENTION, OF COURSE**, is a prerequisite to remembering. Part of the reason that techniques like visual imagery and the memory palace work so well is that they enforce a degree of mindfulness that is normally lacking. If you want to use a memory palace for permanent storage, you have to take periodic time-consuming mental strolls through it to keep your images from fading. Mostly, nobody bothers. In fact, mnemonists deliberately empty their palaces after competitions, so they can reuse them again and again.

**My trainer and all the other mental athletes I met kept insisting that anyone could do what they do. It was simply a matter of learning to 'think in more memorable ways.'**





"Rhetorica ad Herennium" underscores the importance of purposeful attention by making a distinction between natural memory and artificial memory: "The natural memory is that memory which is embedded in our minds, born simultaneously with thought. The artificial memory is that memory which is strengthened by a kind of training and system of discipline." In other words, natural memory is the hardware you're born with. Artificial memory is the software you run on it.

The principle underlying most memory techniques is that our brains don't remember every type of information equally well. Like every other one of our biological faculties, our memories evolved through a process of natural selection in an environment that was quite different from the one we live in today. And much as our taste for sugar and fat may have served us well in a world of scarce nutrition but is maladaptive in a world of ubiquitous fast-food joints, our memories aren't perfectly suited for our contemporary information age. Our hunter-gatherer ancestors didn't need to recall phone numbers or word-for-word instructions from their bosses or the Advanced Placement U.S. history curriculum or (because they lived in relatively small, stable groups) the names of dozens of strangers at a cocktail party. What they did need to remember was where to find food and resources and the route home and which plants were edible and which were poisonous. Those are the sorts of vital memory skills that they depended on, which probably helps explain why we are comparatively good at remembering visually and spatially.

In a famous experiment carried out in the 1970s, researchers asked subjects to look at 10,000 images just once and for just five seconds each. (It took five days to perform the test.) Afterward, when they showed the subjects pairs of pictures — one they looked at before and one they hadn't — they found that people were able to remember more than 80 percent of what they had seen. For all of our griping over the everyday failings of our memories — the misplaced keys, the forgotten name, the factoid stuck on the tip of the tongue — our biggest failing may be that we forget how rarely we forget. The point of the memory techniques described in "Rhetorica ad Herennium" is to take the kinds of memories our brains aren't that good at holding onto and transform them into the kinds of memories our brains were built for. It advises creating memorable images for your palaces: the funnier, lewder and more bizarre, the better. "When we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary and banal, we generally fail to remember them. ... But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonorable, extraordinary, great, unbelievable or laughable, *that* we are likely to remember for a long time."

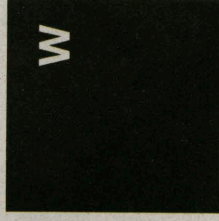
What distinguishes a great mnemonist, I learned, is the ability to create lavish images on the fly, to paint in the mind a scene so unlike any other it cannot be forgotten. And to do it quickly. Many competitive mnemonists argue that their skills are less a feat of memory than of creativity. For example, one of the most popular techniques used to memorize playing cards involves associating every card with an image of a celebrity performing some sort of a ludicrous — and therefore memorable — action on a mundane object. When

it comes time to remember the order of a series of cards, those memorized images are shuffled and recombined to form new and unforgettable scenes in the mind's eye. Using this technique, Ed Cooke showed me how an entire deck can be quickly transformed into a comically surreal, and unforgettable, memory palace.

But mental athletes don't merely embrace the practice of the ancients. The sport of competitive memory is driven by an arms race of sorts. Each year someone — usually a competitor who is temporarily underemployed or a student on summer vacation

— comes up with a more elaborate technique for remembering more stuff more quickly, forcing the rest of the field to play catch-up. In order to remember digits, for example, Cooke recently invented a code that allows him to convert every number from 0 to 999,999,999 into a unique image that he can then deposit in a memory palace.

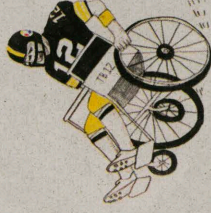
Memory palaces don't have to be palatial — or even actual buildings. They can be routes through a town or signs of the zodiac or even mythical creatures. They can be big or small, indoors or outdoors, real or imaginary, so long as they are intimately familiar. The four-time U.S. memory champion Scott Hagwood uses luxury homes featured in *Architectural Digest* to store his memories. Dr. Yip Swee Chooi, the effervescent Malaysian memory champ, used his own body parts to help him memorize the entire 57,000-word Oxford English-Chinese dictionary. In the 15th century, an Italian jurist named Peter of Ravenna is said to have used thousands of memory palaces to store quotations on every important subject, classified alphabetically. When he wished to expound on a given topic, he simply reached into the relevant chamber and pulled out the source. "When I left my country to visit as a pilgrim the cities of Italy, I can truly say I carried everything I owned with me," he wrote.



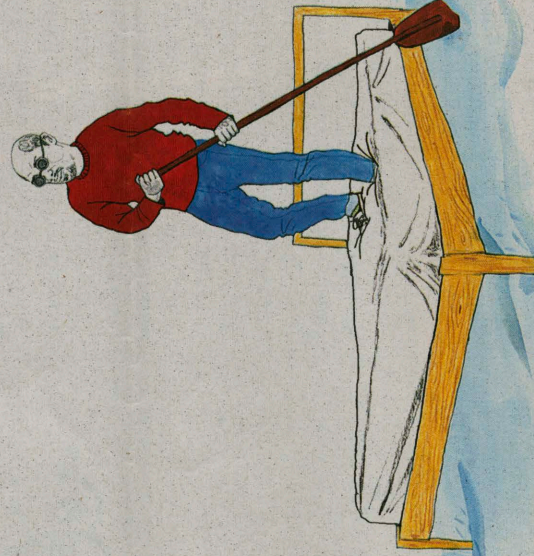
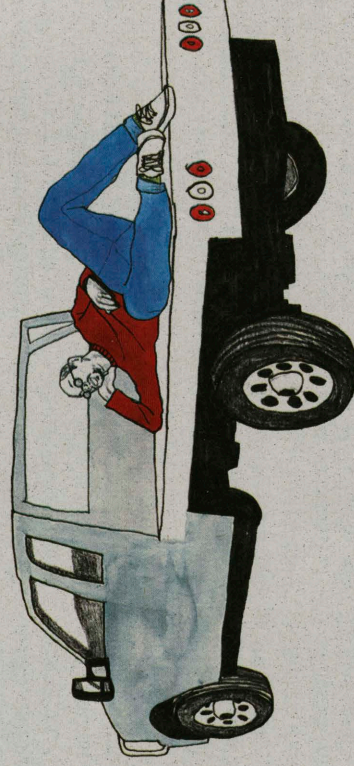
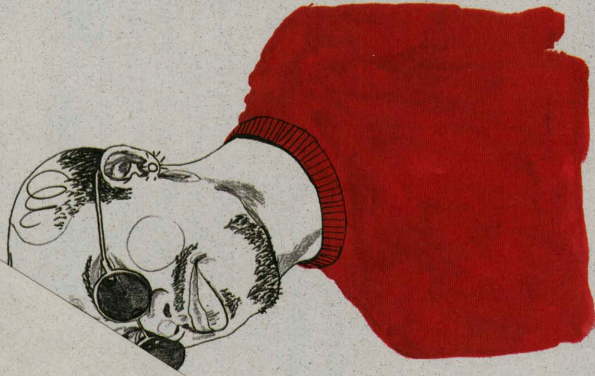
When I first set out to train my memory, the prospect of learning these elaborate techniques seemed preposterously daunting. One of my first steps was to dive into the scientific literature for help. One name kept popping up: K. Anders Ericsson, a psychology professor at Florida State University and the author of an article titled "Exceptional Memorizers: Made, Not Born."

Ericsson laid the foundation for what's known as Skilled Memory Theory, which explains how and why our memories can be improved, within limits. In 1978, he and a fellow psychologist named Bill Chase conducted what became a classic experiment on a Carnegie Mellon undergraduate student, who was immortalized as S.F. in the literature. Chase and Ericsson paid S.F. to spend several hours a week in their lab taking a simple memory test again and again. S.F. sat in a chair and tried to remember as many numbers as possible as they were read off at the rate of one per sec-

The point of memory techniques is to take the kinds of memories our brains aren't that good at holding onto and transform them into the kinds of memories our brains were built for.







## Names

To memorize names, mnemonists take advantage of a phenomenon called the Baker/baker paradox:

it's easier to remember that someone is a baker than that his name is Baker. The trick is to figure out ways to visualize Bakers as bakers.

To remember the name Edward Bedford, **1** for example, a mnemonist might visualize Edward Bedford lying on

the bed of a Ford truck **2**, then deciding that wasn't distinctive enough, see him fording a river on a floating bed **3**. To remember

his first name was Edward, he might put Edward Scissorhands next to him, shredding the mattress as he pads across

the river **4**. That unforgettable image becomes indelibly associated with the man's name.



ond. At the outset, he could hold only about seven digits at a time in his head. When the experiment wrapped up — two years and 250 mind-numbing hours later — S.F. had increased his ability to remember numbers by a factor of 10.

When I called Ericsson and told him that I was trying to train my memory, he said he wanted to make me his research subject. We struck a deal. I would give him the records of my training, which might prove useful for his research. In return, he and his graduate students would analyze the data in search of how I might perform better. Ericsson encouraged me to think of enhancing my memory in the same way I would think about improving any other skill, like learning to play an instrument. My first assignment was to begin collecting architecture. Before I could embark on any serious degree of memory training, I first needed a stockpile of palaces at my disposal. I revisited the homes of old friends and took walks through famous museums, and I built entirely new, fantastical structures in my imagination. And then I carved each building up into cubbyholes for my memories.

Cooke kept me on a strict training regimen. Each morning, after drinking coffee but before reading the newspaper or showering or getting dressed, I sat at my desk for 10 to 15 minutes to work through a poem or memorize the names in an old yearbook. Rather than take a magazine or book along with me on the subway, I would whip out a page of random numbers or a deck of playing cards and try to commit it to memory. Strolls around the neighborhood became an excuse to memorize license plates. I began to pay a creepy amount of attention to name tags. I memorized my shopping lists. Whenever someone gave me a phone number, I installed it in a special memory palace. Over the next several months, while I built a veritable metropolis of memory palaces and stocked them with strange and colorful images, Ericsson kept tabs on my development. When I got stuck, I would call him for advice, and he would inevitably send me scurrying for some journal article that he promised would help me understand my shortcomings. At one point, not long after I started training, my memory stopped improving. No matter how much I practiced, I couldn't memorize playing cards any faster than 1 every 10 seconds. I was stuck in a rut, and I couldn't figure out why. "My card times have hit a plateau," I lamented.

"I would recommend you check out the literature on speed typing," he replied.

When people first learn to use a keyboard, they improve very quickly from sloppy single-finger pecking to careful two-handed typing, until eventually the fingers move effortlessly and the whole process becomes unconscious. At this point, most people's typing skills stop progressing. They reach a plateau. If you think about it, it's strange. We've always been told that practice makes perfect, and yet many people sit behind a keyboard for hours a day. So why don't they just keep getting better and better?

In the 1960s, the psychologists Paul Fitts and Michael Posner tried to answer this question by describing the three

stages of acquiring a new skill. During the first phase, known as the cognitive phase, we intellectualize the task and discover new strategies to accomplish it more proficiently. During the second, the associative phase, we concentrate less, making fewer major errors, and become more efficient. Finally we reach what Fitts and Posner called the autonomous phase, when we're as good as we need to be at the task and we basically run on autopilot. Most of the time that's a good thing. The less we have to focus on the repetitive tasks of everyday life, the more we can concentrate on the stuff that really matters. You can actually see this phase shift take place in f.M.R.I.'s of subjects as they learn new tasks: the parts of the brain involved in conscious reasoning become less active, and other parts of the brain take over. You could call it the O.K. plateau.

Psychologists used to think that O.K. plateaus marked the upper bounds of innate ability. In his 1869 book "Hereditary Genius," Sir

Francis Galton argued that a person could improve at mental and physical activities until he hit a wall, which "he cannot by any education or exertion overpass." In other words, the best we can do is simply the best we can do. But Ericsson and his colleagues have found over and over again that with the right kind of effort, that's rarely the case. They believe that Galton's wall often has much less to do with our innate limits than with what we consider an acceptable level of performance. They've found that top achievers typically follow the same general pattern. They develop strategies for keeping out of the autonomous stage by doing three things: focusing on their technique, staying goal-oriented and getting immediate feedback on their performance. Amateur musicians, for example, tend to spend their practice time playing music, whereas pros tend to work through tedious exercises or focus on difficult parts of pieces. Similarly, the best ice skaters spend more of their practice time trying jumps that they land less often, while lesser skaters work more on jumps they've already mastered. In other words, regular practice simply isn't enough. To improve, we have to be constantly pushing ourselves beyond where we think our limits lie and then pay attention to how and why we fail. That's what I needed to do if I was going to improve my memory.

With typing, it's relatively easy to get past the O.K. plateau. Psychologists have discovered that the most efficient method is to force yourself to type 10 to 20 percent faster than your comfort pace and to allow yourself to make mistakes. Only by watching yourself mistype at that faster speed can you figure out the obstacles that are slowing you down and overcome them. Ericsson suggested that I try the same thing with cards. He told me to find a metronome and to try to memorize a card every time it clicked. Once I figured out my limits, he instructed me to set the metronome 10 to 20 percent faster and keep trying at the quick-er pace until I stopped making mis-

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**TOTAL RECALL** Word and number games from the World Memory Championships are at [nytimes.com/magazine](http://nytimes.com/magazine).



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takes. Whenever I came across a card that was particularly troublesome, I was supposed to make a note of it and see if I could figure out why it was giving me cognitive hiccups. The technique worked, and within a couple days I was off the O.K. plateau, and my card times began falling again at a steady clip. Before long, I was committing entire decks to memory in just a few minutes.

More than anything, what differentiates top memorizers from the second tier is that they approach memorization like a science. They develop hypotheses about their limitations; they conduct experiments and track data. "It's like you're developing a piece of technology or working on a scientific theory," the three-time world champ Andi Bell once told me. "You have to analyze what you're doing."

To have a chance at catapulting myself to the top tier of the competitive memorization circuit, my practice would have to be focused and deliberate. That meant I needed to collect data and analyze it for ways to tweak the images in my memory palaces and make them stickier.

Cooke, who took to referring to me as "son," "young man" and "Herr Foer," insisted that if I really wanted to ratchet up my training, I would

need an equipment upgrade. All serious mnemonists wear earmuffs. A few of the most intense competitors wear blinders to constrict their field of view and shut out peripheral distractions.

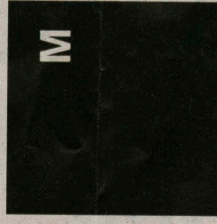
"I find them ridiculous, but in your case, they may be a sound investment," Cooke said on one of our twice-weekly phone check-ins. That afternoon, I went to the hardware store and bought a pair of industrial-grade earmuffs and a pair of plastic laboratory safety goggles. I spray-painted them black and drilled a small eyehole through each lens. Henceforth I would always wear them to practice.

What began as an exercise in participatory journalism became an obsession. True, what I hoped for before I started hadn't come to pass: these techniques didn't improve my underlying memory (the "hardware" of "Rhetorica ad Herennium"). I still lost my car keys. And I was hardly a fount of poetry. Even once I was able to squirrel away more than 30 digits a minute in memory palaces, I seldom memorized the phone numbers of people I actually wanted to call. It was easier to punch them into my cellphone. The techniques worked; I just didn't always use them. Why bother when there's paper, a computer or a cellphone to remember for you?

Yet, as the next U.S.A. Memory Champion-

ship approached, I began to suspect that I might actually have a chance of doing pretty well in it. In every event except the poem and speed numbers (which tests how many random digits you can memorize in five minutes) my best practice scores were approaching the top marks of previous U.S. champions. Cooke told me not to make too much of that fact. "You always do at least 20 percent worse under the lights," he said, and he warned me about the "lackadaisical character" of my training.

"Lackadaisical" wasn't the word I would have chosen. Now that I had put the O.K. plateau behind me, my scores were improving on an almost daily basis. The sheets of random numbers that I memorized were piling up in the drawer of my desk. The dog-eared pages of verse I learned by heart were accumulating in my "Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry." To buoy my spirits, Cooke sent me a quotation from the venerable martial artist Bruce Lee: "There are no limits. There are plateaus, and you must not stay there; you must go beyond them. If it kills you, it kills you." I copied that thought onto a Post-it note and stuck it on my wall. Then I tore it down and memorized it.



ost national memory contests, held in places like Bangkok, Melbourne and Hamburg, bill themselves as mental decathlons. Ten grueling events test the competitors' memo-

ries, each in a slightly different way. Contestants have to memorize an unpublished poem spanning several pages, pages of random words (record: 280 in 15 minutes), lists of binary digits (record: 4,140 in 30 minutes), shuffled decks of playing cards, a list of historical dates and the names and faces of as many strangers as possible. Some disciplines, called speed events, test how much the contestants can memorize in five minutes (record: 480 digits). Two marathon disciplines test how many decks of cards and random digits they can memorize in an hour (records: 2,080 digits and 28 decks). In the most exciting event of the contest, speed cards, competitors race to commit a single pack of playing cards to memory as fast as possible.

When I showed up at the following year's U.S.A. Memory Championship, I brought along my black spray-painted memory goggles for speed cards. Until the moment a freshly shuffled deck was placed on the desk in front of me, I was still weighing whether to put them on. I hadn't practiced without my goggles in weeks, and the Con Edison auditorium was full of distractions. But there were also three television cameras circulating in the room. As (Continued on Page 52)

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## MIND-GAMER

(Continued from Page 42)

one of them zoomed in for a close-up of my face, I thought of all the people I knew who might end up watching the broadcast: high-school classmates I hadn't seen in years, friends who had no idea about my new memory obsession, my girlfriend's parents. What would they think if they turned on their televisions and saw me wearing huge black safety goggles and earmuffs, thumbing through a deck of playing cards? In the end, my fear of public embarrassment trumped my competitive instincts.

From the front of the room, the chief arbiter, a former Army drill sergeant, shouted, "Go!" A judge sitting opposite me clicked her stopwatch, and I began peeling through the pack as fast as I could, flicking three cards at a time off the top of the deck and into my right hand. I was storing the images in the memory palace I knew better than any other, one based on the house in Washington in which I grew up. Inside the front door, the Incredible Hulk rode a stationary bike while a pair of oversize, loopy earrings weighed down his earlobes (three of clubs, seven of diamonds, jack of spades). Next to the mirror at the bottom of the stairs, Terry Bradshaw balanced on a wheelchair (seven of hearts, nine of diamonds, eight of hearts), and just behind him, a midget jockey in a sombrero parachuted from an airplane with an umbrella (seven of spades, eight of diamonds, four of clubs). I saw Jerry Seinfeld sprawled out bleeding on the hood of a Lamborghini in the hallway (five of hearts, ace of diamonds, jack of hearts), and at the foot of my parents' bedroom door, I saw myself moonwalking with Einstein (four of spades, king of hearts, three of diamonds).

The art of speed cards lies in finding the perfect balance between moving quickly and forming detailed images. You want a large enough glimpse of your images to be able to reconstruct them later, without wasting precious time conjuring any more color than

necessary. When I put my palms back down on the table to stop the clock, I knew that I'd hit a sweet spot in that balance. But I didn't yet know how sweet.

The judge, who was sitting opposite me, flashed me the time on her stopwatch: 1 minute 40 seconds. I immediately recognized that not only was that better than anything I ever did in practice but that it also would shatter the United States record of 1 minute 55 seconds. I closed my eyes, put my head down on the table, whispered an expletive to myself and took a second to dwell on the fact that I had possibly just done something — however geeky, however trivial — better than it had ever been done by anyone in the entire country.

(By the standards of the international memory circuit, where 21.9 seconds is the best time, my 1:40 would have been considered middling — the equivalent of a 5-minute mile for the best Germans, British and Chinese.)

As word of my time traveled across the room, cameras and spectators began to assemble around my desk. The judge pulled out a second unshuffled deck of playing cards and pushed them across the table. My task now was to rearrange that pack to match the one I just memorized.

I fanned the cards out, took a deep breath and walked through my palace one more time. I could see all the images perched exactly where I left them, except for one. It should have been in the shower, dripping wet, but all I could spy were blank beige tiles.

"I can't see it," I whispered to myself frantically. "I can't see it." I ran through every single one of my images as fast as I could. Had I forgotten the fop wearing an ascot? Pamela Anderson's rack? The Lucky Charms leprechaun? An army of turbaned Sikhs? No, no, no, no.

I began sliding the cards around the table with my index finger. Near the top of the desk, I put the Hulk on his bike. Next to that, I placed Terry Bradshaw with his (Continued on Page 64)



# Colorado Summer Vacation



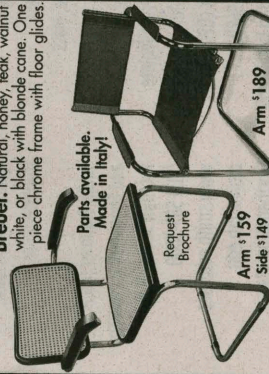
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## MIND-GAMER

(Continued from Page 52)

wheelchair. As the clock ran down on my five minutes of recall time, I was left with three cards. They were the three that had disappeared from the shower: the king of diamonds, four of hearts and seven of clubs. Bill Clinton copulating with a basketball. How could I have possibly missed it?

I quickly neatened up the stack of cards into a square pile, shoved them back across the table to the judge and removed my earmuffs and earplugs.

One of the television cameras

circled around for a better angle. The judge began flipping the cards over one by one, while, for dramatic effect, I did the same with the deck I'd memorized.

Two of hearts, two of hearts. Two of diamonds, two of diamonds. Three of hearts, three of hearts. Card by card, each one matched. When we got to the end of the decks, I threw the last card down on the table and pumped my fist. I was the new U.S. record holder in speed cards. A 12-year-old boy stepped forward, handed me a pen and asked for my autograph. ♦

## ANSWERS TO PUZZLES OF 2.13.11

Bargaining

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P | O | S | T | I | T | S | S | T | I | G | M | A | A | S | P | S |   |   |   |   |
| A | S | T | O | L | A | T | P | E | G | L | E | G | S | O | N | E | T |   |   |   |
| W | H | A | T | S | M | Y | B | A | R | L | I | N | E | I | N | T | O | N | E |   |
| T | E | A | S | E | R | N | O | B | A | R | F | L | Y | Z | O | N | E |   |   |   |
| W | O | E |   |   |   |   | A | L | S | O |   |   |   | O | X | K | A | L |   |   |
| A | S | P | I | C | V | I | A |   |   | M | A | S | T |   |   | E | M | I |   |   |
| T | H | E | D | A | V | I | N | C | I | B | A | R | C | O | D | E | R | E | E |   |
| T | A | N | T | R | I | C | O | M | E | R | T | A | A | L | I | T |   |   |   |   |
| A | L | I | E | N | S | P | A | C | E | B | A | R | C | R | A | F | T |   |   |   |
| S | H | A | G |   |   | I | T | E | M |   |   |   | P | L | I | A | B | L | E |   |
| T | E | L | H | O | S | T | E | L |   | A | B | R | O | A | D |   | L | E | X |   |
| A | X | L | R | O | S | E |   |   | A | L | L | Y |   |   |   | M | E | A | T |   |
| C | A | S | H | B | A | R | F | O | R | C | L | U | N | K | E | R | S |   |   |   |
| T | O | O | K |   | I | D | A | H | O | S |   | O | R | A | N | G | E | S |   |   |
| O | V | A | S | A | V | E | D | B | Y | T | H | E | B | A | R | B | E | L | L |   |
| P | A | R |   |   | E | S | S | E |   | E | N | E |   | A | C | T | I |   |   |   |
| O | M | G |   | I | L | E |   |   | A | S | S | T |   |   | L | A | D |   |   |   |
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| U | S | E | N | E | T |   | A | L | G | O | R | E |   | N | O | N | U | K | E | S |
| M | E | S | S |   |   |   | N | O | O | N | E | R |   | I | N | S | T | Y | L | E |

(AMY) STEWART, FLOWER CONFIDENTIAL — From ... one lily, you can learn ... about how flowers are made. Its anatomy is right there, out in the open—there's no need to go hunting around between crumpled petals to find a stamen or a stigma the way you might with a rose.

- |                |               |              |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| A. Showy       | J. Organ      | S. Daisy     |
| B. Thistle     | K. Withered   | T. Endosperm |
| C. Euphony     | L. Embower    | U. Nanobot   |
| D. Wooser      | M. Red-hot    | V. Tango     |
| E. Anthurium   | N. Capone     | W. Intimate  |
| F. Ray Charles | O. Oswego tea | X. Ageratum  |
| G. Tilth       | P. Nutmeg     | Y. Luna moth |
| H. Fontanel    | Q. Freesia    |              |
| I. Lotus       | R. Identify   |              |

NOTE: 1-Across in this week's diagramless puzzle begins in the 4th square of the top row.



Charles Hulin  
501 Eliot Drive  
Urbana, IL 61801

January 4, 2011

Dear Ivan and Carol,

We both enjoyed your annual letter very much... especially the back page. I followed the success of *Work Song* and knew how well it was selling in the independent bookstores. Considering the almost 100% positive reviews it received, I was not surprised. I am sorry I missed the reviewer who thought that the best thing about Ivan Doig's writing was Ivan Doig's writing. I assume that was a positive comment.

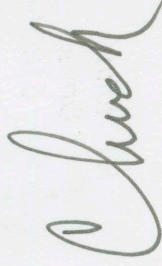
We were also very pleased to hear that Morrie will reappear in Butte in a book set after the 1920 election. I hope the events of this book will include a good helping of the Wobblies, the Miners' Union, Anaconda, and other things close to my heart. I recently found another gem of a two-CD album. *Music of Coal: Mining Songs from the Appalachian Coal Fields*. It has songs in it that illuminate the job of coal mining far better than any data-driven study I could ever do. If I were still teaching I would assign it as required listening. Once again, if I can add my knowledge or help to Morrie's third appearance, I will jump at the chance.

I received a copy of *Hoboes, Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West* from Mark Wyman today. He said he was sending it at your suggestion. Thanks for mentioning me to him. The book looks very good. Maybe I can entice him over to Urbana for the next evening of work songs.

Francie and I were in Butte several years ago and went into a bakery to get something. I noticed they had pasties listed on the board. I was a bit surprised. I thought pasties were found only in Michigan. By the time we got outside the coin dropped. The Cornish miners that brought pasties to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan also brought them to Montana. Apparently they could be heated on a shovel over a small fire for lunch or dinner. The traces of the ethnic neighborhoods were still visible then. Maybe they still are. Anyway, Butte is a very interesting, if abused, city.

We are taking our son and his family (wife and three children) to Montana this summer. We will spend one week with our older granddaughter on the Boulder River and then a week with the rest of the family near West Yellowstone. I think we have missed but one summer since 1966 when we did not visit Montana.

Warmest regards and a Happy New Year. We wish you health, love, money and the time to enjoy them.





We have had a non-Yule type run-up to the holiday season, but we are promised snow and cold weather for this second week in December. The lights are up, the tree is artificial, and the aroma of Swedish breads and cookies is lacking as it has been since Kathryn passed away. At this time of year I am usually getting ready for an exodus from northwest Ohio, including a seven-day Caribbean cruise, followed by a flight to Cairo, Egypt for a 10-day exploration of the Nile River, partly by land and partly by river cruise. Last February I spent three weeks in Mexico, including two week-long stays at resorts on the southern tip of Baja California. It is like being at the end of the earth. If you sailed south from Cabot San Lucas, you would not see land again until you reached Antarctica. The weather was warm, but cool enough to cause you to seek out a heated pool. The Pacific Ocean off Baja is not hospitable to swimmers, but I found little need to apply sun-tan lotion during my afternoon poolside outings. This resort region is very close to the Tropic of Cancer, the division line between the temperate and tropical zones.

I flew from Baja to Mexico City, from which I embarked on a four-hour bus ride to San Miguel de Allende, the cradle of Mexican independence. My hosts at this beautiful city were David and Punky Mikesell, who spend part of the winter there. They are Eric Mikesell's parents and daughter Zora's in-laws, and the three of us took advantage of cultural offerings in this city which attracts many foreign visitors. The long bus ride in the center of Mexico was comfortable and completely uneventful. Evenings are quite cool there, but there is ample sunlight during the day. From Mexico City I flew to Honolulu for the fourth week of my winter-avoidance tour, and son Eric, who flew from Toledo, met me at the airport with a convertible. He was shocked to see that one of the victims of the Pearl Harbor attack was a seaman named E.R. Johnson who had served on the Arizona. No, not the same name, but his initials were the same as Eric's. "Did you know about this," he asked me. Yup, I replied. Kathryn and I had the same reaction when we visited the memorial in 2001.

We spent a day at the Memorial, which represents the alpha and omega of the Pacific War. The battleship Missouri, the ship on which World War II came to an end, is anchored next to the Arizona Memorial. The next two days we spent exploring the island, including a luau and Polynesian dance performance at a Polynesian cultural center on the north side of Oahu. We spent one day on the island of Hawaii, where the volcanic landscapes are fantastic. I think Eric would go back to the islands all the time if he could. Zora, Eric, Grant, and Luke spent eight days at a resort near Sea World in Florida, courtesy of Dad, and also a week at a family camp in Vermont during September.

The other big event of the year, for me at least, was my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, which we celebrated in late August. Zora, Eric, and I worked the better part of the day preparing for the guests. Zora was the host and planner for this party, which was held in my back yard. We rented a huge tent. The weather was perfect, as it was much of the summer and fall. We had great help from Jeannine McNear, Kathryn's sister, and her daughter, Jana, who drove up from Illinois. We had more than 50 guests for a dinner, catered by a cook, who prepared Indonesian food. My screened porch was rebuilt this year. I now have a comfortable three-season man cave, with electric heat. I don't know how I got along without it years ago. Best of holiday wishes to all of you and a happy new year.

(over)

Ralph Johnson



Dear Ivan and Carol:

I waited for your communication before answering, and I am glad I did. You're getting ahead of me, Orville. I'm still working on your WW II novel, and have considered taking it with me on my forthcoming travels to the Caribbean and Egypt. Winter is upon us now, although it is not quite the season. We missed the big snow, though, and I have to contend now with a stubborn ice glaze on the driveway. I liked the critic who said the best part of Ivan's writing is his writing. I know the feeling. Zora took a preliminary glance at The Eleventh Man. I don't know what she thought of it, immersed as she usually is with legal briefs and other matters dealing with her corporate counsel job at Masco, Inc. The opposite side outlines most of what I did this year, except that I didn't find room to report that I went to Stratford and Shaw festivals in Canada, some of the best theater in North America, and then went to a political button convention in Buffalo where I chatted with Presidents McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt or at least their modern-day impersonators.

Set your mind at ease. Dave Felts invented the word "Parajrafts" for the short quips and fillers of editorial columns. I have not seen anything like that done as regularly as in the journalistic finishing school that was Lindsay-Schaub. Ed Lindsay used to tell him, "That's fine, Virgil, but I would change this "should" to "should not" at the marked paragraph." At some point you must have been subjected to his custom of pulling up a chair to the sofa on which his hapless guests had sunk, and then tower over them like a lighthouse. No, I can't recall meeting Dave Winke, although I might have had a job at the Des Moines Register if I had wanted to relocate to that city. Met another tall editor there. The corporate meat-grinder has not swallowed The Blade yet. It is much reduced now, as is the case with most newspapers, and I blame short-sighted management every bit as much as the Internet and all that. Canada, Ireland, and Britain still have lots of newspapers, although that is not to say that they are all doing well.

As for Congress, I despair of rationalism in that body. Obama certainly has taken his lumps, which is not surprising inasmuch as those dry-gulching Southern Dixieicans have no higher goal in life than to dump the black man in the White House and his Commie health plan along with it. They forget that those who will now bless the poor will themselves find blessing. (At least it worked for good King Wenceslas.) ~~Not~~ Why not stop by our town some time? I may be in Seattle in June for a wedding.

P.S. I worry a bit about the cut in the Social Security tax. It changes the FDR frame of reverence, and I fear that those loathsome Republican tea partiers will denounce any change in the rate as a tax hike. We are slipping badly, but it doesn't seem to bother Congress.

Holiday greetings to you both. Cheers

DR J.



**From:** Liz Darhansoff <liz@dvfliterary.com>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Ivan offer  
**Date:** July 21, 2010 5:21:56 PM PDT  
**To:** carol doig <cddoig@comcast.net>  
▶ 1 Attachment, 0.6 KB

here you go, Ivan. it's not exactly a poke in the eye but I know you're disappointed. Hard times out there. Let's talk. xxLiz

----- Forwarded message -----  
**From:** Saletan, Rebecca <[Rebecca.Saletan@us.penguinroup.com](mailto:Rebecca.Saletan@us.penguinroup.com)>  
**Date:** Tue, Jul 20, 2010 at 11:06 AM  
**Subject:** Ivan offer  
**To:** Liz Darhansoff <[liz@dvfliterary.com](mailto:liz@dvfliterary.com)>

Dear Liz,

Thanks for your patience. As I told you, it's much more onerous to do the paperwork here required to offer on a repeat author than one who's new to the house, and tricky to get the kind of projections I needed from finance for a book so newly published. In addition, there's Ivan's somewhat up-and-down track to try to make sense of – will we be able to repeat the long-term success of Whistling Season in this crazy market, much changed since we did that two-book deal? And what can we expect of MISS YOU, given the lesser performance of ELEVENTH MAN and some of the other not-deep-history titles? We've tried to come up with an offer that acknowledges the strong start we've had with WORK SONG and will reward exceptional performance without getting us insanely far out on a limb.

Here's what we propose:

- ✚ \$250K for US, Can, and OM, payable in the standard Penguin quarters on signing, d&a, hc pub, and pbk pub
- ✚ Ebook, first serial, and audio. I know you have sold audio in the past but, apart from the fact that Penguin, having its own audio division, wouldn't have gone for that, there's a strategic reason: Dick Heffernan, head of hardcover sales for Penguin, is also head of our audio books, and it helps to cement the sales effort and Dick's personal investment if we control the audio
- ✚ We'd need to standardize royalties this time to the usual 10% to 5K, 12 1/2% to 10K, 15% t/a, not the flat 15% you had with Harcourt and HMH. Pbk royalties would remain flat 7 1/2%.
- ✚ Bonuses: There is a \$50K earnout bonus per book in place on the existing 2-book deal. That remains. However, if the entire \$600K advance for that deal has earned out by the time SWEET THUNDER is delivered, we'd increase the advance for SWEET THUNDER by \$100K, payable half at that point, the rest split between hc and pbk pubs. If this bonus doesn't kick in, we'd still pay a \$50K performance bonus if SWEET THUNDER has earned out its \$250K advance a year after hc pub.

In thinking of timing for the above provisions, I've assumed that Ivan is planning to deliver MISS YOU next spring, as he's lately been telling me (and as would be true to his early-bird form) rather than June 2012 as existing contract stipulates, so we could publish summer 2012. And I'm assuming that SWEET THUNDER could then be delivered by June 2013.

Standing by to discuss whenever you're ready.

All best,

Becky



Rebecca Saletan

Editorial Director, Riverhead Books

375 Hudson Street

New York, NY 10014-3657

212 366 2908

212 366 2922 (fax)

--

Liz Darhansoff

Darhansoff, Verrill, Feldman

236 West 26th Street, #802

New York, NY 10001

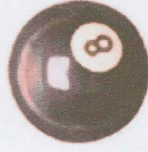
(917) 305-8946

[liz@dvfliterary.com](mailto:liz@dvfliterary.com)

[www.dvfliterary.com](http://www.dvfliterary.com)



**From:** carol doig <cddoig@comcast.net>  
**Subject:** Re: Ivan bookscan numbers  
**Date:** July 29, 2010 2:09:19 PM PDT  
**To:** Liz Darhansoff <liz@dvfliterary.com>



Liz, hi--Given the numbers and your instinct, let's take the offer. Do what you can to maximize the advance and any other details still negotiable, and we'll call it good.

Thanx for your efforts, as always.  
Ivan

P.S. Work Song has held steady at #14 on the indie list, we just saw.

On Jul 29, 2010, at 1:43 PM, Liz Darhansoff wrote:

Ivan, it's been a week since I told Becky we'd like to hold off. She hasn't rushed to improve the offer and yesterday she reminded me that her boss, Susan Kennedy is loathe to leave an offer on the table. So the choice is to accept now (knowing what I know, I suspect sales have peaked) or let the offer go and see if that scares anyone. Given present market conditions, I would argue for the former. To date: total in print – 37,707;;33,120 shipped ; 3351 on hand Whaddya say? xxLizD

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** **Saletan, Rebecca** <Rebecca.Saletan@us.penguinigroup.com>  
**Date:** Thu, Jul 29, 2010 at 10:16 AM  
**Subject:** Ivan bookscan numbers  
**To:** Liz Darhansoff <liz@dvfliterary.com>

The numbers (which didn't get posted till yesterday evening – some sort of glitch) held steady for last week – 2,004, as opposed to 1919, 2213, 2417 for previous weeks. But the big cluster was where he's doing appearances, which are drawing to a close. Chain numbers, as I said, dropped about 15% across the board. We've paid to extend the B&N promotion, as I think I mentioned earlier, and we're also anteing up to put him in the PNBA holiday catalogue, where of course he is a favorite.

Rebecca Saletan

Editorial Director, Riverhead Books



## Cheryl McKeon

**From:** Wendy Manning [wmanning@thirdplacebooks.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, June 28, 2010 9:57 AM  
**To:** cmckeon@thirdplacebooks.com  
**Subject:** FW: Please forward to Ivan Doig on June 29

**Wendy Manning**  
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**From:** Verne and Carol Kelling [mailto:Frobisher1@comcast.net]  
**Sent:** Monday, June 28, 2010 12:31 AM  
**To:** comments@thirdplacebooks.com  
**Subject:** Please forward to Ivan Doig on June 29

Next Tues., June 29, at 7:00 pm we plan to attend Ivan Doig's appearance at 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Books, Lake Forest Park. We have a special interest in his new novel *Work Song* a number of reasons, well beyond the enjoyment of previous works, e.g., *The Whistling Season* and *The 11<sup>th</sup> Man*.

My son, Chris Kelling met Mr. Doig years ago, while personally assisting him at a Seattle Book Fair, when Chris was employed by a local book distributor; Chris became a fan, and subsequently introduced me to Mr. Doig's appealing stories. Now we are both fans.

In the early 1950s, while finishing up at the University of Washington, I had just married Carol Ann Olson, daughter of Carl A. Olson – a great father-in-law – who had come to believe that 5 or more Montana counties in central northern Montana contained oil and natural gas resources that would eventually become (again) economic to extract. Fresh out of the Marine Corps at the tail end of World War II in the Pacific, I was enlisted to accompany him on an automobile tour of farms and ranches from Great Falls eastward to the Missouri Breaks, south of the Canadian border; we sat around rancher's kitchen tables while Carl offered to purchase mineral rights from them, assembling subsurface rights to someday drill and extract the resources we know today as valuable. At only 22, I drove most of the way, and provided a diversion sometimes. The ranchers often wanted to show the "kid", an ex-Marine, their favorite Winchester or long barreled six gun, and see if I could actually hit a prairie dog out in the nearest pasture. I remember that times were tough: dry land wheat yields were skimpy; there wasn't much moisture in the soils; and wheat and hay prices were down. Back over in Great Falls, original Charles Russell's paintings were still on the Silver Dollar's saloon walls.

The described lives of the characters in *The Whispering Season*, read less than a year ago, brought the memories of that trip with Carl to the top of my mind. My own trips to those counties during the ensuing years, on business – still involved with the oil and natural gas leasing Carl initiated – or hunting for antelope, and visiting with ranchers like Bruce and Daisy Dutton in Petroleum County, where they have lived long productive lives at Cat Creek, a bit east of Winnett, have brought me understanding of some of the life events they have enjoyed.

I still have a vivid memory of crossing a significant river -- the Missouri, perhaps easterly of Ft.

6/29/2010



Benton – on an open barge-like 4-car ferry. I've wandered around in the rusting remnants of the 1920s oil boom field on the westerly side of the Musselshell. I've learned that a pasture in Montana places is at least 160 acres, and that tepee rings out on the plains are not to be disturbed.

Mr. Doig, my own dad was born in 1886 in Iowa, was an indentured orphan until age 14, homesteaded (developing a cattle ranch) at age 21 near Kadoka, SD, drove stagecoach in Yellowstone Park and Kettle Falls, WA, and bought and operated a bakery in Butte, MT in the 1914-1918 period. His specialty was providing fresh baked Welsh pasties for the miners walking up the hill in the still dark mornings; this was lunch for them, placed while still warm under their helmets, appreciated in the cold underground shafts and drifts.

My son Chris and I have explored Butte, where the bakery was, and where my dad Ben Kelling lived. My daughter Wendy Kelling and I have found the pasty's still made and available in restaurants in Butte.

These are just a few of the reasons I am really looking forward to enjoying *Work Song*.

Wishing you and the new book success,

Verne T. Kelling  
Sammamish, WA

6/29/2010



once in a while, after a peppery choosing-up of sides, they would try sophisticated games of Who Am I? or of Dumb Crambo. were whole hours when the tiled area of the front hall looked like or of a badly run sports emporium that specializes in arctic ar, there would be so many pairs of kicked-off boots and over-ving around in melted-snow puddles.

line was enormously popular—a siren in the lads' eyes—hotly after as a date for nighttime parties and dances. Julia went to parties ("As many as I want to go to," she said), usually with her Bruce Wilson, who was serious and peculiarly confident. Morgan laud's old rule about midnight's being the hour to be home from g parties was extended to one A.M.: NO LATER THAN! They most always in bed, often awake, always chaste, awaiting Julia's on their bedroom door and her softly spoken: "I'm back"—(often than the deadline hour), and for Caroline's knock (rarely earlier—imes almost dangerously later) and her similar, reporting words. r the holidays Doctor Leigh, ever on the fly, put in a few vigorous ances. Ansel Shurtliff came for Christmas and stayed on to wel-in the New Year, for which event Geoff and Alan arrived from ork on December 30, bringing with them late Christmas pre-distributed—festively—to one and all that evening after dinner. anded Morgan an old, thin, leather-bound, worn, but still intact I found it in a secondhand bookshop down in the Village. It's a ittle production."

gan, extremely curious, opened the book to its first page and read d its title: "*A Digest of Celtic Names*; Compiled by Ian MacNaghten, rivate Printed—1909."

n to page twelve," Alan said.

page twelve, marked in the margin by a filled-in circle of faded ik, he saw his name: *MŌR-GÂN [Welsh]: A dweller on the sea.*

ead it to himself, and sat there, silent, hugely surprised: until that t, he had had no knowledge that his given name was Welsh in et alone, what, in Welsh, it meant.

heard his father's voice, his laughter: "You look dumbfounded, l! We're all panting to know what you've found on page twelve."



He passed the book, opened to the stated page, to Ansel. "Did you know this, Pa?"

It took only a second for his father to read the words, first to himself next in a struck voice aloud to the others, then to exclaim: "I have an idea! None whatsoever"—and, turning to Alan, addressing him as "my wife's father's first name. That's how we came to pass it on to you," turned back to Morgan—"to *you*. I'm certain that neither you nor her father had any inkling of the name's being Welsh, or meaning in that language. They'd have told me if they'd known. Both revealed in all such out-of-the way lore. . . . Why Alan, then, have enlightened us!"

Everybody was active now, talking, passing the book around to-hand. Morgan, though, was in a world of thoughts completely his own. *Morgan: a dweller on the sea*. The words suggested perpetual perpetual drift: a loner's existence devoid of witnesses. It surprised how much within himself he denied that definition of his as dweller on the sea? Ah, no! Not this Morgan. Define *this* Morgan dweller on the land, in his way a deeply-rooted tree: *proof* (it came him to think) that in one's given name there is no destiny.

. . . On New Year's Eve, they all went into Cleveland for Letitia Grant's annual party, Maud, Julia, and Alan in Morgan's car, Caroline and Geoff with Ansel Shurtliff in his "Jag." All three were going to it, Letitia Grant having pronounced them old enough to attend. "Why are you so excited about this particular party?" asked. "Because," Julia explained, "because, *finally*, Callie and I'll be it's really like. We've imagined it for so long, since we were little. We to spend hours talking about it and pretending we were at it. . . . Like princesses, surrounded by princes—everything gorgeous—clusters of flowers hanging by pure gold ropes from the ceiling and veiled pink lights—that was Callie's idea—and the air scented with eign, awfully exotic perfume, Arabian, we thought!" Caroline, at nursery remembrances, said: "We're prepared, on *those* terms, to be pointed." Maud laughed: "On those terms, you're bound to be."

Still, it was a grand party; on its own terms, memorable. . . .



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