

Mind Melders: Lion

You are about to become Sigmund's editor. Remember there are three parts to a finished piece of writing:

- story (narrative is fiction, expository/report is non-fiction)
 - *sequence of events*
- writing (the delivery system, using the alphabet)
 - *sequence of words*
- spelling, punctuation, grammar (the appearance)
 - *spelling is a sequence of letters*

As you read the first three chapters, help Sigmund out in all three areas. Circle places where he could make his writing better so that his story is better.

If you want to watch the complete book trailer for *Mind Melders: Lion*, just click this link:

<https://youtu.be/-dAQiW2LjX8>

The Mind Melders

“Each animal has a special strength, but human intelligence is the greatest super-power on the planet.” — Neville Hill, retired software billionaire turned ecologist

Mind Melders: LION

Neville Hill’s secret Mind Melders program is part of his efforts to help vital ecology programs across the globe.

Neville has sponsored a trip by Jolene Adams, a world famous actress, to film a documentary in Africa to draw world-wide attention to elephant tusk poachers done on behalf of local government officials.

But when poachers decide to kidnap her for ransom, the Ethics Committee agrees that Amelia and Damion are suddenly Jolene’s best hope for survival. The only way to save her is for Amelia and Damion to mind meld with a pair of lions.

Future titles in the Mind Melders series:

Mind Melders: VAMPIRE

Deep in the Amazon forest, hired gangs are intimidating any locals who join programs to stop the slash-and-burn methods of clearing the jungle for short-term profit.

Amelia's proposal to the Ethics Committee? Mind meld with vampire bats for a couple of nights and terrify the gang members into leaving the area.

But hours into the approved mission, a scientist and his assistants who are researching ways to break the malarial breeding cycle disappear from their base camp. The focus of the mission immediately changes to search and rescue.

As Amelia and Damion use their animal superpowers to navigate the night-time world of the waterfalls and jungles near the source of the Amazon river, they find a threat far more complicated than some lost scientists.

Mind Melders: DOLPHIN

Because an international incident might lead to a nuclear confrontation or devastating trade wars, the captains of Chinese ships have no fear in ignoring all international treaties about fishing quota and illegal netting.

When Neville Hill develops technology for computer signals to reach dolphins underwater, his Ethics Committee votes in favor of a mind melding mission for Amelia and Damion to document the horrific localized ecological destruction of the fishing trawlers.

The only trouble is that they discover the trawlers are out on the waters for a lot more than mere illegal fishing. When the military gets involved, a war threat escalates so close to the point of no-return, that it's going to take a pair of dolphins to avert disaster on a grander scale.

Mind Melders: RAT

When Damion is called back without warning from a Mind Melding mission as a polar bear in the Canadian arctic, he learns that Amanda has been kidnapped by Russian spies. The entire program is in danger because the Russian government now possess four stolen brain chips. Their goal is to reverse engineer those chips to duplicate the technology for military purposes.

The Ethics Committee immediately agrees that Damion should mind-meld with a rat. His job? Infiltrate one of the world's most forbidden and infamous prisons to destroy the chips and gain information that will allow Neville to find a way to learn where Amanda is so that she can be rescued.

Just as Damion is on the verge of success, he discovers he is being hunted. And that the animal stalking him seems to be eerily intelligent.

Chapter One

“Lights down in ten. . .”

From a two-way speaker in the ceiling, the whispered countdown carried clearly to Damion in the hush of the tiny isolation room. The walls were covered with acoustic tiles to muffle sound. To give him privacy when he removed his robe, there were no observation cameras. In front of Damion was a tank that looked like a giant aquarium. It had no lid. Only ten inches of motionless water.

“Nine. . .”

Damion stepped out of his flip-flops. He removed his jeans and t-shirt and undergarments. He hung them on a wall hook near a shower nozzle above a drain, where a fresh towel hung from another hook. He moved to the side of the tank, barefoot on tiles. His feet felt the pressure of the tile because of gravity. His skin, however, did not register any coolness of the tile. Underfloor heating kept both ceramics and the air of the room exactly at body temperature.

“Eight. . .”

Because it was unthinkable to drop it, with both hands he cradled one of two existing mind-melder helmets. It was open faced, much like a motorcycle helmet. Unlike a motorcycle helmet, the technology to design and manufacture each had run into mil-

lions upon millions of dollars. The helmets were waterproof and sound proof. The computer built into the helmet sent and received signals wirelessly. The interior of this one molded perfectly to the bumps and contours of his shaved head.

“Seven. . .”

Damion slipped the helmet onto his skull, thinking as he always did, about how he’d been living in an abandoned warehouse and how he had been offered a way to find a future worth living and the price he’d accepted for a new life. At night sometimes, Damion would run his fingers lightly over the scar at the top of his hairless head, feeling the line of a circle where skin had been peeled back so that a bone saw could cut through his skull and remove a cap of bone for the operation.

“Six. . .”

Damion slipped off his robe and stepped over the edge of the tank into the ten inches of water. Again, he only felt the pressure of gravity on the pads of his feet. He had no sensation of water against his skin because it matched perfectly the temperature of his skin. One computer chip in the mind-melder helmet was devoted to monitoring even the tiniest of fluctuations of his body temperature to ensure that the water was always within a tenth of a degree Fahrenheit of his body heat.

“Five. . .”

He gripped the edge of the tank and lowered himself and sat and stretched out the full length of his legs in the water. Epsom salt had been dissolved into the water to cre-

ate a specific gravity of 1.275. It meant that when he leaned back to rest his head and helmet in the water, he floated without any effort. With his mouth closed, he would taste nothing. His skin felt nothing. His body felt no pressure. There were no smells to distract him. And when the voice from the ceiling speaker stopped the countdown and the lights went out, all that would remain for his brain to detect were the thoughts he generated. Along with the signals sent from the mind melder helmet to an array of chips in his brain.

“Four. . .”

It should have been an adult to volunteer for the computer chips implanted into the parts of the brain that controlled muscle movements. But past a certain age, the brain lost elasticity and resilience. Adults were unable to use those chips to their potential. Damion had accepted the operation at age thirteen. Since then, it had been months and months of learning the capacity of a mind-melder helmet. And always under controlled conditions. With rats in a cage just outside the isolation room.

“Three. . .”

This time, it would be different. For the first time — after months of practice — his mind melder shift of consciousness from the isolation room would take him outside the building.

“Two. . .”

At night, sometimes, Damion would run his fingers lightly over the scars, and won-

der about the intertwined mysteries of consciousness and memory and thought and sleep, all contained within the billions upon billions of neurons packed into soft gray matter within his skull. His five senses generated an awareness — consciousness — of what was happening around him. He was also a sum of the memories of a lifetime of consciousness. Those billions of neurons generated new thoughts — and decisions based on those thoughts — from what he'd learned and kept in his memory. As for sleep, science had yet to determine why humans needed sleep. Only that without it, they would die.

“One. . .”

At night, when Damion touched the scar and imagined the bone cap removed and how his exposed pulsating brain must have looked to the surgeon all through the ten-hour operation, he would think about how sleep transported him into an entirely different level of consciousness. Those billions of neurons packed into his skull would shut out all of the five senses and take him to a different awareness. For eight or so hours out of every twenty-four, his body no longer existed to him. Nor did the physical world. Yet his thoughts and decisions would continue to churn away down the pathways of his neurons, creating a world of dreams, hazy at times and at other times, terrifyingly clear. In sleep, the reality created within his neurons would replace the reality of a world brought to him by his five senses.

Consciousness. Memory. Thought. Sleep. So familiar yet so mysterious. All created

through billions of tiny chemical reactions fired from neuron to neuron. Reactions that created equally tiny waves of measurable electricity.

“Dark.”

The lights dimmed to nothing. His vision delivered a black slate. He waited for a rippling sensation in his thoughts. When it arrived seconds later, as if sending him into a vivid three-dimensional dream, came bright sunshine and arid heat and choking dust and a primal blood lust and the coppery taste of fear.

Chapter Two

In that same moment, Damion felt the thump of his paws against heat-baked ground. He saw tall brown grass first, then beyond it to zebras, leaping away from him in huge bounds of panic.

His conscious thoughts had shifted from his own body in the isolation tank in a sleeping state — into a host lion in the middle of a hunt. Except now, his brain wasn't generating the thoughts and images that occurred during a dream. Via a drone above the lion and through a series of satellites that orbited the planet, Damion's brain was collecting the actual sights and sounds and tastes and smells and sensations registered in a series of bio chips embedded in the brain of the lion. In return, through a second set of bio chips tied into the motor cortex of his brain and in the lion's — the part of each of their brains that controlled muscle movements — Damion would be able to control the movements of the lion as if it was his own body.

In this moment, flooded by the sensory impulses from the lion's brain, Damion understood that fear had its own smell, the coppery tang from the zebra in front of him that made the lion almost irrational with blood lust, spurring some twenty-five feet through the air with each leap as it raced to kill.

But this was a disastrous time to make the mind meld shift into a host body.

Images from the drone's camera should have warned them back at the lab that the

lion was stalking the zebras and ready to give chase. The mind meld connection should have been delayed until the lion had finished the hunt.

The plan had been for him for the connection to take place as the lion was in a lazy stroll across the savanna. That way, Damion could take time to adjust to the shift in consciousness. From experience, Damian knew he needed to live inside an animal's brain for a couple of minutes before taking complete control of its movements. He would have preferred easing into it to give himself a chance to understand the lion's full athletic ability.

Especially since this was the first animal he'd control in real-life conditions instead of the laboratory.

This was in the middle of the intensity of a hunt. At this speed, Damion's instincts told him it was too dangerous to try to control the lion this soon. It would be like racing a Formula One car at two hundred miles an hour without first taking practice laps around the track to get a feel for the brakes and gas pedal and steering wheel.

It was too late for Damion to wonder about why the mind meld connection had not been delayed. The lion's world had become Damion's world. Until the chase ended, the best thing Damion could do was go along for the ride.

And what a ride.

Damion felt the amazing power of the lion's legs — no, now *his* legs — as his massive front paws thumped the earth below his body. His rear paws touched down next,

almost passing the front paws. Briefly, all four paws were centered below him. This coiled his body. He released his body again, and became a giant spring stretching through the air. In the next instant, his front and rear paws were almost ten feet apart. His claws were still retracted. He weighed over five hundred pounds, and he needed to let the pads of his paws take the pounding against the earth. The claws would come out only when a final leap would put the zebra within reach.

There was dust. There was heat. There was the drumming of the zebra's hooves as it twisted and turned with each leap. But most of all, there were waves of fear that came in a coppery smell from the zebra's body. It knew it had been singled out and that Damion was closing in.

Yet Damion could feel the energy get sucked from his body. He could feel the lion's body begin to overheat. He was fast, but only in short bursts. The race would be won — or lost — in the next few seconds.

The smell of fear gave him a last burst of energy that came with a sensation of savage joy. This was what he was built to do. Kill!

Damion felt his host lion gave one final push. He was there! He stretched through the air. His front paws were ready to rake the zebra's rear quarters as he came down. He felt the click of his claws suddenly becoming extended razor blades, able to tear through the animal's hide in a flash.

In mid-air — a split second before his claws tore into the zebra's muscles —

Damion's peripheral vision caught a tan blur. He had no chance to react. The blur became a solid physical sensation, tumbling his body sideways into the dry earth of the savanna. He rolled and rolled and rolled, feeling the sensation of the lion's body against each bump of rock and each dip in the earth, his vision showing the blue of the sky, the brown of the earth, the blue of the sky, the brown of the earth until finally he stopped.

He was in a lion body weighing hundreds of pounds. Groggy. Trying to comprehend what had just happened.

Chapter Three

With the hunt over and no immediate danger in front of him, halfway across the planet in the isolation tank, Damion used his thoughts to command himself to wiggle. This caused electrical signals to light up the neurons of his own brain and sent her to the lion's brain and through its nervous system into the lion's muscles.

Damion felt the lion body wiggle.

He knew the lion's awareness of the world would disappear for the lion, as if it had fallen asleep. Just like on the other side of the world, Damion had no sense of own body in its passive sleep mode in the isolation tank.

He imagined he was trying to rolling his on body onto his feet, and the lion did.

Now all four legs, the lion swayed a little. It always happened like this. It took thirty seconds or so for the mind meld to fully take control of the host animal. Early on, sometimes a host rat had fallen over when Damion was sloppy with his mind melding.

Damion looked back at where the zebras where disappearing in thundering cloud. He saw another lion emerge from the dust. Large. No mane.

Female.

Instinct told him was the beast that had attacked him in mid-air.

Damion still had not taken complete control of the lion's muscles. Damion felt him-

self brace his front legs, his chest wide and powerful between them. He drew air and roared in anger. He'd heard lion roars in the videos he had studied ahead of time to prepare for this. But the raw intensity startled him and gave him a thrill of power.

The female lion showed no fear, and instead gave a quick shrug of massive shoulders. Its lips formed a smile, and it made a weird noise that Damion decided was some kind of laugh.

As it moved closer, Damion saw a square black tag inside the right ear of the lioness. Just like the one in his lion ear. The lioness was not there to attack. The black tag meant that the lioness he faced had once too had been captured and implanted with bio chips in its brain. Which meant this animal was being controlled by the only other person in the world with a custom-made Mind Melder helmet and similar brain chips.

Amelia Farrow.

* * *

Damion knew at this moment, too, Amelia's body was back at the Neville laboratory halfway across the planet, floating in darkness and silence in an isolation tank in another room, nothing to distract her from sensations flooding her brain from the body of the host female lion.

She, like Damion, was a rescued orphan with no other apparent family ties.

She, like Damion, spoke little about the traumas of her past or why she had become a runaway from the social welfare net.

She, like Damion, had decided the best chance for the best future was outside of society, in accepting the ten-hour operation and months and months of training that went with it.

In this moment on the savannah, mind melded to his host lion, Damion saw Amelia as the lioness in front of him. But his transferred consciousness meant that he was just as much a prisoner to his own memories, stored in the pathway of neurons of a physical brain receiving life support through his motionless body in his own isolation tank.

This prison of consciousness meant that he could not escape the image that came to mind of Amelia herself. And the emotions that came with it.

She was almost as tall as he was. Her hair blonde, but none of it remained because her head too, needed to be shaved bald for the perfectly molded fit of her mind melder helmet. It was her green eyes and the curve of his lips when she smiled, and the smoldering mystery behind those eyes and smile that haunted and taunted Damion.

Sometimes she laughed at Damion's jokes. Sometimes she didn't. And still, he kept trying to impress her without showing that he was trying to impress. Too dangerous, he thought, if she knew the feelings about her that he wanted to avoid. And too complicated, if Neville ever knew how her smile affected him.

Both were here for the missions they had accepted, that's what Damion told himself each day. Nothing more, nothing less.

Except it made no sense to the mission that she had used the lioness body to knock

him out of the air.

As part of his training, Damion knew that humans formed words because their vocal cords and tongues were uniquely shaped to form the dozens of different sounds of language. Even if a lion knew how to speak, it was physically impossible.

But with lab rats, he had repeatedly tried anyway, and all he'd managed to do was squeak in various pitches of sound. Watching video of it later, he and Amelia had always giggled.

It wouldn't hurt to try from a lion's body, he thought. In his mind, he formed the words *how come you just tackled me?*

But sounds came out of the lion's throat in a Scooby Doo fashion that no human would recognize.

The lioness in front of him shook her head from side to side as if he was just a silly boy, which is how he often felt in Amelia's presence when they were both occupying their human bodies.

Damion gave a huge growl in response, knowing it was merely for his satisfaction. He might be the bigger male here, a hundred pounds heavier than the lioness body that Amelia controlled, but had never seen Amelia intimidated by anything.

After the token growl stopped rumbling from his chest, Damion swung his head around to survey the area. Running at a full sprint put a lot of heat stress on a lion's body. The best way to cool down was water.

Time to appeal to a higher power, one that had remained silent far longer than he'd expected.

Damion squatted on his haunches and looked upward and held out his front legs and pushed the paws together as if forming praying hands.

"Very funny," a voice said from the black speaker tag inside his ear. "What do you want?"

That patient voice had guided Damion through the months and months of mind melding practice with laboratory rats. Although Damion would never have uttered the words, the face behind that voice reminded him of the image on KFC boxes, for Neville Hill sported the same type of goatee, glasses and early graying hair as Colonel Sanders.

Neville could afford not to care about what anyone thought of his looks, however. He was one of the richest software developers on the planet. Some software billionaires developed electric cars or planned trips to other planets and spent time in the media getting famous for it. Not Neville. After selling his software, Neville had retreated from public view. In total secrecy, he had invented the mind melding brain chips as part of his goal to help endangered species and ecosystems across the world. Then he had searched out and recruited Damion and Amelia to help him with his ambitions.

Remaining squatted, Damion pointed at Amelia with one paw, then slapped the side of his head with that paw, then with both paws, made a motion of rolling over. Finished with this, he lifted a paw to each side and made a questioning shrug. It would have

been so much easier with words than acting it out.

“No time to eat,” Neville said. “That’s why I had Amelia knock you away from the zebra. If you’d have taken it down, it would have been tough for us to get the host animal to ignore the need to eat.”

Damion cocked his head as a question. It would have been so much easier to talk. But an animal’s vocal cords did not allow for the complicated sounds of human speech.

“If your host animal gorged on all that raw meat,” Neville explained. “Its body would have needed hours of sleep to digest it. Worse, you would have needed to drink gallons of water to digest it, and that would have slowed you down.

Damion could survive without food. But not water. And the zebra chase had heated him up.

He made a drinking motion with one paw. *Thirsty.*

“Over the next hills to the river,” Neville answered. “At a direction of two o’clock.”

For night travel or for when clouds got in the way of the drone’s camera, each of their other lions’ ears held GPS tags that sent constant location to the drone. But during the day, they could rely on visual directions from Neville as he supervised his television screen back at the laboratory.

From the view point of the drone, Neville would give directions in reference to the sun’s position. Damion glanced at the sky, and then the ground. He drew a mental circle below his chin, and imagined the top of the circle was twelve o’clock, pointed at the

sun. Two o'clock would take them at a shallow angle to their right.

Amelia started moving. Damion followed.

"I want to remind you to find a pace that you can keep for as long as possible,"

Neville said. "But you can't go easy either. It's already been a half hour since we activated the brain chips on your host animals. The clock is ticking."