

Level Up

Sample Chapter

Alex Laugalis

Alex Laugalis  
W2605 Kammel Coulee Rd  
Coon Valley WI, 54623  
[alexlaugalis@gmail.com](mailto:alexlaugalis@gmail.com)

I'm so tired of being so tired,  
just looking around  
it's the same  
it's so lovely everyday.  
Then why do I feel so strange?

I always wanted to be on another level. No matter what level I was currently on, I always wanted to be on the next level. Whichever level my internal Mario was on was a moot point; he is in a race against time to get to the next level. I needed to advance. I was always running through my 4D version of the left to right 2D classic only hitting the pause button for some shitty sleep. Sleep was like hopping into the green tunnel at the end of the level. Sleep was like that moment when the NES was thinking *really hard* about how to generate the next world. It wasn't paused for long and before I knew it, I was running again. To where? Who the fuck knows. Which world? Who cares, all that mattered was that the little 64 bit hero in my mind would have something **new** to run left to right through.

I was my own real life Mario but with way more bits. Every day I would wake up and my brain would tell my legs to go. Then the legs would go, and thoughts and feelings would follow. Meandering through my own version of worlds 1 through 8 (plus bonus worlds obviously), I was always looking for the flag at the end. It was as if achieving that metaphorical flag would trigger that epic anthem and allow the all mighty one who was controlling Mario to have 8 seconds of relief before inevitably, the next run around began.

*When the metaphorical flag theme strikes us we wish it would stay like that forever. But it usually is gone by the time we realize it. Why?*

I ran around all day looking for flags. Different phases, different times, different worlds, different lives I sought and preferred different flags. No flag would ever bring the ultimate level of contentedness, always would just leave me wanting the next flag and that next moment with the epic theme song. I think I went on like this basically until the unfortunate (or maybe fortunate?) event I described in the **Overture**. Until I learned that I was not a 4D bit Mario tra-lala-ing through my bubble life and actually living (or more precisely dying) I was just following paths to flags, looking for checkpoints, **trying to level up**.

In Mario (before he got all 3D and fancy) he could only run to the right. If you went a certain distance to the right you could no longer go back to the left. It basically ceased to exist. As this real, warm and abundant blood poured out of my **side hole** I realized we are like Mario. I realized we don't get to go back. We don't get to redo. We don't get a continue when we die (well, at least not in the same way as Mario). As I watched my Mario juice spill out from my **kidney** I wasn't concerned with the good deal on a washing machine I had gotten earlier that day. I wasn't concerned with whatever the fuck I had been vainly concerned about. I was dying but I was alive. I was really fucking alive. Until this moment I never actually knew what it meant to be alive. I thought I did. But I didn't. I thought there were levels and flags involved, but there aren't.

*Hey buddy, don't tell the whole story in the introduction...*

“Why are there words suddenly appearing from the right? Wait. Why am I in quotes? Actually, who am I?”

Well, center-quote-guy, you are someone. That much we can see...

This is not a book about getting stabbed, leveling up, rescuing princesses, video games, violin, guitar, neurological disorders, Tai Chi, our bodies, or anything involving **leveling up** which would somehow imply **better**. Although we do discuss all of these things. This story, this book, this play, this poem, this...

*We aren't even quite sure...*

...is stories that answer questions. When you see a master musician performing are they really on the stage before you? Where is their mind? Is it just a process how a materialist might say “music is just vibrations in the air” or how an idealist would put it “music is not just sound, it is an emotional experience.” But think about the player and not the audience. How does the player harness this energy while utilizing virtuoso techniques and, as the audience says, “makes it look easy?” I find this phenomenon of the “space between” that a musician in performance (or more importantly developed in practice) might experience as an idea felt and studied among religions and philosophies from many different corners of the world. What is happening in our minds and, like the masters, can we control it while we play a violin concerto or even while we walk the dog or type on the keyboard? This is not just for violinists.

This is mental Kung Fu for all.

This Kung Fu violin theory that can be applied to anyone doing anything. Remember these ideas and practice them when you are in a Mario-esque situation and metaphorically flag hunting and searching for the princess. When you find a flag, how do you keep this feeling? How do you move like you are perpetually hearing the flag's theme song? How does everything go (more importantly, stay) in **easy mode**?

“Are we on a stage or around a campfire? It feels like both. Why do I suddenly have a violin in my hands? Am I the patsy?”

It won't tell you how to do anything exactly, there are no definite instructions. But it will change your perspective on **how** you do **what** you already do. Maybe, the new perspective on **how** will open the door to something **new** that you can do to pass the time. Unlike Mario, we do not have the option of a predetermined walk through. We aren't automatically rewarded with a hot babe in a pink dress just for cruising through some levels after eating mushrooms. There is no definite route or mindset to get us to the ultimate goal of defeating the game.

*So, there are many ways to achieve death?*

*“Do I kill myself with the violin or...”*

Well no, the goal isn't what you call the **ultimate** goal. But like a monk on a Chinese mountaintop, we might want to be a bit more **connected** and **disconnected** simultaneously from the different channels floating through our overcrowded domes. Why do we tune into certain

channels for certain activities and ignore other channels? Why is our work channel seem to be the opposite of our relaxation channel? Where did these channels come from and why do we believe in the truths they slip into our perception? Unlike Mario, we can do more than run, jump, fly and fling fire balls (well, not the last two but you know what I mean). We have more choices, directions, ideas and the lovely ability to procrastinate. We use this one often. Often in combination with distraction. I mean, we have infinite lives like Mario right? When there is a lot to do it is easier to just procrastinate. It is easier to imagine that someday we will do it perfectly rather than risk fucking it up. We don't want the possibility of perfection to be ruined by an actual attempt. Better to just imagine that **someday** sort of perfection and just keep dreaming. A fear of many beginner violinists (adult ones) is that they will play a bad sounding note. They have this fear to the extent that they may never even begin playing no matter how badly they want to. Then when they do begin, it will seem like they are doing two heart surgeries ambidexterously after drinking 12 coffees. Yet, when they imagine playing it they are Lindsay Sterling or Itzak Perlman. Why then, can't they channel that channel when they begin playing?

“So like, why do we suck at stuff when we start?”

*Because, we don't know how to begin with Wu Wei. We only know how to find it after a long period of time has passed.*

“Wait what is Wu Wei? Why am I in quotes?”

*You are the so called “student” who we need to ask questions to drive the narrative.*

Let's name him Chongo.

*“Who is the right aligned italics guy? And what does the violin or Chai lattes have to do with anything?”*

*Tai Chi...*

“I get it, so he like answers stuff? So why violin and chai tea?”

I wouldn't worry about your prior knowledge of violin and Tai Chi. I just happened to make these observations through my experience as a violinist. We will discuss some *Aha!* moment sort of discoveries that have led me to a new mode of thinking. Some sort of **Easy Mode** for any hypothetical version of Mario (you). Like most philosophies, I did not invent anything I have just observed it, practiced it and found a way to explain it. And no, skipping ahead will not reveal some big secret, there is nothing hidden, but once you reach the end of this book you will pick up a violin, or a pen or a fork completely differently than you did before.”

The things we need and the amount of effort required to physically and mentally move throughout our day are terrifyingly simple (think mountaintop monk who spends all day seemingly doing nothing). Yet, the things we believe we need and the amount of effort we actually exert unnecessarily is astronomical. This imaginary yet heavy burden is what has led human beings to constantly be looking for cheat codes. We crave simplicity in the most

complicated ways. We always need more to relax or have to go through a shitload of green tunnels and flag hunts to really get to unwind. Why is it so difficult to get to relaxation, isn't it built in already? Why aren't we always in **easy mode**?

“What does this have to do with the violin and Wu Wei? Whatever that is.”

The violin is an instrument that is well known to be incredibly difficult. This instrument requires great patience and skill. Actually, unless you play it, you can't really be sure what in fact it requires, I mean, how could you? But for the purpose of this book, it makes for an excellent vessel to draw parallels and explain our deeper idea. So in order to paint the big picture, we will use the lens of the violin and a bit of Tai Chi as well to explain. This way, you will have something a bit more concrete to follow along with, something to visualize to go along with the ideas. Like I said, you may not play violin or Tai Chi after this book but you will pick things up differently.

“Why are some words in **bold**?”

Well...

*I've got this one.*

*A lot of the concepts we will discuss flow in and out of each other. There are multiple facets to consider and different vessels like the violin to understand them through. The system of bold words incorporated throughout the book is our attempt to keep a plethora of strings tied together.*

“I see what you did there...”

Also we encourage you to read slowly. Take time between chapters. Go about your day and see what you notice. There is no rush to finish the book the benefit is in learning the process. Remember, partially, we are contemplating laziness and procrastination, don't think too much.

*Float your way through this book.*

Go slow, ponder and wonder. There is no harm in trying a new perspective, only the potential for improvement.

Enjoy.