



The Brainrush Series

Brainrush is a story about second chances, and embracing every day of your life as though it's your last. Called "a terrifically entertaining thriller" by Publishers Weekly, Book-1 of the series was named *The Wall Street Journal* #1 Bestselling Action/Adventure in their *Guide to Self-Published Big Sellers*, while Book-2 was on the Top-10 Amazon Mystery/Thriller Top Rated list for 53-straight weeks. This set the stage for the blockbuster release of the third book in the series, which was heralded by *Suspense Magazine* as "part science fiction, part thriller, part suspense,

part love story, and part mystery. It's got it all and that's what makes this novel one of the best." The characters live on in the final three books of the series. Books 4 & 5 were released in 2014, and were met with rave reviews. Book-5 was named "one of the best books of the year" by IndieReader.com. *No Refuge*, the final book of the series, is scheduled for release in 2017.

Back Cover Text

The Enemy of My Enemy (Brainrush 2)

The Enemy of My Enemy was on the Top-10 Amazon Mystery/Thriller Top Rated list for 53-straight weeks.

Bestselling author Richard Bard returns with his highly rated Brainrush thriller series, pitting hero Jake Bronson against his jihadist nemesis--and a new bioweapon that threatens the soul of every mother in America.

When a freak accident gave Jake Bronson near-superhuman mental powers and landed his loved ones in the crosshairs of an Islamic terrorist, the only way out was with guns blazing. But Jake was unable to put a stop to his nightmares or his murderous nemesis, Luciano Battista, in that ferocious Afghan mountains showdown. Now the terror czar and his minions have brought the fight to American soil--along with the most terrifying bioweapon that has ever threatened the free world. They demand vengeance, and Jake's family and friends are caught in the crossfire.

From California's beaches and Mexico's deserts to the depths of a raging underground river and the treacherous Venezuelan jungle, Jake and his unlikely alliance of combat veterans and gangsters wage a rolling war of wits, weapons, and indomitable will--to rescue those they love, to save America from extinction, and to stop a madman's bid for global conquest dead in its tracks.

The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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Dedication

For my sister, who uses a smile to push through adversity.

The Enemy of My Enemy

Brainrush 2

Richard Bard

Part 1

Chapter 1

One thousand feet above Redondo Beach, California

JAKE SUSPECTED HE WAS ABOUT TO SIGN his own death warrant.

“You want to run that by me again?” he said, hoping to buy a few precious minutes. He edged back on the stick to put the open-cockpit Pitts Special aerobatic biplane into a shallow climb. Their altitude needed to be at least three thousand feet AGL—above ground level—if he was to have any chance of surviving the desperate maneuver. Using one of the rearview mirrors mounted on the side of the cowling, Jake watched the passenger seated behind him. The man’s image vibrated in harmony with the engine’s RPM.

“You heard me, Mr. Bronson.” The first-time student held up a cigarette-pack-sized transmitter that had two protruding toggle switches and a short antenna. He peeled open his jacket to reveal a vest lined with thin panels of plastic explosives.

“I throw the switch and...”—he paused, his eyes vacant, and then said—“...paradise.” His lips curved up in a smile. “I’m ready to meet Allah. Are you?”

The vintage leather helmet that was Jake’s trademark style statement blunted the sound of the wind rushing up and over the windscreen, but the menace in the guy’s tone came through loud and clear on his headset. Jake inched the throttle forward, steepening the climb, passing through twelve hundred feet.

The hawk-faced man in the backseat was in his early twenties. He’d ambled into the flight training school like a young cowboy walking into a Texas bar, wearing boots, hat, and a drawl to match. When he insisted on “the wildest ride ever,” the head flight instructor had turned to Jake with a smile and said, “He’s all yours.” The newbie had been filled with a wide-eyed enthusiasm that Jake found infectious. It reminded him of his own excitement over a decade ago when he’d gone on his first acro flight in a T-37 during air force pilot training.

But the endearing Southern drawl was gone now and the man allowed his natural Dari accent to accompany his words.

“I’m not a fool, Mr. Bronson,” he said, apparently looking at the altimeter in the rear cockpit. “Regardless of how high you take us, we shall both die. Your fate was sealed four months ago

when you blew up my village. Ninety men from my tribe died in the blast. My friends, my brothers.”

Jake grimaced at the reminder. His actions had sparked the explosion that brought the mountain down on the terrorist village. He deeply regretted the loss of life, but given the choices he faced at the time, there’d been no alternative.

The man sat taller in the seat and a rush of pride crept into his voice. “I am Mir Tariq Rahman, and it is profoundly fitting that the enhancements to the brain implant I received—largely as a result of what our scientists learned studying *you*—shall become your undoing. My newfound talents made it so very simple for me to get past airport security and immigration. I’ve walked freely through your malls and amusement parks, attended baseball games, and eaten popcorn at the movies. I purchased a car and rented an apartment. I infiltrated your decadent society and remained above suspicion while I watched you and those close to you. Planning...dreaming of this moment.”

The revelation jolted Jake. The last of the implant subjects was supposed to be dead. News reports had confirmed it. There had been a desperate shootout with US immigration officials as the three jihadists attempted to enter the country through Canada. The evidence had been compelling, right down to the implants found in their skulls. The news had come as a blessing since each of those men had deep-seated reasons for wanting to see Jake and his friends dead. At the time, Jake had discounted a gut feeling that it had all seemed too good to be true.

If he lived through the next few minutes, he swore he’d never make that mistake again.

As if reading Jake’s mind, the man said, “You believed we were all dead, yes?”

“I read the reports.”

“Of course.” He sounded amused. “The sheikh’s final three subjects, killed at the border. One careless mistake and they are gone. At least that’s what authorities were led to believe.” His tone turned contemplative. “The three martyrs chosen for the deception died with honor. They served a divine purpose under Allah’s plan. As do we all.”

Jake centered the man’s face in the small mirror. It was difficult to judge the expression behind the helmet and goggles, but there was no mistaking the determined clench of the jaw or the satisfied smile. This was a man not just ready to die; he was anxious to die. Thank God it’s happening up here, Jake thought, away from my friends. He banked the wings westward to angle the plane past the crowded beaches eighteen hundred feet below.

“I wouldn’t turn just yet,” the man said with an unnerving calmness. “There’s something you’re going to want to see first.”

Anxious to keep the guy talking, Jake switched to Dari. “Why should I even listen to you?” He spoke in a dialect that matched that of his assailant’s tribe. He’d learned to speak the difficult language in less than a week following the freak accident that had transformed his brain into an information sponge. “If I’m going to die anyway, it’s going to be on my terms.” He steepened the bank westward toward the ocean.

“You are more predictable than you are observant, Mr. Bronson.” Tariq held up the device, pointing at the switches. “Aren’t you the least bit interested to learn why there are two toggles?”

Jake tensed. His mind raced through a myriad of possibilities, none of them good. He leveled the wings and edged the throttles forward. He needed to gather as much speed as possible as he continued their steady climb.

“That’s better,” Tariq said. “Steer a heading of zero-one-zero.”

Jake checked his instruments. The new heading would take them over the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

Ocean on three sides. That would work.

He complied, adjusting their heading, passing through 2,200 feet.

“Okay,” Jake said. “Tell me about the second switch.” He watched as his passenger leaned over the port edge of the cockpit, as if looking for something down below.

“There!” Tariq pointed to a bend in the shoreline ahead.

Jake banked the aircraft to get a look. It took him only a second to realize he was over Malaga Cove.

Francesca’s school.

Tariq held up the transmitter, his thumb hovering over the second button. “Now it’s your turn to pay.”

Instinct took over.

Though Jake knew he was still too low for the maneuver, he didn’t hesitate. Slamming forward the throttle, he dumped the nose and yanked the Pitts into an eighty-degree power spiral.

Chapter 2

*Hathaway Middle School
Malaga Cove, California*

FRANCSCA KNEW HOW IMPORTANT routine and structure were to her autistic students. Children who understand the behavior expected of them are less anxious, especially when they're given schedules and visual reminders as they need to move on to the next task or activity.

It was story time. She read aloud from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*—the chapter where young Tom and Becky found themselves hopelessly lost in the caves. She sat on the floor with her legs tucked to one side under the spread of her full-length knit skirt, her thick auburn hair spilling onto an olive cashmere sweater. The book was in her lap. Her soft Italian accent caressed each word of the story, punctuating the growing sense of danger in the scene.

“Under the roof vast knots of bats had packed themselves together, thousands in a bunch; the lights disturbed the creatures and they came flocking down by hundreds, squeaking and darting furiously at the candles...”

Ranging between the ages of seven to ten, the children were captivated by her words. They sat in a semicircle within the designated “imagination zone” at the back of the classroom, each on a different-colored pillow. A Mickey Mouse clock on a stool next to Francesca allowed them to count down the time until the session was over.

Francesca glanced up to absorb their reaction to the story. She cherished her time with these marvelous children. Her graduate education in child psychology and a natural empathic ability helped her guide them through the challenges they faced.

Unlike most children suffering from autism or other spectral disorders, these children had joined Francesca's unique class because they were exceptionally gifted in some way. Nature had provided a unique balance in each of them, replacing the loss of their interactive social skills with a genius-level talent. Three of the children were amazing artists, two with oil and the other with pen and ink. The images they created were astoundingly lifelike. Another had a remarkable affinity for memory and numbers, able to perform complex mathematical calculations in his head in a matter of seconds. Two of the children were natural musicians, including seven-year-old

Sarafina, who could simultaneously compose and play masterful music on the piano, each score reflective of her mood at the time.

Francesca loved each of them for their indomitable spirit.

A nine-year-old boy seated on a plush green pillow raised his hand. He wore an Indiana Jones T-shirt over baggy jeans and sneakers. An unruly mop of blond hair and oversized dark sunglasses covered much of his cherubic face, but twin dimples at the corners of his generous lips hinted of mischief. A golden retriever with a guide-dog harness was sprawled on the floor next to him. As the boy's hand came up, the dog immediately raised his head.

Francesca glanced at the clock. She smiled when she confirmed that story time had ended exactly when Josh put up his hand. Though he was blind, his internal clock was every bit as accurate as any expensive timepiece. "Yes, Josh?"

"Miss Fellini, why can't Tom and Becky just walk out the caves the same way they came in?"

"That's a good question," Francesca said. "Apparently they couldn't remember all the turns they made."

Josh's face screwed up into a question mark.

Francesca shared a knowing smile with the teaching assistant seated behind the group. "Well, Josh," the man said. The children turned his way as he spoke. "Not everyone has a memory like yours. Most people would find it very difficult to keep track of *every* turn."

Bradley Springfield dwarfed the tiny wooden desk chair he sat on. He was in his late twenties, two inches over six feet tall, and had the trim body of an avid cyclist. The rich tan of his skin and a jaguar-like grace reminded Francesca of the star soccer players from her home in *Italia*. He wore light Dockers, a button-down white shirt with rolled-up sleeves, and an Ohio State baseball cap he never took off. The children adored him.

Josh scratched his chin as he considered Bradley's comment. Finally he said, "Then they shouldn't have gone in the cave in the first place."

"I can't argue with that, big guy."

"Well, I can!" Sarafina said in a voice that came out much louder than she intended. When everyone turned her way, she immediately dipped her head forward so that her dark shoulder-length hair hid most of her face. The fingers of one hand danced unconsciously on her lap, playing an unheard melody on an imaginary keyboard. She wore a pink sundress and sandals sprinkled with sparkles.

She peeked up tentatively with a pleading expression that accented her big brown eyes. “I...I mean, sometimes when you’re on an adventure, you have to take chances, right? Otherwise it wouldn’t be a real adventure.”

Francesca knew Sarafina was drawing on memories of her own recent escapades—the painful portions of which she’d learned to bury in the past few months. She’d met the girl three years ago at the Institute for Advanced Brain Studies in Venice, Italy, after Sarafina’s parents had been killed in a car accident. Francesca had been a teacher at the institute, specializing in children with mental and emotional challenges. She’d cherished the position—until she’d discovered that the institute was a cover for an international terrorist organization.

When she and Sarafina had been taken hostage and held in the caves of the Hindu Kush mountains, it was the courage of Jake and his friends that helped them narrowly escape with their lives. After the institute was closed down, the child was alone, and Francesca was determined to protect her. But Italian law prohibited adoption by a single parent, so she acquired the help of a local magistrate—a long-term family friend—and was appointed Sarafina’s guardian. The friend helped Francesca secure the documents necessary to allow them to travel to the United States.

“You make a good point, *cara*,” she said. “But you shouldn’t take risks that could end up getting you into—”

Francesca stopped when she heard the buzz of an aircraft outside.

It sounded like Jake’s plane.

Chapter 3

Malaga Cove, California

WITH A FLOOD OF CONCENTRATION, Jake swept the plane into a spiraling dive, thankful for the Pitts's exceptional control response and maneuvering abilities. The move loaded the airframe with over eight g's—a multiple of the force of gravity exerted on the body—pushing him and his passenger deep into their seats. After the first rotation, he held the turn steady at five g's.

Everyone had a different tolerance for how much their body could handle before losing consciousness. As a trained fighter pilot, Jake had developed a high tolerance, a factor he was gambling on now. The wannabe martyr in the backseat was great at mimicking a Texas cowboy, but his brain implant wasn't going to help him now.

Jake let out controlled grunts as he tightened the muscles in his torso and legs. This inhibited the pooling of blood in his lower extremities and delayed the loss of blood to his brain. In the end he knew it would be a losing battle. He'd have to ease off on the stick before he blacked out. He just needed to last longer than the man behind him.

Jake's eyes darted from the rapidly falling altimeter to the rearview mirror. Tariq's eyes bulged under his goggles. His facial skin sagged into his chin. His hands and arms were out of view. They'd feel as if they each had hundred-pound weights attached to them. Jake hoped that the force would keep the man pinned down long enough.

He tightened the spiral. The ground spun more rapidly in the windscreen. Francesca's school was dead center beneath him. He didn't alter course. To do so meant reducing g's.

Passing through seven hundred feet.

The ground rushing up fast.

Jake's vision began to tunnel. He focused his mind on the school below and screamed a mental warning to Francesca.

There's a bomb at the school. Get out now!

**

Francesca wondered why Jake was flying so close to the school today. His regular flight-training area was on the other side of the peninsula.

There was a commotion outside. The distinctive sound of the buzzing Pitts grew louder, more urgent. Francesca felt a growing sense of alarm. She rushed to the open window. Josh's dog, Max, was at her side. Sarafina and several others scurried to join them. Josh beelined to his "safe place"—a large cardboard box on its side in a corner of the room. He curled up in the box's shadows and pressed his hands to his ears. Bradley moved to comfort him.

Outside, children scattered on the playground. A teacher shouted and pointed at the sky. Max barked. Francesca shielded her eyes from the sun with her palm and looked up. Jake's plane spiraled toward the ground at an incredible speed. Before the scream could escape her throat, Jake's urgent voice invaded her thoughts:

There's a bomb at the school.

She saw from the shocked expression on Sarafina's face that she'd heard it, too.

**

Jake sensed he wasn't going to make it. The ground was too close. Tariq's eyes had glazed over but he wasn't out yet. Jake needed another second or two. But time had run out.

Two hundred feet. No choice.

In one quick movement, Jake pushed the nose at the ground, leveled the wings, and yanked back on the stick. The accelerometer snapped to ten g's and the Pitts broke out of the dive barely thirty feet over the schoolyard. Jake caught a brief glimpse of children running across the playground before a welcome blue sky filled his windscreen.

In the mirror, Tariq's face paled, his eyes lolled, and his head slumped forward in his seat.

Jake pushed the throttles to the max. He put the Pitts into a high-speed climb toward the Pacific Ocean. He had to move fast. Tariq would regain consciousness in less than thirty seconds. He'd be disoriented for a minute or so, but that wouldn't prevent him from detonating the explosives strapped to his chest.

Or those he'd placed at the school.

At two thousand feet, Jake reduced power and trimmed the nose into a shallow dive toward the water. He unfastened his safety harness and headset, flipped a middle finger to the unconscious man in the backseat, and jumped out of the plane.

Chapter 4

Malaga Cove, California

THE ROUND CANOPY OF THE EMERGENCY CHUTE snapped open above him, jerking Jake from his tumbling free fall into a controlled, eighteen-feet-per-second descent. His pounding heart felt like it wanted to break out of his chest. For just a moment, he felt a slight tingling in his left hand. His breath was short. He sucked in deep lungfuls of air to calm himself. The sensation passed.

The altimeter on his watch read fifteen hundred feet. He was over the water but the breeze was pushing him back toward the shore. In ninety seconds he'd be on the ground, or at least in the breakers. Craning his neck over his shoulder, Jake watched as the Pitts descended toward the dark blue water. The starboard wings of the biplane began a slow dip as it lost trim. In another few seconds, the double wingtips would strike the water and the plane would cartwheel to a gut-wrenching end.

Jake reached for the smart phone he usually kept in his breast pocket. He came up empty-handed. The phone was still in its cockpit holster on the plane. Too bad, he thought. The crash would've made a great YouTube video. In any case, the violent scene he was about to witness would be forever ingrained in his brain. Like so many others.

Jake watched in fascination, counting down the seconds to impact. A small part of him would die with the loss of the Pitts, but *every* part of him was glad to say good riddance to the suicide bomber in the backseat—and the detonator that threatened to blow up the people he loved. He prayed that Francesca had heard his warning.

The Pitts was at eighty feet and dropping fast. The wings dipped farther.

Right...about...n—

The biplane's altitude shifted abruptly. The lower wingtips jerked upward. The whine of the three-bladed prop surged. The plane leveled off just above the undulating water. Every nerve in Jake's body seemed to fire off simultaneously. He jerked his head toward the approaching shore, willing himself to fall faster. Five hundred feet above the water. The school's nearly a mile away.

The drone of the plane behind him increased in pitch. Jake twisted in his harness to get a better look. The Pitts accelerated as it skimmed over the water. It was headed straight for him. It didn't take a genius to calculate that the plane would be on him before he completed his descent. He pulled down on the starboard riser, twisting to face the approaching plane. With both hands on the risers, he fought to maintain his position against the offshore wind.

At three seconds before impact, Jake was sixty feet over the water. The Pitts streaked straight at him.

Two seconds.

Now!

Jake dropped his hands and snapped open the chute's quick-release levers. He slipped out of the harness and fell like a stone.

Before he hit the water, Jake saw the Pitts veer sharply away from the collapsing chute. It headed directly toward Francesca's school.

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