

James's mind book analysis



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

James hazel eyes skimmed over the words for what he knew had to be the twentieth time. His pupils darted back and forth over the lines, dancing rhythmically as they flowed toward the bottom of the page yet again. James could feel his heartbeat quicken with each successive pass over the words. Small beads of perspiration began to form on his forehead, causing it to glisten under the soft, white light shining down from above his head. He felt a sudden pain in his jaw; he unclenched his teeth, which had tightened without his realizing it, relieving the growing pressure in his jaws.

He could feel a low tremble building within his muscles, a product of the fear that was beginning to course through his veins, turning his blood icy.

He inhaled deeply, holding it momentarily before releasing it in a powerful whoosh. He closed his eyes tightly. He stood like that, motionless, for almost a full minute, the only movement coming from his fingers, which ran lightly over the pale white sheet of paper with the typed message.

He listened to the low sshhh sound that wafted up to his ears from the paper. Before realizing that he was doing it, James tore the paper in half and crumpled the two pieces into a tiny ball and hurled it across his small living room, where it bounced lightly from the wall and fell behind the tattered couch.

James put his face in his hands, trying to regain his composure. Tears of fear and rage stung the corners of his eyes. He let out a scream, which was muffled by the palms of his hands. He raised his hands and ran his fingers roughly through his dark hair. His mind reeled at the implications contained

within those now-crumpled words. Questions clouded his thoughts, prohibiting any course of action from being taken.

Where did this letter come from? Who brought it? How did this person get in and out of his house? And, most importantly, how did this person know the things that they did? Hadn't he always been careful? He had always planned meticulously; hadn't he?

James felt his knees tremble slightly as his legs tried to give out. The room tilted to the left as a wave of lightheadedness washed over him, almost sending him to the dirty, yellowed linoleum floor. He reached out blindly, grasping until his fingers found purchase, feeling the smooth, yet slightly bumpy, texture of duct tape. He slid the barstool, well past its best days, towards him, scraping his palm on a torn piece of the vinyl cushion as he did so, and dropped down onto it. Using the first two fingers on each hand, he rubbed his temples softly, trying to focus.

This person obviously knows me, he thought. Somehow they know things that they have no way of knowing. In all the time he had led his double life, carrying out his acts of mischief (to him it was merely mischief. To others it was far more serious), he had never slipped up. He never spoke of his deeds. Under no circumstances did he keep souvenirs or trophies. A single camera, Polaroid or otherwise, was never used. And every single field trip that he took was at least three hours away from his home. He always did the proper reconnaissance beforehand, checking the weather, traffic flow of the town, and the habits of the local civilians. So how could this person possibly know what they do?

James opened his eyes and sat upright as a sudden revelation, what he knew to be nothing but pure truth, dawned on him. The thought came with such ferocity that it almost bowled him over; literally almost knocking him to the floor as he sat up straight.

It's a hoax, he thought. Someone broke in and left that note because they thought that it would be funny. It just struck a nerve because, by some stroke of luck, the house they chose happened to contain a resident with secrets.

James stood up and began pacing the length of his small house. He nodded thoughtfully as the idea worked itself out within his mind. He slowly convinced himself that this could be the only plausible explanation. The idea that someone might know who he actually was was inconceivable. It was downright ludicrous.

What did the note really say; anyway, his train of thought continued as he stepped out of the shower and began to towel himself off. I know exactly who you are and exactly what you've done? Well, that was just too vague for his taste. If anyone really knew anything, they'd say something to prove what they knew. Give an example to authenticate.

Despite his best attempts to reassure himself, James found himself obsessed with the locks, certain that he had forgotten to lock one, leaving him unable to go to bed. He walked through the small, two-bedroom house checking each lock, trying to raise the window afterwards. Once he had made his rounds, he began at the beginning once more, double- and triple-checking the locks.

Stop! He screamed to himself on his fourth pass through the house. This is insane. This type of scared, nervous behavior is the intended result. I won't succumb to that. Now, it's time to go to bed. Leave the locks alone.

And, surprisingly enough, he was able to do just that. He curled up in his bed, grasping his pillow in a tight embrace, and drifted almost immediately to sleep. He slept that way until he awoke the next morning, when he was greeted with absolute terror.

The thin band of yellow morning sunlight slowly stretched across the bed from the crack in the curtains as the sun rose. James rolled over, still clutching dearly at his pillow, shifting the light into his eyes. His eyelids fluttered lightly as he gingerly rose from his sleep. He yawned loudly and stretched, groaning as he did so. His back popped audibly, and he chuckled at the thought of his age finally beginning to catch up to him.

“ Good morning, James,” a gruff male voice said from behind him.

James flipped over quickly and scrambled away from the intruder. Reaching the edge of his mattress, his hand slipped, sending him toppling backwards. His head made a hollow thunk! As it connected with the floor. A piercing pain tore through his mind, and he could feel a trickle of warmth that he assumed was blood begin to run down the back of his head and neck. He pushed the pain aside, focusing his attention on the sudden unwanted guest.

“ Who the hell are you?” he wanted to scream. He wanted to shout at the intruder. To demand answers. He opened his mouth to do just that, but only a small squeak managed to escape his throat. Instead, James did the only

thing that his body would allow; he continued backing away, relishing the illusion of safety that the distance managed to bring, until his back hit the wall just three feet away. He stared at the intruder, eyes wide. His breath was harsh and ragged. He inhaled deeply, unable to control himself. A wave of lightheadedness filled him, the quick, panicked breaths threatening to lose consciousness as he hyperventilated.

“Calm down,” the stranger instructed. “You shouldn’t lose consciousness right now. We have some things to discuss, you and I. I would think that it’s in your best interest to pay attention.”

The stranger sat in the old leather chair in the corner of James’s bedroom. He was lounged back comfortably; legs spread wide, elbows resting on the arms of the chair. A sense of utter calmness radiated from him, as though breaking and entering was the most natural act in the world. A pair of smoky grey eyes stared out from behind the black ski mask that he wore. Those eyes were cold, calculating, showing no remorse. Light glinted from the scalpel that he held in his hands as he twitched it absentmindedly.

“Who are you?” James’s voice cracked and quavered, despite his best attempts to keep it level. “That isn’t important.” The stranger leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “You may call me Teacher, for I am here to educate you. James’s mind reeled. He fought desperately to understand the situation, but comprehension stayed just beyond his grasp. His face twisted into a look of confusion. You have led a horrible life,” the stranger continued, seeing the bewildered look that James wore. “Your education will be one to show you the consequences of such a life; that is

why I am your teacher. It has fallen upon me to show you the error of your ways.”

James opened his mouth to protest, to deny the allegations that had been laid at his feet, but immediately closed it, a single sound unuttered, when the stranger raised his hand and shook his head. The gravity in the intruder’s movement said all that he needed to know: there was no bullshitting his way out of this. No quick thinking, followed up with expertly chosen words, would convince this threatening persona that he had broken into the wrong house, chosen the wrong pupil. Instead, James remained silent. What the stranger said next was enough to confirm both his conclusion and his worst fears.

“ August 10, 1994,” he began. “ You were ten years old. In those days you had an affinity for fire. That night you snuck out of your window, a box of matches that sat on the mantel in hand. You wandered the streets for over an hour before finding the right location. It was a small, wooden house a few blocks from your own. You struck the match, using it to light a pile of dried sticks and leaves that you had placed by the front door.”

James’s eyes continued to grow as he listened to the details of his life being recalled to him. The interloper spoke in a monotone voice, reciting the tale as if he were reading from cue cards.

“ When the pile was lit, you rang the doorbell and ran. What you were unaware of was that an elderly woman lived there, all alone. She had taken out her hearing aid before bed, so she didn’t hear the doorbell. It didn’t take long for the old, dried wood to catch fire, quickly setting the house ablaze. The woman died in her bed. She never had a chance.”

The Teacher stood up, staring down at James with reproach. “ That was the first person to die at your hands, but it wasn’t the last. Although it was an accident, you found that you had a taste for murder. You craved it. It became an addiction, your own private heroin.”