

C. Futures

Word count: Approx 7492

The PUP

(The Parallel Universe People)

3:33 A.M.

Jason had opened his eyes and peered across the dark dormitory room at the glowing orange numbers perched on top of the dresser. The numbers were stated simply and without fanfare.

He flopped his head back into his soft pillow, let the sides of the pillow cover his ears and fell back to sleep.

4:44 A.M.

Jason again peered at the clock face. He dimly noted in his mid-dream fog that the numbers were all the same. But he had awoken. He spent a moment staring at the ceiling above his head in the dim light provided by the outside lantern down the street. Then he buried his head in his soft pillow, and went back to his dream.

5:55 A.M.

Jason woke and looked at the clock face. The orange glow was pale in the early morning light. It was only five

minutes to six when the alarm would go off. He hopped out of bed, shut off the alarm and he started thinking of the day's list of critical assignments: one written test, one oral exam, and one playoff game of soccer in the evening. Then he was off to the dorm shower a few doors down the hallway.

Jason's day went fairly well. He thought he'd done OK on the written exam, the rest of his classmates and professor seemed satisfied with his oral responses to questioning on the deforestation of South America, and he was feeling like he had some energy heading into the late afternoon before the soccer game.

Jason glanced at the clock in the study hall he was using to wrap up some homework.

4:44 P.M.

Although it was a dial clock it was clearly marked and the time was definitely 4:44. Something tugged at the back of his mind, like he was supposed to be remembering something. He flipped through his notes to see if there was anything he had forgotten but it all seemed to be covered.

Later that evening his game went well. He fell into bed at midnight - later than his liking.

2:22 A.M.

Jason woke, lifted his head, peered at the glowing orange numbers on the clock, the only things visible in his dark room. They seemed to pulse in the dark night. He dimly thought of things that involved the number two and slowly put his head back in his pillow. He wondered who could be pranking him and how. He made a mental note to keep better track of the clock events. Then he fell back to sleep.

3:33 A.M.

Jason woke, looked at the clock, rose up on one elbow to see if anything was in the room that could be disturbing him, didn't see anything, and lay back down.

3:34 A.M.

Jason had looked at the clock again. After a moment of annoyance he was able to once again go to sleep.

4:44 A.M.

"STOP!" Jason yelled to the empty room. "Knock it off and let me sleep!"

5:55 A.M.

Jason groaned, turned, punched his pillow, forced himself out of bed, turned off the alarm and proceeded with his busy day. He vowed to get to sleep earlier in the coming evening.

3:33 P.M.

Jason was in class and noticed the clock on the professor's desk just as it was turning over to 3:33. His mind was drifting and he wondered if the synchronized time announcements were more than a prank. After all, he was in a classroom where no prank of that type was possible. He started to wonder if something was going on, a bit extraordinary, perhaps super-natural; but he resolved that no such thing was possible and snuffed out the thought.

Then, regardless of his determination to ignore the non-physical and, as if guided, his wandering eye lit upon a term paper pinned to the student-return bulletin board. The title read, "Numerology: Ancient Meanings of Numbers". Jason grunted softly, a clue was being presented. He thought of the traditional meaning of numbers, such as "Three", the age-old number representing the trinity, the parts of God, or any number of universal combinations, such as space-motion-time or spirit-mind-matter. Jason shook his head to get himself back to the real world. Time to get back to his studies!

He finished his day without further thought about numbers on clocks and managed to get to sleep by 11 P.M.

4:44 A.M.

"SHUT UP!" Jason hollered, sitting bolt upright in bed. Now he was getting mad. Synchronized wake-up calls

were not welcome. Only an hour and fifteen minutes short of time-to-get-up he flopped back in his bed. Another intruding thought that numerology was being presented was pushed roughly away. Jason flipped sideways in his bed, pulling the pillow over his ears and eyes. Back to sleep he went. Until the alarm woke him at 6 A.M.

The next day was uneventful though Jason's fatigue was intruding on his ability to concentrate. As he tiredly strode into the men's room to wash his face with cold water and to rub and peer at his bloodshot eyes he noticed a magazine thrown in the corner of the entrance. Picking it up, he recognized it as a popular New Age magazine covering all manner of potential subjects. In a caption along the bottom of the front page, smudged as if with hamburger grease, were the words, Learn basic numerology in three basic lessons! Jason almost tossed the magazine in the trash, then, pausing for a moment, remembered his incessant "wake-up calls", rolled it up and stuffed it under his arm. Determined to finish his day a success, he scrubbed his face and returned to his class.

Later, at lunch, he took out the magazine and, as he ate under a tree, browsed the subjects. He focused on an article with a large number of smudges--many of the greasy spots smearing the words sideways from their printed lines.

It seemed, although without any foundation to support this concept at all, that someone had deliberately smudged specific words. Jason scanned through the magazine to see if other pages or articles had the same treatment--none had. The obvious thing to do was to try and make sense of the smudges.

The article was on the historical use of acronym as a shorthand method to communicate. It pointed out that throughout time man had shortened its most used phrases into single words, using the first letter of each word of the phrase. Words like OMG or BFF were good recent examples.

The author had been researching ancient texts discussing the use of pressure points on the body to verify communication between telepathically linked parties. A high priesthood had trained in this method using acronyms. For example, a pressure on the top of the forehead: in a normal in-person meeting, it was touched by the index finger in a wave to say "Good Day". In the telepathic acronym meaning the sensation of pressure was then turned into TOF (Top of Forehead). It really meant: "Top of the Day", or ... "Hello". So one side of the communication would project a pressure on the top of the forehead to mean TOF, or Hello. Then the person on the other side of the

communication would receive the pressure and respond in kind. This assumed that both could project the sensation on the other, something the high priesthood inferred it could do. Far fetched in our materialistic era, this had apparently been accomplished in the past, leaving a record of practical training and application.

Jason had skimmed the article, shaking his head at times. By the end, his eyes were hurting and he felt a bit spinny. He could barely wrap his wits around the concept of using "touch code"; but then it dawned on him--slaves or captives could have easily worked out such a code, and for that matter, game signals in Baseball were similar. Jason relaxed and wondered just how possible it all was. A little too ethereal for his liking, really. He was a practical sort of guy.

He shifted his weight and adjusted his back against the tree. His lean body didn't leave much room for comfort when it came to tree bark and gravel. He touched his forehead just below his hairline. Just a tap. It was light. Nothing. Maybe someone could intend such a feeling onto someone else. He looked around for anyone who would be interested in testing out the theory--but all were on their way to class. As he should be as well. He stuffed the

magazine back into his backpack, rose, stretched, and trotted off to his next class.

In the class after lunch, Jason listened half-heartedly to his professor discuss the evolution of the English language from Old English, to Middle English to Modern English. Jason could smell a term paper assignment in the relish that the professor spoke with as he discussed the shifting elements of the language over the centuries. It was a fascinating subject. Old English really was nearly incomprehensible to a modern American. But English it was!

Jason idly considered the acronym touch based language and wondered if he could find some non-telepathic angles or any examples written by a former slave or prisoner. Perhaps baseball was going to be the easiest resource. It was apparent that any acronym was based on its underlying language and would be different for each group that developed it.

2:22 P.M.

Jason glanced at the clock, saw the time and rolled his eyes. There they were again. Just as he was getting comfortable. He packed his books for his next class. He walked out of the room to the front of the building. As he stepped out of the building and stood at the top of the low-cut broad steps leading down to the grassy quad, it

happened. A pressure in the middle of his forehead, light but persistent. He looked around to see if anyone was looking at him or even noticing. He saw someone leaving a tree across the quad, and paper fluttering at the base of it. Surprised, he hurried down the steps to the tree. The original person had long disappeared. The pressure on his forehead was gone. The paper was there. Another magazine. "Ah Ha!" Jason thought, "now we are getting somewhere ... or so we think." It was hard to be serious about all this silliness. The use of what seemed to be some sort of telepathic means didn't bother him; perhaps due to the lightheartedness.

A new concept was presented to him through another set of smudges in the magazine. This one was Scientific America with an article entitled "Parallel Universes". Jason picked it up carefully, appreciating the genius of the game. He once again rolled the magazine to take and read later.

Safe in an eating booth in the student cafeteria, he unrolled the magazine, and browsed the contents. He read as he leaned over his plate of meat and noodles. The article on "Parallel Universes" seemed to be more carefully engineered with smudges in certain places. Other parts of the magazine had smudges as well. Jason's eyes narrowed as

he detected a possible message in the random smudges. Words that had a truer ring included, "you", "can hear", "us", "parallel", "reality", "communication". By the time Jason was done reading he had acquired the concept that the time prompts, the magazines, the touch code were all coming from some sort of intelligence that considered itself to be in a parallel universe, of sorts. It wasn't clear just what sort of universe it was, but not the same one that Jason was living in.

He put the magazine down in a daze and looked around the cafeteria. It looked just like it always did: too empty, too quiet, with other students working behind the counters to serve the meager food choices, a scattering of students at the tables. He realized the sun had set and he had hours of homework ahead. Well, parallel universe or no, he had to get his degree in this one!

Jason put his magazine in his new little collection and spent the rest of the evening catching up on his homework and preparing for an expected quiz. Fatigued and ready for a good night's sleep he once again fell into his bed just before midnight, giving himself another hour to sleep in the morning.

4:45 A.M.

Jason peered at the clock glowing across the room, "Oh good," he thought, "they let me sleep." After all 4:45 was just a random time.

5:00 A.M.

Another random moment. But he didn't appreciate waking up.

6:00 A.M.

Jason just looked, rolled his dark brown eyes, now underscored by dark fatigue circles, and buried his dark-brown-haired head under his pillow.

7:00 AM.

The alarm went off. Time was up. And Jason was tired...again.

'Not good,' Jason thought to himself as he pulled on his jeans and tee shirt. 'Too tired. This has got to stop.' He resolved to get to sleep early in the new day's evening. Parallel universe people or no.

"Listen up!" he announced to his room. "I need to sleep and your little experiment is just going to have to take a break or go bother someone else...well don't bother someone else just yet, but let me sleep!" He yelled the last phrase to the ceiling. "I'm turning the clock around! And I'm not going to look!"

His tiredness translated into irritation and he stormed off to his shower, not at any time realizing that he had been talking to the equivalent of thin air. Once in the shower, he leaned into the stream of water, letting the heat of it fill his senses and wake up his body. He shook his head to himself, 'I've got to stop meeting them like this,' he joked quietly in his head. A strong pressure hit the outer edge of his right eyebrow. "Ow!" he protested, pushing against the spot. What the hey was this? Right Eye Brow, the concept came to him strongly as he pushed. Right Eye Brow...R.E.B...."Right He Be?" He asked the shower stall turning around to see if anything or anyone was there. The pressure ceased. He removed his fingers and looked at them. Now he was disturbed. This other presence was crowding him and violating his personal space. He growled an image of a dog with hackles raised in the general direction of where the concepts seemed to be coming from. Which wasn't really a direction at all, but whatever, this was getting too complicated! Then another pressure on the Left Eye Brow...L.E.B...Let He Be...the concept was clear.

"I like that one!" he announced to the shower again. "Yes, leave me alone, like NOW!".

Just then the door opened to the shower room as someone entered and Jason fell silent. Luckily the pressures were also quiet and Jason finished his shower without further disturbances.

Jason felt pretty bad that day as he dragged himself through it. He saw another abandoned magazine but ignored it. He made it through his day, pushing the pain of fatigue all the way. True to his promise, he went to bed early and turned the clock around. True to their "L.E.B." promise, he slept undisturbed.

The next morning, woken by a normal alarm clock, Jason laid in bed thinking. Who were these parallel universe people that could make his body feel sensations and played "synchronized clocks"? Just as a test he put out a thought, "Are you there?"

An immediate responding TOF landed on his forehead.

'Creepy,' Jason thought to himself.

6:06 said the clock when Jason involuntarily looked at it.

"Six is a name isn't it?" Jason asked of the room.

REB came the reply.

"And the '0' what's that?"

Jason felt another touch, like someone had lightly kissed him on the lips. He jerked back into his pillow and touched his lips.

"Love?"

REB

"Oh, so six loves six, right?"

REB

"And who is this six?"

His eyes were now drawn to the mirror on his dorm room wall.

"Me?"

REB

Jason made a face. It was time to get up. He considered, quietly to himself as he was starting to notice a difference between "self" thoughts and projected thoughts--projected thoughts that "they" picked up on--that once again the whole process was getting out of hand and was too silly to be pursued. Besides, wasn't he being insulted as someone who was self-centered?

LEB

Oops, he let that last thought slip into projection mode. Well maybe they were just answering a question; no, they had been the ones to mark the 6:06. Whatever, it was

time to get to soccer practice. Something considerably more visible and ordinary!

While he was trotting through the campus to the soccer field, where his team would be warming up for scrimmage, he wondered if anyone else had been introduced to the parallel universe people. He projected the query to the space that he had gotten answers from when in his room but they didn't seem to be answering. He laughed to himself--he was starting to think of this particular mode of telepathy as if it were a mere phone call. How fast one can adjust, he mused. Just days ago the idea of "concept communication" simply wasn't a possible reality. Now he was already treating it like it was second nature. He hadn't even passed the part where he thought he was nuts.

Well, he thought to himself, being woken up with perfectly timed digital numbers on a clock face managed to avert that issue. And, he reminded himself, it wasn't as if he was doing any of the work either!

He was already in his work-out uniform and trotted right onto the soccer field where his team was practicing goal shots. He waved at the players as they waved at him and took his place at the end of the line waiting to do running goal kicks.

His best friend Jon was there and he came around to be next to him. Jon was a wiry Hispanic player with lightening fast feet, and as he came up to Jason's five-foot-eleven-inches, his own five-eight seemed diminutive. No one was fooled by his height though--Jon could steal a ball away from a dribbling player and be half way down the field before the player even knew the ball was missing.

"Hey, where you been?" Jon asked panting a little from the running and kicking. Sweat gave a happy sheen to his healthy physique. Jon wiped his forehead with the back of a tanned hand, smiling all the while.

"Study, study and more study..." replied Jason continuing to jog a little in place to warm-up. "Besides I just saw you the other night!"

"Oh yea," Jon answered, "time flies, no?"

"Si." said Jason, smiling. Jon never failed to have an upbeat and lighthearted approach to life. Unlike Jason's intense drill-down-into-detail approach, which he accompanied with a smoky straight-ahead gaze that unnerved even the nerdiest of professors, Jon was always cheerful.

"Hey, your turn is next," Jon indicated the net and the set-up player sending the ball to the waiting players. "Show me how it's done!"

Jason shook his head, smiling. Jon liked to tease him, knowing that Jason preferred to be modest rather than boastful. But Jason loved to make the spinning goal kicks that kept his fans and coaches happy. They also paid for his tuition since he was on a soccer scholarship. He was warmed up and could feel a great kick coming on. As the placer sent the ball his way in front of the net, Jason smoothly ran up to it and with one well aimed kick, sent the ball spinning into the upper corner of the goal...a kick difficult for any goalie to block. A few of his teammates clapped a little as he headed back to the end of the line.

Later the team was divided up for a scrimmage and Jason was placed opposite Peter, a larger, meatier player. They squared off as opposing forwards as the coach dropped the ball into the starting circle for the first contest. The ball was neatly passed to Jason by Jon at which point Peter moved to steal the ball and simultaneously turned to block Jason--just as Jason was trying to move around him. Their feet tangled and Jason hit the ground on his side, skinning his hand as he tried to stop his fall. Jason slapped the ground in a brief show of irritation at being caught off guard. Just at that moment he was hit with a LEB hard on his left temple, strong enough to almost be

painful. He said "Ow." and put his hand up to his temple, and at the same time behind him he heard "Ow!" from Peter.

He turned to look up at Peter to see Peter also holding his left temple looking around wildly as if for his tormentor.

'Stop!' Jason mentally projected to the "PUP space" he had found they responded to. 'Bad! Down! Leave him alone!' he insisted. He felt like he was calling off a dog that was mistakenly trying to protect him. The sensation eased off. 'Whew, that was a bit much,' Jason thought. He needed to think about this a bit more it seemed. Now he had a watch dog from a parallel universe ... no, a watch puppy!

He had a wonderful instant idea for an acronym that was humorously appropriate: Parallel Universe People that acted like a puppy--makes them PUP's! He laughed to himself as he got up, dusting off his jersey.

"Let's play!" he hollered running back to his position. Every time he thought of his name for his new caretakers he started chuckling; "The men from PUP", "Hi there, take us to your leader, we're from PUP!". At one point, he laughed out loud. A few players looked around to see what was funny and he just waved at them.

After practice Jason was walking to his first class of the day, Ecology 101. He had chosen it as a starter class

to what he hoped would become a unifying major centered on alternate energy resource development. He was wondering what he could do to flush out the PUP a bit more and find out what they could do or what they wanted or even why they existed!

As he walked he tried to project the query to them, What did they want to do?

As an answer his eyes were drawn to the big school clock, which although a dial clock, was clearly showing 12:12. Jason knew from his recent numerology studies that 12 was considered to be the perfect balance of all aspects of the universe. 'Not bad,' he projected the answer, 'Pretty nice goal if I do say so myself,'. He received a responding REB.

Satisfied that he had successfully executed a query, an answer, a confirmation and an acknowledgement, he knew that he had a path to obtain further information.

Over the course of the next few days he mapped out, with their confirmations, an agreement on what different numbers meant. The meanings were similar to various meanings in man's history, but in this case the numbers were not added together, they stood separate and with their own meaning.

Three was already claimed for the trinity, God-like qualities, and top-level unifying laws. Four turned out to be the PUP's own number as four stood for balance, the four directions, animals that stood on four feet, and generally peace and harmony. Five was for a small team; the basic size of a squad that could be formed into larger groups. Six was Jason, or members of his species, i.e. humankind. Seven was reserved for someone else or something else that the PUP wouldn't define but which Jason detected some degree of reverence for. Eight was the universal symbol for infinity, the ultimate spirit, the creator or Supreme Being. Nice to know the Supreme Being was known in more than one universe! Nine had to do with ethics and strength. Ten was the basic team, comprised of two squads. Ten was also the top quality available in any given field. Eleven meant having more than one duty in life - or operating in more than one universe. 'Double Posted' was the literal translation from the double 1's. Oh, and yes, the kiss or "love" number, "0". One meant "won" or "one", single, a thing. Two was usually a couple or "to" as in "toward".

With that mapped out Jason proceeded to see what other touch symbols they had, although the three he had were fairly useful. All the major parts of the body had names or locations and all of these had letters which could

become acronyms. Jason wasn't able to remember the various possibilities but did keep a few more on hand such as "Bridge" from Bridge of the Nose. This meant that one was crossing from one subject to another or advancing in conceptual understanding. Another was rubbing the left eye, which meant, "Are you looking?" (As in, look better or harder) Or rubbing the right eye, which meant that one was seeing something correctly.

Jason played with these concepts and built his "PUP Library" while he walked between classes without giving it too much attention otherwise. He wondered at his own lack of amazement or concern and perhaps it was a quality of theirs but he just couldn't get too excited about it.

There was one more number which was hard to clarify before the shared language had been built enough and this was "22". Per Jason's research (as the PUP approved of research--more material to "LEB" or "REB" about), this number represented, in some settings, the "Master Builder". It signified not only the fully and satisfactory completion of a life cycle or a life mission but also the design and beginning of a new one. This could include the life cycle, not only of a person, but also of a group, planet or even universe. For Jason it also had a secret significance, that being of a love song, the second song, on the second

side of a favorite old vinyl album in his parent's library, "Tumbleweed Connection". Someday he would need to get the actual name of the song so he didn't lose track of it. But he didn't share this tidbit with the PUP, he just tucked it away as something for himself.

The meaning of "22" once it was derived through prodding questions, REB's and LEB's, automatically drew Jason further down the path of finding what his personal master plan might be. It was obviously now complicated with a cross-universe connection, even if not of his own design. But Jason had spent most of his life just going with the flow: soccer, studies, grades, school...nothing too serious and no final decisions just yet. The ecology major idea interested him the most as he loved nature. But there was no burning crusade that he felt was yet his own to pursue.

That reminded him of another question he had for the PUPs.

He had a bit of time one afternoon and was in the library. Having practiced with the PUP quite a bit on their method of imparting information he was ready with the entirety of the school library to get his questions answered.

He sat down and picked up a magazine in the reading room. It wasn't marked up but then he didn't expect it to be. He could pretend to read the magazine while he had his conversation with the PUP and not be noticed.

'Hey PUP,' he thought to what he now called the "speaking space" in his mind.

TOF came the reply.

'Let's do something,' he suggested.

REB came lightly.

'I want to know what you want with me. I have an entire library of subjects that you can use to direct my attention.' He looked around at all the areas of the library referencing them in his mind for the PUP to see. Although he hadn't yet figured out how they had gotten marked-up magazines dropped for him, he did know that they fared well if he directed them to what he was able to perceive. That way they could use what he was already aware of rather than introducing something new.

'Ok,' he intended, 'show me the subject.' He waited, listening with his mental ear for any touch or indication. It came, on the back of his head. He turned around to view multiple long rows of ten-foot high library shelves stretching away from him traveling the length of the library floor.

'Good,' he indicated, touching the bridge of his nose, 'now narrow the target.'

Nothing came. He figured he needed to make it easier for them so he got up and strode over to the shelving. He walked along one end of the shelves reading the subjects to himself off of the catalogue labels. He went the entire length without an indication. Then, on the hunch that that was just the "information load" step, he then walked back, slower, reading the titles again.

'Geology, geography, genetics, expeditions, exobiology (astrobiology), evolution, environment, engineering, energy, earth sciences...' Jason mentally called off the titles on the ends of the rows.

REB came the pressure.

'Earth Sciences?'

RIGHT EYE came the answer again.

'OK, now lets go down that list,' he sent them the next concept.

BRIDGE of the NOSE came the sensation reply. Which translated, meant that Knowledge would be Bridged or expanded.

He started walking down the row of the towering shelves that had the Earth Science header on it examining the many books that were there. He had no response until he

got to the "E's" within the subject: "Energy" received a strong RIGHT EYE from the PUP's. Jason raised his eyebrows and scanned the many books that concerned themselves with energy - textbooks, research books, books from major industry players, books on the great scientists. The PUPs didn't seem to have any particular direction to give him, so he took a chance and started picking up books and scanning pages.

His first stop was the Tesla section. He found a decent book with an overview of Tesla's life and theories with details on some experiments. Jason had always liked Tesla and had vowed earlier to study his principles. He found himself reading an easy experiment demonstrating the use of a magnet to induce an electric current in a coil, and then how that current could be used to create a magnetic field around a compass. He kept reading, rather oblivious of the fact that he was standing in the library row, unmoving, absorbing page after page. He was fascinated by the discussion of the AC current and the AC motor - one of the best known of Tesla's accomplishments. He didn't realize it at the time, but was dimly aware of a light buzzing "REB" as he read - almost as if the PUPs were reading over his shoulder and agreeing with the text.

He looked up an hour later realizing that the outside light had dimmed and that he hadn't moved at all from his electronics row. He had been browsing from book to book assembling a basic understanding of electrical generation. The PUP had been with him all the way like a little pet on his shoulder, "REBing" a little REB-purr. He put the book away. He had to shake off his daze and moved to go outside.

He had felt very comfortable in that row, warm and accepted and engrossed. Now he must go out into the quiet subdued cool-aired library reading area, then into the marble-coated lobby and thence outside into the cooling autumn air. For the first time in his life he experienced a desire contrary to his own normal self-preserving independence. He wanted to go back and keep reading. Study had its place but never ever controlled his interest. Until now. He liked the company of the PUPs. He felt the comfort of belonging to a group. A strange group. One that didn't share well with his normal friends, but one which kept an eye on him as well as or better than any mother or girlfriend. But always in a nice way. He hoped. The experience of being absorbed in a subject that was now calling him back was a new one.

Jason shared his shoulders and deliberately proceeded down the steps from the library landing and made his way to

a meal and then his dorm room. He needed time to adjust to his new discoveries.

Later Jason sat at his desk in his room and summarized his discoveries, keeping an alert awareness for any PUP phenomena. From what he gathered the PUP were interested in electricity (REB), more particularly energy generation (REB again), and then possibly Alternating Electrical Motors? Pause, then RIGHT EYE. But why? What difference would electricity make to a life force that could transcend mind-matter barriers? Jason felt both a light LEFT EYE (are you looking?) and a chill in his room at the same time. He knew the temperature hadn't changed. He detected a dark side to his hitherto innocent affair with an alternate universe.

He felt a sudden impulse to go look for magazines-- their need to impart a more detailed message. PUP intention felt different than normal human intention. Jason could tell he was in sensitive territory.

He didn't have to go far. The bathroom annexed to the men's dorm showers had a magazine in the usual corner. Jason briefly considered the apparent insanity of expecting parallel universe messages in a discarded magazine, but too much was fitting together too well to ignore the reality being presented. He picked up the magazine. It was a

special edition of Popular Science, "The Future of the Environment". All about identifying the planet's environmental problems and solving them with science. As he was reviewing the magazine, the section on "Duct Tape Methods to Save the Earth" seemed to have received the most smudges.

Duct Tape was the universal patch-up tool. Jason smiled to himself. He had a few duct tape projects of his own; his car side-mirror was the most recent of his "Patch-ups". But he took the magazine back to his room. Shook his head, said out-loud, "Sorry PUP, but saving the planet is not a one-man job."

The answer, was BRIDGE of the NOSE. He was being told to keep going, that a bridge in understanding was in progress.

'Well, that settles it!' Jason thought a little sarcastically to himself. 'No solo jobs here! No siree.' But that wasn't really answering the question of what did PUP want of him. He examined the magazine smudges more closely. They seemed to be random beyond the choice of subject. Jason found himself engrossed in an article about the Greenland ice cap meltdown. It was disheartening. So much was happening and he did want to do something about it. But he was in school, barely a junior, with an

undeclared major and no particular drive to over-study.

'Well, that might change,' Jason commented again to himself. The environmental situation was something he could get passionate about and the PUPs seem to be in alignment with that.

He slept fairly well that night, except for an unexplained dream about glowing ribbons covering the state with cars riding on top. It seemed to be something the PUP had in mind, as he was woken from the dream at exactly 4:44. But it didn't make any more sense even if it was pretty. Jason just shook his head. Something would help clarify it he was sure, at some later point

Jason spent several days in normal student activities. It was after midterms that his next round of "PUP Education" showed up.

3:33 A.M.

Jason was familiar with this game now. "Hi PUP" he said to the ceiling, then fell back to sleep.

He dreamt of the ribbon roads again. This time the dream was more specific; the roads were covered with a material that glowed when viewed through special detection glasses. The dream Jason went to walk on one while it was being built. He examined the multiple layers of the new road. First there was the base layer of cement, next a

layer of insulation, then a layer of a fabric made of intermeshed nylon-like strands woven with metal strands, then a layer of a quickly hardening goop that was poured from a steaming hot special mixing truck. The last layer was a blacktop. Wires flowed out at regular distances from the mesh layer and ran down the side of the freeway in insulated tubing to connect to power lines. In the dream, someone was having a car drive back and forth over a finished section while someone else was reading a voltmeter from the side wires.

Jason was intrigued with the ingenuity of the road builders. He could surmise that if the motion of a car on that combination of elements resulted in some sort of electrical flow, that a freeway in full rush-hour swing could generate enough energy to pay for more than itself. The dream Jason was walking around the construction site with a clipboard and checklist in hand, verifying details and double-checking supplies and progress.

4:44 A.M.

Jason awoke to a full display of the sign of the four elements. All was in balance. The PUPs were bragging. His dream still danced in front of his eyes, he sat straight up in bed, and then immediately jumped out, went to his desk and turned on his computer.

"I've got to write this down before I forget," he said to the air. "That was quite something. I wonder if this is how other people get their inspiration?" He was excited. The city of flowing ribbons. What a cool idea. It could work! It really could with the right materials, the right layering, the right everything...

Jason was sufficiently excited and inexperienced to ignore all of the implied potential stops, barriers and failures that lay upon this path. But the PUP had counted on his youth to happily entertain their idea without dissent. And if it failed, then he would still be better off for all the training, experience and personal advancement that must be made along the way. He had lots of time to work with this idea. At the beginning of his life, he had no family to support, no girl to care for, his life was between him, his classes, his soccer team, and now, the PUP and the project. It was a perfect match.

And Jason was on fire with an idea for the first time in his life.

Jason finished with his notes and diagrams. He noted all the subjects he would have to be familiar with - chemistry, materials, geology, electricity, even business plans to make it all fit together. Easily the rest of a

major and then some. Well, he stood and looked at the clock, time to get going!

5:55 AM.

The sign of a team, repeated. Yes, he would also need a team. But how? He'd save that problem for a little later on.

That morning at practice Jason was excited, even if a bit tired-eyed. He pranced up to his best friend and announced, "I found my major!"

Jon immediately kicked him a ball and kept pacing to get his feet warmed up. "So, what is it?" Jon was less than enthusiastic that morning, having studied half the night for a physiology exam. Jon had known since he was five that he wanted to be a doctor, so the dilemma of not having a major or a career choice just never really made sense to him. But he had listened carefully to his friend's steady vacillation over different choices.

"Environmental engineering - energy conservation methods!" Jason announced happily. He didn't discuss the dream—he could do that later.

Jon looked at Jason's happy face, shook his head, "There's no money in it."

Jason scowled at his friend, "So? I'll invent something and sell it!" he declared.

"Hey, happy inventing, far be it from me to stand between you and your life's calling."

Jason stepped back a bit, "That's true, it is like a calling, isn't it?" Yes, it was a calling he mused to himself, in the age-old tradition of a calling that was revealed in a dream. How cool is that?

Jon wasn't sharing his enthusiasm at the moment though. "I suppose. Pass the ball," Jon said and waited for Jason's kick.

Later that day, Jason was back in the library prowling through the energy conservation section, reading bits and pieces of different books. A lot of what he read didn't make a lot of sense and he could see that he had to take a number of classes in different basic subjects just to start to put his idea together in a coherent manner.

"I'll need help PUP, I'm just not strong enough to take this all the way myself. It will be years before I know enough! And even then, it could be laughed at."

BRIDGE. PUP was listening. LEB, let it be.

Jason's attention was drawn to the reading table in the middle of the stacks with its random piles of discarded books and magazine.

There was a girl reading at the table as he walked over. He sat down feeling flustered and reached over to

pick up what seemed to be a random magazine. He turned it over and almost yelled out-loud. It was precisely the answer to his question as to what to do with the dream, assuming that he made it through all the research. The book title read, From Patent to Profit, and right next to it, Patent Writer. Well he had his answer right at his fingertips! The PUP were really just waiting on him apparently.

5:55 P.M.

Jason realized he was getting tired. He had been up since 4:44! He plopped down in a reading chair and half-heartedly started thumbing through the Patent books. 'More work straight ahead!' he thought to himself. He'd already mapped out what would easily amount to 5 or 7 years of study and research. That done he felt quite alone. Even with the PUP standing by.

He paused for a moment and looked out the distant library window. There was still a big question without any clues--what did the PUP want with him and why were they here?

He felt a "LEFT EYE", in other words, "are you looking." Another magazine seemed to stand out in the pile. Jason reached and flipped it over; there were two pictures on the front: one was an exploding star set

against a background of a field of stars, the other was the same field of stars without a trace of the exploding star. The header read, "Supernova 1987A". It was an astronomy magazine. It was heavily smudged. Gingerly with some apprehension he opened the magazine and began to read the article. The discussion on the expanding ringed explosion, star matter traveling at $1/10^{\text{th}}$ the speed of light (67.1 million mph), the huge volume neutrino emissions--detected even in deep underground lakes on Earth--it was all marked and smudged in what seemed to be an emotional display. Jason felt a wave of grief, not his own.

'Yours?' he asked the PUP.

RIGHT EYE came the answer.

'Oh...I'm sorry to hear, I mean see that.' Quietly in the personal private back of his mind he was suddenly aware of the possibility of a displaced society comprised of cognizant life-forces, bereft of a planet of their own, set adrift and looking for a new home. It almost gave him the creeps.

LEB was a reply. Then it was quiet.

"What are you reading?" the girl across from him asked, her voice soft and clear in the library hush.

Jason heard her voice through his concentration and looked up and across the table into ice blue eyes set in an

evenly tanned face framed by blonde hair. 'Do blondes really have more fun?' he remarked to himself.

"Sometimes," she answered.

Jason almost dropped his magazine.

"Different question," she continued, "are you hungry?"

Jason nodded slowly wondering if he should be alarmed at having another mind-reading entity in his proximity.

LEB came the PUP reply.

"Well, lets go eat, OK? And we can talk?" She asked this as if he had overtly expressed an interest in her.

Jason nodded, standing, gathering the few books he'd found there, and realizing that he probably wasn't going to be afraid of such a cute blond co-ed.

She flashed him a bright smile.

He followed her towards the door.