

Follow Joe Fielding into interdimensional doorways in the rainforest of Ecuador. Will he keep a clear heart? Aesmerald entices him. Evil eyes watch. Joe fights for his life.

Clear Heart: Rainforest Transmissions from the Greater Universe

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Clear Heart

**Rainforest Transmissions
from the Greater Universe**

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ISBN 1-929072-78-3

Published 2001

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Booklocker.com, Inc.
2001

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Introduction

Since childhood, I have been interacting with the greater universe, the universe that encompasses both the seen and the unseen, the light and the darkness, our reality system and all other reality systems. Today, it is becoming more accessible to every one.

My writing is a collaborative process. I work via inner guidance, my internal link to the greater universe. Some might call it channeling, but I prefer to acknowledge my oneness with the greater universe and access information directly through my own 'Greater Self,' with full awareness of the presence of those who wish to communicate with me. For the past three years I have answered a calling to write about access to the greater universe in a way that makes it available to everyone who enjoys a good work of fiction.

Clear Heart began in June 1997 with a trip to the rainforest in the Amazon Basin of Ecuador. While on the trip, I made physical contact with the grandfather tree mentioned in the book. I was assured that all I had to do when I returned to the States was to sit down and ask to reconnect. The connection came easily, since the miles that separated our physical realities were no barrier to the spirits from the grandfather tree. The spiritual characters are real; Ahmed-e-a-da-de-do-ree and the red-haired women made their presence known immediately, followed by significant contribution from Aesmerald. The characters from our reality system, Joe Fielding, Beth Madsen, and the others are fictitious; they do not exist in our consensus reality.

Clear Heart intertwines the adventures of everyday life with lessons of spirit. As the veils that normally separate our everyday reality from the greater universe fall away, more and more people will stumble into the hitherto unseen

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dimensions of the greater universe, where hard and fast rules about truth and reality cease to exist. *Clear Heart* enables you to access this greater universe as a part of everyday life. Simply let go of the notion that what you usually see with your eyes is what's really there and is all that there is, for your eyes see only the outer packaging and not the essence of things.

When you interact with the essence of things, and acknowledge that the unseen or unexpected is possible, then you can find answers to unsolved questions, and live a life of balance and peace with the planet.

The lessons will come easier as more and more of us see the abundance of the greater universe, see beyond our limited everyday beliefs. Fear and scarcity will fall by the wayside as we embrace the lessons of spirit: to keep a clear heart and hold the concept of the abundance available at all times. There is enough.

1

Off to the Jungle

“Joe, wake-up,” Frank called as he laid his hand on Joe’s shoulder. “You must have been on the computer half the night. We’re leaving for the airport in an hour. Time to get moving!”

“Wha-a-t?” Joe’s voice seemed to him to come out of a distant haze. His body and mind told him he was already deep in the rainforest. In his half-asleep state, he couldn’t figure out what his father was telling him.

He shook his head and looked at the clock. 5:05. He still felt disoriented. This had never happened before. “Dad ...,” he started to say but Frank had already left the room.

Joe looked around. Yes, he was in his room at home sitting in front of a darkened computer screen. Those were his posters on the wall and his clothes all over the floor. He hit the mouse to see which website he’d last visited the night before, but all the screen told him was that he’d been signed off for inactivity.

He had a habit of surfing the web late at night and this wouldn’t be the first time he’d fallen asleep on the keyboard. But never had he had a dream like that one. How could it have been just a dream? It was real. Too real. He shook his head again. Still felt too foggy.

Thank goodness I packed last night, he thought. A large khaki duffel bag lay on his bed where he should have spent the night. He dragged himself to the shower, still dazed and still not sure which reality was real. He set the shower as hot as he could stand it.

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Joe had looked forward to the trip for months. As head of research for an international pharmaceutical company, his father frequently went to exotic places all over the world looking for tropical plants that had medicinal uses. His intent was to isolate the natural chemical compounds for use in western medicine. Or better yet, simulate them in the lab. Frank's company preferred to use raw materials if they were in sufficient supply to be exported. If not, years of research would go into synthesizing them.

Frank was a little unusual in that biochemists, and especially the head of research, didn't normally go out in the field, but he had a lot of laboratory experience and the seniority. Also, he had taught university classes in botany, especially tropical species. He made up for his lack of experience in ethnobotany, or the study of how native peoples use plants, by working closely with anthropologists and ethnobotanists on site.

This was Joe's first trip. For once, one of his father's trips came during the summer school vacation. They were to stay at the Mishualli Biological Research Station in Ecuador, deep in the Amazon Basin. Frank had often been there and had close working relationships with the anthropologists and biologists at the station.

Normally, Joe loved taking hot showers, but today it did nothing to clear his confusion. He tried to remember yesterday but couldn't go back beyond the dream. He switched the water to cold. He hated cold showers, but today called for something drastic. A blast of cold water resulted in a loud "Agghhh." He quickly turned off the water, grabbed a towel, and hopped out.

The cold water worked. Joe's head was starting to clear. As he dried off and dressed, he tried to remember what he did yesterday. He and his father had spent all day getting last minute supplies and changing dollars into sucres, the Ecuadorian currency. And, of course, they'd loaded up on snack food, mostly for his insatiable teenage appetite. Double hamburgers for lunch followed by home-fried chicken and mashed potatoes for dinner, one of his favorites, in honor of his departure. They were to spend most of the month of June in the rainforest. Frank had warned that the food at the research station would be sufficient but not very exciting. So, yesterday had been a normal enough day. Nothing that could have triggered that amazing dream.

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Could the whole experience have just been a dream, he asked himself. Never. Joe didn't usually remember everything that happened in his dreams except maybe just a powerful scene or two. That would be the test. How many details would he be able to recall? Joe had all day. They wouldn't arrive in Quito until late tonight. Lots of time to think.

"Whatever," he said to his reflection in the bathroom mirror, flexing his biceps. "You're still a hunk, Joe Fielding." Short blond hair, startling blue eyes and a wide smile looked out at him. He grinned back and said, "Well, guy, wonder if there'll be any girls in the jungle. A cute native girl, perhaps?"

He didn't date seriously. He was too busy shooting for a college scholarship to study computer science. Football practice and swim meets took up a lot of his time. He was the top quarterback and also represented the school at the state level in swimming. All that didn't leave a lot of time for girls, but that didn't stop him thinking.

Joe dragged himself into the kitchen for a quick breakfast of bagels and cream cheese and orange juice. "You sure are quiet this morning, Joe," his Mom noted. She was too cheerful for five-thirty. She was actually looking forward to a little peace with the two of them gone for a few weeks.

"Yeah, I had this really intense dream last night," he answered slowly, not knowing how else to talk about it.

"Sometimes you recall more of your dreams than usual the night before a trip. I think people don't always sleep well in anticipation of a major trip," she suggested.

"I don't know, Mom. This seemed different. I've recalled bits and pieces of dreams before, but this was so real, so vivid. Like it really happened, and I was there. I can remember the whole thing," Joe replied.

"What was it about?" his father inquired as he joined them at the table.

"You won't believe it, but I thought we were already there, in Ecuador, in the rainforest," Joe answered.

"That's an easy one. You can tell me about the dream in detail on the plane and since I've been there before, I can tell you if it was a dream or not," his father said, humoring him with a serious response and a wink.

A car horn honked out on the road.

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“Come on, Joe. Here’s Jake,” his father said. “Good-bye time.”

The next few minutes were spent hugging and saying good-bye. Joe already dwarfed his mother. She was five-seven and one-twenty, and Joe could have picked her up quite easily. In fact, a month ago, when his swim team won the state finals, he did, literally sweeping her off her feet.

She stuffed a bag of snack food and chicken sandwiches into his hands, “This is for the plane. You know how little the airlines feed you. And there’s a little something for your birthday. It’s a shame you won’t have your eighteenth at home.”

“Thanks, Mom. Love you,” Joe added and gave her another big hug.

Daniel, Joe’s eleven-year-old freckle-faced brother dragged himself sleepily into the kitchen. “I came to say good-bye,” he announced, holding his arms out for a hug.

“Bring back some bugs and butterflies,” he asked. Like many little boys, he was big into bugs.

“Tell sleeping beauty good-bye for me,” Joe added, ignoring Daniel’s request. Gayle, his sister, was not a morning person and rarely surfaced before ten during vacations.

“See ya!” Joe waved and was out the door to join his father who was already loading their bags into their neighbor’s Blazer.

The trip to the rail station took about five minutes. Jake, the neighbor, was on his way to work and took the light rail every morning. The rail link ran directly into the airport where Jake was an air traffic controller.

“So, Frank, you’re off to save the rainforest, eh?” Jake asked.

“Yep. Well, a bit of it, anyway. Did you know that it’s disappearing at the rate of two acres a second? That’s about two football fields every second. Heck, an area the size of New York City goes every day. This can’t go on, Jake.”

“So, what part are you gonna play?” Jake asked.

“We’re looking for a rare plant that has some powerful medicinal uses, and I’m worried. We’re losing about six species of plants every day. We don’t even know about some of them, and now we never will. The rainforests are an incredible planetary resource. This time, though, my job is on the line. I promised the lab some really important specimens when I went down last time

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and I came back empty-handed. This is probably my last chance. Funding is tight and competition in the pharmaceutical business is getting rough. You know, most companies are into synthetic solutions, but I'm really into finding the natural answers. At least, I'd like to be."

They pulled into the parking lot and Jake helped them carry their bags onto the platform. A train appeared right on cue.

"I can't believe there are no seats. Even at six-thirty," Frank snapped.

"Getting more crowded every day. It's the new subdivisions on the edge of town," Jake explained.

"Same the world over, Jake. That's why the rainforests are being cut down and burned. To make room for more people. And for cattle. Did you know that most of the hamburgers we eat in the States come from South American cattle, and they need a lot of room."

Half listening to the exchange, Joe thought, this really is pretty slick. Light rail cars doing sixty down the central median of the freeway while four lanes of cars just crawl along in low gear, wasting gas and polluting the air. The train pulled into the airport station and came to a gentle stop. All automatic. As they left the train, Joe thought, maybe after college, I'll be designing computer systems that do this.

They loaded the bags on a rental cart. Frank and Joe headed for the ticket counter. Jake waved and headed for the tower, saying, "I'll take special care of your Miami flight."

Since they were checking luggage in for transfer to an international flight, it seemed to take forever and Joe got antsy at the paperwork. Finally they were ready to go through security. Joe tossed his bag on to the conveyor belt and emptied his keys and change into the tray. As he passed through the frame, a loud buzzer sounded.

"Step over here, please," the security guard requested.

She was a petite brunette, looking no older than Joe. He studied her as she scanned his body with a hand-held device. Pity they don't frisk you anymore, he thought.

The guard's wand beeped over his back pocket. He reached inside and pulled out a stick of chewing gum and held up the shiny wrapper. "Could this be

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it?” he asked, embarrassed to seem so uncool in front of the cute security guard. She said nothing, but waved him through, her face expressionless. Joe could feel himself turning bright red. Why did it have to be a pretty girl? He wouldn't have felt so bad if it had been some burly gorilla of a guard.

Frank grinned at his son and said, “Don't worry. They see it all.”

As they headed to the terminal building, Joe shook his head at the contrast between this steel, glass, and concrete place and last night's experience in the forest. He shook his head and laughed to himself.

“What's so funny, Joe?” his father asked.

“I'll tell you later. It has to do with my being in the ... er ... I'll tell you later.”

Minutes later, they were at the gate still with a short wait. They sat down and Frank outlined the itinerary.

“We'll arrive in Miami about noon, lay over for an hour, and then take the flight to Quito. Miguel will be there to meet us at the airport and it'll be dinner time, you'll be glad to know. We'll spend the night in Quito and head out for the station in the morning. It's deep in the Amazon Basin, so it will be a long day's drive. Over the Andes, too. Sound okay?”

“Sure, Dad. Hey, it's all so new, what do I know?”

“American Airlines flight six-thirty-two to Miami is now boarding at gate B-twenty-three,” the PA system announced. “Now boarding unaccompanied children and passengers with special needs.”

Once aboard, Frank said, “You take the window. I've too much reading to do to be distracted.”

Joe didn't have to be asked twice. When the family traveled, Daniel always pleaded to sit by the window, and pouted if he couldn't.

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to American six-thirty-two to Miami. Federal regulations require us to make some preflight safety announcements.”

Joe sat back and gazed at the female flight attendant demonstrating the usual equipment. Brunette hair, short pageboy style, impish eyes. As Joe stared, they made eye contact and she smiled self-consciously, breaking her resolution

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to go through the motions with a deadpan expression. Lucky pilots, Joe thought. Stopovers in strange, exotic places could be a lot of fun.

Jeez, he thought. What's wrong with me? All I seem to do nowadays is think about girls. Maybe I need to see a shrink or something. Or get a girlfriend. That sounds like more fun.

A few minutes after take-off, Frank pulled his daypack from under the seat in front of him. He rifled through a stack of notes and pulled out a few small notebooks and a package. "Thought you might want to keep a journal while you're in the forest. Record your observations."

Joe took the package and unwrapped a thick spiral notebook.

"And you can try writing down whatever you can recall about your dream, too. You've got three hours with nothing else to do."

"Thanks, Dad," Joe muttered. He hadn't thought of keeping a journal, although he recalled one of his teachers at school suggesting the same thing. "Yeah, maybe this will help me to sort out the dream."

Frank turned to his pile of notebooks and files. "So, Dad, what are you looking for in Mishualli?"

"It's quite a story, son. We're looking for a plant that's been used by the locals for hundreds of years. Its leaves are supposed to cure cancerous tumors. Unfortunately, the old shaman who used to gather the plant died more than thirty years ago. He had quite a store of leaves that his grandson, Nanto, the new shaman, inherited. But one day, the leaves got wet when Nanto's thatched roof collapsed in a downpour. He tried to rescue them but it was impossible during the rainy season. So they got moldy and were useless."

"Why can't Nanto just gather some new leaves? Didn't he ever go out with his grandfather to collect plants?"

"He did. He even remembers where the plant grew and what it looked like. You can't miss it. It's right next to one particular tree. He used to see it when he was hunting in the forest. But last time I was out here, he took me and a colleague, Doctor Brower, to look for it. You'll meet her, too. She's an anthropologist studying the folklore and religion of the tribe. Anyway, Nanto said he couldn't find even a single specimen. I thought maybe he was withholding it because I was an outsider, but Doctor Brower felt otherwise. She

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said that the problem was not a new one, that Nanto hasn't been able to find specimens of several important herbs since the death of his grandfather."

Frank shrugged. "I don't know. It seems there's some kind of tribal mumbo-jumbo mixed up in this. I leave that to Doctor Brower. I'm just a scientist on a specimen hunt."

"Maybe you'll have more luck this time, Dad."

"Luck isn't the operative work here. It's success. Without success on this trip, I may not have a job to go back to, and I know there won't be any more trips. I hate being confined to the lab." The tension in Frank's voice was obvious as he turned back to his pile of papers.

Joe took that to signal the end of conversation, so he opened his new journal, closed his eyes, and tried to recall where he'd been last night.

2

Ah-med-e-a-da-de-do-ree

We climb down a set of steps cut into a hillside and begin hiking. Our boots suck at the mud path as we meander through the forest. The temperature and humidity are brutal. I am amazed at the density of the forest. Every inch seems to be taken up with something growing. Long roots extend down from the trees and anchor into the ground. Vines criss-cross between everything. And the sound is almost deafening. Every imaginable chirp, squawk, click, grunt, and screech assail my ears.

“Hey, Dad, how old are these trees?”

“No one knows. In the tropical rainforest, there are no tree rings because there’s no dry season.”

“Wow, I never thought about that!”

“Are you sure you want to go on? We could postpone our hike until tomorrow morning.”

We walk together in silence. I look up and see many trees covered with plants and vines, and even ants and their houses. Some vines are as thick as small trees. The rainforest is completely cluttered with green growing things. There are so many different kinds of trees.

One tree has roots that look like stilts. They grow out of the tree several feet above the ground and hold the tree up and I could almost crawl under the tree between its stilt roots. Dad teases me with a story about a stranger asking if the stilts really held up the tree. Yes, he was told, but didn’t believe it. He says, “So, one day a test was done. All the stilts around the base of the tree were cut. And to no one’s surprise except the stranger’s, the tree toppled over.”

One tree has slick bark. “This tree sheds its bark each year to keep the other plants and insects from living on it.” Another tree has sharp thick spines, while

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another has thin soft spines. “It seems to work,” I say. “These trees don’t have other plants or insects on them.”

Yet another tree has buttressed roots. Instead of stilts to hold it up, whole walls of root material grow out of the side of the tree, some twenty feet high around the bottom of the tree. In a way, it looks like a rocket on the launch pad, with its huge stabilization fins.

Because the canopy formed by the tops of these stately trees is high and quite dense, little sunlight reaches the forest floor. So there isn’t much undergrowth in the primary forest. Occasionally, I see a mature tree that has toppled over, leaving a gap in the canopy. Undergrowth in these areas is thick as plants thrive in the patch of sunlight that reaches the forest floor. The existing trees around the gap also compete for sunlight.

As we squelch along a muddy path, I am awed at the variety of stuff growing everywhere. Then we come to a grandfather tree. It doesn’t look like a tree at first. More like a house. The buttressed roots extend far above my head, maybe thirty feet. The walls almost make rooms. You can walk around the tree and go in and out of the separate rooms, except there are no doors.

“How old is this tree, Dad? It has to be the oldest.”

“We don’t know. Trees grow fast in the rainforest. Some grow many feet in a year. But this tree does seem to be the biggest. The local people tell of great spirits who inhabit these grandfather trees. Hey, why don’t you hang out around here for a while. I’m going to look for plant specimens. I didn’t finish checking this area the last time I was here. Help yourself to a snack if you want,” he adds, handing me a plastic bag stuffed with trail mix and fruit.

“Oh, and don’t wander far from the tree. Even on the trails, you can get lost here for days if you don’t know the area,” he cautions.

I pause at the base of the grandfather tree. The air vibrates with a symphony of forest insects and frogs that make the intermittent singsong of grasshoppers and katydids at home sound puny by comparison. I look up at the tree with so many questions in my head. How old is old?

“How old are you?” I ask the tree. “Are you a speedy grower and are really just a few hundred years old? Or have you grown more slowly and you’re a

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thousand years old? Or have you gotten all grown up and are just hanging out? That could make you thousands of years old!”

I touch the edge of one of the buttresses. “I’m just feeling grown up myself at seventeen. Well, eighteen in a couple of days. I know you’re way older than me. Older than time. What have you seen? Who lived here a hundred years ago? A thousand years ago? Were you here before people? Were you here with the dinosaurs? Did an ocean once send its tides to the edges of your roots and now you’re a thousand miles from the sea?

I close my eyes, imagining far back in time. “Who are you?” I ask the tree. “What spirits live here?”

Suddenly I see a weird grayish-green creature, about the size of a cat. It has big, round eyes and smooth skin, like a lizard. It grins, revealing a pointy snout full of sharp teeth. It starts chattering at me a mile a minute. I can’t understand a word it’s saying, but it seems to be important to the creature that I understand it.

I’m startled to see anything at all and even then, I expected to see old wise-looking spirits, like old men with long, flowing beards, and gray-haired grandmothers. You know, old stuff, like old people. But this character is the oddest thing I’ve ever seen. As I stare at it, it slowly fades away into the mist. I feel dizzy for an instant in the hot, humid tropical afternoon so I sit down, leaning against one of the huge buttresses. My eyes feel heavy and I drift off.

Suddenly, the odd, gray creature from the tree is back. “I see you there. What do you want?” it chatters, revealing its rows of sharp teeth.

Chatter ... chatter ... chatter ... rattle, rattle. Then it starts to sound like a drum. “Da da du da da da du da. Get out of the mindset you’re in, you must. Understand me not you can from where you stand. Get out of your head, you must.”

Mindset? What’s wrong with being in my head? I think. “Say what? I’ll never understand you if you don’t stop chattering.”

“Chattering, am I? Look who’s talking! Listen to me, you must. Everything is all at once. You pretend it’s in a line, that things happen one after the other.”

Then it, whatever it is, starts humming. “Do re me fa so do re me fa so,” over and over, faster and faster. “No. Wrong, you are. All at once, it is. Everything is all together. Look for it. See it in the forest, you will!”

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The creature starts to fade again.

“What? Come back! And stop talking gibberish,” I shout. “How can I understand? Everyone knows that there’s yesterday, today, tomorrow. Everyone remembers the past.

“I’m not everyone. I don’t need to play that game,” it says, reappearing in front of me. “What if you had tomorrow yesterday?”

“That’s silly and impossible. I can’t even imagine such a thing,” I answer.

“That’s just the point. Not in your imagination, it is. Yet. You think because you can’t see it, it doesn’t exist. So restricted and limited, you humans are.”

“Hey, who or what are you, anyway?” I ask.

“Hmmm. Well, if I try to tell you who I am, I have to define myself in your paradigm ... I mean belief system, reality, mindset, whatever. Maybe not a separate ‘who’ am I. Maybe part of you, I am. Oops! Getting ahead of myself. Have to have it all in order, you do.”

“Well, communication is kind of important, don’t you think?”

“Aaghhhhhh! Your communication is so dada dudada, dada dudada. Babab bubu babab bubu. There’s no depth to it. When you say ‘tree,’ that’s supposed to describe this being you’re leaning against. Four little letters, flat on a piece of paper. Dead, lifeless little letters. That’s not the tree, even to your world. Big, deep, diverse the tree is. Make a model of it, you could, but that’s still only three-dimensional. Understand, you must, that ‘tree’ is bigger even than the picture. Bigger than what you think you see, even when you stand in front of her?”

“I know what you’re trying to say. I guess language is mainly for convenience. And maybe we can’t see what we don’t believe is there. Maybe we miss a lot.”

“Maybe we miss a lot,” the creature mimics. “Can you drink the word ‘water’ when you’re thirsty? Sit down by my roots, why don’t you? Take a nap. See things better when you dream, you can.”

“Can I ask you a question first?”

“Talk too much, you do, but go ahead,” the toothy creature replies.

Look who’s talking, I think. “How can you appear to be this funny little reptile, and say you’re the tree, too?”

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“Hmm. What a lot of words, “ it says, fading into a mist of green and merging into the bark of the tree.

“Hey, where are you?” I cry out.

“Hey, yourself. Baba baba babum. Baba baba babum. I’m in the tree. Trying to talk to you from your world, I am. I’m still the spirit of the tree. There is more of me than you know. Call me ‘drummer,’ you can.”

He reappears, at least I think it’s a he. “I make myself feel physical form to the rhythm and beat of a drum. It helps me to communicate with you. Baba dodo, dada de, baba dodo dada de. Go into the beat. Look at me.”

I watch as he dances to the beat: “Dada dada dum, dada dada dum,” and once more fades into the bark of the tree. “Go to sleep,” he chatters from inside the tree.

Go to sleep indeed, I think. How can I sleep here with you drumming away? I sit down on one long, low root stretching out from between two tremendous buttress walls. I lean back on the wall and almost instantly, I’m covered with mosquitoes.

“Aagh! Get out of here!” I plead. “How can I dream about the drumming creature with all of you mosquitoes are chewing on me?”

I drag an oversized gray plastic rain poncho out of my pack and put it over me. I know it’ll be sweaty, but maybe that’s better than being eaten alive by thousands of mosquitoes. Where did they all come from, I wonder. It’s the first time since I’ve been here that mosquitoes seem to be interested in me. They now attack my exposed legs, so I pull them up under me. Not the best position for a nap.

Sleep doesn’t come. Relaxation doesn’t come either. I look around me. An ambitious community of ants traverses the forest floor along a regular ant freeway. I watch fascinated as they travel as if on invisible paths, across fallen logs, over leaves, and up the bark of a nearby tree.

Mosquitoes keep getting stuck in my eyelashes. This is definitely not fun. I sit still except for shifting my eyes back and forth to see who’s buzzing in my face. I pull the hood of the poncho down over my face as far as it goes. “Hmmm, buzz, hmmm,” whine the pesky mosquitoes.

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Then I begin to notice that they don't look like the mosquitoes back home. Rather than gray-brown and almost invisible when they fly, these guys are something else. I look again. "Wow!" I exclaim to no one in particular. "Some of them are yellow! That's kind of strange. They're easier to see. And some are more reddish, too."

Then I see another flying insect, similar to a mosquito, only bigger. It looks like one of those old bi-planes cruising around my face. There's another one. Suddenly, watching these guys is fun. They look as if they've stepped into a puddle of white paint. Each of their legs is white tipped. When they pull up their legs to fly, the legs extend outward like plane wings. Their real wings whir so fast I can't really see them. They look as if they're suspended in the air, almost motionless, yet their wings are constantly whirring.

The sounds of the forest are almost deafening. I lean back against the tree and close my eyes, willing the intruders to leave, willing myself to relax.

Suddenly, for a moment, everything goes quiet. I forget about my flying friends, the mosquitoes and the bi-plane flyers. The birds and insects of the forest are silent. That's odd, I think. My eyes are closed, yet I can still see the green life in the forest. Green is everywhere. Now suddenly everything is clearly focused, as if bright green spider webs cover everything. Not random webs like my sister and I string up for Halloween, but a green web composed of rays of brilliant yellow-green light connecting each and every living thing in the forest.

When I look at a specific plant or tree, I see it connected to all the others in a web of green light. It's hard to focus. My eyes burn from looking. For a moment, the forest sparkles like a most incredible jewel, the light rays shimmering. The web is everywhere, but it's hard holding the vision. It hurts my eyes and becomes blurred. I find I can focus like a close-up camera shot on one plant or leaf at a time. I can see every detail inside the leaf. The cells, water flowing through the veins, chemical reactions as the leaf absorbs sunlight. Fantastic. But as soon as I pull back to look at the bigger picture, it goes out of focus. One second, I can see it sharply and then I lose it to a sea of green webs.

Suddenly, mosquitoes are humming in my ears, brushing against my face. I see the forest normally, leaf-by-leaf, tree-by-tree, all in sharp focus.

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I look up at the tree and see the drummer crouched on a shelf in the buttress of the tree. Suddenly, I just know his name in my head. “Hey, Ah-med-e-a-da-de-do-ree, what kind of a dream was that?”

He laughs. “Someone told you my name, they did,” he titters, coming as close to a smile as he probably can with a snout-full of sharp teeth.

“Yeah. I just seem to know it,” I say. “It’s like the drumming told me. It’s hard to put it into words.”

“Maybe more than a dream, it was,” he chatters.

Suddenly, I remember. “The web of light. And there were so many mosquitoes that I couldn’t sleep, so it couldn’t have been a dream.”

“Mosquitoes here, g I don’t see any. HUUUUUUUUUU,” he buzzes, sounding just like a swarm of mosquitoes.

Suddenly, I’m disoriented and confused. I can’t recall where reality begins or ends.

“A web you saw. Tell me about it, you must.”

“Well, when I closed my eyes, it was as if all the living things in the forest were connected together. Like they’re all one thing, not millions of separate things. But when I opened my eyes, they were all separate again.”

“Yes, they would be. The oneness in your world, you can’t see. What do you think about that? One thing is it, or millions of separate things? What’s real, Joe?”

“You tell me. What *is* real? I guess the forest with all the separate trees and leaves and plants is real, isn’t it?”

“Hmmm. Yes, in a way. WAAAAUUUUUUUU.” He sounds just like a conch shell horn. “That collection of separate trees, plants, and bugs, what if just like the skin on your body it is? If it is, what’s underneath? What if just the surface skin is all you ever see? Ever stopped to wonder, have you, what’s beneath your skin?”

“Yeaooooow,” I say, sounding like him for a moment. “Ah-med, what are you saying?”

“Hmmm. Ah-med. I suppose you can call me that, but limits my power, it does. Didi didi dudu. Didi didi dudu.”

“Sorry.”

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“Now what were we talking about?” Ah-med chided.

“About what’s underneath the skin. I was trying to understand your suggestion about what’s underneath the skin.”

“Suggesting nothing, I am. Not a suggestion. Obvious, it is. Look again. See what’s underneath, you must.”

I try to figure out what he’s talking about. How can what I see—the trees, the leaves, and the insects—be the skin? The skin of what?

Ah-med waits patiently but after a while he says, “So busy being separate, you humans are. Imagine oneness you can’t. Listen to my drums. Bring us to oneness they do. Dada dada dadum. Dum dada dada. Dum dum dadum.”

“Excuse me, but I don’t see how the trees and leaves and insects could all be the skin? What about the monkeys and the jaguars and the people? What about me? Can I be part of the skin?” I ask doubtfully. I just can’t see myself connected with the green light. For a moment, I’m relieved but then I’m not so sure.

“Tell me again, Joe, what is real? What is the whole picture? See the whole picture did you?”

Suddenly, I have a disturbing sense that I’m trying to avoid something that would make my life complicated. And then, I see it. The web of light is just another focus of the same picture, a focus I’d never seen before. I see the light web picture that shows me that the forest and all its inhabitants are one organism. Then I can change focus, as if through a powerful microscope. Yes, it is possible. I can see the surface with total clarity and then go into the depth of something, focusing on its internal structure. Yes, that’s it. When I look at my skin, I’m looking just at the surface, but xray vision can probe the inner structure of organs, bones, and tissue.

It’s all in layers. The web is the outer skin, connecting the individual objects on the inside. The forest and all of its inhabitants are components of one great organism—the forest.

I look up just in time to see Ah-med fade into the tree.

“Ah-med!” I call. “I’ve got it, I understand. Well ...,” I hesitate, “... just a little ... I think.”

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Ah-med doesn't reappear. Just then, I hear a sound like falling stones in a rainstick. An afternoon shower. Time for the poncho again. Suddenly, I hear a different voice ...

"You seem to be in another world this morning, Joe. So tell me about your dream," Frank asked.

What? Not again, Joe thought to himself. This is too confusing. 'In another world,' Dad said. It sure seemed that way.

"Dad, it just happened again."

"What happened again?"

"What was I doing just now?" Joe asked. "Before you asked me about the dream?"

With a smile, Frank said, "You were sitting there with your eyes wide open, staring into space. That's why I said you looked like you were somewhere else."

"I was. Back in the rainforest," Joe stammered.

"Maybe you'd better start at the beginning, son."

"Okay. Last night, we were already in the rainforest. We'd gone for a hike. There was this incredible tree, like the ones you told me about with the buttressed roots, but more incredible than any even you've seen before. I remember you said, 'That's odd. I haven't been here before,' or something like that."

"Well, we are going to an area I haven't fully explored. Anything's possible. Do you remember seeing the research station or what area in the forest we were in?" Frank asked.

Joe was impressed at the way his father was playing along, as if to support his belief that this was real.

"Umm." Joe thought back to last night's dream. "I remember going down a lot of stairs cut into a hillside in the forest. But it's kind of vague, like a distant memory. I remember being surprised since I thought that the rainforest would be rather flat."

To avoid leading Joe, Frank just asked, "Anything else you can recall?"

"Well, during our hike, you suggested that I take a break while you looked around. I think I dozed off in the dream but I couldn't remember what happened

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next. Then, just now, I went back to that scene, and it kind of picked up from there and continued. I met the weirdest little creature with lots of teeth that seemed to live in this huge tree. He was teaching me about the”

Joe paused, beginning to feel uncomfortable. “I know this is going to sound strange, but this strange creature was telling me that our definition of reality is ... well, er ... incomplete.”

“What do you mean, ‘incomplete’?” Frank asked.

“Well, um ... that there’s more to the world than we’re used to seeing just with our physical eyes. That there’s a whole other world under the surface of what we think is real.”

Joe looked at his father and was surprised at his receptivity.

“I’m impressed, Joe. You’re talking about something that Doctor Brower and I have discussed for hours. She’s an anthropologist, and studies shaman beliefs. In my search for plant species and attempts to isolate medicinal factors, I often find a difficulty. They tell me that a plant works in a certain way. So I try to duplicate in the lab what I think should be the chemical reactions they talk about, and nothing happens. I have to discard many plants because I can’t replicate, according to scientific standards, the chemistry that the locals claim the plants have.

“Or worse yet, as in the case of Nanto’s leaves, the plants seem to disappear when I go in search of them. She once suggested something quite fascinating, and that’s why I’m going back to this particular area again. Maybe we can solve the mystery and locate the plant.”

Frank fell silent, also lost in his own thoughts. Suddenly, he said, “I’ve been trying to remember a book I read in college. It’s been many years and I didn’t pay much attention to it at the time. A fellow named Thomas Kuhn wrote a book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. At least, I think that’s what it was called.”

Oh no, Joe groaned to himself. Now he’s going to go into professor mode. This usually means a long lecture on some detailed topic which Joe really doesn’t want to know that much about. He often joked with his father that if he asks for the time, Frank launches into a lecture on how to build a clock.

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Frank continued, as if reading Joe's mind, "Lucky for you, I don't remember much about the book except that Kuhn talked about the difference between ordinary science and revolutionary science, and that ordinary science solves problems within a particular paradigm."

"Dad," Joe interrupted excitedly, "Paradigm. That's the word the creature used, and I'd never heard it before!"

"Who used?" Frank asked, seemingly not offended by the interruption.

"Oh ..." Joe paused. "A funny little drumming creature. He said something like, paradigm means belief system, or reality, or mindset, and that I needed to get out of that space. He kinda said that you can't see what you don't believe in."

Frank grinned, throwing Joe into confusion. "You certainly have a creative mind."

Joe felt deflated, as if all this were the product of his imagination. He found himself urging his father to go on, "So, what did this Kuhn guy say?"

"He said that what he called ordinary science uses a particular paradigm or way of looking at the world in order to solve problems or look for solutions. I guess that's what I do and maybe why I often get stuck just now in my research. I guess my paradigm excludes something that the locals believe about the plants, so I don't have the same experiences as they do."

"I'm missing something, Dad," Joe said.

"Kuhn talked a lot about paradigm shifts. Like going from a flat earth view to a round earth view. Or Galileo suggesting that the earth rotates around the sun. With such a paradigm shift, suddenly a lot more can be explained. Let me put it another way, Joe. Science can only solve the problems it can see. But revolutionary science expands its vision so that it can see more."

"Wow!" Joe exclaimed. "That's exactly what the creature in my dream was trying to teach me. That my belief system was like, too small. He showed me how the rainforest is, like, one big organism, and not just a collection of separate bugs and trees and animals. Whoa. I was actually dreaming in the dream. Is that possible?"

Frank shrugged. "I don't know about dreams, Joe. You know that if I can't measure it or weigh it, then it's off limits to me. But maybe Red Brower can

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help you there. She's a psychologist as well as an anthropologist. She's into all that stuff because dreams are an important part of tribal life. But as a scientist, I can't take a dream back to the lab, so I can't get excited about it."

There was some commotion in the aisle ahead of them. Lunch was being served. Joe hadn't even remembered to be hungry. "Wow, I forgot how hungry I am."

As the petite stewardess handed Joe his tray, he gave her his best smile and she returned it. Then Joe got the oddest sensation that they were somehow connected. Not just with her, but with everyone on the plane. Too weird, he thought, and turned his hungry attention to his lunch.

After lunch, Frank spent the remainder of the flight to Miami tending his own affairs. Joe closed his eyes and wondered if the dream would continue. It didn't, to his relief at one level and disappointment at another.

Joe spent the hour's wait in Miami writing his dream in his journal. The time passed quickly as father and son scribbled in their respective notebooks, and they were both surprised when their flight was called. With the plane only half full, they took a window and aisle seat, using the center seat to store their books.

Frank looked over at Joe as they took off from Miami. "You know, Joe, you'll find that it's not like anywhere you've ever been. The Amazon Basin is different. Alive in a way that nothing in North America can duplicate."

"Yeah, the tree spirit showed me how everything in the forest is interconnected. Like strands of light between everything in the forest." Joe laughed as he recalled the encounters with the mosquitoes while trying to have a dream vision.

"Dad, are the mosquitoes in the rainforest different?"

"What do you mean? There's certainly a lot of them around at times."

"No, I mean, what do they look like? The ones I saw by the tree were not all the typical grayish insects from home. Some were yellow. Also there were some other weird flying insects that looked like little bi-planes."

"There's a lot of what we call species diversity in the primary tropical rainforest. That simply means that there countless different types of mosquitoes and small flying insects. I admit I haven't paid much attention to the

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mosquitoes. I'm a botanist, remember, so to me they're just pests that buzz a lot. And they still bite. But I can't say much about what they look like."

Frank continued, "Your comment on the interconnectedness of the life in the forest is an appropriate description of the complex relationships found in the biodiversity that occurs there."

"Dad, I think that the interconnectedness is greater than just the rainforest. I had trouble with this concept, but I think we are part of it, too. The whole planet is part of it, as if we were one huge organism. It's weird, but I was able to see out of focus in a way, and I discovered that if I changed my focus, I could see the web of light connecting all things—ants, trees, snakes, people, mosquitoes, whatever."

Frank was quiet for a while. "Well, Joe, I guess you'll just have to wait and see what happens when we get there. I am curious about your experience and what further adventures this trip will give you. I suggest that you keep writing your thoughts and dreams in your journal."

"Yeah, good idea," Joe replied.

Frank turned back to his papers, and Joe pulled out an airline magazine from the pocket in front of him and flipped through it to an article on Ecuador. He was fascinated to learn about Ecuador's checkered history.

"Hey, Dad, did you know that Ecuador was part of the Inca Empire until 1532. Then the Spanish arrived, set up their capital in Quito, and three hundred years later, declared independence from Madrid, just like the States did from England?"

"Sure, Joe. Today, those of Spanish descent make up only sixty percent of the population. The original Indians account for the rest, and they mostly live in the mountains and rainforests. Hopefully, you'll meet a lot of them."

"Yeah, that'll be neat," Joe replied, turning back to his reading.

Joe learned that the Andes chain runs down the middle of the country, with the western slopes running down to the Pacific Ocean, but to the east, they drop abruptly down into the Amazon Basin and the rainforests themselves, often shrouded in dense fog.

"Hey, Dad, how much does it rain there?"

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“Well, the station records about 150 inches a year, but it could be anywhere up to 400 inches a year in other parts of the rainforest. That and the temperatures usually in the eighties and nineties makes for fierce humidity, often at 100 percent. Seventy degrees is a cold day in the jungle.”

“It says here, Dad, that the major problem in the rainforest is the poor soil. The only source of nutrients is decaying vegetation, and that makes up a very thin layer of just a few inches, so when the local farmers and lumber companies conduct slash-and-burn clearing, the soil only supports one or two years of growth, and they have to move on and destroy even more forest.”

“Yes, Joe. Did you know that at one time, rainforests covered twelve percent of the earth’s surface, but now it’s down to just two percent. Even so, they house more than half the species of plants and animals on the planet. The experts predict that the last of the rainforests will be gone by 2025.”

“Stop it, Dad. You’re depressing me.”

“It’s a sad fact of life, son, so enjoy the forest while you can.”

Looking out of the window, Joe marveled at the majestic Andes below them. And in the distance, he could see the telltale plumes of smoke writhing up from the hillsides and valleys. He kept watching the scenery change as they got closer to Quito.

As they flew over the city, Joe noticed how the city looked just like the photos in the airline magazine. Red-tiled houses jammed together on the slopes of a dormant volcano. Well, I hope it stays dormant for a few more weeks, he thought. Built directly on an earthquake fault, the city is often rattled, with the centuries-old churches usually the hardest hit. Joe looked down into houses with private courtyards, and saw donkeys straining to pull carts up steep cobbled streets. Factories, churches, and schools flew by below them until, with a gentle bump, they were down.

As expected, Miguel was waiting at the baggage claim area. He wore a light beige suit and was trying to cover up the fact that he was a little overweight. When he saw them, he broke out a smile that revealed two perfect rows of white teeth. He greeted Frank with a hug and Joe with a handshake. Since the letter J is silent in Spanish, he had a little trouble with Joe’s name, and ended up calling him, “Señor Ho.”

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“Where would you like to have dinner?” Miguel asked Frank in Spanish.

Frank turned to Joe and translated, “What do you want for dinner?”

“What are my choices?” Joe asked.

“Anything you want, Quito is a big city like anywhere else in the world.”

“Well, pizza would be nice,” Joe joked.

Frank and Miguel had a quick exchange in Spanish. Miguel turned to Joe, “Would Pizza Hut be okay?”

Joe laughed, “Sure, why not?” guessing they were taunting him about a Pizza Hut so far from home.

They loaded up Miguel’s battered Land Cruiser and headed out of the airport for downtown. Joe knew just a little Spanish and tried to read some of the signs along the way. Suddenly a familiar sign appeared—the golden arches of McDonald’s. Just beyond was the familiar sign of Pizza Hut.

Joe chuckled, “I thought you guys were teasing me about Pizza Hut. This is great.”

Frank turned and grinned at Joe. “Enjoy yourself because you won’t see any more pizza until we return to Quito.” Frank sounded more relaxed than he had in months.

They ordered, and as Miguel brought Frank up to speed on events at the station, Joe was intrigued by how the staff all smiled the same broad smile and revealed perfect white teeth. The girls in particular were fascinated by Joe’s tall, blond stature and giggled among themselves as they exchanged comments in Spanish. Wish I’d paid more attention in class, he thought. I’d love to know what they’re saying about me.

After dinner, they drove to a simple hotel finished in pink stucco. Frank and Joe shared a room with two single beds and a bathroom whose hot water supply was an off and on again affair. The walls of the room were the same salmon pink as the outside stucco. Joe tried for a while to get some hot water and just as he’d finally soaped up, it went to lukewarm. He rushed to rinse the soap off before it turned cold, but failed.

“This place isn’t much for luxury, is it?” Joe shouted at Frank in the other room.

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“Wait till you get to Mishualli before you complain about this place. Soon this will look like a five star palace,” Frank warned.

Joe dove into bed. Even in June, the nights got chilly at 9,000 feet.

“Who’ll be in my dreams tonight?” Joe wondered as he lay awake listening to the sounds of traffic outside the hotel. What are dreams, anyway? Are they just random workings of the mind once it doesn’t have to manage the day? Or are they really a different reality where all the rules are different? And if I just get to watch them, whose really having the dream?

Suddenly, Joe was surprised to hear a voice.

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