



Patterns on Pages

Secrets of the sequenced symbols

C. R. Downing

Traveler's **HOT L - Volume 4**

C. R. Downing

Patterns on Pages is a *work of fiction*. With the exception of verified historical events and persons, all incidents, descriptions, dialog and opinions expressed are the products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. *Any resemblance to actual events or persons is entirely coincidental.*

ISBN-13: 978-1977944467 **ISBN-10:** 1977944469

Dedication

To Mom, with all my love.

Table of Contents

The Day the Earth Shattered	3
The Way It Is	15
Recruitment 1	29
Recruitment 2	55
Education – Phase 1	71
Teacher Education	91
Education – Phase 2	113
Education – Phase 3	153
Homecoming	181
Implementing the Plan	207
A Type of Closure	217
Acknowledgements	231
Books by C. R. Downing	233

Back Cover Photo by *Stas Ovskey*. <https://unsplash.com/@technobulka>

The Day the Earth Shattered

Distant Future

A1 G>it peeps. Blds in LA swy n sync w/
seismic wvs. No bg dl. We flt wrs.

*Get over it, people. Buildings in downtown LA are swaying in
synch with the seismic waves. No big deal we've all felt worse.*

A1 1st jlt ;-) Nw 45min>1st pst. Wht's lft
stdg dwntwn LA is rptd 2b 10mi N orig locat.

*The first jolt fooled us all. It's 45 minutes after my last post.
What's left standing [of] downtown LA is reported to be 10
miles to the north [of its] original location.*

A1 2hr>1st post. I ?? f'll get nthr pst b4 I ls
pwr 2my phn r grd gs dwn. Afrshks frm bg 1
hv redcd wht litl ws lft r infrstctr 2 pls rb

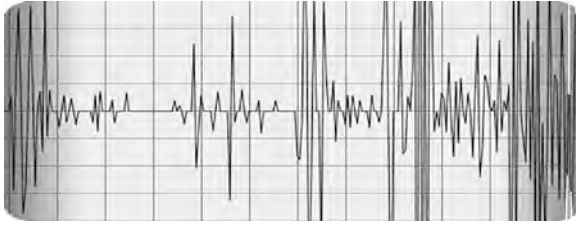
*Two hours after [my] first post. I doubt if I'll get another post
before I lose power to my phone or the grid goes down. After-
shocks from [the] big one have reduced what little was left [of]
our infrastructure to piles [of] rub[ble]*

*The above is archival material retrieved from a damaged server three
weeks after the cataclysmic seismic event referred to as "The Day the
Earth Shattered." The messages are from the social media venue,
Article1—after the first amendment's guarantee of Freedom of Speech.*

Programmers agreed that no code they wrote recognized the circled[Ⓢ]
as a starting point. There is more information on Article1 in the
Acknowledgments at the end of this book.

Italicized below each post is the most probable translation of the post.

C. R. Downing



This photo is a seismogram of a substantial earthquake. It appears here as an inadequate illustration of the seismic event that sets the stage for the story that follows.

Patterns on Pages

Carl and Carla rode to work together every day. He started work at 7:00 a.m. She didn't have to be at work until 8:30. She didn't mind. Carl was an excellent conversationalist and a very good driver. Besides, he had time to kill while waiting for her after he finished work. They both figured the partnership is what made twelve-hour workdays and two-hour commutes worth it.

Then again, days like today made them wonder about the worth of any commute. Two big-rig haulers jackknifed within a mile of one another. Between looky-loos and actual accident victims, Interstate 5 was bumper to bumper all the way south to Disneyland.

It was 8:45 a.m. He'd managed to crowd his way onto an off-ramp from I-5 to one of the lesser freeways that spider webbed the Los Angeles basin. Without warning, his hydrogen-powered roadster was tossed into the air. That was the first notice of the earthquake.

The roadster landed upside down nearly fifty feet from the launch site. Both passenger and driver were knocked unconscious. Seconds later, another jolt shifted the entire off-ramp over one hundred yards to the north. It collapsed into a pile of crumbled concrete and twisted rebar.

The roadster took flight a second time. When the car landed this time, the hydrogen gas canister's integrity was compromised. The explosion obliterated Carl's roadster and a dozen others inside the blast zone.

When the dust settled hours later, seven massive quakes had reduced California into sequential piles of debris. The piles were all that was left of scores of towns and cities.

The number assigned to the date by the Julian calendar isn't important. On that day, the hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years of accumulated strain along the San Andreas Fault was released. Hack journalists then called it "The Day The Earth Shattered." Calendars lost all meaning.

Some visual records of the massive destruction remain in digital format. They are few in number and brief in length.

The Pacific Plate lost its hold along the San Andreas Fault. Geologic energy in the form of seismic waves spread through all Earth's tectonic plates. Plate borders slid, sank, rose, pushed, and slid past one another. Existing rifts increased in size. A handful of new rifts formed.



Troy and Rob loved backpacking. They'd been friends since grade school and began camping in Rob's backyard at the age of eight.

Living in Bozeman, Montana made it convenient to trek through Yellowstone National Park. They could be found on a trail somewhere in the park at least twice each month. This morning found them at the trailhead of the Bunsen Creek Trail.

"Pretty cool sunrise," Troy said as he slammed the passenger side door of the pickup truck closed.

"Yep. I got a feeling that this is going to be a memorable day," Rob responded.

The young men were less than a quarter mile down the trail when their memories were seared into the ground beneath them. The Yellowstone Supervolcano erupted for the first time in one hundred and seventy-four thousand years.



Patterns on Pages

On The Day The Earth Shattered, the massive volcanic dome beneath Yellowstone National Park erupted. The most recent major eruption of the supervolcano occurred six hundred and forty thousand years before that day. Most Americans didn't even know The Yellowstone Supervolcano existed.

The supervolcano's eruption might have triggered the seismic activity that devastated the planet. In a twist of the "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" adage, it is equally likely that the seismic turmoil along plate boundaries triggered the eruption.

Either way, the end result was a massive outpouring of lava and ash. The human populations of Montana and Wyoming died within hours of the onset of the eruption. The Rocky Mountains provided a barrier to the ash flash for most residents of Idaho and Utah. Human populations of those states were spared immediate demise.

Nations on every continent were eradicated. For some, eradication consisted of loss of all buildings of consequence. The confluence of seismic events reduced factories, refineries, hospitals, governmental edifices, prisons, and apartment complexes to piles of rubble. The majority of the damage occurred during two hours of horrific earthquakes.

Power lines, aqueducts, highways, railroads, airports, and transmitters of all types went from state of the art to obsolete in the same two hours.

The Himalayas rose three meters in two hours as the Indian Plate forced itself inland. The African Plate and Australian Plate, prime movers of the Indian Plate, also ground against one another. The African Plate split; a giant fissure opened like a zipper in the Serengeti. Earthquakes spawned tsunamis across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Coastlines disappeared under massive tidal surges.

A group of partying college students littered the beach outside Sydney, Australia. It was early in the morning. The event that lured them all to this stretch of sand had officially ended before midnight. In spite of the curfew, several dozen collegians lingered in various stages of sobriety and consciousness.

The earthquake was short and hard. The tsunami was wide and terrifyingly tall. When the first wave receded, no evidence of any occupants of the beach remained.

Things were no better in Sydney Harbor. A series of five tsunamis destroyed the Opera House and its environs. Not a soul living in a building within five miles of the harbor survived the onslaught.

Marsha fingered the tag attached to the lanyard she wore around her neck. *I've worn this silly "Principal" badge every day for nearly 15 years. What am I going to do now?*

She heard the sound of footsteps crunching the litter behind her. She turned. Two of her teachers approached. She watched them pick their way through the rubble that had been the administrative, counseling, and nurse's offices.

"Are you okay, Marsha?" asked Cindy, a second-grade teacher at Lake View Elementary.

"No. I'm definitely not okay," Marsha replied and quickly turned to hide another bout of tears.

"We thought you'd be here," Larry, a sixth-grade teacher said.

Marsha didn't respond. *I'm the principal of this wonderful school. Where else would I be, Larry? Where are you? We both know what this means for our students.*

Patterns on Pages

“There’s nothing we can do here,” Cindy said. She used her right arm to turn Marsha away from the scene of devastation. Marsha didn’t resist.

A sound, like a rifle shot, crackled through the air. All three educators spun back toward the school. A second crackle announced the collapse of what remained of the roof of the school’s auditorium. Tears flowed freely down each cheek.

The trio carefully picked their way back toward student drop-off station the school buses used. They never made it.

A swirling wall of super-heated ash overtook them. It consumed the three educators in seconds.



In times of disaster, governments are quick to call a state of emergency. If the disaster is sizeable, that might include a suspension of certain rights of its citizenry. Most common priorities include the resumption of power, water, and sanitation networks. Rebuilding educational service is rarely in the top five priorities.

Never in Earth’s history had there been a disaster of the magnitude of The Day The Earth Shattered. Governments collapsed along with the structure and infrastructure of their societies.

There was no United States of America to loan disaster relief funds. There was no Red Cross to offer food and shelter. There was no Doctors Without Borders to minister to the injured.

In many parts of the globe, conditions returned to the Biblical description of Hebrew society in Judges 21:25. People “*did that which was right in his own eyes.*” [KJV] Without police or military to control the citizens, anarchy reigned supreme.

As a general rule, anarchists don't consider public education as a priority at any level. Over time, an educated populace moved from just that in most nations to anything but that in every nation.

Within three years of the seismic catastrophe, no sustainable public education existed on Earth. Without an educational system, fewer people learned to read in each generation than the one before it. Over time, no one read books because no one knew how to read.

The lack of literacy is a major player in the story that follows.

“Leave now, and I'll let you live,” the man inside the library hissed through the partially opened door.

“We need the books,” one of the small, angry crowd shouted.

“We can't start fires without kindling,” shouted another.

“I will not allow you to destroy this collection,” the man replied through gritted teeth. “What's in here is irreplaceable!”

“Look through the doorway, you imbecile! We're people! We're irreplaceable, too! Without heat and fuel for cooking, we'll all die!”

In answer, the man inside the library door opened fire with the automatic pistol he held in his hand. When that clip emptied he slammed another into the magazine. When he exhausted that clip, he hefted a second weapon. He didn't stop firing until the whole crowd lay dead or dying on the library's exterior stairs.

Patterns on Pages

Walking through a suburban neighborhood after a fast-moving wildfire or a tornado reveals block after block of smoldering wall studs, flattened chimneys, and empty foundations. But, every so often, a house remains intact. Not a burn mark on it. Not a shingle out of place.

Nature's capriciousness was visible in the devastation following seismic cataclysm as well. For reasons unknown, enclaves on every continent were spared. Some retained functional solar or wind power. Others escaped the worst air quality. A handful of sites were doubly blessed.

A reasonable estimate of the number of people that died during the quakes and within the following six months is six and one-half billion. Disease, starvation or suicide contributed more victims than all seismic events combined. Small pockets of survivors huddled together in isolation from each other and the rest of the world.

For all intents and purposes, civilization was erased. The fate of humanity was uncertain and not optimistic.

There are few written records of the cataclysmic catastrophe beyond the electronic posts that preface this saga. None of them shed more light on the disaster than is reported here.

As time progressed, written communication of all kinds diminished then disappeared. There was no time to invest in reading or writing. Not with wild animals, disease organisms, and crazed human beings running rampant. Books became nothing more than holders of patterns of shapes on pages.



Marin cast a furtive glance around her pottery shop. She wasn't looking for problems, but she'd learned that being careful was better and safer than being reactive. The warmth of her kiln was a magnet for forest animals.

She and her family had lived in their current location for nearly ten years. That was a long time for Marin, but not long at all for the others who lived in S'isco. Although they were unaware of it, their family's shelter had once been a fast food restaurant. They were happy that the only openings in three of the four outside walls had once been doors and windows. Few of the other buildings in their community boasted such security.

Marin's life was simple. On most days, she went to her pottery shop, a much less secure room in another building. Once there, she formed various cooking and serving vessels and plates without the benefit of a potter's wheel. She'd learned from her mentor how to fire her pieces. She was now the preferred provider of cookware and dinnerware in the community.

No one in her family knew her attraction to the holders of patterns of shapes in the Lib'ry or to a young man named Lincoln.

Lincoln was born in S'isco. His mother lost four of five previous children during various stages of pregnancy. The fifth child was stillborn. She died in childbirth—his birth. That was something he now considered ironic, although he was unaware of that term.

Lincoln and his father were close. Both were keen observers of human nature. Both were smarter than most of the others in the community.

His father *tinkered*. He constantly dismantled items he'd found only to put them back together again soon thereafter.

Lincoln *knew* things. He often couldn't explain how he'd learned some of the things he knew, but once he'd learned them, they became part of his daily activities. He was highly desired by nearly all who had a problem or who needed fresh eyes to help determine what action might be best in a given

Patterns on Pages

situation. For these reasons, he was a frequent speaker at Council meetings.



Tempus and Epoch, Time Synchronizers for the years 1901-2099, were exhausted. They were charged with monitoring conditions of the fabric of Earth's timeline and performing necessary adjustments to keep the fabric free of wrinkles.

They did repair threads and loosen wrinkles in emergencies. This was the biggest and perhaps the last emergency in Earth's history. Tempus and Epoch were doing more than any time synchronizer had ever done to any fabric in any timeline in any galaxy in the universe.

The planet known as Earth had come close to self-destruction in a massive seismic upheaval. It was the second worst catastrophe in the history of time synchronization. The only known disaster to eclipse the shattering of the Earth's crust was a supernova that destroyed an entire solar system. The local time synchronizers were among the casualties.

On The Day the Earth Shattered, billions of time threads for humans on the planet Earth terminated within hours of each other. Billions more ended within a half a year of the initial devastation. The catastrophic loss of threads continued for a decade.

Preventing Earth's timeline from unraveling was more than any pair of time synchronizers was capable of without assistance. A pair's combined effort was roughly analogous to moving the sand from the Sahara Desert to a new location with spoons.

Pater, Father of all Time Synchronizers, declared a Code-10 emergency. Time synchronizers from all quadrants rotated back and forth between their assigned location and the site of

the horrific unraveling of individual time threads on Earth's timeline.

Epoch and Tempus were among the multitude of others from all over the galaxy called in by Pater to assist with the overwhelming devastation. It had taken over one hundred Earth-years to stabilize the fabric in the zone of destruction.

However, stabilization of the fabric was nothing more than Pater's short-term goal. Without regeneration, the fabric of Earth's time was doomed.

The story that follows originates several centuries after The Day the Earth Shattered.

The Way It Is

Distant Future

Marin looked left and right. She moved her left hand toward the holder of patterns of shapes. *The outside of this one looks rough. I've never seen that before.*

She stopped and looked both directions a second time.

Convinced that no eyes observed her, she once again extended her hand. *What did the ancients call you?* she wondered as she allowed her fingers to make contact with the stiff outer covering of the relic.

The sensation of what we know as handcrafted bonded leather beneath her fingertips brought with it a realization.

Some might think what I'm about to do is blasphemy or worse.

She performed a ritualistic gesture to the Man on the Cross with her right hand.

That should protect me if I upset the Man by thinking about what I'm going to do.

She reached out her right hand until it joined its partner at the edge of the book's cover.

She allowed both sets of fingers to caress the cover for several seconds before she lifted the book from its stand in the Lib'ry.

"You know you've got our Council in a tizzy," she murmured. "What is it about you that frightens some Council members?"

She turned, walked to the only table in the room, placed the book on the surface, and slid into the closer of two chairs.

Marin was named after an ancient geographic term for the area directly north of S'isco, the coastal city nearest to the village in which she lived. According to legend, S'isco once contained impressive buildings. Of course, that was before the devastation caused by Grumbler, the god who loved to shake the ground. In addition, S'isco was said to have been the home to millions of people. Although the concept of "million" was more fantasy than fact to Marin, she was sure that number was an exaggeration. No more than a few thousand people inhabited the entire state of No'Cal.

S'isco was now nothing more than a traveler's stop on the journey across the ice bridge from Nor'asia in the northwest to Soca'mex in the warmer regions south of them. Although limited in status, S'isco maintained the largest Lib'ry in all No'Cal. There were conflicting explanations for the reason lib'ries existed. All she knew for certain was that books were stored in their Lib'ry. She'd heard rumors that their Lib'ry was the largest in all the U'Sta'Am.

Regardless of the validity of the rumors about lib'ry sizes, Marin knew that books were irreplaceable. Each time she visited this shrine to the Ancients she was careful to respect their abilities by honoring the holders of patterns of shapes.

"I cannot bring you back," she whispered to the spirits of those long dead Ancients. "But I will respect the wonderful things you made."

She lifted one side of the cover with care.

What she saw inside the relic was nothing she hadn't seen before. While this disappointed her, she was certain that the organized patterns of shapes held a depth of meaning for the Ancients that she could not fully imagine.

"Every pattern holder is filled with these shapes," she said aloud. "They must have special meanings to be so carefully arranged and stored in this Lib'ry."

Patterns on Pages

“I see my dreamer is back.”

Startled, Marin let the book’s cover drop back into the closed position. She turned in her chair.

Standing just inside the door to this shrine was one she called a friend.

“That was unkind, Lincoln,” she chastised and hugged the book tight against her. “I might have damaged this in my fright.”

Lincoln laughed.

“Marin. I’ve seen you with pattern holders before. I don’t think a visit by the Man on the Cross would frighten you as much as you were just now.”

“You might be right,” Marin admitted. “Will you sit with me and look?”

“I will.” Lincoln covered the distance between them in two long strides. “Although I see chose the best chair.”

“I chose this chair because I was alone. If you wish, I will trade with you.”

“Thinking of the desires of others before your own. That is your way, Marin. I said what I saw. I was not asking for a different chair.”

She felt her face flush at the words of praise. Lincoln had a way about him that brought that feeling to her often. She was torn between the joy she felt at the sensation and the irritation at him she felt for causing it.

“A chair is a chair,” she said as she pushed herself up and reseated herself.

Lincoln smiled. He loved this woman. She might never accept that, but he knew he loved her. He seated himself in the vacated chair.

“What thoughts do you have about this?” he asked as he hefted the book.

“I haven’t had time to think,” she confessed. “You disturbed my thoughts.”

“Then, we will have thoughts together,” he decided and flipped the cover open.

There was no way that Marin or Lincoln could have known that a library was a place where books were stored for use by the people in the area. Neither could they have known that in prior centuries, people came to libraries to use or check out books on all topics imaginable.

Even the most prestigious school systems collapsed after the seismic catastrophe. For a few years, parents and committed teachers worked on keeping literacy alive. Eventually, survival won out over education.

By the time Marin and Lincoln were born, the term *book* meant anything with a cover that opened but had nothing removable inside that cover. With the loss of written literacy, use of the term “book” in reference to anything like those in this Lib’ry was uncommon.

Earth’s time fabric remnant now contained fewer than twenty percent of the threads included before the seismic calamity. Few new threads were being added. Only select individual time synchronizers knew that, in actual fact, more threads were terminating than were being added to the fabric.

Epoch and Tempus were two of those entrusted with the horrific news. They stood before Pater. He called them into his presence to describe their new assignment. It was an unprecedented meeting.

Patterns on Pages

“. . . Something must be done to reverse the ratio of fibers added to fibers lost,” he concluded.

“I do not yet understand what role you have for Tempus and me,” Epoch said.

“I’m sorry, Pater, but neither do I,” Tempus added. “What is it that you want us to do?”

“I have an idea. It’s been done once or twice elsewhere in the galaxy. To the best of my knowledge, you will be the first team in this quadrant to perform what is as close to an undercover operation as I will ever permit.”

The synchronizers looked at one another. This news was unexpected. Part of the initiation ceremony required newly recruited synchronizers to pledge to refrain from the direct intervention of any timeline beyond manipulating the fabric already in place. Not only that, but if they’d heard Pater correctly, he’d implied there had been another in his position prior to his assuming the leadership role.

“What is your plan?” Epoch asked. “Earth’s fabric in the time upon which we have been working is fragile.”

“I am aware of that. It is one of the motivators of my decision.”

“I cannot predict the exact number of threads that must be removed before we lose all structural control,” Epoch said. “I will not attempt to predict what will happen when structural control is lost.”

“We are both worried about what will happen if all the threads are removed, lost, or damaged,” Tempus added.

“According to prevailing theory, only the elimination of the species most closely linked to its timeline can cause the loss of an entire piece of fabric.”

“I am aware of that,” Epoch said.

“Me, too,” Tempus added. “We must do something to prevent the extinction of humanity.”

“Agreed. Experience with humanity has taught us that most humans have good intentions. Unfortunately, we have also learned that they are too often weak on follow-through.”

“That is an astute summary. What do you propose to overcome that obstacle?” Epoch asked.

“My plan to prevent the extinction of humanity involves using the HOT L to transport at least one human from the damaged portion of the time fabric back to where the fabric is complete.”

“For what purpose?”

“Beyond gaining an understanding and appreciation of past accomplishments, I do not know,” Pater admitted. “The initial goal of your undercover mission is to determine the components of the most efficient and productive trip of that type.”

“And?” Epoch asked. “There must be an ‘and’ still to be unveiled.”

“Very well. *And*, once the humans have arrived at the designated time, the undercover assignment shifts to one of subterfuge. We cannot direct the actions of the humans, even if we know what they must learn or do before returning to their own time. It is up to the humans to make those choices based on information they gather themselves.”

“What if they make the wrong choices?” Tempus asked. “How much flexibility are we allowed in our interactions?”

“I cannot provide a definitive answer to that question, either. Making sure the future-humans return to their time with as much of the information they hoped to obtain as possible should be the extent of further interaction.”

“It becomes a routine assignment at that point,” Tempus offered. *We return to synchronization of our portion of the timeline, hoping the choices made provide adequate data to avoid extinction of humanity.*

Patterns on Pages

“Routine in nature. Hardly routine in importance.”

“I would request some time to discuss this with Tempus. We must agree on our protocol before we accept this assignment.”

“I suspected as much. I offer you three Earth days to complete your deliberations. I must have a definitive answer by that time at the latest. If you decide not to be my agents in this plan, I would appreciate learning that as soon as possible.”

Pater gave a dismissive gesture and exited his audience chamber.



Marin and Lincoln deliberated for more than an hour. Conversation, argumentation, and speculation alternated with silence as they studied, pondered, and pontificated.

“I see patterns in these shapes,” Marin stated without inflection. “Look.” She pointed out three occurrences of the same pattern of shapes.

“I agree. And many of the groups of shapes end with this one.” Lincoln pointed. “It looks a bit like a wriggling snake.”

“It’s a puzzle.” Marin decided.

“Maybe. I’m not sure of that. I think it’s a way to communicate.”

“It’s a lot of work to go through unless the message is important.”

“Have you any idea how many of these pattern holders are in this Lib’ry?”

“No.”

“I don’t know the true number. But, I want to show you something.” He stood and extended his hand in a gesture of assistance. She frowned but accepted his hand after sliding her chair back from the table.

He led her through a doorway behind the long counter that divided the open space into a large area with tables and chairs and a smaller area with table-like wooden structures with room for only a single chair.

Each of the table-like structures had an ancient electronic view screen sitting on its surface. Many had metal and plastic towers below the desk. Lincoln assumed them to be some form of collection or storage sites of some kind because a cord connected them to the screens.

The doorway had no door. Marin hesitated when they reached the opening. Beyond the doorway was shrouded in darkness.

“I see no use in exploring a man-made cave. Did you bring any torches?”

“I never use a torch inside the Lib’ry. Besides, we don’t need them,” Lincoln assured her.

He stepped through the doorway. As if by magic, light sources in the ceiling illuminated.

Marin gasped. *There must be hundreds of pattern holders in this room!*

“Are you all right?” Lincoln asked as he moved back to her side.

“How did you find this?” she asked.

“It was quite by accident,” he assured her. “But, it is where many of the pattern holders are stored. Did you ever wonder where the new ones came from when you visited and the pattern holder on the stand was not the one there on your last visit?”

Marin nodded.

“I trade one for another each seventh day.”

“Why?”

Patterns on Pages

“At first, it gave me a purpose. Now, I do it because I hope people like you begin to wonder why the ancients had so many pattern holders. I know I do.”

And, now I wonder, too, she thought and asked, “Can I touch them?”

“Same rules as out at the table,” Lincoln intoned in his best officiant’s voice.

Marin smiled at him. She went to the first row of wooden book holders and removed one from its place.

She stepped away from the book holder to gain access to more light. She opened the book’s cover.

“Lincoln! Look at this!”

Long strides brought him to her side. She held out the open book. He looked and inhaled sharply.

“May I turn this page?” he asked.

“If you don’t, I will.”

With reverential care, he turned the page.

Two sharp inhalations.

He turned the page back.

“It appears to be a, um . . .”

“I don’t know what it is,” Marin admitted. “But, I think that each page has some meaning for the single shape on it.”

“I agree. Let’s take this pattern holder out to where we were looking at the other one.”

Back at the table they’d occupied previously, the duo opened the book to the first page. What they saw was an enlarged version of two single shapes. Beneath the shape was the picture of an apple. Below that was a pattern of shapes with the enlarged one on the page in the first position in the pattern.

“This picture is an apple,” Lincoln said. He immediately apologized. “I don’t know why I said that. I know you know what an apple looks like.”

“It’s all right. See how one of the single shapes is first the pattern below the apple. Do you think that’s important?”

“Do you think the shape means ‘apple?’” he asked.

“I haven’t thought about that,” she said without looking away from the book. “Turn the page.”

Lincoln smiled at her no-nonsense tone. *She doesn’t know how bossy she sometimes sounds.* He turned the page. The two facing pages had layouts identical to the first page. But, the single symbol, the picture below the shape, and the pattern of shapes under each picture were unique to each page.

“Look!” Marin’s excitement flared. “One of the shapes on the first page appears on both of these pages as well!”

“Yes, but see how, in the picture of the boat on the second page, the shape from the first page is in the third spot in the pattern.”

“What is this picture?” Marin asked as she pointed to the third page.

“I don’t know,” Lincoln admitted after several seconds of brow-furrowing concentration. “I thought I recalled a memory of such things, but—”

“Remember the pictures from *The Day the Earth Shattered?*” Marin interrupted. Her eyes sparkled with anticipation.

“I do. Oh, I do! That’s very good, Marin. Many of these items line strips of tarred surfaces. Some believe that they were a form of transportation.”

Marin frowned. *There are wheels on these items. Why are there no horses to pull them in any of the images?* She ignored the thought and focused on the pattern of shapes below the picture.

“See? Here is the crescent moon-like shape in the first position. But the same shape from the first page at was in the

Patterns on Pages

first spot there and the third spot on the boat page. Now it's in the second spot." Marin's excitement escalated with each revelation.

"I see that. Let's predict the spot for that shape on the next pages?"

"I'll call my idea a guess," Marin said. "I think that because it was on the first page, one of those shapes will be on each and every page."

"I like that. I will call it my prediction. Please turn the page and—"

"Guess!"

He smiled.

When she turned the page, her face fell. Only one oversized shape from the first page appeared on either of the newly exposed pages.

"I was wrong," she grumbled.

Lincoln bit his tongue. He studied the two pages for several seconds before he spoke.

"The picture on this page is a dog. But, I don't know what this is," he added as he touched the picture on the fifth page of the book.

"It must be a made-up animal," Marin observed. "It has four legs and what looks like a tail."

"I see those, but if these are ears," he said as he pointed at the picture. "If they are ears, they are much too big to be real."

"I agree. It looks like a child drew this. Look at what is where the nose should be."

"Long and gray. It looks like a snake. It could be a drawing by child artist."

They sat in silence for several seconds before Marin sighed.

"Look closely," Lincoln encouraged. He pointed at the shape in the second position in the sequence beneath the dog.

“What? Oh, wait. That shape is in . . .” she paused and counted. “It is in the second place under the boat.”

“Yes,” Lincoln agreed. “Here is one of the shapes from the top of the first page.” He pointed to the appropriate letter in Elephant.

“Other shapes from the first page are in the pattern under the child’s drawing, too,” Marin said. She pointed to the lower case e and p.

“So, what do we know?” he asked.

“The patterns of shapes are different lengths on different pages. And the place where a shape is found is different, too,” she answered.

This time there was silence for a full two minutes. Neither member of the pair was willing to admit defeat. Yet, neither was willing to turn the next page, either.

Lincoln sighed.

“It’ll be dark soon,” he said. “Let’s leave now. If we don’t we’ll have to travel on the strips of tar without light to show the cracks and broken pieces.”

“I know. It’s just that I feel like we’re close to something. Something important,” Marin mused.

“The books don’t have legs or wings. They will be here in the morning.”

“I know.” She stood.

Lincoln closed the book.

They exited the Lib’ry in tandem. On their way out of the building, they passed a plaque. It too displayed patterns of shapes.

**The Regents of the University of California dedicate
this library annex to the preservation of knowledge.**

October 12, 2---

Patterns on Pages

Built in a forested mountain area northeast of Berkeley, the building was unknown to most of those who lived nearby. There was evidence, also passed by, but ignored by the couple, that others had known of this place in the past. A few bleached human bones littered the area just off what had once been the portico.

“I wish I was more like you,” Marin said as she stopped beside Lincoln outside the Lib’ry.

“I can’t imagine why you’d want that.”

“I know you’ll sleep well tonight. On the other hand, I will lie awake thinking. I’ll drift off just before sunrise and wake up in a foul mood. You. You’re never in a foul mood.”

Oh, dear Marin. If you only knew the troubling thoughts running through my mind. There will be no sleep for me tonight. I must talk with the Council. I have an uneasy feeling about what those shapes and the patterns they form might mean.

He intertwined his fingers of his right hand with those of her left, but he said nothing.

She looked up at him.

He smiled.

She blushed but held his eyes for what she hoped was a meaningful length of time. *I’m no good at expressing my feelings. I hope you know why I kept looking into your eyes.* She looked away.

They walked hand-in-hand the rest of the way to their living complex being careful to avoid all cracks in the strip of tar.