

# 1 - A Box of Sacred Relics



Great Barrier Island – New Zealand/Aotearoa 2065

**S**hafts of mid-morning sunlight flickered within the stand of giant pohutukawas. They repeatedly caught the small boy in their glare, air-borne now as he leapt a fallen branch in the dense mat of spring grasses. The patchy light added to the urgency that fuelled his racing legs and dispelled his sense of caution.

He landed, stumbled on something unseen and recovered to continue pell-mell, exhilarated almost as much by the gradient of the slope as by the gravity of his mission. Both provided unaccustomed speed and he knew he had never run faster.

He tore between the village burial mounds, only dimly sensing the sanctity of the place, grateful for the shorter clipped grass between the half dozen stone cairns. His ears were filled with his heavy breathing, his heartbeat, and the thudding of his footfalls, the chaos of sounds reflecting his thoughts.

Shirtless and shoeless, with a sheen of perspiration starting to show, his small wiry frame proclaimed his youthful vigour. About his lower half, battered khaki shorts clung tenuously to scant hips and only by the miracle of a mother's needle did they stay there. The same motherly skills had kept them serviceable down the line of her three sons, but this youngest one, Evan, would no doubt see them committed, to the village rag-bag.

He caught sight of the villagers, a score or so, of mixed gender and ages, still out of earshot down by the lagoon's edge. Relief that he wouldn't have to search for them added to the tumult of his emotions.

Beyond the gathering, the two village ketches appeared large and motionless at their moorings and the backdrop of distant surf on the bar behind them would, on other days, have beckoned the boy. But the scene failed, this once, to distract him. Without a