

THE BONE SCRAPER LEGACY

A historical occult mystery

Gabriel Farago

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Black Arrows' clubhouse, Auckland: 23 September

The trip from the airport to the southern outskirts of Auckland turned into a white-knuckle ride difficult to forget. How the cumbersome vintage car managed to take corners at such breakneck speed – tyres screeching – without hitting the kerb was a mystery. Jack resisted the urge to ask the Māori driver, who seemed to be enjoying himself, to slow down. Conversation with Tristan was impossible due to the blaring reggae music, the deafening base making the seats shake.

'The Black Arrows are one of the most dangerous gangs in New Zealand; be careful', Jack heard the policeman say. *Too late*, he thought and closed his eyes. He opened them again when he could feel the car slow down as it entered a dilapidated industrial area littered with abandoned car bodies and broken furniture. The stray dogs rummaging through rubbish added to the desperation of the district.

'Here we are,' said the Māori in the passenger seat as the car pulled up in front of what looked like a large corrugated-iron shed, a solid steel gate with razor wire on top blocking the entrance.

The driver honked the horn. Moments later, a small peephole-like opening in the steel door opened. Obviously, someone was having a look.

The driver waved and slowly, the massive gate opened.

Jack turned to Tristan sitting next to him. 'It's another world, all right,' he said as the car drove into an enclosed courtyard and came to a sudden halt in front of what looked like open, flood-lit workshops with cars on hoists being repaired by sweaty, bare-chested mechanics. There was also a gym with a dozen or so Māori youths working out.

The scene reminded Jack of his visit to the clubhouse of the Warriors, an outlaw motorcycle gang in Sydney, where he had met the Bone Scrapper for the first time.

'Satan's panel-beating shop for lost souls? What do you think?' said Tristan and opened the door.

'Welcome to hell, you mean? Hieronymus Bosch would have loved this,' said Jack.

'Inspiration for one of his paintings, do you think?'

'Aha. Certainly reminds me of his work. Your relatives, mate, not mine,' replied Jack and got out of the car.

The driver walked over to a tall, grey-haired Māori watching them, and pointed to Tristan. Jack thought he looked vaguely familiar. The grey-haired Māori nodded and approached Tristan. 'Just in time,' he said. 'Follow me.'

Tristan pointed to Jack standing next to him. 'This is Jack, a friend. He has met the Bone

Scraper before.’

‘I remember. He got shot by the Undertaker the night the Wizard died.’

Of course, thought Jack as he remembered that fateful night at the Wolf’s Lair. Jack touched the scar on his forehead, a reminder of a deadly bullet that narrowly missed his brain.

‘Wait here,’ growled the Māori and went inside. He returned moments later. ‘All right. You can both come in, but first I have to pat you down; house rules. Spread your legs and raise your hands ...’

Satisfied, the Māori turned around. ‘Follow me, but I have to warn you, he’s in a bad way.’

Jack looked at Tristan, raised an eyebrow and pointed to an open, rusty door. ‘After you, mate. Prepare yourself.’

As soon as Jack entered what looked like a workshop smelling of paint and diesel, he stopped and looked around to allow his eyes to become accustomed to the gloom.

A space had been cleared in the middle of the otherwise cluttered, windowless chamber, which had previously been used for spray-painting. The only light intruding hesitantly into the darkness came from a single light globe dangling from the corrugated-iron ceiling. It cast a pale circle of light on the grimy concrete floor, illuminating it like a stage in some bizarre play with only one actor.

The Bone Scraper sat in a high-backed lounge chair, its horsehair-stuffed armrests torn around the edges. Bare-chested, with bandages crisscrossing his massive, hairy torso, he locked eyes with Tristan, staring at him.

‘Come closer, where I can see you,’ said the Bone Scraper, his deep, resonant voice sounding otherworldly, like the voice of some Greek oracle revealing secrets of the future.

Both Tristan and Jack took a few steps forward.

‘Ah, Jack. Good of you to come as well. We meet again. Times have changed. Look at me now.’

‘What happened?’ asked Jack.

The Bone Scraper lifted his hand slowly and pointed to his bandaged chest. ‘A fight. What else? Knives. After all, we once were warriors,’ he said with sadness in his voice.

Jack watched the Bone Scraper sitting as if strapped into what looked like some weird ejector seat into the afterlife, and wondered ...

‘You were there when the Wizard was dying. *Ars Moriendi*, remember?’ continued the Bone Scraper with a wry smile. ‘We gave him quite a send-off, didn’t we?’

‘You sure did. I would call it unforgettable. Retribution would be more accurate, just as Cassandra had predicted.’

‘He had to pay the ferryman before he was allowed to cross to the other side.’

‘Some payment,’ said Jack, remembering that fateful night at the Wolf’s Lair.

‘Now, it’s my turn,’ said the Bone Scrapper. ‘If I had listened to the medicos, I would be lying somewhere in a hospital bed with tubes hanging out of my chest. That was never going to be for me. This place may not look it, but it’s infinitely better than that. It’s part of my world.’

Exhausted, the Bone Scrapper paused and looked at Tristan. ‘Tristan, it’s time,’ he said.

‘Time for what?’ asked Tristan.

‘You *know* what. You are the last one. It’s your turn now. Death is just another path. Nothing to be afraid of. It’s how we deal with it is all that matters. There isn’t much time, and I have a lot to tell you. Come, have a good look at my face, because very soon that will be the lasting memory of me, and I want you to take it with you,’ said the Bone Scrapper. He was beginning to choke and blood had begun trickling from the corners of his mouth.

‘You have to complete what I’ve begun. You have to succeed where I have failed. You are our only hope ...’ continued the Bone Scrapper, his voice barely audible.

Tristan walked into the circle of light and stood facing the Bone Scrapper.

‘Jack, please leave us. This is between Tristan, our ancestors, and me,’ whispered the Bone Scrapper.

Jack nodded and walked towards the door.

‘It’s all about destiny,’ added the Bone Scrapper just before Jack reached the door. ‘We can’t escape destiny. I’m sure you understand that better than most.’

‘I do,’ said Jack and left the room.

Tristan came out of the chamber half an hour later, his ashen face drawn. Jack had never seen him like that before. He looked as if he had seen something terrifying, like a ghost from a violent past. The grey-haired Māori walked up to Tristan standing at the open door.

‘Has he gone?’ he asked.

Tristan nodded. As the Māori raised his hand, the entire complex fell silent and men came from all sides and stood in front of the open door. Five men, all elderly Māori, their heavily tattooed faces looking grim, stepped forward and followed the grey-haired man inside. Moments later, chanting could be heard as the men came out of the room, carrying the dead Bone Scrapper on their broad shoulders, as tradition demanded.

‘Me tangi, kāpā ko te mate i te marama.’

Soon, all the others joined in. It reminded Jack of Cassandra’s funeral, where the same

eerie, moving song had filled the chapel as her coffin had been carried outside on similar shoulders.

As the strange procession passed Tristan, it stopped momentarily. ‘You, come with us,’ said one of the Māori elders carrying the Bone Scraper’s limp body. Tristan nodded and fell in behind them.

Jack was about to do the same when someone placed a big hand on his shoulder from behind. ‘Not you,’ said a deep voice.

Jack nodded and stood respectfully to attention as the body was carried past him.

Jack was invited to sit with a group of Māori, singing and drinking beer, in what seemed like an improvised wake. All work in the complex had stopped, out of respect for the departed.

When Tristan returned an hour or so later, surrounded by a group of elders, Jack gasped. A striking Māori tattoo, a traditional *moko* covering the right side of his face, had transformed Tristan’s appearance. His handsome features had turned into a tribal reminder of a violent past, a link to a famous ancestor whose revered memory lived on and was being celebrated by all those present.

‘We are staying as guests in one of the Māori homes tonight before we get on the ship,’ said Tristan, sitting next to Jack in the back of the vintage club car.

‘On the *ship*?’ asked Jack. ‘We are going somewhere?’

‘We are.’

‘Where?’

‘Chatham Islands.’

Jack nodded but decided not to pursue the matter further. ‘Care to tell me what happened while you were with the Bone Scraper?’ he asked instead, changing direction.

‘Later,’ said Tristan, waving dismissively. He was tracing the outline of his new facial tattoo with his fingertips. ‘This is only the first outline. There will be follow-up procedures. Tradition.’

‘All right,’ said Jack, realising Tristan had to be left alone with his thoughts. Jack was holding on as the car screeched around corners at breakneck speed.

By the time they arrived at the modest home in a poor, working-class neighbourhood, a rowdy party was already in full swing. Loud music boomed through the open front door, and crates of beer almost blocked the crowded hallway. Tristan and his new *moko* were a curiosity. Giggling girls and burly, heavily tattooed youths kept pointing to his face, their manner jovial, but respectful.

After several hours of heavy drinking, the guests left and the music became softer. An elderly Māori woman who obviously lived in the house showed Tristan and Jack to a room at the back. 'Ship leaves at sunrise. I'll wake you and cook breakfast,' she said, smiling, and left the room.

Tristan lay down on one of the narrow beds and closed his eyes.

'Quite a day, mate,' said Jack. 'Is this what you expected?'

'No. This was more than I could have imagined.'

Jack sat down on the other narrow bed in the room but didn't reply. He knew Tristan would tell him more when he was ready.

'You know all about promises, Jack, don't you?' began Tristan after a while, his voice hoarse.

'I do.'

'I made a promise today and gave my word to a dying man; my uncle,' said Tristan.

'What kind of promise?'

Tristan opened his eyes, sat up, and looked at Jack. 'To find the head of one of my ancestors and bring it back here for burial.'

'That's quite a promise,' said Jack, raising an eyebrow. 'Can you tell me more?'

'We are talking about Parema Te Pahau. A famous Māori chief and warrior. The Bone Scraper is named after him. Parema Te Pahau is his real name.'

'I know.'

'Then you would also know that the Bone Scraper's facial tattoo was inspired by the *moko* on the famous chief's face.'

'The Bone Scraper told me. And this is relevant because...?'

'I now wear part of that very tattoo on my face, right here.' Tristan pointed to his right cheek. 'It's an exact copy of the Bone Scraper's tattoo. This should help, but it may not be enough,' said Tristan.

'You speak in riddles. Please elaborate.'

'This is quite a tale. Taking a leaf out of your book, I'll tell you a story.'

'Always the best way,' replied Jack, smiling. 'I'm a good listener.'

'It all began during the bloody Musket Wars in 1825. You have heard of them, surely?' said Tristan.

'Sure have. The European settlers brought muskets to New Zealand, and the warlike native tribes soon discovered their devastating effect in battle and began to acquire them through trade. This resulted in an arms race between tribes who all wanted to gain the upper hand.'

‘Very good. How come you know all this?’

‘Research. I looked into Māori history and customs when I wrote *The Disappearance of Anna Popov*. And besides, I interviewed the Bone Scraper on several occasions, and he spoke a lot about these wars, and Māori history and tradition. Apparently, more than twenty thousand Māori died in battle during these wars, which began in about 1820, lasted around two decades, and wiped out almost twenty per cent of the entire Māori population.’

‘Dreadful as that must have been, this sets the scene for the story I’m about to tell you, because the event that had such a far-reaching impact on my family took place in 1835 on the Chatham Islands.’

‘Fascinating,’ said Jack.

‘Parema Te Pahau was a revered chief of Ngāti Mutunga, an *iwi*, or tribe, living in the Wellington region. But they felt unsafe and threatened by neighbouring tribes, always on the lookout for more land and conquests. Weakened by frequent inter-tribal wars, a decision was made in 1835 by tribal elders to leave Ngāti Mutunga land and migrate to the Chatham Islands. They gifted their land to neighbouring tribes, burned the bones of their ancestors, and left.’

‘That’s quite a decision to make.’

‘Sure was. Apparently, Chief Parema Te Pahau had a lot to do with this because he was a *tohunga matakite*, a foreteller of the future. There were about eight hundred Ngāti Mutunga ready to leave their home, and how they made it to the Chatham Islands is a story worthy of a movie. Ingenious, and bold.’

‘Oh? Tell me.’

‘In November 1835, Mutunga warriors hijacked the brig *Lord Rodney* in Port Nicholson, today’s Wellington, and forced the crew to sail to the Chatham Islands. With several hundred souls and a vast amount of supplies and livestock on board, the ship left Port Nicholson and sailed to the Chatham Islands, where the newcomers were welcomed by the peace-loving Moriori population. This had catastrophic consequences for the local Moriori, who were slaughtered by the invaders and not only took their land, but also enslaved the survivors.’

‘Brutal times,’ said Jack, shaking his head.

‘Perhaps, seen through the lens of history, but to the invading tribes this was nothing unusual, because taking possession of the land in that way was entirely in accord with custom.’

‘Interesting.’

‘All seemed to be working well between the invading tribes until 1840, when the Ngāti Mutunga decided to attack Ngāti Tama, their former allies. A bloody battle ensued, during which many were killed. Parema Te Pahau was one of them, and that’s when it all began.’

‘What exactly?’

‘Killing the chief of their opponent in battle was seen as a major victory by Ngāti Tama. The jubilant victors paraded his body through their *pā* – their village – before cutting off his heavily tattooed head, and then eating the rest of the corpse.’

‘That’s quite a victory celebration to digest. And to think that this wasn’t that long ago. Local custom, I suppose,’ said Jack.

‘It was. Eating your enemy was the ultimate victory, and annihilation of their power and spirit. The Māori believed that as the defeated enemy’s flesh passed through the body, there was a transfer of power to the victor. As Parema Te Pahau was well known not only for his prowess on the battlefield, but also for his spiritual powers, this was viewed as a significant event.’

‘Obviously that didn’t include his head, because you made a promise.’

‘To find it and bring it back for burial, because until that happens, the soul cannot pass into the afterlife and take its rightful place next to the ancestors.’

‘Any idea what happened to it?’ asked Jack.

Tristan shook his head and closed his eyes. ‘By then, the Bone Scrapper was almost incoherent and could barely speak, but he did give me a significant clue just before he died.’

‘What kind of clue?’

‘He said I should go and talk to someone who may be able to help. Someone who lives on the Chatham Islands.’

‘*Who?*’

Tristan turned to face the wall for what seemed a long time and didn’t reply. Jack thought he must have fallen asleep.

‘My grandmother,’ whispered Tristan softly after a while, with pain and sadness in his voice as he remembered the Bone Scrapper’s death and his own mother’s funeral, before drifting into a restless slumber.

**** End of Chapter Excerpt ****

The quest in *The Bone Scrapper Legacy* grows ever more dangerous, with Jack Rogan at the heart of an ancient struggle. What secrets will the dark past unveil, and what fate awaits the sacred Maori artifact? The confrontation with shadowy forces intensifies, and each step is a fight against the encroaching darkness. The thrilling conclusion to *The Bone Scrapper Legacy*

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