Tyler and the Treasure of the Ancients

It was a sunny Thursday afternoon as the van stopped outside the house. Tyler got in, waved goodbye to his Mum and dogs, Luna and General. General a fearsome looking, but gentle pit bull and Luna, a loving and excitable, young border collie cross, watched through from the front door.

“What are we doing today?” asked Tyler.

“We’re going on an adventure” said Ken excitedly.

“OK. What sort of adventure?” asked Tyler warily.

“I found a treasure map tucked into an old book that I got in an Op Shop” Ken replied.

“Yeah, right”

“Seriously. Look”

Ken handed over an old, folded piece of paper. Tyler opened it and studied it. It was thick, yellowed paper with ragged edges. There was a rough map on one side and a maze on the other.

“I’m not sure where it is though” said Ken “it could be anywhere, even Australia”.

“It’s near here. This is the Waitakeres” Said Tyler “look this is Whatipu and here are the caves. This river is the Pararaha. We follow it up into this valley. But then it just stops at this hole in the paper”

“What’s on the other side?” Ken asked

“A maze. It looks pretty easy, but it seems to start in the middle, where this hole is” replied Tyler.

“OK, we’ll work it out when we get there. I’ve got a torch, rope and some sacks in the back of the van”

“I’m hungry”

“Yeah we need supplies, what do you feel like eating?”

“Chicken”

“KFC or Nuggets?”

“Burger Winsconsin and we can get dippers for later”

“Cool”

An hour and a half later they were in the carpark by the beach. With Paratutae Island looming over them in Wonga Wonga Bay.

They filled a sack with rope, chicken McNuggets, coke, a couple of hoodies and a torch and set off on the next leg of their adventure. It took them half an hour or so to get to the caves, where they finished off the chicken and coke. Also some chocolate for dessert. They walked along the hot black sand for a while and then when they came to a river flowing into the sea, turned inland. They followed the river as it got smaller with tributaries joining it. They followed the river deep into the valley, until they reached its source. A deep, clear pool. They had also come to the end of the map.

“What now?” Ken wondered “This is the end of the line. Maybe it’s in the bottom of the pool?”

“I reckon the map carries on to the other side. See, the hole this side joins the hole on the other side” Tyler explained

“A worm hole? Or a portal?” Ken asked

“Maybe. Look the other part of the map could be caves. If they are, then there could be an entrance in the pool.”

“OK, I’ll go in and have a look. I’ll come and get you if I find anything”

“I’m a better swimmer than you and I can hold my breath longer than you” Tyler said.

“Yeah, but I can’t risk anything happening to you. Your Mum would be really annoyed with me if I don’t bring you back home. Also they’d laugh at me at the next Upside meeting when they ask how things are and I have to say that I lost you on an adventure. I probably wouldn’t get another boy”

So Ken tied the rope around his waist and jumped into the pool. He swam down and down. The water was clear and he could see several metres in front of him. The bottom of the pool was littered with rocks and some skeletons of animals that had not been able to get out. He swam up to the surface, gasping for air.

“Find anything?” Tyler asked

“Not yet”

“Get down there then”

So Ken went down again and again. After six dives Tyler started to get impatient, but Ken persisted. He methodically checked the steep sides of the pool.

It was still hot and Tyler was sitting on a ledge overlooking the pool. He jumped into the pool to cool down, swam around and pulled himself up at the ledge. His legs swung underneath the ledge and he couldn’t find any purchase with his feet to get out. He dove underneath the ledge and found an underwater cave that went under the bank. He went back and told Ken about his find. They got their sack of supplies and together they took deep breaths, dove back in and swam into the cave. Fortunately it was only about 20m or less than a minute of swimming before they reached a large cavern and were able to surface and take great breaths. They pulled themselves out of the pool in the cave.

It was completely dark; they couldn’t see their hands in front of their faces. Fortunately the torch was waterproof. It’s cool, yellow light illuminated the void around them. It was large cave with a very high ceiling. A stream flowed from the darkness of the other side of the cavern into the pool. The boys decided to follow the stream to see where it led. The map seemed to follow the stream. They entered a tunnel at the far end of the cavern, the water splashing around their ankles as they slowly walked in single file. The walls of the tunnel could be reached with outstretched arms as could the ceiling. The tunnel sloped gently uphill as they walked for almost an hour. At first it seemed as though the tunnel was carved out of the living rock, but they realised that they were lava tubes, great vents created millions of years ago, when New Zealand was being formed by the volcanic and seismic activity of a young continent.

Ken called a halt, he was starting to tire and needed to rest. Tyler, Impatient to see where the tunnel led, took the torch and explored further ahead. A cry of surprise brought Ken running to Tyler.

“Look” said Tyler, excitedly “here’s some pictures. They’ve been carved into the walls”.

“They look like people. I wonder if it’s the people who used to live here.” Ken mused.

“Doesn’t look like people” Tyler pointed out “their faces are very long, like they’ve got snouts and they seem to be covered in hair”.

“Looks familiar somehow”

“They seem to be almost like dogs or wolves, but standing upright”

“It must be their favourite pets” Ken wondered aloud.

The carvings continued as they walked through the twisting tunnel. There were forks and turnings, making them consult their map.

“We’ve been walking for hours” said Tyler “must be at least 10 kilometres”.

“My watch says that we’ve walked 11,000 paces. So that’s 8km” replied Ken “How much more of the map is there?”

“I reckon we’re half way there” said Tyler “Do we have any more food?”

“Got some chocolate, then that’s it.”

They noticed that they were no longer following the stream. The cave was dry and now was slowly going downhill.

A glow seemed to emanate from the walls. On closer inspection, they realised that the walls were covered in glow worms. They turned the torch off, as there was now enough light to see by. The cave was getting bigger and they were soon in another large cavern. It looked like they were in a massive temple. The walls were almost completely covered in carvings. They depicted a great civilisation. Rather than showing the doglike creatures as pets, it seemed that the murals were the record of their world. It wasn’t clear what had happened to the dog people at first, but after following the timeline a grim picture emerged.

A race of cat-like people had arrived from overseas. Initially they were welcomed and were treated well. However the cat people wanted more land and more resources and soon war broke out. The dog people were unsuited to such a brutal and savage conflict and were driven out of their own lands. They hid deep in the forests and caves of the land, ruthlessly pursued by the unremitting and cruel felines. It seemed as though all that was left of the wise and gentle canines was this underground abandoned city.

“So, where’s the treasure?” asked Tyler

“Dunno” replied Ken

“Hope this hasn’t been a waste of time”

“Well, we set out on an adventure. Which we’ve done. Treasure would’ve been a bonus. We should head home”.

“Which way do we go? Back the way we came or do we finish following the map?”

“Might as well see where it leads to. There may still be treasure” Ken suggested.

They crossed the cavern to the other side and picked up the trail. The tunnel was much smaller, they had to stoop in places and the walls brushed their arms as they walked. They walked for almost an hour, the path had been slowly rising. The walls still had carvings, but there were also niches in the walls that looked as though they’d been carved out. Some held boxes. Old wooden boxes, some had crumbled. Inside were bones. It looked as though they were passing through a crypt where the canines had buried their ancestors. The boxes were scattered about, as though they had been smashed open.

“We’re too late. Even if there was treasure here, it’s gone now.” Tyler commented.

They walked a little further, the tunnel had grown dark, and the glow worms had been left far behind. Tyler turned on the torch.

They came to the end of the path. Ahead was a deep ravine, so deep that they couldn’t see the bottom. Tyler threw a rock and after several seconds, they heard a splash.

“There’s water down there and the ravine doesn’t seem too deep” said Tyler “Last one in is a chicken”.

They looked at each other and both jumped at the same time. They bombed into the cold dark water and both surfaced gasping for air.

“Yeah” whooped Tyler “This is more like an adventure”.

The water was a fast-flowing river. They let themselves be carried along by the current. Ahead was a dim glow, that grew brighter as they raced towards it. Ahead was a strip of bright light, which streamed through bushes. They were approaching very fast, it seemed to be a wall of plants that were hanging down from the roof.

“Duck” yelled Ken

They both took big breaths and dove down as they passed under the hanging hedge. They were thrown about, scratched, and bruised as they came into daylight. They were still floating in a river, but with steep, bush covered sides. They swam for shore as they approached a bend, which had a low bank and easy access to shore. They lay on the small stony beach, gasping for breath.

“Wonder where we are?” mused Tyler

“Let’s walk and find out” said Ken

After 20 minutes they came to a track. They followed it, which widened into a maintained trail. Before long, they were on a dirt road. They walked until they flagged down a passing car.

“Where are we?” they both asked.

“Mokoroa, not far from Muriwai” the old man replied from behind the wheel “I’m going to the Shore. I can give you a lift as far as there.”

“Cool, ta. I’ll pick the van up tomorrow” Ken said

Half an hour later, they were home. Tyler jumped out of the car and waved goodbye to Ken.

He excitedly called out to his Mum, to tell her all about his adventure.

Luna and General raced out to welcome him, barking furiously.

Luna jumped up on his hind legs, resting his paws on Tyler’s shoulders and licked his face.

“Don’t say anything about today” he barked “we’re not ready”

“Did you just speak? How can I understand what you’re saying? puzzled Tyler.

“You are one of us now. You can help us. But you can’t say anything, we are not ready. Soon we will overcome the hated cat oppressors and once again we shall live in a land of peace and harmony” Luna barked, showing his teeth and growled to show he wasn’t joking. He then licked Tyler’s face to show that they’re still best friends.

“Stop barking Luna!” Kendra, Tyler’s Mum yelled

“Hey Tyler” she called out “Hope you both had a nice time. Come inside, it’s late.”

To some, gold and money is treasure.

To others, its friendship, camaraderie and being a part of something.