

# ACHOORA

Three youths were reaching the age  
of manhood.

Three dark spots appeared on  
the setting sun.

Urundi Wolaroo saw and read  
the signs.

**Present time Australia.**

**Bold Melbourne newspaper headlines announced.**

## SKIER DIES ON MT. KOSCIUSKO

**“Peter Fowler an experienced skier from Carlton was killed on Mt. Kosciusko. Friends who were with him to celebrate his birthday begged him not to ski due to the snowstorm and quantity of alcohol he had taken at lunch. However Peter ignored their advice. He was found dead on the top of Mt. Kosciusko where he apparently was caught in a freak snow whirlwind. Peter leaves no family. He will be greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues.”**

\*\*\*

**This had not happened before and Australian skiing enthusiasts were shocked.**

**The official forensic pathologist’s autopsy report stated that Peter Fowler’s death was due to internal head injuries and that the blood test had confirmed a high alcohol level.**

**But another confidential report by the same forensic pathologist was sent to the Health Minister in Canberra. The Minister was alarmed and instructed all major hospitals and police stations throughout the Australian Continent to handle similar deaths with caution, to keep the deaths under wrap, and report them to Canberra until further notice.**

\*\*\*

**A few evenings later the film studios in Surfer’s Paradise, Queensland, were holding a finishing party for the Australian film *The Ghost Ship*. It lasted till late in the night but Robert Chandler stayed only long enough to say goodbye to the director, the film crew, and his fellow actors. He always did that. It was his trademark: no star snobbishness with Robert. No aloofness like his Hollywood colleagues. He was proud of his Australian open “hi mate” image.**

**Robert had one glass of champagne then left. The role had exhausted him. The final night scenes of the shipwreck were difficult and dangerous with sharks constantly circling around the set. They terrified him especially the white-belly sharks. A couple of**

these monstrous ocean killers attacked the steel mesh. But having established his heroic film image Robert kept his fear to himself.

He needed a good night's rest to drive the following morning to Brisbane for his flight to Melbourne. He was eager to get home to make sure that all was well organised for his "Grand Prix" party. His luxurious apartment overlooked the Grand Prix circuit around Albert Park Lake.

Robert was popular with the public. However some journalists, with the sleazy press, were looking for a sex scandal. He was too "clean", they thought. Robert was a young buccaneer still unmarried and with no serious girlfriend in sight. However, he did have a couple of highly publicized affairs and fans cheers, even though they were fully aware that the romances were contrived by his publicity agent to boost Robert's screen masculinity, especially for the US cinema audience. The loyal fans didn't mind. They loved Robert. He brought a ray of sunshine into their routine daily lives.

Some journalists hinted that Robert was gay. They had no proof of it and Robert wisely ignored their innuendos.

\*\*\*

When Robert was in his early teens, his grandmother had told him that she had researched the family tree up to his very first Australian ancestor, Arthur Wilson. This young labourer from Windsor, England, had been sentenced to transportation in 1818 to Australia for highway robberies. After serving his seven years, he had decided to remain in the Colony as a free citizen. Robert was his only male descendant.

Robert liked the idea that his first roots in Australia were those of an English petty offender punished by merciless laws. It sounded romantic. He had already decided to be an actor and fancied himself portraying his ancestor in a film. But after his grandmother's death he discovered an envelope in her private papers and what he read shocked him.

Among the papers was a copy of a Court order for the arrest of three emancipist farm hands, one Arthur Wilson and two other men, described as 'idle drunkards', who had raped three very young aboriginal girls and brutally murdered them and many other aborigines of all ages in New South Wales. Also they were suspected of having murdered their master and stolen his guns. They had disappeared, leaving behind their wives and children. However, his grandmother's notes pointed that she had found no definite proof that this Wilson Scott was the same person as the highway thief from Windsor. The name was after all fairly common one and records were few. She also explained that if a former convict committed a crime in the Colony, he was sentenced to hard labour for life and sent to Van Diemen's Land as a de facto slave. Therefore escaping to the outback was the only solution for second offenders. Owning a gun and stealing ammunition would have been essential for survival in the bush. All three men were caught and because of their horrid crimes in were hung on the banks of the Tasman Sea and their bodies thrown into the ocean, watched by a jubilant crowd of deportees, as a pack of sharks devoured the bodies.

\*\*\*

Robert was shattered. He had never imagined that his ancestor could have been such a vile criminal, but now there was a strong suspicion that the man was his ancestor, a truly despicable character. He feared that sooner or later this would become public knowledge and destroy his dream of becoming an actor. He had to do something to eliminate the threat – and he did. Being an only child, still in his teens, he reinvented himself as a second generation Australian.

Today it is an accepted fact that Robert's great-grandparents were English from Dorset and came to Australia before the Second World War. According to his CV his grandmother was an actress in England and he had inherited his talent from her.

After Robert left the film party a studio car drove him to his temporary penthouse apartment in Surfer's Paradise in time for him to watch a documentary on ABC TV channel: "Australia's Stockmen."

A Hollywood filmmaker was planning a major production on this subject to be filmed in Australia and Robert was hoping to obtain the starring role. He thought the programme would give him hints on how to improve his portrayal of a stockman.

Back at his apartment he helped himself to a glass of J&B and telephoned his agent in Melbourne to ask her to have dinner with him the next evening. Then he switched on a large high definition television and settled down in a comfortable armchair to watch the programme.

The ABC News' logo filled the screen. But the programme was interrupted with a news flash. A male voice announced: "Geoff Stewart, our world surfing champion, died in a fire in his house in Darwin this evening. The police are investigating the cause of the fire.

\*\*\*

The capital city of the Northern Territory is often hit by tropical storms.

The day of Geoff Stewart's death the air in the afternoon had been charged with electricity - sign that a tropical disturbance may be on the way. But, according to the latest weather forecast, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Torres Strait, two of the most treacherous seas influencing Darwin's weather, were calm. The Arafura and the Timor Seas were calm too. Yet the electricity in the air was strong. People looked at the evening sky for signs of a true "knock'em down storm".

The signs were there but the white Australians did not see them. Only the true children of the sun-drenched continent, the Aborigines, saw the three black spots on the setting sun and many thought that the world as they knew was about to end and Dreamtime was returning, as in their forbears' time, before the earth was born.

Only Urundee Wolaroo, of the Mandawaroo tribe, understood the real meaning of the dark spots on the sinking sun. He paid homage to Achoora, the Spirit of Dreamtime, by fasting and chanting a prayer.

That afternoon Geoff Stewart had felt a tingling sensation on his body while training for his next International surfing competition on his favorite beach near Darwin.

He returned early to his home, a bungalow surrounded by tropical shrubs and trees. But even there Geoff could not escape the tingling sensation on his skin and he telephoned the Meteorological Bureau. No hurricane warning had been issued.

Earthquake, he thought. Darwin had experienced earth tremors in the past and it was logical to Geoff that this time might be 'the big one'. He called the Seismological Bureau but he was told that there was no indication of an earthquake in Northern Territory.

It happened at 11.20 pm. Geoff was sound asleep.

A full moon bathed the still night. Cicadas chirped in Geoff's garden and a couple of possums romped besides the swimming pool. The cicadas stopped chirping, the possums stood dead still, their eyes bulging with fear. All nature's sounds seized and a fierce whirlwind struck Geoff's bungalow. A short scream was heard in the bungalow and the whirlwind shot away, with a gold-green light in the centre of it. A silence reigned for a second, then all-nocturnal sounds were back to normal and tongues of smoke and fire started to swell from the windows of Geoff's bedroom. Soon flames engulfed the whole bungalow. It did not take long for the Fire Brigade to arrive but the men could not save Geoff.

Soon an ambulance arrived with two medics. They took Geoff's body to Darwin's mortuary for post-mortem. The ambulance men were convinced that the fire had caused Geoff's death but not Akamuti Burooroo, a young Aborigine laboratory assistant who was on duty that night. He had had a look at Geoff's body: the dead man's eyes were closed surrounded with dark rings and Akamuti's heart started to race with a foreboding excitement. "Not possible! - Can't be, it can't be," he thought, unable to take his eyes off the dead man's face. Then his eyes slowly checked the naked body but he did not see any burns serious enough to be fatal. The victim looked asleep rather than dead. With a trembling hand he touched Geoff's closed eyes and jerked his hand away, as if he had touched a forbidden secret sacrament.

Later, in his humble studio apartment, Akamuti stood in front of an aboriginal painting mumbling a prayer in his native tongue. In the centre of the painting was a large eye painted in gold-green colours.

The prayer was short. He touched the eye with his lips then dialled a telephone number on his mobile. A croaky male voice with a strong aboriginal accent answered.

Akamuti apologised for telephoning so late, and said: "A miracle happened, Uncle."

"I know, my son, I know," replied the voice calmly.

"Should I tell my superior the truth of the man's death?" asked Akamuti.

A pause followed. Then the voice on the phone said, "Don't, my son. Your boss will inform the white law enforcers and they will not understand. It will only muddy the waters. Justice is being done. No one can alter what was written in Dreamtime when

everything was a spirit before the earth was born. The souls of our forbears now will rest in peace. This man's destiny was sealed at the time of his conception. It's Achoora's law." After a pause, the voice added, "You are a wise young man hence you were chosen to carry in your heart the full knowledge of the Spirit Achoora. Later, when I have left this earth and your first-born son reaches his manhood, tell him how our Great Spirit saved your ancestor from being murdered by the white men. Keep well my son."

"Goodnight uncle," said Akamuti, and shut his mobile.

\*\*\*

In Melbourne, over a quiet dinner in an upmarket restaurant, Robert and his woman agent were discussing the planned Hollywood Australian Western.

"My spies in L.A. tell me that a number of American stars are after the principle role," she told Robert.

"Of course. What else did your 'spy' tell you?"

"The film is still under wrap. I also have good news. I found out that the Red Sun Film Distribution Co. in Sydney is Hollywood's sleeping partner with 20% interest in the project."

"I see," replied Robert, suppressing his sudden excitement.

"Surely James Campbell will have a say in who plays the Australian stockman. He did sway the producers in your favour for *The Ghost Ship*. Do you want me to talk to him?"

"No. I'll talk to him," Robert said sharply, and added; "But it would help if you let the Sunday Age columnist know that I'm a good horseman. Tell him also that I'm a devotee of Stanislavsky's method of acting."

"You're a good actor. Why mention Stanislavsky?"

"Marlon Brando was a method actor. Hollywood will respect me."

He told her that while working on *The Ghost Ship* he had arranged to spend two weeks as a herdsman on a cattle station in New South Wales. "I must capture our stockman's true soul for the cowboy's role," he added with mock seriousness.

"What about your birthday? Aren't you having the party this year?"

"It's time we stopped advertising my age. Anyway I won't be in Melbourne," and turned the conversation to his pending Grand Prix party.

\*\*\*

Robert's annual Grand Prix party was the envy of Melbourne. The guests were predominantly chosen for their ability to help Robert with his career, especially the press. Among them was the show-biz columnist from the Sunday Age and the paper's woman film critic. The parties went on till late in the evening.

That night, as on other occasions, the lady film critic, fifteen years Robert's senior, shared his bed. She did not love him and neither did he love her. But he needed her for favorable press reviews and she needed him to release her emotional tensions.

After their passionate lovemaking she asked Robert if she could sleep in the spare bedroom. He willingly agreed. She snored and he could not stand his bed partners snoring. It took a while before Robert fell asleep - but it wasn't a proper, deep sleep - when he became aware of an intruder standing at the end of his bed. First he thought that it was the woman film critic. Then he realized that it was shadowy dark matter. "Nightmare!!" thoughts flooded his mind. And he realized he could not move. His body was paralyzed. "Lie still. Pretend you are asleep and the horror will go away." But it didn't go away. It drifted to the head of his bed and scrutinized Robert. He had never seen eyes like it; like two boiling volcanoes about to erupt. He tried to shut his eyes but he couldn't the gold-green eyes controlled his mind and body. Then the eyes vanished and he drifted into a restless sleep. A little later he woke up but the 'horror' was not there. He sank into a sudden deep sleep. In the morning he attributed the incident to the overflow of champagne he had drunk and gave no further thought.

\*\*\*

A week later Robert took a sleeper on XPT express train from Spencer Street Station in Melbourne and on arrival in Sydney the next morning, wearing dark glasses, carrying a suitcase, he took a taxi to the Hilton Hotel in Pitt Street where he had booked a room for one night. From his hotel room he telephoned the Red Sun Film Distribution Co. He was connected to James Campbell seated at a Chippendale desk, with photos of his wife and two children displayed in Victorian silver frames. After an amicable conversation they arranged to meet that evening for dinner.

It was close to 6.30pm when James arrived in Robert's hotel room.

Their greeting was more than friendly - they were lovers.

Two hours later they were dining in an exclusive fish restaurant in Pittwater. It was over the dinner that the two men discussed the Hollywood western. James assured Robert that the role of the 'cowboy' was his. Also he wanted to make arrangements to celebrate Robert's birthday. Robert regretfully declined since he would be away in the country on his cowboy stint.

The next day, close to midday, Robert's train was moving through an ocean of gently swaying golden wheat with no railway station or any other building in sight. It took another few minutes before the train stopped at a dilapidated colonial type one-house railway station - Cooina. Robert was the only passenger to disembark from the train.

He was gazing at the station. “Just like the shoot-out scene between Gary Cooper and the villains in *High Noon*,” he thought when he heard a hoarse voice calling, “Hi Bob.”

Robert had arranged for the farmer to meet him at Cooinda station and had expected him to look like any other white Australian. But apart from his strange voice, tatty shirt and worn shorts, he had deep-set eyes matching his dark sunburned skin.

Robert hated to be called “Bob”. For him the name conjured up images of a sheepshearer, overweight, in a sweaty dirty T-shirt, with a lit cigarette in his mouth, removing the wool from a traumatised Merino sheep trapped between his legs.

“Thank God there are no photographers to immortalize this,” he thought, unconsciously throwing a glance at the immediate surroundings, as if he expected flashing cameras to pop out from the endless field of wheat.

He smiled his famous screen smile and extended his hand to the farmer: “Robert Chandler.”

“Greg Smith. Welcome,” the farmer croaked, and gripped his hand fiercely.

Greg took Robert’s suitcase and led him to his car parked in the shade behind the run-down railway station. Robert’s heart sunk further when he saw the car – an old Holden.

“Holden is still a good banger. They made good cars in those days, mate,” Greg said, having noticed Robert’s disappointment.

In the car Greg briefed Robert about his family and the cattle station.

“This is Achoora Creek.” Greg said some time later, as the Holden rattled past a lush green oasis embraced by an ocean of wheat. Then, as an afterthought, he added: “When the first European settlers arrived here the country was covered by eucalyptus and gum trees. And look at it now! This” – indicating the creek with his hand, “was an aboriginal holy place. They still come here once a year during their walk-about season to worship Achoora the Dreamtime Spirit.”

To Robert the creek looked like a picturesque postcard yet he felt uneasy. A cold shiver went down his back.

“We’ll be home soon,” Greg said and Robert relaxed.

\*\*\*

The Smith family welcomed Robert with open arms. Greg was less enthusiastic than his wife and a teenage daughter about having a film star in their house. However, knowing that ‘the actor’ would be gone in two week’s time he promised himself to be civil to him. He doubted that the guest could ride a horse well enough to round up let alone control the cattle. The next morning, to his surprise, Robert chose a lively mare. He liked the horse and the horse liked him, especially after having been given a few lumps of sugar Robert had taken from the breakfast table.

“Bob, meet Tangamukka, the best stockman in Australia,” boomed Greg’s deep voice.

“Oh shit,” thought Robert. “I must tell him not to call me by that bloody name,” and turned, expecting to see a sun tanned white Australian.

His eyes fell on a tall, wiry, full-blooded Aborigine, grinning at him.

“He’ll teach you all you need for your ‘cowboy’ movie,” said Greg.

“*Ro-bert*”, said the actor insistently, as he shook the stockman’s hand.

“*Tanga-muk-ka*”, replied the other, without smiling, but with a knowing gleam in his eyes.

It was Robert’s first close contact with an Aborigine and he was surprised at the firm grip of Tangamukka’s handshake.

\*\*\*

The three men rose at sunrise and after breakfast, with packed picnic-barbeque lunches, mounted their horses and rode east into the hills. The day’s task was to round up the cattle, dip them in a specially built bath at a creek to rid of ticks and other parasites then mark them with a dash of red paint. The hills were dotted with eucalyptus and gum trees. The majestic eucalyptus trees screeched with yellow-hooded white cockatoos while colorful **rosellas** dominated the more leafy gum trees. Giant gray kangaroos speedily hopped away after sensing their most dangerous predator – man. But a couple kookaburras welcomed the stockmen.

Robert saw a dog under an ancient gum tree on top of a hill some distance away looking at the horsemen. He paid no attention to the beast till the wild dog howled. It was an eerie howl and Robert froze momentarily with fear. When he looked again the dog had disappeared.

“What a horrid sound,” Robert told Greg.

“What sound?” asked Greg, who was riding beside him.

“I think it was a dingo. Didn’t you hear? He was standing under that gum tree there.” He pointed to the hill.



**“I heard no dingo.” Greg casually replied, then added; “You must have imagined. Dingoes are pests. Kill lambs even young calves. Real devils they are. Don’t be surprised if you see a dingo prowling around our farmyard at night. ”**

**\*\*\***

**Robert quickly learned the tricks and pitfalls of an Australian stockman’s trade. The most difficult thing he faced was using the whip. Tangamukka was a master at whip-cracking. Sounds echoed through the hills like shots of a pistol. At times, to show off, Tangamukka even produced sounds of aboriginal songs. Robert was very impressed and asked Tangamukka to teach him a few musical sounds of Waltzing Matilda, his favorite Australian folk ballad.**

**“I’ll teach you, mate,” said Tangamukka.**

**A few days’ later Robert had started mastering the trick of whip-cracking and Tangamukka was full of praise: “Good man ... Good man.”**

**The men finished work quite early and were home a couple hours before sunset. But the evenings were a heavy burden for Robert. There was nothing for him to do but watch loud rubbishy television with the two women making a fuss of him, especially the daughter. He gladly would have gone back to Melbourne but he couldn’t. He had to stick out the two weeks to avoid being ridiculed by his friends, especially the press. The journalists would make mincemeat out of his ‘cowboy’ venture.**

**It was a few evenings later that Robert asked the farmer if it was ok. if he rode to Achoora Creek.**

**“Tonight?” asked Greg.**

**“Yes. It’s still early. I would like to have a look at the green oasis.”**

**“If you like,” Greg said nonchalantly.**

**\*\*\***

**It was a lovely late afternoon, a typical New South Wales weather. A light breeze added a gentle touch of cool to the pulsating heat. Robert was happy. “That’s what I’ll do every evening, ride into the open spaces,” he promised himself. A few kilometers into the wheat field Robert halted his horse. “What a setting for a love scene in a film.” And, like a cameraman looking through a viewfinder, he observed the vista through his partly closed fist, focusing last on Achoora Creek still some distance away. Then he urged his horse on. The closer he got to the creek the more reluctant his mount was to go further. If Robert hadn’t been a skilled rider the horse would have turned back. He reached the creek and tried to ride down the embankment where the creek widened into a pool but the horse would advance further. From the top he scanned the vegetation for wildlife but he saw none. He saw no animals, heard no birds. His eyes moved to the small lake saturated by the rays of the setting sun. A snake appeared from the still water and grew in height; the viper glittering in colours of precious stones. Robert was mesmerized by the spectacle. A cloud obscured the sun. As the sunrays faded so did the**

snake. Next gold-green mist started to rise from the lake and drifted towards him, against a light breeze. The mist reached Robert. He started to itch as if his body was crawling with bugs. The sensation subsided when he left the creek. He returned home baffled.

He dismissed the snake as being an illusion of the sunrays.

That night he was awakened by an eerie howl. Like a call of a jungle soul in distress. Full of pain: he felt as if he should go and help the creature. But he didn't. He lay in his bed his senses fully alert. Then he heard it again; louder and closer this time, as if the creature were in the farmyard. His heart started to race and an urge pulled him to the window. He couldn't resist it. Without switching on a light he stepped out of his bed and, like a sleep walker, drifted to the window and parted the curtain. Two turbulent volcano-like eyes met his eyes. Robert tried to drop the curtain and step back from the window but he couldn't move. His limbs didn't function. He felt body-less, as if floating through the ether. Then the eyes suddenly vanished. The tranquility of the night returned and Robert's mind and limbs functioned again.

His alarm clock didn't ring that morning. Greg knocked at his bedroom door to wake him. Over breakfast Robert asked the family if it was a dingo who howled that night in the farmyard. The family had heard nothing. However Greg told him that the electricity had gone off for a while close to midnight but it was nothing to worry about. It happens in the country all the time. Greg told him.

The night incident worried Robert. He was tempted to tell Greg but he didn't. He decided to keep it to himself, even though it was the second time this had happened. He was quite sure that the experience he had in Melbourne was due to the quantity of champagne he had drunk at his Grand Prix party.

Later, rounding up the cattle, he proudly showed off his newly learned skills to Greg: lassoing the cattle and making different sounds with his whip. Tangamukka joined him and together they played a few phrases of Waltzing Matilda to the annoyance of the cockatoos. But a couple of kookaburras joined in as chorus.

That evening Robert did not ride to Achoora Creek. He slept well and the alarm clock rang on time the following morning.

The next evening Robert rode again to the creek and told his hosts that he would be back by sunset. It was well before sunset when he returned home, looking rather subdued. Greg's wife offered him a light dinner but he declined and went to his room. That night in his sleep he was tormented by aborigine young children – mainly girls.

The following evening, as if pulled by a magnet, he rode to the creek and the strange mist drifted towards him again against a light breeze. And his body started to itch as if his clothes were crawling with bugs. But what really frightened him were the sounds he heard. First he thought they were nature's sounds. But the closer he listened the more distinct they became and he realized they were human cries and unmistakable gunshots.

Suddenly all went quiet and the itching stopped, too.

**“I’m going mad,” Robert thought, and loosened the reins to turn his horse around to go back home. The horse took off immediately at full gallop and it took Robert time to slow her down - sweat steaming from her body.**

**That night the same nightmare tormented him again: Aboriginal children, women and men attacking him relentlessly, like crows a bird of prey.**

**\*\*\***

**Next day Greg chose a large shady gum tree for their barbeque lunch. The atmosphere was congenial as usually when Robert tentatively said: “Achoora Creek is a strange place.”**

**“Why, mister? Why?” Tangamukka burst out, looking at Robert, his dark eyes full of fear.**

**Robert was taken aback by Tangamukka’s strange reaction and felt he had to explain. “A strange mist rose from the lake. And I thought I heard sounds like voices ...gunshots...”**

**But Tangamukka cut him off, mumbling hysterically: “Achoora. Achooraama. You dead man, you mister.... You dead man mister.” He jumped up. Looked at Robert his eyes glaring, and walked away briskly going ever faster.**

**Robert was stunned for a moment then ran after him.**

**“Leave him alone!” cried Greg with such authority that Robert stopped dead in his tracks.**

**“I don’t understand,” said Robert, walking back to Greg.**

**“To understand Tanga you must understand the Aborigines. They believe in Dreamtime as their forbears did. Dreamtime is the heartbeat of their culture and their religion. It’s in their blood. They say the white man brought nothing but misery. Before the Europeans came they communicated by telepathy but not now. They think the white man’s technology polluted the air”.**

**Robert sat down opposite Greg and neither of them said anything as if afraid that their voices would feed the unexpected turmoil that had erupted.**

**Quietly, not looking at Robert, Greg said, “By tomorrow morning Tanga will be gone and there is nothing that you or I can do to stop him.” After a pause, he added: “He has always avoided going near Achoora Creek. After hearing what you said, he thinks your visits have awakened an evil spirit. Now he is afraid of you.”**

**“What has Achoora Creek got to do with Tangamukka?”**

**Greg did not answer. He killed the barbeque fire, collected the lunch boxes, and then said, “We’ll have one more run to the dip, mark the cattle then go home. We can talk tonight.”**

\*\*\*

That evening, after dinner, the two men withdrew to the sitting room with a bottle of XXXX\* each.

An hour later both beer bottles were empty and the two men sat silently.

Robert broke the silence. "What do you know about the boy?"

Greg didn't answer. He sat lost in deep thought for a while. Then he got up and slowly switched off all the lights, but one lamp on a table, the far side of the room. The room now lay almost in total darkness. The eerie darkness seems to vitalize Greg, give him strength, to tell his inner secret thoughts to Robert.

"There is nothing written, only tales," he said quietly, his eyes focused on a small picture on a wall.

He moved back to Robert and sat down.

"Only tales handed down from generation to generation," he told him.

Another silence followed then Greg's voice took on an Aborigine chanting lilt, pausing after broken sentences: "The boy was very young.... he had gone hunting with his father...his sisters came running crying for help. They were bleeding. The boy hid in the cave." He stopped, wiped his eyes of tears, and continued, "There came three strange creatures – men. Their hair was like the rising sun, their skin was paler than a dead man's skin, and their feet were leather hooves. With flying fire they struck the boy's father, a strong man.... he was killed. Blood... blood... and more blood.... Many people were slain and disappeared in the black water of Achoora Creek. The boy was alone. A she-dingo looked after him. She fed him raw meat and took him to waterholes. Finally the dingo took the boy on a hazardous long journey... he came upon a hunting party. The hunters spoke a tongue he understood. They painted his body with the eye of the she-dingo".

After a deathly pause he wiped his eyes of tears, blew his nose with a handkerchief, and added in a normal voice, "Such killings of Aborigines are a stain on white man's history in Australia that will never wash away, my friend. You see, some Englishmen thought that Aborigines were no more than vermin. They considered them to be fair game and hunted them like animals. But I've always wondered who these three white men were, venturing so far from the settlement, so long ago. They may have been bushrangers.

"I should know but I don't. Is that a kind of mounted police?"asked Robert.

"The opposite escaped convicts. There were times when many of these escapees lived on the fringe of the settled lands. They were a troublesome lot.

Greg went on: "When the murderers struck, the Aborigines felt the distress of those who were attacked, over great distances. Call it telepathy if you wish. The slaying burned their minds like the rays of the midday sun. Even today they feel a restless spirit stirring when they come near the killing grounds. For them the boy's story is not a

\*Australian beer

distant history. It is in their blood. Woven into the landscape. The people come to Achoora Creek to worship and to plea for appeasement. Now at long last their prayers are being answered. Two young men, descendents of the murderers, have died. Tangamukka said they bear the marks of Achoora's justice. Urundi Wolaroo saw the signs."

"Who is he?"

"A descendant of the boy. He is a Holy Man."

"Can't he stop the murders?" Robert asked, with anxiety in his voice.

"No. No one can. Achoora is a spirit, an invisible power that has been created by Dreamtime, a long time before the earth was born. Achoora does not maim the descendents of the perpetrators. Her weapon is a bolt of lightning that strikes them through his eyes and burns his brains. It is a swift death. Achoora is merciful."

"You're a white man. How do you know all this?"

Greg didn't answer immediately. He walked to the far side of the room, switched on the lights, then walked back to Robert, stood in front of him, and told him: "Look into my eyes."

Greg's eyes suddenly puzzled Robert.

"What do you see?" Greg asked.

"*Dark pools of still water,*" Robert felt like saying, but he couldn't. His heart was racing.

"Don't tell me. I don't want to hear," he felt like shouting.

"Didn't you know?"

Robert remained silent.

Greg unhooked the small picture from the wall and handed it to Robert.

"That's my grand dad."

It was a faded black and white photograph of a full-blooded naked aboriginal boy, taken in a sun-drenched rugged terrain, somewhere in the Northern Territory.

After a silent pause Greg hung the photo back on the wall.

"I live and will die in a twilight zone neither a white nor a black man. Descendent of the boy that Achoora saved over two hundred years ago, yet with a white man's blood in my veins, I have learned tales and songs but Dreamtime is forever lost for me." After a pause, he added: "Aborigines have had a rough time under whites, Bob. But things are improving. Aborigines are peaceful people, not indoctrinated with revenge and greed,

like the white man. Many early settlers from Great Britain were minor criminals, stealing a loaf of bread or a piece of clothing. They were deported to colonize Australia. But these three men were truly evil. A couple of weeks ago three dark spots appeared on the setting sun for all Aborigines to see that justice is being done. Now there is only one dark spot left.”

“The crimes were committed a long time ago, centuries,” Robert mumbled.

“Achoora is timeless. Two first-born male descendants of the murderers have been executed upon reaching the age of manhood, and a third will die on his birthday.”

“But they are innocent of the crimes,” Robert said, his voice trembling with fear.

Having noticed the anxiety in Robert’s voice – Greg smiled and said: “Don’t you worry about this. You are not a descendent of the barbarous Englishmen. Our daughter told me that you are only a second generation Australian. She knows. She reads all about you people in her gossip magazines.”

Robert listened aware that Greg did not know that he was a direct descendent of an early settler. His fabricated family history had deceived everyone, but not the Dreamtime Spirit.

\*\*\*

That night Robert went to bed with the full knowledge that he would die in a matter of days for the crimes committed by his forbear. He was surprised how calm he was, as if a heavy weight had been suddenly lifted off his shoulders. He was fully resigned now that there was no escape for him. Wherever he went the Spirit would find him. It was his pre-ordained destiny. Achoora Creek was the heartbeat of the Dreamtime Spirit.

As he lay awake in his bed his life slowly floated through his mind, like an autumn early mist carried by a gentle breeze. He realized that his life was an empty shell. Everything seemed so futile, bathed in the timeless glare of a newfound wisdom. James Campbell’s face appeared in his mind and Robert realized that his love for James was one-sided. They had known each other from their days at Sydney University. He would have given his life for him. But James was only looking for raw, loveless sex, otherwise never wavering in his commitments as a husband and a caring father. Robert, in his state of pitiless lucidity, recognized that he had been nothing but a sex object and that his starring roles in *The Ghost Ship* and the planned Hollywood epic had been intended as a reward for his services: fame and wealth bartered for safe clandestine sex. James and Robert had been like two ships on a moonlit night sailing past each other glad of the encounter but each steering towards his own goal.

Suddenly he felt cleansed of his ambition of becoming an international film star. He loathe the idea now of rubbing shoulders with his fellow-actors and their inflated egos, the thick-skinned film producers, journalists and sex-starved fans. Even the thought of walking the red carpet to receive the Hollywood Oscar, the object of his most persistent dream, had become repugnant.

\*\*\*

The next day, in the hills, Robert and Greg worked in silence, never mentioning Tangamukka's name. The herdsman did not show up and Robert accepted the fact that he would not come back.

Over lunch Robert asked Greg if he could stay one day longer than originally arranged.

"Stay longer, if you wish." Greg didn't know that it was his birthday.

"Just one day," Robert said casually.

On Robert's birthday he and Greg did their routine work and were home at the usual time. Robert told Greg's wife that he wouldn't be staying for the evening meal. "It is my last evening. I would like to say goodbye to Achoora Creek. Don't stay up for me - I might be late." Then Robert shaved – he had never shaved before in the evening while on the cattle station – showered, put on a clean plain shirt, clean pair of jeans, hugged Greg's wife, shook Greg's hand, smiled at Valerie, mounted his horse, and rode away to meet his pre-ordained destiny.

The endless field of wheat swayed like the gentle swells of an ocean on a calm day.

Robert looked at the sun expecting to see a dark spot announcing his execution. But the huge sun was clear of spots and he realized that the sign would be invisible to him because no Aboriginal blood flowed in his veins.

He rode slowly towards the oases. He was calm. Relaxed.

Achoora Creek glowed in lush green colours. When Robert dismounted he expected the mare to gallop back home but the horse stood still, as if she were sleeping. Robert waited for the mist to rise from the small lake but there was no mist. The water glowed black, saturated by sunrays. He scanned the creek for a she-dingo but there was no dingo, or any other animal, or birds. He heard no sounds. Nothing moved. In this uncanny silence he felt drawn to the lake. He slowly descended and advanced to the edge of the pool. He was about to feel the water with his hand when his horse whinnied aggressively. Robert stood up and saw the mare rear up, her front legs lashing at an invisible enemy.

The strange confrontation lasted a couple of seconds. The horse whinnied again and bolted.

Robert was sure now that his death was imminent and stood facing the disappearing sun with his eyes open.

But an urge to touch the water seized him again. As soon as his hands had touched the surface, out of the pool rose the snake. It grew in height. From the jaws came the gold-green mist. As the vapor spread, everything it touched was altered. The small lake became larger its edges overgrown with shrubs, eucalyptus and gum trees. The fields of wheat were transformed into a lush green gum tree forest.

Under the towering trees, a short distant away from the lake, a few tree-bark shelters could be seen. At the edge of the lake stood naked Aboriginal man with a spear in his hand pointing to a young boy beside him a sleeping koala in a eucalyptus tree. Screams broke out nearby. The tree-bark huts were going up in flames. The Aborigine signaled to the boy to hide in a cave on the lake's embankment, then hurried towards the commotion, spear in hand. A young naked aboriginal girl came running towards him, screaming, her legs streaming with blood, with a white man in close pursuit holding a pistol. With a shock Robert realized that the man was a portrait of himself – dressed in the early 1800s' fashion, yet unmistakably his own mirror image. The Aborigine was about to throw his spear at him but the white man fired his gun first and the hunter dropped to his knees, his right shoulder ripped open by the bullet. He managed to rise to his feet, seizing the spear with his left hand to protect the girl. The white man fired a second shot and the Aborigine fell to the ground, badly wounded but still alive. His attacker kicked his head and chest savagely, grabbed the girl, ripped out both her eyes with his hands and threw her into the lake then, with his foot, he pushed the Aborigine man into the water.

Two other Europeans came, dressed in early 1800s, one being the spit image of Geoff Stewart, the surfing champion of Australia in Darwin, with two even younger girls in tow - more lithe and childish than the first - bleeding, struggling, and doomed to the same fate. Then a vision of massacre unfolded past Robert's eyes, as a slow procession of Aborigines: men, women and children were jubilantly stabbed and shot by the three white men. Leather boots crushed small skulls. Black heads were bludgeoned to death with the guns. Dead and dying bodies disappeared under the lake's surface on Achoora Creek. The water glowed red with their blood.

The snake started to coil around Robert and dissolved to become the mist swirling around him. The mist gradually built into a fierce whirlwind and carried Robert away.

Achoora Creek reverted to today's familiar state. Only a faint glowing mist lingered now over the water - the green oasis lost in the shadowless full moonlit night.

Two black swans appeared in the cloudless night sky and landed softly on the water. For a moment stillness ruled over the creek then a howl of a dingo shattered the eerie quiet.

To this day Robert Chandler's disappearance remains shrouded in mystery.

---

George Mikell.  
Battersea  
London  
2007



## **ACHOORA CONTINUES**

# **JOURNEY OF NO RETURN**

**The next morning Greg found that Robert's bed had not been slept in but the horse was back in the farmyard fully saddled.**

