

Journey Into the Heart of the Volcano

Once upon a time, just a few weeks ago, in a place far away, around the corner, there was a strange yet awesome village, just like yours or mine, with people who laughed, loved and argued, just like we do. One night, the villagers held a heated meeting to discuss the changing of their village name.

The adults cannot agree; some want change, some do not. Who is important enough to have the final say? The kids are asked for their thoughts, but answer with silly suggestions. Everyone stops as a beautiful dove of many colours swoops into the hall. Silence leads to chaos, as five kids fight to catch the bird, arguing over what to do with it, but it flies off. The meeting ends in disaster. The five kids are left to clear up the mess. Solana, Storm, Awa, Fern and Orion. Each blames the other.

When the village kids wake the next day, a strange curse has befallen the adults of the village. They are beholden in a trance, fixated on their electronic devices; phones, laptops, tvs. They are device zombies, not able to hear, see, or do anything other than stare into their screens. The world as everyone knew it stopped.

The kids begin to have a blast; eating, playing and doing anything they liked. School is out for good! However, they start to bicker, to get hungry for takeaways, the rubbish is stinky, and they are missing maths! What were they to do? They call a zombie emergency meeting, where self-professed computer nerd, Orion breaks in, announcing that, on the night of the curse he identified an electromagnetic disturbance channelling through an am frequency on his homemade transynthometer. (He found a strange signal). The kids tune in and listen; deciding on a mission to locate the source of the transmission and break the curse. The unpopular five are voted to lead the quest: Orion, the village whizz kid, Solana, always found with her head in the clouds and playing music, Storm, always the winner and ready for action, Fern, nature loving and thoughtful and Awa, unpredictable and ambitious. Kid, Malu interrupts to announce his parents are turning grey. Charlie's too; they are slowly turning to statues. Focused by the news, Orion hands Malu one of his walkie-talkies, and the team track the co-ordinates of the transmission, arriving at their principal's house. It is coming from the laptop she is staring at. It is displaying an image of a map, an ancient drawing of some unknown island. Before they have much time to question or plan, Storm has swiped the laptop away from the principal. The zombie principal makes her move and begins to angrily approach the crew. In a moment of panic, Orion shouts out, 'Escape, press escape,' and the world turns black.

The team's screams are met by light of a bright sun as they find themselves on an unknown island, shrouded in mist, with noises of unknown wild animals: the island in the picture. The mystery dove of colour swoops down and flies inland. Orion tries to reach the outside world on the walkie-talkie, Malu and Charlie pick up, the news is not good; people are turning greyer. Together they decide to continue their mission, and follow the transynthometer's faint signal: the same direction of the bird.

Waterman Sarah

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They journey into giant grasslands to feel the ground shake and are astonished to meet a family of Sauropods. Fern advises the group that they are extinct herbivores that roamed Aotearoa millions of years ago. They begin playing with the babies. Solana plays them a tune, Poi E, on her ipod, they all dance together, with vine as a Poi. The transynthometer's signal drowns out the tune. They move on into the daunting Kauri forest.

The forest comes to life with giant snails, adzebills, wrens, tuataras and piopio. Grazing and burping and sliming, tickling the strange humans. Wonder turns to fear as giant Moa birds appear and chase the scattering team, who do not help each other. Each are cornered, when Solana plays Poi E on her ipod. The ground shakes and the Sauropods scare off the Moas as the team escapes.

Gathering themselves together, they assess the situation and blame each other. Fern however spots the mystery bird, shouting to the others as she follows it. Amidst arguments, Orion and Solana head off in one direction, Awa and Storm the other. Fern returns, breaking down, lost and alone. The divided groups set up their camps, scared by the night's noises, missing home, and isolated. Orion picks up a faint transmission from Malu and Charlie, "hurry", is the message.

The new day sees Storm and Awa trudging through the wetlands. Spying a giant nest, they climb to peak inside. They are trapped as the giant Haast Eagle attacks. Fern arrives and distracts the eagle as they escape the nest. From their hiding spot, Fern realises the eagle seems injured as it falls to the ground. Fern bravely removes the thistle caught in its claws, setting it free to fly once more. The threesome head on towards the caves.

After gloomy passages, the caves illuminate in many glow bugs, allowing them to see Orion and Awa, the team re-unite. On the cave wall, Solana notices cave drawings. It's the mystery bird, a huge volcano and above it five symbols. A star, the Sun, a plant, water and lightning. De-coding the picture is short lived, as giant trilobites crawl out from hiding, cornering the horrified huddle at the ledge of a ravine. Orion's walkie-talkie is transmitting, it's Malu and Charlie. They are watching the gang on the principal's laptop. They remind Orion he is inside a computer. Orion snaps into nerd mode, telling them the coding to use to erase the bugs. Just in time, the trilobites disappear, but not before the transynthometer and walkie-talkie are lost down the ravine. The cave starts to crumble, as Orion perceives the re-programming has set off the disintegration of the whole island. They flee the caves.

Stumbling onto a lake shore, amidst a growing storm of crumbling land, the tired, anxious and almost out of time crew, re-group. What now? No comms, no transynthometer, how could they complete the mission, break the curse and get home before they vanish for good? The illuminous dove flies into view, signalling for them to follow it across the lake, to the volcano, just as in the drawing. Awa heads up a frantic waka raft- built from driftwood and flax. A lone giant snail passes by and coughs up some flax, giving it to Awa, who thanks him without noticing who he thanks. The snail shrugs and slinks off. They prepare to cross.

Amidst a thunderous storm, the raft nears the volcano, when a terrifying beast appears: a pre-historic crocodilian fern declares. Fighting for their lives, Storm decides to distract the

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beast by swimming to shore, allowing the others to reach the shore. She jumps in, and the crocodilian chases as the waka lands on the beach. Storm does not emerge.

On the volcano shore, the team mourns for storm. Orion thinks he hears the signal again; it's coming from inside the volcano. Only one thing to do: climb to the top. Once there, all they see is a dark hole and the signal echoing from within. Solana, re-drawing in the ash, the images from the cave picture, exclaims she understands the symbols. They are all the same as their five names, Solana, the sun, Orion, the star, Awa, the water, Fern, the plant and Storm, the lightning. Surprisingly, in swoops the bird of colour, and Storm emerges at the volcano top, waving thanks to the bird, who saved her. An emotional re-union is short lived, as the world starts to crumble around them. The bird reappears and dives into the volcano's black abyss. 'We must follow it', Solana declares. Fern agrees. She convinces the others that, as a team, somehow, they must dive into the unknown and whatever happens, they will show they were not afraid of the unknown anymore. Awa leads a haka and they hold hands, diving in together. The island explodes.

The team appears back in the principal's house, greeted by Malu and Charlie. The principal awakens from her spell. One by one the adults break from their trance and everyone is united with their whanau. A heroes and celebration party sees the villagers rejoice at their hall. They make assurances to stop their bickering, to not divide the village, but to help each other in times of change, for even when they were separated, they found ways to break the curse together. The kids realised things have changed. Life will not quite be the same again, but they can learn from their ordeal and are stronger. The villagers agree to change the village name to Dovedale, in memory of the mysterious dove of colour.

So that was the tale of how Dovedale got its name.