

Epilogue

surprised at the ease with which they sprang. The contents were tied as a bundle with a light ribbon. He tugged the knot apart and, with a care inspired more by his memories than the aging paper, he laid the stack of documents on the closed case in front of him.

Topmost was a collection of his grandfather's tattered notebooks, assembled in order of a month and year noted on each front cover. Their handwritten pages contained the elder's raw, truncated thoughts and memos, a first capture that he later expanded into the Whangapoua journals and committed to the memory drives of the Commscon. Leafing aimlessly through the unfamiliar pages, Evan recognized among the brevity of words and phrases, community events that he'd half-forgotten. It was like reading a potted, shorthand history of his home village.

He paused here and there as his own name appeared, each instance prompting a new wave of recollection. The old man's words rose from the pages to touch him, seeming almost audible. Throughout the collection, the handwriting was clear and confident, empowered, save for a handful of the final entries and those of a period when, Evan calculated, he'd been seven years old. These brought to his eyes a familiar prickling sting and he saw rising from the enfeebled script a floating face that was his own but not his own, his grandfather's but not his grandfather's, a shared face that, in his memory, remained forever un-aging. As always, it was a bitter sweet intrusion that he could neither deflect nor fully embrace.

He put aside the old man's pads and looked deeper into the contents of the case, removing pages in singles and groups and laying them carefully on the grass by his side. He allowed himself to browse distracted for several minutes through the words of a century-old thesis on ecosystem balance, its pages of unfamiliar typescript yellowing and fragile.

Eventually he found the real object of his intentions. From a heavy plastic sheath he removed a thick wad of yellowing documents, also bound with a light tape. They were instantly recognizable as the papers his grandfather had explained to him two decades previously. Yet as he loosened their binding they seemed altered, almost as though he was seeing them for the first time. It took him some moments to realize that it was not the