

## I. COMPREHENSION ECRITE (20 POINTS)

### READ THE FOLLOWING TEXT

One afternoon Chris and I went up the valley to the gold workings to search out wood for the boat he was planning. A century before the upper valley had been well populated with men looking for gold and above the stream bed we came upon a collection of derelict<sup>1</sup> huts and their complicated arrangement of wooden parapets and sluices<sup>2</sup>. We worked on a sluice run until we could free its boards with ease, digging to loosen the framework from the earth. Then Chris stopped and stood up, he held in his hand a long-tapered bone from which he shook the remaining traces of soil. What's this? Leaning forward, he pointed the bone at my chest, he was frowning heavily. You are condemned to take this boat we build and sail in her to the west for all eternity, he said, and I said, don't joke what kind of animal is it anyway?

We scraped at the earth at the base of the frame and came upon other bones, they were laid out in a pattern that twisted in under the frame posts, and after a while Chris said, I think it's a man. Maybe the miners buried people alive under their buildings for luck, like the Melanesians. But the skeleton was too large to be human, the bones of the legs were exceptionally long and as we uncovered more of it, we could see that the creature had a thin, curved neck like a swan, but much longer and more powerful. Then I said, It's a moa. We both stopped digging and sat back from the skeleton. We shouldn't move it, I said and Chris said, "But who is there to show it to? "

We sat and looked at the bones for a while, a little afraid, aware that the great bird had remained undisturbed for a thousand years. Then Chris said that we should collect the bones and take them to the house where we could piece the skeleton together again, it would be safer there, though safer against what he did not say. That evening we sat on the veranda and tried to remember what we knew about the great flightless birds that had ruled the country before man arrived from the north and hunted them into oblivion. We argued about their size and colouring and finally agreed that they had been as high as twelve feet, with powerful scaly legs and a plumage of deepest blue. Chris was certain that they were predators able to catch their victims through their great speed across the ground, but I was sure that they did not kill, that they were stately birds who were able to live quietly among the rich grassland of the time.

In the days that followed we laid out the bones in a shed<sup>3</sup> beside the house and began to fit them together. I had made a sketch of how they lay and Chris had glued a piece of paper to each bone and numbered it according to my drawing the way we imagined scientists did. Because the skeleton had been twisted where it lay in the earth our attempt to arrange it in its true shape was based partly on how we imagined the bird must once have looked. We worked on the moa late into the evenings the two of us crouched in the shed under an oil lamp with the bones scattered around us arranging, adjusting, fitting and matching the pieces we had taken from the earth, until we were light-headed with the effort of it, and still the great bird lay stubbornly misshapen on the floor, less clear now in its form than when we had uncovered it first at the head of the valley. We had been working on the bird now for more than a week, and we sat defeated in front of the skeleton looking down at the bones, which showed ashen white in the dull light from the lamp. Are you sure you didn't make a mistake with the numbering? I said. Chris stared at me for a moment without speaking then turned back to the bird and I wished that I had said nothing.

John Cranna, Archaeology. 1989

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<sup>1</sup> derelict: that had not been in use for a long time

<sup>2</sup> sluice: a conduct for water

<sup>3</sup> shed: small building