

# **GARINJITA**

**A short story  
By Bob Goodwin  
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## Garinjita

Jimmy's hand clutched his boomerang as he surveyed the expanse of grass spears waving in the breeze. His hair gently brushed against his cheeks as he contemplated the journey ahead.

If only circumstances had been different he could set the grass alight. Two or three weeks later he could return with his brother, his sister and their young ones. The wallabies would be chewing at the sweet shoots of new grass and the turkeys would be picking at the insects and cracked seedpods. The children would have been delighted. They could have played for hours in the burnt clearings finding goanna holes and bush tucker. In the evening by the light of the campfire their grandfather would have loved nothing better than to enchant them all with stories of mysterious secret places, powerful ancestral beings and monsters good and bad. The story of the Garinjita, the invincible guardian of tribal spirit, would strike fear into their hearts, while epic tales of creation would eventually settle them into a restful sleep.

Today however was no family occasion. Jimmy gazed across the grassy field towards two low rocky hills and a line of lush vegetation that lined the banks of the Alligator River. He tightened his hold on his boomerang and set off into the chest high grass.

\* \* \*

It was thirty minutes later that a sweaty body covered in grass seeds emerged into the clearing. The gap between the two rocky outcrops, that looked almost insignificant from the other side of the grassy plain, now loomed overhead like some foreboding predestined gateway. A wave of goose flesh shivered through Jimmy's being as he moved forward into the shadow of the boulders.

In a few weeks the old men would come to this sacred area. They would light fires, sing and dance for several days before the arrival of the young men. The feet of many would pound heavily on the ground. A fine red dust would fill the

air like a mysterious mist. Boomerangs would clack loudly against one another as the didgeridoo droned a monotonous tune. After being awake for three nights the young men would be trance like and the elders would allow them to see and hold the sacred implements and hear the secret stories. Now blessed with the tribal spirit and armed with special tribal knowledge they could grow and become as powerful as their forefathers had been. Now they could finally be tested before Garinjita.

\* \* \*

Jimmy proceeded with some apprehension through the rocky gateway towards the nearby river. Thick twisted roots of many trees thrust themselves in and out of the ground like giant serpents. The broad leaves of pandanus palms waved coolly up and down the water's edge. It was all so familiar, but this time the outcome must be different.

He soon found himself a clear view of the Alligator River through a narrow strip along the riverbank where the pandanus refused to grow. He moved forward, sat and waited. The water rippled peacefully, but there was a hidden power here and it was almost palpable.

\* \* \*

Fortunately the initial wait was shorter than he had expected, and slowly lifting his boomerang the young man took careful aim. The unwary cormorant's long neck snapped like a twig. The easy part of his challenge was complete.

Jimmy wedged the dead bird under a protruding root. Blood oozed from the single fatal wound, colouring the water, forming slow spiralling circles, and drifting away with the current. Now it was time to wait. It could be minutes. It could be hours. It was all part of the testing ritual and this time he was determined to see it through.

\* \* \*

Jimmy turned and tilted his head from one side to the other. He could hear nothing. He could see nothing new, but still he could feel a presence. The feeling was more comforting than alarming. He smiled and nodded to himself then focused his attention back on the Alligator river and settled in for a patient wait.

\* \* \*

Garinjita approached as expected from downstream. The creature moved evenly, slowly, and without a ripple. The unknowing would just dismiss the few small dark protrusions as perhaps a submerged log or some other bush debris – but this was a powerful fearsome predator. This was a tribal god. Jimmy's vision locked in on the two black eyes. Now another feeling had descended over him and this time there was nothing pleasant about it.

The giant crocodile moved forward even more slowly. The Aboriginal man slowly assumed a crouched position. His thighs and calves strained and quivered. There was absolute quiet. The air had stopped moving. The river had stopped flowing. The beast moved closer. Any second now...

Jimmy used every sinew in his legs to launch himself from the bank. His timing was perfect. There was a brief glimpse of a huge fleshy mouth; a loud sinister hiss and a single sharp and piercing clap as the giant crocodile's jaws snapped together. In a second Garinjita and his prize had disappeared. A flock of a hundred white shrieking cockatoos took flight from the trees on the opposite side of the river.

An older man pushed past some low hanging branches and looked anxiously about the area from where the giant beast had emerged. After what seemed like an eternity Jimmy shot up out of the water with a loud gasp, grabbed a thick root and hauled himself frantically from the water. The sacrificial cormorant was gone. The young man ran to the open arms of his father.

'Finally my boy, the ceremony is complete. I have witnessed your acceptance by Garinjita. You are now a man and a warrior,' announced the old man. 'Your grandfather will be so proud. Tonight we celebrate.'

Jimmy's body trembled against his father's chest. He could only manage to grunt between his short gasps. At the moment he could only experience absolute relief, the feelings of elation and euphoria would have to wait a while.

The mass of cockatoos settled back into the eucalypt trees.

**The end**