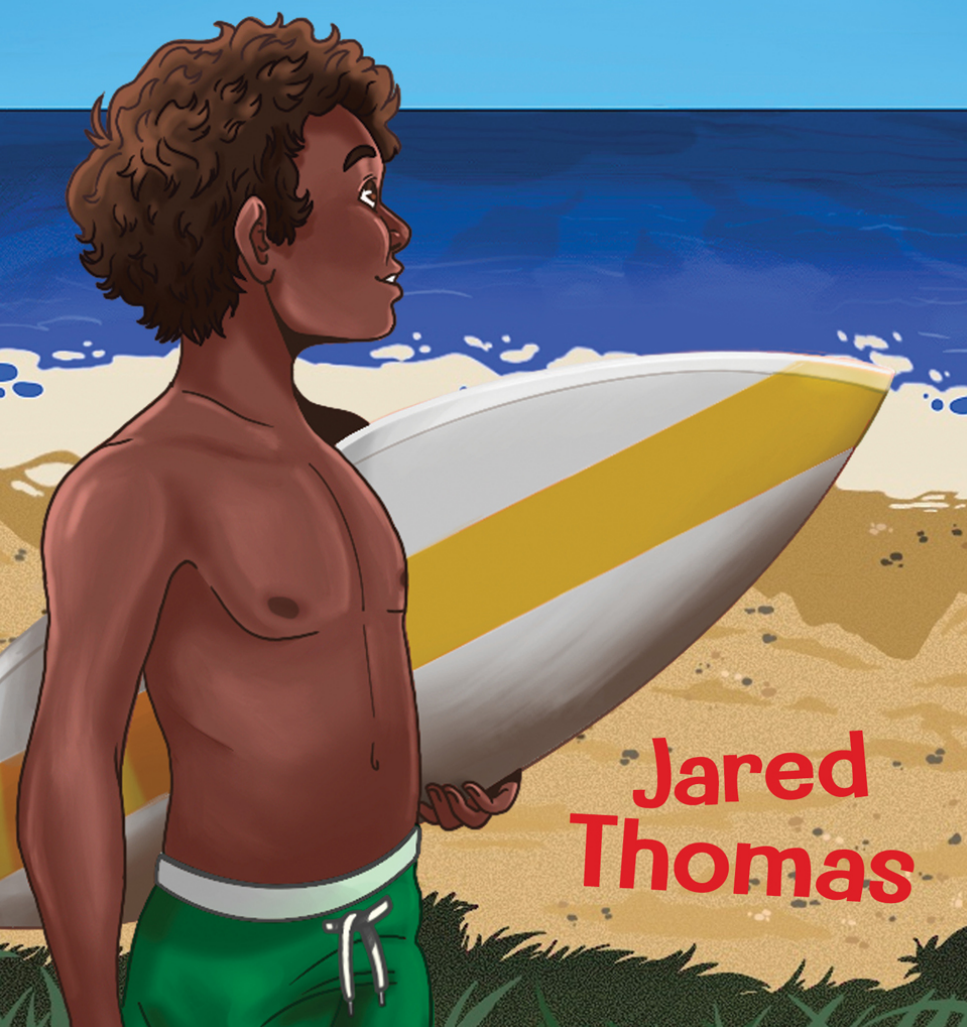


UNCLE XBOX



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Magabala
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*For my Uncles and all of the First Nations Uncles
around the world doing the most important work
of nurturing our young people.*

CHAPTER ONE



Hanging out with Marcus was the best, kicking the footy, going fishing and especially playing Xbox with him. We'd play FIFA World Cup soccer for hours, like we were doing when Mum walked up to us with baby Mary swinging off her hip and said, 'Marcus, I asked you to clean up the kitchen and put the rubbish out over an hour ago.'

'But I'm playing with Dusty, Kathy,' he answered, half looking up at Mum from the beanbag.

‘It’ll only take a few minutes.’

‘We’re right into the game Mum.’

Mum stormed off saying, ‘I’m not going to ask you one more time Marcus.’

It was just a regular thing, Mum complaining about Marcus not cleaning up, not having a job and things like that, but it was a complete shock when one Saturday morning Marcus loaded his bags full of things into his car.

I raced after him. ‘What’s going on?’ I asked.

‘Your mum, you and your little sister are going to be much better off without me hanging around little bro.’

‘That’s not true,’ I said, looking at Marcus and all his things shoved into the back of the car. I began to cry because I knew Marcus was serious but I didn’t really understand why he was leaving.

Marcus started the ignition and wound up the window. I pressed my hands against the glass and yelled, ‘Don’t go Marcus.’

He wound down the window, held my hand

and said, 'I'll be back to see you soon. I just need a break little bro.'

'A break?' I asked.

'Yeah, just a break,' he said. 'Now come on little bro, I got to get moving.'

I wanted to ask him where he was going but he was already reversing onto the road.

Tears were streaming down my face as I raced back inside to get some answers from Mum.

Mum was lying in bed, holding my little sister. Mum was crying too. I cuddled in beside her and cried some more with her and Mary. Even though Mary was so little, I think she understood what was going on, that her dad had left.

Once we'd all had a good cry, Mum explained, 'I'm sorry Dusty but we just hadn't been getting on for a long time, he just wasn't pulling his weight.'

And once Mum had said that I felt really guilty for all the time I'd spent having fun with Marcus, kicking the footy, fishing and playing Xbox. I went to my room and threw myself on my mattress to sulk a bit more. I was sad but also

really angry with Mum. First my dad was gone, now my stepdad. And I knew that all the things Marcus was expected to do, I was now going to cop.

I decided to try and cheer myself up and went to the lounge room to play the Xbox. It was the worst idea ever. Not only had Marcus left, he'd taken the Xbox with him too.

'Nooooo,' I yelled and Mum ran into the room in a panic.

'What is it, what is it?!' she yelled, shaking me by the shoulder.

'Mum, Marcus took the Xbox,' I cried.

'Good!' Mum said. 'Maybe now you can help out with the chores a bit more.'

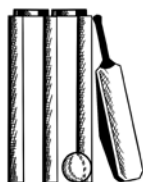
'Only if you buy me a new Xbox,' I pleaded.

'You're mad boy! I need to save up and buy us a car first,' Mum bit back.

My heart sank even more knowing it was going to take Mum the longest time to save for a car because she didn't have a job, she was too busy looking after me and my baby sister.

I went and got my soccer ball to boot it around the backyard to try and get out some of my anger and frustration.

CHAPTER TWO



At school the next day my best friend Wal, who is an Aboriginal fella too, asked, ‘What’s wrong Dusty?’

‘Nothing, why?’ I asked.

‘It’s maths lesson, your favourite, and you’re just sitting there staring into space.’

‘Oh, right.’

‘So what’s wrong?’

‘Mum broke up with Marcus,’ I grizzled.

Wal screwed up his face, ‘Sorry bro.’

‘He took the Xbox with him,’ I moaned.

Wal’s jaw dropped and he blurted out, ‘Oh bruz, that’s horrible,’ sending the teacher our way.

Ms George looked at us sternly and said, ‘If you boys plan on being trouble today, you’ll miss out on this afternoon’s cricket match!’

Missing out on playing cricket didn’t bother me too much. I only joined the team because Wal wanted to play. If it was soccer, that’d be heaps different; I’d be really worried then. I love soccer more than life itself. And the thing with soccer is that you only need a ball to play. With cricket you need a bat and ball, stumps, pads, gloves and all that stuff. It’s too much.

Anyway, I got back to concentrating on my maths, Wal stopped asking questions and at lunchtime we were getting changed into our gear to play against Seaview Primary School. I pulled on my white shorts and the white shirt that I wore to one of Mum’s cousin’s weddings, because I didn’t have a white collared t-shirt like we were supposed to wear.

And that's when Wayde said, 'Hey, Stone Age.' He called me that because in grade two he got sent home for calling me one of the worst names you can call an Aboriginal person. 'Where's your whites? We're playing cricket, not doing ballet.'

'It's too hot for long pants,' I told him.

'And what about your shoes,' Wayde boomed, making everyone stare at me. 'They're supposed to be white, everything is supposed to be white!'

I stared down at my tattered, dirty sneakers as everyone laughed at me, apart from Wal, who I could see was fighting back the temptation to jump to my defence.

Our captain, Jeremy, won the toss and sent us in to bat. The coach, Mr Wills, had placed me at number four and Wal at number five in the batting order. I was looking forward to batting with Wal, I thought it would make playing cricket and putting up with Wayde worthwhile.

Wayde opened the batting and was still at the crease when it was my turn to bat. As Jeremy

walked back to the boundary, Wayde loped along with him, to welcome me to the crease.

As we turned back towards the pitch Wayde said, 'Make sure you don't get hit on the legs. It'll sting like hell without long pants!'

Rather than making me scared, Wayde's comment had me fuming. When the first ball zoomed down to me, I slogged it in Wayde's direction, almost hitting him. The ball raced past the fielder to the boundary for four runs.

'Go Dusty!' I heard Wal yell out, above the clapping of my teammates.

Usually after hitting a boundary I'd walk to the centre of the pitch to fist bump my partner, but there was no way I was doing that with Wayde. I just looked at him to make me more determined to score more than him.

I thought about Marcus and the teasing from Wayde and took out all my aggression, bashing the ball around. Not every ball went for four but a lot of them did.

Before I knew it, I'd made thirty-seven runs,

three less than Wayde. We had to retire at fifty runs in school cricket. I knew that if I made fifty, that would shut Wayde up about my clothes and shoes.

Wayde was facing the bowler and I was hoping he'd get bowled. Instead he played a nice cover drive that shot towards the fielder who was out pretty deep. 'Yes!' he called and I started running to the other end of the wicket. But Wayde turned back, and I had to try and race back to the crease. I was run out.

I shot a look at Wayde before walking to the boundary. I didn't even need to see his smirk to realise that he'd deliberately run me out.

'Don't worry about it,' Wal said as he walked to the centre of the field. 'I'll run him out for you.'

I replied, 'We don't need to be like him, just go out there and make some runs for the team.'

I sat on the boundary watching Wal bat, wishing that we were playing soccer instead of cricket and that I could just go home and play Xbox once the game was over.