

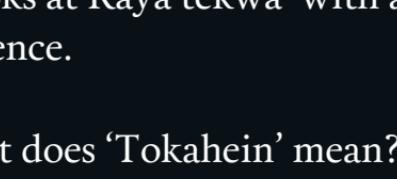
You check and recheck your notes, confirming everything seems to point to that specific spot on the map as you await the agonizing hours until at last the first soft glow of sunlight begins to push the darkness back. By now the alleged word of power "Tokahein" is burned into your brain.

You pack up your things and grab Thomas's journal as you orient yourself, preparing to set off to where all of this seems to lead. You are about to head out when you spot the small hatchet Thomas had left for cutting up wood for the fire, grabbing it, you begin the trek to where the map shows, checking in with the landmarks as you go, your GPS and radio still useless.

The early morning air has a chill to it and you can't help but feel unease at the darkness still beneath the thick canopy of trees. Making your way as best you can based on your map, you lose track of time as you walk on, your body not succumbing to weariness and your water bottle sloshing around, as you hike on. Your thoughts are dominated by Kaya'tekwa, the trappers and Thomas. The lack of sleep allows you to slip into a daze as you trudge on. It is only the bite of a mosquito that seems to snap you out your dazed state and to your horror, you realize the day has slipped away and the sun is already beginning its steady dip behind the trees.

Looking at the map in the now fading light you seem to be in the correct place. You begin to call out. "Thomas!" you yell into the woods surrounding this small clearing. "Thomas can you hear me?" you clench the axe in your hands, the creeping feeling of dread tickles your neck as you watch the shadows of the trees grow longer.

Then movement, out of the corner of your eye. You spin to face it but nothing, then again on the opposite side of you. You take a step back out of reflex and trip over a root, falling onto the ground. Before you can scramble up you see it.



It is tall, lanky and its skin a milky white. Its eyes are black and so are the long teeth peaking from its mouth. It watches you, then in an instant it seems to disappear. You stand, holding onto the axe, shaking as adrenaline pulses through you. Your mouth is dry as you scan the ever darkening foliage for the monster when you see it.

It stands at an unnatural angle, the bones jut out and pull the skin taut. It takes a step towards you when you suddenly remember the word of power.

"Tokahein" you say, barely a murmur. Clearing your throat and swallowing you croak it louder "Tokahein!" the word seems to fall flat as the creature continues its slow steps towards you. You hold the axe in front of you, preparing to use it. Its a voice, that causes you to jump. A human voice.

A hoarse and sounding on the verge of tears whispers their words after saying them "I told you, someone would come."

Turning you see Thomas, he is naked from the waist up, his skin dirty from a mix of mud and what appears to be blood. His eyes are wide and he looks hungrily at you.

"Thomas?" you ask incredulously. The man laughs, a shrill cackle. "Yes, yes it is I." Thomas confirms.

"What is going on, that thing...what is it?" You ask gesturing with the axe at the Pale Walker who has for the moment stopped its advance.

"That...thing, that is the end. Kaya'tekwa is the end of it all." Thomas's eyes are glassy as he looks at Kaya'tekwa with a near reverence.

"What does 'Tokahein' mean?" you ask, desperate for the word of power to work.

At this Thomas smiles. "Tokahein...yes, that...that means ending. As I said, Kaya'tekwa is the end, the end that will eventually come for us all."

He turns to face towards Kaya'tekwa, his hands shake as he holds them up in the air.

"As I said, someone came...you need to eat. Feast." Thomas says as the reality of his words hit you. Before you can act, the creature moves with a blur covering the distance between you in a split second,

For a moment time seems to stand still, Kaya'tekwa stands before you, then a cold burning pain in your chest. Looking down, you see the sharp claws of the pale white hand racking at your chest.

The world around to goes black.