

Interpreting and Animating the Tāwhaki

Myth Cycle in a Video Game

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Abstract

Indigenous oral traditions are at risk of dying out, but they can be preserved using digital media (Dorji, 2009). Video games are one of the digital technologies that are being increasingly used to preserve indigenous cultures (LaPensée, 2017; Machkovech 2015). However, there is a pressing concern that Māori identity may be misappropriated if Māori do not claim these digital spaces for themselves (Mahuta, 2012). In response to these growing concerns, Māori game developers have begun the process of establishing an authentic Māori identity through video games (Davis, 2016; Mahuta, 2012).

This exegesis explores the ways in which the Tāwhaki myths may be interpreted in a video game. The Tāwhaki myths were chosen because of their relative obscurity in the modern era (Mead, 1996). I examine three possible ways these myths may be interpreted using digital media. I then build a video game prototype based on one of these interpretations. I conclude with a discussion about the creation process of building this prototype, focusing primarily on writing issues which pertain to the retelling of the Tāwhaki myths.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is
my own work and that, to the best of my
knowledge and belief, it contains no
material previously published or written by
any other person (except where explicitly
defined in the acknowledgements), nor
material which to a substantial extent has
been submitted for the award of any other
degree or diploma of a university or other
institution of higher learning.

signed

13 August 2018

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Ngā mihi

The video game prototype may be downloaded from:

<https://waetford.wixsite.com/tawhaki>

<https://isaacwaetford.itch.io/tawhaki>

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Interpreting and Animating the Tāwhaki myth cycle in a video game

How might the Tāwhaki myths be preserved, reinterpreted, and reinvigorated in a narrative-driven video game?

Chapter One: Introduction

This exegesis discusses the process of retelling a Māori myth through a video game.

The collection of myths selected for this project are centered around the mythological character of Tāwhaki, a demigod known for ascending a sacred vine to retrieve the three baskets of knowledge from the higher realms. These myths were selected due to their relative obscurity in the present age (Mead, 1996). Indigenous oral traditions are at risk of dying out, but they can be preserved through the use of digital media (Dorji, 2009).

Video games are one of the digital technologies that are being increasingly used to preserve indigenous cultures (LaPensée, 2017; Machkovech 2015). A prominent example is ‘Never Alone’ (Upper One Games, 2014), a game that has been lauded for its effectiveness in sharing the oral traditions of the Iñupiaq people while challenging damaging Indigenous stereotypes (Longboat, 2017). There is a pressing concern that Māori identity may be misappropriated if Māori do not claim digital spaces for themselves (Mahuta, 2012); the ubiquity of digital devices and the ease in which digital artefacts can spread could exacerbate misrepresentation. In response to this concern, Māori game developers have begun the process of establishing an authentic Māori identity through video games (Davis, 2016; Mahuta, 2012).

One might argue whether it is appropriate for these stories to be made into video games. Mills (2016) writes that emerging technologies can be employed to articulate alternative

Māori worldviews, enabling “a different kind of cultural activism” (p. 19) whereby colonial modernism can be resisted. By utilizing Western technologies to tell these stories, one naturally goes beyond *cultural reductionism*, which Mills defines as “a retreat from the tools and techniques introduced by Pākehā to New Zealand, towards a purist return to traditions” (p. 19). Makereti (2018) writes that Māori literature has a *whakapapa* which does not flow in one direction; it can speak back to the past while it is being modified by the present. She cautions us not to privilege one form of Māori literature over others, as to do so would preclude other ways in which Māori understand their heritage. McRae (2017) makes the point that while Māori orators held esteem for their heritage, they tended to shape their material in highly personal ways which befitted their audience. I would argue that the survival of the stories and traditions of Māori culture may require the creative freedom of those who wish to engage with those traditions, even if doing so incurs an unintended transgression. Consider the many transgressions of Māui; some of them had an adverse effect, such as when he tried to kill Hine-nui-te-po, but other transgressions were beneficial. For example, Māui did not ask his grandfather if he could take his jaw, he connived a way to steal it, and with it he was able to fish up Te-Ika-a-Māui, the North Island of New Zealand.

In trying to answer my research question, I considered several ways in which these myths may be interpreted. I have selected three possible interpretations for discussion in this exegesis, and a prototype based on one of these interpretations was developed. I begin this exegesis by situating the Tāwhaki myths in Māori oral tradition, paying cursory attention to the trickster archetype. I then discuss the historical context of the Tāwhaki myths, in particular their transcription and translation into English. Following this, I detail the chronological development of my ideas, ending with a discussion on the prototype that was built.

Chapter Two: Overview of the Tāwhaki Myth Cycle

Tāwhaki, like Māui, was a demigod, and while he was capable of shapeshifting and deception, the archetype of the trickster seems to have a stronger presence in Māui. Māui was an inexplicable rogue, a character whose morality was as polymorphous as his body, and much can be said about the values or warnings Māori ascribed to him. Tāwhaki on the other hand seems to be guided by a stricter moral code, although he is not without his faults. When he tried to steal dogs from Tama-i-waho, the supreme tohunga, he accidentally killed some of the dogs and was consequently banished from the highest realm.

Tāwhaki was a child of prophecy and was given the important task of bringing down knowledge from the higher realms. He grew up to become a tohunga, a powerful spiritual leader who draws their power from their knowledge of *karakia* and *tikanga*. Some of Tāwhaki's powers includes the ability to transform into an old man, the ability to render himself invisible, and the ability to send out lightning from his armpits. Tāwhaki was also known to be unusually handsome, taking several wives over the course of his life.

As a character who demonstrates aspects of the trickster archetype, Tāwhaki often fools his opponents to gain an advantage over them. However, according to Hyde (2010), the trickster archetype has a deeper, more significant function in mythology than as a devious rogue. Tricksters are bearers of change who can only exist in polytheistic religions (Hyde, 2010). This is because the trickster can only exist in spaces between

realms of established powers. As an amoral character, the trickster transgresses boundaries, disturbing the established order in an act of creative destruction. This is certainly the case with Tāwhaki, who exists in a world dominated by several nature gods. He subverts those gods either through trickery or by crossing boundaries to enter their realms, modifying them from within; in the process, he forges new pathways to new worlds for the benefit of humanity.

Tāwhaki journeys from the earthly realm into the higher realms. Generally, there are two versions of this story which provide different motivations. In Grey's (1885) and Mead's (1996) version, Tāwhaki seeks to reunite with his wife Tangotango and daughter, who leaves him after he offends her. According to White's (1887) and Wohler's (1874) versions, Tāwhaki and his brother Karihi travel to the higher realms to avenge their father.

In both versions, as Tāwhaki and Karihi journey to the sacred vine, they encounter their blind grandmother counting ten kūmara. In some versions she is called Whitiri; in White's (1887) account her name is Ruahine-mata-morari, in Grey's (1885) it is Matakerepo. In all versions she is a cannibal. The ten kūmara that Whitiri is counting may represent the ten months of labor during the year, with the remaining two months being omitted because they weren't important (Leather & Hall, 2004). In this interpretation, Whitiri may be regarded as a timekeeper. Alternatively, the kūmara may represent the people themselves, with Whitiri being symbolic of Hine-nui-te-po (the goddess of death), who over the course of a year, randomly kills and sends people to the Māori underworld known as Rarohenga (Leather & Hall, 2004).

The brothers restore Whitiri's eyesight hoping that she will reciprocate their goodwill

and show them how to climb the sacred vine. She expresses her gratitude and convinces them to stay a night before they continue their journey. However, she schemes to kill them and eat them in their sleep. Whaitiri may be considered a gatekeeper, and her function as such is to test Tāwhaki to determine whether he is worthy to continue his journey. Tāwhaki must outwit her to avoid being eaten. Humorously, during the night, Tāwhaki tricks his grandmother into thinking he is still awake by placing shells, which resemble eyes, over his eyelids. This forces Whaitiri to keep watch over him throughout the night, preventing her from resting. The following morning, Tāwhaki bullies the sleep deprived Whaitiri into showing him the pathway to the sacred vine.

Usually the pathway is symbolized by a tendril which may be held in Whaitiri's hand, however in some versions the vine extends from the back of her neck. There are other versions where Whaitiri directs her grandsons to a second gatekeeper, Kawhere, who is also one of their ancestors. In any case, Karihi is the first to climb, preparing his ascent with incantations. However, he is unable to complete the climb because the winds of Ururangi keep blowing him about. He makes several attempts, but he continually fails, and in some versions of the story, he dies. Tāwhaki manages to secure a successful climb by remembering a whakatauki given to him by his wife, Tangotango, which enables him to resist Ururangi's winds. The story of Tāwhaki's ascent to the higher realms thus demonstrates not only some of his trickster qualities, but also his capacity as a tohunga, as someone who remembers the right action to take.

As Hyde (2010) has previously suggested, tricksters cross boundaries to forge new pathways and modify the established order. In the Tāwhaki myths, this would be the higher realms. The Māori concept of the higher realms seems to be complicated by the different tribal ideas about them. According to Best (1982), the number of realms differ

by tribe. He writes that to the Tākitimu people, “each of these heavens, it was taught, has its own series of heavenly bodies, or luminaries, its sun, moon, and stars, also its clouds and waters. Our luminaries, as seen from our position on the body of the Earth Mother, are those of the first of the twelve heavens,” (p. 73).

According to Mead (1996), there were ten higher realms. The six were found in Maru’s domain (Kikorangi, Te waka o Maru, Ngā Roto), and Tāwhaki’s domain (Hauora, Ngā Tauira, Ngā Atua). The next three levels are not named in Mead’s book. Finally, there is Tūwarea/Naherangi/Tawhitorangi, or ‘the lonely heaven’, isolated from the others, and incredibly sacred.

According to Wohlers (1874), the higher realms are not perpendicular to the earth. He suggests that they exist on the same horizontal plane as the earth, perhaps existing on an island across the ocean. But this begs the question why Tāwhaki would need to climb a vine to reach an island. Perhaps Wohlers is conflating the higher realms with Hawaiki, the mythological homeland of Māori and the destination of their departing spirits. Mead (1996) writes that Tāwhaki and Karihi were instructed by their sister to find their grandparents across the sea, and from there they would find the sacred vine. Rather than travel by boat, Tāwhaki and Karihi skip across the water, taking care to only land their feet on the crests of the waves. They eventually arrive at an island where the majority of Tāwhaki’s adventures take place. Supposedly this is Hawaiki (Metge, 1998), although the flora and fauna are endemic to Aotearoa.

Chapter Three: Historical Context

There is no definitive version of Tāwhaki's exploits, as each Polynesian subculture have their own account. Similarly, in Māori tradition, different tribes have their own version of the story, just as they have different customs. Versions may differ in the order of events, the places in which events are set, the names of characters, the genealogy of the characters, the outcome of the characters, and the motivations ascribed to Tāwhaki. As such, the varying versions would contradict each other. The lack of a reading and writing tradition in Māori societies meant that the myths were fluid, continually changing, much like the shapeshifting Māui. They could not be made to sit still or captured on a piece of paper; they were meant to be performed, with each orator adding their own voice and twist to the story (McRae, 2017).

Elsdon Best (1982), Sir George Grey (1885), John White (1887), and Reverend Johan Wohlers (1874) published the earliest written records of these myths. As ethnographers, they spent several years living among and consulting with the chiefs and tohunga in different regions, documenting their local oral traditions before they were lost. Even though some Māori were already literate, the belief that names of ancestors were too tapu to be written down made it difficult to obtain written records of Māori knowledge and genealogy tables (Walker, 2016). By the end of the nineteenth century, the Māori population had been so significantly reduced that it was generally expected they would become extinct and their culture would be lost forever. In the preface to the second edition of *Polynesian Mythology* (1885), Grey writes that many of the chiefs had passed away, either dying in battles against the British Empire, or perishing of old age in the

wilderness. The Tohunga Suppression Act 1907 led to further losses of cultural information, making it illegal for Māori to practice some aspects of their traditions. Some Māori continued to practice these traditions in secret, but there are doubts surrounding the authorship of the traditions which survived into the 21st century, as he who writes the history also controls it.

While Western social scientists had helped to preserve Māori culture during the nineteenth century, modern scholars are critical of their work, noting the destructiveness that colonialism had on early Māori scholarship. According to Walker (2016), Grey plagiarized Te Rangikaheke's manuscripts, publishing them under *Kō ngā Mōteatea me ngā Hakirara ō ngā Māori* (1853) and *Kō ngā Mahinga ā ngā Tūpuna* (1854). John White, who was working for George Grey as a translator, has been criticized by David Simmons for altering the Ponga and Puhuhuia myth, calling into question the credibility of his scholarship (Derby, 2009). Best has also been scrutinized for modifying the myths, possibly refashioning them after the Greek mythos (Metge, 1998).

Furthermore, an attitude of colonial superiority can be gleaned from direct examination. Grey, despite later declaring his reverence for the Māori, is condescending in the preface to the first edition of his book *Polynesian Mythology* (1885): "I believe that the ignorance which has prevailed regarding the mythological systems of barbarous or semi-barbarous races has too generally led to their being considered far grander and more reasonable than they really were" (p. X). As for Wohlers, even when he seems to venerate Māori, he does so at the expense of other ethnic groups, again showing the racism of the colonists:

I am inclined to think that [the myths] refer to a period when the ancestors of the Māori race were migrating among the East Indian Islands... where they must have come in contact with such different races.... And that the ugly people spoken of as belonging to the whale kinds may have been tribes of the Negro race.

(Wohlers, 1874, p. 15).

Sir Hirini Moko Mead has compiled his own collection of the Tāwhaki myths from his perspective (1996). He cautions his readers not to consider his version as being either superior or inferior to other versions, noting that all versions are correct. It is from his version which I primarily draw upon, even though it could be argued that a Ringatū worldview influenced by Christianity pervades his account; for instance, there is a resemblance between Tāwhaki's resurrection with Christ's resurrection. There is also a story where a flood is called forth to punish Tāwhaki's enemies. Finally, the baskets of knowledge contain knowledge of good and evil, which one might suppose is a morality based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. McRae (2017) writes that the Christianization of Māori stories occurred because Māori enjoyed drawing comparisons between Pākehā culture and their own and were attracted to the Bible's poetic, allusive style. This suggests that the Christian influence on Māori literature was less ideological and more experimental, therefore it may not be indicative of colonial imposition.

Chapter Four: Chronological Development of Ideas

4.0 Tāwhaki as Science-fiction and Fantasy

When I first started this project, it was my intention to construct an experience such that the reader would become the author of their own story, or as Barthes (1967) puts it, the reader would ‘exclude’ the author in their reading. I would be no more than a vehicle for these older, mythical, layered traditions to reach new audiences, an explorer of how others may interface with these traditions.

I drew my initial ideas from my intention to ‘update’ the myths thematically and contextually. Thematically, by way of applying the mythic structure to contemporary issues such as climate change and the ongoing effort to decolonize indigenous cultures; contextually, by retelling the myths in a modern genre such as Fantasy and Science fiction.

In one of my nascent ideas, I thought about portraying Tāwhaki’s ascent to the higher realms as a journey into higher dimensions of reality, drawing upon a liberal interpretation of String Theory. In Mead’s account, there are ten levels of ‘heaven’, or ten higher realms, which correlates closely with some versions of String Theory, such as M Theory, where there are ten spacetime dimensions and one energy dimension (Garisto, 1998). However, the higher dimensions in String Theory are so miniscule that they are hidden, thus even a liberal interpretation of String Theory would be difficult to visualize, and the logic of a fictional world based on these ideas would break down. In

any case, Tāwhaki's journey would culminate in the retrieval of the baskets of knowledge which would prevent humanity from destroying the ecosystems in which they inhabit, as well as help humanity construct new ecosystems. Furthermore, this knowledge would encourage the preservation of the cultural artefacts and traditions of people who do not identify with the dominant culture in their vicinity.

A question could be asked as to whether that interpretation would be politicizing the myths. It should be noted that preserving knowledge is a core theme of the myths. In Mead's account, Tāwhaki's role is to obtain, disseminate, and preserve knowledge. In order to obtain new knowledge, Tāwhaki must draw upon that which has been handed down to him. This knowledge comes in the form of karakia, or prayers and incantations, and tikanga, which are guidelines for right action. Without these, Tāwhaki's journey is made harder, though not impossible. There are a few moments when Tāwhaki's failure to remember the correct karakia or tikanga causes him to falter, however he is still able to persevere. Thus, preserving the 'endangered' traditions of a minority culture is thematically consistent with the Tāwhaki cycle.

Returning to the ecological themes, Nunn and Britton (2001) suggest that ancient Polynesians living around the year 1300AD were affected by climate change during the Little Ice Age (1300-1800AD). During this period, sea levels fell, and coral reefs were no longer a source of food. Resource scarcity led to infighting and the development of fortifications and weapons of war (Nunn, 2006). The stories of Kupe (Grey, 1854) suggest that the growing tribal tensions on the islands led him to discover Aotearoa, thus emigration due to resource depletion and infighting is encoded in Polynesian myth and perhaps lingers in the psyche.

Drawing upon this cultural background of infighting due to climate change, and applying it to the sci-fi genre, I thought of humanity being forced to abandon an ecologically damned Earth, carrying as little as possible to their new home worlds. The oral tradition would be revived as an insurance against losing cultural information, including the stories (pūrāku) of heroes such as Māui and Tāwhaki. At this point, perhaps Hawaiki would be appropriated and interpreted as a new Earth; a continuation of the idea that Polynesians are continually seeking their true home, Hawaiki. Later, Tāwhaki, as a cosmological being who is part human, tries to help humanity by forging a path to Hawaiki. In that sense, Tāwhaki would be a recurring character throughout human history, signifying the cyclic nature of the myths.

Although the interpretation of Hawaiki and the higher realms as physical locations would be easy to visualize inside a computer game, one runs the risk of losing the symbolic power of those images, reducing them to simulacrum. Perhaps Hawaiki would be more appropriately taken to be a spiritual home for Māori, as Robert Sullivan writes in Waka 92:

Waka are hearses not for exploration

I gladly take them

They send the loved ones here

With some knowledge

Of what it is to be Māori

The others go to the other place

Called the collective unconscious

I am Hawaiki

(Sullivan, 2013, para. 3)

If one should take Hawaiki as a visual metaphor for spiritual belonging, then one should be careful not to reduce other symbols to stereotypes. For this reason, I became uneasy about interpreting the myths as sci-fi fantasy. I was concerned that doing so would introduce too many discordant elements into the story and take away their deeper meaning. It became apparent that my knowledge of the myths was still limited by my perspective as a person living in the 21st century. Even though I am Māori, I don't share the same cultural space as the ancient Māori orators who told this story. In many ways, I am a product of multiple generations of British colonialism, meaning that I have been imbued with Western values and modes of thinking, making it difficult to perceive my Māori heritage from the same standpoint as my Māori ancestors. With these limitations in mind, I decided it would be more appropriate to be more conservative in my handling of the myths, being careful to avoid creating simulacra.

In the video games industry, simulacra are abundant. There is a tendency to adopt the visual aesthetics and recognizable customs of different cultures, but this practice often seems to preclude deeper engagement with the people from those cultures. The fictional Karui race in *Path of Exile* (Grinding Gear Games, 2017), a fantasy Action Role Playing Game made by the New Zealand company Grinding Gear Games, was inspired by Māori aesthetics and customs. Like the Māori, the Karui have a warrior culture and a religion which deifies ancestors and nature gods:

The blood of the Ancestors surged in our veins and each and every one of my warriors earned Tukohama's mark upon their skin. We descended into the heart of Wraeclast, and there He came to me. Tukohama. He asked of me a sacrifice. I

gave it willingly. My axe fell five hundred times, the jade drinking its fill of Karui blood. Tukohama was pleased.

(Path of Exile Wiki, n.d., para. 25).

The Karui employ primitive weapons such as wooden staves and spears, adzes and stone maces. Even the language is phonetically similar to Te Reo Māori, with the use of the same vowels and consonants in the names of characters such as Tawhoa and Ngamahu. Despite these similarities, one might question whether Māori are being represented faithfully. It is possible that the Karui are based the stereotype of the noble savage, an image which is broadly applied to indigenous people. If the noble savage is the stereotype informing the creation of the Karui race, then one can base the aesthetics of the race on any other aboriginal culture without significantly altering the Karui's overall character. I am not suggesting that the design of the Karui was not well intentioned, after all there is an anti-imperial tone in the Path of Exile; rather, one would find it difficult to distinguish the Māori-ness of the Karui without the obvious signposting to Māori aesthetics and customs.

4.1 Game Mechanics

I planned to incorporate deeper aspects of the culture into my game, for example, taking a concept like mana and building an appropriate game mechanic around it. While some of these culturally derived mechanics do not make an appearance in the final version of the game, describing them will give an indication as to how my ideas developed. These game mechanics are also story mechanics, since they determine the outcome of the story inasmuch as they affect the affordances offered to the player.

The most important mechanic is derived from the cyclical nature of myths. This gives the player the liberty to develop their own retelling. There is no grand narrative encapsulating all the different versions of the myths and there is no canonical timeline for Tāwhaki's deeds. Different stories may even contradict each other, and sensemaking does not adhere to linear logic. I like to use the metaphor of story events as being equivalent to nodes on a graph, where the player's decisions forms link between nodes. The player may link different nodes in any manner of their choosing.

In addition to developing a game mechanic based on the cyclical nature of the myths, I wanted to incorporate the Polynesians' conception of time, which could be conceived as being nonlinear (Metge, 1998). A nonlinear conception of time implies that one's dead ancestors can be brought into the present, such as when Kupe gives sailing instructions to one of his descendants. Since Tāwhaki is a demigod, I thought about giving him the ability to send his consciousness backwards and forwards in time, with his birth and death delimiting the boundaries of his ability. In terms of game mechanics, this would enable the player to re-do certain actions, or to make different decisions in the game, especially if they had reached an undesirable plot ending. This reduces the frustration players would feel after they make a series of bad decisions. They can continue the story without needing to restart from the beginning.

From a storytelling point of view, I felt that giving Tāwhaki the ability to travel through time would also present him with an existential crisis. If meaning requires constraints, boundaries, and distinctions, then a character who is essentially timeless also loses meaning; none of their actions matter because all of them are possible. Thus, there is a price which comes with the ability to be unbounded by time. As a demigod, Tāwhaki is both powerful and cursed to confront the nihilism of his existence. Furthermore, when

Tāwhaki is betrayed by Hinepīripi's brothers, his sense of being a demigod is wounded, further pushing him towards a sense of meaninglessness. His psychological wounds never fully heal until he fulfils the prophecy of retrieving the baskets of knowledge from the higher realms. The prophecy imprisons him, forcing him down a single path, but it also liberates him from nihilism, allowing him to transcend his wounds.

From a game mechanics perspective, I wondered whether it would be necessary to put constraints on Tāwhaki's 'time travel' power to prevent the player from continually second guessing their decisions. I decided that Tāwhaki would only be able to 'time travel' in locations imbued with wairua, or spiritual essence. These locations would be placed near potential dead ends. Since there is no 'game over' or lose condition in this game, undesirable outcomes are reversible for the sake of the story, and it is up to the player to decide when the story ends.

I also thought about visually representing Tāwhaki's role as a trickster who modifies the physical world. For instance, in the beginning of the game, the world may appear dull, limited to a grayscale or monochrome colour palette, but as Tāwhaki enacts changes in the world, new colours begin to appear. For example, the story of Tāwhaki's betrayal by his wife's brothers leads to the Kākā's feathers and the Takahē's beak becoming red with Tāwhaki's blood (Mead, 1996). The player co-creates the world with Tāwhaki, filling it in with more details. Through replaying the game from different angles, the player's experience of the game changes as new sounds, textures, and colours emerge.

Learning Tāwhaki's whakapapa would also be part of this 'completion' process.

Learning one's whakapapa is an important tradition in Māori culture because if one

does not know their lineage, then one is considered to be a nobody (Mead, 2003).

Knowing Tāwhaki's whakapapa opens other storylines in the game. For example, he may recognize allies or relatives who can help him; he may also understand why certain characters are trying to attack him, as they seek vengeance for a past wrong committed against them by one of Tāwhaki's relatives. Māori have a collective identity where a person is identified with their ancestors and kin, thus an offence to one's ancestor several generations ago would be taken as a slight against one's self (Gluckman, 1976).

As one learns about their whakapapa, they also learn about their responsibilities to their hapu and iwi. Sometimes this involves seeking ea, or balance, through utu, or reciprocity (Mead, 2003). Not fulfilling one's filial obligations would lower the mana of their people and induce ill health (Gluckman, 1976). I thought about incorporating this psychological effect in the game. For example, Tāwhaki would be asked to perform an unpleasant act of utu, and the player would have to decide between going through with it or suffering the psychological consequences. If the player decided not to obtain utu, then Tāwhaki would lose mana and will become a psychologically and socially weaker character going forward. If the player did enact utu, then Tāwhaki will restore the mana of his people and become stronger as a result, but he may have to deal with a reciprocal act of revenge from another character later. It must be noted that there are multiple definitions of concepts such as utu which vary by iwi, therefore the aforementioned game mechanics would only draw upon a few of the multifarious customs and traditions within Te Ao Māori.

Finally, I thought about how passive voice is more frequently used in Te Reo Māori than in English (Foster, 2012). I wondered if this meant that Māori saw themselves as passive agents whose environment is acting upon them, rather than as active agents who

act upon the environment. I wondered how this could be implemented in a game mechanic. It might work best in Virtual Reality, where the player is naturally passive due to the movement restrictions placed on them by the VR headset. However, I could not find any evidence that Māori saw themselves as passive agents in relation to the environment, so naturally the concept was discarded.

4.2 Writing Process

Twine (Klimas, 2017) was used to plot out an early configuration of the story branches. Twine generates a hyperlinked digital artefact which can model story flow. Story events are summarized in nodes and links are created between nodes to delineate different pathways the player may take.

All the myths were combined into a single meta story, however only certain parts of the story are experienced during any given playthrough. Different versions of each story may be told depending on the player's previous decisions and the items in their inventory. An inventory item may include tangible objects such as a hook or spear, as well as memorized karakia or a whakapapa line. The retrieval of inventory items is sometimes necessary to make progress in the story, as some inventory items unlock different branches.

Once the basic story outline was plotted out, I began thinking about the structure of the story in detail. I knew that opening the story in media res can capture the player's attention, so I selected a dramatic scene to open the game with. This opening scene does not necessarily coincide with a chronological beginning. Due to the nonlinearity of the

myth cycle, the story may begin and end anywhere in Tāwhaki's life. I chose to begin the story when Tāwhaki is betrayed and murdered Hinepiripiri's jealous brothers. As Tāwhaki lays on the ground dying, he tries to recite a karakia to coagulate his wounds. However, he has forgotten the karakia, so he must send his mind back to the past and relive his nascent memories as a young man.

At this point the story is meant to diverge into nonlinearity. Once the player has relearned the karakia from the elders in his home village, they may direct Tāwhaki back to the time where he was laying on the ground dying, or they may choose to continue the story from here, experiencing Tāwhaki's journey from the beginning.

While I had planned to tell a nonlinear story, the story writing process is necessarily linear in that only one pathway can be written at a time. Before starting my first attempt at a draft, I needed to understand the entire story structure in detail. I used John Truby's (2007) twenty-two steps to develop the story structure, rather than the more commonly known Three Act Structure, which is derived from Aristotle's Poetics. Truby notes that splitting your story into three acts is arbitrary, arguing that writers should think of their story as mimicking the processes of life, which he systemizes into twenty-two discrete stages. These twenty-two stages or steps are not fixed or necessarily present in all stories but are useful guides when trying to architect a story that is both cohesive and organic. According to Truby, of the twenty-two steps, eight of them are prevalent in all good stories: problem/need, desire, opponent, plan, battle, self-revelation, and new equilibrium.

As I was developing the story structure of the myths using Truby's twenty-two steps, I realized that my original plan for the plot would not be cohesive unless I split the story

into two parts, with each part having its own twenty-two step structure. Truby advises that in each story, the protagonist should only have one desire. This desire forms the spine of the story, and the story should be concluded when the protagonist either realizes their desire or abandons it. Having multiple desires in a single story muddles the cohesiveness of the plot and can drain the story of energy.

Since the myths are a collection of stories, each having a different desire line, the awkwardness of telling a cohesive story could not be avoided, even when I split the Tāwhaki myths into two parts. As a result, I took many liberties as to how I organized the myths. Part one follows Tāwhaki's journey into a faraway island as he searches for his grandparents. His desire changes over the course of the story from wanting to find his grandparents, so that he may learn how to fulfill the prophecy from them, to seeking revenge against Tangaroa for killing his father. In part two, Tāwhaki's desire is to reunite with his second major wife, Tangotango, who retreats into the higher realms after he offends her. Both stories are related to each other by the larger quest of Tāwhaki's life, which is to retrieve the baskets of knowledge from the higher realms.

Splitting the story in two brought clarity to my decision making as a writer, however much of the planned nonlinearity was compromised. Writing a genuinely nonlinear story that satisfies our expectations for good storytelling is a complex problem that cannot be solved by merely presenting the player with a series of choices with divergent consequences. Furthermore, the writing requirement of a nonlinear story increases exponentially as a function of the number of story branches. By necessity, the nature of the Tāwhaki story would have to be linear: a single, cohesive story would be told from beginning to end, with a few minor variations depending on the choices of the player.

What the story loses in nonlinearity, it perhaps gains in elegance. Each part of my rendering of the Tāwhaki myths is a thematic complement to the other, with the domain of part one being the ocean, the principle antagonist being Tangaroa, the god of the ocean, and the domain of part two being the sky, the principle antagonist being Tāwhirimātea, the god of wind. As noted earlier, Tāwhaki has multiple wives, but there are two main ones: Hinepīpīri and Tangotango. Hinepīpīri features in part one, while Tangotango features in part two. Finally, Tāwhaki's character arc follows a different route in each story, eventually leading him to become the hero he is known to be. In part one he is arrogant, apathetic, vain, and obsessed with revenge; as a demigod he is gifted with powers, but he overestimates his place in the world as he tries to wage a war with the god of the ocean. He is ultimately betrayed by the villagers who felt hoodwinked into fighting alongside him, suffering innumerable losses under his defective leadership. In the beginning of part two, Tāwhaki has been brought low by the events of part one. He is misanthropic and no longer wants to fulfill the prophecy to benefit humanity. He falls in love with a woman from the higher realms, but when she leaves him he resolves to climb the sacred vine to reunite with her. In doing so, he learns how to become the person he was meant to be, and he fulfills the prophecy.

It must be noted that the female characters are not 'rewards' for Tāwhaki. Sarkeesian (2017) criticizes the way that women are portrayed in video games, particularly indigenous women. In my game I tried to write the female characters as having their own desires and reactions, even if they happen to be romantically involved with the protagonist. For example, the character of Hinetuatai, a mermaid (Mead, 1996), could be problematic if she is overly fetishized, but in my interpretation, she too is a trickster, operating in the boundary between Tangaroa's domain and the world of the islanders. Initially, I wrote sex scenes to depict Tāwhaki's relationships with multiple women, but

upon reflection they did not help develop the characters and were not necessary to the story, so I decided to cut them.

Eventually I encountered the problem of whether to include a narrator. At this stage I was uncertain as to what the final game would look like and how it would be played, not knowing that these would have a significant effect on how the story is experienced. Furthermore, much of the literature of game writing does not approach this field using the principles, theories and techniques often discussed in creative writing discourse. For instance, point of view and voice are barely mentioned in game writing literature. As an experiment, I wrote my manuscript in second person, since this seems to be a common point of view in interactive fiction (Ford, 2016). I used Tāwhaki's wives as the narrators in the respective story arcs in which they appear. The manuscript included in the appendix of this thesis is written in this style, however it should be noted that I consider this experiment a failure. It can be awkward at times to play the game in the present while an intrusive narrator, who is both 'inside' the story as a character and 'outside' the story as a disembodied voice, clumsily tells the player what Tāwhaki is feeling, thinking and doing. I had not realized the awkwardness of this approach until I saw it demonstrated in the prototype.

Writer-led game development may require clear expectations as to how the game is meant to be played, otherwise one risks employing less effective or appropriate storytelling methods for the given game genre. The lack of a universal standard for a game script exacerbates this issue as writers may find it difficult to communicate their story ideas across different genres. Furthermore, an extended vocabulary for game writing would be desirable, as the deeper relationships between game story and game mechanics are yet to be determined.

Not wanting to rewrite an entire script, I found a solution to my narration problem, which also helped to streamline the story, removing unnecessary scenes and reducing the amount of content that would need to be built into the game. For part one, I kept Hinepiripiri as a second person narrator, however she would only begin narrating the story once she made her entrance as a character. She rescues Tāwhaki from dying, carrying him to Hinetuatai's cove, speaking to him while he is unconscious. Tāwhaki drifts in and out of consciousness, returning to dreams and memories while he is unconscious, his wife's voice acting as a guide, helping him make sense out of what happened to him. This part of the story plays across two timelines: the present, in which Tāwhaki is being escorted to safety, and the past, where Tāwhaki's background story is given.

4.3 Virtual Reality Gamebook

Since the beginning of the project, I was interested in developing a VR retelling of the myths. I was attracted to the idea of being face to face with Tāwhaki's cannibalistic grandmother, keeping an eye on her as she creepily devises a way to eat you. I also liked the idea of physically moving your arms to climb the sacred vines to the higher realms.

After attending Edwin McRae's seminar on Storytelling in games at the 2017 NZ Game Developers Conference (McRae, 2018), I became interested in the idea of a VR gamebook. A gamebook is like a novel in that the player engages with the story by reading text, with the additional ability to direct the way in which the story progresses. Similar to a Visual Novel, the text in a gamebook is accompanied by visual and auditory

elements such as character avatars, background scenes, music, voiced dialogue, and computer-generated artwork. I was interested in extending a traditional gamebook into Virtual Reality. I imagined the game being composed of 3D tableaux which surround the player. The player would be stationary, but they would be able to look around the scene, and they may or may not assume the perspective of Tāwhaki. The narration could be presented in a text box, however I also thought about incorporating the text into the scene itself, with the text being imbued into the environment like writing on a cave wall.

This approach held more potential than a Sci-fi Fantasy ARPG since it could be expanded upon to form a new genre. As I was formulating this new design, I was simultaneously interested in the religious and psychological aspects of the Tāwhaki myths. I liked the thought of esteeming the Tāwhaki myths by presenting them as a digital religious experience. Given the liturgical tone of such an interpretation, an appropriate art style would be required. I was compelled by the various art movements in Western Europe with its long tradition of rendering Judeo-Christian biblical stories. I was drawn primarily to the dreamlike paintings by Symbolist movement artists during the early 20th century because they conveyed the mysteries of the subconscious without losing their connection to the source material (Mathieu, 1991). During this time, Carl Jung's (2014) work on archetypes and the collective unconscious had inspired within me a deeper consideration of myths in general, which is why the style of the Symbolist movement garnered my attention. Jung believed that myths express the unconscious content of the individual and their society. To examine the Tāwhaki myths through a Jungian lens opens the possibility of exploring the unconscious psychical forces of ancient Polynesians. However, since Jung was a Liberal Protestant firmly rooted in Western modernity (Sherry, 2008), his ideas may be predicated on his belief in the

Judeo-Christian God, thus using his ideas as such may conflate Christian metaphysics with the Polynesian mythos.

Nonetheless, I offer an example of how Jungian thought can inform and enrich our understanding of Polynesian mythology. I developed my own interpretation of the Māori creation myth using Jung's ideas about the unconscious. First, I equated Rangi with consciousness and society, which is patriarchal. Papatūānuku is the symbol of the unconscious and nature, which is feminine. When Rangi and Papatūānuku are joined together, the human mind is undifferentiated from nature and the unconscious, therefore the world of human society is nonexistent. Separating the two lovers renders the world visible to the mind; language emerges, and the natural world is named. Thus, society emerges, and history begins.

Savett (2014) poses the question of whether game designers mediate access to the collective unconscious, suggesting that virtual storytellers have significant influence over the creation and exploration of new myths and fantasy images which are informed by, and play upon, the psyche. She concludes that game designers are primarily influenced by the puer archetype characterized by Hermes, "the inventor, the communicator, the public speaker, the trickster, and the guide laying the pathways toward the outer boundaries of exploration" (p. 201). A strong parallel can be drawn between the puer archetype, which informs the game industry, and Polynesian trickster characters, whose role includes the exploration and creation of new worlds.

An in-depth consideration of the relationships between mythology, religion and Jungian depth psychology and their application to virtual storytelling would be too vast to continue to discuss here. While I liked the ideas I was developing, I wanted to continue

exploring other ways to interpret the myths; I was searching for an appropriate core game mechanic which would elevate the game beyond a gamebook. The core game mechanic of a gamebook is the nonlinear story, the freedom by which the player may explore different pathways in the narrative. But the nonlinear aspect of gamebooks has many drawbacks, requiring the writing of multiple story branches which would ultimately have minor impact on a player's experience.

4.4 Adventure Game Genre

According to Savett (2014), "game play mechanics have been envisioned and crafted through the impulses of the puer: survival, problem solving, death and eternal resurrection of the warrior, disassociation with "the other," and sexual desire" (p. 203). She continues, stating that a hunger for new game verbs is growing, which may require the influence of other archetypes. Her discussion about archetypes ventures into nebulous territory, as the only archetype which she identifies as being useful to game designers are the feminine archetypes. How this is to be achieved is not something she explicates, but it has given me much to consider.

While I was generally avoiding the employment of puer verbs in my game design, I was concerned that my gamebook idea resembled a Twine game with 3D graphics rather than a game with dynamic verbs. If my plan had been to write electronic literature with minimal graphics, then I would have spent more time incorporating literary techniques in the manuscript, using florid description and large passages of dialogue. Through discussions with my supervisor, we were able to identify a game genre for my story that would be both appropriate to the source material and feasible to construct. We settled on the 'point and click Adventure' game genre, a genre which was most popular during the

early 90s with titles such as ‘Monkey Island’ by Lucasarts and ‘King’s Quest’ by Sierra Games (Vara, 2009).

Point and Click games are interfaced with a pointing device such as a mouse. The player avatar may be directed to move to a location signaled by the pressing down of a mouse button, or they may interact with objects or characters in the environment. Often the player must solve puzzles in order to make progress through the game. These puzzles may involve the combination of inventory items with characters or objects in the environment, such as using an axe to chop down a tree (Newheiser, 2010). Puzzles may be multilayered, as the solution to one puzzle may be a prerequisite to solving another puzzle; for example, the wood gained from chopping down a tree may be refashioned into a torch so that the player can explore a cave. Other types of puzzles include pattern puzzles, where the player must use the information obtained from another part of the game to solve a configuration problem, where items must be sequenced in the correct order.

In the Tāwhaki myths, Tāwhaki often uses his wits, rather than brute force, to find solutions to his problems. This is demonstrated when the vastly outnumbered Tāwhaki must find a way to get *utu* on the Ponaturi, the minions of Tangaroa who have killed Tāwhaki’s father. Through information given to him by his mother, he realizes that the Ponaturi are averse to sunlight, so he devises a way to fool the Ponaturi into exposing themselves to the sun. The trickster nature of Tāwhaki is characterized by problem solving, thus presenting the player with puzzles in the style of Point and Click Adventure games seemed an appropriate way to model Tāwhaki’s behavior. The solutions to these puzzles may come as a consequence of combining unusual pairs of items. Unexpected outcomes often have a comedic effect; the comedic aspect of

Adventure games seems appropriate given the comedic undertones of some of the Polynesian myths, such as how Hirini Mead (1996) names Tāwhaki's slaves Tahi and Rua, which translates to 'One' and 'Two'. Some criticism might be leveled at a comedic interpretation of Polynesian mythology, especially if characters are rendered in a seemingly irreverent manner, such as when Disney portrayed Māui as overweight and narcissistic in *Moana* (Ito, 2016), but this criticism may exclude comic dimensions of the Polynesian imagination.

The lighthearted tone of the Adventure game genre lends itself to a wide range of visual art styles. I spent a few months experimenting with Low Polygon art, purchasing Low Polygon models built by other artists, constructing some of my own models in Blender, and applying flat shaders to high polygon models to render them in Low Polygon style. This approach proved to be time consuming and the results were inconsistent. I eventually adopted the voxel art style, which made it easier to build art assets, the only drawback being the blocky cartoonish appearance of the models. But after animating the characters, they develop a charm of their own. The character models were procedurally rigged and animated on Adobe's Mixamo platform (Adobe Systems, 2018) and then imported into Unity's game engine (Unity Technologies, 2018). From there, I used Adventure Creator (Icebox Studios, 2018), which is a visual scripting tool, to build the game logic and piece the game together.

The final product presented alongside this exegesis is a prototype and is not intended to be polished or complete. Rather, it is meant to demonstrate how the Tāwhaki myths may be interpreted by using Adventure game genre conventions.

Conclusion

There are an infinite number of ways to interpret and retell a myth. By taking an exploratory approach to retelling the Tāwhaki myth cycle, my creative process has remained open ended, allowing me to be influenced by a range of different ideas. I began by researching the historical context of the myths, coming to terms with the colonial appropriations of Māori authorship, and gaining an awareness of the influence of Christianity upon later retellings of Māori myths. Although Christianity may have had a significant influence on Māori storytellers, McRae (2017) points out that Māori enjoyed experimenting with merging their own traditions with Western culture. Perhaps this hybridization of the two cultures enabled the continuation of the old Māori stories; simultaneously, it may have modified them such that it has now become difficult to source versions of Māori stories which precede the Christian influence in New Zealand.

I then considered how the trickster archetype can help one come to see Tāwhaki as serving an important function in mythological space. A trickster is not just a humorous character who cleverly foils their enemies. They are also world builders, subverting established polytheistic orders. Knowledge of the trickster archetype informed my decision to build a prototype which uses Adventure game genre conventions such as puzzle solving and inventory management. Furthermore, the comedic nature of Adventure games is characteristic of Polynesian trickster characters.

I also looked at the religious and spiritual aspects of Tāwhaki. It may seem contradictory that a character can be both a religious icon and a comedic trickster, but I suggest that an austere conception of religion may privilege the Judeo-Christian

tradition over Polynesian mythology, which has comedic dimensions running throughout. Tāwhaki is both a trickster and a tohunga. The tohunga use knowledge of karakia and tikanga to guide their actions; and at times, Tāwhaki may employ the use of trickery, such as shapeshifting to disguise himself. Tāwhaki's imperfections also suggest that he should not be taken too seriously, even if he is a demigod. At the end of his journey he commits a serious transgression which results in his banishment from Tama-i-waho's realm. This story is humorous but is also informative, suggesting that one never achieves perfection. It may be that Māori spirituality is both reverential and grounded in the reality of human folly.

In thinking about the religious and spiritual aspects of the oral tradition, I conceived of a religious retelling of the Tāwhaki myths within a Virtual Reality environment. This idea uses the gamebook format (McRae, 2018) as a foundation and can be imagined as a series of scenes where the point of view of the player is situated in a stationary position. The player is surrounded by 3D tableaux which have been stylized in the manner of Symbolist art. This concept would be preferable to a Science fiction and Fantasy ARPG retelling because it can potentially serve as the basis of a new game genre. I have also discussed some of the limitations of the ARPG interpretation, a major one being its inability to marry game mechanics with the deeper significance of Polynesian myth. Despite the potential of a religious VR retelling of the myths, it has significant drawbacks. For example, it would require the writing of multiple story branches in order for the nonlinear narrative to function as a game mechanic.

The writing of the story initially involved the use of Twine (Klimas, 2017) to construct the outline of a nonlinear plot. As the writing progressed, a linear narrative was adopted in order to develop a well-crafted story informed by Truby's (2007) twenty-two steps.

This move was justified by the need to combine multiple myths into a single linear narrative during the first phase of writing. In the future it may be possible to construct divergent storylines that are connected to the main narrative, thus achieving my initial conception of the player being able to construct their own retelling.

In addition to incorporating nonlinearity into future iterations of the Tāwhaki retelling, I would like to develop the concept of the VR religious experience, exploring other ways to use game mechanics to tell a story. This may require the discovery of new verbs through the exploration of psychological archetypes beyond the puer archetype as identified by Savett (2014). Thus, a thorough consideration of depth psychology research that intersects with game studies may prove to be a fecund source regarding virtual storytelling. I would also like to use game mechanics which incorporate concepts of mana and utu. Finally, it might be interesting to weave the retelling of the Tāwhaki cycle into a transmedia universe which utilizes the wider Māori mythos, including the stories about Kupe and Māui.

Applicability of this thesis

The process outlined in this thesis may inform future game developers, particularly those developing games based on indigenous source material. The reader should be able to discern which practices suits the needs of their project, and I encourage them to discard anything which might be infeasible or inappropriate. For example, despite my interest in the applicability of archetypes in video game storytelling, I would caution the reader that Jungian psychology, being a Western perspective of the mind, may not be an appropriate analytical tool with regards to non-Western cultures. The prototype that I developed made sparse use of some of the ideas that have been covered in this thesis,

but they were included in the discussion to show how my thinking developed over time. The production of a creative piece sometimes requires the abandonment of initial methodology as one allows their creative process to be informed by unconventional sources. Whether those influences help or hinder the result will probably be best ascertained after the fact.

Scholars in the various fields of indigenous studies may also take interest in this thesis. I have tried to demonstrate to the reader that cultural knowledge can be transmitted through a combination of game mechanics and story, but I should reiterate that, within Māori culture at least, there is potential disagreement as to what constitutes cultural knowledge. For example, since there are many variations of the Tāwhaki myths, I was only able to draw upon a few of them, primarily Mead's (1996) and Te Rangikaheke's via Grey (1885). Other iwi have their own account of Tāwhaki's exploits, some even prefer to use Tāne in place of Tāwhaki. The goal of this thesis was not to create an official version of the Tāwhaki myths, but to show how one can create their own retelling of them, and generally reinvigorate the oral traditions through new media. I agree with Mead (1996) when he states that no one version of the Tāwhaki myths is more legitimate than any other, and I hope that the reader recognizes that I have based much of my thinking upon this premise.

Lastly, the game that I have developed and the story that I have written may encourage other Māori and indigenous writers and game developers to populate digital spaces in new media. The issue of representation is complex and was not intended to be solved here, but hopefully a path towards self-representation can be grasped by those wishing to build upon some of the ideas and issues presented in this thesis. Indigenous video gaming is an emerging and fecund area with plenty of space for diverse and

underrepresented voices. It is unlikely to be dominated by a single vision, nor should it be, particularly as scholarship within indigenous studies and video game studies continues to grow.

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Glossary of Terms

ARPG – Action Role Playing Game

VR – Virtual Reality

Ea - be satisfied (of a wish), fulfilled, gratified

Hapu - kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe

Hau - vital essence, vitality - of a person, place or object

Hawaiki - ancient homeland - the places from which Māori migrated to Aotearoa/New Zealand

Iwi - extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race

Karakia - to recite ritual chants, say grace, pray, recite a prayer, chant

Kete - bag

Kūmara - sweet potato

Mana - prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma

Pākehā - English, foreign, European, exotic - introduced from or originating in a foreign country.

Ringatū - a Māori Christian faith founded by Te Kooti in the 1860s with adherents mainly from the Bay of Plenty and East Coast tribes

Tapu - sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden, under atua protection

Tikanga - correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention, protocol - the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context

Tohunga - skilled person, chosen expert, priest, healer - a person chosen by the agent of an atua and the tribe as a leader in a particular field because of signs indicating talent for a particular vocation

Utu – to repay, pay, respond, avenge, reply, answer

Wairua – spirit, soul - spirit of a person which exists beyond death

Source: Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary (2018)

APPENDIX A

Tāwhaki Part One - Hinepiripiri

Chapter One – Kāinga

You awake in a wharepuni. Through your foggy vision, the heke(rafters) seem vaguely familiar, appearing to be the carvings of your ancestors. You hear the crickets buzzing outside as a gentle breeze finds its way into the whare, circling around the other sleepers and settling on them like a warm blanket. You are already hot to begin with, wrapped in a thin muka cloak, and the heat makes you uncomfortable. You brush the cloak aside and exhale, then you gingerly feel your torso with your fingertips, wincing just as you are about to touch the place where you were stabbed. But you only feel skin that is smooth and undisturbed. For a moment you are confused. You run your hand over your chest, then to the back of your neck, then over your temple, but all you feel is the integrity of your body, as if nobody had ever laid a hand on you. You tilt your head up to look over your torso and you find no evidence of your wounds. You look around the whare, trying to discern the figures in the carvings in the pare and the poutokomanawa, and it slowly dawns on you that you are in your father's kāinga.

You crawl out of the gap in the entrance, angling your knees against the flattened earth, edging towards the light of day and the hustling noises of the kāinga outside. As you crawl beyond the doorway you see a kuia squatting on a log directly across you on the other side. She is using a pāua shell to tear some flax into strips. To your left you hear the laughter of children playing with a kurī pup. The wharepuni is comfortably nestled in some bush. A tui is perched on a mānuka tree above the whare, calling out with its sawtooth voice. The smell of smoked fish and pūhā drifts across the courtyard. You realize you are hungry.

As you stumble through the courtyard, following your nose towards the cooking area, the kuia looks up at you and laughs. Your eyes are squinted because of the harshness of the sunlight.

Kuia: You've been sleeping in, eh boy? You'd better go wash yourself with some cold water!

The old woman cackles. You continue walking towards the smoke, ignoring the old lady, determined to pay more attention to your stomach.

You turn around the corner of a palisade wall, walking down an alley which divides smaller wharepuni of varying shapes, some rectangular, others oval, but all made from raupō, brushing past some of the other villagers as they went about their day. At the end of the alley you see a couple of pātaka (store houses) on either side, and beyond them and further downhill there is an open ground where the slaves are smoking some fish over a fiery pit. You walk towards the slaves, noticing a tohunga being fed some fish by a child. Your brother Karahi is not far away, chopping firewood. Recognizing you, Karihi drops his axe and greets you.

Karihi: Brother, you look like you've seen a taniwha.

Many questions race through your mind. How did you get here? What happened to his wife, Hinepiriri? How long have you been unconscious?

Tāwhaki: Before I woke up, I was lying in a hole in a bush on Motukairangi.

Karihi: You probably had a vivid dream.

The tohunga yells out and approaches you, supporting himself on his tokotoko stick. He waves his arm around while chanting; his face is blackened by his moko and his hair is gray with age. The child who was feeding him scampers up the hill towards the wharepuni.

Tohunga: The prophecy is beginning. You know who I am, do you not?

Tāwhaki: I know that you are a revered tohunga. Although, we have never spoken before. You are too tapu to speak with.

Hiwa: Ae. I am Hiwa-i-te-rerenga. I have always been in the background, watching the people, waiting for the signs from our ancestors. I now see such a sign - that bewildered look on your face, the implantation of strange memories in your mind, dreams that seem so real that you cannot distinguish them from reality. It's my responsibility to notice these messages and try to guide others towards an understanding.

Tāwhaki: So I was not merely dreaming?

Hiwa: I would say it's unlikely that those were ordinary dreams. Dreams can come from the future, or from the distant past; only in our waking life do we organize information chronologically.

Tāwhaki: Indeed, it was no ordinary dream. I was murdered, and when I awoke I sought out the wounds on my body. I knew things I'm not supposed to know, for I've never experienced them. And yet my body knows.

Hiwa: What you speak of is a common experience for tohunga. Information can flow backwards and forwards through time. Somehow we are able to access a maelstrom of information, but we do not understand the mechanism behind our ability.

Tāwhaki: Information can flow backwards through time. Does that mean time is non-linear?

Hiwa: I am saying that time can be experienced non-linearly, that cause and effect is not necessarily chronological. For example, a prophecy is not a prediction, it is an event which has already happened.

Hiwa: It is time for you to learn about the prophecy from your father.

Tāwhaki: I'm already familiar with it.

Hiwa: You are perhaps familiar with the surface meaning of the prophecy, but not its truer, deeper meaning. Your mind has opened itself to other timelines, so maybe now you will reach a better understanding of the prophecies.

You wait until nighttime, for the teaching of prophecies cannot commence until the sun goes.

Hiwa leads you past the kumara gardens. Karihi reposts one of the whakapakoko atua sticks which had fallen over. The whakapakoko atua stick is in the likeness of Rongo, the god of agriculture. One of the children had knocked it down while they were scuttling away.

You walk down the hill, beyond the palisade gates and out of the pa village. You then backtrack through a hidden path in the bush, which leads you up a hill, then down again towards an opening at the bottom. Four whare have been built in this secret location. Collectively they are known as whare wananga, houses of learning. Each house faced east, but each was used for different purposes. There was one for karakia, one for whakapapa, one for waiata, and one for whakatauki.

Karihi: I've always wondered why these whare wanaga were kept separate from the other ones, such as the ones for bird snaring, fishing and astronomy.

Hiwa: Each school has a different tapu, because each discipline has a different atua associated with them. Tangaroa for fishing, Tane for bird snaring, Rehua for astronomy, and so on.

You enter the whare for the teaching of karakia, making your way down the elaborate hall, stepping past carvings of ancestors and gods. Tāwhaki and Karihi's father stood waiting for them at the altar, where dogs or slaves would sometimes be sacrificed during a student's dedication. Unlike Tāwhaki, Hema did not possess good looks; he was rather reticent and had poor posture, much like Tāwhaki's ironically

named grandfather, Kaitangata, who was a meek and gentle man. However, despite his aged appearance, Hema's lineage is irrefutable. His whakapapa goes through the lightning god, Whaitiri, all the way back to Rehua. Meanwhile, Urutonga, on your mother's side, comes from the higher realms.

Hema: Your younger sister Pūpūmainono already knows everything I'm about to teach you. But she follows a different path, so her place in your prophecy is ancillary at best.

Hiwa: I've told your sons about our understanding of time. Whether they believe me is up to them. I leave them to you. Remember, grandson of Rehua, they are both important to the prophecy.

Hema: Thank you Hiwa-i-te-rerenga. I've long sensed this time would come, though the reason is still mysterious to me. I've felt that I've walked this path thousands of times before, each time a slight variation of the next. The nature of our art is confounding and yet I'm expected to explain its inner workings to my sons, who've experienced little. Like the dog who knows nothing of the complexity of a human, the ordinary person knows little of the Tohunga's art. Though my sons are of divine origin, much in part due to their mother, they are not yet initiated. Their humanity limits them.

Tāwhaki: The way you speak of us makes me feel ashamed.

Hema: Don't feel whakamā. The shame is mine to bear. Though I've tried tirelessly to teach you, I've come to realize that I don't possess the gift of a true teacher.

Karihi: The way you continually debase yourself saddens me, father. Though I may joke about you from time to time, I still respect you.

Hema: I know Karihi. I sought to initiate the two of you indirectly, because I was afraid that you'd be unable to handle the chaos that comes with my teachings. Now I see that wisdom cannot be learned without a bit of chaos. So I shall impart the prophecy to you now, in all its rawness. It is not a teaching I expound lightly. There's much I don't like about it. Much I wish I could change. Yet I'm afraid that the act of trying to change the prophecy will make it more likely.

Tāwhaki: Why do you believe in such things as prophecies in the first place?

Hema: Because once you enter the slipstream of dreams you'll begin to predict events by simply paying attention to your body. The tohunga may seem unreliable at times. They may even seem like a privileged class taking advantage of gullible minds, but they are often right, despite the fact that they can be corrupted by their own humanity. Thus it is important to respect their tapu.

Hema: My dear sons, the prophecy primarily concerns Tāwhaki, although a prophecy is both a blessing and a curse. Karihi is not bound to any particular destiny, so his life is potentially greater than ours. Whereas Tāwhaki's fate is bound, and everything he does will only contribute to the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Tāwhaki: What if I don't believe any of it? What if I choose my own direction?

Hema: My son, look around you. How many of these people choose their own direction? Many are overcome by their base desires, and they mistakenly believe their desires are their own. But that is not the case. Many are merely trying to fulfill impulses, following instincts they were born with.

Tāwhaki: I cannot speak for others, perhaps you are right about them. But in regard to myself, I do not act impulsively. The notion of a prophecy I find offensive, because I believe they rob people of their choices.

Hema: Ah. A prophecy, when accurate, is a prediction of the general course of human endeavor. It is not some mystical power only available to a few sages. All information is available to everyone, but the ability to decipher seemingly chaotic information meaningfully is uncommon.

Tāwhaki: So what? Why should I put faith in somebody else's interpretation over my own?

Hema: You don't have to. I offer this information for your consideration. You are free to reject what I have to say, but at least hear me out first.

Tāwhaki: I've been waiting for you to get to the point for a while now.

Hema: Don't be so rude my son. You are free to decide these matters on your own, but this place is still tapu. Now I shall begin reciting the prophecy...

Hema: Our ancestors are located in a higher realm, in a world that we only know how to access via our thoughts. How they ascended to these higher realms after death is unknown. Nonetheless they look down on us, and, driven by their compassion, they seek to help us. They've suffered much more than we ever will, but not wanting the painful patterns of the past to be repeated, they try to guide us down paths they deem right. But for some reason or another we cannot receive the full extent of their wisdom. Perhaps their wairua is waning. I'd say our connection to the spirit world has been lost.

Tāwhaki: What use is the world of the spirit when reality often contradicts everything we hold to be true about the spirit? What if our concepts of wairua, hou, and so forth, have no use on the earth, which seems to be so corrupted?

Hema: Alas, this is where I come to the dismal prophecy my son... You were born to fulfill a purpose, but in order to achieve this goal you will not be confined to a linear experience of time. This may seem advantageous at first, but it is not. You will realize that without time, your life is meaningless. Nothing you do will matter, because you always have the choice to do something else. You will have absolute freedom, but you will be denied any semblance of meaning.

Tāwhaki: It doesn't seem that bad. What is this purpose you speak of?

Hema: You are to ascend to the higher realms and retrieve the baskets of knowledge. Then you must distribute the baskets to all the people of the earth. These baskets contain the wisdom of the past as well as the future, for wisdom is timeless. Many have gone on this journey before, some have even succeeded. But the knowledge is often lost; societies crumble and new ones rise up out of the darkness. A society may

progress far without ancestral wisdom, but in times of crisis a retriever becomes a necessity. The ancient ones are calling us, and they have selected you to fulfill this quest.

Tāwhaki: And what if I refuse this quest?

Hema: Then your destiny will fall on Karihi. And if he also defaults then another will be found. You are not the first retriever of knowledge, Tāwhaki. But prophecies have a tendency to come true in one way or another.

Tāwhaki: So how do I begin?

Hema: Seek out your grandparents, Kaitangata and Whaitiri. They know the way to the higher realms. I don't know where they are, but your sister might.

Tāwhaki: I have other questions. I have memories of being married to a woman on an island far to the east of here, or being in a battle against Tangaroa, of being killed by my wife's brothers. But when I spoke of these things to Karihi he knew nothing of what I meant. Was I dreaming? Was this some part of the prophecy?

Hema: As far as I know, this is not part of any prophecy. It has more to do with the nature of time and your ability to access information in your dreams. Few humans have this power, but remember you descend from Rehua, the star god, so your mind has been partially dipped in the pool of mataurangi. Your purpose is to bring down the baskets of knowledge for everyone else.

Hema: Go now, my son. Find your sister. She is on her own path, but she may help you get started on yours.

Chapter Two - Pūpūmai

You lie on the sand, breathing in the ocean breeze, watching the clouds drift eastwards. The sand is sizzling, you feel as if you are being baked by the sun, but you don't care. You've been walking along the cove for hours, searching for your sister, and now you've given up, allowing yourself to rest languidly.

Karihi: Brother, we will never find Pūpūmai like this. Let me use this kōauau to call her out.

Tāwhaki: Good idea. Remember, when you see our sister, don't tell her we've wasted many months trying and failing to find our grandparents.

Karihi: I'll tell her we came to her in the first instance.

Your brother Karihi starts playing a song with his kōauau. You recognize the tune from when you were younger, it was probably something your father taught you but you're not sure because you rarely paid attention to him when he was teaching. The flute produces an oscillating wail which is paradoxically both soothing and haunting. As Karihi continues playing the tune your thoughts begin to drift...

Why am I here? The prophecy is what other people want, not what I want.

Who was the woman in my dream? I can't remember her name or her face.

Why doesn't Karihi fulfill the prophecy by himself? He's the one who forced me to fulfill the prophecy.

Hours pass. The sky turns indigo and the sand becomes cooler. Suddenly your brother stops playing the flute. He waves his arm energetically and smiles broadly, and you direct your eyes to where he's looking. You see Pūpūmai walking down the beach towards you, kicking the sand up with her footsteps.

Finally.

You prop yourself up onto your feet, brushing the sand off your thighs as Pūpūmai comes to meet you.

Karihi: Kia Ora sister!

Pūpūmai places a hand on her hip and arches her eyebrows incredulously.

Pūpūmai: Is there a particular reason why you're here? And please, don't tell me you came here just to visit me.

Karihi laughs awkwardly, trying to appear conciliatory. You frown. You have no time to appease your younger sister.

Tāwhaki: We're looking for our grandparents.

Pūpūmai: You found me instead. Which grandparents?

Karihi: Whaitiri and Kaitangata. We've been searching for them for a while.

You dart your eyes at Karihi.

Tāwhaki: It's only been a couple of weeks.

Pūpūmai: *Only* a couple of weeks? Well, they are difficult to find. I myself haven't seen them, although I've heard rumors about their whereabouts...

Tāwhaki: Apparently one of them knows the way to the higher realms.

Pūpūmai: And why would you go there?

Karihi: It's father's wish to see Tāwhaki ascend the staircase of the gods and return with the teachings of our ancestors.

Pūpūmai: I see. Our father has often spoken to me about the baskets of knowledge. I thought that particular prophecy was meant for me. I guess not.

Karihi: Don't discount yourself just yet. If Tāwhaki or I fail, then the task may fall on you.

Pūpūmai: I doubt it will come to that, even though our big brother doesn't seem all that enthusiastic about his quest. Now, about our grandparents. Whaitiri is a troglodyte so she is rarely seen. The latest news I've heard is that she was driven away from Te kao, a village in the forest of Kohukohunui because she was eating some of the

people. As for our koro Kaitangata, he is across the ocean in a fishing village. I will tell you how to get to him when the time is right.

Your eyes widen when she mentions a fishing village across the sea.

Tāwhaki: Why not tell us how to get there right now?

Pūpūmai: Because I'm worried you will kill yourselves if you leave without the proper preparation. Besides, it's getting late.

Tāwhaki: No thanks to you. We've been looking for you all day.

Karihi: And I've been blowing this flute for hours.

Pūpūmai: See how impatient you both are? I can't believe father set you guys up for this.

Tāwhaki: And this is precisely why we were reluctant to come see you. But enough about that. Let's rest. We'll begin our journey tomorrow.

Pūpūmai laughs.

Pūpūmai: It may be tomorrow, it may be next week, or next month. You ain't going across the water until the kelp points the other way.

Karihi: What other way?

Pūpūmai: The direction opposite to where it's pointing right now!

You see Karihi bob his head in and out of the water.

Karihi: The kelp is pointing towards the reef.

Tāwhaki: So you're saying we can travel across the ocean when the kelp is pointing towards the ocean - away from the shore?

Pūpūmai: Yes. But who knows when that will happen?

Tāwhaki: Why? And how are we supposed to travel across the ocean? We don't have a sailing vessel.

Pūpūmai: I'll tell you when the time comes.

Pūpūmai leads you and Karihi to her village, Te Puke I Tauranga, which, as the name suggests, is on top of a hill. It was some way away from the cove, so it's a wonder how Pūpūmai was able to hear Karihi's flute, even if he was playing the song for a long time. It was not a traditional pa site, so there weren't any fortified walls.

Pūpūmai: We don't have any enemies near us. Few people know how to get to this village, not even you.

There were dozens of kumura mounds on the hill, and at the base of the hill there was a marshland where watercress would be cultivated. Huts were built into terraces, each hut separated by a generous amount of space since few people lived in there.

Tāwhaki: Who else lives here?

Pūpūmai: A dozen tohunga, students like myself, a couple of farmers and fishermen, and a few warriors. This place is more like a school than a fully populated village.

Tāwhaki: What do they teach here?

Pūpūmai: Karakia, lore, knowledge of the land and sea, astronomy...

When you reach the top of the hill you see the final rays of the sun stretching out from the land to the west. Karihi yawns and stretches his arms out. His yawning is contagious, so you copy him.

Karihi: Let's rest tonight. We'll check if the kelp has changed direction tomorrow.

Everyone agrees.

As night settles in you go outside and sit in the tall grass, overlooking the ocean to the east. The moon is a glowing hook suspended in nothingness. You feel it tugging

you towards the sea as if you were flotsam drifting on the tide. You imagine you are being pulled towards the mysterious woman in your dreams, who is waiting for you on an island faraway. Every time you think of her she seems more and more familiar, but you are never able to recognize her. Pining for someone you've already met is not altogether strange, but you're not even sure that this woman is real. As the night wears on you begin to tire. The moon wriggles around in your vision, blurring into an indistinct shape as you lay yourself to sleep on the grass.

In the morning you return to the beach with your siblings to check whether the direction of the kelp has changed.

You bob your head into the sea. It's been a while since you've left your eyes open while underwater, so the seawater stings a little, but you quickly get used to it. The water is a little murky due to the nutrients from the seafloor being pushed to the surface by the current. You make out hundreds of long columns of kelp swaying in the ocean in what looks like a submerged forest. The stipes are so tall that the kelp disappears into the darker, murkier abyss, but they are slightly bowed, and you notice the blades of the kelp are pointing towards the open sea. You lift your head out of the water and wipe your face with your hands.

Tāwhaki: The kelp has changed direction.

Pūpūmai nods.

Pūpūmai: Then you must go now. If you don't go now it may be a long time before another opportunity arises.

Karihi: Sister, is the path dangerous?

Pūpūmai: Not if you follow my instructions. You'll be able to walk across the water as long as you place your feet on the crests of the waves. Never place your feet in the troughs of the waves, or not only will you fall into the water, you'll drown. Let me show you.

Pūpūmai wades into the water, then she hops onto a wave and jumps from peak to peak. Then she let herself fall into a trough, but because she is still in shallow water she doesn't drown.

Pūpūmai: This is a special lane in the sea that only becomes available during certain times of the year. The people of Te-puke-i-Tauranga have known about it for many generations, but they didn't create this pathway.

Tāwhaki: Who did?

Pūpūmai: I'm not really sure. Some think Tangaroa created it so that his lizard children will have the courage to venture out into the sea again. But they've devolved much since this lane was made. Their legs aren't long enough to reach the crests of the waves, and they've forgotten how to breathe underwater, so they just drown.

Pūpūmai: I have a karakia you should use to help you.

Huru huru takiritia I Raro-hara

I te kī pōhutu

Horahina atu te moana pātōtō e takoto nei

Horahina atu te moana waiwai e takoto nei

Hiki ka tahi, hiki ka rua,

Hiki ka toru, hiki ka whā,

Hiki ka rima, hiki ka ono,

Hika ka whitu, hiki ka waru

Hiki ka iwa, hiki ka ngahuru

Tuturu whakamāua kia tina!

Tina! Hui e! Taiki e!

Karihi: Thank you for your help sister. After we've fulfilled the prophecy we will come back to visit you.

Tāwhaki: If we find Whaitiri I will come back and tell you where she is.
Farewell sister.

Pūpūmai: Remember to recite the karakia I've taught you. Now I'll use another karakia to help clear the way. Farewell!

You give yourself a running start, splashing into the shallow water. As you head further into the ocean you leap out of the water, landing one foot on the crest of a wave, and then you leap again, landing the other foot on another wave. You start by leaping from wave to wave. As you become more comfortable you slow your movements to a stride, then to a tiptoe, matching your leg movements with the frequency of the waves.

You try to find a comfortable rhythm, but no matter what you do it's still difficult.

There is no time for rest. You look behind to check on Karihi. To your relief he's not far behind, but he stumbles awkwardly, and you worry he might accidentally fall into a trough. You begin reciting the karakia that your sister taught you to flatten the waves. The waves seem to stabilize, becoming more predictable, slower, longer, more gradual. This should give you a second of rest in between each wave. You hope it will be enough.

Chapter Three - Cyclone

You dance across the water with tremendous speed thanks to the karakia. Your brother follows closely behind you. The ocean ahead seems vast, but guided by your sense of navigation, you push on. You feel the wind rushing through your hair. You see dolphins following you, then overtaking you. Te Puke I Tauranga is faraway now, you cannot glimpse the land you just came from. The water feels warm as your toes dip into the waves ever so slightly as you leap from wave to wave. A flock of seagulls fly overhead, and you see more birds further on in the distance, flying in one direction. You know that by following the birds you will get closer to land.

The path seems limitless, but you feel as if you are sailing across the water. The ocean is placid, tranquil, like a lake, but you know how unpredictable it can be. For now, you feel at peace, thankful that Pūpūmai's karakia has worked up till now. The dolphins that were following you are now jumping out of the water and performing tricks to your delight. You see them rounding up a school of fish, coordinating their attack. Sweat continually drips from your body, which would usually trigger a tired reaction from you, but with a quiet utterance of the karakia you suddenly feel an influx of energy emanating from within, compelling you to push on. You make good progress across the ocean. You feel that you can do this forever.

Hours pass, the sun is past the high noon mark. You've been traveling at haste for a while without resting and you are beginning to wonder where the island is. The birds that you saw before are still loitering near your horizon, but you still see no land.

You feel the current underneath beginning to change. The waves are becoming a little rougher. You recite the karakia again to calm them down, but it doesn't seem to work this as effectively this time. You hope that you are heading in the right direction.

The waves are coming in faster now. You are having trouble keeping up with them. You stumble off a crest, nearly dipping your feet into a trough, but Karihi manages to push you onto the next wave. You were so used to the rhythm of the waves for the past few hours that the change in frequency threw you off balance. What's worse is that the waves are becoming larger and more unpredictable. This time you project your voice as you recite the karakia, hoping that it will work this time. It doesn't. Maybe a different karakia is needed in this part of the ocean.

Tāwhaki: Brother, maybe Pūpūmai didn't give us the whole karakia. The one she taught us doesn't seem to work here.

Karihi: Crap. What do we do? I can't see any land ahead of us. Maybe we've gone in the wrong direction.

Tāwhaki: Impossible, we haven't changed course since we left.

Karihi: I'm worried about these waves. They are getting worse.

Tāwhaki: Let's just follow those birds. I hope they know where they are going.

You see a storm in the north. Grey clouds are gathering. You feel the winds shifting direction, and the current with it.

Tāwhaki: That storm out there is changing the direction of the waves.

Karihi: Don't tell me we've been misled by the current.

The storm seems closer now. The closer it gets, the larger it grows. You feel the air heating up, the sea becoming wilder and wilder. The wind has suddenly become more turbulent. The waves are beginning to move in random directions. The birds have faded from view.

Karihi: How did we get caught by this storm so quickly?

Tāwhaki: Tāwhirimātea can come out of nowhere. I think we've gone down the wrong path.

Karihi: But we did everything right.

Tāwhaki: According to Pūpūmai we have. I don't think she knew about storms.

Karihi: She's not this stupid. Did she trick us?

Tāwhaki: I don't know.

The wind picks up speed. A cyclone is forming near you. It's a bleak, grey vortex whistling and whirling in the middle of the ocean, getting closer and closer to you like a twirling spear of an enemy.

Karihi: A cyclone. What should we do?

Tāwhaki: Let's go back to the beach.

Karihi: That's hours away.

Tāwhaki: We don't have a choice.

You change direction, aiming generally towards Te Puke I Tauranga.

Tāwhaki: Anywhere west should take us back to the shore.

Karihi leaps ahead of you, motioning you to follow his lead.

Karihi: Follow the sun!

You feel the wind getting stronger. You nearly slip into another trough, the waves behaving completely erratically now. You have to get out of range of the cyclone fast. You don't even bother to recite a karakia, fearing it might distract you from landing on the crest. Instead, you focus on Karihi's position. Somehow, he is much farther ahead of you, leaping away as if he was untethered. But every time you touch the water your feet feel a little heavier, as if the water was viscous, attaching itself to you.

Tangaroa: You are mine now!

Tāwhaki: Karihi!

Your voice is suffocated by the wind. Karihi is almost out of sight, he hasn't noticed how far you've lagged. You yell out, but you can't even hear yourself. The whizzing of the cyclone is all you hear. You feel hot air wrapping around you like a seasnake, jerking you back every time you try to move forward. You feel trapped. Your feet dip into the trough of a wave and you feel yourself plunge under the water, only to be lifted out again by the cyclone. You feel yourself being dropped into the sea. You try to regain your footing, positioning yourself on the crest of a wave, but you get pulled into the air. You close your eyes and recite a karakia in vain as you are tossed around within the monstrous vortex of the wind.

Tāwhirimātea: No brother. He is mine!

Initially you feel nausea, but you quickly lose consciousness. The only thing you remember seeing is the sun spinning across your vision.

Chapter Four - Hinetuatai

You awake on a sandy tropical beach next to a coconut. A giant coconut crab scuttles towards you and grabs a hold of your head with its pincers. It tries to crack your skull open, mistaking your head for a coconut. You react instinctively, breaking the crab's pincers with brute force, ripping away its claw and tossing it into the water. The poor crab scuttles away, but a dozen more emerge from behind the palms. You feel groggy and you'd rather have some more rest in the comfortable sand, but this isn't the time for sleep. With some effort you stand up and edge away from the scuttling gang of invertebrates. You toss a couple of coconuts into the midst of the crabs, which distracts them. You lurch off to another part of the beach.

You find yourself in a lagoon. The climate is tropical, the water is crystalline turquoise. Besides the plethora of coconuts and palms you spot the odd banana tree. It's warmer and brighter than your homeland, perhaps because the sun is higher in the sky. You scan your eyes over the land and you see a mountain jutting out of the dense bush. Even though you have no idea where you are, you figure there might be people here.

You walk along the perimeter of the beach, hoping to find signs of habitation. Since the climate is tropical you assume you're on a volcanic island in the Pacific. You remember stories being told about your distant ancestors who came from islands like this, but you find it unlikely that you'd be so far away from home. You continue wandering.

You see a woman standing in the sea, the water is up to her waist and her breasts are uncovered. She is a slim woman with cobalt skin and wavy indigo hair. Her cheeks are red and when she smiles at you her teeth are a healthy white. You watch her as she wades out of the ocean, her hips swinging from side to side, her private areas covered by a grass skirt. Unusually, her eyes are gray, almost reptilian, and her gaze is piercing rather than alluring. Her smile is welcoming but you can't shake off a feeling of mockery emanating from her lips.

Tāwhaki: What is your name?

Hinetuatai: I am Hinetuatai. Who are you?

She innocently grabs your hand, presses into it, and begins squeezing your arm, starting from the wrist working her way up to your shoulder. Her beautifully formed body breathes languidly in front of you. You instinctively pull her in, caressing her back. You stare into her eyes unflinchingly.

Tāwhaki: I am Tāwhaki. I will be your husband from now on.

She nods and smiles, then guides you to an alcove, where she lays you down onto a mat. She climbs on top of you, gazing attentively into your eyes, saying nothing. All you hear is the flickering of the fire. You spend the rest of the day and night with her.

The next morning you find that Hinetuatai is gone. You begin wandering around the island again.

You find Hinetuatai kneeling in a lagoon. You walk out to meet her and embrace her from behind, but her face is scrunched up in agony. She is whining and breathing heavily.

Tāwhaki: What's wrong?

She doesn't answer. You look down through the clear water and you notice that her belly is protruding out. You panic.

Tāwhaki: Has some sea monster entered your stomach?

You say stupidly.

She shakes her head, pursing her lips together. She exhales and cries again.

You take another look underwater. You see the tail of a fish coming out of her private area. It flops around in the water.

Hinetuatai: Help me! Pull it out!

You grab the thing by the tail and yank it out.

Hinetuatai: Oh!

It slides weirdly out of Hinetuatai. You pull it out of the water to inspect it. It's a large fish, but it's unlike anything you've seen before.

Tāwhaki: You know you're tapu if you're menstruating!

You say in shock. She looks at you quizzically. You remember that this woman is not from your homeland, so even though she understands your language, she probably doesn't understand the meaning of tapu. You try to relax yourself.

Tāwhaki: The fish are attracted to blood.

Hinetuatai: I am not bleeding. This is our son.

She places her palm against your cheek and simpers.

Tāwhaki: This fish is our son?

Hinetuatai: His name is Ikanui.

She takes the fish from your hands, gently setting it free in the water. It circles around your legs, nibbling at the ground. You feel his slippery scales against your skin and you cringe.

Tāwhaki: Who are you really?

Hinetuatai: I am your wife.

Tāwhaki: How can you give birth to a fish?

Hinetuatai: I am the maiden of the ocean.

You spend another night with Hinetuatai.

Tāwhaki: Have you seen a fishing village around here?

Hinetuatai: Yes. Why?

Tāwhaki: I'm looking for my grandfather. He may have settled at a fishing village on an island. Perhaps it is this island.

Hinetuatai: The fishermen in that village are evil and voracious. Do not go there!

Tāwhaki: Why do you say that?

Hinetuatai: They killed my children.

Tāwhaki: Your fish children? How many children do you have?

Hinetuatai: Hundreds. Many of them are gone now.

Tāwhaki: So I am not your first husband?

Hinetuatai: You are my first husband, although I've had many lovers before you.
Does this make you angry?

Tāwhaki: No. You are a beautiful woman, it's understandable that you've had many lovers.

Tāwhaki: Why did you name our son Ikanui?

Hinetuatai: Of all the children I've had, he was the largest.

Tāwhaki: I need to find my grandfather. Where is this fishing village?

Hinetuatai: I don't want you to go there. I hate those people.

Tāwhaki: What if I went there to avenge the death of your children?

Hinetuatai: Then that would be good. But will you?

Tāwhaki: If my grandfather is not among them, then I will find a way to punish them for what they've done.

Hinetuatai: But what if your grandfather is among them?

Tāwhaki: Then I will take him home. I have to. Do you understand?

Hinetuatai: Yes, I understand. Will you come back to punish the villagers?

Tāwhaki: Yes, I promise.

Hinetuatai: Then I will tell you where to find them.

Hinetuatai bids you farewell as you continue your search for your grandfather.

Chapter Five – Motukairangi

You continue walking along the perimeter of the island, following the directions that Hinetuatai gave you. The island is much bigger than you thought, but it shouldn't be surprising how large it is given the size of the volcano at the centre of the island. The volcano is so large that you see snow on its peak, a sight that you've only seen back home.

After many hours of walking you finally see a couple of waka in the ocean not far from the shore. You continue walking, then you spot four men on the beach gutting some fish. As you walk up to them, three of them become frightened and run away. The one that remains is petrified. He is a balding old man with gaunt features, wearing nothing but a flax skirt. He is holding a sharp rock used for gutting fish. It rattles in his hand. He tries to speak but he stammers.

Pororo: Who are you?

Tāwhaki: Don't be afraid old man. My name is Tāwhaki.

As you move closer to him, the old man squints, trying to get a clearer picture of you. He suddenly drops his tool and falls over backwards.

Tāwhaki: Do you know me?

The old man shakes his head. You help him get up. His hands are dark and calloused.

Tāwhaki: What is your name?

Poro: I am Poro. Where did you come from?

Tāwhaki: I came from across the sea. I was carried by a cyclone.

Poro: Why did you leave your country to go across the sea?

Tāwhaki: I am looking for my grandfather, Kaitangata.

The old man suddenly laughs. You see the tenseness leave his body, and you are relieved that he is now relaxed, although you are also more confused.

Poro: Ah, Kaitangata.

Tāwhaki: Do you know him?

Poro: I know him well. The fearsome man called Kaitangata who only likes to eat fish!

Tāwhaki: Where is he?

The old man frowns and looks at his feet demurely.

Pororo: You'd better come with me.

He mumbles.

Pororo takes you to the village which isn't far from the shore. However, it was snuggled so well into the bush that it would've been difficult to find it without a guide. Whare are dotted on and around hills. A few whare are built nearer to the coast, and a few more are secluded deep within the bush. It is a large village with more than three thousand people, a village small enough to sustain itself on the environment, but large enough to ensure some measure of security.

As you are being shown around the village you notice a large fleet of seventy or so canoes arranged near the pathway to the sea. Unlike the waka back home, some of these canoes are fitted with sails. Pororo notices you looking at the canoes and anticipates your questions.

Pororo: We once used these canoes to trade with other islanders. Unfortunately, the winds have kept us from straying too far from our own island. That's Kaitangata never returned to his homeland.

Tāwhaki: I can't wait to see him. I've never met him before.

Pororo looks at the ground, scratching his head.

Poro: Ah, about your grandfather. I'm sorry to tell this to you boy, but he's been gone for almost a year.

Tāwhaki: What? You're just telling me this now?

Poro: I've been holding a debate within myself as to how to break it to you. I didn't want you running off before you had the chance to see where he lived.

Tāwhaki: I'm glad that he lived in a nice village with friendly people, but I never knew him. I just needed to see him because he may be able to help me with my quest.

Poro sighs. He seems exasperated.

Poro: I'm a little shocked by your remarks. I imagined you'd be a little sadder. To hear that you only saw him as a means to an end is rather disappointing. He was a good friend of mine.

Tāwhaki: My apologies. I meant that I never felt particularly close to him, but if I knew him I'm sure I would've missed him greatly.

Poro: No offense taken. You would've known him, if it weren't for Tāwhirimātea and Tangaroa blocking the passage across the ocean.

Tāwhaki: They both tried to kill me while I was travelling across the ocean. Tāwhirimātea was able to take hold of me in a cyclone. Tangaroa fought to claim me for himself, but in the end their bickering enabled me to escape from Tāwhirimātea's grip.

Poro: Incredible. Your grandfather had a similar journey on his way here. One of the reasons I was so shocked when I first saw you is because I thought you were him. I thought he'd come back from the dead.

A man wearing an elaborate cloak emerges from a large whare in the middle of the village complex.

Chief: So you are the grandson of Kaitangata. Many of the villagers think Kaitangata has risen from the dead. That's why they look so spooked.

The villagers peer out shyly from within their huts.

Chief: I am the chief of this place. Your grandfather was a valued member of our community. He taught us many things, even some karakia to help us fish. As you are his grandson, I welcome you to our village. You may stay here as long as you want.

Tāwhaki: Thank you, your chieftainship. I have a few questions concerning my grandfather.

Chief: Please.

Tāwhaki: Why did he come to this island?

Poro and the chief laugh.

Poro: To get away from his wife, or so that's what he told us. Kaitangata literally means man eater, but Kaitangata was incredibly squeamish. His wife, Whaitiri, was the real cannibal. He was frightened of her.

Tāwhaki: Did he mention anything about the pathway to the higher realms?

Chief: No, he did not. However, some of the things he taught us came from the higher realms.

Poro: We were hoping that as an outsider he could teach us how to establish a route to the other islands. But he knew no way, despite his vast powers.

Chief: How did you get here?

Tāwhaki: Tāwhirimātea captured me in a cyclone, intending to kill me, but through fortune or accident I was brought to a nearby lagoon on this island.

Poro: Did your ship sink?

Tāwhaki: I wasn't on a ship. I was running across the ocean using a karakia taught to me by my sister. My brother was also with me, but we became separated when Tāwhirimātea tried to kill me.

Poro and the chief stare at you in amazement.

Chief: Could you teach us these karakia so that we too, may venture across the ocean?

You are reluctant to agree to help these villagers learn the karakia, since you know how long it takes to teach these powers to others.

Tāwhaki: It would take a very long time, even if you have talent. And you may only be able to use the weakest karakia, because only a tapu person of the right lineage can use them.

The chief huffs.

Chief: I am a chief, are you saying I don't have enough mana to learn your karakia? Do you not understand te moenga rangatira? I am deeply offended by your presumptions of my lineage.

Tāwhaki: My apologies chief, I didn't mean to direct my comments to you. I was referring to the common people.

The chief spits on the ground in front of you.

Chief: Well make yourself clearer next time, boy. You are welcome here, but do not take my magnanimity for granted.

Pororo: Tāwhaki, don't underestimate us. Your grandfather never did that. He taught us most of everything he knew, and we picked it all up rather quickly.

Tāwhaki: Of course, Poro. I'm sorry, I will be more careful with my words next time.

Chief: Apology accepted. Now, I would like to see what you can do.

Tāwhaki: I can calm the waves of Tangaroa, but not the storms of Tāwhirimātea. With this power your boats can travel further into the sea, but if they encounter Tāwhirimātea then there isn't much I can do to help them.

Chief: That power is still extremely useful. Having a little control over Tangaroa is better than nothing. What else can you do?

Tāwhaki: I have some knowledge of healing. I can also bless warriors for combat. I know a bit about the seasons. There is much I have learned during my training as a tohunga.

Chief: Then you shall become our tohunga! We have not had one since Kaitangata passed away. It would be an honor to have his grandson take his place.

Tāwhaki: I am grateful for your offer. However, I need some time to think about it. I am already committed to a path - to find the staircase to the higher realms, and I was instructed to ask my grandfather where to find this staircase. Furthermore, I already have duties back on Aotearoa. I must return to my homeland and tell my father about what has happened to our tipuna.

Chief: There is no way off this island. You may try to use your karakia again to help you walk over the water, you may even use one of our canoes, but you will be continually rebuffed by the wind. The ocean surrounding us is cursed, do you understand? And Tāwhirimātea's winds often consume our buildings in squalls and cyclones. But even worse than that, each year Tangaroa reclaims more of Papatūānuku for himself. I fear that one day the only place for us to stand is on the volcano in the centre of the island.

Tāwhaki: If that's the case then we must work together to find a way off the island, before it becomes part of Tangaroa's domain.

Chief: Well, you may be able to find a way using your special powers. But it is quite useless. We've searched for an escape on every inch of our island and the surrounding ocean to no avail.

Tāwhaki: Great chief, allow me to conduct my own investigation. I'm not entirely sure how I got here, because I blacked out. All I remember is that I was carried by a cyclone. But I think the solution lies in my memory.

Chief: Very well. If you have any questions, ask me, or one of the villagers. However, they are still spooked by you, so don't expect a warm reception. They regard you as a revenant because they think you are Kaitangata.

Tāwhaki: How is it that my grandfather looks like me, when he's much older than I am?

Chief: He did not look that much older than you. He was in remarkable shape for his age. But I would say that it was his tattoos, his ta moko, which makes you indistinguishable from him, to the villagers.

Chief: Farewell.

You walk freely around the village inspecting the whare, trying to get a sense of how much the villagers know about navigation. You don't spot anything interesting.

You see a young man standing next to a kuia, probably his grandmother. They don't find you intimidating, so you approach them.

Tāwhaki: Greetings, I am Tāwhaki, from Aotearoa. As you can tell, I am new to your village. I just wanted to introduce myself to you, because it seems I will be here a while.

Tame: Tāwhaki eh? I'm Tame, a fisherman.

Rangiwai: Kia ora, Tāwhaki. I am Rangiwai. I make fishing spears and nets for the men.

You tell them how you came here, and why you're here. You mention that Kaitangata is your grandfather.

Rangiwai: I knew Kaitangata well. Many of the older folk do as well. Handsome man, but he doesn't live up to his name. Very nice person though, which is why he is so missed. You look just like him.

Tame: Your koro taught me a karakia to help me catch bigger fish. I say it under my breath, because I don't want others to know my secret.

Tāwhaki: I can teach you a few more things later. Have either of you heard my grandfather talk about the pathway to the higher realms?

Rangiwai: I have. He said it is more like a vine, rather than a path or staircase. His old wife, Whaitiri, guards the entrance, waiting for him. He was afraid to see her again.

Tāwhaki: He is a descendant of Rehua, the star god. How can he possibly be afraid of his wife?

Rangiwai: Because she's a maneater! She knows he will try to return to the higher realms, so she waits. Sadly, he got stuck and died here.

Tāwhaki: I'm beginning to suspect he wasn't really stuck here. He just didn't want to leave. Perhaps he was an even more powerful tohunga than me, so he probably knew how to get off the island. I at the very least believe there is a way out.

Rangiwai: I don't know. It was nice talking to you.

Tame: Yeah.

You notice that many of the women have taken an interest in you. You try to talk to some of them, but they giggle and run away. You feel embarrassed.

You see a beautiful girl peering into a spring pond. She reminds you of yourself.

Tāwhaki: Who are you looking at?

The woman has jet black hair, smooth as the feathers of a kiwi, and a small waist with large hips. When her eyes meet yours, you feel a combination of soft shyness and intensity emanating from her. You feel flustered. She is unlike any of the other women you've seen here. Something inside you clicks into place. She is me, of course.

Is this the woman in my dreams?

Hinepiripiri: I was looking at Hinepiripiri.

You sit next to me.

Tāwhaki: Is that the name of the spring?

Hinepiripiri: It's my name.

You peer into the spring, admiring your reflection.

Tāwhaki: Ah, I don't see Hinepiripiri in there. I only see the handsome Tāwhaki.

You laugh, I smile coyly.

Hinepiripiri: You look like your koro, but you're quite different to him.

Tāwhaki: How so?

I look away, laughing to myself.

Hinepiripiri: Nevermind. I overheard the chief naming you our new tohunga. Are you going to stay here?

I place my hand on yours.

Tāwhaki: Possibly.

You feel some people watching you. Three men emerge from a whare behind me. The one in the centre is large and stocky, the one on the right is smaller and prettier, while the one on the left is average looking and taut.

Matiu: Kia ora brother! Looking good!

I pull my hand away from yours and glare at the men.

Hape: So you're Kaitangata's mokopuna eh? I'm Hape, this is Matiu, that's Hemi, and that girl over there is our sister Hinepiripiri.

Tāwhaki: Tena koutou. Did you know my grandfather well?

Hape: A little.

Tāwhaki: Then you know more about him than I do.

Hape: Ah, that's too bad.

Matiu: He wasn't a bad fella, old Kaitangata. It's strange to see his grandson all the way out here though.

Hemi: Hine, go to our mother.

Hinepiripiri: What for?

Hemi: She wanted to see you.

Hinepiripiri turns to face you.

Hinepiripiri: I'll see you again.

I flash you a smile before scampering away.

Tāwhaki: I have a question. I don't suppose you know a way to get off this island?

Hape: You could sail through the storm like a few others have, but nearly everyone who's done that has died.

Tāwhaki: I see.

Matiu: You want to leave already, brother?

Tāwhaki: I need to get back to my father, eventually.

Hemi: Well then, if you find a way off the island, be sure to tell us.

Tāwhaki: Sure.

You find Poro sweeping leaves away from the front of his whare.

Tāwhaki: Where did my grandfather live?

Poro: He never had a fixed abode. He would sleep in a different whare each night.

Tāwhaki: Where did you bury him?

Poru: He was buried in a secret location deep in the bush, as is our custom. I don't know where exactly he was buried, but I can ask around if you want.

Tāwhaki: Don't worry about it. When I bring my father here maybe then I'll ask someone to show me.

You see Hinepiripiri again.

Tāwhaki: Your brothers seem a bit aggressive.

Hinepiripiri: They were behaving weirdly. But I guess everyone is getting used to having you around.

Tāwhaki: How about yourself? Do you like me being here?

Hinepiripiri: No.

Tāwhaki: I guess I should leave then.

Hinepiripiri: Relax. I was just kidding.

Tāwhaki: I know, but I wasn't. If it were up to me, I would leave right away. Not that I don't like the people or anything.

Hinepiripiri: I suppose you have things you need to do back home.

Tāwhaki: Yeah. I need to talk to tell my father about grandfather. And then I must find my grandmother, wherever she is.

Hinepiripiri: Don't be offended, but you have a weird family. Your grandmother is a cannibal and your father took off without telling anyone where he was going.

Tāwhaki: You don't know the half of it. My parents are massive believers in prophecies. They continually tell me I have to fulfill some prophecy about climbing the sacred vine and retrieving the baskets of knowledge. But if it were so important, why doesn't somebody else do it? Like my younger brother and sister, who seem more motivated to fulfilling prophecies than I am. What if I want to do something else?

Hinepiripiri: What do you want?

Tāwhaki: I want to meet someone from my... it's hard to explain. I thought that I found it, but I was wrong. Now I'm just confused.

Hinepiripiri: Well, feel free to tell me when you've figured it out.

Tāwhaki: I guess I just want my questions to be answered.

Later that night, you sleep in the wharehau and you begin to dream.

You see yourself in your father's village. The village is on fire, blazing huts light the night sky. Bodies are strewn around the village. Large reptilian creatures crawl across the bodies, some of the reptiles stand and walk around on their hind legs. Their

forked tongues lick the air. You see a lone warrior jump out of the bushes, thrusting a spear into one of the lizard creatures. Two of the creatures crawling on the ground leap towards the warrior, he parries them away, stumbling backwards. One of the bipedal reptiles picks up a spear on the ground and slashes a diagonal across the warrior's chest. Another reptile bites at his ankle. The man falls over. The spear wielding lizard stabs the warrior through his torso. The other lizards crawl over his body and finish him off, ripping his limbs off with their mouths. His screams echo in your mind. You wake up.

You are sweating again. You go for a walk outside to cool off. You walk down the pathway that leads to the ocean, letting the noise of the breaking waves guide your way. You see me watching the ocean on the beach. You sit next to me.

Hinepiripiri: Couldn't sleep?

Tāwhaki: This island it's a lot warmer than my homeland, I'm not used to it. I needed to cool off.

Hinepiripiri: Ah. I like to come here before I go to bed. It reminds me of the wairua of my ancestors.

Tāwhaki: Your ancestors and my ancestors probably knew each other.

Hinepiripiri: Aren't you a direct descendant of the gods?

Tāwhaki: I come from Rehua's line, the star god. But I also have human ancestors.

Hinepiripiri: You have so many ancestors that they can all help you find a way off this island.

Hinepiripiri: Your koro talked a lot about prophecies. But we've got prophecies too.

Tāwhaki: Most hapu I've met have prophecies.

Hinepiripiri: We were told that our ancestors arrived here with the help of a demigod. He was the best navigator in the Pacific. He showed my ancestors how to live on this island, how to send blessings to Tangaroa so that we could catch fish from the sea without worrying about the ocean god's retribution. But then this demigod died in the vagina of Hine-nui-te-po.

Tāwhaki: You're talking about Māui.

Hinepiripiri: Yes. The prophecy states that another demigod will be sent to us to lead us off the island. At first, we thought it was Kaitangata, but he wouldn't leave the island, and then he got old and died.

Tāwhaki: Now you think the prophecy might refer to me.

Hinepiripiri: Who else could it be? You yourself talk about needing to fulfill a prophecy, although your prophecy differs to ours.

Tāwhaki: Yeah, I was just looking for my grandfather so that he could help me fulfill the prophecy of the sacred vines, and thus get my parents off my back for once and for all.

Hinepiripiri: But your grandfather died before you even set out to find him. So, you must've come here for another reason, unbeknownst to you. Tāwhirimātea's cyclone didn't kill you. It was meant to be.

Tāwhaki: Maybe you're right. I never really cared about fulfilling my father's prophecy. And yet, I came here anyway, because it seemed the right thing to do. I felt that something was waiting for me here. Or someone.

I place my hand on yours and look into your eyes. You hold my chin.

Tāwhaki: Close your eyes.

You kiss me. We fall asleep on the sand to the sound of breaking waves.

Chapter Six – The Ponaturi

A few days later you marry me, and for the first time in your life you feel fulfilled. However, her brothers still treat you with concealed hostility. You trust that they will come to get over their jealousy as they come to see how much good you're doing in the village. You try to help the villagers learn better spiritual practices, giving them more strength to hunt, fish, cook and build. Everyone comes to see you as a great tohunga, just like your grandfather.

You see Karihi stumbling around the village as the villagers surround him. Poro is already next to Karihi, trying to talk to him. Karihi looks emaciated, exhausted and dehydrated.

Tāwhaki: This is my younger brother!

You run to the centre of the group and embrace Karihi, placing your cloak over him and guiding him to a whare. You light a fire and ask Poro to bring some fresh fish. Karihi looks at you wearily. After Poro brings the fish, you cook it and hand it over to your younger brother. He takes a nibble at it, but he quickly falls asleep. You stay with him for an hour, but it's obvious that he needs a lot of rest, so you leave him be.

The next day you visit him. He is still lying on the ground, but he is awake.

Karihi: Tāwhaki, you shouldn't have let me sleep.

Tāwhaki: You needed to rest.

Karihi: You don't understand. Our village was attacked. Our parents have been abducted.

Tāwhaki: What?

Karihi: After the cyclone separated us I went to rest at Te Puke I Tauranga. I rested there for a few days because the sprint across the ocean drained a lot of energy from me. I then set off back to our village with Pūpūmai so that we could gather a search party to rescue you. But when we got to the village we found it burned to the ground, with hundreds of our people slain. We couldn't find our parents among the bodies. We found some survivors in the bush, in the ngahere, and they told us what happened.

Tāwhaki: Who attacked us?

Karihi: The Ponaturi, minions of Tangaroa.

Tāwhaki: Why would Tangaroa send his minions to attack our village?

Karihi: I don't know. But the Ponaturi have abducted our parents. We tried looking for them everywhere. We asked everyone we knew where the Ponaturi might have gone. Eventually Pūpūmai had a dream. It was a dream about an island far to the east in a tropical climate.

Karihi begins to cry.

Karihi: I was worried when I lost you. But to lose our parents at the same time... Pūpūmai and I were desperate. We took an old sailing vessel from the village, blessed it, then braved the wild ocean, fearing that the winds of Tāwhirimātea might capsize us. When he did come he nearly destroyed us.

Tāwhaki: Karihi, how could Pūpūmai not know about Tāwhirimātea?

Karihi: Because our people haven't voyaged out into the ocean in centuries. They've been too busy fighting wars with other tribes to bother with an ocean-going expedition.

Tāwhaki: What happened to Pūpūmai?

Karihi: She used some powerful karakia invoking Tūmataunga to subdue Tāwhirimātea's rage. She then told me to jump ship and swim east towards an island. I thought it was a stupid idea, but she told me it would be the only way through the winds. She would distract Tāwhirimātea while I swam to the shore. It worked. As for Pūpūmai, she used a karakia to return to Aotearoa safely. Tāwhirimātea followed her all the way to the shore. Her distraction worked, and I was able to come here.

Tāwhaki: I'm glad to see you brother.

Karihi: I wasn't even sure if you were alive. In hindsight it was a foolish plan, but we were desperate.

Tāwhaki: What do we do about the Ponaturi?

Karihi: I hopped from island to island, following their trail. They have been eating our people and discarding their bones on these islands. I tracked them to another island not far from here. Perhaps these villagers know about it. Maybe you should ask some of these men to help us attack the Ponaturi.

Tāwhaki: That won't work. Our village is much bigger than this one, with 10,000 strong, and yet we still fell to the Ponaturi. We must use a different strategy. If you and I go alone, we may be able to rescue our parents without being detected. I know a few karakia that can make us invisible.

You and Karihi set out together. The village lends you a sailing vessel, which is much faster than the waka back home. You sail towards an island to the north east, a part of the ocean teeming with life. It doesn't take long before you've found the island of the Ponaturi. You drive the boat onshore and you and Karihi lift it up and hide it in a bush. During the day you walk around the island, walking up and down the hills, searching for signs of the Ponaturi. It takes you many days before you find Manawatāne. The island seems eerily uninhabited, as if it's never been touched by humanity, but the house where the Ponaturi live looks as if it were created by men.

Manawatāne is beautiful and large. You see your mother outside chained near the front door. You see some bones dangling on the porch. You hear the bones rattling,

clanking, and knocking together, and you recognize that they must be your father's. You feel a sudden pang of grief. You feel as if you've been hit with a taiaha across the stomach. To make matters worse, you see your mother by herself looking down and sobbing quietly, while your father's bones dangle above her. You begin to surge with hatred. You want nothing more than to walk into that wharenuī and murder every Ponaturi inside.

Karihi: We can use a karakia to help us sneak up to our mother.

You and Karihi recite the karakia that silences your footsteps. You are able to run smoothly and quietly. You quickly sprint to your mother who is overwhelmed when she sees you. You hold a finger up to your lips to quieten her down.

Urutonga: My sons, I'm glad to see you. But you must leave now! It's too dangerous to be here.

Tāwhaki: No, we've come to kill the Ponaturi and get you out of here. Where are they?

Urutonga: They go into the ocean during the day, only returning when the sun goes down. Now please, leave me here! I cannot bear to see them kill you too.

Karihi: There is still some time before dusk. Why do they keep you out here?

Urutonga: They tell me to wake them up in the morning before the sun comes out. But if I lie to them they will hurt me.

Tāwhaki: How can we kill all of them?

Urutonga: The sun will destroy them if you expose them to it.

Tāwhaki: Hmm, so they truly are creatures from the ocean. I wonder why they need to come on land during the night.

Urutonga: They are amphibians, and they are very dangerous, even though there aren't many of them. Just one of them can easily kill ten toa.

Karihi: Maybe we can trick them into sleeping until noon, and then we expose them to the sun.

Urutonga: Yes, that should work. Before they come back, you should hide in their wharenui. Then, when they are asleep, block up the windows and the door so that they won't know whether it's daylight outside. They will wake up in the morning and ask me if the sun has risen. I will lie and send them back to sleep until the sun is high in the sky, then I will tell them it is morning. At that moment you should unblock the windows and doors, allowing the rays of the sun to enter the wharenui.

You and Karihi prepare some boards to cover the windows and doors, stowing them away within the wharenui. As the sun begins to descend you recite a karakia to remove your scent and make yourself invisible, then you climb the rafters and hide in the gables, waiting for the Ponaturi to arrive. It quickly becomes dark outside as you wait. The Ponaturi begin streaming into Manawatāne. They pat your mother on the head

on the way in. One of them kicks her while a few others spit on her. You hear her whimper and cower by the side of the door. You feel a rush of rage, but you try to calm yourself. The Ponaturi sniff the air, a look of suspicion on their faces, and for a while you worry that they've caught your scent. Their eyes scan the rafters, and every inch of the building, but after a while they convince themselves that nothing is out of the ordinary. After a while they all settle down and fall to sleep.

You climb down from the rafters and begin the work of blocking the windows with the boards. You recite karakia to silence your movements. After many hours of work, you finish by covering the door. You wait outside with your mother, waiting for the sun to rise.

Just before dawn, you see the sky shift from dark blue to black. One of the Ponaturi calls out.

Ponaturi: Door, is it light yet?

Urutonga: No, it is still night. Go back to sleep.

A couple of hours later the sun is low on the horizon and the sky has shifted to a purplish pink. Another Ponaturi wakes up.

Ponaturi: Door, what time is it?

Urutonga: The sun is still sleeping. Go back to your bed.

Ponaturi: Are you sure? I feel that I've been asleep longer than usual.

Urutonga: Yes, I am sure. I will wake you when the time is right.

It is now morning and the sun is 45 degrees in the sky. Once more a Ponaturi wakes up.

Ponaturi: I am getting impatient. Surely it is time to wake up.

Urutonga: Not yet. It is very dark outside.

A couple of hours later the sun is directly above Manawatāne. It is hot. By now several Ponaturi express their discomfort.

Ponaturi: It must be time by now. I can feel the heat of the sun.

Urutonga: Yes, you are right. It is time to wake up! Get up now!

You hear a murmur and a clambering from within Manawatāne. The Ponaturi are now getting up.

Urutonga: Hurry my sons, tear down the boards quickly!

You and Karihi run to opposite sides of the wharehūi and kick in the boards one by one. You start on opposite corners of the building, so that the Ponaturi have nowhere to hide. You hear their screams as they are burned quickly by the rays of the sun.

Ponaturi: Lying wrench! We'll kill you!

You kick the door down. A Ponaturi burns by the entrance, and the others are too afraid to come out. Soon the entire wharenui is exposed to the sun, and they all die, except for one, whose name is Kanoa. He skips quickly into the sea.

When they are all dead you unchain your mother and take your father's bones off the rafters. His bones knock together in your hands, a display of happiness and pride. Your mother embraces you and Karihi, kissing your cheeks and crying.

You and Karihi set Manawatāne on fire, leaving the corpses inside to burn with the whare. Even though it was a beautiful building, it was now nothing more than a graveyard. You feed your mother some fruit and let her have some rest while you and Karihi prepare your boat.

The next day you set sail.

Tāwhaki: Where shall I take you?

Urutonga: I want to go back home.

Karihi: Our village was burned to the ground, and most of the people are dead.

Tāwhaki: Karihi, didn't you say that there were some survivors?

Karihi: Yes, plus there is also our sister.

Urutonga: Oh, I'm glad that Pūpūmai is still alive. Take me to her.

Tāwhaki: Mother, let's go back to my wife's village. We can replenish ourselves there.

Karihi: No, we should leave for Aotearoa as soon as possible, while the winds of Tāwhirimātea are gone. Look at how calm the weather is right now. If we wait too long, we may miss our opportunity to return home.

Urutonga: I want to return home immediately. I want to see my daughter. Besides, I don't know your wife's people. They may not welcome me.

Tāwhaki: What about Kanoa? I won't rest until all the vile creatures that were responsible for the murder of my father are dead.

Urutonga: Forget Kanoa, you've already avenged your father.

Tāwhaki: Even if I could forget him, I cannot yet return home. I must see my wife. My heart longs for her. Karihi, take our father's bones with you. He should be laid to rest on his own land. Drop me off at the island and take the sailing ship with you.

Urutonga: But how will I see you again if the winds block your path?

Tāwhaki: I will find a way to deal with that. It seems Tāwhirimātea cannot block our path without the help of Tangaroa. There are karakia and tools to sail safely in either strong winds or tumultuous seas individually, but very few karakia to deal with both at the same time. However, I believe there is a way to weaken Tangaroa, thus granting safe passage.

Urutonga: My sons, your father would be so proud of you. Tāwhaki, your brother and I will rebuild the village. When you've found a way to ensure safe passage back to our home, bring her to me. Let our tribes be united.

After a day of sailing you are dropped off at the island of Motukairangi. Your mother embraces you, weeping at having to say goodbye to you again. You hug her tightly, ensuring her that everything will be fine. You hug your brother and hold your father's bones in your hands while reciting a karakia to send him on his way. They sail off into the sea as you wave goodbye.

You return to the village and I run up to you and give you a hug.

Hinepiripiri: There is a look in your eyes which scares me.

Tāwhaki: I know how to get off this island. Let the chief know that I am here. We need to arrange a meeting for the entire village.

I brush away my concern and smile at you. I lead you back to our home and prepare your bed. You lie down, allowing yourself to sink into a moment of respite as I cook some food. You fall asleep with the smell of smoked crab permeating the air.

Chapter Seven – A Case for Utu

You wake up and you walk to the wharenuī. Some of the villagers are waiting for you, sitting on mats. The chief is sitting on the far end.

Chief: You wanted a hui Tāwhaki, well here it is.

Tāwhaki: Tēnā koutou katoa. I have a found way off this island, though it's a dangerous venture.

Chief: Go on.

Tāwhaki: A few days ago, I destroyed the entire tribe of Ngati Ponaturi. If you try to find Manawatāne to the north east of here, you will see that it no longer exists. You will discover the charred remains of the Ponaturi. The Ponaturi are of course, minions of Tangaroa. And I killed them all with my brother, using only the power of karakia.

Chief: So that island is now uninhabited. Of what use is that island to us? We are still trapped in this part of the ocean.

Tāwhaki: As I was about to say, you are trapped here because two gods are fighting to keep you here - to keep all the people of the pacific isolated from each other.

But if we can destroy or weaken the power of just one of the gods, then we can easily slip past the other one.

Chief: Intriguing.

Tāwhaki: I was surprised by how easy it was to defeat the Ponaturi, even though they are among Tangaroa's strongest warriors. All I needed were some basic karakia and a bit of cunning. Therefore, I believe that Tangaroa is a weak god, and it will be possible to banish him from these islands using the power of karakia.

Chief: It is indeed impressive that you destroyed all the Ponaturi. We were often afraid of encountering them, but we knew that if we paid tribute to Tangaroa then they would not bother us. However, destroying a few minions is one thing, banishing a god is quite another. What makes you so sure that your karakia are powerful enough to weaken Tangaroa?

Tāwhaki: Tangaroa is weak. I believe that with your help, I can easily subdue him.

Chief: We do not know karakia like you do. Our spiritual power is not that strong, although you say we are capable of learning. Still, quite a few of us will be next to useless, since the talent to utilize powerful karakia is rare.

Tāwhaki: But you are proficient fishermen, perhaps the best in the Pacific. You have a level of sophistication that is unmatched anywhere else. You are good at killing Tangaroa's children. Every child of his that we kill diminishes his dominion over the

ocean. With your expertise as fishermen and my powers as a tohunga, Tangaroa will leave us alone and never return.

Chief: This plan of yours is bodacious, but you are quite right. We are the best of Tūmataunga's warriors when it comes to defeating Tangaroa's children. However, we have paid our respects to Tangaroa for a long time, and for the most part he's left us alone and even gifted us with some of his children. Trying to attack to him now would be a sign of bad faith.

Tāwhaki: Tangaroa attacked my village indiscriminately, killing thousands of innocents, including my father.

Chief: I was sorry to hear that, but it is your problem, not ours. Perhaps your father offended Tangaroa.

Tāwhaki: No, it's everyone's problem, because Tangaroa's nature is inherently unpredictable. Do you believe in utu and ea?

Chief: Yes.

Tāwhaki: Do you believe that people who have the power to prevent crime, should do so?

Chief: Yes.

Tāwhaki: And do you think that gods are powerful?

Chief: Of course.

Tāwhaki: Then it follows that Tangaroa is guilty of many crimes, for he has the power to prevent himself from drowning our shore side villages, from condemning our explorers to be lost at sea, and from sending his warriors to kill us. Only the gods are guilty because only they have unlimited power. We must hold them to account. We must restore ea.

The chief strokes his chin, spending a few moments contemplating your words, and then grins, laughs.

Chief: The prophecy was right after all. A person of great power will come and save us from imprisonment and slow death. At last, the time has come!

The villagers begin to stir with excitement.

Tāwhaki: And don't forget that Tangaroa abandoned Tūmatauenga during his time of need. It is our duty, as humans, to punish Tangaroa for his crimes against our ancestor Tū.

Chief: I agree with everything you've said. I must admit, for a long time I've desired to raise my mana. To banish Tangaroa would render me one of the highest chiefs of all time. You have our backing, grandson of Kaitangata. Tell me what you need.

Tāwhaki: Send me the people whom you believe will be the best learners of the karakia. Then collect a thousand of your best fishermen. Arm them with spears, nets, anything they need for weapons. Bring some women to do the karanga and boost our morale. Together we will drive Tangaroa away, and the Pacific will be united once more.

The excitement in the room carried over to the rest of the village as the people ran excitedly back to their huts to sharpen their spears, prepare the waka, and repair the nets. The other villagers looked around, trying to figure out what was going on. When they were brought up to speed, they too became excited, some were even jubilant, and they helped the men prepare the vessels.

You return to your whare with me. I take you by the hand and examine you. I am deeply concerned.

Hinepiripiri: Is this really going to work?

Tāwhaki: Of course it will.

Hinepiripiri: What makes you so sure you can defeat a god?

Tāwhaki: Why do you doubt me? I've seen Tangaroa's weakness. How could it be possible for me to kill a thousand or so Ponaturi in a single swoop if Tangaroa were so powerful?

Hinepiripiri: What if he intended you to kill them, to make you overconfident and lure you into a trap? Or what if the Ponaturi are simply daft, so they easily succumb to trickery?

Tāwhaki: You're overthinking this. Remember the prophecy? You told me about it yourself. Don't you believe in it anymore?

Hinepiripiri: I suppose so. But I've never seen a single prophecy come true. We've been on this island for a long time. Nothing ever changes.

Tāwhaki: The world changes all the time, the balance of power shifts from one god to the next, sometimes power is even usurped by humans. Remember when Rangi was separated from Papa? Or when Māui slowed the sun? Have you forgotten the deeds of my ancestors? It's my destiny to banish Tangaroa from these islands and enable your people to travel across the ocean again.

Hinepiripiri: Why do you suddenly believe it's your destiny to do this? Ever since you came back from Manawatāne you've secretly held hatred in your heart.

Tāwhaki: My hatred towards Tangaroa is simply fuel. I owe it to your people to free them from their beholden state to him.

Hinepiripiri: I suppose I should be grateful that you are trying to help them. I'm just worried that you are still trying to avenge your father. I haven't seen you grieve for him. I worry that your anger towards Tangaroa and the loss of your father is clouding your mind.

Tāwhaki: The pain makes me more determined.

Hinepiripiri: More determined to do what? To risk the lives of hundreds of villagers just so you can get even with a god?

Tāwhaki: More determined to do what your people already want me to do. Even your brothers want to get off this island.

Hinepiripiri: But many of us would rather not disturb Tangaroa.

Tāwhaki: That's not the mood I got from the hui. The chief wants to raise his mana. He's been humiliated by Tangaroa, he's been treated like a loser.

Hinepiripiri: You don't understand. You are a foreigner to these islands, so they think you have special powers.

Tāwhaki: I do have special powers. Don't you believe in me?

Hinepiripiri: I have never heard of anyone being able to take on a god. Not even Māui.

Tāwhaki: You dishonor me greatly by thinking so poorly of me.

Hinepiripiri: You are more important to me than my own brothers.

Tāwhaki: How disrespectful - doubting my abilities. I see why your people have been stuck on this island. You're all cowards.

Hinepiripiri: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you.

Tāwhaki: Just stay here. Stay out of my way. Do not poison my mind with your ill-conceived concerns. When I return as the victor, I expect you to show me some gratitude.

Hinepiripiri: Forget my foolish words. I apologize. Please be careful.

You walk off without saying anything more to me. I feel ashamed and timid. I huddled behind the whare like a scared child. You have no time for the concerns of a worrier.

A day passes before the village is ready for the expedition. The fishermen have now rebranded themselves as toa moana. They are all assembled by the shore. Fifty waka are lined up along the beach. The entire village is out singing waiata and throwing lei at the warriors. Old men are praying for their sons and daughters. Children hug their parents goodbye. Beautiful banners made from raupō, dyed in greens, reds, and yellows, are being carried by young boys in the crowd. Some of the squads are assembled in a circle, drinking kava and chanting whakatauki.

As you walk towards the crowd they begin chanting your name. Everyone is staring at you. You hear the beat of island drummers. The chief makes some

indistinguishable commands, and the people form a gap in the crowd which leads directly to the chief.

Chief: Come here Tāwhaki. Let me bless you in front of everyone.

You walk up to him. He clasps you by your shoulders and gently pushes you to the ground. You yield, your knees dig into the sand as you feel the leathery hands of this old chief rest upon you.

Chief: You are the one that was promised by our ancestors to set us free. We acknowledge that now. You will open up the world to us. For that, we thank you.

The crowd erupts, cheering. You peek up and you see the bright white smiles of the villagers.

Chief: Now, let us pray for victory.

After the chief is done with his karakia you stand up.

Tāwhaki: It is time to bless the warriors.

You begin reciting a karakia. The crowd is suddenly silent, their eyes are closed, their heads are bowed. Your voice resonates across the beach and in the hearts of the villagers. When you are done, they open their eyes, and you feel the energy shift. They are now ready. The drums begin playing again, and the men begin hollering and the

women resume dancing. The chief puts his arm around your shoulder and guides you to your waka.

Chief: Here it is. The waka of the tohunga. And here are your men, the most gifted minds in our village, who will carry out your instructions. Of course, they are not as talented as you in the art of karakia, but you will find them worthy assistants.

The chief then addresses your men.

Chief: You have the most important task - to help Tāwhaki banish Tangaroa from these islands. No one else can do this. Your wives, husbands, and families are counting on you. Our revered tohunga, Tāwhaki, is counting on you. The warriors in the other boats are counting on you. When we succeed each of you will become high ranking leaders. Some of you may even become your own chiefs, if there are other islands that you can colonize. That is how important you are.

You see the pride in their faces as the chief says these words.

Chief: Now, I leave you to Tāwhaki. Listen to him. He has trained you, molded you from nothing into what you are today. When the stories about Tāwhaki's deeds are told to future generations, you will be remembered as among those who helped him accomplish his greatest mission. Kia kaha!

The great chief walks to his own waka. You bless your squadron, reciting a small karakia to give them presence of mind. You sense the karakia working when they look at you with clear, discerning eyes.

A pukaea sounds in the distance. It is time to leave. The warriors push their waka into the ocean, then jump into them. Some of the waka have sails, but many of them do not - instead they must be paddled. The fleet makes its way into the ocean, leaving the rest of the villagers cheering and waving on the beach. The sound of the pukaea fades in the distance.

Chapter Eight - Tangaroa

Only gods are guilty, because only gods have unlimited power. These were the words you spoke on the marae at Motukairangi, a fishing village on an island far to the east of where you were born. A cyclone carried you there, the same sort of cyclone that would carry seeds, insects, and sometimes even crabs and birds to populate distant islands in the Pacific. The cyclones are the angry winds of Tāwhirimātea, a god who is still at war with all his brothers: Tangaroa, Tāne Mahuta, Tūmataunga , Rehua, Rūaumoko, Haumia and Rongo. As baleful as Tāwhirimātea is, he is not the god you seek to banish today...

A fleet of fifty waka is strewn across a patchwork sea of turquoise and navy blue, each waka sailing beneath an encroaching storm, heading towards the desolate reaches of the ocean. At the vanguard is a massive waka taua holding over one hundred men, the length of the vessel reaching forty meters, its port and starboard decorated with tōtara carvings of interweaving spirals, each spiral sprouting smaller spirals in fractal fashion. The chief stands near the tau ihu (bow) of the waka taua, proudly adorned in a cloak made from a variety of exotic feathers, his voice thundering above the heaving waves.

Chief: Cut through these unwielding tides with your hoe as if they were trees to your adzes(toki). Slice these pathetic waves in half, let the cowardly Tangaroa know that we, the descendants of Tūmataunga , will no longer be beholden to him!

The fleet glides over the irascible sea in improvised procession, the paddlers in each waka synchronizing their downward strokes with collective exhalation. An army of shadows under the water's surface darts ahead of the canoes, while a large, ominous presence seems to be stalking the fleet from the depths. They were all nearing a whirlpool which extended beyond the horizon.

Chief: Whano, whano! Haramai te toki! Haumi ē! Hui ē! Tāiki ē!

You sit at the tau rapa (stern) of the tohunga's waka. Rather than pay attention to the bombastic rallying of the chief, you direct your focus towards the battleground emerging in front of the fleet - the growing chasm in the sea.

Tāwhaki: Eventually my old enemy will come. I will banish him from these islands and these primitive fishermen will make me their Ariki. Then I will bear many children to Hinepīpīri and the villagers will worship my line until the end of time.

The fleet had sailed deep into an ancient part of the ocean, where few people ever ventured. The familiar species of fish, manta rays, tiger sharks, and bull whales would not be found here, there would only be the primordial creatures which have been slumbering unperturbed beneath the violent waves for eons. The whirlpool was cycling cold water from the depths of the ocean towards the surface. Large shadows circled the perimeter around the fleet where the water was warmer, now and then a whale would smash itself into a waka, causing it to capsize.

Tāwhaki: This is Tangaroa's blue hell, an oceanic underworld, and that spiraling mass is the gateway.

The ominous threat which had been stalking the fleet seems even greater now. A groan emanates from the ocean's depths, followed by wild currents which disoriented the waka. More whales crash into the fleet.

The men at the outer edges ready their spears, axes and mere. A few high-ranking women begin chanting their karanga with their banshee voices, hoping to ward off Tangaroa's influence over the whales. Some of the other men, boost morale with the haka. The chief continues to bellow, attempting to drown out the alien groaning of the deep ocean. He was claiming his sovereignty; this place and its bountiful marine life would now be his.

Chief: Tangaroa will be banished once again, like the coward he is! Remember when he ran away from Tāwhirimātea, leaving our ancestor Tūmataunga to fight by himself? Why should we pay tribute to such a pathetic god? Today we stop disgracing Tū. Today we will stop being afraid of a coward.

The fishermen try to entrap one of the whales in a net. They plunge their spears into it. A much larger whale opens its large mouth and snaps two of the canoe in half, freeing the captured whale.

Chief: Keep rowing! Our speed is our best defense!

Tāwhaki: I have an idea. Trap them within a circle.

You pull out a matau from your kete.

Tāwhaki: This is Māui's hook. I can use it to draw land from the bottom of the ocean and trap some of these whales between the rocks. Then we will have an easier time killing them.

Villager: How did you get Māui's hook?

Tāwhaki: I got it from my father, who is related to Māui.

You plunge the hook into the sea and let it sink until it gets caught on something. You start pulling the hook up, using a karakia to give yourself the power to move the earth, but each time you pull, a deafening scream erupts from below. This doesn't stop you, so you continue pulling until at last a giant mass of translucent turquoise flesh jumps out of the water. Māui's hook pierces its side. An ethereal pink ooze bleeds out of its wound. The force of the giant mass emerging from the water pushes several waka into the air. As the mass of flesh continues to rise it resembles the body of a sea serpent, a taniwha. Its head has the characteristics of a lizard - scales, a beak, fangs, cold eyes, a protruding tongue; but its expression was almost human. It did not seem like another mindless monster, rather it seemed to possess its own intelligence.

You are in awe of the beast you've pulled out of the oceanic depths.

Tāwhaki: Oh great Taniwha, I didn't mean to wake you. We are here to fight Tangaroa.

Tangaroa: I am Tangaroa!

Tangaroa's voice resonates in the minds of all the fishermen. As he speaks, his eyes pierce through your soul. His tongue pokes into the air, tasting the fear emanating from the villagers. He seems to be cackling under his breath, grinning at everyone as if they were mere playthings.

Tāwhaki: Is this a trick? Or has Tangaroa finally emerged from his hole in the sea? I didn't take the god of the ocean for a mere taniwha.

You try to diminish the magnificence of the creature in front of you, hoping it would give everyone some false courage.

Tangaroa: I have many forms. I am the current that carries kaimoana to your shores, I am the tsunami that floods villages. I am everything in the sea, I am undifferentiated, I am boundless, I am infinite. The ocean has no end, it carries on forever, like the night sky. My domain has no end, no bottom, no edge. You skirt fearfully on the surface of my world, yet I penetrate yours so easily. Your words do not convince me of your bravery, Tāwhaki.

Chief: But you do have an end. We have come to murder you.

Tangaroa laughed.

Tangaroa: You know nothing about killing. Death is a transaction. I let you butcher my children, and in exchange I destroy entire civilizations. What would you

trade to have me die? The forests that you depend on? The air that you breathe? You cannot kill anything without first sacrificing something of yourself.

Tāwhaki: We are here to banish you, to punish you, and to claim the ocean for ourselves.

Tangaroa: With what power?

Tāwhaki: With the knowledge I possess of the structure of the earthly realm.

Tangaroa: From where did you gain this knowledge?

Tāwhaki: From my father.

Tangaroa: Hema! Tell me, Tāwhaki. How do you intend on modifying the rules of nature, when your father was easily apprehended by my Ponaturi? It seems he couldn't have known much.

Tāwhaki: He knew a lot, but he underestimated your perfidy. Why did you attack his village?

Tangaroa: Ah, Tāwhaki, you betray yourself too easily. You have no comprehension as to how you would bring harm to me. You know the rules are only modifiable by my brothers. You have come here first to seek answers, and then to seek revenge. But like the coward you are, you didn't come alone. You brought these dopey

fishermen to give you courage by numbers. But why are they here? What have they against me?

Chief: We did not want to be beholden to you. We have been trapped on that small island for hundreds of years. The winds to the west block us from traveling there, the waters to the south are barren and frozen, and the islands to the east are populated by tribes more fearsome than your pathetic children, whom we eat. The only route out of our prison is to the north, to the heart of the Pacific, Hawaiki, which you have blocked from us.

Tangaroa: Interesting. I'm beginning to see how Tāwhaki deceived you. He made you think he could defeat me with a bit of your help. He played you. That fool is possessed by revenge. Like you, someone poured lies into his ears. Do you know the biggest lie which all humans believe at one time or another? It is their belief in themselves. Tāwhaki fancies himself a demigod. Indeed, he is a close descendant of my brother, Rehua, the star god, so he is not far wrong. But it is the human part of Tāwhaki which does all the self-aggrandizing. The human is a joke creation, an abomination. Give a crude creature a developed consciousness and then laugh at all his attempts to overcome his lowliness. Blessed with such a noble mind, he will never accept his flaws. He will consider himself ugly, stupid, and cruel, eternally bound to self-hatred he will seek an escape through mutual destruction. Tāwhaki is an extension of that same joke, only crueler. His mind has been dipped in the pools of cosmic truth and he can intuit things an ordinary human cannot even imagine. But he is utterly human in all other regards. He has brought you all here to die.

The villagers were stunned into silence. They expected a bloody battle with the god of the ocean, but they were defeated by his mere words. Some were already paddling back to the island. They could all feel Tangaroa's grin fall over them and pulling them into the cosmic absurdity of their condition. The Chief was now considering Tangaroa's words, eyeing up Tāwhaki and suspecting that Tangaroa was right. Tāwhaki had filled them with false courage in a desperate bid to get revenge. He preyed upon their fear and resentment about their isolation from the rest of the world, and it was made possible by the fact that Tāwhaki appeared to be the hero of a prophecy.

Tāwhaki: Enough with the talking. There are karakia strong enough to banish you from these parts of the sea and you know it. Look at how I was able to dredge you up using nothing but Māui's hook and a common karakia. You also forget that we are descendants of Tūmataunga, who is far superior to you. We are even out here deep in your domain, killing your children with ease. Your rhetoric is only meant to dissuade lesser minds from the right path.

Tangaroa: Oh, but it's just a game to me.

Tāwhaki: No it's not just a game to you. You have a desire, you want to reclaim the children you lost to Tāne.

Tangaroa: Yes, but between me and Tū, there are only games. Did you know that Tū is really the god of ugliness? Yes, yes, Tū, the god of war. Tāwhirimātea's only equal. But he has nothing I want. He is as much a clown god as he is a war god.

Tāwhaki: Then why are you so afraid of him? Why are you so afraid of us? Why not leave humanity alone?

Tangaroa: I'm not afraid of Tū. Tū is a bringer of chaos. Chaos is catastrophic, but when harnessed correctly it can be creative. Without Tū, the world would be boring. Without me and my brothers to keep Tū in check, the world would be nothing but randomness. You forget that by keeping humanity isolated from each other, I preserve order by giving other creatures a chance at life.

Your rage reaches its breaking point. Reducing your father's life to a necessary counter to chaos, treating humanity like a cosmic game, it was clear that Tangaroa's moral argument placed little value in human life. The ocean god's long snakelike body was coiling around everyone, dipping in and out of the sea, spiraling in the air. He was laughing at everyone, but it also seemed that he was growing tired of playing games. His tongue curls as his eyes roll over every person there.

Tangaroa: I'm interested in seeing these powers of yours, Tāwhaki. Show me these karakia, let's see how much you know.

You scowl. You try to appear unphased by Tangaroa's patronization. You shut your eyes and enter a deep part of your mind. You see spiraling koru emitting colours and auditory vibrations. The patterns are symbolic, but they are ever shifting, transforming both visually and audibly; sometimes the patterns are patterns of feeling, of texture. In this state, you start to recite the karakia. As you speak the karakia, you see the patterns beginning to change. You are certain that you understood all the nuances of

the karakia correctly. It should be enough to bring pain to Tangaroa, so that he will exile himself from the Pacific Ocean.

Tāwhaki: I did not deceive them. I know I'm right, I know I can do this.

The visuals start to emit a different feeling, one that you associate with positivity.

Tāwhaki: Yes, it's working.

You begin to see a massive spiral forming in the heart of the Pacific Ocean. Its arms are spinning circularly, and in the centre of the structure there is a singularity, a black hole which felt infinitely deep. You expected the hole to be plugged, and the spirals to dissipate, but the hole only grew bigger. Then out of the hole you hear a mocking laughter. Then the ocean swells, covering the entire planet until there is nothing but water.

Tangaroa: You see Tāwhaki, even in the spirit realm, I have dominion over you. One day I will reclaim all the lands of Papatūānuku, and I will be reunited with my lost children! Now, suffer, you arrogant fool.

You are ejected out of your trance. The last thing you see is Tangaroa's tail descend upon you.

Chapter Nine – Disgrace

You are plunged deep into the ocean along with all your acolytes. You swim to the surface. The waves slam into the fleet relentlessly, shoving several warriors into the ocean. You hear the chief barking orders, although you can't make out what he says. Tangaroa looms overhead, his coils taunt the remaining armada. You try to use another karakia, but you are smacked back by Tangaroa's tail. You feel water enter your nostrils, you see a trail of blood marking the trajectory of the knockback. Your head is plunged into the water again. You try to flail your arms, but they are too heavy to move. The wind has been knocked out of you. You descend deeper and deeper into the ocean, the light of the sun fading away. You close your eyes, silently reciting a karakia to help you breathe underwater, but it's no good. It's over now

You feel tiny teeth dig into your flesh and a soft, slimy texture envelope you. Something is moving you. It takes you to the surface. You gasp for air. You open your eyes. You realize you are in the mouth of a large fish. You glance about, seeing waka still being plunged into the sea, a sight which drains the remaining willpower out of you. Some of the waka have managed to escape the confrontation with Tangaroa and are now heading back to the island. The fish is faster than the waka, so you are moved past them. The villagers notice you being dragged by this fish, you reach an arm out to them, but they do nothing. They continue paddling. Some of their faces even look angry and disgusted by the sight of you. You close your eyes. They have a right to be angry. You let the fish take you wherever it wants. You don't even pray.

A few hours pass before you open your eyes again, and you find yourself in the lagoon near Hinetuatai's alcove. The fish lets go of you, dropping you into the shallow water. You crawl out of the ocean and collapse on the beach. Your skin is shriveled, you let yourself dry out on the sand. Shutting your eyes, inviting the heat of the sun to pour over your face, you rest for a while. You sense that the fish is still there, watching you.

Hinetuatai emerges from behind the palm trees. She holds your face in her palms. You feel her long hair tickling your cheeks.

Hinetuatai: Our son has rescued you from Tangaroa. Now, come back to my home and let me heal you.

Tāwhaki: I can't. I must return to the village.

She helps you up and you embrace her, thanking her for saving your life. You stumble back to the village.

The village seems like a ghost town. You neither hear the laughter of children playing, nor do you hear the women sharing stories by the flax bush. Several waka are jumbled in a pile as if they were tossed away. Fishing spears litter the ground. A scowling kuia glares at you. You look away in shame. You head towards the chief's wharenuī.

He sits at the altar as if anticipating your arrival. His head is held high and he looks down on you, frowning, saying nothing. You fall before him, shaking, whimpering, crying.

Tāwhaki: I'm so sorry.

The wharenui is heavy with silence, the spaces between the walls belonging to a cavity of vast emptiness.

Tāwhaki: There is no forgiveness for me. I will leave this island. I will never return.

Chief: You are forgiven, Tāwhaki.

Tāwhaki: Why?

Chief: Only the gods are guilty. You are not a god Tāwhaki, you are just a man like us. You may have special powers, but you are still just a man. It was our mistake to believe that you were something more, such was our desperation to get off this island and believe in silly prophecies.

Tāwhaki: But I made you believe in me.

Chief: That you did. But tell me, did you intend to trick us into fighting a battle we could not win?

Tāwhaki: No. I believed it was possible to win.

Chief: So do all who start conflicts. See, you are not the sole person to blame. What about me? What about all the other men who were eager for battle, filled with the raging blood of Tū? It was a collective decision. We cannot punish everyone.

Tāwhaki: Even if you forgive me, great chief, I still sense the wrath of the villagers.

Chief: In time they will have sympathy for you. You are still loved, Tāwhaki. You've done much for us all. Now please, get some rest. See to your wife. I will ensure that no harm comes to you. I promise.

You return to your house where I wait for you. You feel whakamā in my presence, so you say nothing. You slump into the corner of the hut and sob. I wrap a blanket around you and caress your cheeks.

Hinepiripiri: Go to sleep my husband. You need to rejuvenate. Don't worry, I won't go anywhere.

You drift off to sleep to the soothing sound of my voice.

Later that night you have a dream. You hear voices. There is a heated debate in a meeting house. You can't make out who the voices belong to, except for the chief's.

He is arrogant and foolish.

Many of us are now dead.

He has made Tangaroa angry with us. For many generations we lived in peace with him, now we will never see the end of his wrath.

That phony tohunga started this, he is responsible.

Chief: He hoodwinked me into believing in his powers. He is a dangerous charlatan. My mana will not be restored until he is made to pay.

Didn't you want to defeat Tangaroa? Weren't you sick of being beholden to the gods?

Chief: That tohunga put a powerful spell over my mind and filled me with lust for power. Only a madman would go against the might of Tangaroa.

You've always wanted power.

Chief: I have never been so foolish to attack a god!

He made us believe in all of his lies. He even lies to himself, such is his vanity.

What about the prophecy? He came to us when noone else could.

He got here by fluke.

And his powers? His sorceries?

Cheap tricks!

The next morning Hinepiripiri's brothers wake you up. You peer at them groggily.

Hema: Tāwhaki, we understand how you must feel. We want to help you, if we can.

Matiu: Come fishing with us, get your mind off yesterday.

Tāwhaki: What about Tangaroa?

Matiu: He will be too busy enjoying his spoils, I guess.

Hema: Come, Tāwhaki. You are part of our family now. I know we have been jealous of our sister and were less kind to you than we should've been, but that was because we were in awe of you. Now we see you are just like us, and we have sympathy for you.

They take you to the ocean on a small waka...

After many hours of fishing, you finally pull out a giant Hāpuku out of the sea, hoisting it onto the waka with exasperation. Your muscles are taut as the creature thrashes in your arms. Its slippery body wrangles with you as its tail slaps your face.

Seawater mingles with your sweat and you taste salt on your lips. You let go of the fish and it flops onto the hull with a thud, continuing to flap around, its body drumming against the bottom of the waka.

Matiu beats its head with the broad side of his mere, continually pounding it until it stops moving, a necessity in case the heavy fish destabilizes your tiny waka. When it finally becomes motionless and there is no sound except for the lapping of the water against the waka, you retrieve your matau from the fish's mouth, noticing that the mouth has been badly torn during the struggle, perhaps a sign that Tangaroa, the god of the ocean, is still wrath with you.

Tāwhaki: This fish has been spoiled. Have I lost my powers?

You hold your matau up to your eye, inspecting the circular hook for irregularities. You rinse it in the briny sea. Its bony texture seems pallid against the glistening water. Your brow furrows.

Matiu acknowledges your consternation.

Matiu: You're being too hard on yourself.

Tāwhaki: It's just unusual. For me, fish don't put up much of a fight.

Hemi: It was a big haul.

Matiu: And you're not the biggest of men

The two brothers chuckle. You nod in resignation before slumping into your end of the waka. You sigh as you gaze into the eastern horizon. The azure ocean mirrors the Pacific sky and its buoyant clouds, two seemingly parallel planes stretching unperturbed into infinity, with the moon at the zenith pulling the tide, sending wave after foamy wave towards the glittering metallic shore. For a moment you are lost in the contemplation of infinity, taken by the tranquility of the ocean, supposing that a place without people is the only place where there could be true peace. The shadows of a flock of seagulls dart across the waka, their shrill cries break you out of your daydream as the birds glide towards the rocky cliffs in the south.

Hemi: Suppose we should be heading back, eh?

The men drag the waka up to where the sand meets the grass, their wet toes leaving footprints in the warm coarseness of the sand. Matiu, setting a pace that is uncomfortably quick for you and Hemi, had no trouble hauling the small vessel. He couldn't help but laugh at you two, whom to his estimation had traded raw strength for pretty faces.

Matiu: It seems the both of you need more kai. I'd better let you have generous portions of this hāpuku.

Matiu cackles haughtily.

Hemi was unimpressed.

Hemi: Wait here. I'll go see what our other brothers are up to.

Hemi points to four men fishing on the reef. He begins jogging towards them.

Matiu grins at you. You lean against the waka, unable to hide your exhaustion. The tide is beginning to go out and the sky is beginning to dip into fushia. A breeze shuffles loose grains of sand against your skin, and as they sting your face you tasted the saltiness of the sea once again.

Matiu: I hope that made you feel better, brother.

You are lost in the moment, as you were before, watching Hemi run towards the silhouettes of the four men - three standing, casting lines into the ocean, and one sitting, dangling his legs over the rock; and then, in the same instance, it seems that Hemi is already running back - it was as if he was simultaneously leaving and returning. The strangeness of the moment, the instantaneous passing of time suggests to you something strange is happening.

Hemi: They haven't caught anything yet. They won't be coming back until they catch something.

Matiu: Useless. They've been at it all day. Then again, they don't have a tohunga with them.

Matiu: So Hemi, this Hāpuku is pretty big. You'd better show us that shortcut you found the other day.

Tāwhaki: There's a shortcut?

Hemi: It's not that much quicker, but it'll save Matiu from having to haul that fish up the hill.

Hemi leads you into a bush. It's wild, random and dense, and you wonder if it would've been easier to take the normal route.

Suddenly Matiu swings his mere to the back of your head. You tumble into the foliage, ejecting a trail of spit and blood from your mouth. Your fall is eerily noiseless, amounting to little more than a soft thump. As you lay motionless, blood oozes out of your wound and mingles with the dirt, forming a viscous deathbed. The brothers stand over you, gazing at you with cold contempt.

Hemi: Just another mortal man. A pity he drove us to this.

Matiu: Don't feel sorry for him. He disrespected our sister and paid no heed to our customs.

Hemi: I am just sorry he fell so easily.

Matiu crouches over you, looking for signs of life. He got close enough to allow the spreading blood to touch his toes. Your eyes are not shut, but they stare vacantly into the sky above. Your chest continues to heave convulsively, your breathing is jagged.

Matiu: We still have work to do.

Matiu looks over to Hemi. Hemi takes out his fishing spear. The spear is two meters long, carved out of ancient red rimu, and the tip is barbed like the tail of a stingray.

Hemi sighs as he lifts his spear. He thrusts it into you a couple of times.

Matiu: We better dig a hole to bury him in.

Hemi: Not here, in case someone finds him near all the blood.

Hemi points to a banyan tree. They walk over to it, leaving you to bleed to death.

A kāka flies towards you and begins rubbing his feathers in your blood, leaving him with red feathers. Soon after, a Takahē joins him, dipping her beak into your blood, also staining it red.

You try to recall a karakia to induce hemostasis and prevent more blood from escaping your wounds, but your memory fails you.

The brothers return and drag you by the ankles towards the hole they had just dug.

The hole resembles your wound: tender, glutinous. The exposed dirt seems to pulsate. The brothers dump you into the hole. When you hit the bottom, you slam your head and you fall unconscious.

Tāwhaki: Hinepiripiri...

Chapter Ten – Hinepiripiri

The sun is already beginning to go down. Hape and Kaituru return with one basket full of kahawai and tarakihi, and another filled with pipi and kina. It's not much, probably only enough to feed five people, but at least there was more to come.

“Where is Tāwhaki?” I ask.

“He's with Matiu and Hemi,” Hape says.

I begin by preparing the fish, using a wedged rock to gut it. I pull out the intestines with my hands. I sprinkle the fish with manuka wood chips and horopitu leaves, then I wrap them in harakeke and smoke it over a large fire. I put some kowhitithi (watercress) in a gourd and boil it. Hape and Kaituru collapse onto the ground, but I can see their gleeful faces salivating as their nostrils breathe in the aroma of the manuka and fish.

I hear Matiu's boisterous voice rumble into the village. I look in Matiu's direction, anticipating you to be with him, but I only see Hemi. Matiu is carrying a large hāpuku on his shoulders, and I wonder how he's able to speak so loudly even though he's obviously over encumbered. Hemi looks a little dejected. As they come closer I leave the fire and help them carry their load back to our whare.

“No need, Hinepiripiri,” Matiu says. “We'll take this to the chief.”

He avoids eye contact with me.

“Where is my husband?” I ask Matiu, but he ignores my question, waddling away trying to balance the fish on his shoulders. I walk past him and position myself in front of him, looking him directly in the eye.

“Where is my husband?”

“Oh, didn’t he come back with Hape and Kaituru?” he says evasively.

“No he didn’t. Where is he?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he’s with Tiari and Niko.” Again, he avoids eye contact with me.

It’s already dark and Tiari and Niko haven’t returned. I remove the smoked fish from the fire.

“Help yourselves”, I tell my brothers.

“What about you? Aren’t you going to eat too?” Hape says.

“I’ll eat when my husband comes back.”

After my brothers have finished eating, and after the cooked fish has become cold, Tiari and Niko emerge through the bush carrying torches, dragging a net behind them. They haul the net all the way to the fire and drop it. They fall to the ground, huffing and puffing. You are not among them.

“Where is my husband?”

“I thought he came back with Hape and Kaituru” Tiari says.

“He did not return with Hape and Kaituru, or with Hema and Matiu. So where is he?”

“I don’t know. We’re tired. Let us rest,” Niko says, closing his eyes.

“He must be looking for a way off the island then,” Hape says.

“He would have told me!”

“Don’t worry, if he’s not back by morning, we’ll go look for him,” Matiu says.

I burst into tears. I knew something was wrong when I saw the dejected look on Hema’s face. Now Hema has vanished, he didn’t even have dinner, and none of my other brothers will speak to me. I remove myself from their sight, running into the bush. I glance behind me to make sure no one is following me, but there isn’t much point. None of them seemed worried about you, I doubt they will care if I try to find him by myself.

I try to follow the path they took back to the fishing grounds. I can barely see where I'm going, but after a while my eyesight adjusts to the darkness. As I walk I recite a karakia to help me find you. Eventually I find a torch flickering in the middle of the bush. I walk towards it circumspectly, making sure there it's not a trap, but there doesn't seem to be anyone around, so I pick it up. Niko must've dropped it when he was carrying the net back to the village.

As soon as the torch is in my hands I hear the fluttering of wings above me. I shed light on the branches arching overhead and I find a Kākā tilting its head, pointing its beady eyes at me.

“Brrrr-roooo” it says.

It flies to another branch and I follow its flight with the torch, noticing its bright red feathers under its wings. As it perches itself on another branch, red droplets falling from its wings stain the branches and the ground. I inspect the little red stains, touching them with my finger. The substance is thick and viscous. It's blood.

“Brrrr-roooo” the Kākā says.

“Why is there blood on your wings?” I ask.

The Kākā tilts its head, then flies away, dripping a trail of blood on the bush floor. I can no longer see the bird, so I follow the trail of blood it leaves behind. I am led

deeper and deeper into the bush. It seems that I've lost track of the bird, but it calls out again. Using the torch, I notice it's above me.

“Do you know where Tāwhaki is? Can you take me to him?”

But the bird flies away, into the night sky, disappearing forever.

“Tāwhaki!” Tāwhaki!” I call out. I search for you everywhere, but there is nothing.

I hear a rustling in the grass. A Takahē pops out of the shrub, its beak stained red with blood. The blood drips onto the ground in front of it. It walks awkwardly to the right, bobbing its head with each stride. I follow it through the bush again. It walks slowly, but it eventually settles around an area that seems freshly dug up, pecking at the ground.

“Tāwhaki!”

I hear a faint murmur beneath my feet.

I dig out the earth using only my hands. The murmur gets louder as more dirt is vacated. I scoop out large packets of soil with my arms, tossing it to the side. It seems that I'm digging forever until the dirt is slightly moist and tinted to a dark brown. I scoop out more earth, and I suddenly feel soft flesh.

I wipe the dirt away and I see your face. Your eyes are closed. Your mouth is stuffed with dirt. You spit it out. Your breathing is frightening and irregular. I continue removing the dirt from your body, noticing cavities in your torso. It's horrifying but I push my shock aside. You continue to murmur, chanting a karakia, but I cannot distinguish your words through your mumbling.

"Husband, I am here."

You are unresponsive. You simply mutter under your breath.

I lift you up, carrying you in my arms. I try to step out of the hole, but it's too deep, so I slip back into it. You're much taller than me, but in my arms you curl up like an eel. Your body is lank, cold and heavy. I try not to think about dropping you. I put you down again and brush some dirt into the hole, forming a step. I try lifting you out again and it works, although you are writhing in pain.

As soon as I get you out of the hole you whimper. I can barely hear you even though the night is silent.

"Don't take me back to the village. Take me to Hinetuatai on the shore. She is not far from this forest."

I listen to exactly what you say. I wander through the bush following your general directions until I reach the shore. You point to an alcove, so I take you there, setting you down on the ground.

“My devoted wife, chop down a Rimu tree and set it on fire in front of me, so that I may be resuscitated”.

I reenter the bush armed with an adze. I search far and wide for a large Rimu tree. When I find one I immediately cut it down, chopping into logs. I carry the logs back to the alcove and set them on fire. Tāwhaki inhales a whiff of the smoke. I recite a karakia and pour some warm water over his wounds. I let the smoke fill with alcove and I stay with him all night.

In the morning a woman approaches us from the sea. She is beautiful with long dark green hair that wraps around her body like seaweed, but her eyes are unusual and grey.

Hinepiripiri: Who are you?

Hinetuatai: I am Tāwhaki’s wife. Who are you?

I look at you angrily even though you are still asleep. I redirect my anger towards the woman.

Hinepiripiri: I am his wife.

The woman smiles. Somehow her smile is disarming.

Hinetuatai: I apologize. I meant to say that I was his wife. But he moved on, and so did I. I’m Hinetuatai.

Hinepiripiri: I see. I'm Hinepiripiri. He never told me he had other wives.

Hinetuatai: When you look at him, does it surprise you?

Hinepiripiri: No, I suppose not.

Hinetuatai: Are you jealous of him?

Hinepiripiri: Not now. He is gravely injured.

Hinetuatai is shocked and immediately climbs over to you. She touches your forehead, inspecting your torso for your wounds.

Hinetuatai: When did this happen?

Hinepiripiri: Last night. Someone attacked him in the forest.

Hinetuatai scowls angrily.

Hinetuatai: Men from the village.

Hinepiripiri: I believe so.

Hinetuatai: I warned Tāwhaki about them.

Hinepiripiri: I warned him about many things, but he never listened to me.

Hinetuatai: Well, this is a lesson he'll unlikely forget.

You cough and struggle to get up. I offer you some water, Hinetuatai tries to help you sit up.

Tāwhaki: I was stupid not to listen to either of you. But all that's past now.

Hinepiripiri: Your wounds are still healing. Go back to sleep.

Tāwhaki: I'm feeling better, thanks to you. Hinetuatai, sorry to come in like this.

Hinetuatai: I told you not to go back to that village.

Tāwhaki: I know. But I need to go back again.

Hinepiripiri: Why? They'll kill you, whoever it is.

Tāwhaki: I need to know who. And why. And then I need to deal with them.

Hinetuatai: I know you will not listen to me again, so do what you please. I'm telling you now, they are all guilty.

Hinepiripiri: That's not true. There are some good people in the village.

Tāwhaki: Yes, Hinepiripiri is right. I need to know the truth, before judgement can be made.

Hinetuatai: And what if learning the truth kills you again?

Tāwhaki: The attempt on my life was made by cowards. Now that I have risen from the dead, they will be too afraid of me to try to kill me again.

Hinepiripiri: I should go with you.

Tāwhaki: No, I will appear more fearsome if I go alone. It will seem as if I brought myself back to life. Let me surprise them, then I will know the truth about what happened. Then I'll return here, and we'll decide what to do.

Hinetuatai: What makes you think they will let you go?

Tāwhaki: Because they will be too shocked and afraid to try anything. I will leave when their anxiety is still high, before their courage returns to them. That's my plan. Stay here until I return.

Hinepiripiri: I don't like this stupid plan. Why don't you recover here, with Hinetuatai, and let me investigate for you?

Tāwhaki: No. They will never reveal the truth to you. It is quicker if I go there myself and shock them into revealing what happened.

Chapter Eleven – Ea

You return to the village, though your wounds have not fully healed, and your mind cycles relentlessly through your recent traumatic experiences.

You walk down the accustomed paths between the whare, pens, and storehouses - buildings which once felt familiar now seem alien, even hostile. You hear the echoes of Tangaroa's taunts sneering at you as you wander through the village, expecting the Ponaturi to ambush you, an absurd notion since you killed them all. Every so often you check behind your back for foes, sensing eyes stalking you from within the huts.

Ever since the failed war against Tangaroa, this village has seemed silent, ghostly, distant. You know you do not belong here, but there are questions that demand to be answered.

You know that it was your wife's brothers who betrayed and attempted to murder you, but you suspect there are others to blame as well. You need to talk to the chief.

As you head towards the wharenui, a small crowd begins to assemble around you. You peer at the faces of the people and you notice that they seem astonished, even aghast, as if they are looking at a dead man. It's similar to how they looked at you when you first came to the village. They are behaving as you predicted.

The kuia that would yell at you tries to place her fingers in your wound. You smack her hand away and you watch her collapse to the ground, wailing. You look down at her in disdain. The assembly begins to irritate you, it almost feels as if you are being asphyxiated, so you rudely push them away.

Tāwhaki: Where is the chief?

You ask in a commanding tone, no longer apologetic, but the people say nothing.

Tāwhaki: Where is Matiu and Hema?

Again, your demands are met with silence, save for the quiet sobbing and bewildered gasping of the villagers.

You angrily move past the crowd, heading in a straight line towards the wharenuī. Your fear begins to evaporate as it is replaced with irritation and rage. You get closer to the wharenuī when you notice another kuia holding a familiar looking spear. It is in fact the spear that was used to kill you. You saunter up to her with disrespect dripping out of your mouth as your lips curl into a snarl.

Tāwhaki: Where did you get this weapon?

You bark. She frowns, meeting you with cold silence. She doesn't even acknowledge your presence. You try to yank the spear from her hand, but her grip is steadfast. You pull even harder, even going so far as to rip it from her. Your disdain for

the villagers is on full display, and you refuse to hide it even from an aged woman. Her seniority would make her tapu, but it no longer makes any difference to you. In your mind, she deserves contempt.

Tāwhaki: Whose is this?

You bark at her again.

Kuia: My grandson's, whom you killed.

She spits. Her voice trembles, not out of intimidation, but out of defiance. Her hatred is nothing but a reflection of yours.

Tāwhaki: I did not kill your grandson. This weapon was used to kill me!

You toss the spear in front of the kuia's feet, which incites the mob. An indignant man hurls an insult at you.

Man: You bastard!

You recite a short karakia to send a gust of wind out towards the villagers, which silences them and discourages them from getting closer to you.

You walk away in disgust, still looking for the chief. The wharenuī is not far from where you stand so you go there. Just as you are about to enter the large building, the chief appears at the entrance with a solemn look on his face.

Chief: Tāwhaki, no doubt you have questions for us.

Tāwhaki: You know what happened to me, don't you?

Chief: I know just from looking at the wounds on your body. I'm sorry this has happened to you.

Tāwhaki: Don't pretend to be my friend. This old woman was holding a spear which was used to kill me. She even admitted that it belongs to her. Meanwhile all these villagers look as if they've seen a kereru, and my wife's brothers, who tried to kill me, are nowhere to be found. Now, what can you tell me that might explain what's going on?

Chief: I can only tell you this- these people are not guilty of bringing harm to you. Not even that old kuia, whose spear was thrust into your torso.

Tāwhaki: More lies.

Chief: Hold on. It's true that they are angry at you, after what happened during the battle of Tangaroa. In fact, they hate you. They wanted to punish you.

Tāwhaki: I thought I was exonerated. You said so yourself.

Chief: I could not appease them. Many had lost husbands, sons, even wives and daughters. The battle took a heavy toll on us, and they were angry with me because they

felt that no one is being held accountable. I tried to reason with them. I tried to tell them that we set out to banish Tangaroa as a community. But they wouldn't accept my defense of you. In the end, they felt justified to punish you.

Tāwhaki: And you let this happen? You didn't bother to warn me?

Chief: No. In fact, I put the order through. I asked Matiu to hit you with my mere.

The chief brandishes his mere, waving it in front of you, shaking it. You recognize it as the other weapon that was used to kill you.

Tāwhaki: What a coward you are. Forgiving me and then betraying me the next day.

Chief: Understand this. If you had died, I would have become an even greater chief, with my mere soaked in the blood of a tohunga. The people would have their vengeance and life would go on.

Tāwhaki: Your plan failed. I'm still alive.

Chief: To my great shame. I don't know how you survived. Even now, as I observe your wounds, the hole in your torso, the gash on your head, I cannot believe that you are able to stand there and talk to me. Indeed, you have great powers Tāwhaki, but it was your arrogance which led you to believe that you could take on a god. That same arrogance destroyed my people.

Tāwhaki: I returned here on my knees, a broken man, bearing the full the weight of my guilt upon my shoulders. You had never seen me cry until then. At that moment, I did not seek forgiveness. I sought justice for the hubris which led to the deaths of hundreds of people. I was more than willing to accept any punishment you thought befitting, save for death, but you convinced me that no punishment was necessary. And then you put out an order to kill me the following day, when I had barely spoken to my wife. Was that your utu? Have you achieved ea? No, you behaved cowardly. And judging by that solemn look on your face, you probably know it.

Chief: The fault is mine, Tāwhaki. If you seek utu, then I offer you my life, but you must spare the villagers.

Tāwhaki: Are you joking? How can I live in this village anymore, when so many of you want to kill me? I doubt punishing you alone would do any good.

Chief: You've shown that your powers are too great to be subdued by mere humans. I very much doubt that these villagers will have the courage to bring harm to you again. So spare them. Punish me however you wish. You may even take my life.

Tāwhaki: I don't want your worthless life.

Chief: The life of a chief will bring you glory. I am already disgraced, Tāwhaki. I prefer to die by your hands than by one of these villagers. If you will not take my life, then I will take yours!

The chief swings his mere towards your face. You dodge it by ducking sideways, so he pulls the mere back and tries to swing it at you again. You recite a short karakia to turn your exhalations into gusts of wind. The next time the mere is swung in your direction, you breathe out, and a gust of wind blows the mere back towards the chief. You continue blowing air out of your nostrils, pushing the chief back with every gust. Eventually your breaths push him over. You wait for the chief to get up.

Chief: Tāwhaki, one of us must die. Your only option is to run away but you should know that we will pursue you forever. And if you return to your home, the people here will one day wage a war on your people, even if it means waiting for hundreds of years.

Tāwhaki: And what if I let you kill me?

Chief: Then your deeds will be forgotten, and no one will seek utu against your tribe.

Tāwhaki: Will you protect Hinepiripiri and the child she bears?

Chief: We will not bring harm to her or your child.

Tāwhaki: Then let me talk to her. I will consider my options.

Chief: Go now. I'm sorry Tāwhaki.

You blow some wind into the crowd, forming a gap which you escape through, and you run all the way back to Hinetuatai's cove.

Hinepiripiri waits for you there with Hinetuatai. You tell them what happened.

Hinepiripiri: What are you going to do?

Tāwhaki: They will hunt me down. Even if I leave this island, they may follow me. They may tell stories about me to their future generations, breeding warriors who will one day wage a war against my people. I cannot allow that to happen.

I cry.

Hinepiripiri: Maybe they will forget about you. Let's just hide from them. You and I can raise a family somewhere else.

Tāwhaki: My devoted wife, if I give myself to them they will let you return to the village. They will let you keep our son.

Hinepiripiri: Why should we deprive our child of a father? Besides, there is no guarantee they will keep their word.

Tāwhaki: You're right. It's madness to trust them now, after everything that's happened. There is only one option: to run and hide.

Hinetuatai: There is another way, if you are willing to try it.

Tāwhaki: At this point I'm willing to try anything.

Hinetuatai: Then consider this. My other lover is Tangaroa, your enemy. His hatred towards you and the villagers is immeasurable, however, he may be reasoned with.

Tāwhaki: How can he possibly reason with me? He is worse than the villagers.

Hinetuatai: He hates you greatly, that is true, but he has put aside differences before, for a price.

Tāwhaki: And what price would that I need to pay?

Hinetuatai: Hinepiripiri, who do you love in your village?

Hinepiripiri: I love many people there, but now my heart is sundered. There are few, if any, I can trust. Even my own brothers lied to me. Betraying me, because of their jealousy and hatred of Tāwhaki.

Hinetuatai: It is a serious question which requires deep thought, because what I propose may spell the end of the village.

Hinepiripiri: Many of the people I loved have passed on. Those that remain are now tarnished by guilt. If we have to end the lives of the villagers, to ensure the safety

of our family, then so be it. I don't say these words lightly. I don't want anyone to die.
I'd rather run forever, until their memories of us fade.

Tāwhaki: You are telling me to kill the entire village using Tangaroa's power?

Hinetuatai: Yes. He can send a tsunami to the village, but he will need a tohunga to grant him the power to wash over the domain of Tāne Mahuta and Papatūānuku.

Tāwhaki: Hinetuatai, how can we arrange this?

Hinetatai: I know him well. He has often made deals with others. Approach him humbly and offer the lives of the entire village in exchange for yours and Hinepiripiri's. He will honor the deal.

Tāwhaki: I know your heart, Hinetuatai. You have wanted nothing but revenge on the villagers for what they've done to your children. I suppose these children were also Tangaroa's, however, he was appeased by their offerings to him. I will consider what you say. Hinepiripiri, do you think this should be done?

Hinepiripiri: No, but I don't know what else to do. In a day or two they will find this place. Where will we run to then? I don't know.

Tāwhaki: There is no other choice. Hinetuatai, take me to Tangaroa.

Hinetuatai: Very well. Leave your wife in this alcove. She will be safe until you return. Then when you return, you must take her and climb the volcano, going as far as you comfortably can, to avoid the tsunami of Tangaroa. Now, let me take you to him.

You recite the karakia to turn Hinepiripiri invisible.

Tāwhaki: Wait here until we return. This invisibility karakia will hide you from the villagers if they manage to track us to this place. My love, it will all be over soon, and we will raise our family in the safety of my homeland.

You and Hinetuatai wade into the sea. Ikanui, now the size of a whale, opens his mouth.

Hinetuatai: Enter. He will protect you while you are inside him.

Tāwhaki: What about you?

Hinetuatai: I prefer to swim.

You enter the mouth of your son, ignoring the rank smell of his insides. You walk deeper into his cavity and sit against the wall of his mouth. He closes his mouth, and you enter a world of darkness. You sense movement as Ikanui turns to face the ocean. He accelerates, pushing into the sea. The sounds of the shore recede. You are probably underwater now, since you can no longer hear anything. You close your eyes. Your wounds still ache, the stress of the past few days is finally being registered by your body. You weep, feeling a wave of relief wash over you. It will all be over soon.

You don't even care if it means making a compromise with Tangaroa, as long as you can return home.

Your son, Ikanui, opens his mouth, a trickle of water streams in.

Hinetuatai: Tāwhaki, recite the karakia to let you breathe under water.

Tāwhaki: It only works temporarily.

Hinetuatai: That's okay. It will all be over soon.

You do as she says, just as the ocean gushes in, ejecting you out of Ikanui's mouth. You find yourself surrounded by pounamu in an underwater basin. You see the figure of a man in the centre of the basin, who you take to be Tangaroa. You swim down to meet him.

Tāwhaki: So this is your true form.

Tangaroa: No. Do you not see my tail? My forked tongue?

Tāwhaki: My mistake.

Tangaroa: Precisely. I embody a form that is essentially reptilian, but in the likeness of man, to remind you of where you come from. You consider yourselves dwellers of Tāne's domain, but you once belonged here. As do all who live in Tāne's forests. It is only my wish to bring you all back to me.

Tāwhaki: I intend to help you to that end, if you agree to help me and my wife travel to my homeland.

Tangaroa: That can be arranged.

Tāwhaki: But you must promise never to attack my people again.

Tangaroa: I cannot guarantee the safety of your people for all eternity. Perhaps a life for a life instead? For every island villager you help me kill, I will spare someone from your own village.

Tāwhaki: Including the ones you've already killed during the battle?

Tangaroa: No. Only the ones we kill from here on out.

Tāwhaki: Very well. What if I helped you kill other people, beyond the villagers at Motukairangi?

Tangaroa: Ah, perhaps I will have no need of you by then. Perhaps I will find another agent, one more desperate, less astute. There is no deal. After today, you and I are done.

Tāwhaki: As you say.

Tangaroa: Now, recite these words which will grant my waters access to the island of the villagers, and I will murder everyone there. Be sure to elevate yourself before my waters come, or I will kill you as well. Then, when it is done, leave the island with your wife. Your son will ensure you safe passage. He will then return to me. Go now.

You simply nod in acknowledgement, not even bothering to say a word. You return to your son's mouth. The water drains out as he takes you back to the shore.

Hinepiripiri is still exactly where you left her. Hinetuatai observes you from behind.

Tāwhaki: Tell me, was it always your plan to kill the villagers?

Hinetuatai: I've always hated them. You must realize by now that I would do anything to get my revenge. But I did not expect my wish to come true until I met you.

Tāwhaki: Have I been used?

Hinetuatai: Not entirely. It is hard to know for sure. Perhaps certain outcomes are inevitable, but not predictable. Now go. I am no longer to be associated with you. Your wife, Hinepiripiri, has you all to herself. Now head up the volcano as high as you can, then summon Tangaroa's tsunami. When it is done, Ikanui will take you back to your home.

You and I leave Hinetuatai's alcove. You look back at the woman who you were once infatuated with, but you only feel a strange coldness towards her. The passion that you shared hardly seems real now, and you begin to accept that I was the woman you were destined to be with. After all, I was the woman in your dreams. The idea that Hinetuatai was merely an agent of Tangaroa's is a prospect that you find disturbing. As you walk into the palm bushes you glance at Hinetuatai one last time. She smiles at you from afar, the same way she did when you first saw her. You smile back and then she disappears into the ocean.

Hinepiripiri: Did you love her?

Tāwhaki: Define what you mean by love.

Hinepiripiri: Did you prefer her?

Tāwhaki: Not particularly. She is the maiden of the ocean, not my wife.

Hinepiripiri: And your son?

Tāwhaki: He is my son, but he is more Tangaroa's son I suspect. The unnatural way he was born, and the time he saved me. I don't know. He doesn't need me the same way our child does.

Hinepiripiri: Speaking of our child, what shall we name him?

Tāwhaki: Wahieroa, after the log that you burned to bring me back to life.

You climb the feet of the dormant volcano, and after an hour of hiking you reach the halfway point. You begin reciting the karakia to allow Tangaroa's waters to enter the island. The sun disappears as clouds cover the land. You feel strong winds coming on.

Hinepiripiri: Are these winds caused by Tāwhirimātea?

Tāwhaki: No, they are merely reactions of Tangaroa's forces.

You see a colossal wave approach the island, followed by several other colossal waves. They eat up the fishing boats dotted in the distance. You see the waves pounding the shore, sending sheets of water deeper and deeper into the island. The villagers try to scramble further inland, others even try to enter the bush which leads to the mountain. But the colossal waves come in fast and in greater successions. You see debris floating, rushing past trees. People are being picked up. The water assaults the village for days, ripping trees out of their roots, drowning everyone and everything. During those days some of the villagers tried to ascend the volcano, but they too were swallowed by Tangaroa's waters. Those who could swim eventually succumbed to fatigue and drowned.

A week passes before the water recedes. You step down the volcano and enter the wasted remains of the island. Seagulls and birds are pecking at the corpses dotted about. You head to the shore and wait for Ikanui to return.

I cried all throughout the week and you tried your best to comfort me. Even though what you did was necessary for your survival, it still felt like a crime against

your very humanity. Perhaps these people deserved to die, but it would've felt better if they'd died at your own hands. You can't shake off the feeling that you've betrayed a fundamental part of yourself. Your deeds lay heavily on your mind. You look towards me for comfort, but I avert your gaze, still weeping for all the lives that were lost. You gain a sense of security, having destroyed your enemies, but you also feel compromised.

Ikanui arrives and you enter his mouth again, this time with me.

As you lie against the wall of your son's mouth I rest my head on your shoulder. You try to talk to me but I merely whimper. You stroke my cheek gently and you begin to weep. It seems that the woman you've dreamed about has become a different person, after seeing all the things that you've done. When you look into my eyes you see a woman who has lost nearly everything that has meant something to her.

You try your best to reassure me that you can make my life better, but at the back of your mind you know it's not possible.

Was it your fault that these things happened? You want to pin your guilt on Hinetuatai. Somehow, you think it's easier for you to use her as a scapegoat. She manipulated you, didn't she?

You close your eyes.

When you wake up I am gone. You wonder if you'll see me again. You wonder if your child will seek you out. Or do you? Maybe you don't even care. Maybe you just go back to your village and try again.

APPENDIX B

Tāwhaki Part Two - Tangotango

Chapter One – Opening

I see you writhing through sleepless nights, trying to forget what had transpired last year. Memories of your encounter with Tangaroa continue to haunt you, turning you into a shell of the proud man that you once were.

Hinepiripiri left you. Perhaps it's more accurate to say that you let her leave. I can understand that. But to me, a mere onlooker, none of it was your fault.

In fact, I admire you. You avenged the death of your father. You made peace with Tangaroa in order to save your family.

I have to admit, and I feel a bit silly saying this, you are beautiful to me Tāwhaki.

I want to see you one day.

Oh, well, maybe I've said enough for now. Sleep tight Tāwhaki. There are people out there who still believe in you.

You awake in your father's wharenuī. The carvings on the ceiling are slightly different, with the original ones being burned down by the Ponaturi. You brush your

fingers over your torso and you feel a layer of scar tissue cover where your wounds are. You slip the blanket off and crawl through the door.

Men are carving new panels in some tōtara logs. They nod at you as you walk past them.

“Morning brother.”

[This part of the game is open world. It needs to be shown that Tāwhaki is no longer interested in fulfilling the prophecy, due to his misanthropy. However, he may interact with other characters, some of whom will have quests for Tāwhaki to compete. After one quest completed Tāwhaki will have a dream about Tangotango. After two quests she will sleep with him. After three quests she will reveal herself to him, because she will be pregnant. He will ask her to marry him. This starts off the main story.]

You fall asleep and you dream again of the woman. You thought she was Hinepiripiri, but it seems like an entirely different person now. She has hair which changes colour and length, her eyes tint differently depending on the angle in which you stare at them, and her skin changes pigment from pale white to brown to ebony. Who is this woman?

She whispers in your ears, appearing by your side, stroking your hair with her fingers. You cradle her face in your palms.

Tāwhaki: Who are you?

Tangotango: My name is Tangotango. I come from far away.

Tāwhaki: Do you know who I am?

Tangotango: Of course. I've observed you from afar. Your glorious deeds are well known throughout the higher realms.

Tāwhaki: My ancestors come from the higher realms... Is my father there too?

Tangotango: Yes, yes he is.

Tāwhaki: Did he send a wife for me? Is that who you are?

Tangotango: Perhaps.

She cradles you, and you pull her in...

The dream seems fleeting. It changes with each breath. One moment you're surrounded by the shore, another you're in the depths of space.

You feel the rays of dawn stinging your skin, and the woman recedes into the air, disappearing.

You wake, and you find nothing. There is nobody there. What you experienced was merely a dream. You try looking for the woman, but all you see is the bush. She

seems familiar, like the woman in your dreams from long ago, before you ventured out across the sea. At the time you thought the woman in your dreams was Hinepiripiri. But now you're not sure. You pine for her - you long to be with Hinepiripiri again. But you suddenly reject these feelings, wincing as you cut them off.

You walk back to the village. You find Karihi building another whare. It's the seventh he's built in a row this week, although his buildings aren't that good.

Then again, you haven't done anything, so you decide not to vocalize your critique.

You find a boy sulking by the river. You feel like talking to him, mainly because you have nothing better to do.

Tāwhaki: Eh tama, how are you?

The boy barely acknowledges you as he shies away, staring gloomily into the river. He is fiddling with some toetoe, tossing its strands into the water.

Normally you'd move on, but you feel drawn to this kid. You quietly recite a short karakia which produces fog over the river.

The mist rises so high that the boy can't help but notice it. His eyes bug out. He looks up at you.

You reverse the karakia and the mist disappears. You point to the river, which has returned to its normal state. The boy looks back.

Tāwhaki: Want to see another trick?

Boy: No.

Tāwhaki: No tricks then. I can do more than that.

Boy: Can you raise the dead?

Tāwhaki: Ah, I'm afraid not.

The boy retreats into his sullenness again. His rudeness begins to annoy you.

Tāwhaki: Loser.

You leave the boy where he is. A small rock hits you on the back of your neck. You check behind you, and you see the boy scampering off.

Tāwhaki: Brat.

You mutter. You figure it's better to leave him be. You don't want to look like a grumpy old man in front of everybody else.

You go about your day, but you come across the boy again. He's crying, and rather than gloat over his misery, you feel a pang of pity for him.

Tāwhaki: Tama, I'm sorry about what happened before. What's going on with you? What's the problem?

The boy ignores you, trying to hide his face beneath his arms.

You place your hand on his back.

Tāwhaki: If there's anything you need, just come to me, or one of the elders. We're always here for you, even if you think we're not.

You get up and turn to leave.

Boy: Wait. You're a tohunga right? That means you know about the spirit world.

Tāwhaki: I am a tohunga...

Suddenly something clicks in your head.

Tāwhaki: But the spirit world only speaks to me in dreams and visions. If there's someone you want to speak to, I can't guarantee a connection.

Boy: That's okay. They cannot speak anyway. I had a kurī.

Tāwhaki: A dog? You want to know what happened to your beloved pet?

Boy: Why is your tone so critical?

Tāwhaki: It's not. I'm sorry, what did you want to know?

Boy: He was my friend for seven years. I just want to know how he is doing. I want him to know I am here for him.

Tāwhaki: You'll always be with him. The wairua persists long after death. Everything that lives has a wairua. Wairua doesn't need a physical form but expresses itself that way from time to time. Do you not feel him sleep next to you when you go to bed? Doesn't he visit you in his dreams? Don't you hear him barking when you walk in the forest?

The boy looks even more despondent.

Boy: I do. All those things happen to me. But I don't know if they're real.

Tāwhaki: Sometimes you have to believe in things you cannot see. Our best prophets and visionaries are blind because they don't let sight get in the way of seeing. Of knowing. I can teach you to trust what your wairua tells you, and then you will see your dog more vividly and more often. Then you'll know that he still exists, albeit in a different form. I know what you feel. I lost my father, but I know he is still around. Nobody leaves their loved ones, they are simply hidden from them by Hine-nui-te-po.

Somehow, we associate existence with the ability to sense or see something. I do not think that way. I cannot, otherwise I lose my power as a tohunga.

Chapter Two – Whakamā

I lay next to you again this night, stroking your back, trying to calm your troubled mind. You feel guilty about something. You feel as if you've turned your back on humanity. You know they need you. Cyclones are ravaging villages up and down the country, the ocean is swallowing islands whole. The land is changing, the time of the Māori is coming to an end.

You welcome my embrace, settling into my warmth like a puppy. It brings a smile to my face. I kiss you lightly and you pull me in with your strong arms. I let myself collapse under your strength.

There's something growing inside me.

I wanted to tell you. Should I stay here with you?

Yes, you say in your sleep.

I will stay.

You wake next to me in the blue dawn.

Tāwhaki: There you are.

You say in amazement.

You brush your fingers through my hair, then run them down my shoulders and arms, inspecting me, trying to check that I'm not a figment of your imagination.

Tāwhaki: All this time I thought I was dreaming.

Tangotango: I was not sure how you'd react if you saw me.

Tāwhaki: How can you not be certain I wouldn't fall in love with you immediately? You are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

I feel my cheeks tinge with redness. You take my hand delicately and I let it rest in your palms like a bird on a branch of a kauri. Your eyes droop, not with tiredness, but in ecstasy as you catch a whiff of my fragrance, sweet gentle and slightly piquant.

Tāwhaki: Where are you from? How can such beauty live on earth?

Tangotango: Do you think I am too strange and beautiful for this world?

Tāwhaki: Ethereal is the word. Even now your skin changes colour. In my dreams your form was never the same, but somehow, I always knew it was you. Each night a different looking woman would speak to me, but it was always you.

Tangotango: Your reasoning is correct, handsome Tāwhaki. I come from the higher realms, but nobody sent me here. I chose to come here myself because I wanted to see the famous Tāwhaki for myself. Your deeds are well known.

Tāwhaki: I must be renowned as a failure.

Tangotango: A failure? Look at how beautiful you are - you are the most handsome man in all the islands. And what about your father? You avenged him nobly.

Tāwhaki: Thank you, sweet Tangotango. It has been a long time since I heard kind words.

Tangotango: As for my appearance, you should know by now that from where I come from, the people there aren't limited to one type of body. We are shapeshifters.

Tāwhaki: I understand. Some of my ancestors come from the same place, or near enough to it.

Tangotango: Then you may have that power too. But you are already a fine man in appearance, you have no need to change your it.

Tāwhaki: What shall we do now?

Tangotango: We have spent many nights together. So enraptured was I that I lost track of time, and now new life grows within.

Tāwhaki: I have another child?

Tangotango: Yes, but I don't know if it is to be a boy or a girl.

Tāwhaki: I think we should get married then.

Tangotango: Yes, of course, but I have one thing to ask of you. If our child is a boy, then I will clean after it. If it is a girl, then you must clean after it.

Tāwhaki: Yes, why not. Is there anything else?

Tangotango: Just be careful with our child.

Tāwhaki: Of course. I will love our child as much as I love you.

I stay with you through the following months as we build a new house for our family. I meet your mother, brother and sister, all of whom took me in congenially. I remember when your mother held my face in her hands, dazzled by my unearthly appearance.

I would notice some of the other men in the village trying to peek at me from the corner of their eyes. Some would kindly brush away the dirt in front of me as I was walking.

We spent many days laughing together and many nights making love. One night while I was brushing your hair you asked about my home.

Tāwhaki: Will I be able to go there one day?

Tangotango: It's possible, but because you have been here for so long, I cannot take you there myself. Your connection to that place has been severed. You could say that your umbilical cord has been snipped off, while mine is still connected to the higher realm.

Tāwhaki: That's why you can travel between the two realms so easily.

Tangotango: Yes, but conversely, I cannot stay here for too long without going back periodically.

Tāwhaki: Why not?

Tangotango: I suffocate in this place of cruelty and despair.

Tāwhaki: The tohunga try to keep the wairua flowing through the land. They try to keep the people connected to their hau.

Tangotango: I know. I can stay longer in places that are tapu, and places that have been blessed, like your home. It is a bit like humans diving in to the ocean. Even though you came from the ocean, you are so evolved that you can only last underwater for a limited time - and the deepest parts of the ocean are too deadly to you, because the pressure is too great. That's what it's like for me, I suppose.

Tāwhaki: It is like that for me also, my love. I do not belong here.

Tangotango: But it is your home.

Tāwhaki: My home is with you now. This place cannot offer me anything. I am too good for it. The people are miserable, greedy and petty. I cannot stand it. I want to leave.

You silence me with your words, as I did not know how much you hated humanity. As I finish brushing your hair I kiss your cheek.

Tangotango: You may hate this place now, but in time you'll forget about the experiences which made you feel this way. If this place was so wretched I wouldn't have bothered to come down to meet you, but I am here now. After all, our child does whakapapa back to this land.

Tāwhaki: No she doesn't. I whakapapa back to the higher realms.

Tangotango: Wasn't your grandfather from this world?

Tāwhaki: Ah, yes he was. Kaitangata was his name. I never met him.

Tāwhaki: Tangotango, how do I get to the higher realms? Tell me, I want to go there one day. My father is from a lower part of the higher realms, and my mother is from an even higher place.

Tangotango: Why don't you ask your mother?

Tāwhaki: I already have, but she is reluctant to tell me, perhaps because she doesn't want me to leave home, now that my father is dead. Or perhaps because she is afraid I may perish during the ascent.

Tangotango: The only way is to ascend the sacred vines which stretch to the stars.

Tāwhaki: And where is this vine??

Tangotango: I don't know. It is never in one location. It seems to be in a different place for each person.

Tāwhaki: How is that possible?

Tangotango: It always grows in the place most dangerous to the individual. Years ago my ancestors climbed the vines. They attained the right to live in the higher realms, and their children were allowed to stay there. But many of them perished as well. Sometimes there is no vine. Sometimes there is kelp, and you have to dive under the sea. Sometimes you have to travel for decades on the open ocean, looking for Hawaiki, thus the passage is to be found on an island. There are many variations of the passage. But don't concern yourself with it. I will stay here with you. The journey to my home is too dangerous for you.

Tāwhaki: Then I will stay here, as long as you never leave me.

I smile down at you.

Tangotango: I won't.

Months later I give birth to a daughter. You cradle her in your arms for a while and then you give her to me. You take the placenta and bury it in an appropriate place. When you return I have fallen asleep with our baby on my chest. You take our daughter and wash her and then you set her down next to me. You watch over us for a while and then you fall asleep.

The next day your sister visits us with some kai ready for us to eat for breakfast. I am still lethargic, so you bring the food to me and feed some of it to me.

As the day progresses the baby is coming in and out of sleep. I let her suck from my breasts while you prepare another meal. Night comes quickly, and you nourish me with fernroot and watercress. You keep a fire burning in the whare to keep us warm throughout the night.

The following day I feel like my normal self again. I take you aside.

Tangotango: My husband, you've done much for us for the past two days, and I appreciate you what you've done. But do you remember the promise you made when we first met?

Tāwhaki: I promised to clean after our child if it's a girl.

Tangotango: I've been cleaning after her for the past two days. But now that I'm able to take care of some of the other duties such as cooking and preparing the fire, I was hoping you'd make do on your promise to me.

Tāwhaki: Of course, the next time she needs to be cleaned I will take care of it.

Hours pass while the baby sleeps. I am filleting a fish that Karihi caught for us. I smell the poo emanating from the baby's bed. She begins to cry. I am about to call out your name when you appear in the doorway.

Tāwhaki: Is it time?

I nod.

You head to the baby and pick her up. Arahuta becomes quiet in your arms, but some of her poo drips onto your leg, and you chuck her down in disgust.

Tāwhaki: What the hell is this rank smell?

The baby lands on the pillow, but she is shocked by the fall and begins to cry. You pick up a leaf and wipe the excrement off your leg, but you gag and storm out the whare.

Tāwhaki: What a stink baby!

I hear you coughing and moaning outside.

Tāwhaki: I can't do this. The smell is too bad.

You mutter to yourself.

I tend to our child, who you left to roll around in her own excrement. I wipe off the poo with some leaves and take the bedding outside, throwing it into the bush. I then collect Arahuta and dip her in the warm water, cleaning her up as you stand apart, watching us foolishly. You scratch your head and blink.

I wash the child three times to ensure she is nice and clean.

Tāwhaki: Okay Tangotango, I can take care of her now.

I glare at you angrily.

Tangotango: The hard work is already done. You just stood there uselessly.

Tāwhaki: I was surprised by the smell, that's all.

I pick up our daughter gently and walk outside, saying nothing, barely acknowledging you. But as I cradle the child in my arms, looking forlornly into our daughter's big trustful eyes, I could no longer hide my disappointment in you. The man whom I admired from afar and naively married, believing all the stories I heard about his heroic deeds, seemed entirely devoid of grace. I instinctively felt that your impudence would tie you, and all those around you, to a dismal destiny.

You followed me outside, a sudden look of concern on your face. You reach out to grab my shoulder.

Tāwhaki: My wife, where are you going with our child?

I scowl, then, turning to face you, I change my expression to one of contempt.

Tangotango: I'm going to a place where your rude words will never do violence to us.

Tāwhaki: My love, those words slipped out of my lips before my sense could catch them.

Tangotango: That shortcoming I might expect from an ordinary bastard. Aren't you a famous tohunga? An orator whose gift with words can move the ocean? And yet you cannot even blunt your tongue in front of our child.

Tāwhaki: I made a stupid mistake, but don't be angry with me. Everyone falters.

Tangotango: I gave you this child, a precious gift, but you treated her with disdain.

Tāwhaki: She is precious to me as well. Do not feel so whakamā, my wife. I will not make the same mistake again.

I shook my head and averted your gaze. I put my foot up on the parapet on the veranda and begin to climb the pou.

Tangotango: You all say, “Never again”. But not even you can change yourself by the mere utterance of a promise, as powerful as your words may be. If I naively believe what you say, you will never respect me, you will always consider me a fool. So farewell. Live with the hurt you have caused me. Words uttered are actions, and actions create destiny.

As I said this I was already walking on top of the gables, heading towards the tekoteko, climbing up with one arm while holding our daughter in the other. Te atarau (the moonlight) douses me in clover-lime radiance, the pohutukawa tumble down the cliff’s edge towards the lapping waves, and the ancient moon is buoyed in an endless night sky.

Tāwhaki: My love, come back! I’m sorry for hurting you with my words. Stay here. Please do not go. How can you leave me like this, with nothing at all? What cruel fate would you consign me to, where the punishment doesn’t match the crime?

Tangotango: I will leave you with a parting gift then. Do not hold on to the loose vines, even though loose vines are easier to reach. Loose vines and careless words alike dangle one over an abyss. Only a fool would reach for them. Instead, seek the main vine. Farewell.

A zephyr stirs the nikau canopy above you, a faint breath brushes against your forearm. I vanish as softly as a dream, leaving a trace of kaihua (NZ native Jasmine) behind. But that vanishes too, and you are left with nothing but the long still night.

Chapter Three – The Journey Begins

Even though I've returned home, leaving you behind, I continue to watch over you, because you are my husband and the father of my daughter. I never wanted to leave you, but something within me said that I had to. Was it too extreme? No, it was a necessity. Tāwhaki, you could not even fulfil the most basic of promises, which any person can do. What does that say about you?

The nightmares return. Hinepiripiri is on your mind this time. You're thinking about your son Wahieroa. You want to reunite with them, but they're gone. Impossible to find. You've been deserted twice. It must be familiar to you now, the loneliness, the nothingness, Te Pō.

You hide yourself from your neighbours. You smash Tāne's trees without paying due respect. You sleep with easy women in our house and then toss them aside the next day. Your brother tries to hold a normal conversation with you, but you avoid him because you are whakamā.

You've gone back to being the shell of a man you were before I met you, only this time I will not comfort you in your dreams. You'll be given over to Hine-nui-te-po, the goddess of death, as she plants visions of your mortality into your mind.

I see your nightmares, but they don't move me. I'm not disturbed. I don't feel pity for you. I merely watch as if you are an animal being studied.

My daughter is growing fast. I have my slaves clean after her. I could send you a vision of her while you sleep, but I won't.

I hear your cries and I see your grief. You didn't even weep this much for your own father. The tears form caverns, literal caves where bats and insects begin to infest. In time, Māori will bury their dead there.

As the weeks pass your grief doesn't subside and I must confess, I begin to feel sorry for you.

But if you think that I left you for some trifling reason, then you're wrong.

There's a way back. Only the worthy make it through.

One day Karihi catches you by surprise while you are walking through the forest. He's cleverer than you think. He's been watching you.

Karihi: Tāwhaki! Stop hiding from me.

You continue to walk, pretending not to hear him. He runs up to you and grabs your arm.

Karihi: Brother, this is ridiculous. You've been moping around for weeks, ignoring everybody. We've let you have some space to yourself, but enough is enough. Come back to us.

You don't even look at your brother. You shake him off and continue to slumber onward.

Karihi: Your wife is gone. What are you going to do? Just mope around like a loser? Why don't you go find her?

You stop walking. You shrug.

Tāwhaki: Where can I find her?

Karihi: Didn't you say she came from the higher realms? Why don't we go there and find her?

Tāwhaki: I don't know how to get there. Can you fly brother?

Karihi: Tāwhaki! Have you forgotten already? Wasn't it your destiny to ascend to the higher realms anyway? Remember what our father told us. We must seek out Whaitiri.

With that realization you begin to waken from your slumber.

Tāwhaki: If she is still alive.

Karihi: We won't know until we find out.

Tāwhaki: Will you help me, brother?

Karihi: Of course I will. Seeing you like this is no good for me either. When you were with Tangotango you looked so happy.

Tāwhaki: I was. She was divine, and I was looking forward to raising a child with her. But what if she leaves me again?

Karihi: What kind of fool would leave you twice?

Tāwhaki: It doesn't take much to offend her.

Karihi: Brother, don't worry about that now. By the time she has been reunited with you, she would have forgiven you, and perhaps be as understanding of your imperfections as I am. Now can I get a hug?

Karihi opens his arms wide to embrace you. You embrace him, then hongī. You suddenly burst into tears.

Tāwhaki: I'm lucky to have you as my brother.

Karihi: Yeah, you should be.

You and Karihi head back to the village to talk to Pūpūmai, your sister, about the whereabouts of Whaitiri.

Pūpūmai: As I told you fellas before, Whaitiri was last seen near the forest of Kohukohunui, where she was driven out of the village of Te Kao. If I were you I'd go to Te Kao and ask the people who live there where she might be. But don't tell them you are her grandson, otherwise they'll think you're a cannibal too.

Tāwhaki: We'll figure something out.

Urutonga: I wish that your wife hadn't driven you to this Tāwhaki. I know all about the climb. It is fraught with peril. I've already lost a husband, I can't bear to lose one of my sons.

Tāwhaki: Mother, I must prove myself worthy to my wife by climbing the vines. I love her deeply, so much so that I'm willing to risk my life for her. Besides, our father is not completely gone.

Urutonga: That's true, but he's no longer here with me, and I doubt you'll find him in the higher realms. I haven't gone back there, so I won't know for sure. I prefer to stay here with my children. Even a moment in the higher realms feels like an eternity.

Karihi: Have faith in us, mother. I will help Tāwhaki reunite with his family because it's important for me to see him happy again. I also hope to find our father in the higher realms, even though you doubt he will be there.

Urutonga: I'm proud of you both. If only your father hadn't filled your heads with that prophecy nonsense, maybe you wouldn't have gone away to that dumb island and maybe he'd still be here. Anyway, that time has passed. Come my children, let us

embrace before you set out on your journey. And Tāwhaki, when you find your wife, show a little coldness towards her. However offended she may be, however offensive you were to her, there is no reason to abandon a husband and deprive her daughter from having a father. Then again, I know the women from the higher realms, since I'm one of them! They aren't used to human imperfections, so I can understand that. But if they were so perfect themselves, they get over it. Now come here. I'm going to miss you both.

You join your siblings in embracing your mother.

Urutonga: The both of you had better come back.

Karihi: We will, mother.

You and Karihi set forth for Te Kao, which takes you through a dense forest beneath the mountainous region. The forest of Kohukohunui is thick with mist. The mist holds secrets, whispers of forgotten races such as the red headed Patupaiarehe who lived in the higher mountains and would sometimes descend into the forest and encounter local Māori. You've heard of their fair skin and the haunting melodies they play on beautifully foreign instruments. You remember legends of other races, the Turehu, people from the underworld. There seems to be a parallel between you and Mataora, the man who followed his wife, Niwareka, into the underworld after he beat her. But I didn't beat my wife, you tell yourself, so why do I have to go on this arduous and dangerous journey?

I am spirit, Tāwhaki, and you are a Tohunga. I cannot be harmed by an adze, but I can be easily wounded by a moment of thoughtlessness.

And so can my daughter.

Think on that as you are shrouded by these mists. What are you to these trees here? Imagine what stories they have to tell. What if you decided to turn back now and return home, what would these trees have to say about you? You know they are watching. Would you go down in history as Tāwhaki the giver-upper? And if you press on, will they call you a hero?

These forests are a nexus of phenomena stranger than your cannibalistic grandmother.

The forest is cold and seems to drain you and Karihi of the vigor that you sought out with.

Karihi: How can anyone live here?

Tāwhaki: Ae, it's too peculiar.

Karihi: It's probably inhabited by a taniwaha.

Tāwhaki: Or something stranger.

Your pace slows, the both of you deciding to tread more carefully. An unusual decision considering how loud the mist seems to be, like a cacophony of ghosts. After a while you hear the grumbling of a moa. You perk your head in the direction of the noise and you glimpse the silhouette of its trunk like neck.

Not long after, you come across some hunters in the forest. Their leader approaches you with suspicion.

Hunter Leader: What are you doing here? This isn't your land.

Tāwhaki: We are just passing through, e hoa. We're going to Te Kūmara.

Hunter Leader: That's our village. What business do you have there?

Tāwhaki: We're looking for a cannibal witch known as Whaitiri.

You grin darkly. The Hunter looks at you quizzically.

Hunter Leader: I don't know who that is. Nor do I know of any cannibals. However, you find all kinds of weirdos in these lands. Someone in the village might know. I trust you know the way.

Tāwhaki: Yes, we are following the river, or at least the sound of the river that runs through a gorge.

Hunter Leader: Correct. Now, maybe you can help us. Did you see a moa on your way?

Tāwhaki: Yes we did. Why don't you let us help you catch it? My brother and I are skilled tohunga. We know a few karakia to make you noiseless and invisible.

Hunter Leader: Really? We've been tracking that thing for hours. You know our ancestors would burn forests down just to round up a few of these birds, but we can no longer do that. These forests have become tapu. Tāne Mahuta warned that he would destroy us if we carelessly burned his forests.

Karihi: You won't need any fire if you've got us with you.

You help the hunters track and kill the moa. They offer you some moa meat, and you consume it greedily. Then you are on your way, walking through the forest again.

Eventually you enter a clearing. There are crops of kūmara and taro, and a river running between them. The river passes by a fortified village with palisade walls.

Karihi: That's definitely a Māori village.

Tāwhaki: Yeah, it looks normal. I was concerned we'd stumble into the territory of some strange race.

You and Karihi walk through the fields in the broad daylight, expecting a warrior to come and check you out. As you near the gates of the pa a man of about

Karihi's age, clean shaven and bare chested, prances out of the gate twirling his taiaha. He grunts as he spins his weapon, kicking up dirt towards his behind, poking his tongue out.

Warrior: Why are you here?

Tāwhaki: We are looking for Whaitiri.

Warrior: Who are you?

Tāwhaki: I am Tāwhaki, son of Hema, and this is my younger brother Karihi.

You place a fern leaf before you. The warrior inspects it, crouches down, and then whisks it away with his hand. He grunts as he prances back to the gate.

You are not aware of the protocol here. Generally waiting for the welcoming party at the gate is the right thing to do, so you wait, not wanting to upset anybody. After a while an elderly couple walk towards the gate.

Koropu: Haere mai, come in. I am Koropu.

Whaiuru: Kia ora, I'm Whaiuru.

You hongi the old man and kiss the old woman on the cheek. They walk you in then lead you to the hangi pit.

Whaiuru: You must be hungry, walking all that way from Maraetai.

Karihi: We had some moa on the way here, but I wouldn't mind some more food.

Chapter Four – Tongameha

Whaiuru: I know where you come from. Yes, I know your father Hema. And I know who his parents were. So, Tāwhaki and Karihi, I know you are the grandsons of a strange sort of person! But don't worry, I'll keep your identity to myself.

Korotu: Well it'd be nice if you told me something.

Whaiuru: I'll tell you later.

You and Karihi eat their food even though you're already full.

Tāwhaki: You probably shouldn't have told them we'd already eaten.

Karihi: It doesn't matter. I'm hungry.

After a good meal you approach the older man, Korotu, and ask him about Whaitiri.

Korotu: Of course, I know that woman. She was here a few years ago, speaking her nonsense, frightening the other villagers. I figured she would get kicked out, and I was right, although from what I can recall, she never brought harm to anyone.

Tāwhaki: Do you know where she went?

Korotu: I do, but tell me this - why do you seek her?

Tāwhaki: She possesses knowledge that I require. I am looking for a special vine which extends towards the sky.

Korotu: Ah, I know nothing of that sort. She was not human, so I suppose she would have some peculiar knowledge. And when I say she was not human, I mean she came from the sky. She had strange powers of some description.

Karihi: Did you find out why she came here?

Korotu: No, not really.

Whaiuru: Well I know. After her husband left her she lingered around here for a while. Actually, she was probably from around this area.

Tāwhaki: That makes sense. I've been told she knows where the sacred vine is. My best guess is it'll be around here, where the land is strange and other races converge.

Whaiuru: Many strange people come here. And many strange people are born here. Whaitiri probably feels at home in this land. It is us who are the invaders.

Korotu: I've lived in this village my whole life. I don't consider myself an invader.

Whaiuru: Well, my dear, I am much older than you, so I know a few things that you don't. The people here do not really belong here. We were driven out of our settlements by other tribes, but that doesn't matter anymore. The tangata whenua of the forest don't seem to mind. And we observe the tikanga of the area, cautious to never overhunt, permitting ourselves from burning the trees. And when the strange races come our way, we don't disturb them. And thus, we are allowed to stay here.

Karihi: So if Whaitiri is tangata whenua, why did you kick her out?

Whaiuru: It is as Korotu says. Some part of her is inhuman and wicked. The younger generations didn't understand her. Even Korotu doesn't understand her. But I do. Sadly, there isn't much I could've done. She had to leave.

Tāwhaki: Now, you should already know the next obvious question I'm about to ask.

Whaiuru: Yes, where did she go? I sort of know, well. I have a guess. She has certain needs as a cannibal. But it's hard for a blind hunter to catch any prey, unless the prey couldn't move.

Korotu shivers and whimpers.

Whaiuru: Far from here there is a fortress at the foot of the mountains. It looks manmade, but it's not. It's entirely natural. There are poor souls littered all about that fortress, trapped in their bodies, unable to move. They have been petrified by the magic of the monster who lives there, whose name is Tongameha.

Tāwhaki: Turned to stone?

Whaiuru: No, worse. They are still conscious, but they are unable to move. They are trapped within their minds, within their deepest nightmares, within their shame. It is like they are experiencing an extreme form of whakamā.

Korotu: I have walked past that fortress once before. It is an ominous place. I was warned not to look at it. Nonetheless I saw all the trapped people there.

Karihi: Why doesn't anyone rescue them?

Korotu: It's too dangerous. We are too cowardly. It's said that when you try to touch one of the petrified persons you also get pulled into their madness. I don't know. I wouldn't want to find out if that's true.

Tāwhaki: I understand that there would be many people for Whaitiri to feast on, but wouldn't that place also be dangerous for her?

Whaiuru: You only get petrified if you see the fortress. Whaitiri is blind. It is the perfect setup for her.

Tāwhaki: Ah. Your theory seems plausible to me.

Karihi: Ae, but how are we supposed to find her in a place like that?

Whaiuru: I don't know the answer to that.

Korotu: I hope you're not going there alone.

Tāwhaki: We have no choice.

Korotu: All for some mysterious vine? What's the value of such a vine?

Tāwhaki: It's not the vine I want. The vine will take me to the higher realms.

Korotu laughs in disbelief.

Korotu: This story just gets crazier and crazier. So you want to go to the doomed fortress of Tongameha to find a crazy old woman who will show you a magical vine that will take you to the higher realms? And why would you go to the higher realms?

Tāwhaki: To be reunited with my family.

Korotu: Ah, I see now. I'm sorry for laughing at you. I have lost many of my own family, and I long for them. If I knew of a way to see them again I would visit them. But it's too late now. I'm old, I'll be joining them soon enough.

Whaiuru: Ae, you will, old Korotu. But I doubt you will live to be my age.

Whaiuru cackled, and Korotu joined in the laughter.

Tāwhaki: I thank you both for your hospitality and your information.

Karihi: I also thank you. I am here supporting my brother in his quest, but I hope to meet my father in the higher realms when I get there.

Whaiuru looks aghast.

Whaiuru: Hema is dead?

Karihi: Murdered by the Ponaturi, a vile race created by Tangaroa.

Tāwhaki: We've already avenged his death. We just want to see him again.

Whaiuru: I understand. Kia kaha boys. You have our blessings.

Korotu: Wait. Before you go, take two of our slaves. They will help you find Whaitiri.

Tāwhaki: That is kind of you. How can we repay you?

Whaiuru: Don't worry about that. There is plenty of time to repay us. Take Tahi and Rua, they were gifted to me by another adventurer not long ago. Korotu needs his men. I, on the other hand, have more than enough, and I expect I'll be seeing you again.

Tāwhaki: You will. Again, thank you so much.

They lead you and Karihi to a whare where some butt naked slaves have been stowed away. The slavemaster is a hulking, barbarous looking woman with a permanent frown.

Slavemaster: Are you sure whaea Whaiuru? Tahi and Rua are fine men. We could use them to build better whare.

Whaiuru: This matter is more important than a few whare. Bring them here and give them to Tāwhaki and Karihi. One each.

The slaves look like they've had the tapu siphoned away from them. They are downcast. You look at them with some disdain.

Tāwhaki: Tahi, Rua, you are to take us to Tongameha's fortress.

The slaves cower and shake their heads. The slave master beats them with her taiaha, shouting the cowardliness out of them.

Tāwhaki: Do not worry, you will not die. My brother and I are powerful tohunga who will protect you with all our lives, if you serve us well.

After saying your final goodbyes to Korotu and Whaiuru, your party takes off, leaving the village and entering the misty forest, heading towards the foot of the mountain.

The slaves are quiet and submissive, carefully addressing you with respect while guiding you at the same time.

After some time, you reach the outer perimeter of Tongameha's fortress.

You take your slaves and Karihi aside and hide behind a kawakawa tree. Sensing your presence, Tongameha begins blaring from his million-year-old fortress.

Tāwhaki: We're nearing a dangerous and ancient fortress guarded by a monster that has the power to stupefy and petrify you. The monster's name is Tongameha. Many others have become his victims, trapped in eternal mental anguish, unable to leave his domain. You must not look at him. He will try to lure your gaze. But it is through your eyes that he exerts his power. He is like a dark mirror reflecting your deepest shame, the worst aspects of yourself. No one has ever been able to break free of his spell.

Tahi: Can't we simply move around his fortress and go another way?

Tāwhaki: Unfortunately, no. Whaitiri's cave is behind Tongameha's fortress, so we have no choice.

Rua: Why would anyone live here?

Tāwhaki: She likes to eat Tongameha's victims while they are petrified.

Tahi: Doesn't she become petrified too?

Tāwhaki: She's blind.

You teach your slaves a karakia to give them courage.

Tāwhaki: Chant this karakia. Stay true to the path, do not deviate, and do not look at Tongameha. He will try his utmost to distract you.

Tahi: Sounds easy.

Rua: I hope so.

You lead your men behind some stones which are lined up in a concentric circle around the fortress.

Tongameha: Tāwhaki! I know you are there!

The tall jutting rocks of Tongameha's fortress pierce the brown autumn sky like ancient spears waiting to be wielded by the stone-skinned Tūmataunga . Bats with angry silhouettes flutter hungrily in search of scampering weka.

Tahi makes the catastrophic mistake of looking at Tongameha. He melts into fallen manuka foliage as if trying to gather up the pieces of his mind, a mind which has split into a thousand shards. You look to where he is, steeling yourself as you witness his helplessness.

Tāwhaki: Leave him behind.

Your brother glares at you disapprovingly.

Tāwhaki: We cannot risk the party for the lost soul of a mere slave.

Fear tastes like acid and salt. It has the texture of rock and coral. It enters your mouth and lodges in your throat, refusing to go down. You realize it's easier to look at the fortress, than to stay focused on the path before you.

You press on with Karihi and Rua, trying your best to ignore the screams of agony coming from Tongameha's victims. However, the demise of Tahī has made you afraid to lift your eyes in case you accidentally glimpse the fortress. You are disoriented.

Rua is cowering as he tries to lead your party onwards.

Tāwhaki: Do you know where you're going Rua?

Rua: I do. We just need to find cover.

Karihi: Be careful!

Tongameha: Tāwhaki! Look here, I have something you need to see!

Karihi: Ignore him!

You aren't convinced by Tongameha's imperatives, but you find it strange that this demon knows your name.

Rua: Come this way. I recognize this area.

You follow Rua into a gulley.

Rua: This is where the warriors from the other village caught me. I hid here. The mountains aren't far from here, and if I recall correctly there is a cave somewhere close.

Tongameha gnashes his teeth, calling out to you again.

Tongameha: Tāwhaki, I will enjoy ripping out your pounamu eyes from their sockets. They must taste divine.

Rua: We will have to go through the most exposed part of the fortress, that open field over there.

Karihi: Will you be all right?

Rua: I don't know.

Tāwhaki: Just continue to recite the karakia. Keep your mind on the straight path, do not be distracted.

You continue chanting the karakia as your party emerges from the gully, moving forward into the open field. You repeat the karakia repeatedly to steel the fortitude of your party. You seem to be making good progress until you hear the voice of your wife – my voice.

Tangotango: Tāwhaki, my husband, I am here in this fortress. Come, join me so that we may be reunited again.

My voice soothes the trembling of your soul. You feel elated, as if a heavy cloud has lifted over you.

Tangotango: Don't be afraid anymore. I am here for you. I will not run. I have forgiven you. Please, just look at me.

You don't understand how Tongameha can possibly know about us. You think that it might be real after all.

Tangotango: This isn't a trick, my husband. I am here. Why do you ignore me? I feel shame. Am I that ugly?

You slowly tilt your head towards the fortress. It must be Tangotango, you think. Karihi catches sight of you. He slaps you out of your daze.

Karihi: It's a lie Tāwhaki! Tongameha has the power to enter your mind. Ignore him!

You feel the rash on your cheek.

Tangotango: Please my husband. Let me see your eyes again. I regret abandoning you. Let me see you. Please.

Tāwhaki: Tongameha, stop trying to ape my wife, or I'll send a storm to destroy you!

Tongameha lashes out in fury, gnashing his teeth once more.

Tongameha: You would ignore the sound of your own wife, Tāwhaki? What kind of a man are you? I command you to look at me! Look here fool!

Tāwhaki: What a pathetic demon you are.

Hinepiripiri: Help us Tāwhaki! Tongameha has me and your son! Please, set us free!

You stall for a moment, trying to ascertain whether it was really Hinepiripiri that you heard.

Hinepiripiri: We've been trapped here all this time. Come into the fortress and rescue us!

Karihi: Tāwhaki, don't. It's another trick.

You feel the burden of your past weigh upon you once more. Every step forward is painful, like tearing rotting flesh from your body.

Hinepiripiri: You abandoned us Tāwhaki.

Tāwhaki: No I didn't.

Hinepiripiri: You are abandoning us again.

You feel a strong urge to look, just to see that it's not true, that Hinepiripiri isn't really there with your son.

Hinepiripiri: How will you know I'm not here if you won't even look at me?

You try your hardest to ignore the pleas of your lost wife, but the guilt is overpowering.

Tāwhaki: Karihi, I can't keep pushing on. It's too difficult. I need help.

Karihi: It's not your wife, Tāwhaki. Think about it. How can she even find her way here, when she's not from these islands?

Tāwhaki: You're right. It's another trick.

Hema: My sons, I am so proud of you for avenging me. I never got the chance to tell you. Now I see you are both trying to reach the higher realms, a place I failed to

reach. Please my sons, come here before you go. I would like to hold you in my arms again. It's been so long since I last saw you, let's reunite.

Karihi: Father!

Tāwhaki: How is it possible?

Rua: It's not your father. No, don't listen.

Hema: I am here my sons. Just have a moment with me before you go. I won't let that bastard Tongameha keep you here any longer than you need to be. Just a moment is all I ask.

Rua: It's another play by Tongameha! Look, we are near the cave!

Hema: Silence slave! You have no mana. Come my sons. I will not be here for very long as I must depart to other shores. Besides, I must give you something before you meet your grandmother, otherwise everything you've done will be for naught!

Karihi: Would it hurt if I took a look, Tāwhaki?

Tāwhaki: No, don't do it. I severely underestimated Tongameha's guile. Whatever you do, don't look at him.

Karihi: Yeah, I suppose you're right. Tongameha, you failed! Look how close we are to the end.

Tongameha rages, throwing boulders in your direction.

Tongameha: You will die in that cave, Tāwhaki! I've seen your weakness. If you thought this was a test, wait until you meet your hideous grandmother! I will enjoy ripping your eyes out when you come back out, screaming like the nasty little boy you are.

Karihi: You were right Rua. It was just another trick.

You all make it to the entrance of the cave, the taunts of Tongameha finally receding behind you. You take a much-needed rest.

Chapter Five - Whaitiri

You enter the cave, shrugging the torment of Tongameha behind you. Rua looks up at you and shakes his head.

Rua: I don't know the way from here.

Tāwhaki: We'll search these caves for Whaitiri.

Rua: Do we even have a torch?

Karihi: I can make one.

Karihi takes a stick lying on the ground, muttering some words into it. He exhales then stokes the flame that ignites on the end of the stick. He moves past you and takes the lead into the cave. It's precipitous but you have to keep going since there is nowhere else to go. Glowworms dot the ceiling as you descend. Salt water drips onto the stalagmite, tapping gently in darkened silence.

The cave seems to go on forever. You hear a creek trickling beneath you. It's probably been there for centuries. It leads to a pool. Your slave cups some of the water and brings it to his mouth.

You continue forward but you don't notice any signs of Whaitiri. It's as if this cave is untouched.

Karihi: Do you think we entered the wrong cave?

Tāwhaki: Possibly, but I'd rather push on than go back.

You come upon another passage which goes up.

Karihi: Do we follow the same passage down, or do we go up?

Tāwhaki: Let's try going up.

You ascend the passage going up. It's a gentle slope, but there are tight spots which you have to crawl through. As you fit yourself through a tight passage you notice that the rock is slightly worn.

Tāwhaki: Do you think Whaitiri has been using this passage to get to the bottom? Look at the smoothness of the rock.

Karihi: Yeah, that makes sense.

You continue on. You reach some cinders and discarded bones.

Tāwhaki: We're getting warmer.

Rua: If she's blind, how is she able to start a fire?

Tāwhaki: She has other powers.

Tāwhaki: I think there's an opening ahead.

You walk past a few more firepits with bones strewn around them. The light of day streams through the cave opening, and as you exit you find yourself halfway up a mountain, with forests populating its base. You look around and see a staircase leading to a platform of sorts. You climb the staircase and see an old woman counting kūmara.

She has surrounded herself with ten kūmara in a circle. She points to each one, feeling them in her hand.

Whaitiri: Tahi, rua, toru, wha...

You observe her quizzically. She doesn't notice your presence.

Whaitiri: Rima, ono, wheru, waru, iwa, tekau.

She cycles through all ten kūmara. She then begins again. Karihi decides to play a game with her, so he grabs one of the kūmara.

Whaitiri: Wheru, waru, iwa... what? There are only nine kūmara?

She restarts the counting process. This time you take a kūmara for yourself.

Whaitiri: Ono, wheru, waru.... now there's eight kūmara!

You chuck the kūmara at her face. It bounces off her to your delight.

Whaitiri: Who's there? Who's stealing my kūmara?!

Whaitiri picks up her walking stick and starts flaying it around. Her movements are quite dexterous, and you're convinced that if she could see what she was supposed to hit, she'd be rather deadly. Karihi throws his kūmara at her and laughs as it knocks against her head. She picks up on his location and thrusts her stick at him, giving him a bleeding nose. He falls to the ground. She then brings her stick down across his head, but you push her to the ground. The old woman trembles.

You then place your hands over her eyes and recite a quick karakia. when you take your hands off her, she opens her eyes in astonishment.

Whaitiri: You've cured my blindness! Who are you rascals?

Tāwhaki: I am your grandson Tāwhaki. And that boy over there is your other grandson, Karihi.

Whaitiri swoons her head to peer at Karihi, laughing at his bloody nose.

Whaitiri: Oh my mokopuna! Oh I knew this day would come.

You help your grandmother to her feet and give her a hug. When Karihi comes to, he also gives Whaitiri a hug. She is elated at seeing you. She then points at Rua.

Whaitiri: Who is that? Another grandson?

Tāwhaki: No, his name is Rua. He is our slave.

Whaitiri: Oh, so you won't mind if I eat him?

Tāwhaki: I do mind. He's been very helpful.

Whaitiri: Your poor grandmother hasn't had a good feast in years. I just have these crummy kūmara.

Tāwhaki: We'll hunt something for you later on.

Karihi: Why are you counting kūmara anyway?

Whaitiri: I was going to have one for each month of the year! Ten months, ten kūmara!

Karihi: I see.

Whaitiri: Oh but ten kūmara is not enough. I was getting so hungry that I was afraid I would die before I'd get the chance to see you.

Tāwhaki: How did you know we were coming?

Whaitiri: Because of the prophecy. It's an old story. When you tell it, it becomes real. In fact you cannot have an event without a prophecy. Everything that happens was predicted by someone.

Karihi darts you a look of incredulity.

Tāwhaki: Well... We are trying to find the pathway to the higher realms.

Whaitiri: Oh, you didn't come here to meet me, to spend some time with your kuia?

Tāwhaki: Of course we did...

Whaitiri: Good! Then stay the night in my cave! Look, it's already getting dark. You've spent a long time looking for me. It's time for you to have a rest.

Rua: A rest would be good.

Whaitiri: I will make a fire and we can all sleep in the cave.

Whaitiri reaches down to gather some firewood, but her hand misses the wood and she grasps some dirt instead.

Whaitiri: Oh, my vision isn't quite perfect.

You pick up the firewood yourself and start the fire in the cave.

The air cools as evening settles in, the fire is burning brightly. You tell the slave to fetch a bird from the forest, some fernroot, and anything else he can find.

While you wait, you feel Whaitiri's eyes leer at you hungrily all throughout the evening. You feel uneasy in her presence. You summon your brother aside for a talk.

Tāwhaki: She has been watching us all this time. Her eyes are like mouths, salivating, searching for food.

Karihi: The cave is less creepy than she is. Hard to believe that we descend from such an unsettling person.

Tāwhaki: We need to find out where the vine is, but she won't tell us until we've spent the night with her.

Karihi: I don't trust her.

Tāwhaki: Did you notice that her eyesight is poor? Perhaps we can trick her.

Karihi: Yes, but how?

Tāwhaki: Perhaps we can place these smooth stones over our eyelids when we sleep tonight. She may think we are wide awake. That way, she won't try to kill us.

Karihi: We could try it. What about Rua?

Tāwhaki: He'll be fine. She won't be able to do anything if she thinks we're awake.

You place the stones in your kete. Night quickly follows, Rua returns with a couple of dead birds and some fernroot. Whaitiri gulps down a whole bird, forcing you, Rua and Karihi to share the other one.

After you finish eating, Whaitiri sets her bed against the cave wall opposite yours and Karihi's.

Tāwhaki: Grandmother, you should get some rest. You need to be as well rested as possible, so that you can remember all the answers to the questions we'll ask you tomorrow morning.

Whaitiri: I will go to sleep when you've gone to sleep. I sleep late in the night because my eyes are used to darkness.

She leers at you from the shadows.

Tāwhaki: No, it's fine, you should sleep first, I have many karakia to recall.

You're fatigued, and your eyes begin to droop. You take the stones out of your kete and place them over your eyes. You make sure that you're sitting up so that Whaitiri can see your face. You continue to talk as you drift to sleep.

Tāwhaki: I need to make many preparations for our journey tomorrow. I don't want you to wait for me to go to sleep. You should just catch some moe.

Whaitiri: Oh, it's fine. You do what you need to do.

You're eventually cast away in the dream world. As your mind is set loose from your body, you have an uncanny dream of Whaitiri eating your torso. She is munching away at your intestines. When you notice her, she looks up at you and casts a bloody grin, bile drips from the corners of her mouth.

Whaitiri: You had a big feast today, eh boy? I can taste moa!

She spits and gurgles. You look to your left where Karihi is sleeping, only to find his entire face missing. You wake up in horror, only to land yourself in another dream.

Whaitiri is stalking the fields of Tongameha, gnawing on the limbs of the petrified souls. You hear the blasting aggravations of Tongameha in the background, but you drown it out. You approach Whaitiri as she munches on Tahi's face.

Tāwhaki: Don't you feel the fear and shame of your victims as you eat them?

Whaitiri: No, grandson, there is no such thing to me.

Tāwhaki: No one can touch a petrified person without being drawn into their madness, and yet you're able to consume them whole.

Whaitiri: Let me ask you a question. When you eat a bird or a fish, do you feel its pain? Do you descend into its despair as you wipe away its existence?

Tāwhaki: No.

Whaitiri: Well, to me, people are like fish or birds. I am so superior that I cannot sense their pain. I do not fall into their despair. Now, if Tongameha petrified a being equal to me, then perhaps I would be wise to avoid interfering with them. But in the case of human flesh, I am immune to their suffering.

Tangotango: Tāwhaki! Look here, I love you!

You turn your face towards Tongameha. All you see is a hand reaching towards you. The finger pierces your eye and rips it out, pulling your eyes towards the fortress.

You wake up. It's morning. Whaitiri is still staring at you, but she looks weary. You shove Karihi out of his slumber. He jerks back in fright.

Karihi: Get away from me hag!

Tāwhaki: Relax brother.

He hastily checks his body, then feels relieved.

You look back at Whaitiri who is just beginning to drift off to sleep.

Tāwhaki: You didn't get any rest grandmother.

She becomes alert.

Whaitiri: Oh, neither did you.

She says in resignation.

You get up.

Tāwhaki: We don't have any more time. Let's get some answers out of her before she collapses.

You say to Karihi. He nods in agreement.

You help Whaitiri up to her feet. Your slave is snoring behind you, but you ignore him.

Tāwhaki: Well, grandmother, you promised to tell us how to get to the sacred vine.

Whaitiri: Oh, but won't you stay longer with me? I am all alone.

Tāwhaki: I would like to, but there is no time.

Whaitiri frowns and crosses her arms. She spits on the ground.

Whaitiri: That's not tika, boy!

You begin to lose patience. You've already wasted a lot of time trying to please her.

Tāwhaki: Old woman, tell us how to get there, or I'll make you blind again.

She looks at you aghast. Even Karihi is shocked by your insolence, even though he just referred to her as a hag.

Strangely, your threat works. She composes herself and reconsiders.

Whaitiri: I will tell you then. But first, you must know it's a dangerous path. I don't expect you to survive. In some ways, I was trying to dissuade you from going there, to spare your lives.

Tāwhaki: There is no need to worry. We already know the path ahead is dangerous.

Whaitiri: Very well. The vine you seek is in the cave, but you must choose the right one. I don't know which is which. Now, when you begin climbing, Tāwhirimātea will send gusts to fling you off. You must recite this karakia I'm about to teach you.

[karakia]

Whaitiri: As to the exact location of the vine, you must go back the way you came. Then take the passageway which goes deeper into the mountain. Eventually you will reach an intersection, and there will be a hole in the roof above you with the vines dangling down. Use the vines to climb out of the hole. When you get to the top you'll find yourself at the summit of the mountain, above the clouds. The vines continue upwards, into more clouds. On and on they go until they reach the lower boundary of the higher realms. Do you understand?

Tāwhaki: I do. Thank you, grandmother, for this valuable information.

Whaitiri: I'm not done yet. Once you reach the higher realms the vine may disappear. You must be careful now, because you will come across many dangers as you explore the lower levels of the higher realms. Many sleazy women will try to seduce you, so you must ignore them! However, one of the women will show you how to get to the next level. She is your cousin, then like you, she will be very beautiful. I warn you now, if you sleep with her you must do her right and marry her. Otherwise her lover, Tāwhirimātea, will blow you both away.

Tāwhaki: Grandmother, I already have a wife. In fact, she is the reason why I seek the higher realms.

Whaitiri: Eh what? You're married already? Well then, don't let your cousin seduce you! She is very beautiful, and her beauty will be the end of you.

Tāwhaki: Very well. Once I move past the lower levels of the higher realm, what do I do?

Whaitiri: You must climb some more, but the higher dimensions will seem strange and unearthly. More abstract, if you will, and yet they retain some semblance of that which you're already familiar with on earth. There is a logic to that place which you will have to figure out for yourself. Eventually you may meet Tama-i-waho, the supreme Tohunga who watches over everything. But not without resistance. Even if you have moved past Tāwhirimātea, there is still the case of Rehua, the star god, who sends out solar winds.

Tāwhaki: I see now. I suppose that is it then.

Whaitiri: Not yet, there is one more thing.

Whaitiri reaches around to the back of her neck and pulls out a vine. It extends from her as she pulls it out, and it seems to have no end.

Whaitiri: This vine protruding from my neck will lead you to the other vines. Hold it in your hand and follow it into the darkness. Do not take your torch in case you set fire to the vines. They combust easily.

You take hold of Whaitiri's vine.

Tāwhaki: We will be going now grandmother.

Karihi: It was nice to see you.

Whaitiri: Oh, please come back and visit me again. I don't want to die alone.

Tāwhaki: When I reunite with my wife I will take you to father's Kāinga and you can live out the rest of your life with your whanaunga.

Whaitiri: I look forward to it!

You say your farewells to your grandmother and then plunge into the darkness, her vine your only guide. You crawl through the crack, step on some bones, and wet your feet in the creek. Eventually you reach the forked path you came across earlier and you follow the vine down the descending passage. It goes on for some distance, and the air becomes clearer, crispier and cooler. You marvel at the glowworms once again, noticing their multitude now that their light is not being drowned out by your torch. Finally, you hit the bottom. Light streams into the centre, and the vines wrap around the wall, curving into the hole. You look up, seeing the daylight filtering in from above.

Tāwhaki: We'll climb to the top, then have a rest at the summit of the mountain.

There are many vines, so you pick one that isn't too loose, and begin your climb. You ascend through the mountain with ease, resting against the wall periodically. Rua manages to keep up with you, despite being a mere slave.

When you reach the top you all collapse onto the snow. The clouds dance around you. When you catch your breath, you stand up and scan the horizon. The clouds mostly cover your view, but you can make out the forest, the river, and the coast. You recognize landmarks and manage to triangulate the position of your father's Kāinga, as well as Te Puke o Tauranga. The island of Motukairangi is too far to see from here.

Karihi: I've never seen a view like this before.

Tāwhaki: I guess the view is about to get even more impressive.

You look up at the vines which tower into the seemingly infinite sky.

Tāwhaki: Ready to climb?

Karihi: Ae.

Rua: Do I have to come with you?

Tāwhaki: Where else are you going to go?

Rua: I can find my way down the mountain.

Tāwhaki: Then where? You will just become a slave again.

Rua: I will return to my relatives, who live far away from here and from the villagers of Te Kao.

Tāwhaki: Of course, Rua. You are now free.

Karihi: Brother, take this taonga with you. It's worth a lot. Consider it compensation.

Karihi hands Rua a whale bone manaia.

Rua: Thank you! I will take whatever I can. I have lost many years in service to the people in Te Kao. If it were possible I'd rescue Tahi from petrification, since he is from my village too.

Karihi: It is possible, but it will be dangerous. You should use this rope to haul him away from Tongameha but watch out for Whaitiri. She will be stalking the fields for food.

Rua: Wow, why didn't we rescue Tahi when we had the chance?

Karihi: I also thought the same, and I was angry that Tāwhaki was willing to dispose of him so quickly. In any case, farewell Rua.

Tāwhaki: The reason is because I was already feeling the effects of Tongameha.
He was mainly targeting me, once he took Tahi. Farewell Rua.

Rua scampers down the mountain, rope and taonga in hand.

Chapter Six – The Climb

You and Karihi stare up at the vines which go on forever.

Karihi: Ready brother?

Tāwhaki: Let's go.

You tug on the vines again, looking for a firm grip.

Tāwhaki: Whaitiri said that you have to find the right vine, otherwise you may fall off when Tāwhirimātea's winds blast in.

Karihi: I think I've got one.

Tāwhaki: Me too.

Karihi: I think I should go first since I know more karakia than you. I will try the one that Whaitiri taught us, as well as some other karakia, and you can copy whichever ones work the best.

Tāwhaki: Go on then.

Karihi mutters some karakia, then took to climbing. Once he was up a sizable distance you begin your ascent, reciting the karakia that Whaitiri taught you. You and Karihi make good progress, until the winds become a little rougher.

Karihi: Tāwhirimātea is coming!

Tāwhaki: I know!

You take a firmer grip of the vine and Karihi does the same. You both continue to recite karakia.

The winds blow forcibly, and the atmosphere becomes chilly. It begins to rain. The vine becomes slippery, and at one moment you nearly lose your grip.

Karihi is still ahead of you. Suddenly he falls, but you catch hold of his wrist, and prop him back on the vine.

Tāwhaki: What happened?

Karihi: The vine was loose.

You push forward. The sky groans, and Tāwhirimātea's voice croaks out of a crack in the clouds.

Tāwhirimātea: This vine grew out of the mountain like an infection, and now I see two parasites attempting to enter my realm. Grandsons of the lightning goddess,

Whaitiri. Descendants of my brother Rehua. Destined to perish on one of Tāne's mutated arms.

Lightning strikes one of the vines, burning it to a crisp. It evaporates into the air, leaving nothing but a trail of smoke.

Tāwhirimātea: Do you see what lies in wait for you both? A broken bridge with broken hearts. You will fall.

You and Karihi struggle higher and higher, this time climbing on two vines simultaneously, in case one of them is burnt away. You hear Karihi muttering some more karakia.

The rains fall thicker and faster, and the gusts become squalls. You hear a crack and then a scream. You look down, and you see Karihi falling. Your heart falls with him. He disappears into the clouds. You use a karakia to send a burst of energy through the clouds, to see what happened to your brother. The clouds part and you make out his mutilated body crumpled on the mountaintop.

You close your eyes. For a second you consider climbing back down the vine. When you open your eyes again you see Whaitiri crawling towards Karihi's corpse. She immediately begins to eat him, even though he is still twitching, holding on to life by a thread. She looks up at you madly, with blood dripping down the corners of her grin, her face disappearing as the clouds cover your vision again.

You look up at the vines that pierce the sky. There is nothing you can do now.
You must press on, and you are determined to see the mission to the end.

Tāwhirimātea: Give up now Tāwhaki. You are less worthy than your brother, who knew more about the traditions than you. Now look at him, a tragic mess, food for a fallen goddess. How do you feel?

Tāwhirimātea sends another bolt of lightning which destroys another vine. You hold fast to the one vine that's been sustaining you all along.

The rain burns away the pain in your tears. You do not taste salt, only determination.

Tāwhaki: I will press on, Tāwhirimātea. I will not give up.

Tāwhirimātea scorches your back with a lightning bolt. Your skin crisps as the rain seals the burn. You cry in agony, but you hold fast to the vine. Your arms stretch upwards, seeking another grip. You continue to pull yourself upwards.

Tāwhirimātea: Is your wife really worth all this? Look at what she did to your brother, sending him alongside you on a doomed quest.

Tāwhaki: You did that!

You grit your teeth. Your muscles are taut. Your entire body is fatigued.

Tāwhirimātea sends another bolt of lightning, this time it strikes the very vine you're holding onto. But the vine doesn't disintegrate, there is just a small bore where it was struck. You quickly move to another vine, then climb up past the hole, then switch back to the strong one. Tāwhirimātea tries to electrocute you again. The electricity burns your entire body, but it fails to kill you. You press on, ignoring the pain and the loose bits of skin dangling from your legs and your back. You smell your scorched hair and it disgusts you, but you push your feelings aside.

The vines disappear into a final cloud, but the cloud suddenly disappears. Tāwhirimātea exposes you to the sun.

Tāwhirimātea: There is no protection up here, Tāwhaki. Ra constantly burns, his anger stretches out and roasts all that exists. Is this where you wanted to go? You will be immolated before you reach the realm of the sky gods.

You ignore him, but you can't ignore the radiation as it melts your flesh.

Tāwhirimātea: Go on, finish your climb. You will find nothing here. You scum of Hema.

Tāwhaki: My father is not scum, you bastard Tāwhirimātea!

Tāwhirimātea: Hema was the son of a disgraced goddess and a pathetic fisherman. That is the reason he was never invited to the higher realms. He belonged with all the other corrupted creatures. The failed creations of my mātua, and the

abominations of Tāne, Tangaroa and Tūmataurangi. There is no prophecy, Tāwhaki.
Only the sad dreams of a mongrel god, and the broken hearts of his family.

Tāwhaki: I am here for my wife!

Tāwhirimātea: She is disgusted by your defective line. By your impurities. She is too good for you. I must protect her from your kind. Turn back! I would kill you, if you weren't the son of Urutonga. I already feel her grief at having one of her sons dead. I cannot let you both die. For her sake, turn back!

Tāwhaki: Karihi's life was not yours to take. Now you must pay the price!

You smash through the lower boundary of the higher realms. The sky fragments like rock collapsing, like a landfall. You enter the crack, and you leave the earthly realm behind.

Chapter Seven – The Higher Realms

You are surrounded by endless cloud and cool winds. The wind wraps around you like a blanket. The cloud below feels like solid ground. This place is known as Kikorangi, and it is Tāwhirimātea's realm, a place of holy winds. An aurora dances around one side of the white void like an eel through water. A flock of gulls, drawn to the magnetic aurora, break through the clouds and disintegrate in the irradiated atmosphere. Your own skin begins to peel. It dries, becoming crispy, then crumbles away, evaporating to dust. The wind blows your ashes into the clouds, causing the clouds to become dark grey. Rain from the clouds above you begin to drip onto your face, and you decide it's time to climb to the next realm.

As you climb the sacred vine, Tāwhirimātea's winds continue to buffer against you, but his winds aren't as strong in the higher realm. Long ago, Tāwhirimātea struck a deal with Tangaroa; if Tangaroa allowed heat to transfer between the atmosphere and the ocean, thereby creating stronger winds, then Tāwhirimātea would carry more of Tangaroa's lost children in gusts of wind away from the forests of Tāne. Therefore, the further you distance himself from Tangaroa's ocean, the weaker the wind.

You reach the second realm, which is known as Waka Maru, the Canoe of Maru. You see orbs of hydrogen, spiraling liquid koru, and other strange shapes suspended in midair. The floor is a sheet of moisture. Your feet slush in the water.

You bounce around and punch a hole in the floor, causing the water to fall to earth and turn into rain. The water gushes out as the floor begins to sag under the weight of the moving liquid, so you make a run for the vine.

Tuna the Eel and his family are slithering down the vine. You call out to him.

Tāwhaki: Where are you going, Tuna?

Tuna: You made a hole in the clouds. There's no more water here for us to swim in, so we're following the water down to earth. Will you join us?

Tāwhaki: No friend. I'm heading up.

Tuna: What for? So you can wreck the other realms too?

Tuna chuckled. You laugh awkwardly, not quite able to mask your shame.

Tuna: I kid, Tāwhaki. This place was beginning to bore me anyway. I would like to swim through creeks and rivers, exploring the crevices of Papatūānuku. I hear she is very beautiful.

Tāwhaki: I'm sorry, Tuna, I didn't know what I was doing when I was bouncing around like a child. But let me advise you of something. When you reach earth, don't forget to bring your teeth, or my people will eat you.

Tuna: Oh, I know all about your kind, Tāwhaki. That is why my teeth have grown to be long. See?

He smiles, but you don't see any teeth.

You laugh at him but then wish him well as you continue your climb. You spend some time observing Waka Maru from above, captivated by the strangeness of the orbs floating and shifting into different shapes. The hole you made in the floor grows ever larger, consuming the entire realm until all the water has fallen to the earth. But as you watch, you see a new floor forming spontaneously as if someone had decided to rebuild it. You assume the rest of the hole will be plugged.

You reach the house of Hine-nui-a-te-kawa, which is halfway between Waka Maru and the next realm in a land which belongs to Punga, the lizard god. Hinenui calls out to you and welcomes you into her home.

Hinenui: Rest here for a while, Tāwhaki. My husband is away, and you look weary.

The ageless Hinenui kisses your forehead and you fall asleep. When you awake you find yourself in a hot spring with Hinenui wrapped around you. You kiss her and then sleep with her.

A few hours later, her husband returns, witness to his wife's adultery.

Paikea: Do you love this man?

He asks calmly.

Hinenui: I do.

Paikea: Then go with him.

The legendary Paikea looks over you serenely.

Paikea: You have somewhere to be, Tāwhaki.

You take Hinenui's hand and guide her outside, somewhat surprised by Paikea's coolness. Once you are outside, the house quietly fades away, leaving you stranded in Punga's land.

Tāwhaki: I have to continue climbing, my love. I cannot take you with me, it might be dangerous, and it seems you are already pregnant.

Hinenui: Tāwhaki, I will stay here and raise our children in the forests of the lizards. I know why you've come to the higher realms, and I believe in your mission. I knew all along. I've gotten what I wanted, now push on Tāwhaki. Don't worry about me.

You kiss Hinenui once more and then continue climbing.

The next layer of the higher realms is called Ngati Roto, the many lakes. This is the home of Maru, the god of fresh water. The space in Ngati Roto is like being on the inside of a giant hollow sphere, with the lakes dotted about the inner surface of the sphere. The vine subtends one end of the sphere and pierces through the opposite end. You see a lone man paddling his canoe on one of the lakes. He is some distance away, but as he speaks you are able to hear him.

Maru: You broke the hull of my waka, Tāwhaki. Now the water is pouring in.

You notice he is sinking into the lake. You rush over to help him.

Maru: I tried to plug the hole. But there's so much water in the hull that I continue to sink anyway.

You get nearer to Maru.

Tāwhaki: I'm sorry Maru. Let me help you, I know how to walk on water, so it will be easy for me to reach you and pull you out.

Maru: The water coming through the hole in my waka... what would you call it? Holy water perhaps. The water will wash over earth, like in the deluge of Te Tai-a-Ruatapu all those eons ago, stripping away the rock, and plunging the people back into the sea.

As you near Maru, he inexplicably ducks his head into the lake and doesn't come back to the surface. You rush into the lake to try to help him, but an arm grabs you by the shoulder and pushes you to the ground.

Maru: Leave at once Tāwhaki. You may know me as the god of pure water, but in other places I am also one of the gods of war. Leave before this hole you made engulfs you.

Confused, you look up, but rather than seeing Maru, you see Paikea. The lakes are now filled with the bodies of dead chiefs.

Paikea: Do not stay to count them, Tāwhaki. There were one hundred and forty of them, enough to fill every lake in this realm. They died in the old days, long before your time. Long before you sent the deluge which destroyed all humanity.

You narrow your eyes in disbelief, your nostrils flare in anger.

Tāwhaki: What are you talking about? The deluge I summoned with Tangaroa flooded a tiny island, not the entire world.

Paikea: It all depends on who the storyteller is, doesn't it? In some places I cast away my wife, in others I let her go. Who is to say that only one of those things is true?

Tāwhaki: Why weren't you angry at me when you found me sleeping with your wife?

Paikea: There are many possible reasons. Because she was a burden on my life, and you did me a favor by ridding me of her. Perhaps I am too busy contemplating things more important than my feelings. Or perhaps I am merely happy that she has garnered the attention of the most beautiful man in the world. This time, I let her go because I realized that she was never mine to begin with. Would I scale the sacred vine to reunite with her? No, I would not. That is why our love is nonexistent. You have shown me that, Tāwhaki. Now you must deal with the consequences, if there are to be any.

Tāwhaki: Tangotango knows what kind of man I am. It is not a bad thing to have so many wives when it's your job to populate the world with superior offspring. But still, I am completely devoted to her. She has my ata, my heart.

Paikea: Very well. Continue on Tāwhaki. You've spent too long in these lower realms. The next three realms belong to you.

Vines grow out of the ground and wrap around your body. They carry you to the main vine.

You take yourself up to Hauora, which is the first realm which belongs to you. Hauora is the spring of life, where Tāne's living waters reside, Te-Waiora-a-Tāne.

You see another great lake, going by the name of Aewa. The unburnished moon is dipping herself into the lake, replenishing her light. The realm becomes radiant with her light as she emerges anew to continue her path through the skies of Rangi.

You encounter a child who immediately seems familiar to you. [Could be Tāwhaki's brother or father reborn as a child; it could even be himself; later, he will encounter the soul of his father - perhaps the soul has an independent existence from the body] Beyond him are other children emerging from the lake. He smiles at you and hands you a shell. He passes on, following the other children to the edges of the realm, where the light curves into the world below like a waterfall. The children vanish into the falling light. You return to the vine and continue climbing.

The fifth realm is called Nga Taurira, the realm of the enlightened ones. You see many tohunga studying shapes and forms, reciting stories and karakia, and building houses and temples.

The sixth realm is called Nga Atua, the realm of the inferior gods. This is where your father came from. You walk around the realm hoping to catch sight of your father, but you find nothing.

You remember Whaitiri telling you about your cousin who lives here, and you figure she might know something about your father, so you talk to a group of pretty women, hoping they will direct you to your cousin. They ignore you and start singing a song to get rid of you.

Girls:

Climb higher Tāwhaki

Climb to your wife

Climb to your destiny

To the hanging skies

To the exalted stars
To the sacred house
To the infinite realm
To the cradle
The pathway of Tāwhaki
By which he climbs
To the abode of the gods

Tāwhaki: Ladies, I am searching for my cousin. Have you seen her?

Girls: Why are you so bothersome? Can't you see we were having a decent conversation before you came along? Why should we care about where your cousin is, when we don't even know their name?

Tāwhaki: I am told that she goes by the name of Maikuku-maikaka.

Girls: Maikuku lives in Autoia, one of the realms of Rehua. If you want to meet her you'll have to climb to the seventh realm, but you better be careful because her husband is Uru-rangi, one of Tāwhirimātea's sons.

You thank the women and continue climbing. Ururangi's winds are vicious. You barely make it to the seventh realm and you take refuge in a whare. When you hear the winds die down you venture outside to look for your cousin, as well as your father. After a while you meet a pretty girl and begin talking to her. You get along with her, and even find her very attractive, only to discover that she is Maikuku-maikaka. You

ask her about your father, and she tells you to look for him in Aukumea, the eighth realm, where the spirit resides before it enters the body.

Maikuku: Are you leaving already?

Maikuku blushes.

Tāwhaki: No, I want to stay with you for a while.

You spend some time with Maikuku. Overwhelmed by your mutual attraction, you sleep together outside the whare. Ururangi rudely interrupts your time with your cousin, blowing her away in a gust of wind. You never see her again. You realize you must be more careful moving forward, because these realms are the abode of the higher gods.

The eighth realm is Aukumea. You explore it, searching for your father or brother, but the realm is incomprehensible. You receive images of your father and brother in your mind, as if you were dreaming about them, and you have a distinct sense of their presence permeating through space, but you can't make sense of anything. You wonder if Tama-i-waho has the power to teach you how to communicate with your father and brother in this realm, so you decide you push on.

The winds of Tāwhirimātea and his son Ururangi are far below you now, but an even stronger wind buffets against you. It is the solar winds of Rehua, the star god.

Tāwhaki: What quarrel do you have against me, mighty Rehua?

Rehua: None, Tāwhaki. Such is my power that I must periodically disperse my energy. I am indifferent to you. However, I find that inferior souls are disintegrated by my power. Therefore, it can be said that only the worthy may ascend.

Another layer of your skin peels off. You push on regardless.

The ninth realm is Wairua, the home of the attendant gods. It is similar to the fifth realm, except at a much larger scale - entire galaxies are being built, and matter is being shaped in strange ways. You continue climbing, resisting Rehua's solar wind.

The final realm is Tuwharea, the lonely realm. This is where I live, but you don't come to me. You seek Tama-i-waho first, knowing that without his wisdom, you may fail in your quest to find me.

You hear dogs barking, which means you are near Tama-i-waho's place. As you get nearer the dogs bark even louder. You turn a corner and you see several large dogs staring at you with pointed tails. They are almost the size of an adult male, coming in assorted colours: black, white, grey, brown and orange. A small grey dog lunges at you, but you smack it back with the swing of your arm. Three larger dogs try to attack you, so you lift your arms up and discharge electricity out of your armpits which frightens the dogs away. A wizened old man with a bald head waddles out from behind some rocks.

Tama-i-waho: Who is the buttlicker that is upsetting my dogs?

Tāwhaki: Oh great ancestor, it is me, Tāwhaki.

Tama-i-waho squints and examines you carefully.

Tama-i-waho: Why it is. E tama, you are a fine young man.

He chuckles. The dogs continue barking.

Tama-i-waho: Quiet down!

When the dogs calm down you stride towards the old man and press noses with him. He chuckles again and pats your upper arm, squinting out of one eye, giving you a crooked smile.

Tama-i-waho: The path to this realm from earth is long and arduous. Why have you come?

Tāwhaki: To seek your guidance on many things.

Tama-i-waho: You have been praying to me, and I've taught you many things through our consultations. Isn't that enough?

Tāwhaki: Well, I also came to this realm to reunite with my wife, but I haven't gone to see her yet. I'm worried she still won't accept me.

Tama-i-waho: So what? You came here to learn some special powers? Have you learned nothing, tama? The powers I teach are useless without the right intention.

Tāwhaki: What's wrong with wanting to reunite with your family?

Tama-i-waho: What if you're so bad that she doesn't want you?

Tāwhaki: Even if my wife is still angry with me, I won't let my daughter grow up without her father.

Tama-i-waho: That I can respect.

Tāwhaki: I also wanted to know what happened to my brother's and father's soul. I couldn't find them in the lower realms. That place is too incorporeal for me to make sense of anything.

Tama-i-waho: Your time with your brother and father is finished, Tāwhaki. Their souls have moved on. When you avenged your father's death, he no longer had any reason to linger on the earth. When you made your way to the higher realms, your brother found peace. Be happy that you did right by them and allow them to continue their journey. You may come across them again, if you look for the signs.

You feel both at peace and a little disappointed.

Tāwhaki: Really? I cannot even talk to them from here?

Tama-i-waho: Of course, you can, but whether they talk back is entirely up to them. It seems to me that they'd rather watch you live out the rest of your life. This is quite common. Now Tāwhaki, surely there is another reason why you've come all the way here. Please don't tell me you've forgotten.

You consider his words for a while, then you sigh in acknowledgement.

Tāwhaki: I'm meant to bring the baskets of knowledge down from your realm and distribute them to humanity. But to be honest with you, I don't like humanity. Why should they benefit from this knowledge? Isn't it better to let them flounder in the dark, where they belong?

Tama-i-waho: Eh tama, I don't much like you either. Isn't it better that I let you flounder in the dark, wifeless and childless? And yet, I am more than willing to help you.

Tāwhaki: Well if I take the baskets down to humanity, will you help me get my wife back?

Tama-i-waho: That I can guarantee. But you must first understand why the baskets are so important.

Tāwhaki: Great ancestor, I already know. The baskets are meant to improve the conditions of humanity, so that they may learn how to live better. They will learn how to navigate the oceans, and cultivate food for every season, and cure diseases and so on. They may even learn about the soul (hau), the importance of respecting the tapu of

people and places and things, and how to live with mana. But what is the point of teaching them all these great things when many of them will continue to behave harmfully?

Tama-i-waho: What you say is true. There are some whose capacity for harm will increase as they become more enlightened. But have you ever thought that even the most harmful person may serve a purpose that will ultimately benefit everyone?

Tāwhaki: No, I don't believe that. An injustice will only lead to utu, or lost mana. There is no net gain from such an action.

Tama-i-waho: Tama, your thinking is no good. You must learn how to ask uncomfortable questions, because the baskets of knowledge demand a mind capable of handling uncomfortable truths. In any case, there are three baskets for a reason. Each basket contains a different kind of knowledge, and each branch of knowledge balances the other. You cannot carry one basket down. You must carry all three.

Tāwhaki: What are they?

Tama-i-waho: [explains the baskets]

Tama-i-waho teaches you some of the knowledge contained within the three baskets, especially the knowledge that may aid you soon.

Tāwhaki: Thank you great ancestor. I will fulfill my promise and bring these baskets down to humanity so that everyone may benefit from the matauranga contained within. But first, I must see my wife and daughter.

Tama-i-waho: I understand, Tāwhaki. See to your filial obligations before you try to set humanity on the right path. Then teach them everything that you've learned, and tell them about the journey you went on, so that they may learn through your deeds as well. You are a demigod: a descendent of the gods, but also a man. It is through you that humanity will recognize themselves, both their good and their bad. And it is through you that they will gain respect for the gods, and thus the traditions which maintain harmony. Go now, Tāwhaki. You have my infinite blessings.

Tāwhaki: Humanity will no longer stumble around in the dark. These baskets will forever be their gift. Farewell, ancestor.

You take your leave. Tama-i-waho watches you silently, receding into the mist with his dogs whose tails are wagging, looking longingly into the eyes of their owner.

It's time for our family to be reunited, my husband.

Chapter Eight - Reunited

You saunter along a shoreline until you see some men building a waka on the beach. You quickly hide behind the bushes, realizing that those men are from my village. You think that they will probably send you away once they see your face, since you are well known around here, so you shapeshift into an old man using some of the knowledge you learned from Tama-i-waho.

Your skin thins and folds into wrinkles and your glorious hair falls out and deadens with grey. Your back hunches and you limp lamely towards the men on the beach. They catch sight of you and begin to mock you under their breath, finding your feeble appearance amusing. You try to speak to them, but they cut you off, ignoring you as they go back to building their waka. They appear to be building slowly, and you marvel at their slow pace, almost wanting to laugh at them for being so useless. You try to talk to them a few more times until it becomes apparent that they will never acknowledge you.

You carry on, following the trodden grass all the way to the village. You pass some beautiful women talking outside a storehouse. They notice you approach them. At first, they seem to smile, until you gain a feeling of malice from them.

Women: Look girls, a slave for us. This old dog can't run from us, though it looks like we can put him to work.

One of the women arrogantly saunters up to you and pinches your flabby arms.

Woman: He can carry a load, I bet. Look over there old man, you see those logs? You'd better carry them back to our village, or we'll end your miserable life right here, right now.

You nod eagerly.

Tāwhaki: Please don't kill me. I'll carry those logs for you, whatever you want.

The woman smiles viciously.

Woman: Good. We'll leave you to work then, and we'll wait for you at the village. Just follow the path, it's that simple. But if you try to run away then we'll find you and feed you to our dogs.

The women laugh and mock you, but you filter their nasty comments and haul the logs onto your back. They cackle and point at your knees as they knock together. Soon enough, they are gone, having bored themselves at making fun of an old man. With no one else around, you easily carry the logs back to the village.

When you reach the village, the women seem surprised that you were so quick. They feed you a leftover meal, stating the need to make you stronger so that you can carry more wood tomorrow. When everyone has fallen asleep you sneak around the village, trying to find your wife and daughter, but you can't see anything in the dark.

You return to your sleeping mat, which is outside with all the other slaves, and have a good night's rest.

The following day the women send you out again to carry some wood. You first go to the waka that the men were building on the beach. You use an incantation to build the waka speedily, and you manage to finish the hull before you return to the storehouse to carry more logs. You do this with ease and you make it back to the village before the sun sets. The women are impressed by your progress, so they take you to me.

When you see me you almost burst into tears, your heart is overfilled with joy. You try to hide your emotions so as to maintain your disguise.

Women: This old man is a great slave, Tangotango. He is a fast worker. We think you should make him do some work for you.

Tangotango: Very well. Slave, bring that firewood to my house. My daughter is cold.

You lurch towards my whare.

Women: Take the firewood into her whare, but don't approach the fireplace. That place is tapu. It's where Tangotango sits, and she is very tapu.

When you reach my whare you ignore the warnings of the women and set the firewood in front of the fireplace.

Women: Stupid old man! Now you've become tapu. Get out of there immediately.

They kick you out of my house as if you were a rodent. Our daughter Arahuta observes this and feels some sympathy for you.

Arahuta: Who is this poor old man? He looks tired. Why is everyone being so mean to him?

Tangotango: He is just some vagrant who has decided to become our slave. Let him sleep outside, I don't want him in the house because he smells.

Arahuta: I don't think that's fair. He did all that work and you won't even let him sleep comfortably.

You lie on the ground outside, closing your eyes, but still listening to our conversation.

Tangotango: He's fine. Look, he's already gone to sleep.

Eventually you do drift to sleep. In the morning the men that were building the waka wake you up.

Men: Come old man. We need your help to build our waka.

They take you to the beach, but when they arrive they are surprised by the appearance of their canoe.

Men: It looks different from before.

They try to figure out who worked on the canoe. Not only did the canoe look different, it appears as if some master carver had come and spent many years carving it.

They work on the canoe for a few hours, despite their confusion. Eventually get up to leave for the village.

Men: Old man, keep working on this canoe. Don't come back until the sun begins to set, or we'll use your bones as fish hooks.

The men laugh all the way to the village.

You recite some karakia to help you build the waka even faster this time. It's not long before the canoe is fitted with an outrigger and some sails. A bit more work and it'll be done. You return to the village at nightfall and return to the sleeping mat outside my home.

The following morning the women get you to carry some more logs. They get you up before the men have an opportunity to use you for themselves. When you are lifting logs onto your back at the storehouse you see the men come back from the beach. They walk silently with astonished faces, ignoring you as they head back to the village.

When you return to my house with the logs, you overhear the men talking to the women about what they saw at the beach.

Men: It's as if ten or twelve master carvers came in the night and worked on our waka.

Women: Maybe it was the old man.

Men: Impossible. Have you seen him walk?

Women: Who else could it be?

Men: I don't know.

You rest well that night. You get up early in the morning and walk back to the beach, deciding to finish the rest of the waka. You use the incantations to shapeshift back to your normal body, knowing that you can work faster that way. After a few hours you finish the waka. Then you return to your disguise as an old man, returning to the village with more logs on your back.

When you reach the village the men and women are gathered outside my whare. They watch you approach, but they all look at you differently this time. They seem bewildered. You take the logs into the house and set them by the fireplace. Then I get close to you, staring directly into your eyes.

Tangotango: Are you my husband?

You shake your head.

Tangotango: These men over here are my brothers. They say they saw a godlike man build their canoe this morning. Then they saw this man transform into a disfigured old person. They saw him transform into you. Going by the description of the man they saw, it matches the appearance of my husband, Tāwhaki. I ask you once more, are you my husband?

You ignore my question and walk over to Arahuta, hoisting her up into your arms. Then a flash of lightning dashes out of your armpits, and you return to your normal appearance.

Tāwhaki: Yes, I am Tāwhaki, your husband. I've journeyed for a long time across a dangerous path just to be reunited with my daughter, Arahuta, so that I may dedicate her to the gods. This little girl whom I love so dearly and for whom I've sacrificed my own brother. Now, I can finish my duty as a parent. Greetings to everyone here.

The people in the village were amazed by your sudden appearance.

Women: A god walks among us.

Tangotango's brothers: Welcome to our family Tāwhaki.

You look at me in anticipation with our daughter in your arms. I come to you, embracing you.

Tangotango: Welcome my love. I'm sorry I made you go on this dangerous journey.

Tāwhaki: We are together again. That's all that matters.

Chapter Nine – Arahuta's Dedication

Later that night you take me aside and in a serious tone, you speak to me.

Tāwhaki: I wish to dedicate our daughter to the gods tomorrow morning. It is a ceremony taught to me by Tama-i-waho. Usually the child is dedicated the day after their umbilical cord falls off, but since Arahuta was taken away and I didn't know the karakia, I was unable to perform the ceremony.

Tangotango: Let's perform the ceremony in the morning then. I'll tell my family about this, so they can witness the ritual.

When the rays of dawn warm the cool morning air, my family gathers outside our whare, anticipating the dedication. You pick our daughter up and wait for the light to burn a hole in the east side of our house, which will become a doorway for our daughter to enter the world of light. When the hole is finally formed, the light pours into our home, filling it with the presence of wairua, and a sense of new beginnings.

You step through the doorway with our daughter, reciting a karakia as you walk outside across the grass and towards the river.

Tāwhaki: The daughter journeys across the long pathway... The lightning flashes!

When you finish the karakia, lightning disperses out of your armpits and disappears into the sky. You notice the fear on our faces.

Tāwhaki: Don't be afraid, the lightning is part of the ceremony, which will be over soon.

The authority of your words strikes astonishment in our hearts. We tremble with excitement and anxiety.

You enter the river with Arahuta, wading into the most sacred part of the river. We stay on the bank. My sister and I prepare a cloak for our daughter, so that she will be warm when you take her out of the river.

Tāwhaki: Let the malevolent spirits be cleared from this river.

Lightning flashes from your armpits once more, signaling that the dedication is finally over. You bring our daughter over to me and my sister, and we wrap her in a cloak.

Tāwhaki: You can hold our child now, my love. The dedication is complete.

I hold our daughter up lovingly and I cover her face with kisses.

Tangotango: My daughter, you are now a child of the light. Your ancestors have welcomed you into their house, and now you carry their memory with you. The gods have also given you their blessing. This is truly the happiest day of my life.

I hug Arahuta and then I pass her to my younger sister, who also hugs her. We then take her back to the whare.

You arrive a bit later, and when you come back you greet Arahuta once again.

Tāwhaki: You are the first person to be dedicated to the gods and the ancestors by Tāwhaki. This is a ritual that has been taught to me by my great ancestor and tohunga, Tama-i-waho. The dedication has made you into a sacred being. It is my wish that when you are older, you will go down to earth and teach the people about the dedication ceremony, so that their children will receive my love and my blessings and go on to live long, joyful lives. But for now, rejoice in your entry into this new world of light, for you are my daughter, and the granddaughter of Hema, and the descendant of Whaitiri, the goddess of thunder. You are also the daughter of Tangotango, of the tenth realm. The gods will continue to protect you from henceforth, beautiful child. And I will continue to love you with all my heart.

When you finish your speech some of the chiefs from the tenth realm stand up to honour the event, and many of the other people there begin to sing. The chiefs then greet you, recognizing you as a great tohunga. One of the chiefs even comments that you are perhaps an even greater tohunga than Tama-i-waho, since you are the only tohunga who can send forth lightning from his armpits.

As the chiefs praise you, I begin to worry whether that old arrogance might creep back in and fill your head with silly ideas. But you laugh off some of the more generous compliments and humble yourself, telling everyone that Tama-i-waho is the greatest tohunga to have ever lived.

Tāwhaki: I have journeyed long and far to get here, and I have lost much as a result. I endured much pain and sorrow, but none of the pain I endured to get here is as the devastating as the suffering of being separated from my family. Even as a demigod with great powers, family is still the most important taonga to me, for my limitations make it impossible for me to behave like an indifferent god. It is the boundaries of my existence that enable me to love, the boundaries predicated by my humanity. And it is the meaningfulness of limitations that spare me from the nihilistic void that all gods must face. The lessons of my life have been encoded in my soul, now it is time for me to rest and replenish my strength, so that I may pass on these lessons to others.

Chapter Ten – Tama-i-waho's Dogs

After many years of relaxation, the monotony and repetitiveness of your life in a place which you once described as a paradise begins to gnaw at you. I see your belly become pregnant with the flesh of kaimoana, as you use your power to draw up an abundance of fish every day, and then your endless appetite causes you to gauge all the food. Our daughter lives happily, and I become more beautiful with age, but even we aren't enough to stave away your boredom.

Tāwhaki: My loving and beautiful wife, I would like to get a dog.

Tangotango: There are no dogs around here. Where are you supposed to get one?

Tāwhaki: I know a man who has hundreds of dogs. I will ask him if I can have a few.

A wicked smile flashes across your lips and your eyes laugh inexplicably. I let you go and you seem to take off with a spring in your step.

Little did I know what was really on your mind.

All this time the compliments of the chiefs germinated a hidden ambition in your heart. In secret, you believed you were equal to Tama-i-waho, and only now do I understand the nonsense that you would mutter when you thought you were by yourself.

Tāwhaki: Why is that old man considered the best? All he does is lounge around and feed the flesh of men to his dogs.

Tāwhaki: I am better than that old fool.

Tāwhaki: Why should I do as he tells me? All he wants is for someone else to do all the work while he takes all the credit. I'm not some messenger boy. I'm the great Tāwhaki.

Your mutterings became more erratic and nonsensical as the days became more boring.

You once told me that your grandmother warned you about Tama-i-waho's dogs, how he would feed foolish men to them to make them large and strong. She told you not to covet them, which you thought was a ridiculous accusation, since you've never been interested in dogs. But perhaps her warnings turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Perhaps she purposefully planted a desire in your heart, which would incubate during the more mundane moments of life, and eventually possess you.

You creep outside the perimeter of Tama-i-waho's house, observing the dogs as they lie about lazily in the sun. You try to call to a couple of them, but they don't hear you. You try calling to them again with a louder voice, but they still act as if they can't hear you. You keep trying to call to them, each time becoming louder and louder, until you speak so loudly that they all hear you and begin to bark at you at once.

This wakes Tama-i-waho from his slumber, so he stumbles out of his house and whistles to stop his dogs from causing further ruckus. You hide behind some rocks to avoid him.

Tama-i-waho: Who is the bumlicker who has come to disturb my dogs? Come out at once.

You slink further beneath the rock, trying your best to remain quiet.

Tama-i-waho: Very well. Go on dogs, find that bumlicker and eat him alive.

He incites his dogs to rip you apart. When a dozen of them surround you and try to chomp at you, you lift your arms up and send forth lightning which instantly destroys a couple of the dogs and incinerates a few others. The dogs run off whining and howling in pain, while Tama-i-waho glares at you.

Tama-i-waho: Tāwhaki you idiot. You should've come out when I said. Now you've gone and killed some of my dogs.

You feel stupid and ashamed. You feel so awkward that you become whakamā, and you are barely able to look at the great tohunga.

Tama-i-waho: I gave you some precious gifts which were to be shared to all of humanity and this is how you repay me, by trying to steal my dogs? Why didn't you just ask me for one? Dung-eater!

You say nothing, knowing that it's best if you simply take his wrath, in case you aggravate him further.

Tama-i-waho: Now I need to think of an appropriate punishment for you. I'd like to kill you right here, on the spot, but that wouldn't bode well for my reputation. Maybe I should fling you to that rotten piece of earth, like dung from a dog's bum, so that you live out the rest of your days with those stink humans. But then you would never fulfill the rest of your duties as a god. So I'll tell you what. Try and kill me. Do it, dung-eater.

You lift your armpits up and hurl a bolt of lightning towards the old man. Initially it seems that you've incinerated him, but he merely coughs and then laughs as the smoke clears away.

Tama-i-waho: Nothing will happen to me, tama, no matter how many tiny sparks you eject from your hairy armpits. Just accept that I am better than you.

You nod as if to resign, feeling humiliated and ashamed at ever thinking you were Tama-i-waho's equal.

Tama-i-waho: Good. Now I have an appropriate punishment for you. From henceforth you and your wife will be banished from the tenth realm. You are to live your days in the sixth realm, the realm of the lesser gods. This is where you belong. As for your daughter, I will send her to earth to live with your mother and sister, where she will fulfill her duty by teaching the people about the knowledge contained within the three baskets. When she has done her duty, she will live with me at Naherangi, and I will continue to teach her the ways of the ancestors. Now, say goodbye Tāwhaki. I will send forth a cloud that you will end your time here. By the way, in case you were wondering, this is the same cloud that I used to take Tangotango away from you all that time ago. Farewell, fool!

The cloud flashes before your eyes and you end up in Nga Atua, the sixth realm, with me standing beside you. I weep as I see our daughter drift to the earth, and I hit you in your face.

Tāwhaki: My mother will take care of her. And we can still visit her from time to time. But for now, this will be our new home my love.

You name the milky way after me, calling it the Fish of the Sky.

We spend the rest of our years in this realm, watching our daughter grow up, fulfill her duties and then marry. You and I never appear to age, although we realize that time will catch up to us eventually. The souls of the tohunga who die come up here to meet you and learn from you, many of them coming and going. The house of your first wife, Hinepiripiri, become experts in healing, and occasionally they ask you for assistance, which you give to them generously.

At long last the prophecy is complete.