

Fall Five

I stared at her smiling face, but it wasn't enough. I caressed her cheek with the back of my fingers. My hand opened, my palm rested on the side of her beautiful face. The softest skin. My thumb moved back and forth. My entire mind dedicated to the sensations, her feel. I let out a quiet laugh. My other hand climbed to the back of her head, pulling her smile into mine.

She fell upon me, and she began to laugh. I held her close. We rolled onto our sides. She pressed herself against me. I looked to my wrist. The red pulse had grown rapid, almost continuous. I covered her laughing face with rapid, pecking kisses. The wristband clicked. The light became constant. I couldn't bare to watch it all go.

My eyes closed. The last thing I felt before the fall was a pair of kisses to my closed eyelids. I was filled with warmth. I fell. Swallowed by the Earth. Falling through miles of solid iron and carbon like clouds.

9.8 m/s² for minutes. No terminal velocity.

My body became numb, then cold.

I could see the light of K through my eyelids.

“Sir.”

I licked my top lip. I could still taste her. I smiled and opened my eyes.

“Is it true sir? This is your fifth fall?”

This happened to me the last time. People ask questions knowing the answers. They know. They just can't believe. I looked at my latest fan. Sandy-blond hair. Strong jawline. Clean-shaven. Adorned in snazzy leathers. I looked to his left hand. A floral looking tribal design, pulsing blue. Just like his eyes.

I shrugged off his question, “Are you on your second?”

“Third, sir.”

I shook my head, “You're on your third fall, you don't have to look up to me like this.”

I looked to the tattoo on the back of my hand.

An infinitely intricate geometric pattern composed of millions of shimmering red points. It was hard to take my eyes away from it. We still don't know what it means, or why it gets more complicated each time.

The scientists will have a look at it. Its development will be charted. But I'm here for the Divers.

“Do you mind getting me some leathers, my standard arms, and the dossiers on the Divers?”

“Sir, no sir.” He began marching off.

I shouted after him, “Just call me ChinJo.”

I stretched and scanned the horizon. The city had grown much. Taller. It fortunately avoided growing in this direction. They didn't want to detract from the view of those standing after their falls. K, the burning moon, was nearing the mountains to the North.

My dossiers and leathers arrived. I put the coat on. Strapped the weapons to my legs. The soldier turned gopher opened his mouth again, “were you here before K was burning?”

Thankfully a familiar voice answered, the question, “Hell, Finn, that's the man who set it ablaze.”

I looked at Finn, it was clear he believed what Fade fed him. I shook my head.

Fade chuckled and impolitely asked Finn to go away. Finn did so.

I sneered, “Tears you up. You work your ass off building this world. Earning respect. But I get it for having arrived more times than anyone.”

“Being stuck at two affords certain opportunities.”

“The opportunity of being remembered as the man who gave ChinJo his name. Now lets see this pretty tattoo at work.”

I pulled up my sleeve and pressed my had to the ground. A pillar of red light poured up from me, then soaked into the ground. A ring around me. I watched the red glowing ground intently. Then the light pointed, forming a line between myself and the divers. My lip trembled.

“You'll not make it this time, Fade.”

“Oh, what, you're psychic now?”

I avoided eye contact and we were off.

During our rail ride we discussed the growth of the cities. The politics of Deep. We dodged the topic of home. Fade's wife didn't want to jump, we had little hope that Fade would ever be backed there. We didn't talk about her seeing other people. We did talk about him seeing other people. We didn't talk about the woman I hoped to return to.

I berated him for the insignificance of his celebrity when contrasted to my own.

And we talked about our Divers.

One was a decorated CAE. A Combat Application Engineer. Involved in weapon design and the creation of improvised weapons and explosives.

But the other Diver was more striking. He held a joint degree in Anthropology and Sociology. He finished early, wrote many articles. All of that was unique to this Diver, but none of that caught my eye quite in the way that the dive itself did. It was his second.

I'd never heard of a diver getting back. I wondered if people like Fade could go home. I wondered if the damage increases on the second dive, the way that the power of the Fallen increases with each fall.

The rail ride slowed to a stop in the virginal town of Spring. The doors opened, I had a laugh at our greeting.

“Chief Sentry Fedalyn and ChinJo Fifthfall.”

Then that uniformed man, along with three others stood at attention.

I looked to Fade, “Tell me you didn't have this town built to get a title.”

He shook his head, collecting a file from one of the men, “Thank you gentlemen, you're dismissed.”

His peons ran off. I saw pride in his face. A bit of happiness. I had to look to the heart of my friend. Did he love his wife enough to stab me in the back when the Diver offers him a way home. No doubt he'd pick his wife over me, but fortunately for me that isn't the decision he'd be faced with. I don't have much fear that Fade would betray order.

Fade scanned the page, wrinkled his brow and started walking.

We exited through Spring's north gate. I'd never been to this region but it truly was a work of art. My shield of hatred for Deep was highly penetrable by the handmade countryside. I almost felt drawn to a nearby tree, just to touch it, to know that something so breathtaking could be real.

But Kaera's face appeared to me. I'd touched her not long ago. I felt the tendrils of home pull on me. I drew my CoWeap and fired on the tree. A cloud of splinters erupted. Three small fissures were visible as the sawdust settled.

Fade stopped walking and gestured at the tree, “Did that happen for a reason?”

I put the concussive weapon in its place.

I continued to walk, Fade followed, then took the lead. His question hung in the air.

Progress was slow. I didn't complain about the lack of transportation. To do so would be to compare this world to the other, which is beneath me. We leave that to Divers and Jumpers. I was mindful of traps and mines. Surely they knew I was coming. CAE Lawrence Malae had the ability. I

began to wonder why he took the dive. Half of the dossiers tell me why, he and Mark Tallis had no section for that.

Fade threw a knife, attached to a chord and slowly reeled it in. A small piece of paper was there skewered. Fade held the knife's handle and read around the blade. He took the paper into the gloved hand opposite and crumpled it, tossed it to me.

I caught, unfolded and read, "I can take you back up. You'll carry your marks and gifts back with you."

I discarded the scrap. No discussion of its words. Most of the next two days were filled by alternation between silence and brief pulses of wind. The engineered trees sounded like orchestras as air coursed through small holes in the branches and rustled varied leaves.

We slept briefly in short shifts. I had the good fortune to not dream. We neared the edge of the crafted world. We crested a hill and a small village came into view. I turned to Fade, who spoke.

"It's unregistered." He gestured to the far side of the village, "It would appear they're trying their hand at crafting."

I squinted at a small patch of blue. It looked to be moving, swaying. I wasn't at all certain what I was seeing. I made out two figures at the edge of the blue. The Divers. Jumpers could be seen walking about interacting.

Fade pointed to a tree line that could get us quite near. We could remain out of view. For two hours we made our way through the forest. Soft, unobtrusive underbrush. Nothing snapped under our feet. Branches bent, never braking. A constant breeze cloaked what little sound we might have made.

We arrived at the last few trees. Fade sat facing away from the town with his back to a tree. I did the same. As the star began to set before the burning moon could rise, we stood.

We walked quickly and stood low. Fade signaled my stop, tossed me a tracker and he became less visible. Fragments of his image hovered about. People who didn't know to look for him wouldn't know what they were seeing. Fade was a unique, one of the very few. If there were many of his kind, people might know what they were seeing, they might know where to aim.

I leaned against the log cabin, away from the window. I looked down to the tracker. I heard footsteps. A middle aged, female jumper rounded the corner. I moved closer, ready to act if her eyes came near me. They did. Her mouth opened.

My tattooed hand engulfed her mouth and nose.

I could see the reflection of my blazing eyes in her mild eyes. My tattoo pulsed. All air was drawn from her lungs, some oxygen stripped from her red blood cells. She fell. Convulsed. A moment later she breathed. I pulled her the rest of the way around the corner. I brought my mouth close to her ear, "I'll be back to nurse this very soon."

I rolled her onto her chest, placed my hands on her side, a foot and a half separated them. I rammed my knee into her ribs. Two were broken. I knew no words, no shouts, nor screams could escape amid her quiet, rapid, desperate breaths. I pulled out a small length of rope and bound her ankles together.

I whispered, "I know I've just placed you in the worst spot of your life. I'm sorry, but I assure you, you'll be just fine."

I looked at her ear, when I said this.

I'd looked into enough eyes doing that speech to know that it wouldn't help either of us. I noticed the tracker was active. I stared at my arm, waiting for the glowing to subside.

The air quickly became cold. I knew most would be inside. Fifteen minutes before K would rise. I could see my breath. I bobbed and weaved through the dark village. I followed the general path revealed by the tracker. Without further incident I arrived at the edge of creation. In the darkness I saw no trace of Fade. I could see what had been blue earth, but had no clearer idea what it was. I did

have a clearer idea what I was up against. A hint of motive. The Divers were holding hands. Lawrence's thumb caressed the back of Mark's hand. Lovers.

I exhaled a small cloud, watched it dissipate.

I drew my weapons.

I breathed in and stepped out into the open.

“Gentlemen, I’m ChinJo Fifthfall. Sentry Chief Fedalyn has weapons upon you as well. You are bound by law to come with me.”

Mark and Lawrence's hands were no longer entwined. They turned to me, I couldn't see their eyes.

Mark spoke, “This world dies without us.”

“Not my problem Tallis.”

“You only say that as you can't believe what I'm saying. I hope the Sentry Chief is listening. This behind me was my revelation. When the typical jumper crafts this world, they shape the surface. Some of the earliest brought warmth to its core. At night the cold can be unbearable, hence the burning moon.”

I hate speeches. I wanted him to go for a weapon, or to press his face into the ground. Instead he kept talking.

“I have convinced these Jumpers to craft down. The animals of this world are the work of Jumpers. These Jumpers have turned much of the core of this world into an animal. Only the village chief knows how to feed it. I am the chief. Remove me and the planet dies. If we pollute this world as we did the last, the world will die.”

I leveled my MAG at the blue, pressed the trigger. Nothing happened. A dampening field.

Mark faltered. His words stopped. He grew faint, “You would kill this planet to remove my leverage?”

“I was going to do it to shut you up.”

I put the MAG away, and steadied the CoWeap. It should be able to fire at least once despite the damp field. Mark returned to words.

“I have the ability to send you back up with all the blessings of this world. Your file on me likely says I'm on my second dive, but this is my third, because I dive back.”

I began walking slowly forward, weapon trained on Mark.

There was movement behind me.

I heard the familiar chirp. Red flooded my eyes. Screamed from my tattoo. The hand steadying my weapon raced to the ground. A pop, a flash, mild destruction of the touched earth. I was ejected into the sky. I felt the warm ripple of the concussion blast as it passed under me. I brought my limbs in close like an ice skater, to speed my rotation. I lashed out with my armed hand, pressed the trigger as I locked onto Fade's shimmering core.

The downward angle of the shot saw fit to bring his fragmented image together. His opacity returned. Fade's back slammed into the ground, hard. His unconscious body went through an involuntary reverse somersault, almost resting on his feet, then tumbling to a resting position on his back. I clacked my teeth together as his head bounced on the ground.

My rotation continued. Attention shifted. I traced the ripple's path. I was a bit surprised to see Mark in the air 40 meters from me.

He dodged as I did. Although he had refrained from shooting his backup. Lawrence was taking his third step in a dash to flank me.

I popped my hips, directed my feet to point down. I wondered if the damp had left me with only one shot, which I'd spent, or if I had a second shot, too. I toggled the safety, pointed the weapon at Mark, tapped the trigger.

I could see his eyes clearly. Not in whole. Dark blue escaped his pupils in lightning shaped cracks. Both his hands shared that glow. The glow deepened, intensifying as he thought a wave might come his way. Once committed to the air, not much could save him from the ripple. No ripple came. He calmed.

Lawrence hadn't seen my show. I might get him to show his hand. I had a moment before Mark told him my gun wasn't loaded. Lawrence's face could tell me my gun had another go, or he might show me something else entirely.

Lawrence wasn't quick like Mark or myself, I landed. Trained my weapon on him. My back was now to Mark. I hadn't the slightest what either might try, thinking or knowing my clip was spent. Lawrence arrived at his run's end shortly after Mark landed.

Lawrence looked proud. I heard a clashing, jingling as he spread his arms. Bladed curtains, were strung from his forearms to his waist. I could see Fade laying unconscious through Lawrence's flightless metal wings. That answered that. His damp wasn't too powerful or he wouldn't need the wings. Lawrence underlined my realization.

“You fire on me, you kill your partner.”

“You made yourself a terrible booby trap, but didn't plant mines? You left a note, but I'm guessing there was no poison on it.”

I became aware of Mark's approach. About 30 meters behind me, coming in with the speed I'd expect from him. My unoccupied hand fetched a length of cable from my hip. The same red coursing through me coursed through it. I switched off the safety.

I jumped at and over Lawrence, Mark was close behind, as he began his leap. I thrust the chord at the ground. The end burrowed a short distance then became firm. I pulled myself down head first. Gravity wouldn't have been quick enough for this.

I leveled my weapon at Mark's legs. I fired the moment my line of sight was obstructed by Lawrence's preposterous defense. A plume of steel shards passed through the bottom quarter of Mark's body. Lawrence was hit high by the concussive force. At his normal speed he'd only managed a third of a turn to look for me behind him when he was hit. His legs were rather stiff at the time of impact. He folded at the middle, and landed face first. A greatly pained right angle. For a moment the right angle remained. Ass in the air. Legs straight. Back straight. The sustain didn't last long. Lawrence became a proper heap. Moments later Mark made his way to the ground. His legs proved worthless at catching his fall. I think I saw the glaze of a tear run in front of one of his glowing eyes.

Mark had no words for a time.

Words are absent from the minds of folk in that variety of pain. He offered no resistance as I bound his arms together.

Lawrence was similar.

K was rising as I tried to stir Fade.

He came to, grumpier than typical, “We've done that play before without me getting shot.”

“He knew your blast was coming and got out of the way. It was time for plan B.”

“Did you see him dodge my blast before or after you shot at me?”

I chuckled.

I saw to it that the woman I downed was on the mend as Fade tried to figure out how to transport and repair Mark.

The town woke and trickled into the streets. They flowed to their creature, their chief. I asked if anyone could help nurse their chief, I was met with silence. I waded through the town folk. I saw a gash in the back of Fade's head. I didn't address it as it was there because of me.

Lawrence had revived, “He's to take the chief away. You must stop him and save this planet.”

A clamor began to rise. Escalation. Two dozen angry faces shouting. Behind them I estimated

four dozen more. The ones in the back began holding planks and tools over their heads. I grabbed Mark by his ankle, he winced as his pain hit another peak. His legs were both in splints. I momentarily admired the craftsmanship. Someone had rigged him up in under two minutes.

I pointed my CoWeap at the nearest member of the throng. I fruitlessly pressed the trigger, I put the weapon away and I dragged Mark until I was standing on blue.

It moved only slightly. Not enough to affect my balance. I shook Mark gently by the ankle, "If this man cares about you or this world, he'll now tell you how to care for your beast."

The people ambled forward. More blunt instruments over heads. Fade stood beside me, placing Lawrence on the ground with only a small degree of care.

I shook Mark by the ankle, harshly, "Tell the people how to feed it."

He began to whisper. I couldn't discern any words. I leaned in. He repeated when I could hear, "I have them under the belief that I must die naturally before the feeding will work for anyone else."

I nodded, released his ankle. I raised my tattooed hand, I brought my fingers together. I inhaled sharply. My hand became blazing torch of red. My body jerked as I stabbed the blue with my hand.

An audible gasp fell out every mouth attached to eyes that'd seen me do it. I had their attention. My finger probed for anything wiry, I found something. I gripped. Small bursts of my red light would escape the hole I'd made.

I decided to command my audience, "You fear that the world will starve if I take your chief away. If you fail to comply with what I tell you to do, I assure you that act of non-compliance will result in the immediate death of this place. I've gone home four times, and I have little fear of not going home this time.

"I ask you, at this time to walk to the east for ten minutes, then straight north for thirty more."

They stood and stared.

"Do so now."

And they did. With facial expressions that all read as if I had a chambered bullet against each of their heads.

For forty minutes I held that organic cord. I became familiar with it. Once every three minutes I could feel a heartbeat. The exterior had shallow grooves. Over a one foot stretch the thickness had little variance. It started as mildly warm upon first grasp but had become feverish after ten minutes. Twice it convulsed.

My hand gladly retreated. There was thankfully nothing to wipe off. The Jumpers were a fair distance into the uncrafted land.

I tossed Mark over my shoulder. We force marched Lawrence. We headed south toward Spring. Twenty minutes in Fade suggested I look back. I did. The jumpers were coming. Most of their village had vanished. Fade explained, "It looked like wind on a sand dune. The houses just went away. I've never seen Jumpers undo before."

In the hours that followed we witnessed much undoing. The mob was a grand eraser, uncrafting everything in their path. I squinted and could see glints of steel. They'd likely crafted blades. Small ones, to not encumber their pursuit.

We were going faster than them. Even with me carrying Mark and Lawrence not wanting to keep pace. The three of us walked faster. We were better conditioned and could march longer without breaks.

By the day's end our thirty minute lead grew to two hours. As we set up camp, I made note of the Jumpers' camp. They'd recreated their village.

I tore a small chunk of the comments page from the dossier on Lawrence as Mark babbled. Mark was hoping to convince Fade and I to turn on each other.

I turned the paper over a couple of times, then I got it, “Fade, gotta pen?”

He nodded, rifled through his pouch and presented my requested writing implement.

I scrawled on the paper, 'I believe I can drop these notes when they aren't paying attention. If you get this, expect others.'

I placed the note on the ground, found a small rock and pinned it down. Lawrence intended to prevent us from sleeping. He failed to stop Fade.

In the intervening minute between handing me the pen and Lawrence raising a ruckus Fade had nodded off. When my turn came I wouldn't be able to fall asleep with Lawrence being rowdy. I locked eyes with Lawrence. My hand went for my first aid kit. I popped the latches. My finger invaded. It found what it sought. I pulled the small disc out. Latched the kit closed. Clicked the disc twice. I smiled at Lawrence. Slight nod.

I glanced between Lawrence and the village. I was jealous of their ability to create shade to sleep in. K isn't exceptionally bright, but it wasn't dark either. An hour after my turn would start, K would trade places with the star.

Small tendrils of smoke connected the homes with the sky.

A voice other than Lawrence spoke out, “Your turn.” It was Fade. Lawrence read me correctly in part. As my turn began he redoubled his efforts to interfere with sleep. I chuckled and slapped the disc on his exposed forearm.

I slid to the ground, got cozy. Lawrence collapsed. Silence accompanied me to sleep.

I woke to Lawrence's shouts. I stretched. We mobilized thirty minutes before the village stirred. Six or seven kilometers behind us, the people were hard to see. Mark was again tossed over my shoulder. Fade was shaking his head as he read my note. Lawrence was prodded and we were underway.

We again outpaced our pursuers. An hour into the day we crested a hill. The hill had some impact on Fade that I couldn't read. Standing on top for a moment, I figured it out. Lawrence let out a laugh. A powerful river was in our path. I looked back. I saw some varied motion in the mob, “Fade can you lay eyes on the followers and tell me what I'm seeing?”

He did, “They've made some horses.”

We shrugged and proceeded. At the bank of the river I turned to Fade, “I can get three of us across my way.”

He nodded and dashed into the water.

I retrieved Fade's pen and scrawled, 'you need to send five back, a new lender will emerge.' The note was then trapped under a small rock.

I looked at the two captives and it took me a bit to figure out how I planned to transport three my way. I didn't like the method I'd settled on.

My leather coat was laid on the ground, Mark was placed atop it, perpendicularly. Lawrence was put on top of him, parallel. The coat was then brought up, wrapping them like a volatile burrito. I straddled the mess. My legs scissored. My left hand gripped the coat's two ends. My right hand reached skyward, focusing my energy into its palm. Again the hand fell to the ground. With a 'pop' we were ejected from one bank to the other.

One of Mark's leg braces shattered upon landing. I sat on the divers and waited for Fade's crossing to be complete. As Fade arrived I noticed pooling blood beneath Mark's leg. I glanced it over, pulled a portion of brace out of his leg. I retrieved the bandage spray, applied it to the wound. The bleeding ceased, the skin looked waxy. The spray was replaced in the first aid kit. Fade watched most of this with ambivalence, then signaled his desire to continue.

The wrap was undone and I slipped into the coat. I threw Mark over my shoulder. Fade stood Lawrence up, and again we marched.

Almost no conversing, even when we noticed hills bubbling up a few hours ahead of us. Still no talking as those hills grew into mountains. As these mountains grew together and became cliffs. The end of the crafting elicited a response from me, "I fear we may need to take those villagers out."

Over the next hour, as we marched toward the virginal cliffs. I became confident in my assertion. We watched the river dry up as the villagers approached it. We were fairly near Spring.

"Fade, could you summon some people to uncraft this thing?" I gestured at the nearing rock face.

He nodded, "I've done that, I fear they'll arrive a little too late. They could show up in time."

I couldn't tell if they'd sent five people back, but they did appear to be closing. Now they're all on horseback. I noticed a person to our east emerging from a small forest. Fade noticed the person as well, and shrugged.

The village was likely three hours behind. If that person headed toward us we could meet up in forty minutes. That happened. Before we entered range to talk. I began to size up the person. It was a man. He was injured.

Then we talked. We kept walking toward the monolithic cliff. The man was a first fall healer who had walked Deep for six years. He was evasive about his injuries. He was clear about his love of humanity, his love of the world, and his love of God. I wrote a note from Mark. I told the healer to tend to the creature, to show the note to those pursuing us. Then I sent the wounded healer on his way.

At the pace of things we'd arrive at the wall 40 to 50 minutes before the village catches up.

I drew my CoWeap. Still empty.

I had our wards disrobe.

Our march continued.

Still my gun held no charge.

I grabbed Lawrence by the neck.

"Where is the damp?"

He smiled and answered true, "In Mark's legs, you put it there."

The debris I sent into Mark needed to be removed.

With busy hands and small knives Fade and I carved Mark up. I looked to his lover's face as my fingers probed for metal buried in tissue. Lawrence's face revealed a great deal. There was sympathy pain, as expected, but his eyes gleamed and dance. He was excited.

My hand fired up, I placed it on his knee.

"Ok, we can go."

Fade sprayed the reopened wounds with the liquid bandage.

I gathered shards and dashed east. I charged up and threw the fragments further east. I went back to Fade and again drew my CoWeap. It was charging. I drew my MAG, it too was active.

I put the weapons away.

We waited, backs to the cliff.

I walked ten minutes from our captives.

Fade scattered his image.

I picked up a stick and drew a line. I there stood.

As the villagers drew near I raised my hands, they slowed to a stop.

"I suggest you turn back. Your chief has informed me that he sent a replacement. I have no issue with any of you, unless you cross this line."

A young woman pushed to the fore on a magnificent black stallion. "We needn't cross this line if you turn our chiefs over to us."

"I'd sooner draw blood from each of you and the steeds you ride. Mark and Lawrence will be

turned over for trial.”

“Faller, we represent a different beast than those faced before. This world is subservient to us. By our combined will you stand no chance.”

“I fear your train of logic will lead you down a dark path. My power is over myself, whereas you have no power over me. I implore you, turn back. I have no choice in this matter, the choice is yours. Will you risk your lives on your guess that you can take me?”

I stood waiting for the measure of their zealotry.

They weren't deliberating with each other.

I interrupted the silence, “Take the cliff away.”

Earthen spires jutted from the ground, encroaching from all sides. The rock beneath my feet began to crumble. The masses drew their blades.

My hand immolated and the air screamed with resistance, as I rocketed my appendage into the deteriorating earth. Again I was sent flying, this time at a relatively sharp angle.

I left a hole behind me.

My hand sank into one of the jagged spires, which snapped off. My eyes locked on the thigh of the woman that exchanged words with me. I set the earthen spike into flight. The rocky imperfections were not received well by the thick air. The flight was not a straight one.

I drew my MAG, discharging round after round after round. I paused momentarily, I watched with disappointment as rock penetrated, shattered and destroyed the knee of its target. Smaller shards worked their way into, and felled her beautiful steed. The young woman's face began to fold in on itself, reflecting her pain.

Now halfway through my three second flight, I returned to tapping the trigger. The clip was spent. I released my grip and tumbled to my feet.

I measured the damage done, time eased to a normal flow.

35 thighs punctured and bleeding.

A busted knee.

36 critically wounded steeds.

Some perceived my move, and knew where to look for me. Before the rest found me on their own, I announced myself, “You can turn back now, if you please. It should be clear at this point that you pose me no threat, and I will not hesitate to inflict grievous harm.

I drew my CoWeap and knife.

All eyes were on my blade, save for a few, which were focused on their own wounds. Some of those wounded made their way to the ground as their dying beasts collapsed or threw them.

With my position I could see Fade, but I saw something else, too. Mark was standing, Mark's eyes expelled a thick, deep blue fog.

I didn't wait for the village's response, I charged up and began running between them as fast as I could. I watched Mark grasp at random at the fractured image of Fade. One swipe got lucky, he snagged Fade by the neck.

Fade's image reassembled.

Mark's mouth opened, more of the thick fog rolled out. Fade attempted to struggle, I watched with fury. Fade's resistance was happening at a fractional speed. It seemed as though Mark might be my equal in speed.

I didn't manage to close the distance in time.

Fade became saturated in the fog.

His opacity dropped.

He took on the hue of the fog.

Mark released his grip, and deep blue, ghostly Fade fell into the sky.

Mark hunched, and prepared to leap.

I drew my CoWeap and fired three concussive waves at Mark, each shot aimed higher than the shot prior. The first wave caught his legs, propelling him into the rock face. Liquid bandage was shed, not entirely. The exposed skin revealed that he'd healed almost entirely. As though his flesh wasn't riddled with metal an hour before.

The second wave made contact with his pelvis, this collision with the cliff was more kinetic, smashing his hip, with a snap, against rock. He'd now lost most upward momentum. He bounced about a finger width away from the surface by the time the third wave caught him. It landed squarely on his chest. Again Mark was thrown into the wall, and he began to drop.

As he fell, I snagged his ankle and swung him into the ground.

“What have you done with Fade?”

I was unaccustomed to the lag as words traveled through the air. The words arrived in his ear. His lips began to move, then stopped.

His words came to me, “I sent him home.”

I snarled.

I tightened my grip.

Red light pulsed through Mark.

It ran from his captured ankle to his core, then out to his limbs.

Each pulse fooled Mark's brain into perceiving a layer of his skin was removed.

He began to scream, it too pulsed in a rhythm matching the coursing red.

Mark's screams continued until he passed out.

The screams became gurgles.

I calmed myself and let go.

My breathing slowed.

I looked at my shanking hand.

My face was spattered with cold sweat.

Lawrence was moving on me, hands still bound behind his back.

My trembling hand became a fist.

That fist was thrown, a lunging haymaker arrived shortly thereafter into Lawrence's gut.

Lawrence collapsed.

I sat, leaning against the cliff with the Divers sprawled out on the ground. The villagers looked at me, at each other. They collected their wounded. Some apologized to Mark. They ultimately turned and went toward their home.

The sitting was uneventful.

I felt the cliff pull against my clothes, I leaned forward.

Within minutes I was greeted, “ChinJo where is Fade?”

I turned and saw Finn, “He went home.”

Two Fallers and five Jumpers had responded to Fade's call.

Mark and Lawrence were turned over to the proper authorities.

I felt the tug.

I closed my eyes.

I ascended.

When I returned I didn't think about Fade.

I didn't think about the Divers.

I went into the city.

I walked into the He Said She Shed. I asked if Kaera was busy. The man at the front shook his head. I slapped some bills on the counter and went back to where I left off.