The rats in the Crypt of Fiendish Worms were monstrous. With their razor-sharp teeth, claws that looked like they were stolen from a butcher's shop, two horn-like protrusions above their ears, and bright crimson eyes that glowed malevolently in the dim dungeon light, the two-foot-tall creatures gave off a ghoulish appearance.

But, they were rats nonetheless. And that meant they fit into the category of monsters that Lukas was fond of: *best when cooked well.*

Unfortunately they also attacked in packs, which was why he was currently facing about a dozen of them, with more possibly lurking in the shadows, ready to pounce at a moment's notice.

CINDERFACE
Quadruped creature with sharp, metallic claws. The claws and fangs have poison. Expert diggers.

As if in acknowledgement, the closest cinderface unhinged its jaw, revealing two pairs of fangs that glinted in the darkness.

"My, what big teeth you have, grandmother," Lukas chuckled, pumping lifeforce into a pulsing ball of energy in his right hand. He had, very recently, learned how to mold lifeforce into physical shapes, though the constructs only remained stable for a few seconds. But that suited him just fine.

The pest army squeaked and lunged towards him.

Lukas crouched, dodging an aerial attack as one of the cinderfaces soared over his head. He hurled the unstable sphere towards another cinderface, and the ball exploded upon contact with its belly, spraying purple blood over the cavern floor.

It was the first to die.

But Lukas was far from done. Exercising Kinetomancy, he grabbed the motion of the now-dead cinderface and pulled it back in a sharp twirl. The dead rat's body flew in a perfect arm and slammed two more into the ground. Another pulse of lifeforce quickly followed suit.

3 prey eliminated.
+17 Experience

"Wasteful," Inanna noted. **"You will soon tire if you keep that up."**

"Everyone's a critic," Lukas grumbled to himself. He kicked the closest monster with a wide sweep of his leg and threw up a wall of inertia that held three more in their place. The creatures snapped at him and tried to move, but it was all in vain; they were unable to break past his power. Lining his hands with lifeforce, he ran his palms through them.

3 prey eliminated.
+17 Experience

His right palm dripping with dense, purplish bodily fluids, Lukas wearily regarded the remaining assailants. There were two on the left and two more in front of him, but they were all roughly telegraphing their movements.

Lukas deeply inhaled. Lifeforce flooded his body, specifically his lungs — a simple, yet no less significant change. The results were instantaneous. As increased amounts of oxygen rushed to all his organs, most importantly his brain, he felt his senses sharpen and his vitality skyrocket. The haze of adrenaline that permeated to permeate his very being lessened just a smidge, and Lukas felt his calm focus return.

The two cinderfaces on the left leapt of their own accord, acting like individuals instead of two separate units of a pack. The first met with a thin layer of lifeforce that diagonally tore through its face. The second, however, was more agile. It leapt to the side and then lunged towards his face, claws extended and ready to rend. Lukas gasped at the sudden proximity and instinctively sidestepped in the nick of time, dodging the attack by millimeters. The creature snarled and leapt back at him for a second attempt, but was greeted with a lifeforce-enhanced punch that marked the end of its fate.

Eight down. Three to go.

"None, actually. The rest are fleeing."

Inanna was right. The remaining monsters, including the ones he couldn't count hiding in the shadows, had turned tail and scurried out of sight. Was it because one of the slain creatures was the leader of their group? Even in a strange, new world, animal behavior was similar to what he was familiar with. Overthrow the leader, and the flunkies would flee.

Though, now that he thought about it, some humans behaved like that too.

"So," he tiredly panted, "did it work?"

"Better than the last few times. You must keep doing it until your body assimilates the process."

"And then?"

"Once you manage to enhance an organ function with lifeforce, it will unlock the skill. Be advised, mortal, that this will not help you augment the other organs by default. But you will not have to worry about employing lifeforce the wrong way."

Bottomline — it would still be an arduous job, but at least he'd get there faster.

"I'll take whatever victory I can get," Lukas replied, sucking in deeper breaths. His constant pumping of lifeforce into his lungs was his way of learning Body Augmentation, a component of Raw Lifeforce Manipulation that, according to Inanna, would open doors to countless future opportunities. Like augmenting existing processes in organs. Or increasing the efficiency of body tissues. Or, even better, creating cascading effects with multiple organs to generate new skills. The possibilities were endless.

Once he managed to acquire them, he would need to unlock more lifeforce production to level up his skills. But to get there, there was one more obstacle to face.

A threshold, rather.

SOULSCAPE	
NAME	**Lukas Aguilar**
Type	**Base Host**
Level	**4**
Experience	**387**
Current Threshold	**640**
Utilized Soul Capacity	**1379/1379**
ESSENCE	
Maximum Lifeforce Output	**725**
Replenishment Rate	**180 / hour**

SKILL ATTRIBUTES		
SKILL	**LEVEL**	**CONSUMED SOUL CAPACITY**
Raw Lifeforce Manipulation	**1**	**50**
Momentum Manipulation	**1**	**50**
Kinetomancy (FRAGMENTED)	**APEX**	**1279**

OMPHALOS ATTRIBUTES	
Energy Reservoir Capacity	**∞**
Current Energy Level	**722,434,311 units**
OMPHALOS FUNCTIONS	
Scan	**Level 1**
Analyze	**Level 1**

Still too far, Lukas cursed, slamming his right fist into the ground. *It's still not enough.*

"Whining does not a warrior make," the goddess sagely replied. **"You should feel lucky that you already have a healing function, courtesy of the omphalos within you. At least you can no longer bruise yourself to death."**

FUNCTION - Prophylaxis	Level - 1

TASK - Complete	Energy Cost - 73 units

Lukas supposed she was right, though he had learned that Prophylaxis was a finicky thing. The skill operated on one wound at a time, and if there were multiple of them, then it would heal one at random while the rest patiently waited for their turn. On the bright side, the healing was perfect. As good as new, really.

"You still have yet to fully master your skills at hand. Mastering the basics is essential to growth."

"I'm trying!" Lukas gritted out. Truth be told, he no longer had a burning need to level up so quickly. Earlier, he had a solid reason when he chose to keep the fragmented Kinetomancy skill and exhaust his soul capacity. There had also been a stark need for a healing skill, but now he had Prophylaxis.

He could afford to take it a little more slowly. If anything, he was pushing himself even harder than he was at the start.

"I—I'm having trouble sleeping."

As the words were spoken, Lukas felt a small weight lift from his shoulders. He had finally said it out loud. "All this fighting, hunting monsters, using lifeforce, feeling the adrenaline…" His hands clenched into fists. "It's like it *wants* me to go on. Every time a breeze touches my skin, my sleep breaks. Every time I hear a sound, lifeforce floods into my hands faster than I can process what happened. I guess I… I just want to feel something other than constant confusion and danger. At least if I level up, I'll feel like I… I don't know, I'll have accomplished something. Become *more*."

Inanna took a moment to answer. **"Monsters are forged through war and battle. Do you know how you rise to the top? You do not sleep. You do not eat. You do not rest. You live and breathe the art of combat. Every waking moment must be dedicated to training and improving yourself. And perhaps at the end of it, you may find yourself at the top. And I daresay, you have taken the first step in this path."**

Lukas was taken aback. "I… Thanks, but I can't help but feel it's a bit undeserved. None of this would've been possible without the skills you gave me."

"Do not mistake my actions for charity. You obtained any such skills through a bargain. Likewise, you may bargain something else in exchange for a mana skill. Perhaps it will bring about a similar feeling of accomplishment."

"No thanks," he laughed, but there was no humor in his voice.

Truth be told, he hadn't been completely upfront with her. There was no surefire way to explain it, but he had still been suffering from anxiety attacks. There was just *something* there— a thought, a question, a memory— something constantly trying to push its ugly head out of the ground. A hideous terror that would send his heart racing like a frenzy and make him scream madly if he ever remembered what it was.

But as quickly as it came, it was gone again, as if it were never there at all.

"Is there anything else you wish to tell me?"

"…No. Nothing else."

Deciding he'd had enough of this conversation, Lukas proceeded deeper into the anomaly.

The Crypt of Fiendish Worms was an endless, stone-walled labyrinth. A dark, deadly place lit only by the luminescent moss lying around. It was a veritable stronghold, filled with vicious monsters that rose out of every shadow. But now, the stone walls slowly came to a close, and led into a deep underground forest.

Lukas respected forests, aware of their contribution towards generating oxygen and providing a habitat for countless ecosystems and species on Earth. After going on several expeditions with his grandfather, he also experienced the flip side — the feelings that came from wading through thick, dank jungles filled to the brim with insects and predators.

Forests were scary.

It was already dangerous walking through a dimly lit cavern, skills be damned. But to walk through an *underground* forest? It was something out of a nightmare.

He really couldn't see much, if at all. A plethora of sounds assaulted his ears, from the rustling of leaves and roots, to the movement of animals somewhere inside this enormous fauna-filled area. Invisible things kept encroaching his personal space, from the remnants of spiderwebs to fallen twigs, to simple leaves that fell from the branches.

The ground shifted every now and then. Sometimes, the elevation was low, and other times, it was high. Stones tripped his feet, and broken vines and thorns and branches obstructed him every step of the way. If something large and nasty were to come after him right now, he'd have no choice but to stumble around in the dark in a feeble attempt to escape.

Most likely, he'd immediately trip and fall over, with sharp thorns digging into his tender flesh. And that was him being optimistic.

"You ignore the fact that this allows you a perfect opportunity to train, mortal."

"It's always sunshine and daisies with you," Lukas groaned. The constant use of lifeforce to reinforce his respiratory system was still underway.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Breathing was the most natural instinct anyone could have. Easier than locomotion, more natural than feeding, and less tiring than mating. If repetition was the mother of learning, a vehicle through which the body could develop fixed patterns of employing lifeforce, then breathing was the best process with which to practice.

Every time Lukas inhaled, lifeforce flooded his lungs, enhancing the entire breathing process. A little bit more oxygen was carried in than usual. And every time he exhaled, a little bit more deoxygenated air left his lungs than was normal.

With every waking moment spent doing this one thing repeatedly, he was beginning to feel the effects. While the use of lifeforce generally left an adrenaline rush in its wake, reinforcing his respiration had a calming effect on him, reducing said rush. His mind felt sharper and clearer.

The irony that he was using lifeforce to counter another effect of lifeforce was not lost on him.

“How long will it take until I can do this subconsciously?” Lukas asked.

“You will know.”

“When?”

“Once you gain the skill.”

Inanna’s penchant for vague responses was only matched by the prowess of her sarcasm.

Sighing, Lukas shifted gears. “Alright, fine. Then tell me about anomalies again.“

“What is it you wish to know?”

“How do I get out of this anomaly?” he asked.

“I will hear your thoughts first, mortal.”

“Well, since I haven’t seen any sunlight since I stepped in, we might be inside a mountain, or maybe underground. I don’t know which is more distressing,” he said, lightly shivering. “Also, the air smells pretty fresh, meaning it isn’t too deep beneath the surface if it’s underground. And if it is in fact in a mountain… well, anomalies want prey to enter. That means entrances. Lots of entrances.

“Any other questions you would like to answer yourself?”

“Not at the moment, no,” Lukas quipped, pausing to deeply inhale and exhale. “So theoretically, I can start looking for a way out of this hellhole.” He considered the thought carefully. “Just imagine if I leave and find my way to civilization. New species, new places, new languages I won’t have a clue about. Here's hoping they’re friendly and don’t want to dissect me immediately.”

“I concur.”

“But if I stay, I can level up and work on my skills and powers. In a worst case scenario, I’d have a better chance at fighting if the people I eventually meet turn out to be antagonistic.”

Lukas glanced down at himself, wondering if they would see him as some sort of savage. His shirt was mostly shredded through wear and tear, but he’d held onto it for sentimental purposes. His trousers weren’t in the best form either, with the portions below his knees practically threadbare. A thick strip of monster hide was tied around his waist, doubling as both armor and belt.

In hindsight, he was lucky he had shaved the day before his world turned upside down. He really didn’t want to imagine himself with a long, scraggly beard covering his face. It would look terribly—

Lukas’s thoughts screeched to a halt. An unearthly chill came into being at the base of his spine, slowly slithering its way up his back and over his neck. Settling into a defensive stance, he looked around and scanned for visible threats.

When he found nothing, he inhaled and began circulating lifeforce within him, keeping his senses as sharp as could be. But still, there was nothing.

Being in a world full of monsters has made you paranoid, Aguilar.

Lukas shook his head. If nothing else, he was well-rested, with enough lifeforce to handle things should they go south. But maybe he was just being too jumpy. Maybe it was just some monster squirrel looking around for flies, or another cinderface that had a bone to pick with him.

Suddenly, he heard a loud scratching noise from the ground. Even though it was outside his Scan radius, it was obvious that the creature in question was crawling along the floor, with multiple bony appendages being dragged about. Either that, or it loved to incessantly scratch at walls for no good reason.

Knowing his luck, it was probably both.

"Mortal," Inanna's voice rang out. **"Look up."**

Lukas did as she asked. And stared. And kept on staring.

Hanging on the walls by invisible threads, smoldering balls of bluish flames lined the entire cave ahead of him, illuminating the way. Even in the thin, ghostly glow, Lukas could clearly make out the strange sigils and engraving etched upon the walls. The pathway seemed to flow into the endless depths of the anomaly itself. In the distance, on one of the walls, a rectangular cross-section appeared to protrude out slightly.

Lukas gawked with wide, open eyes as he realized what he was looking at.

"Is… is that a *door*?"

He made his way forward carefully, looking around with both his awareness as well as his eyes in case his nigh omniscient Scan Radius glitched and failed to classify a threat for what it was. The pathway was unsettling, with walls that looked too clean and too sharp to be natural. This was no natural forest cave. It was a corridor, and a well-frequented one at that. The squarish protrusions on the walls were definitely sliding doors of some kind, and the markings must have served some greater purpose than this world's variant of graffiti, especially considering how they shimmered in the azure glow of the levitating flames.

There was also a strangeness in the area, like a dissonance of energies. It tickled at a sixth sense that Lukas didn't even know he had.

"It is the omphalos within you reacting," Inanna chimed in. **"You are correct. This path is not natural. There is something here."**

The interest in the goddess's voice did not make him feel any better.

"Mortal, get a closer look at those markings."

Why?

"Because I told you to."

Not wanting to entertain the imminent argument, Lukas stepped forward and eyed the etchings on the wall. The strange markings bore a startling structural resemblance to East Asian languages. His grandfather had kept copies of some really old manuscripts that had letters similar to these.

Analyze.

Insufficient data.

"Languages are neither skills nor existences. I would be shocked if your Schema could decipher them."

Lukas pursed his lips. "What about you, then? Do you know what they say?"

"…I can sense that they are enchantments. The sigils are magical, and they are enacting something here."

"Like what?"

There was a long, uncertain pause before the goddess whispered again. **"I — I do not know what they are."**

He frowned, reasonably certain he hadn't imagined the uncertainty — or worse, *fear* — in her tone. But why seeing a new language was such a big issue for her, he wasn't sure. One couldn't know everything after all. Not even a goddess.

"You do not understand. These are not languages, they are enchantments. Enchantments abide by the World's Rules. The same World that worships me as a goddess. Whatever the language may be, the Rules do not change. Yet these enchantments do not follow the Rules I remember."

Inanna was a goddess. There was very little she did not know, despite how scarcely she shared that knowledge freely. For her to say something like that about some engraving on rock did not feel odd. It felt *wrong*.

"Surely you have some idea about what they do?" Lukas probed.

"I can tell you that they are gathering negative energy. Dark desires, curses, leftovers, remnants of souls. The dissonance you are feeling is being exuded from these sigils. I cannot say why or how, but these enchantments are entrapping this energy."

There were hundreds, possibly thousands, of such sigils adorning the walls. And if the doors led to more of these corridors, then there was no saying what else he'd find there.

Still, a part of Lukas was actually looking forward to meeting whoever was behind those doors. Would they be people? Real, humanoid, people? Inanna was a goddess, and she looked completely human — at least appearance-wise. At the same time, however, there was no saying how dangerous it would be.

Do you think I should—

"Escape?" Inanna mused. **"The idea is not without its merits. However, should you stay, you may find out more. Perhaps even—"** She paused. **"Something approaches."**

As she said those words, the dissonance in the air grew, making him feel oddly nauseous.

Scan, he thought.

No prey within Scan Radius.

Lukas narrowed his eyes. Could it be that *Inanna* was wrong?

Even the eerie feeling from before was waning.

Maybe it was just… a breeze or something.

No Prey within Scan Radius

Then, he felt it.

Lukas whirled around, right on time to see a… something. The thing was humanoid in shape, but lower, longer, and leaner. It was bipedal, but everything else was wrong. The head looked toad-like if he was willing to ignore the long, tentacular protrusions coming out of its hundred-fanged maw. Two more flailing tentacles jutted out from its torso into hands, and its feet were that of a bird.

No face. No eyes. And it was floating towards him.

“More monsters,” Lukas groaned. “Damned things!”

He slashed his arm at the creature, but the burst of lifeforce passed through it without hurting it in the slightest, merely sending it drifting backwards a few steps. The sigils on the walls were also engraved on the creature's lower body, and they glowed sinisterly.

“What the hell is that?!”

Insufficient data.

Huh?

Whether it was earthly or alien, the Analyze function had always returned something, ever since he killed that strange bat on his first day in the Crypt. First, the sigils had Inanna baffled, and now his Schema wasn’t able to help him? What the hell was going on?

“Behind you.”

Two more of the blasted creatures were behind him, their tentacles undulating in the air as they let out weird, clicking noises. To Lukas’s growing dread, another appeared through the wall and joined the pair. He turned back around, and the first one was now three. The walls became flimsier and more wavy, like a curtain.

When the creatures crouched simultaneously, the cluster of tentacles around their head quivered in unison, the motion becoming more and more energetic as time went on. Then suddenly, one of them flew forward, producing a sound so deep that Lukas could feel it more strongly than he could hear it.

Lukas did the only thing that came to mind. Using his left hand, he grabbed its motion in a way that still made little sense to him and guided it upwards. With his right, he added an extra push. The creature was flung to the opposite side, where it crashed against two others of its kind.

I can’t hurt them, but they can hurt each other.

Lukas gave the sprawled bodies a momentary glance, then turned around and did the only sensible thing anyone in his place could do.

He ran.

And the creatures followed. He wasn't sure how many were on his trail; it was more than half a dozen, but fewer than twenty. They made odd, light, creepy noises as they drifted towards him, passing through stone walls as one would through open doors. Some followed him from directly behind while others snuck up on him through the floor and ceiling.

Lukas jumped and flipped and ran down the long corridor, his lifeforce shutting down any fatigue as he made his way through the seemingly endless labyrinth.

"They are no longer close," Inanna said. **"But remain cautious."**

He slowed down his pace, but continued to stay on the move. "Just what were those things? Definitely not part of the local crowd." If they were from the Crypt, he had a feeling that the Analyze function would've worked.

"Ethereal beings."

"They certainly *felt* solid enough," he complained. "You saw it. I could grab their motion. Remember how one of them fell onto its friends? You can't be ethereal and do that at the same time. Can you?" he added at the end, remembering just who he was speaking to. These days, it seemed anything was possible.

"The physical bodies were not real. They were constructs. False creations. I could sense it absorbing energy from the world around it."

"Is that why they could faze through walls?"

"Simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of different areas of the physical construct. I imagine they are metamantic beings oriented towards such false body construction."

"In mortal-speak, please?"

The goddess let out a soul-suffering sigh. **"Do you recall our discussion on the nature of mana?"**

Lukas nodded even as he ran. "Five elements. Fire, water, wind, earth, ether. Manacrafters could harness them to use as weapons or augment themselves."

"Metamancy is the manipulation of the ether, the fabric of false creation. Temporary construction. Conjuration. Illusion."

Lukas hummed. "So blunt force attacks won't work on them."

Prey found you.

Cursing, Lukas frantically gathered energy and dashed ahead to avoid getting surrounded. For all their wackiness, if they couldn't catch up with him, then they couldn't hurt—

He staggered, suddenly feeling dizzy. Before he knew it, he planted face-first into the ground and bruised his cheek and forehead. His heart beat violently and his entire body felt like a thoroughly shaken bottle of Pepsi. He turned back over, blinking his eyes owlishly.

What the hell was—

The thought shriveled and died as one of the creatures came charging towards him. Using Kinetomancy, Lukas grabbed its motion and shifted it by a few degrees. The monster was tossed against a stone wall, but phased right through it.

"Damn it!" He got up drunkenly. "How the hell do I fight these things?"

"You cannot. Not as you are. However, I can provide you a way out," Innana offered with a smile. **"You need only ask for it."**

Lukas gritted his teeth. "Forget it."

Running would only exhaust him further. Whatever these creatures were, they had the home-field advantage. But as he scrutinized their movements, Lukas found that the creatures weren't really gliding towards him. They scuttled forward, as if they stopped and considered each burst of motion before committing to it. There was something unnervingly primitive about it. Reptilian. Insectile, even.

"You cannot defeat an ethereal construct using pure force," the goddess advised. **"You must use an element. I find that fire works best. Especially natural fires."**

What's the difference?

"Survive, and perhaps I will deign to teach you the difference between elemental conjuration and the natural operation of the universe."

Worriedly, he glanced at the creatures encircling him from all sides, and came to a grim conclusion: he would not be able to fight them as he was now. He had to improvise.

Inanna suggested fire. But somehow, he doubted the creatures would wait until he'd managed to rub two pieces of flint together to create a spark. He needed a different solution. Something combustible.

Another monster glided towards him, its tentacles frothing at the ends. Lukas whirled it around and smashed it against the wall on the left. It slid straight through, but some moss shook from the remnants of his Kinetomancy and fell.

41 prey eliminated.

Lukas narrowed his eyes. And then it hit him.

Of course.

He slapped his palms together, as if in prayer. The irony of the action was not lost on him. Glancing at the nearest abomination, he gave it a cheshire grin. "Come to daddy."

As the monster shot into motion towards him, Lukas trusted his instincts and channeled as much kinetic energy as possible into both hands. He then slashed it against the creature's body, both hands rubbing against one another.

A brilliant wave of flames emerged.

The abomination screeched loudly, two deep scorch marks now prominently displayed on its body. It turned around to escape—

"Oh no you don't," Lukas chuckled, grabbing it with Kinetomancy. "I didn't say you could leave."

What was fire if not excited particles exuding the extra energy? The more excitement, the more motion, and the more power he had over them. Invisible hands grabbed at the creature, and Lukas whirled it around him, over and over, spinning it in circles, fanning the flames with ever-increasing friction. He then grabbed the burning creature and launched it towards its brethren.

The screeching cries made by the monsters were like honey to his ears.

Burn, you greasy toad-faced bastards! Burn in hell!

Lukas stood amidst it all, grinning at the change in the tide of battle. Wielding the flames using kinetomancy gave him a surreal feeling, like he was being *burned* from within, but not in a bad way. The flickers of flame spreading from one creature to the next reflected in his eyes, and a dark power within him sang, wanting to cause more destruction.

He grabbed another monster that tried to escape and did the same to it, igniting yet another group. Everything around him exploded into motion, shadows flashing through brightness, seeking escape, screaming.

But Lukas would not let it happen.

For he was—

"Stay in control," Inanna warned.

Fuck control! Lukas acerbically thought. He *wanted* this. He yearned to give into the impulses he'd always kept shackled, to unleash it all into obliterating everything around him. His mind felt like it was splitting at the seams, consumed by the deepest pits of hell itself as he let his instincts take control of his body.

"Die! Die! DIE! DIE! *DIE! DIE! DIE!* ***DIE!DIE!DIE!DIE!DIE!DIE!DIE!!!!!!"***

The carnage was like ambrosia. The more the monster screeched, the more *something* inside of him luxuriated. A gleam of insanity shone in his eyes as he madly slashed at everything around him, using the dead bodies of the creatures and slamming them into each other even though they were deader than dead. He utterly fell prey to his ecstasy like a hedonist on a pleasure trip.

"Mortal. Stop this now."

He spat at the notion. What did she know?

Gathering power in his palms, he propelled it against the stone walls, causing more moss to fall. As they cracked and crumbled, a gale of dust brewed amidst the still burning bodies. It made him feel sick and hollow, but *strong*.

"Should you let it take control of you, you shall lose yourself forever."

"FUCK OFF!" he snarled.

“Very well. I shall not ask again.”

Her words disturbed the purity of his lust for battle. How dare *she*, a mere reflection residing in jewelry that was forced to seek rent in his mind, ask *him* to stop when she herself had butchered thousands to craft her throne? He finally got to taste the pleasures of victory and domination, and now this *harlot* was trying to put an end to his enjoyment? How dare—

Without warning, Lukas’s world became endless pain.

His power melted like ice in the afternoon sun. Every injury, every bruise, every splintered bone, every torn muscle, scratch and strain — it all crashed into him at once. As his limbs gave up, he staggered forward and bonelessly fell to the floor like dead weight.

And then, Lukas moved no more.
