

THE SHORN ONES



A LATINXPUNK FICTION FROM THE WORLD OF
"FLIGHT OF THE CHICXULUB"

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“All the earth is a grave, and nought escapes it; nothing is so perfect that it does not fall and

disappear”—Aztec Saying



“Are you ready, Young Ocelot?” Capulii asks.

His dark hood and cybernetic skull-shaped mask glare down at me.

I respond with the words, signaling my willingness.

His right breast is input with a row of surgically fitted and armored chem-jacks attached to a biohacked organ grown and shaped by the Genesculpting Cartel.

Only a Gang Boss touches War Chems. Biohacking is forbidden, lifetime iso-celled or farmed out to work.

Most men die the first time they try mainlining. Capulli shuddered and groaned, the veins of his neck black as a rad burn.

Capulii places a hand on my shoulder.

I’m an acolyte of The Shorn Ones.

Today, I make my first real move towards my destiny.

I try to contain my grin.

I never dreamed of ground-floor.

Never felt afraid of heights or grew curious to see the grey wastes miles below.

I wanted to conquer *the world around me*. To become a name for my **Stratosphere-Level 555 Tower of the Mexique Territory, Megaspire One**. Property of our Primarch, that vile high-born bitch, Novedades Columpia.

“Are you ready to begin your Longwalk, Young Ocelot?”

“I am, Lord Capulii,” I bark in reply with what I hope is brave enthusiasm.

Within our skull-shaped dome, we Shorn Ones, *Cuauhchicqueh*, smoke our stim-carts and vaporize oils of sapo and bufa squid or hydra-frog venom through cracked lips after a long day skirmishing over long, smartapp-lined tunnels, crawling up ladders and scaffolds, fighting through cramped blocks and up levels, shooting and slicing and ducking for cover behind iron bulkheads, swinging across corrugated walkways using mesh and chains.

After enough bolts were fired we gained ground. Throats cut with our onyx daggers. Charred corpses lay in our wake.

The citizens trembled no matter who won. There's no such thing as a benevolent gang, I remind myself.

Though I try not to, a boy's eyes caught my glance just seconds after setting a particle bomb in the puesto run by a man with Los Escorpiones.

He had to go.

Unfortunately, more charges were used than needed. The bomb took the whole market in a blast, just the one fucking traitor I'd wanted.

I still see them.

Eyes like two moons that never orbit.

That final big rumble settled things horribly, but definitively

Since then things have gotten calmer.

Los Escorpiones are our natural enemies, but it's not personal. Even after literal wars, for the right price you might see us working together.

What moves everything but the stars? *Chamba, papi.*

No time to afford vendettas up here. Survival is what matters.

But it would have to be one sweet fucking deal.

Los Escorpiones are a chem-zooted gang of biohacked lunatics with spiked armor and mohawks and black warpaint, modded stim-muscles and gene-jobs. They built an aesthetic out of grotesquery. I wouldn't normally give a frag but they've been getting testy lately.

I don't like it.

Once initiated, I'll be a full-blown Shorn One.

I can fight *and* data-swim.

The first of our tribe to get the latest tekka implanted.

I've had a mainframe slot surgically notched into the back of my neck, a Tizoc-Pattern Triple-Processor attached to my spine, linked to my blue warpack, enough fiber optic wiring and a strong signal with slots for upgrades rising up my arm in concentric circles.

I'm not tall, but I'm fast.

Not big, but strong enough.

Not a deck-gaucha, but I swim the stream with the best of them.

We little guys are always forced to hit twice as hard.

Tlaloc Plaza is where every zoohead, gang prospect, glitter kid and religious nutjob gathers. You've got Post-Remedialists preaching next to dust-heads taking blasts under cloud kids floating in their particulated color data, neon hues transmutating as they speak their holographic language.

It's where every gizmo subculture allows itself full configuration.

And the zone takes care of its own.

“HEY!” a cloud kid signals as I accidentally step through his magenta diamond formation.

“Sorry,” I tell him, waving my hand, “here, my bad.”

I transfer an adequate sum of creds to him and stand, letting my freshly shorn scalp gleam.

“A shorn one?” The cloud kid signals in wild purple spirals and neon splashes of fear.

“Almost,” I say with a grin. “Very soon.”

Farther through the plaza I come across stands of snaking fiber optics and the bright nano-enhanced flesh of noble-born kids in various stages of being perfected, curved gene-hackers working laser-scalpels like old-world tattoo-artists.

I walk up to a smiling pharmaholo and take a hit---zang!

That exhaustion gone, sleep and rest an afterthought to an idea never discovered. I’m a motored being.

Brought to you by PHARMAKON! Says a voice in my head.

Better living through the chemstream.

I make sure to nod at a gang of Data-Thieves I sometimes slot with, Hammerhead,--their boss, is wearing a yellow raincoat that shimmers--some unidentifiable fabric, something new.

Impressive. Blue Starskin boots. Must have robbed something tasty.

The iron of my own boots is heard clicking.

We Shorn Ones wear knee-high warboots stitched with polymer armored fibers and woven with Jade and Onyx shards that cut like razors.

I turn at a compound and watch grav-bikes groan through circular doors of sliding black glass. I follow into a larger clear plastic dome, then down a staircase that descends from the plaza.

The Shorn Ones are very particular in what we take and don't take. Nothing "stupefying," our codex states.

We focus minds and bodies for weeks before an experience, each so used to the tumbling feeling that we now conduct our functions *through* our familiarity with distortion, what initially bewildered and awed us is now just as mysterious, frightening, but not enough of either to keep us from experimenting.

My sometimes-lover and ally Skym, a peripheral smuggler and chem merchant for the Shorn Ones *and* Sidewinders, exclusively. Escorpiones hated them for that.

A creature of ambiguous sex, Skym has always in their many *iterations* been a tall and lean thing with blonde hair and nearly porcelain skin, no matter the detail changed they always appeared beautiful to me.

Skym gave me experiences which didn't and couldn't come from chems.

We were alight together, two or three years when I first began as prospect, then acolyte. We were each a flame glowing in a different way. The pieces that make me up like a jigsaw. They're the biggest shard. Skym is what fits those parts together.

Even the machine parts of me seem to know their soft touch.

Sometimes, *especially* those parts get pulled and refracted in new ways.

With Skym I let myself speak unfiltered. I tell them about my ambition to rise up and push until this whole fucking spire belongs to *us* and every last Escorpion's been crushed under my jade bootheels like the insects they are.

"No time to dearticulate, man," Skym whispers in my ear.

I'd killed six Escorpiones before my Longwalk. Out on patrol, backing up Capulii or another champion. I'd killed Saicos and Rolleros and plain, zooted Level under-scum. 33 lives. Give or take. I've stopped counting. It doesn't help to count.

The megaspire's colossal needle rises from the crumbling earth of these ruined Americas, like a fist thrust at heaven in reproach of this God-abandoned Empire of fear.

I sigh and light a stim. My thoughts turn to making love.

I think of Skym and drop a memory enhancer fizzing down my throat. I relive the first time we lay together, shivering teenagers nervously probing, politely embarrassed of our feelings, not our arousal. Sex is a cheap commodity. Many subcultures like the Neo-Puritans and the Orthodox Brotherhood of Helios have surgically removed their sex organs, jacking directly into the pleasure centers of their brains and engaging in hours-long sustained orgasms through full-body electro-pumps.

But what *we* had or *have* wasn't that. It was soft, and sweet.

It's real.

Skym's been a part of my life since we were just kids blasting bluefires and listening to that thumping, minimal crawl of underboss gangman dub machine beat.

Dreaming dreams together. Sometimes for each other.

But that was long ago.

Those times are long done.

I've come *way* too fucking far to turn back now.

Apart from the two fellow acolytes I killed, former brothers, most of my initial brood died long before reaching this point of initiation. I am among three that were permitted the Longwalk.

Today I kill the Lieutenant, and...will that be enough?

Only Skym. Only Skym can trust and understand and stay quiet.

"I have one target, one of the enforcers sent in to keep the area patrolled. He's with Los Escorpionos, a poli in their pocket. Scum."

"What can I do to help?" Skym asks softly.

They sound tired.

"I have to vaporize the Lieutenant--ok, consider it done. Easy. Now, how? That might be tough with just my jade boots, but I got a bad little motherfucker of an old-world bolt-thrower with me and I'm packing FOUR shots."

I pull the heavy square pistol out of its leather hip holster.

I hope the thing doesn't explode when I try to shoot it again. I blow a breath on the barrel and a bit of actual dust comes off its bulky carapace in a puff.

Frag me running.

Skym sucks their vapor from a cushioned grav-seat, hiding a giggle.

"Don't be stupid Young Ocelot. Take out your target. Don't try anything fancy. Make a plan."

“Everyone knows he likes his girls,” I say, dipping a finger in Skym's floating seashell tray.

I slowly pull a smoke out without breaking contact with their eyes, now modified to appear as yellow as a wolf hound's and somehow, fitting. Intelligent and fierce.

Beautiful.

Skym caught me looking at them, the stim-smoke's long silver frame lithe between my fingers, blinking microscopic clusters of nanolight in the half-dark.

“You know just which girl he likes?” I ask, taking another puff.

“I know you've been working some credgirls lately. Word gets around. Everyone knows.”

“*Everyone* knows,” Skym chuckles. “I told **you** that, Ocelot. In confidence. When you had me...in a vulnerable position.”

“Ok,” I said, sliding next to this old friend. “I can do so again. Happily.”

“You might just have to, ” Skym replies, turning their body towards me.

They drop the vapor gun onto a cushioned spore bed.

“I don't give things up so easily, Young Ocelot.”

“As of today,” I say, letting linen pants fall to each side of me, standing with only mech and chrome and flesh bare. “I'm going to be True Ocelot.”

Enough Tlaloc Plaza girls, boys, and everything in-between have confirmed it. I have something that's fine without enhancement. A fucking work of art.

Young Ocelot has a worthy cock, if nothing else.

Skym tells me I'm never going to grow up.

I think they mean I'll never grow *old*.

“As of today my name isn’t *Young* Ocelot. I’m **True Ocelot**. Or, I will be, once I kill the Lieutenant,” I say, gently taking Skym and pushing their legs apart.

I suck three fingers wetly then assist my insertion with a gasp of theirs followed by a low moan.

The room shudders luminescent blue movies all around us.

Easy. It all seems so easy.

“¡A la chingada, cabrón!” I shout, as if I’d already killed my target and had risen to the rank of a *true* Shorn One.

As if mighty Quetzalcoatl heralded my ascension.

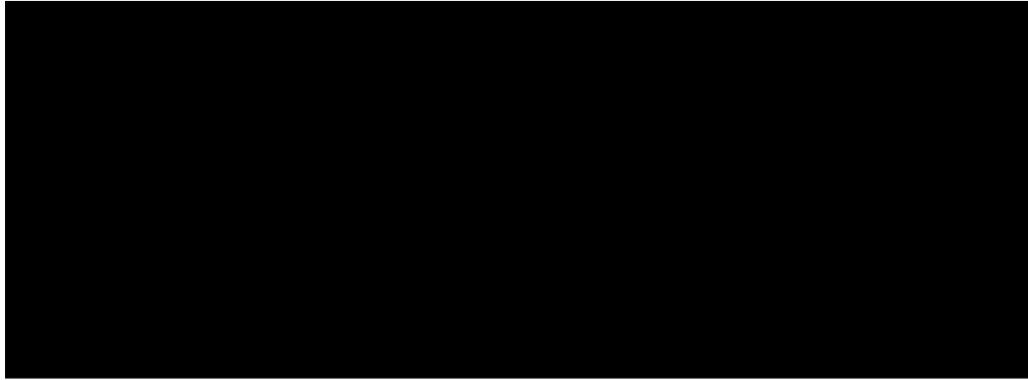
I pump hungrily, the machine parts of me and the meat parts coming together in that way that sometimes sends literal sparks flying.

“You promise you’ll leave it at that,” Skym says, heaving under me. “This will end, you’ll become a Shorn One and you will do nothing more?”

Strange, were they that *worried* about me? I felt something cramp in my chest.

Why so concerned? Sweet Skym.

“I promise,” I tell them, exhaling as I come, a showering of eclectic lights exploding behind my eyes in four dimensional fireworks that hum in unfathomable colors.



The Gaijin is a 24-hour joint, a Korean-Chinese conglomerate bar where the credgirls and sex synths gather.

Synths are nearly human only, empty. Flesh, enhanceable and fuckable but, nothing within. Just puppets. That's my opinion on the matter, not that I've thought about it much.

I step around the blue-lit room past gnarled, floating bodies.

On the outside of a small low-grav dancefloor adrift in a swirling of damp flesh, chrome, and cloudkids throbbing and pulsating.

Inside the Gaijin there's a number of heavies I can spot right away. Escorpiones rumble boys holding chains and flash-lances.

A group of four or five with their white-out eyes and mohawks crested above tattooed skulls. Their bodies are bedecked with chains and plated armor, their breastplates a glossy black that's dark as a spider's fat belly.

Nothing's ever easy.

I try not to look at them for long.

Outside a grav-bike screeches across the plaza's canopy sounding like a tormented soul descending into the depths of Mictlan.

Some Sidewinder boys, a multi-level gang we've worked with often, wave me over.

They're natural allies of ours, so I must join them for a drink.

I don't know if Sidewinders have Gods, but they fight as if they do.

"Have a bite of snakejuice," their boss Vale tells me.

His lithe, half-mech arm seats me next to him, a tattooed veteran with greying handlebar mustache and a denim vest covered in oil-stains. Vale's seen some shit.

"Are you having your Longwalk?" he asks.

"Yeah," I reply, blood rising in my face despite myself.

"Sure, we jump in our crew a lot differently than you Shaved-in's. Normally we just let our toughest knock our prospect all the way to shit. But, yeah with all the stims and enhancements, safer to use two of the lowlies. Any man that can stand a beating from those wannabe, hanger-on Meta freaks is welcome in the gang any day."

"But it ain't what it used to be, is it?" I ask him.

"I sure hope you help bring things back around in your time, kid"

I tip back the snake juice and thank the Sidewinders. Half are slotted and decked with the finest new, pearl-white Tecnolo processors, hard-wired decks, pet-drones that chitter like hounds and some real nice chrome inlays. I notice the Dual Hikuri Processors. Great tekka.

The Lieutenant arrives with an entourage.

Not even bothering to hide the fact he's extra meat for Los Escorpiones, Skym's girl does just as she's been paid to do, conducts him and two Escorpiones champions.

The Poli's two bodyguards look like rad-beasts. They grimace in confusion at the arrangement, Skym's girl smiling in terror as she waves them to sit. They then do their best to awkwardly accommodate her, momentarily placing their weapons down.

Got them.

The Escorpiones have perfected the art of war-chems and brutality. They even put rad-beasts to use, catching giant scorpions in the lower-levels where the Terraforming Cartel run

elaborate mines and refineries for chems made from rare algae, forged their tekka from mysterious minerals. Lunar engineers were well-known as the best craftsmen in the galaxy.

Escorpion “beastmasters,” train the warped arachnoids by feeding them chem-laced food, getting them dependent, hooked to anything.

Pretty soon the creature will kill just for a blast of whatever vile shit their master has them hooked on.

The big Escorpiones sit and survey the Gaijin, muscles and sinew wrapped around their trunk-like necks, veins warped and pulsing. Worms slithering under pale, paper-thin skin.

The hair is scary, I’ll give them that. Like a moving mohawk made of colored smoke.

Sometimes all you can see if they turn their heads are eyes so bulged I half expect them to leap out of their fucking whacked-out faces. They’re so zooted they could pop any second.

Can’t let them get up and out of that booth.

Killshots, I remind myself.

“Excuse me, fellas,” I say, handing the flask of Snakejuice back to Vale.

I try to sound calm but my heart is pounding.

“Here it comes boys,” Vale says, capping the flask and returning it to a pocket inside his denim vest.

Here it fucking comes.

I kick a stim with a needlegun hiss, return it to the notch in my mech belt. It kissed the vein in my neck. The cartridge hissed, emptied of liquid, then dropped out the chamber with a clang to the ground.

A rush like electric fire crackles from my head to my toes. I move so fast everything around me blurs. I jack my ace-in-the hole adrenaline organ and the fucker doesn't kill me.

So far so good.

"Fuck," I taste a mentholated whizzbang particulates go shivering across my vision.

I fire twice, the thick old gun bursting orange muzzle flash, action sliding back, ejecting an enormous shell from its side that drips with smoke as it spins to the ground.

One of the Meta-Freaks lets out a swinish squeal.

The first shot blew through its shoulder, tearing a mech arm and ribs in a showering of mech parts and meat geysering blood and sparks.

The other heavy falls over, limp and dead, his stump of a neck a bloody mess and his enormous body slumped over the long black table.

I fire again, legs moving over cloned-bamboo seats as the Lieutenant throws objects desperately in my way.

Chopsticks click against my breastplate.

He goes for his own weapon, a slap-cracker tied around his left wrist.

He's not fast enough for me.

Last shot fired before his hands come apart and he explodes like a fiber-bag of groceries on a rainy day.

Synths begin their awful, high-twang screams then so do customers. The Escorpiones by the bar are on me already.

I explode out the front entrance onto streets puddled with dripping coolant, realizing I've acted completely impulsively, foolishly, and without a plan.

I turn down four alleys, right-right-left-left-right, back to where I began.

Halfway through I'm met with a surprise.

I practically charge into an Escorpion, one of their rumbler from the bar, when I turn the next corner of puestos selling mixtas and cloned seafood.

He's mad with rage and twisted on something heavy. He picks me up and slams me down on my back hard enough to bend the iron grating beneath me with a whine of twisting iron.

I kick before he can move. My boot flashes up at him, glancing off armor and ripping through meat but finally finding purchase in his groin.

The jade tears through flesh like a razor through paper.

Everything spills out of him with a horrendous *schlup*.

His hollowed, armored body hits the grated ground with a clang.

I leap over the corpse and keep running down the orange, smoking alley, a length of his lower-intestine still wrapped around my left boot.

Each level of the megaspire rises in parametric slabs, geodesic curvatures. All of it designed as an elastic building by artificial minds. A vertical, sliding geodesic tower meant to work with the conditions of the stratosphere. A white blade glittering along exo-suits, robots, and nanites consistently upgrading our Portcullis, made of holo-glass twenty inches thick. Even when the spire sways in gall-strength winds, it's designed to do so safely.

We live and fly on one of the top levels, just before the elite glitterkids and Primarch family. Last of the hive levels, 555.

The stratosphere keeps the tower moving most of the time. We move so much and so subtly after a while, there's no noticing even if you try and search out the feeling.

We're flying through the skies in great circles as storms and tectonic events shudder through us. All of us inside this burning hypodermic building, this white and glistening needle pushing up into the grey crook of the sky's arm, searching above the clouds for a fresh vein.

I remember my mother telling me we lived up in heaven.

She'd hold my face up to a port window and I'd watch the sun set red over an ocean of cirrus clouds.

In the Plaza air swirled with neon advertisements and loud games. Cloud kids shot by in vapor streams of blue and yellow. Without anyone or any holos, the place could be as big as an empty stadium.

Sleep domes gathered like bubbles along the spire, under bridges and near burning, hole-eaten steel cans with ragged desperados gathered for warmth.

The Merchant and Rogue Merchant Cartels each sell and respect the other's territory. The neutrality between them is an example of the diplomatic power of creds.

Bosses began yelling at teams to unload supplies.

Stolen Mexiante-9001 Processors, matte black Slot-Decks for wrist and surgical insertion. Jade fiber optics in jewelry, as pills you could swallow that opened inside of you and spilled a trillion nanos into your blood.

I tried to catch my breath, losing the trenchcoat I never needed to begin with, tossing it behind a garbage can fire-eaten with holes.

Continue walking with that fine black blade unsheathed and in my hand, for all the goddamn world to *feel*.

“Hello friend! Very nice weapons! Onyx dagger, a True Shorn One. Honor!”

I turned to face a synth with a high brow and androgynous cheekbones.

“Do you know of us?”

“We have highly valued our dealings with The Shorn Ones. Few gangs offer chamba to us due to our...being synths. You’ve always shown us kindness,” the dark haired synth, impossible to tell of what age, said with consternation.

I felt bitter ashamed of my own bigotry then.

I’d gone against the codices.

“Today is my longwalk,” I confided in the synth, resting splayed fingers on my chrome kneepads above my jade boots and breathing deep and long.

“How exciting,” eyes widened. “You need now to return to the dome of the skull, to receive your final step in initiation and ascendance.”

“You really do know us.”

“Not that you will be a True Shorn One, you’ll learn more. Soon, you’ll be underboss. Specialist. One day, perhaps a warboss. Everything is for a reason.”

“I suppose that’s true,” I said, having always believed that...I suppose, my life has some purpose or destiny to it.”

“A life then,” the Synth said with what I *swear* was longing. “What some of us wouldn’t give for a taste of what that might be.”

Smell of ozone crackling.

I rush past the synth, two steps before the shriek of a flash lance’s sparkling payload flies directly at me.

I grab the synth by its perfect, vat-born hands and I whirl it around, capturing the white-hot globule of flash-lance on its back. The synth's shriek is something between a hog dying and the cry of an eagle as it burns, the lance's blast searing it in half, its bottom landing with a thunk on a mesh of dead fiber optics and trashed silicone.

I turn my body with a twist of abdominal muscles and throw my onyx blade, a last resort, but I caught enough of a chrome twinkle in the distant murk, above steaming grates and geodesic permutations to know where the blast had come from.

The black form of the blade flies like a bat, spinning into the dark. I hear a deep grunt and wet *thunk*.

An Escorpiones woman with dark skin and barometric sensors all along her neck and face like studded jewelry, bedecked in metallic armor that fell over her breasts yet left a large open space above her cleavage and neck. She steps forward.

The knife handle is jutting out just below her throat and above her chest. A look of horror and surprise is frozen on a face gurgling blood. Both her gloved hands are helplessly wrapped around the handle which is buried to the hilt.

She wears a long green mohawk, stumbles from the shadows, drops a Quetzal-Pattern Flashlance and lands face-forward with a clang.

I rush towards her, hammering boots on grated ground.

I smell her charred flesh.

It makes me *hungry*, I hit a stim but the hunger doesn't go away just...dissipates some.

I tear the knife free from her, spray of her blood warm and dripping down my face.

I promise myself a bloody feast of cloned steak when this is done.

My free hand grabs the flash-lance and whirls it over my shoulder, both ends tapered into blades like a halberd but my finger's on the trigger and the quetzal spitfire cannon barrel juts out before me, probing as if I were blind, leaping from one shadow to the next as I make my way as up and over the Merchant Cartel district back towards Skym's Smartapp and the Plaza.

Where will I go to eat my steak? Don't suppose I'll be hanging out at the Gaijin much anymore. Don't suppose I'll be leaving the skull dome much anymore, except to fight.

For the first time I think of Skym and feel an overwhelming sadness.

What'll it cost me, an hour if I stop and see them? One last: *'So long and thanks for all the shoes?'* sort of thing?

We'd been raised together in the same foster pod, in and out of juvenile iso-cells and had never really had anything close to what we had in our life as a "couple," if we could ever be called that.

Whatever we were, it was something I realized I've never even come close to having, not with anyone else.

Perhaps Skym knew this, but the thought hits me like it's novel and somewhat of a revelation. I don't think I've ever slept with anyone I've *cared about* before.

Shit, I realize. I don't think I've ever cared about anyone else.

Or at least, I thought I didn't.

Skym, I think to myself, and begin to run down familiar steps, swinging over bulkheads and dropping down the stacked cubes of Smartapps, through plywood alleyways and up webbed mesh scaffolding, then stairs with rusted rungs until I'm back in block 23 street and plaza level of Stratosphere Megaspyte One, level 555.

An hour. Two, tops.

It's just some low-level Poli I killed, and the Escorpionos are just dumb meat. It'll take them a few hours to even gather what hit them.

They're known for their brawn. For their penchant to use stims and battle-narcs, to mutate insects into venomous beasts of war.

Not smart at all.

I'd beat the fuckers.

Skym's smartapp was dark and dank when I walked in. Sweat beaded my face and fell like tears from beneath my eyes. The air seemed to burn somehow.

It was dark. I offered a silent prayer to Xipe Totec for protection.

"Skym," I said, waving my hand furiously before the light sensor. "Skym, we gotta go baby."

An absolutely...*horrible* smell assaulted me as I stepped inside. A carnal house. Sewage. Something...else, something distinctly organic like the garbage fire smell of sweat sizzling.

I sensed movement on the opposite end of the app. I trained the tip of my flash-lance towards the dark.

I heard a muffled whimper. I dilated the pupils in my eyes to adjust to low light.

Skym, flesh gone from gold to blue, covered in something weblike and sticky.

"Ocelot," they said. "Sweetheart, I--"

And then a giant furry leg. Then another. Eight glistening eyes.

"Fuck!" I screamed.

The mutant arachnid moved impossibly fast, but I managed to back out of the smartapp, raising my flash-lance in preparation though my hands trembled in fear.

I tripped backwards over something and looked down.

Skym, lifeless now and blue with venom. A green pus leaked from their ears and eyes like wretched tears.

My fear turns to rage and I point the lance up, screaming my war cry as the Escorpiones' irradiated pet leaps through the air with a screech like a lost child.

I fire the lance just as the thud of its eight pads land around me. Fangs as long as rifles retract from a brown, mucous covered skin.

Then, BOOM.



(Irradiated narco-spider, by J.B.)

Later, after calling the recycling cartel and returning Skym's body to the Megaspire's coolant system, I walk home to the skull dome.

Capulii stands like a caryatid prying open those holo jaws.

I take a final bite of the arachnid, the flesh cooked by flashlance into a delicious white and flaky meat, better than cloned squid jerky and less chewy. A bit like vat-bass, which I only ate once when I finished getting my first jack surgically inserted.

The arachnid was enormous, but I tore out its fangs. I ate all eight of the eyes so it couldn't see its way through the Nine Hells of Mictlan. I waited in the dark for the two Escorpion "beastmasters" to return for their pet, then I cut their throats and impaled them each with an amputated fang.

For Skym.

I'm sorry.

Didn't intend for anything fancy.

I just...didn't make a plan.

I embrace Capulii as I enter the war room. I smile through the dried streams of black spider blood. I step with my gore-slicked boots into the vaulted dome made of glass bulbs containing warrior's shorn hair, a dome of white beneath which holos flash and a small army of men speak in low voices.

Everyone stops what they're doing when I walk in, stand up, salute.

A cheer rises in a scribbled frenzy around me as I stand triumphant and hollow.

True Ocelot, unable to hide from the name I've earned for myself.

“You’re going far kid,” Capulii assures me.

I’m afraid he may be right.