

The man felt happy. He had finally done it. He had overcome his fears, and took the Plunge into the Deep. Now that he was under, he noticed his body below him continue to sink, yet he remained stationary. The pain was immense. He was confused. Where was the Gatekeeper and his Codex? He was supposed to come, congratulate him on all of his accomplishments, and lead him into the After, where all the worries and struggles of mortal life would metaphorically *and* literally wash away.

The liquid pain would drain off his body, and pool around his feet. Winged creatures would come and bottle up the pain, the fear, the memories, and give them to the white clouds. Tell them to hold on to them, bring them away, don't spill. Sometimes they did.

When the liquid pain poured from the sky for the first time, an indeterminable amount of time ago, it created a vast ocean around the Island. All other land was drowned. Only the Island, which would come to be the home of the Settlement of survivors was left. Every year, it became tradition for men who had reached the appropriate age (around seventy) to take the Plunge into the Deep ocean, to give thanks to the many gods for saving the Island, and to descend into the After.

He knew now it wasn't true. Any of it. He was clearly sacrificed, yet he was alone. No Gatekeeper, no Father. Nothing.

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He stood on the edge of the Deep. He watched the rolling waves below him, hitting the side of the cliff. No rocks could be seen below. A single stone was tied to his ankle. He glanced behind him, the other Steller's watching, waiting to witness a great ceremony, and the great honor he would bestow upon them. The other men next to him, crouched down, into a diving position. He mimicked them. He was terrified. He thought of his family, his parents, his son. They were all counting on him. The other men jumped. He didn't.

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Was it his doubt that caused his present immovability? Was this his punishment for his assistance? Eternal drowning in literal, yet also metaphorical, liquid pain?

*Originally Written: High School, Book 8*