

StoryLine-11

“It’s about time.”

I look up at the hole in the ceiling, at the cloudy sky. They’ve grown darker with each one I’ve come across, so it might rain before I reach Court. I wonder how my ability deals with wet surfaces.

No pop-up, so no information about that in the system. Doesn’t mean I won’t get penalties, just that it’s not something that I can get from a standard query.

This is the fourth crack in the ceiling I’ve come across since waking up. But the other didn’t have a wall that went up to the lip. Now, it’s going to be about working out a path around the obstacles poking out of the wall.

It’s angled in a little; from the rest of the damage, I think the ceiling collapsed. This has got to be close to twenty meters, and there’s no straight path up. But I shouldn’t have to weave too much and I have plenty of space for my running start.

Here I go.

Foot on the wall, and again my hand’s on it too. Work on that later. Other feet, don’t slow, get the foot over the ankle, again. Okay, here’s the first obstacle. I’m going over, so step higher. Use it to push myself up, feet on the wall, hand grabs the one above me and I continue.

Okay, not something to worry about, but this is taking a tad longer that I thought. My stamina’s down to almost half and I can’t tell if I’ve made it halfway. Definitely not pausing to check. Falling from here is going to hurt.

So change the angle, it’s not like that’s going to cause me a problem, just step higher each time, look ahead, plan for the stuff in the way, can I go over them and cut a few seconds off? Will it be enough?

Oh, I hope so.

Over that one. Step higher so I can make it over the next one. There, past that, and the lip of the hole is not far. Half plus steps and I’ll be there. It’d better be because my stamina’s getting low. If the next few steps don’t drain it, the ones after that will, and I doubt I have enough willpower to make the check that will let me keep going.

Not taking chances then. The lips, in reach, so I reach for it, with the next step I’ll—

I’m falling.

How am I falling?

What did I do—

* * * * *

I come awake to a line of debuffs and my health bar flashing angrily, as all it has left is a just visible sliver.

My gaze is then drawn to the debuff that’s so dark the red might as well be black

Debuff: Bleeding, internal
You are bleeding internally. You lose 1 hit point every 13 seconds. Seek healing immediately.
Time remaining: 3 hours, 26 minutes, 1 second

I stare at it, and it takes me long enough to understand that means I’m dying, that one of the other debuffs has to be a concussion.

At least I have healing bars left. No idea if one’s going to be enough— how many do I have?—but sort of remember these start working the moment I swallow one bite.

I will one bar to my hand and close my fingers on it. It’s got a wrapper. Fuck.

Okay, I can bite through it. It was paper...wasn’t it?

I lift my arm, and instead I scream in pain, then I’m panting from the effort and notice my stamina is basically gone.

I am so screwed. The only way I’m doing with is with a will check, and I’ve never trained it. Doesn’t mean I can’t manage one, but the odds are not in my favor.

Fuck, I hate doing this. But I have to do everything I can to succeed. I’m not giving Rich the

satisfaction of dying down here. I dump my six skill points in Willpower training.
Okay, what else? Attributes. I have two points and... which ones influence Willpower?

System Query: Willpower
Willpower is the pool indicating how far you can push yourself beyond what you are normally capable of. Willpower is governed by the attributes of intelligence and endurance

Thank you System. I don't think one influences it more than the other, so I put my two points in endurance. That's going to help more in the long run.

If I survive this.

Okay. I'm putting every available point of willpower into this.

And go!

I scream in defiance and pain, then the bar falls on my mouth and I bite into it, paper and all. My willpower is basically gone, so it's a good thing the wrapper's not particularly thick. Tastes horrible though, but it's already in my mouth with the bite of the bar. So I chew, then swallow.

The relief isn't total, but it's enough that I feel myself fading again.

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I sneeze at something tickling my nose and wake up with a strangled scream of pain. I manage to glare at the piece of the wrapper that caused this, then realize I am breathing easier. My health bar is flashing angrily, with barely a tenth of it remaining. My stamina's still barely existent, so this wasn't restful at all. My willpower is under a quarter.

Probably ain't pulling another one of those for a while.

No nearly black debuffs, so nothing's about to kill me. And the bar's at my mouth, so eating the rest of it is simple, and with each bite, my health raises, debuff vanish and I feel better. Once I'm done, and my health stops going up, it's around two-third, and I'm still sore everywhere.

Not every debuff's gone.

Debuff, Hairline fracture, right humerus
You have damaged a bone All actions require this arm are taken at a 10% penalty

Debuff, Hairline fracture, right Ulna
You have damaged a bone All actions require this arm are taken at a 10% penalty

Debuff, Hairline fracture, left Femur
You have damaged a bone All actions require this leg are taken at a 10% penalty

Debuff, Hairline fracture, right tibia
You have damaged a bone All actions require this leg are taken at a 10% penalty

Okay. I get the message. No bleeding at least, internal or otherwise.

I have to healing bars left. Not what I want to do, but if I'm going to get out of here, I have to be in top

form. Getting a bar to my mouth isn't as hard this time. I even manage to remove the wrapper before I bite into it.

Okay. What happened?

I ran up the wall. Everything was going well. Stamina was low, but not gone. I was almost there and... I fell.

I'm pretty sure I didn't run out of stamina. And if I had, I don't think I would just have fallen. I'd have become exhausted, have to put my will into continuing. The result would still have been me falling, because I'm not exactly known for my willpower, but I wouldn't have simply... what, slipped off?

Can I slip when using my ability? Okay, no response. Which means it's not an outright do this and slip. So did I misunderstand something about how the ability works?

Momentum, ranks: 1

So long as you are running and maintain 2 points of contact on a surface, you can continue to move even if the surface is not horizontal. Maximum angle from horizontal where the ability can be used: 135 Degrees.

Cost: 10 Stamina per second

Okay. Nothing hidden in the text I can make out.

Two points of contact, check, under a hundred thirty-five degree, probably check. If it was beyond, it wouldn't have worked, period, and if anything it gets less steep toward the top, so... what?

I didn't trip on my feet; I didn't stop running. I didn't do anything any different as I reached the edge than I'd done on the way there or when I got out of the basement.

So why?

The System doesn't change the rules, so I'm the one who changed something.

Okay. Step back, think about it. I ran to the wall, stepped on it, and started up. My hand ran along the wall even if there was nothing to grab hold on to because.... I needed the sense of safety touching something engendered?

Anyway, kept going, pulled up on one of the beam to help me, changed my angle to make up time, reached the top, reach for the edge and...

I fell.

Okay. So what did reaching for the edge do that caused the fall?

I moved my hand away from the wall so I could grab on to it.

Except that can't be it. I still had two points of contact and I'd reached up to grab a bar before and that didn't—

I'd reached with my left hand for that one, the right one was still on the wall.

But that doesn't matter, my feet are my two points of contact, so...

Oh, I am such an idiot!

How many points are touching the wall when you raise a foot, Dennis? Not two, you idiot.

Okay. I don't know if putting my hand on the wall is a reflex triggered by the ability. "If it is, it would be nice for you to update the description, System." But that's what makes running up the wall possible; it's my second point of contact as I raise my feet.

I glance at my stamina, which is still under half.

A nap to top that up, and then I am getting out of here.

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I stretch to limber myself and move to the other side of the space. This time I'm running up the wall so my left hand is touching it. Being right-handed, I want that hand free to do everything else I might need to, like grabbing onto the lip to pull myself out.

Okay. Don't think about how if I fall this time, I'm probably going to join Aaron wherever the System sends the dead, and run.

Hand on the wall first, foot, other foot, look ahead, raise your feet, keep running. Should have used this side first, less obstacles in my path. Go over that one. Half my stamina left, but don't think about that. Eyes forward and up. Change the angle, cut out a second or two. Don't worry about how low the stamina is, or that I don't have enough willpower to push beyond it. Look ahead, I'm almost there.

Stamina's flashing, not good. Can I reach it? Shit, if I'm out of stamina, I'm not going to be able to hold on and pull myself up. Okay, no waiting then. Push off that beam, grab the edge, other hand now!

Pull!

Harder.

Roll on my back, look at the sky.

Laugh as the rain falls.