

*If you're planning to wage a war or conquer a world, demons are the single greatest investment you can make. They're renewable, malleable, and can be delivered across all the known worlds in existence. Sure, you'll have to buy them from that asshole Mepheleon because they have a monopoly over that **SYSTEM**, but they're always willing to sell.*

*And before you Necromancer or Animator **Class** people start whining about how you can rise the dead and conjure undying legions, I got one question for you: how efficient are you when you don't have the bodies? Can you keep a war going if you're not killing enough to replenish your lost forces? And how many forms and abilities do your undead have?*

*Demons don't need much in the way of logistics. You just need some ichor from the **Fallen**, a sinner as a source to draw from, and a little bit of know-how about demonology (or just order custom from Mepheleon if you're in a hurry), and soon, you'll be counting your forces in the millions, billions, trillions.*

War, in the end, is about making cost-effective choices. And thankfully for us, the Claimed Hells are always open for business.

Happy conquests, Trespasser.

-The Trespassers Compendium

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The Hatchery

Wei fled, and the demons followed. The hounds led the charge, their flames lapping ahead, rolling across the ground in sweeping weaves. Beside them galloped the Horsemen, spreading themselves wide and summoning spectral bows to bear. Overhead, the Specter brought forth a blanket of mist, obfuscating the demonic hordes from clear sight.

As they stalked him, the ground fractured more, birthing new horrors to join the hunt.

Like a sparrow herded by ravens, Wei broke from the clearing and sprinted into the hellish thicket before him. Incubators extended forth like the trunks of rising trees, and the people within them drifted in bliss. But Wei could feel a shift in his surroundings, like a faint awareness was mantling itself upon his surroundings.

Darting between the branching Incubators, his eyes flicked all about, searching for a potential path toward salvation. He needed to break from his pursuers first. Couldn't stop. If they managed to delay him for any duration, he would be overrun. After that, he needed to find higher ground or a place of respite. Some place to get his bearings and come up with a plan.

Searching his instincts, he found himself rushing blind, the winds rising to a piercing shriek along his ears as crackles of flame whipped at his neck, driving him to shift directions, throw off

the aim of the hounds. The ground was fracturing beneath his feet. Where he trod, more demons were being born. Constant movement was the only thing that kept him alive.

An ethereal whisper caressed the back of his mind. Wei lowered his stance without thinking—watched as an arrow made from the same unnatural glow composing a Horseman's bow darted overhead. Then, impossibly, he watched it decelerate, curve, and then turn for him again, moving of its own accord.

A choked chuckle of offended disbelief slipped out from Wei. *Ridiculous*. The heavens weren't just being blind to him today, they were out for his blood.

More arrows shot past him, missing by lengths of fingers and hairs. Fast as Wei ran, the shots came faster, and the scraping of the Hellhounds' paws against obsidian told him they weren't far behind. Distantly, he could feel the hammering of hooves—the density of the Incubators prevented him from being ridden down by the Horsemen at least.

Though most disconcerting was how fast the temperature was dropping. The moisture in his eyes felt like it was hardening. The tips of his fingers grew laden with building pain.

He pushed himself hard, running as fast as he could while keeping his path erratic. The demons weren't the only surprise here. His muscles felt strained, but lacked any sensation of building fatigue. Though he prided himself on his endurance, he felt different. *Perfected* in some way. His body was kept at a constant pace, his speed never lessening after hitting that point of peak velocity. As the world around him blurred, as the chase continued and his dodges grew increasingly desperate, he kept expecting weariness to set in, for a mistake to follow.

But exhaustion never came. Weakness would not be his undoing.

Walls of fire speared forth to his left and right. The flames of the hounds were racing against him, trying to get ahead so they could cut him off. As arrows started weaving between Incubators from the front as well as behind, Wei gritted his teeth and made his miserable choice.

He would be boxed in if he hesitated. Overwhelmed. More demons were likely already waiting ahead; an ambush already prepared. Forward presented better odds of survival, but not high. Especially if they were already expecting him. Instead, he decided upon a third option—get over the flames vertically.

The surface of the Incubators quivered with each surrounding vibration that passed. Wei could feel the essence coursing within, the hues an uncanny red—shades contrary to the monochrome now painting his **Spirit**. If the Incubator behaved like water beyond merely holding the aesthetic, then perhaps he could run up its length—jump from it as the lakes he used to race his fellow disciples across.

Bound high, he pedaled his feet as if there were wheels beneath him, striking the surface of the glistening ichor in rapid taps. His heart sang as his stride found purchase. Arrows seeking his back and chest failed to adjust their vectors in time, plunged into the fluid within.

And dissolved.

This was working better than he hoped.

Mustering his focus, he jumped from one Incubator's stalk to another, skipping over the burning barricade below, and continuing higher. He had a moment to breathe now, could use this opportunity to get as high as he could to survey the land. The Hellhounds grew a distant concern, but the Horsemen's arrows hounded him in their stead. He began timing his hops to see them vanish in the ichor. Looking through the demonic waters, Wei swallowed as he realized every being submerged within its flow as staring at him, eyes following as he hopped from Incubator to Incubator, expecting his arrival.

Were they watching him? Tracking him for the demons? What was this place? Where was he?

A looming brightness swept over him, once more, Wei looked up and followed the ichorous branches up into the atmosphere; to where the traveling storms touched them, drank from them, pass over them; to where that immense mass loomed, an immense curving loop that dwarfed Wei's comprehension.

And then, between the serried columns of Incubators, he caught sight of a structure just over the horizon. It called his attention with a sudden flash, stabbing at the corner of his eye left eye. From what little he could see of it between the clefts of clear space offered by his nightmarish forest, it seemed a metallic structure. Symmetrical even.

Man-made.

Whatever he was looking at, he wagered it presented better odds for his continuing survival than staying in place. But as he prepared to leap from his current stalk, another sensation flood his senses.

Around him, the coldness suddenly dropped from mere discomfort to actual *pain*.

And only then did he felt the claws sink through his ribs.

SOURCE [8.04/10] LITERS

Wei's mind went blank as darkness itself seemed to uncoil around him, forming a shrouded shape driving a clawed hand through his chest. The Specter lacked a face to gaze upon, and the space within its hood was like looking down into a deep well with no end.

The sudden agony severed Wei from his focus; ruined his technique. His feet fell hard and splashed through the ichor as gravity came to claim its due. But the Specter would not let him fall. He was impaled along its arm. Shaped from nothing but shadow and mist, Wei wasn't sure what he expected when he tried to drive a fist into the Specter's absent face.

Which worked to his advantage, for the demon clearly wasn't prepared either.

The blow *landed*. The entity—assumed *incorporeal*—snapped back, clawed digits sliding free from Wei's wound. The feeling of weightlessness overcame Wei for a moment as he felt for the severity of his wound. To his surprise, when he pressed his right hand to his ribs, he felt not the warmth of blood, but the seeping of colorful essence.

Flowing patterns of shadow and light were coming untangling from him, coming loose as if a thread of yarn.

What happened to him? What was he?

Then he was falling, and such thoughts were a distant concern. Thirty meters above the ground, he could see pockets of the ground below bursting, birthing swarms of demons from its crust. Arrows were still chasing him—they knew exactly where he was.

He guessed he could survive the fall, but not the horde that was waiting to take advantage of it.

Reaching out, his arm splashed into the Incubator as a grimy wetness soaked his mangled robes. He pawed hard, tried to slow his descent—

Then a blade of pure *coldness* cleaved along his shoulder behind, and plunged him into the Incubator itself. Foul tasting liquid flooded into his mouth, seared at his eyes. He slammed hard against a cluster of bodies—head bounced off the face of a blonde-haired woman. Her eyes were still locked to him. Unblinking. Undeterred. All of their eyes were.

SOURCE [5.68/10] LITERS

Immediately, he felt the essence of the ichor recoil from his. Crimson fled from the monochrome, but to no avail. His black and white spread out like an infection. Ironically, the entire process reminded him of blood coloring water, inverted though the involved colors were. Shade and bright spread out from his open wounds, neutralizing every drop of crimson they touched.

A pocket of air formed around Wei, the hellish waters neutralized—*unmade*. The woman staring at him bounced as her full weight asserted itself, dropping as the umbilical cord attached to the back of her skull dissolved into nothingness.

Wei hadn't the time to consider what just happened to him as a section of the Incubator was fully severed by his leaking Source. And suddenly, and the surging ichor below him reversed

their flows. Hundreds of bodies were abandoned, left to fall from the sky. The rest of the Incubator above Wei retracted into the air, fleeing from him.

Once more, he was descending. But this time, when he sensed a chill forming against his throat, he reacted instant.

His hands shot out—caught the Specter’s claw before it could plunge it all the way through. The demon responded with surprise, carried both of them higher as a sweeping mist poured free from its dancing cloak. Ethereal frost began to form around Wei, burrowing deep into his joints, digits, and orifices. Despite this, the Specter struggled to match his strength—and then screamed when he drove a fist up into its extended elbow.

An echoing substance exploded out from the Specter’s broken limb. The colors of its **Spirit** flashed into his awareness—crimson as well, but of a different shade from the Incubator. He drove a kick into his chest while digging his fingers into the back of its neck with his left hand. With his right, he caught its shattered arm and *pulled*.

SOURCE [4.79/10] LITERS

WARNING: You are damaged. It is recommended that you perform [Source Refinement] at the soonest opportunity to prevent an undue death.

Part of the Specter jerked, snapped, and came free. The demon screamed again, and the volume like spikes of pain burrowing into his ears. But no ringing followed. No deafness.

They exploded across the sky, the coldness assailing Wei, his fists and knees assaulting the Specter. It carried him around the winding columns of ichor, spun, dove, and rose to shake him free, but he was beyond noticing pain now.

Within Wei’s mind, there was just him and the Specter—the face of his father filling the emptiness within its hood. His fist rattled away against its body in a rapid blur, every strike burrowing deeper, gouging more and more of its **Spirit** away. It slashed at him using its other hand, raking across his stomach. Wei noted the damage, and ignored it. He was still functional. This fight wasn’t over.

The Specter may be the death of him, but two could still share a fate.

SOURCE [2.04/10] LITERS

As more Source spilled free from his body, its threads unfurled over the demon and left clean slashes where they passed. Entire sections of its body suddenly *weren’t*. The cold broke as the sweltering heat of this hell returned, and the Specter staggered, form flickering as more of its wounds revealed themselves with oozing echoes.

Whipping a final fist up into the nothingness that was its face, Wei felt his strike pass clean through as the Specter broke apart, unraveling as if flecks of black ash.

Weightless returned. For a few heartbeats, Wei felt himself continue forth, the force imparted on him by the Specter's flight carrying him through the air still. His body screamed. Monochrome essence left his wounds in incomprehensible patterns. He felt death approach once more. He felt death, but his body still somehow *fine*, without a hint of diminished efficiency.

SOURCE [1.89/10] LITERS

All around him, the other Incubators were retracting, plucked from the ground by a passing storm. It was like a chain of lightning extracting a forest of trees in an instant. The sight was absurd. Ridiculous. More and more, Wei was convinced that he had gone insane—or had been condemned to some strange hell. But it still felt real. There was too much detail; too much coherence to be just a delusion or a dream.

As the blockade of ichor vanished ahead of him, he found the horizon unveiled to him for the first time. Near the bend of the horizon, rising from the soil beyond even the storm-scarred firmament, was a tower unlike anything he ever witnessed. It rose higher than even the mountain of the Drowned Sky Sect, and its design was a thing of gold, bronze, obsidian, and painted glass. It continued past the point where he could see, seeming crossing over into the colossal loop that hovered beyond the atmosphere.

At its base was a bowl of other shapes and structures—parapets made from blackened stone; watchtowers with blinking eyes forged from viridescent flame. They noticed Wei around the same time he saw them, and as their gazes met, he felt a hammer fall against his **Mind**.

Psionic attack detected

Resisting Attribute Damage to Host's Memory (Lv. 2) using Spirit Willpower Lv. [ERROR]

Resisted

Transferring reduced damage over to Spirit

SOURCE [0.83/10] LITERS

COMBAT ENCOUNTER ARCHIVED

CONVERTING CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE INTO SOURCE...

Warning: Source capacity critical. It is recommended that you perform [Source Refinement] at the soonest opportunity to prevent an undue death.

Attention: You have archived enough conceptual experience to advance the Level of your Source Core

The hammer broke itself upon his mind. Distantly, he saw the eye that notice him come asunder, imploding inward while the rest of it shattered. Wei's vision blurred momentarily as his thoughts took a moment to respond.

A second later, his consciousness stabilized itself, restoring him to full efficiency.

Warning: Source capacity critical. It is recommended that you perform [Source Refinement] at the soonest opportunity to prevent an undue death.

"I heard you," Wei said, feeling himself begin to fall. Ridiculous. He was speaking to a voice in his head now. A voice that offered him more information that he knew. A voice that was trying to... *Source Refinement*. Was it referring to cultivation.

Yes.

Right. Of course, his madness could read his mind.

Weakness nipped at him. The ground was coming at him face, a surface of hard obsidian hordes of demons still roaming across pockets of its expanse despite the departure of the Incubators.

Broken as he was, Wei didn't think he would survive this fall.

Your estimates are correct. That is why recommended that you perform [Source Refinement] at the soonest opportunity to prevent an undue death.

Wei listened to the same recommendation repeated for a third time and nodded. It wasn't like he had anything to lose anymore. If this was a second life, it had been a quick one; if this was just madness, he wished he could have found himself trapped in a different delusion—one where none of this happened, where he was back with his family, his sect.

He pushed all that aside, asserted his focus as only he could. He closed his eyes, tried to forget that he was due an ugly landing soon, and sought his **Nascent Spirit**—only to find it absent. The surprise he felt from earlier returned, and his trance nearly came undone, but another sensation kept his mind rooted.

The sensation of... *everything*. He thought he could feel everything—was a part of everything. Before, his **Spirit** had its own boundaries, existed apart from the greater wholeness. Reality screamed at him as he tried to cultivate, assailed him as he tried to nourish himself with much-needed energy. Now, reality didn't scream as he flowed. Flowed perfectly through him. Flowed with him. Passed beneath him, an ocean of colors deviating from shifting monochrome.

Centering himself upon this ocean of existence, Wei felt his **Spirit** fill once more, growing from a paltry droplet to a raindrop, then a trickle, then a welling pool.

Source Restored

>[10/10] LITERS

SYSTEM STABILIZED

INTERNALIZING CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE...

[SPIRIT CORE] ADVANCEMENT: 225%

>SPIRIT CORE Lv.1 > Lv.3

BODY ADVANCEMENT: 350%

BODY THRESHOLD [POST-MORTAL] (Lv. 1 > Lv. 10)

BODY Lv. 5 > Lv. 8

- **MIGHT Lv. 4 > Lv. 8: 6.5 TONS [MAX FORCE OUTPUT]**
- **CELERITY Lv. 5 > Lv. 7: 0.09/SECOND [MAX REACTION SPEED]; 165 METERS/SECOND [MAX VELOCITY]**
- **FORTITUDE Lv. 4 > Lv. 8: 81 CENTIMETERS OF IRON [CLOSEST MATERIAL COMPARISON FOR HOST'S BIOLOGICAL DURABILITY]**

MIND ADVANCEMENT: 55%

MIND Lv. 2

MIND THRESHOLD [MORTAL] (Lv. 1 > Lv. 3)

SPIRIT ADVANCEMENT: 350%

SPIRIT THRESHOLD [POST-MORTAL] (Lv. 1 > Lv. 10)

SPIRIT Lv. 5 > Lv. 8

- **SYMPATHY Lv. 3 > Lv. 6: 0.60 LITERS/SECOND [OF SOURCE DISTILLED FROM EXISTENCE]**
- **WILLPOWER Lv. [ERROR]: [ERROR - UNABLE TO QUANTIFY]**
- **SOURCE Lv. 5 > Lv. 8 [AT CAPACITY]: 15 LITERS**
- **AWARENESS Lv. 3 > Lv. 4: 60 METERS [RANGE OF PERFECT SENSORY AWARENESS]**

MASTRIES DEMONSTRATED

>UNARMED COMBAT: 85%

>THROWING: 20%

>EVASION: 105%

>MEDITATION: 10%

MASTERY ACHIEVED

GENERATING MASTERY FROM FOUNDATIONAL ATTRIBUTES

>EVASION [I]: HOSTILES WILL HAVE THEIR REACTION SPEED AND MOVEMENT SPEED DIMINISHED BY AN AMOUNT EQUAL TO THE HOST'S (CELERITY).

SOURCE CORE AT Lv. 3

PROGRESSION TO NEXT FOUNDATIONAL SOURCERY [SOULSPACE]: 50%