

**[THRALLS]**

**[SERVANTS]**

**[KNIGHTS]**

**[COUNTS]**

**[MARQUESESSES]**

**[DUKES]**

**[PRINCES]**

**[KINGS]**

***A world has been found. A world of incomparable value. A pure world, devoid of a true and deserved master, untainted by the primordial ichors — unclaimed by a [SYSTEM].***

***Such a supple canvas calls to me, and its soil lay ripe for our expansion.***

***The time is upon us once more. The time to raid. The time to rage and rave. The time to bring forth a cleansing (APOCALYPSE) to sweep bare this world's original design, and usher in a proper order.***

***But we are not singular in this hunger. We are not alone in conquest. Our rivals seek to infest this land before we can, seek to absorb its people, mysteries, and technologies before we can. Such an insult cannot be allowed to stand — make no mistake: this realm is a treasure above treasures, and it must be made ours.***

***In recognition of this, We, Mepheleon the [HARBINGER], Speaker of the [SYSTEM] that governs these Crawling Worlds, declare the summary initiation of the Blood Games!***

***Regardless of if you find yourself a [THRALL] seeking to claim a [CLASS] and descend to the Circle of [SERVANTS] through triumph, or if you are simply hungering for the [SYSTEM]'s favor, the gates to the Moongraves stand open, and the path to your pleasure awaits.***

***Prove yourselves. Prove yourselves for a place in the coming (APOCALYPSE). Prove yourself to us, and be granted the right to take from this virgin world your rightful spoils.***

**-Mepheleon the [HARBINGER], Sovereign of Diaspora, Lord of the Claimed Hells, Master of the Crawling Worlds**

## Stranger in a Stranger Land

Existence came alight before Wei. All of a sudden, he was aware and alive, with no memory of even opening his eyes. It was like his consciousness ignited into being like a candle.

What greeted him first was the sky, but not a sky he knew. No clouds drifted overhead—no freshness of air, no blue and bright colors. Instead, the atmosphere was one of sweltering static, and its face was lined with slow, sprawling storms. Bolts of crimson lightning spread out like expanding veins creeping languidly over existence, their branches joining and breaking, curving down past his vision like trailing willows.

Between their striations were pockets of quivering monochrome. Wei gained his first glimpse of the greater cosmos and beheld its aesthetics. It seemed a turbulent ocean locked in struggle against itself, shifting motes of light and dark grinding together, making the skies resemble a boiling cauldron. A twinge of recognition passed through Wei. He knew these colors—more, he could *sense* them. Feel an energy there that seeped down upon the world, that dissolving into faintness.

Those were the hues poured into his **Nascent Spirit**, recolored him from the dullness of gray.

And then, just beyond the near-opaque chaos, a colossal structure loomed, bringing with a wave of artificial brightness. At first, he thought it was the curve of a burning moon drawn near to him by an illusion, but then more of it unveiled itself, displaced the chaos inhabiting the hues beyond the atmosphere. It resembled a torus passing over him, and across its surface were massive sprawling structures and blooming lights.

Even so far, he felt faint emanations of cultivation—spikes of power that pierced his awareness as if daggers cast from beyond the horizon.

A line of text drifted across his perception, breaking him from his stupor.

**HOST AWAKENED**

**GENERATING STATUS UPDATE FROM HOST'S MEMORY**

**NAME: WEI AN WEI**

**SPECIES: [CULTIVATOR/TRESPASSER]**

**SOURCE CORE: [Lv. 1]**

**SOURCE [10/10] LITERS**

**>SOURCE CONVERSION: 0.33 LITERS/SECOND**

>SOURCE OUTPUT: [ERROR]

## ESTIMATING FOUNDATIONAL ATTRIBUTES...

WARNING: (BODY) AND (SPIRIT) ATTRIBUTES ARE ENTWINED DUE TO ADAPTION TO SOURCE CORRUPTION

ORIGINAL BODY LOST AND REFORMED FROM CONVERTED SOURCE

## ATTRIBUTES

BODY (Lv. 5) [LEVEL CAPACITY SHARED WITH SPIRIT]

>MIGHT Lv. 4: 2 TONS [MAX FORCE OUTPUT]

>CELERITY Lv. 5 [AT CAPACITY]: 0.15/SECOND [MAX REACTION SPEED]; 120 METERS/SECOND [MAX VELOCITY]

>FORTITUDE Lv. 4: IRON [CLOSEST MATERIAL COMPARISON FOR HOST'S BIOLOGICAL DURABILITY]

MIND (Lv. 2)

>LOGIC Lv. 2 [AT CAPACITY]: 1.5x [BASELINE HUMAN PROCESSING/PATTERN COMPILATION EFFICIENCY]; 1 STREAM OF THOUGHT

>MEMORY Lv. 1: [BASELINE HUMAN]

>INSIGHT Lv. 1: [BASELINE HUMAN]

SPIRIT (Lv. 5) [LEVEL CAPACITY SHARED WITH BODY]

>SYMPATHY Lv. 3: 0.33 LITERS/SECOND [OF SOURCE DISTILLED FROM EXISTENCE]

>WILLPOWER Lv. [ERROR]: [ERROR - UNABLE TO QUANTIFY]

>SOURCE Lv. 5 [AT CAPACITY]: 10 LITERS

>AWARENESS Lv. 3: 50 METERS [RANGE OF PERFECT SENSORY AWARENESS]

## ASCENSIONS

>[SOURCEFORGED]: THE HOST'S PHYSICAL VESSEL HAS BEEN REFORMED FROM PURE SOURCE. HOST IS NOW CAPABLE OF KINETICALLY INTERFACING WITH PURE SPIRITUAL ENTITIES. WARNING: HOST WILL CEASE TO EXIST IF ALL SOURCE COMPOSING THEM IS COMPLETELY EXPENDED.

## MASTERIES

>[NONE]

## SOURCERIES

**>SOURCE REFINEMENT: THE HOST CAN DISTILL SOURCE AT A PACE OF 0.33 LITERS/SECOND BY MEDITATING AND SYNCHRONIZING WITH THEIR SURROUNDING REALITY [BASED ON SYMPATHY LEVEL].**

**>SOURCE AMPLIFICATION: HOST CAN CHANNEL THEIR SOURCE TO BOOST THEIR BODY ATTRIBUTES. PHYSICAL CAPABILITIES ARE MULTIPLIED PER 5 LITERS OF SOURCE CONVERTED.**

Wei struggled to make sense of all the information. He had no idea what **Source** or **Anima** was supposed to be, and neither did he fully understand how some of these metrics were established. The analogies used to judge his body and mind cultivation were in line with what he knew; he had demonstrated feats in line with those listed during his training.

More incomprehensible was the **Ascension. Sourceforged?** Physical body destroyed? But that was impossible. He wasn't at that stage of cultivation yet. For a disciple to become Ascended took centuries of training; of perfecting mind, body, and spirit. Wei had barely begun to walk his Path.

As his confusion grew, a *presence* within him reacted.

**The [SYSTEM] will provide a detailed walkthrough for all queries posed by the host. However, it is recommended that the host leave the local area. Informational telemetries indicate that we are in a demonic hatchery.**

Wei blinked twice. "*What?*"

He shot up to a seated position and took his surroundings once more. The ground beneath was that of obsidian, with gleaming fluid flowing through the arteries that lined its cracks. Heat seared discomfort into Wei without ever becoming pain, but he found himself more consumed by the fact that he could *feel* the drifting liquid running through the ground's sundered channels—could feel *everything* in perceivable existence drifting around him, *through* him.

This was a level of clarity he never knew before. He was a disciple at the **Nascent Spirit** stage—true awareness should not be—

Coldness filled him. He turned his focus from beyond to within, and found his stomach turning into a growing void. His **Nascent Spirit** was missing.

**Correction: Your metaphysical shadow was damaged; your body was being corrupted and reverted to pure source. The [SYSTEM] transplanted your Spirit into your Body to ensure your continued existence while adapting your Spiritual architecture to process Source. Your body and spirit are no longer layered, but parallel.**

Wei understood the words, but the sense behind them—what was going on? His mind was lost in a whirlwind. Memories tore through him as his breath came fast—he couldn't feel the beating

of his heart—his *mother*... she was dead. His father... was he dead? How was Wei still alive? Where was he? What—

His mind tumbled from one moment to the next. A new sight distracted him from the rising tumult. Not five meters away, an enormous, transparent column sprouted from the land. The many veins lining the obsidian surged upward, channeling their energies into it. It wasn't *cultivated* essence, but he could sense it. Feel it. As he followed its pathway up, Wei felt his jaw open slightly as he saw a cluster of shapes bobbing within the column.

*Humans.*

Some of them were human, anyway. From all manner of foreign cultures, considering the way they were dressed and the oddities of their appearances. The other creatures... seeing how he could sense them too, he guessed they counted as awakened beings, alien though they were. Cords were burrowed into the back of their skulls, and their faces were shifting contortions of emotion and expression.

Their eyes were open but vacant, and from them was extracted a particular resonance that slid across his senses like a sword gliding over tin. Wei winced.

All around him were countless more of these pillars, with where he stood being a clearing in a dense forest. Looking up, he saw the webwork of red storms connecting and breaking from the structures, exchanging energies as they passed.

**Structures Identified: [Sin-Incubator]**

**>Sin-Incubator: A structure meant to extract conceptual [Sins] from an entity before combining the severity and nature of their transgressions, thereby forming a demon.**

Then, from behind, Wei heard a noise—sensed something *break* at the borders of his perception. Spinning, he found the cracks running along the ground fracturing wider. Blackened blacks spewed free in sync with a spray of festering fluid. Wei recognized it immediately as the ichor of a demon, and when a thin tendril punched through the ground, instinct guided Wei as he readied himself.

The boulder-sized nightmare that burst free from the soil greeted the air with a screech—a twisted facsimile of a newborn at the moment of their birth. Nine whip-like tentacles flicked along its back, but the rest of its body resembled that of a hound. The way its skull blossomed open like petals ended the comparison there, and a chasm of quivering flame licked at the world using plumes of flame.

**Hostile Entity Identified: [Hellhound]**

**>Hellhound**

**Threat Lv. 2**

**Capable of limited pyrokinesis and possesses Essence [Conceptual distillations of Source] draining capabilities.**

**Assessment: Inferior adversary. Might attribute on par with host.**

The Hellhound sniffed twice and looked around. Only when it laid eyes on Wei did it seem to truly notice him. It jerked back, seemingly in surprise, before letting out an enraged cackle with its howling flames.

Wei moved, and an explosion of air erupted opposite the path he strode. He cleaved left across the ground as a wave of cascading fire roared out from the Hellhound's open skull. Its tentacles lashed at the surrounding area, slashing wildly to deny him an angle of entry. Intelligent. Definitely more intelligent than just a dog.

**Demons inherit fragments of memories and experiences from the progenitors they were extracted from.**

Wei ignored his *potential insanity* as he snatched a shard of obsidian off the ground. He aimed his shot as he kept running, moving fast to keep to the hound's side. The fire coursing out from it was unceasing. To his surprise, he could *sense* the channeling of its energy as well, knew it to be a diluted form of what flowed within him. He timed his shot—waited for three tendrils to arc past—then launched the rock with all his strength.

A whip crack sounded through the air. The stone threaded between its misshapen body, punching through ragged fur with a splatter of kaleidoscopic ichor. The Hellhound stumbled two more steps before its flame sputtered and its body sagged. It collapsed face-first on the ground and began decomposing rapidly, material body unraveling into flecks of ash and unidentified essence.

## **COMBAT ENCOUNTER ARCHIVED CONVERTING CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE INTO SOURCE...**

Wei swallowed as the voice inside his mind continued talking, as lines of text flowed across his awareness. Perhaps this was all just a dream. A nightmare. Or maybe all he remembered did happen, that he went made the moment he saw his mother's severed head facing him. Or maybe he was dying still, and had retreated into his mind.

But it didn't feel like he was dreaming. It didn't seem like he was lost in a delusion. His **Body** and **Spirit** felt more attuned than ever, and his mind processed things with a clarity he could only call refined. Functionally, he never felt better. Internally, his thoughts were still reeling, forced him to do all he could to not think about what happened to his home, his mother, his father...

**New hostile entities detected.**

No sooner did the voice speak to him did he sense them as well. They crept into the borders of his awareness from all around him. Some slithered, others walked, a few trotted, and one passed over the land like flowing mist.

Looking around, Wei saw more forms emerging from behind the **Sin-Incubators**, forming as if a pack of wolves stepping out behind the trunk of trees. But wolves they were not. Instead, their bodies were misshapen distortions of humans, insects, and animals. First among them were the Hellhounds, faces snapping open, flames burning bright. Behind them came towering chimeras that seemed the bastard offspring of a human skeleton grafted upon the body of a war horse. And then, wafting over them, drifted a hooded shade, bringing with it an ethereal chill.

There were twelve of them so far, and more were entering his perception by the second.

**Hostile Entities Identified: [Horseman], [Specter]**

**>Horseman Lv.4**

**>Specter Lv. 7**

**Assessment: Successful engagement unlikely. Recommend an immediate retreat.**

Wei nodded numbly at that. He might be going insane and hearing voices, but at least his delusions sounded intelligent and were trying to aid him. A cultivator was to draw from all sources of power to forge an advantage. Even if it was their own madness.

Eyeing a potential gap between the foes arrayed against him, Wei mustered his focus and sprung forth, intending to break out from the encirclement.