

I'm done. I'm done being bitter about me falling out from my life because someone else made the mistake of not fastening the fridge when they were driving down the freeway! I'm done. I'm fine. I'm entirely calm now.

*But even so, it would have been nice if instead of getting this useless **System** that makes me suffer across all corners of this miserable parody of a universe, I could have gotten something that would have allowed me to change myself from being a damn goblin...*

Alright. Okay. Let's get down to writing this entry.

"Trespassers: Getting ingrained with a system doesn't naturally make you better than someone else with a Class. Your relative power is purely determined by your Core and Ascension Levels.

*What is Ascension, some of you new guys ask. Well, that's a measurement for how elevated you are from baseline material reality, and how close you are to becoming a literal platonic embodiment of a certain **Classified** or **Systemic** ideal.*

You can think of a System as a frame built around an existing reality, replicating the existing structure to create new conceptual laws to use as pillars. It's why attributes work the way they do. It's also why there are so many different attributes across various Systems, its why gunpowder and electricity doesn't work right in some, gravity is looser in others—it's why magic exists, basically. The essence? Mana? Whatever you call it? That's just conceptual discharge. A membrane formed to protect the stable structure of unaltered dimensions from Systemic dimensions.

The biggest difference between the System and a Class is how the former doesn't really have a limit of growth. You'll develop based on your experience, restructure reality to whatever extent your System designation allows. Not bad. A Class has limits because it's a Classification within an environment. A person marked as "Fighter" is going to continuously get better at fighting with his weapons, while someone marked "Mage" can start telling the laws of thermodynamics to screw.

Ultimately, though, take what you can get. Take what power you can find. Get your Core and Ascensions up as soon as possible. It's a rough place down here, and dimensions predate on each other. The Source is only so much an insulator between all the System-Hosts, and if you end up like me, you'll learn to appreciate the cards you do have.

Not everyone gets a glorious dimensional-warping System or something that allows you to hand out Classes. Some of us just end up trapped as constantly diving parallel instances of the same shitty person who just can't die.

Or, for the rare few that find them, you might end up with System Designation Keter: the Concept Breaker. That one doesn't reshape the world. Doesn't hand out Classes either. Not Made for it. That one is meant to do one thing, and one thing only. Shatter other Systems. Shatter other realities.

Needless to say, other System-hosts usually try to destroy Keters when they can..."

-"Schrödinger," of the Terminal Omnipresence

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The Almost Invisible Hand of the Market (I)

As the Almost Invisible Hand of the Market rose, strands of viscera clung to its underside, while the wealth of the slain bandits were absorbed into the inner threshold of the hand's translucence. A numeric projection manifested over the slain in brightly flashing orange colors.

<10,000 SINS

LIVES FORECLOSED!

Wei frowned as he tried to understand what just happened. Once more, his System offered him context.

The demonic entity is inflicting pure force damage upon other entities that do not meet a certain economic threshold within its measurements. Detecting an essence related to the concept of wealth. Expect physical damage to be expressed through all conceptual representations of wealth.

The young master turned his gaze upward and frowned at the figure looming over him. **[28,550 Sins]**. He was insulated for now, but if the threshold of Sins rose a few times more, perhaps he would find himself sharing a fate with these fools. Strange as the demon's Path was, Wei knew cultivators who manipulated the flow of wealth and fortune, refined their Spirits by mediating on their earnings.

The foe he was facing might be esoteric, but its effects were still physical, and the items it fixated on were still tangible. There must be a way he could exploit this.

A massive set of numbers materialized over the hand.

Almost Invisible Hand of the Market - [1,000,000 SINS] + [33,554 SINS]

Tethers that once bound coins and items to the bandits were now joined to the hand, and all the goods that were taken circulated in the Demon of Greed's interior like blood through veins.

"Ignium's Eye," Agnesia muttered, looking near-sick at the sloppy remains of the dead. Despite the power and heat emanating from her, there was also a stench of inexperience. How did this girl get here? With an ill mother, no less.

There was a story worth knowing. If they managed to survive.

The fingers of the Almost Invisible Hand of the Market curled around them, forming something akin to a cage across the entire cavern. Slowly, the wealth it consumed dissolved inside it, and Wei thought it became ever more corporeal. The sheer amount of essence flooding out from the hand ground against Wei's senses like an intangible pressure.

Something told him he didn't have the **Constitution** to survive even a single direct blow from the demon. But neither was there anywhere to maneuver, any way to escape. As things stood, it seemed like his only options were to attack first and risk retaliation, or play this absurd game. Then, the choice of the former was seized by another as one of Angelous' archers loosed a shot straight into the hand's palm.

It struck with a rattling crack that rippled across the entire hand but where metal would sink through flesh or skip off against armor, the arrow jolted to a halt from the hand's aura alone. Not even a dent was left at the point of impact.

Another set of numbers ignited over the hand.

Almost Invisible Hand of the Market [1,033,554 SINS] > Sebastian Yew (Longbowman) [6,500 SINS]

Challenge failed! Monopoly maintained!

With the hand's market supremacy established, a pulse of pressure detonated out from the hand, and splashed across the entire chamber. As people everywhere threw up their hands to ward off the rushing winds, Wei kept his eyes on the offending archer—a man known as Sebastian Yew—and watched them burst apart in a puff of red vapor.

It was like watching a mortal caught in the crossfire of a high-velocity technique: one moment they were there, the next, they were gone.

Mepheleon entered the scene once more with a sigh. ***“Now, as you can all see, demonstrated helpfully by our unfortunate friend, Sinner Yew, attacking the market when you are poor does nothing but harm you, much like in actual life itself. In this Trial of Charity, your goal is simple: kill the Almost Invisible Hand of the Market. There are two ways of doing that. The first, if you're a certain cultivator, is the direct way. But the rest of you aren't so blessed as he is, and I don't think he's developed far enough for a direct confrontation. The other... well, all of you surviving Sinners combined still hold more wealth than the Almost Invisible Hand by far. Just a shame all that currency isn't concentrated.”***

Wei watched the other competitors as Mepheleon spoke. He counted a pack of twelve wolfmen not far away, Angelous' scattered band in the near vicinity, the Oathbearers, Faebloods,

Agnesia and her mother beside him. He knew there were others from the time he spent airborne earlier. The insect-people, for one. How many stood against the hand?

The Harbinger continued. ***“The second path to survival comes in two forms. Match the wealth of the hand to damage it — a process that will take longer, as you will be required to manually kill it in this case — or surpass its wealth and let it fall upon you. In such an outcome, the fate met by poor Sebastian will be visited upon the demon in turn. Sinners. I ask you now, will you be charitable enough to share your treasures when the next foreclosure falls? Or will you hoard? Will you take from another?”***

A cipher-formed dome manifested over Wei and those near him, separating them behind a weave of shifting sigils and flowing symbols.

“The market is closed now. I am placing all in five separate sanctuaries so you may look over the treasures you claimed and prepare yourselves. Spend the next minute how you will, for when it ends, the ciphers will vanish, and you will be able to face the others again. You’ll get another minute after that to give away your wealth. Should you wish to steal from someone else... well, they cannot be alive for such a thing to be possible. As promised before, the treasures are bonded to you. Till death do you part. Anyways. I have said enough, and leave you with a quote: greed is good so long as you know how to use it, and it doesn’t use you. Good luck!”

As soon as Mepheleon’s voice faded, new text manifested next to the Almost Invisible Hand’s total Sins.

Time to Market Opening - 01:00... 00:59...

Time to Next Foreclosure - [01:30]

Another second ticked by, but Wei was already preparing himself. Checking his new equipment as quickly as he could, he took stock of his artifacts and gauged their potential. Once again, his System proved its use by interfacing with them via their essence and feeding the details directly into his mind.

Staff of Falling Thunder: Creates a cloud containing mystical, concussive bolts of lightning [4/4 Casts Per Day]. The contained spell is aimed by the staff and triggered through intent.

Shield of Inner Holding: Shield will convert every hit of force into mass [up to 2 tons]. The force can be detonated outward at any time.

Banner of the Palliative Mists: Creates a healing mist for 25 meters around the user. Remains active for as long as the banner remains intact. Those inside the mist can see the outside clearly as well. Triggered by intent.

Helmet of Darkseeing: Allows the user to have perfect visibility in darkness up to 120 feet.

Feet? Wei thought, looking down at the soft, leather helmet. It wouldn't be stopping any real blows, and it held little aesthetic to its design, looking little more than a hood.

A different form of measurement.

Shaking off his confusion, he dropped the helmet on the ground beside him for now before seizing the banner and slamming it into the ground. The vapor should give him and the others some cover should Angelous or the wolfmen decide to meet their fates, force them to approach and die upon the tip of Wei's spear.

As he hammered his banner's haft into the obsidian, rooting it in place and triggering the spreading of the vapors with a thought, he saw the Oathbearers hammering away beside him, their runic hammers flashing with blinding symbols as they struck and reshaped the ground. It was as if existence itself was their anvil.

Another blast of light shone out beside Wei, and he saw Agnesia gasping as she hefted the greatsword. Massive stone-formed gauntlets now covered her hands, calcification climbing up her arms, and as she twisted the hilt of the blade, the weapon somehow grew three times larger, the cipher connected to its pommel glowing bright.

The girl's mother meanwhile shivered against the chest, eyes rolling. A leather vest had been hastily strapped over her, as well as the chainmail pants, pulled directly over her current breeches, but she was in no condition to fight. She was barely conscious as it was.

"Stone Giant Gauntlets and a Greatsword of Enlargement," Agnesia said, testing the weight of the weapon. Her posture indicated that she knew how to hold and use the sword, but the closeness of her stance told Wei she lacked true skill. "The former makes me weigh as much as a stone giant. The latter can be enlarged to three times its size." She swallowed. "I'm in your debt for this, ser."

Wei regarded her quietly. "Have you ever killed anyone?"

She scoffed. "You saw me burn the demons—"

"A person. Someone that will scream if not incinerated outright. Someone that will wail, beg, and weep for their life."

Agnesia went quiet. Her eyes were like burning embers as her face hardened with distant bitterness and pain. "Yes."

"Good. You will likely need to kill a few more for her." He pointed at her mother with his spear. "The mist will provide cover to her, but she will need more wealth soon as well. Unless you can make return to the state she was in—"

“No!” The sheer forcefulness of the girl’s reply cut him off. “No. I will not let her succumb to the taint. I will not.” She bit her lip and sighed. “I’ll find a way to keep her safe. I will remember what you have done for me. Us. If I ever manage to—” She stopped talking and shook her head. “I have nothing worth offering but my thanks and gratitude. But I know how dire my state is. If you wish to focus on preserving yourself—”

Wei found as her voice took on a bargaining quality. As he read fear in her gaze and a nervousness in her posture, he guessed her fear, and almost found himself outraged. “I’m not going to take from you or your mother, you fool.” He scoffed. What did these Pathless take him for? A faceless savage? “I already pledged to keep her in my responsibility. She is under my charge. I will see her safe and restrained, less my virtue be tarnished.”

A look of pure disbelief overtook Agnesia’s expression. “Y-you meant that? Actually?”

Wei narrowed his eyes at her. “Are you trying to insult me? Of course I meant what I said. Why else would have made the declaration.”

She looked against, a slight bit of color came to her face. “I... guess that you might have been partially motivated by... untoward intentions towards my mother. Or me.”

“Untoward intentions?” Wei blinked. “What are you on about.”

Agnesia’s expression grew evermore awkward. “It’s well. You’re a—” She sighed. “I don’t even know your name.”

She clearly wasn’t listening the last few times he introduced himself. Or every time the Harbinger talked. But then again, she was understandably distracted.

“Young Master Wei An Wei of the Drowned Sky Sect,” he said. He neglected to perform the salute for her, more intent on strapping the shield across his left arm. The weight felt unwieldy and Wei tested moving his arm. Shields were not his tool of preferences, but he knew how to use them as well as any.

Among all the gifts he claimed, only the Staff of Falling Thunder proved more to be his preference. As it was so, he grasped the staff and activated it. A cloud immediately hissed free from the cracks in the length of gnarled, ashen wood. Now a cloud hovered over him, melting into the banner’s vapors, thrumming with pregnant electricity and static.

Casts: [4/4]

As he grinned at his staff, a wall went up around the corner of his vision. He turned, only to find himself wordless again as the dwarves began hammering out battlements. The machine they once had was now missing, and in its place, they had trench lines dug into the ground, furrows running from point to point, small bunkers from which Wei sensed the three Faebloods hiding.

The Oathbearers swung their hammers to the melody of a unified rhythm and song. Their blows fell in practiced tandem, but more surprising was how neatly the ground shattered. Every impact had a square block some five meters across come asunder into parting steam, then contained within a hovering runic symbol that vanished thereafter. A wall of battlements went up around their group in bursts of white-hot vapor, and upon them were ballistas and catapults—all in a matter of seconds.

Roggi approached him from behind, the ground shaking beneath the Oathbearer's alloyed sabatons.

"Wei," Roggi greeted, "another fresh horror for us to sample, eh?" He laughed, as if several men weren't just smeared across the ground. "Ah. We'll be fine. Every *Forgekin* knows the worth of gold. No glorified tax demon will see us done. Say, your number's looking a little low. Would you like to have a loan?"

"A loan?" Wei said, incredulous. He stared up at the towering Oathbearer. "I saved your life!"

Roggi nodded. "Yes, and I'm doing you a favor: I'll give you good interest. 1.4%. Annual."

One of the other Oathbearers, one with sapphires instead of rubies in their eye sockets, cried out. "Don't trust him, lad. This one would sell his Make to a pack of goblins for a good story and some ale."

Roggi cursed and waved them off, and Wei just took in the scene. A second layer of protections went up immediately thereafter. What was once open space was rapidly growing more fortified. The young master sighed as he studied Roggi's number. 66,000. That was substantial. The other Oathbearers also shared comparable numbers. With a re-pooling of wealth, potentially they could see the Almost Invisible Hand of the Market's Sins surpassed. But that came at substantial risk for the others, and took more than a little trust.

10... 9...

Roggi rolled his arms. The act made his armor groan. "The others. I expect some of them to be coming for us," He bounced his hammer in his hand. "Make you another deal. We'll keep fortifying here. You keep the fast and slippery ones in check if they get in. And maybe do a little raiding of your own after. It'll free you up from watching the sick one with the girl." Roggi gestured at Agnesia's mother.

Wei nodded. "It would be appreciated, but you might need to convince this one." He gave the white-haired girl a look. "She is fearful. For good reason, I suppose."

"Oh," Roggi said, hearing Wei's subtext. "If we intended to take something from her or you, we would have done it immediately, instead of preparing these battlements."

Wei nodded at that. He assumed as much. There were many other openings presented. None taken. "But one can't be too paranoid when trapped in hell."

“Such is truth.”

3... 2...

“I thank of you for this. Again.” Agnesia placed her hand against her chest as she spoke, her voice thick, her eyes slightly misted. “I won’t ever be able to—”

1

Foreclosure - 01:30... 01:29

And before the girl could finish, we felt twelve clenching sensations squeeze his senses at once. Distortions formed in random places around them, and the forms of snarling wolfmen entered the haze.

Awareness Advanced > 13

[4/5] Aspect Advancements to Core Ascension

“Bring me that little shit!” a familiar voice howled. “Take him alive so I can tear off his balls!”