

There are two truths universal to the Fathoms: worlds die, and most Systems can't coexist in the same place without breaking against each other. When these two truths intersect, you get what most Trespassers call a "System Apocalypse."

For those of you fortunate enough to be on the right side of an apocalypse—or survive the wrong end of one—it usually begins with a Tower from one world breaching another. Or maybe it was always there, and someone just decided to use it.

What follows after is usually a struggle for assimilation. Every realm has its own rules and function. Sure, most places are pretty similar in a lot of ways, with the only difference between whether they call essence "Mana" or "Magicka," but it's these differences that cause the gears of this universe to get jammed.

Imagine a nation with two kings. Equal in authority. You have to do exactly as they say. And they just told you different things. Yeah. Things start to break. Knowing this, the invading System will usually deploy forces from their side to damage the critical metaphysical infrastructure on the other side.

This might be flooding a low magic world with mana until reality starts collapsing. More commonly, it takes the form of murdering all the gods or heroes the defending System uses to exert its will, thereby severing it from all its existing tethers and causing it to shrivel and die in short order without hosts. The simplest—and crudest way—however, is just destroying everything. Kill all the people, crack the planet, collapse the atmosphere, and let Source Corruption deal with the debris as the phlogiston comes pouring in.

The winner usually doesn't get any new subjects or resources in that case, so the only time a System chooses annihilation over conquest is if they really, really hate the other world, need them removed for whatever reason, or, if you're an asshole like Mepheleon, do it partially because you like stealing stars, but mostly because someone else paid you to.

-The Trespasser's Compendium

4

Apocalypse

Air currents whipped up at Wei's face as he found himself plunging parallel to the tower. Chuckling shades brushed past him as he struggled to take in all the detail. The walls encircling the tower proved to be more *analogous* to a barrel, and impossibly, he saw streets and sprawling structures lining every inch of the curving walls. More than that, there were people walking there, some of them pointing at him as he fell, their bodies pointed perpendicular to his.

Gazing down past his feet, a weave of shifting platforms and bridges shifted, one with festooned to the tower, the other fused to the walls. And far beyond that, he watched the enormous pillar descend, reaching further than he ever thought a structure could, passing through a concentric

opening below where it tore a gulf into a shaking sea of monochrome, the rupture revealing a breach to another place.

Another world.

A dissolving world.

Time seemed to slow, then. And Wei found everything moving slower after he blinked, he realized that time didn't appear slowed — it was slowed. His plummet slowed to a languid pace as even his body obeyed the alterations made to time. Only his mind still moved at its original pace, but that did him little good, as he found himself a prisoner in his own body.

All structures blocking his view from the rift below were shifted aside, spinning to the other side of the tower. There, he was given a clear view of a realm's final moments. The first thing he noted was how the tower was sucking in atmosphere below, jet streams of vapor tracing distortions along the sides of the ponderous structure. Then, he saw all the demons spilling free from the parts of the tower extended beyond the rift, their bodies countless and myriad — a swarm leaving a hive.

Suddenly, he felt himself yanked ahead, placed exactly where the roiling sea of monochrome was parted, giving him an even closer look at the proceedings. The tower went even further. *Even further.* Far enough to split the skies over a world. Far enough to stake itself clean through a mountain.

The *mountain*... There was a tree sprouting from its top. A great and colorful tree that was...

Something inside Wei *clenched* with pain. He knew that mountain. He knew that tree. Even from so far away, he knew it—remembered the three rivers that split out from its back, the wooded pond he wandered around countless times when he needed to think. Those lush, golden fields of farmland—the protective arrays over them shattered, the land incandescent with flame.

He knew all those places and more. Knew them even as fissures enveloped the earth, the cracks spreading far and vast—opening crevices across the reach of the sea. Entire chunks of landmass were breaking free from the planet like crumbs falling from bread. This world was on the brink of shattering.

This world.

His world.

His realm.

His home.

The death of his mother loomed like an ever-present shadow in the back of his mind, but that trauma would now share space with this moment evermore. Wei's mind wailed as he found himself beyond the capacity to feel. Numbness consumed him.

Blessed numbness.

No more early morning runs down the side of the mountain. No more picking peaches from Aunt Jiu Li's backyard. No more games to be played on the outer court disciples. No more moments with his masters, seniors, peers, or juniors.

No more.

No more.

No more.

And never again.

Once more, the voice returned, humming an apologetic tone.

“Sorry. Forgot to tell you that wasn't actually a gate, but more an anchor for one of my Towers. Whoops.”

Wei barely heard them. He could barely focus on his own thoughts.

Severe mental trauma detected...

No applicable Sourcies detected.

Spirit Advancement: 110%

>Willpower Lv. [ERROR]: [ERROR]

“Well, now. You're handling this much better than I expected you to. That's a whole lot of grit you got there.”

Wei's mind jolted. The voice—they knew, they were showing this to him deliberately, taunting him. An ineffable hatred spread through his body, settling deep more like a winter chill than a roaring flame. *Why? Why are they showing me this? Was this their doing? Was it their demons that scoured my Sect?*

Warning: Psionic intrusion detected

Resisting using Willpower (Lv. [ERROR])

“Hm. Can’t quite hear your thoughts so well.”

A pocket of time resumed around Wei’s head. He took a gasp as if suffocating and strained himself. His body remained imprisoned in stasis, unmoving, looking about, he sought the form of his enemy—a form he could direct his ire upon. “Where are you?”

“Everywhere. Well, technically around. It’s more like you are ‘inside’ and ‘beside’ me at the same time. Systems. They’re pretty hard to explain. Regardless, before you start accusing me of being the destroyer of your world, I’ll have you know that my involvement is limited to the sale of a few Incubators and the temporary leasing of one of my Towers. This one, to be exact. If you want to find out why your world is getting demolished, well, I recommend you catch u to your father as soon as you can.”

Wei’s head was spinning. He felt sick. It was all he could do to stop himself from emptying his stomach. Taking in his world again, he made his heart a stone and endured. *Betray nothing.* That was what his father had always told him. Betray nothing. Not even the slightest hint of emotion before the world outside.

“Why?”

“Why?”

“Why are you showing me this? And why haven’t you stopped my father if you have such power over time.”

“Well. I thought it would be right to give you a chance to say goodbye. And honestly, I was interested in finding out what you’re made of. I expected you to die earlier, landing in my hatchery like that. But you survived. You survived a whole lot today, Wei An Wei. It might not feel it, but you are a lucky, lucky boy.”

“And as for why I haven’t stopped your father... well, that doesn’t really matter. He’s just the trigger-puller, and not the master behind. Also, I’m not in the habit of attacking my clients afterward.”

“Have you no righteousness? Have you no virtue?”

To Wei’s disbelief, the voice broke into a chorus of choking laughter. ***“Ah, man, hearing people say that to me never gets old. Wei. Buddy. Kiddo.***

Soon-to-be-angry-vengeful-patricidal-little-engine-that-could. It doesn’t matter. Nothing matters beside what me, or someone like me decides. Your world?” The voice resumed time, and Wei flinched as he watched the planet come asunder all at once. He expected a calamity of fire and devastation. He expected the skies to burn, the oceans to boil, the land to peel apart. When happened instead was a *liquefaction*. Coursing veins of red spread from the

tower across the fracturing world, plunging into its open wounds, into the skies, into the seas, into *space* itself.

Slowly, a weave of crimson enveloped all their walls, and with a final few pulses, Wei gasped as he felt last drip of Spiritual Essence be drained away from his once home.

No final crash sounded. No flash of brightness. Not even fire.

Even without meditating, he could feel one reality draining another dry. There was *so much* energy coursing up the tower—climbing higher and higher...

“What is this place?” Wei whispered, sanity quivering. “Where am I?”

“Oh. Where are my manners. I was having so much fun with you that I forgot to introduce myself. I am Mepheleon the Harbinger, Sovereign to the Claimed Hells, Ruler of the Crawling Worlds, Master of the Diaspora, and System-Bearer, with all the powers, privileges, and burdens that entails. I suppose that last part is something we both have in common, isn’t it, Young Master Wei? You someone managed to get a Category-Keter System to fuse with your Spirit. Haven’t seen one of those in a while.”

With each exchange, Wei grew evermore lost. Too much had happened to him. Too much. He needed to—he needed to—

His father. The man was still alive, or so this Mepheleon claimed.

“Release me,” Wei muttered, focus flooding his mind with purpose. He couldn’t process the information, he didn’t want to spend a moment longer thinking of his past. But he could hunt the man who betrayed his sect, who murdered his mother. “You said my father survived—that I can still catch him. Where is he?”

“And right on schedule, the vengeful son.” The voice sighed. **“You’re not ready for that fight, yet, you know, sproutling? The System’s been building you up so far, but he—”**

“Release. Me.”

There was no power Wei could pit against the Mepheleon’s will. If he was a worm trying to fight an eagle when facing his father, then here, he was an insect screaming his will in the face of a falling storm. Yet, to his surprise, time began to flow all around him, and Mepheleon just chuckled.

“Okay, then. He’s about four hundred meters—” Suddenly, Wei snapped back up to the point where he started falling, far above the threshold of the breach. **“—below you.”** A mess of ramps, platforms, and bridges swung back into place. **“In thirty seconds or so, he’s going to broad the central elevator and climb the tower to reach my First Circle. From there... well,**

who knows where he's going to go next? Better hurry, Wei. And good luck. Hope he doesn't kill you."

Time snapped back into motion like a rubber band. But Wei gravity returned, Wei suddenly found him falling perpendicular to where he was before, the tower now looming over him like a sky as he tumbled and bounced across narrow streets.

Surprised cries sounded as he felt people throw themselves out of his path. Rolling to bleed off the momentum, Wei bit back a curse as he found himself disoriented by the sudden shift in gravity. As he flowed from roll to sprint, his mind worked to right itself. What was done is now forward.

"Four hundred meters," Wei muttered. That was about... ten of those ponds he used to skip across. He imagined them spreading out before him—used the estimated length to gauge his path.

Mind Advancement: 15%
>Logic Lv. 1: 35%

As he exploded forward, he found himself baffled once more by the sudden sight of other people besides him. Most of them were small and slow, with only a sliver of Spirit flowing within them. He knew them to be Pathless at once. Mortals unperfected by cultivation. A crowd before him was parting, pressing themselves against a maze of small hut-like structures continuing as far as the eye can see.

The fragrance of incense and winding paths were what waited. But venturing down their length would see him delay—especially with how congested the crowds were. It was whiplash inducing, going from a plain defined by emptiness and demons to this choked nest of humanity. There were hundreds around him. Hundreds in every direction. More people he saw in once place in his entire life.

But he needed room. And so he leaped upward, running along three square huts before launching himself higher, rising to the rooftops as he sailed over the communal labyrinth below.

"Hm," Mepheleon said. "Controlled and considerate, even now. Most of your like would have just barreled through the people. Decorated their robes with a bit of red and viscera."

Wei ignored them and continued. Ahead, an enormous stone bridge churned like an ever turning wheel separating sections of this—if it could be even called a city.

Angling his path, Wei sprinted slip the bridge just as it passed; the strange thought that he was running along the insides of a large barrel occurred to him, but he pushed past that too, the thought stripped from him as a demonic shadow passed through his body.

A swarm of Specters trailed overhead. On his flanks, men and women called out to him, their person's mounted on the backs of galloping spiders, their word an incomprehensible garble to his ears.

Foreign language detected...

Beginning linguistic analysis...

Matching archives for parent languages...

Rows of columns connected the "ground" to the Tower itself. Rushing past them, Wei did everything he could to go faster—cursing his maximum speed. It had been a boon before when he was running from demons, but now, he didn't care if fatigue devoured him from within; he would give his heart if he could just go faster.

All your Body attributes can be multiplied through your Source Amplification Sorcery.

The sudden advisement of his System gave him pause, but the technique it mentioned was somehow already known to him. Wei reached inward, channeled the essence circulating his core through his body. A part of him *vanished*. A part of him crossed from Spirit to physical force.

His speed doubled. He snapped through the air like a cracking whip as he hammered against the threshold of sound. The ground beneath his feet cracked. With each step, something behind him broke.

Source: [10/15] Liters

He cut across a fifth of this tunnel city like a sailing spear.

Eighth pond. Eight. Eighty more meters to go.

"Eighty more meters when measured from above. You're on the wrong side."

Wei nearly snapped at the unseen presence before he turned to an angle again, leaping off to the top of a building—only to be impacted by a murder of enormous seven-eyed ravens. The demonic avian soared through his body as he felt himself drained dry of speed. Crashing down through a wooden cart, he caught a dismayed woman's face as he broke into a sprint again, bouncing between walls to mantle a rooftop again.

"Where?" he snarled, eyes jumping from platform to bridge, trying to find the presence of his father. Perpendicular to him, he saw massive processions of people progressing down all the paths leading into the tower.

Suddenly, the cityscape before him began to wail and turn once more. **“Here,”** Mepheleon said. **“Let me give you a bit of a hand.”**

Part of the entire “barrel” twisted separately from the rest. A chorus of screams went up as men, women, children, and more went flying off their feet. A single silver-carved pathway shifted into Wei’s sight like a wall turning into place. Following it upward, he searched for any traces of familiarity—and found him almost immediately.

Towering over most of his group and dressed in fluttering robes, Wei’s father was an obvious as a wolf among swine. He was but a few steps away from passing through a shimmering gateway lining the side of the tower. Wei’s heart thundered with anticipation. For a beat, he wanted to call out the *traitor*, to make them turn and face him.

But he held his tongue and put his focus to finishing this deed of vengeance.

Drawing upon his **Source Amplification** once more, Wei consumed more of his Spirit to nourish his body, felt his strength double one more time. As he jumped, the roof beneath him caved inward, and he shot across eighty meters as if he was capable of flight.

An oscillation of essence drifted out from his father, rippling outward in anticipation of his coming. The man was just about to enter the gateway when he froze.

Wei impacted just three steps behind him as gravity shifted once more—the bridge now resting beneath his feet, his fist scything forth to claim his father’s life. Wei struck the man as hard as he could—harder than he ever struck anyone in his entire life. The others with his father were already vanishing the threshold—beyond the reach of harm. But as Wei’s fist struck his father’s body, a shroud flickered around the man, curved slightly, before redirecting the blow right back through Wei.

A thread of pain tore clean through his right arm. A shift in the wind bade Wei to dodge—barely avoiding a cut from his father’s **Shapeless Blade**.

But not the palm to his gut thereafter.

A second shockwave immediately followed Wei’s as he lurched back. Things inside him shattered and rattled. A gulf of space loomed between him and his father once more. As he was carried away by the blow, the man turned to face him, features hard and ashen, taking him in once more before stepping back.

Wei wanted to cry out, to scream his hatred, but all he managed was a final, choked cry as he splattered against the wall in a sickening crunch.

Source: [0.21/15] Liters