

*The hive-kin, or as they refer to themselves “The Inheritors of Memory in Thought and Vessel,” are species of intelligent beings that originated from beyond the Fathoms. This is known because they, like Trespassers, are also immune to Source Corruption, suffering only the slightest discomfort should their “spirit” be destroyed.*

*With that said, it is uncertain from where they hailed or how they arrived, only that they, as a species, were migrated into the Fathoms at the same time around two centuries ago. Since then, they seized frontiers of technology and accrued countless Systems of their own.*

*It is important for Trespassers to understand that the hive-kin are actually a very individualistic species—though this wasn’t always the case. Their life cycle begins with them being born as mindless grubs, which, through exposure to thought and nutrition, develops into a semi-sapient male drone, then a psionic praetorian with full intelligence, and a questing matron as they seek a unique philosophy of their own to begin their full metamorphosis into queen, in which the young within them hatch and feed off the queen’s memories and flesh, devouring their mother entirely, and repeating the process anew.*

*As a result, the hive-kin are by remain the most enigmatic among the many species encountered in the Fathoms, and odds are you’ll find as many of them allies as you do enemies.*

*-The Trespasser’s Compendium*

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Break the Glass

Angelos' face darkened. "There is no decency in you. No honor."

Wei stopped smirking immediately. He would not take such an insult from a man who only felt comfortable exhibiting martial valor against a sick and dying woman. "You steal my words, old man. Forty thousand Sins, or I leave you to them."

The hive-kin scurried forth, their psionic aura blooming wide around them, cupping around Angelous' men imitation of a wall. As the construct formed, opal lances speared out—as did whispered thoughts of fear and anger. The projections struck Wei's **Aspect of Will** like glass arrows cast upon steel plate. The young master would bend to no will but his own.

The same could not be said for the old man, who flinched as if he was being lashed by unseen whips. Sweat poured down his forehead, and the shine of his wings were choked down to the merest embers. A concession escaped him thereafter, the strain in his voice betraying his weakness. "I will give you what you ask. I give my Sins to you of my consent. Take them. Take them, damn you."

With the ceding of his treasure, lattices broke from Angelous and connected to Wei. The young master grinned as he watched his Sins grow by another 40 thousand additions. The desperate made for such lucrative business partners. "Your offering will be honored, old man."

And then Wei was a blur of motion, exploding forth with **Form of the Resonant** ringing around him. His being trembled, and the world around him responded, monochromatic wavelengths pulsing from his body.

### **Source Amplification**

>[Speed +2]

Trading four Lumens for speed, Wei exploded ahead, going around the row line of soldiers rather than through them. He was going to use Angelous' men to his advantage, force the hive-kin to split their attention, lest they be overcome from both sides. He created their dilemma by striking their psionic cage as he ran. His blows carried no force in the real, but it like him strike another's externalized thoughts like taking a hammer to porcelain. Where his staff left but the smallest crack where it struck the hive-kin's protections, Wei's resonant-imbued thrusts with his spear and bashes with his shield pierced deep and shattered thereafter.

The soldiers trapped within were freed. The hive-kin cried out, clutching their mandibled faces with their six humanoid arms. Wei came rushing at them from the right flank, preparing to make his skill known.

One among the insects provided tougher than the rest. From came a lance of telekinetic force. Wei's awareness caught a shift in the air, alerted him to the coming of the blow. He dipped low, let a beam of opalescent force cleave over his shoulder, and then brought his shield up, swatting the projection aside.

Once more, opalescent essence shattered before a ripple of monochrome, and with it came the turning of the tide.

The hive-kin were split of focus now. Wei was clearly the greater threat, but Angelous had not let the moment pass. A sudden flash of brightness followed by a hoarse cry accompanied the ignition of the soldiers' weapons. The mystical armor covering their bodies vanished entirely. Defense had been utterly sacrificed for the coming offense.

Wei reached the hive-kin before the first pikeman drove his polearm forward, before the first greatsword fell, before the first arrow struck true. He vaulted a wave of force and closed in. As the hive-kin were bathed by his aura, they further fell victim to his **Proximal Acceleration**. Their movements grew stiff, and their responses developed a visible lull.

Three of the insects were layering their psionic projections together, desperately trying to be rid of the young master. Their attack never had time to reach culmination. His spear split through their burgeoning power, and a wave of force detonated outward.

Men were flung from their feet—and Wei was no different. But where the soldiers and bandits landed on their backs—bounced and rolled across the ground—the young master shifted his momentum into a turning roll before planting his foot down to a grinding halt. His spear left his hand before he even stopped, and now, with their neuro-kinetic defenses shattered, the hive-kin were left naked to direct attacks.

The weapon punched clean through one of the insect's thorax in a spray of glossy green and buried itself in the second's chitin. Before the rest could rally, Wei yanked his rope and caught the staff under his arm. Invoking the last cast within the artifact, a fork of concussive force smashed down between the exposed hive-kin.

### **Casts: [0/4]**

A second explosion came thereafter, and this time it was the insects that were sent sprawling. Their segmented legs snapped under the sudden pressure, and oozing ichor ruptured from their bursting bodies. Their twin-mandibles opened wide in soundless screams as they clawed for the sky.

Soundless, but not thoughtless.

Splashes of opalescence were broadcast from their antennae, swept out in search of Wei. They held their hands high and diminishing their projected psionic in a show of supplication.

*"We surrender!"*

*"Please!"*

*"Give us life! We will offer forth our treasures!"*

Wei hesitated for but an instant as his mind worked. Many would offer just about anything to stay alive, and this might very well be a trap. But though they were near unstoppable for the soldiers, Wei's capabilities proved specifically crippling for them as well. They were beaten and overcome, and more than just Sins, he could force them to work to his will.

Having a group of mind-weaving servants that one was immune to would be insurmountable in the gathering of wealth, after all. Still, he needed leverage to control them—a promise was worth nothing without a means to extract it.

Thankfully, he had just the means to do so.

"Will me your Sins. All of them."

He knew their capitulation was genuine when every tether connected to them broke free and snaked into him instead.

Wei looked above his head and studied his current count of Sins.

### **We - [484,003 Sins]**

### **Foreclosure - 00:20... 00:19**

A most profitable haul. If only it had strained his physical Aspects more. But the day wasn't done yet.

“Right,” one of Angelous’ pikemen growled, The soldiers are bandits were recomposing themselves, thinking this was an opportunity for them to “finish the fight.” Their weapons were pointed at the hive-kin, and their faces and eyes formed masks of promised violence. As the pikeman prepared to jab his polearm into the insects—now laying flat along their bodies and facing Wei entirely—the young master whipped his staff into the man’s face.

The solid length of wood struck the pikeman dead between his upper lip and his nose. Blood sprayed free and the clattering of broken teeth was ever satisfying to hear. As the man stumbled back, Wei drew back his staff, catching it under his arm. Angelous’ gaze was livid, but he was worthless in martial merit, and so he would be worthless in rage.

Greatswords came striding forth. The other pikemen pulled their downed comrade to safety. An arrow whistled out from between two armored heads and Wei tilted his head, let it whisk by. With each advancement, his enemies grew slower in contrast; weaker. These soldiers, then, didn’t even deserve to be called enemies. Their lives would be his to take at leisure, and his to grant in mercy.

“The hive-kin have surrendered to me,” Wei said, striking his chest with his shield. Angelous and his underlings stared on, some angry, some nervous, all fearful. “They are my prisoners now. They do not belong to you. Take them from me, and I will take everything from you.”

One of the insects angled their heads at him. An appreciative whisper arrived.

*“Thank you. Merciful human. Thank you.”*

Offering the hive-kin a glance, Wei spoke once more before the hand fell a second time. “I will give you five each 25,001 Sins to preserve you from the coming Foreclosure.”

Links to various treasures snapped free from Wei and returned to the insects. A series of disbelieving mutters and curses came from the men.

“What is this?” Angelous snarled.

“A victor’s mercy,” Wei said. “I have prevailed. And I now I choose to exercise my virtue instead of sating my cruelty. As is my right by mandate of victory.”

The old man’s eyes drifted along the ground until it fell upon one of his dead soldiers. “They have taken *lives* from me.”

Wei scoffed at the corpse and doubled his scorn for Angelous. Foolish Pathless. Always whimpering about the injustice of the heavens. “You lost men to them. A life is defended and fought for, not guaranteed.”

## **Foreclosure - 00:09... 00:08**

The Almost Invisible Hand of the Market was beginning to shake now. Wei glanced upward in anticipation of what was to come. "I say this once more: they are my prisoners. Their lives belong to me. Just as I have preserved your lives when you yourselves couldn't."

"You contemptible cult-born-mongre!" Angelous spat. His eyes were bloodshot with anger, and each word escaped his clenched teeth in hisses of air.

Wei simply laughed as the Almost Invisible Hand fell for the second time. It splashed over them, jolted against their person's briefly before passing through them like nothing more than haze. As it greeted the ground, however, it impacted with the noise of a crumbling mountain.

The young master faintly heard splatters in the distance, felt essence-signatures vanish, heard the ambient fighting stop. The Demon of Greed had claimed more victims. He looked up to regard its current tally once more.

## **Almost Invisible Hand of the Market [1,077,082 Sins]**

### **Foreclosure Limit: 50,000 Sins**

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

### **Time to Next Foreclosure - [01:30]**

As the hand lifted, a substantial increase in foreclosed Sins made itself known. Sounds of fighting renewed with greater intensity. Everyone within the cavern were as if frogs slow-boiled in a cauldron.

Someone needed to asset order. Secure the grounds and distribute wealth fast.

Wei had just the candidate in mind: himself.

Pointing his spear at Angelous and his men, he looked at what few of them were still beyond the 50 thousand Sin threshold. A greatsword and a single pikeman. "You two. Cede your Sins to me. Leave yourselves with 49 thousand at most."

The two looked at him horrified.

"You're rottin' robbing us?" the archer cried. "Now?"

The young master scoffed. "Please. If I was going to take, I would have done so from your corpses. I still have a use for you. But I need your compliance. Sins. Or I discover which of you are worth sparing."

It was a testament to their loyalty when both men turned to get approval from Angelous. Whatever the old man to earn their favor, Wei would never know. With a nod, Sins flowed into Wei, and he commenced the next step of his plan.

"You," Wei said, pointing his spear at the surrendered hive-kin. All of them flinched and winced from their injuries. "How far can your minds reach?" They all spoke at once. "I only need to hear from one."

"*Only as far as our senses.*" Wei couldn't distinguish which bug said that, but as long as they were all in accord, it didn't matter. "*We are but nascent praetorians our minds are—*"

"Can you carry yourselves with your telekinesis?" Wei asked.

"Yes," they replied. "*But—*"

"Good. Find as many other people as you can. Prioritize those with higher Sins. Bring them back with you. Alive. Take them to the fort." He pointed to the Oathbearer's defenses—now somehow sporting a moat, a draw bridge, and what looked like four artillery pieces on the battlements. "Do this as fast as you can, and I will grant you enough Sins to survive the next foreclosure."

Wei regarded Angelous and his men. "The same goes for the rest of you. Outward. Find those of wealth. Take them by force or charm. Take them to the tower before the final thirty-second are upon us." He gave the hive-kin a stare. "The same to you as well."

The old man's visible hatred lessened as he realized what Wei was doing. "The other groups as spread far."

"Then be fast about it," Wei said. "You waste breath speaking to me. Be with your task."

He gave them no time to dissent—for there was no time at all. Instead, he strode past everyone and made for the fortress. He did not join the gathering of Sins like the others. Rather, he intended to watch from a point of elevation; to observe the potential capabilities of the other groups as well. It was his fortune that his **Form of the Resonant** proved useful against the hive-kin.

Assuming that the advantage would always be his was complacency, and therefore death.

His sect taught him better.

If the hive-kin and soldiers could get him what he needed to break the market ceiling, good. If they couldn't, he would find where they failed, and approach off the basis of their defeat. Straining himself for advancements was one thing, but pointless risk was another.

## **Mind Advanced > 8**

### **[6/5] Aspect Advancements to Core Ascension**

Agnesia and her mother would likely be fine if the Oathbearers loaned them some Sins for the coming foreclosure, but Wei still wanted to be sure. Regardless, the legwork now belonged to his lessers. There was a chance that one of the hive-kin could still betray his trust, kill a few people to build their Sins back up, but that would only prolong their demise.

And it wouldn't be the hand they needed to fear in that case.

Right now, he was to wait, prepare, and reap the spoils of his efforts.

As he approached the fort, another voice whispered to him, this one speaking as a legion, and making Wei grate his teeth immediately.

***“Well done, Wei. Honestly, I expected nothing but violence and brutality from you, but this was a surprise. I do so like surprises.”***

“Harbinger,” Wei said, watching the countdown reach the fifty-second mark. “I am *disappointed*. Does your hand do anything more than threaten sheep?”

***“No. And it's not supposed to. I made it as a literal, blunt metaphor. And you have defeated them, ironically, by being ever the capitalist yourself: outsourcing your efforts to reliable lessers. How the Circle of Greed applauds you. You would be surprised how many realms I managed to conquer through these hands, but every so often, there is one like you: a user of riches, rather than an addict.”***

“Material wealth only holds purpose when it can buy you power,” Wei scoffed. He didn't need this lesson from the Harbinger. He knew the way of the world, that degeneracy existed alongside ambition. Hearts, minds, and bodies were to be mastered. One must be a tyrant to themselves first if they wished to rule their lessers and instill true order. To be without virtue would only deepen existing discord. “But through power may righteousness take form.”

***“Might for right, then? And who is to decide this? You?”***

Wei chuckled. “Only until you decide otherwise. I am not deluded, Harbinger. I am the biggest carp in this pond. But your reign stretches past any sea I have ever known.”

***“You know what, dear boy? I'll take that as a compliment.”*** Mepheleon sighed. ***“In trade, I must warn you the easiest trails are done. What follows from here will strain even you,***

***cultivator, for in the Moongraves, one's character will be laid bare, one's regret and misdeeds will be manifest, and one's despair will be found"***

"They will do nothing more than refine my will. I will see my father broken and slain. I will grant this tower life and take it back after I hear it beg."

As always, it was the last part that made the Harbinger react oddly. ***"...Right. Well, then. The Claimed Hells watch with bated interest. Oh. One final thing: you formed most fascinating bonds in this short time. I look forward to seeing them tested as well."***

That provoke a sudden suspicion in Wei. "Speak plainly, Harbinger. Harbinger? Harbinger!"

All was quiet again. The young master glared up at the hand, knowing the Mepheleon was watching. Always watching.

### **Foreclosure - 01:15... 01:14**

Damnable bastard.

As he arrived before the fort, a draw bridge of stone slammed down across a 25-meter-long trench filled with spikes. Across the way, Oathbearer Roggi stood, and the Faeblood were now gathered behind him, looking down upon Agnesia and her ailing mother.

"The matter is settled," Wei said, announcing his victory casually. "There will be supplicants coming soon. Prepare the ballistas."

But the Oathbearer didn't respond. Rather, they stared at him with those ruby-encrusted eyes on their helmet, posture awed and uncertain. "What in Ruin are you, lad?"

Wei came to a stop just beside Roggi. Looking up at the Oathbearer as the bridge went up behind them, the young master released a slight sigh. "I'm in the process of discovering the answer to that question myself."

As he entered their enhanced encampment, he saw the Faeblood flinch away from him, but they seemed more accepting of his presence than before. One even offered him a slight nod. He counted their Sins in total. About 220,000. Substantial.

Agnesia and her mother gained a few Sins over 50 thousand. The generosity of the Oathbearers, Wei assumed. Arriving next to the girl, he saw her mother's eyes were open again, though she still looked frail and brittle. It was hard to stare into her green irises, so he focused on her forehead instead.

"Wei," Agnesia said, her massive sword now reduced to its original size, left abandoned on the ground. "How are things outside?"



“Developing. I think I have engineered a resolution, though.”

A look of relief settled on her face. “Very good. The mists of your banner have worked wonders on mother as well. They seem to sooth her suffering and suppress the taint.”

The older woman mouthed something at Wei, but no words rose from her throat. “So it is,” the young master answered. “See to it that she remains well.” He looked to the trine thereafter, their faces a shared mask of surprise. “Give the girl and her mother space.”

With the speaking done, he ascended the battlements and watched as the hive-kin enacted his will. Though they were wounded, their minds carried them across the length of the cavern, psionic energies allowing to gallop toward unsuspecting groups—snatch members worth considerable Sins mid-combat and return.

The young master laughed softly as he watched his plan take shape. This was working better than he even expected. Truly, there were few things better than having reliable servants in this world. Comparatively, Angelous and his mind seemed taken with diplomacy, speaking to another group of men rather than fighting them. Wise. But less efficient.

“I’m not letting the damn bugs into this keep,” growled one of the Oathbearers, Wei turned and found a sapphire eyed giant standing right next to him.

“You fear them?” Wei asked.

“They’re mind-thieves. Stealer of secrets. Taker of memories. It’s not about fear. It’s about knowing a fire will burn down your hold if you let it, and an infestation will eat you out your home just the same if you let them too.”

“Well. They will not be coming in. And if my suspicions are correct, this ordeal will be over very soon as well.”

As the rest of the Oathbearers mounted their ballistas—large, ball-shaped mechanisms with the biggest cannons Wei had ever seen—the five hive-kin returned from their raid, offering their bounty. In their grip were well over twenty writhing figures. Many amongst the captured were human. A few were Faebloods, emanating strange songs. And a few more were massive dark-green skinned creatures that struggled and fought constantly.

*“We return!”*

*“We uphold our agreement.”*

*“Your mercy is answered.”*

*"We did not betray your trust."*

*"Give us our Sins. Let us live!"*

Their mind spilled out over Wei like a chorus, and he gripped his spear tightened. Nodding down at the hive-kin, he noticed Angelous' minions approaching as well, with them trailing another dozen men.

In the far distance, there were still two more groups fighting. Maybe fifteen people in total. Wei didn't think they would be necessary.

### **Foreclosure - 00:35... 00:34**

"I cede you five Sins enough to put you beyond foreclosure," Wei declared. Strings detached from him and linked to the hive-kin. He spoke the same words to Angelous and his men thereafter, earning another surprised look of disbelief from the old man. Wei had considered just killing them, but they might just still have a use if he could exert this debt of mercy further...

"Prisoners," he said, channeling his mother as she spoke to the sect. His voice cracked, killing the effect, and Wei winced. Damn his age. Coughing awkward, he spoke again. "Prisoners. I come offering you your lives, and a way out of this trial in exchange for your offerings."

Some of the captured stopped struggling, looked up at him. Most were still distracted. The large green creature roared and trashed. Wei flung his spear through its head, killing it outright. Now, he had everyone's attention.

Over a 100 thousand Sins flowed into Wei, and the hive-kin released the prisoner-tuned-corpse. "Your lives are mine to take, and mine to spare. Be thankful I wish to indulge in virtue. Cede me—" Wei paused as he considered the situation. Should the hand strike the ground and gain more Sins to its total market value, that might just put it beyond Wei as well. That will not do. He would not lose anyone to the hand. "Cede Sins to those below foreclosure. Put them a single Sin above the limit. Do it now."

The prisoners and new arrivals hesitated, then started acting together at once. A complex weave of lines flowed like a churning network among those below. After ten seconds of frenzied ceding, the acts stopped, and Wei nodded. "Now. Those of you far beyond the limit. Cede your Sins to me, and leave yourself but a Sin above foreclosure."

At once, a coruscating flow of offerings rose across the air and threaded through Wei. He watched his Sins spike as a satisfied grin pulled at his features. A feat of cunning, if he was to say so himself.

**Wei [1,105,030 Sins]**

That might just be enough to beat the hand.

### **Foreclosure - 00:09... 00:08**

As the countdown ticked its last seconds, the young master held out his arms in taunt to the Harbinger, to these Claimed Hells. If these were the trials, then the trials wouldn't do. "I challenge the hand!" he declared. "I dare it to strike me. I dare it to prove its weight."

### **Foreclosure - 00:00**

On cue, the Demon of Greed fell, and an avalanche of essence came with it. But as it impacted, as it swept over Wei, a sudden shudder passed through the ghostly appendage, causing its fingers to curl, and its structure to shiver. Slamming hard against the ground, the hand splattered members from the distant group as its Sins climbed one more time.

### **Almost Invisible Hand of the Market [1,099,455 Sins]**

A bark of triumph escaped the young master. He jabbed his spear out in spite, and as the tip sliced through the air, his challenge was registered.

### **Wei [1,105,030 Sins] > Almost Invisible Hand of the Market [1,099,455 Sins]**

The hand jerked wildly, as if in disbelief of its fate, and across its width, essence burst free, leaking from it like rupturing wounds. Wei and the others braced for a coming end, anticipating an explosion from the violence of the hand's trembling.

Instead, as it reached a critical threshold, it suddenly popped like a bubble.

And the world around Wei changed with it.

Suddenly, they were no longer in the cavern, and he was no longer standing on battlements overlooking his moment of glory. Rather, he, Roggi, Agnesia, and her mother were standing upon a field of ash as foul clouds swirled above them. A chill wafted through the air, and screeches sounded in the distance.

The sheer unexpectedness of the transition caught Wei off guard. His total count of Sin had shrunk down to a fraction of its size under the name projected over his head, and most of the treasure was gone as well. But his artifacts still remained.

"What just happened?" Roggi asked.