

*There are four parts to the **Trial of Temptation**, and they're all built around building your Class. Establish which Circle of Hell you wish to belong to starts first. Understand that this isn't the "warrior, mage, thief" part yet for those of you who play those games. No, this is more like choosing the **Primordial Sin** that will power your Class.*

*Wrath is about damage and destruction. Pride is about exerting your will and dominance over another. Lust is about controlling another's behavior or affecting their choices. Envy is about mimicry and copying another's behavior. Greed is about taking and owning things other people used to. Gluttony is about consuming and devouring everything you can. Entropy is about inflicting decay and despair on another.*

*Performing Sins associated with your base Class will charge your **Abyssal Invocations** and allow you to channel the power of the Claimed Hells. After your base Class is selected, you'll get to do some leveling in a specific Moongrave. Should you survive, you'll find yourself with three or so paths in the next Sanctuary over to decide your Class Specialization. This is where your Class evolves to be more defined and starts doing the standard RPG thing.*

*You'll have to pass through two more Moongraves before you get the option to face the **Trial of Despair** located within the Hearted Realm of one of the Archdevils. Understand that you absolutely must be prepared for this. I recommend that you over-level and make a few more runs in the Moongraves to secure helpful artifacts or Invocation Shards for your Class.*

*Perhaps if you're lucky, you'll get the chance at an Eidolon as well. That's basically like having a levellable demon from another bound to one of your Aspects, giving you a subclass...*

*-The Trespasser's Compendium*

27

Classed (I)

The lich within the display case came alive with the group's approach. Rafael floated alongside Wei as twin spectral embers came alight within the guide's sockets. A golden plaque on the base of their case listed the lich as "Irene Wellerberry," while the whorls of fluff that constituted their dress and the massive sunflower-themed hat they wore made Wei assume them to be female—as "female" as an undead creature devoid of flesh could be.

At once, the locks unlatched, and Irene came drifting down with notes of melodic laughter. Holding her hands wide, she greeted everyone present with a warm sigh. "Ah. Sinners. My greatest congratulations on your survival. Welcome to—"

"We know where we are," Rafael interrupted. The floating skull's voice was low, with more than a little hint of animosity. The young master arched an eyebrow at his newest companion. "And I know what *you* are, merchant. Was it worth it? Selling yourself to Crossroads? Being traded to that piece of filth, Mepheleon to serve as a glorified receptionist."

“Rafael,” Wei growled under his breath. “What are you doing?”

The skull turned to face Wei. “Letting my disapproval be known. You cannot trust the dog-merchants of the Crossroads, my friend. They will hire a group of flesh-raiders from the deep Fathoms to raid your world, steal your father, and then send all his pieces back to you before offering you a resurrection ritual at an inflated price.”

Irene cleared her non-existent throat without a hint of anger. “I am contractually obliged to refute this point: Resurrection rituals as only provided to high-end clients on the phylactery-package program. Crossroads also disapproves of any potential scams being conducted in our name related to such acts of sorcerous perfidy, and encourage any potential customers to report instances of deception to our legal team any time they wish.”

Rafael levitated skull to skull with the guide. “The words leave you like dog piss flows down a man’s tongue!”

“I... what?” Irene said, sounding more confused as to the other lich’s hostility rather than any kind of offense.

“Ser, please,” Ellena said, muttering her disapproval of the lich despite her sickened state. With her hair matted with sweat, veins approaching pitch black, skin tone wan, and only standing thanks to her daughter’s support, the former queen looked closer to dead herself than alive. Even still, her decorum lingered. “This is most... unbecoming.”

Rafael turned, jaw nearly unhinged in a sharp intake of outrage.

“Enough,” Wei said, glaring at the skull. “I care not for your grudge against the Crossroads. We require information.” The young master eyed the seven glimmering portals that awaited behind the displace case. Once again, the heavens were conspiring against him. No. Not the heavens. His enemy had a name: The *Inheritors*. His father’s supposed masters. “I wish to understand the essentials behind these paths. Where they lead. What is demanded of us in the Trial of Temptation. What these Classes offer.”

“Certainly,” Irene replied, her jubilation spiking. Wei wondered if she was always this way or if training was required to achieve such a demeanor. Raising a skeletal digit, she tapped reality with her index finger, and existence rippled like a pond touched by a falling pebble. Inky blackness unfurled from behind her, and the walls of the sanctuary vanished, leaving only seven paths forward remaining, each corresponding to a respective Circle of Hell.

So, the information in the Trespasser’s Compendium was accurate. The Classed were being infused with the creatures of hell. Wei’s gut turned. His sect spent much of its time trying to purge the demons and keep their territory secure. The thought of having such entities seared

into his being left him nauseous, but even so, the others needed the edge, and he required a new weapon.

“The Trial of Charity is split into four phases,” Irene began. “The paths open before you is base Class selection. Please focus on any of the presented paths for additional details.”

Wei did just that. As he went through the information, he considered what he might have chosen if he didn't have a System already, and what could boost his combat potential even more. Such would be what he was seeking in an Eidolon, after all.

In the end, of the seven present, only two appealed to him on any level.

Greed was too esoteric for him to understand, with descriptions filled with more numbers and formula than he can comprehend. Sloth would take away his speed and render him a creature of decay. Gluttony demanded that one constantly gorge themselves to ward off starvation. Envy practically demanded that he debase himself by shifting himself unnaturally in body and flesh to take on aspects of his enemies, and though lust allowed one to touch minds, Wei desired to bleed flesh.

### **Circle of Wrath - Path of the Destroyer**

**Summary: Grants the Classed immense Strength and Constitution. Gains experience by committing the Sin of Wrath as expressed through destruction, death, or harm. Starts with the [Abyssal Rage] Invocation.**

#### **Primary Aspects**

**>Strength — 10**

**> Constitution — 10**

**Free Allocatable Advancements: [5]**

#### **Abyssal Invocations**

**>[Abyssal Rage]: Every act of death and destruction charges the Abyssal Rage lurking within you. When your Abyssal Rage is at max, triggers the [Destroyer] state, which causes your Strength and Constitution Aspects to double with each passing second, allows you to rapidly heal from even the most grievous of wounds, but also saps your Mind Aspect. Abyssal Rage capacity will be determined by your Will Aspect.**

Wei thought himself to be a straightforward man with simple pleasures. In this regard, the Path of the Destroyer appealed to him, though the part about his Mind being sapped gave him pause. An Eidolon that could boost his Strength and Constitution was most welcome, but if he lacked the mental capability to take advantage of the benefits, then the whole thing would be a waste.

### **Circle of Pride - Path of the Tyrant**

**Summary: Grants the Classed immense Will and a minor boost to Strength. Also grants two Abyssal Invocations: [Will Above All] and [Aegis of Arrogance].**

### **Primary Aspects**

**>Strength — 10**

**> Constitution — 5**

**Allocatable Advancement Points for Remaining Aspects: [10]**

### **Abyssal Invocations**

**>[Will Above All]: Allows you to transfer points from your Will over to your other Aspects, temporarily increasing them.**

**>[Aegis of Arrogance]: Creates a protective barrier from your Will Aspect. Damage inflicted upon your person will be soaked by your Will instead. The barrier dissipates when your Will is expended and returns when your Will is restored.**

Where the Destroyer called to Wei because of its simplicity, the Tyrant compelled Wei because of its efficiency. He was already capable of amplifying himself using his Sourceries, but that led him to a question.

“Guide,” Wei said. “I have a question about the Path of the Tyrant. Should one possess near incalculable Will, how will points from the Will Aspect be transferred via the **Will Above All** Invocation?”

Irene tilted her head at Wei, and a flap from her floral cap flopped down. “This should not be a concern. The Base Class will provide you with a designated amount of—”

“What about as an Eidolon?”

That seemed to have the lich taken aback. “I... well, the matter of an Eidolon is different and few Sinners will be fortunate enough to attract the attention of a potential benefactor to see them gifted with such a potent subclass. Moreover, Eidolons are not usually encountered in the Moongrave connected to your base class.”

“But the Eidolons work in a functionally similar fashion?”

“With some reduced Aspect points, yes.” The guide hummed to herself. “I suppose if they are bonded to a master with an extremely high or theoretically limitless Aspect of Will, the amount of Will you can infuse into the Eidolon will be limited by its Class Tier.”

“Class Tier?” Wei asked.

“Yes. Every ten levels constitute a Tier up to 1000. With every Tier achieved, new **Abyssal Invocations** will be unlocked, and more **Skills** and their corresponding modifiers can be equipped by you, allowing for more diverse builds! The major difference for Eidolons is that they lack an Aspect of Mind and are fully subservient to another’s will, but one requires an active Class or System to bond with an Eidolon. It is highly unlikely you will encounter such an entity at this point in the Moongraves.”

And yet, Mepheleon hinted at things being others. It seemed the master kept much from his own people as well.

“I need to know something,” Roggi said, voice rumbling like distant thunder. Though Irene was hovering, the Oathbearer was still capable of meeting her face to face. “Where are my Forgekin? Where are my charges?”

“Ah, yes. They are along another track of the Moongraves, though one of them, unfortunately, did not survive the encounter against their respective Keeper.”

Roggi’s eyes widened. “Who?”

“My counterpart in their sanctuary conveys that it was an Oathbearer with sapphire gems slotted over their helmet. They carried him in, but he expired before they ever reached the spring.”

A tired breath escaped Roggi, and the stout giant bowed his head. Wei remembered this one—not their name, but how they were, teasing Roggi for requiring Wei’s rescue. Death came quick, and sometimes there was still one could do to deny the cold hand of fate.

“It is a pleasure to fall fighting for oneself or a goal even greater,” Wei said. “You must carry his deeds now.”

The Oathbearer met his gaze with an expression that was more weary than furious or sorrowful. “I always expected Vaulder to be the last of us to fall. Always had an eye for detail. Nothing gets past him. But I suppose no one gets past ruin either.”

“Our condolences, great ser,” Ellena managed despite her feverish state.

“Do you have any other inquiries?” Irene asked.

“How do I get to them?” Roggi replied.

“You can request an alignment of Moongraves when you arrive in the following sanctuary. Presently, you must choose a path and take on a base Class. Before you can continue.”

“This is madness, isn’t it,” the Oathbearer laughed. Wei looked up at the hulking figure beside him and found a hollow smile adorning Roggi’s face. “For years we fight the demons. Hunt

them. Watch them spill across our lands like an infection devouring the living and desecrating the dead.” Roggi paused. “And now we’re going to become one of them. Madness.”

“Madness,” Agnesia concurred. “But it is also our only path. For survival. For power. For another chance.” Her final words sounded almost like a plea.

Parts of the young master writhed at the paths as well, but he thought there was something more to this. There was much he didn’t know about the Harbinger, and they seemed both all-powerful and constrained at the same time. Wei didn’t understand why they offered so much to him the other Sinners while still making them endure these cruel trials. He didn’t understand why Mepheleon resorted to subterfuge to speak with him. “There is more at play here than we see. Far more. I expect forces greater than we will try to press us against each other. Or use us as pawns.”

“Tale of all realms,” Roggi agreed.

“I will do all I can to ensure that you are returned to your brothers if you pledge to do all you can to get me up the Tower. We are sworn to each other, so know my resolve to be true.” Wei hesitated before he chose his next words. “But should there come a moment where you are forced to side with your kin and the Faeblooded against me... I understand if you will do what you must. So long as you know I will do what I must. Mepheleon named this the Trial of Temptation for a reason. It is time for us to anticipate obvious outcomes.”

The Oathbearer cracked a smile. Their mood was easy, accepting, and light. Though a tinge of darkness lingered in their gaze, there was something admirable how Roggi carried himself in the wake of his hammer's destruction and the wounds left upon him by the shadows of his past. “You’re a strange lad, Wei. Strange. But pure. I hear your words. Don’t worry. You can keep your back to me without worry.”

“The same with us,” Agnesia said. “Me and my mother would not have survived the earlier trials without your aid. All of you. By my honor as Crown Princess of Dawnrest, I will see your kindnesses rewarded should we prevail over this tower, Ignium willing.”

Rafael sighed. “Glorious. It is pleasure to be among a party of heroes once more.”

“Once more?” Wei asked.

“Yes. My last group met their unfortunate ends recently. You saw poor Thalgor, how he was smeared across the stones. Ah. Well. I feel we will fare better.”

Everyone winced a bit at that. The presence of a bad omen settled over Wei. Pushing past the dour image of the splattered orc, Wei addressed his companions. “Do you all have Paths in mind?”

Roggi folded his arms and shrugged. “Agh. Envy, maybe.”

“Truly?” Wei said, surprised. He saw nothing appealing to him there; nothing that would add to his power. Considering the sheer strength Roggi possessed, Wei expected Wrath or Pride.

“Aye,” Roggi breathed. “When I was first created before I fully became one of the kin, I used to look at different bugs that lived in the Hearth. Watched dragonflies fly free. Free. Anywhere they wanted. I remember... wanting to be like them. I remember... wanting to be more than what the Creator’s Fires made me.”

A few seconds passed as Wei digested the Oathbearer’s words. “I suppose we all wish to be more than who we are sometimes.”

“Wrath,” Agnesia said, sounding impossibly certain.

“And your mother?” Wei asked.

“Where I go, she goes,” the girl muttered. “I suppose Wrath too.”

Understandable. “When we pass through these gates, we will be in separate Moongraves,” Wei asked the guide.

Irene nodded vigorously and anticipated his question. “Yes. However, the terrain ahead is shaped to converge and arrive at the next sanctuary via seven bridges. Should you survive the upcoming portion of the trial, you will all arrive at the next safe zone as a group.”

Everyone looked at each other. Though they had only known each other for a short time, shared trauma and tribulations instilled a deep fondness that was hard to describe.

“Ultimately, you will need to complete your base Class selection and your Class Specialization paths before you get the opportunity to face the Hearted Realm and begin the Trial of Despair. It is recommended that you walk more of the paths to obtain **Skill Shards** and level your Class before culminating the Trial of Temptation.”

“Can you tell what threats await us ahead?” Wei asked.

“The Moongraves beyond this portal will be filled with Lv. 5 demons. Expect their numbers to be endless. Your goal will be to acclimate to your Class and—”

Wei felt a sudden shift of essence beyond the pathway of lust. All of a sudden, the inky distortion projected by the lich stabilized as Irene turned. Shadow was approaching from within the portal containing the Path of Lust. It looked like a dark smear growing smaller and closer with each passing second.

“Odd,” Irene said. “It seems as if someone is trying to—”

And then a thin needle of alloyed gold ruptured through the portal, splitting clean through Irene’s form before burying its full length clean through Wei’s chest.