

Severean. Your window has closed. Hold for now. We are transferring more System resources to the rebellion occurring in the Fifth Ring of the Claimed Hells. A second attempt on the Harbinger's existence will be attempted in three hours. Additionally, we have censored all details of related to your existence—but this will not take effect on your target.

You know by now what System he has. You know what is at stake here for our benefit.

And your continued survival.

Fail again, and we will not be able to save you.

-Harlon Seever, Inheritor

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Eidolon (II)

The idea of tunneling through the desiccated bodies forming the floor tiles of this chamber was a macabre one, even to Wei. A small part of him remained curious how these people ended up in this state, from where they came, but a larger portion of him suspected he didn't want to know.

Taking the makeshift spear from his original body, Wei felt his **Lesser Manifestation's** speed increase by 50%. That went a little way to alleviate his diminishment. As he focused his **Aspect of Intent**, he took a moment to direct his **Omniscience** further downward. The bodies were endless. They just kept glowing like mummified stacks sinking further into the earth without end. It seemed that no matter which way the young master looked, the Claimed Hells were always too happy to remind him where he was. And then there were the smiles on the faces of these kneeling supplicants.

It was like they were trying to sell him on the joy of eternal damnation.

Infusing his monochromatic essence into their bodies, he targeted their **Constitution** and realized just how lacking they were.

Concept-Integrity of [Supplicant's Constitution]: [1/1]

But that wasn't the only revelation he experienced. As his **Intent** seeped into his first target, he discovered they had a host of other influenceable Aspects as well. They were, in a sense, still alive, maintained by merest figments of essence. It was a disconcerting realization, one that he would resolve by keeping his senses alert. The supplicants were dormant now, but he wouldn't be surprised if some of them rose from the ground and tried to come for him or Ellena if the right conditions were met.

After that, he delivered the first blow his **Lesser Manifestation** ever struck. An echo shuddered through the supplicant he was targeting. He shattered another Aspect thereafter. A few casual strikes was all it took to conceptually shatter them, rending them from existence in a rippling

flash of darkness, light, then nothing thereafter. He found himself pleased with the outcome. Breaking something conceptually was far cleaner than rending them of flesh and matter.

"I was expecting that to be a lot more gruesome," Ellena said, a squeamish approval hidden within her voice.

"Likewise," Wei replied, before continuing on with his task. Burrowing through the bodies was a trifling thing. They did not fight back, and they didn't have much conceptual integrity. Every few punches, a body vanished. With each four bodies destroyed, a pocket of space opened, allowing his manifestation further progress.

He also took this time to acclimate himself to his new mastery. **Lesser Hollow Mind** had been an obvious thing he used after his engagement with the gatekeeper. **Lesser Manifestation**, meanwhile, was another layer to his self-preservation. Indeed, it was far slower than he, far weaker, far more fragile. Worse, the pain and wounds sustained by the **Manifestation** would cross over to him as well. But if it was destroyed, it would only cost a fourth of his Lumens. A small cost comparatively, and with his recent Gate 1 System Ascension, he had plenty of Source to spend.

It took him less than two minutes to cross beyond the black gate. The further he went, the more bodies were on the other side. However, the next room had a slab of concrete built over the supplicants. The desiccated masses here were tasked with holding up the slab, bearing the weight of every demon in the room and then some. Even so, these mummified near-corpses never lost the smile on their faces, as if they were happy to be tormented eternally. Happy just to be of service.

Diverting his focus from the dead, Wei used his **Omniscience** to scout the area. It took scant seconds for him to fully map out the dimensions of the room. It was practically 120 meters wide, and twice again that long. There were about 20 Supplicants of the Brass Throne in total, but only three Bearers of Brazen Glory in the end. More worryingly were the four columns of tarnished gold that occupied the corners of the space. None of them reached the ceiling, but instead held a skull-barreled ballista carved from ivory and festooned with gems. Diamonds sparked down its sides, and Wei's System gave him an estimate of their capabilities.

Proclaimer of Obliteration: Lv. 2 Demon of Pride

>An essence-seeking ballista that attacks one's Will rather than their material body.

That made sense. These were the kinds of entities Wei expected Ellena to face alone instead of the massive Bearers. Those were definitely here because of him.

Aside from the demons, the layout of the room itself was thematically peculiar. It resembled a devastated throne room with a dais at its very center. The ceiling was partially collapsed, but Wei could perceive little of the world beyond, aside from a chaotic haze choked with veins of crimson lightning. What captured his attention most of all was the throne, however, for the royal seat was cleaved clean down the middle by what resembled a three-headed lance composed of liquid fluidity.

Wei sensed a trickle of essence from the weapon before his System even informed him of what it was. Exciting rose inside his person in pace with realization.

[Unnamed]: Lv. 0 Unawakened Eidolon of Pride

Had it been planted here by Mepheleon? Stashed in place for Wei's benefit? That was more than likely the case. With the amount of favor the Harbinger was granted, the young master suspected that he was being primed for something far greater than his own revenge. No master would let a worthy disciple remain unshaped, after all, just as no true lord would let a willing vassal go idle.

Beyond the hewn throne itself, the room descended a long flight of stairs made from obsidian. The stairs continued forward, shooting past two twenty meter tall doors shaped from rust-claimed gold. Past that point, Wei found his Omniscience reaching into a wide open space shrouded by dark, hungering mist. Blackened particulates devoured all light that passed into them, sparing only the path—and the looming portal it led to. There was the exit to the next sanctuary, Wei assumed. Spending another few seconds studying the looming blackness, the young master sensed additional Supplicants and Bearers hidden within the veiled haze.

As he extended his tunnels beyond the throne room, he counted the hidden demons and felt his stomach drop. He noticed a dozen at first, but they quickly exceeded the hundred count, and only swelled more in number after that. Diverting his path in different directions away from the structure, Wei further discovered that he was effectively on a large sphere made out of kneeling supplicants, and that it was connected to the Black Tower via a long set of cipher-infused chains.

He wasn't sure if there was an *infinite* number of demons waiting in the darkness to kill him, but he could definitely say they were well past the threshold of "too many to fight." There was a veritable army out there in the dark, and Wei couldn't even tell where they were spawning from.

But that wasn't exactly a bad thing. If this place was designed to overwhelm him and Ellena, the demons on standby would have long since flooded in. Instead, Wei assumed it was as the guide mentioned: some newly Classed would likely stay and fight a continual trickle of foes to level up a few times as well.

Such could be to Ellena's benefit, but time was not on their side. Rafael was fleeing with Wei's property, and they still had that knight hounding them. He would claim the Eidolon, get Ellena up to Lv. 5 by breaking demons so they could be easy kills, and then they would depart this place before he got to learn why these skinless abominations were so happy about their hellish state.

"Do you see anything," Ellena said. He could hear her easily, but when Wei tried to reply, his voice left from his **Lesser Manifestation** instead. It seemed that though his original self was still connected to his projected form, he couldn't control both of them at once. The young master wondered if improving his master would allow him to direct his **Manifestation** alongside his actual form concurrently.

Performing such a feat will require you to reach Enlightenment [50] and Meditation Mastery (III), his System answered.

Life was full of things to look forward too.

Deciding not to answer Ellena, the young master instead focused on the task at hand: removing the Proclaimers preemptively and getting his hands on a proper weapon.

The tunnel Wei's **Lesser Manifestation** made was perfect for his purposes. The many supplicants he destroyed created open hallways under the room, and it only took breaking a few more to reach the underside of each column. After he finished creating the accessible routes, he decided on attacking the rightmost Proclaimer closest to the black metal gate. That way, at least one of the closest threats would be removed.

With the supplicant holding up the concrete above fading away as a monochromatic echo, Wei infused his will into the base of the structure and struck. He attacked its Constitution and conceptually shattered the Aspect in three blows. He didn't even need to go through all the other ones, as with the failing of the column's Constitution, its material integrity began to give under its own weight. The demonic ballista toppled as the pillar beneath it broke away into dust. As it fell, it fired a random shot, launching a flaming skull of radiant gold that pounded hard into the ground. It left no damage, for the detonation was one of pure essence meant to harm one's **Will**.

The other Proclaimers came alive at once. They fired randomly, unleashing salvos of skulls at the same place the first ballista shot. The 20 Supplicants and 3 bearers all jolted to alertness as well, but found themselves ignorant as to where their enemy lay. They turned away from the gate they were guarding and began to patrol the room, sprinting around as if hounds sniffing for a trace.

By this point, Wei was halfway over to the next closest column. His manifestation was sluggish compared to his original form, and he wondered if it would have been better if he did everything as his original self. But then his caution was awarded as all the surrounding bodies jolted with animation. Without warning, the formerly bowed supplicants lifted their heads and started staring at him. A room over next to his original body, Wei heard Ellena cry out as the dried corpses beneath their feet also responded, all staring in the same direction at Wei's **Lesser Manifestation**.

A primal surge of unease filled the young master, but he quickly choked it down. Withered hands gripped at his **Lesser Manifestation**, prying at him with weak grips and reed-thin fingers. He was but a step away from the second column, and had no intention of succumbing just yet. Shrugging them off using his **Aspect of Authority**, he lashed out with his spear, shattering the supplicants' **Aspects of Strength** and leaving them impotent.

But where they were weak, there were also many, and around him, he felt the space he created slowly close up as more bodies rose from below the ground. New supplicants slid into empty spaces, and soon, he tunnels he made began to fill as new demons joined the frenzied subterranean mob.

The young master wasted no more time. He immediately struck at the pillar above him and shattered its **Constitution** as well. But he didn't stop there. With the material structure weakened, he burst free of the slab above, catching sight of the Proclaimer as it shattered apart against the ground.

His **Omniscience** kept him aware that the tunnels were completely filled, and that the Bearers and Supplicants in the throne room were after him as well, noticing his manifestation through the veil of dust rising from where the ballista once stood.

The remaining two Proclaimers fired on Wei's lesser manifestation thereafter, golden skulls screaming through the air, singing songs of glory as they sought him out. But though he was slower than his original self, he still had his concept-breaker abilities, and rather than sprint across the room, he struck at the space between him and the next column over. It took four blows to shatter the conceptual integrity. In that time, the first of the arrows almost struck him, and as it entered his vicinity, he felt the song that was singing assail his sense of self, as if begging him to surrender himself to something greater.

Wei resisted it with a flex of his **Intent**, and though the effect was faint upon him, he considered how it might affect Ellena, how many hits she could endure under such pressure. He blinked across the room and rose up into the air. The Proclaimer that fired upon him was unprepared for the sudden shift in position as he flung his spear through it—then recalled the weapon back to his grasp using **Vector Chain**. Before the third ballista fell off the top of its pillar and even hit the ground, he broke the distance between him and the last Proclaimer and prepared to bring it down as well.

But as he got there, he realized a few of the throne-bearing supplicants below had moved to intercept him, anticipating his course of action.

No matter. He thrust out with his spear and split the last ballista in half. A second before his blow landed however, it fired a skull, and though time flowed a moment slower around him, his **Lesser Manifestation** was still far slower than his actual form. He managed to dodge most of the projectile, but the skull still bounced against his shoulder. Wei felt a jolt rush through his **Aspect of Intent**, and briefly, he was stunned, but the sensation was a passing one, and a moment thereafter, it was like he had never been hit at all.

And as the final Proclaimer came apart, the supplicants gathered below lifted their thrones high over themselves as they ignited with a radiant glow. Wei briefly wondered what they were doing when all three detonated at once, swatting him out of the air with a joined tide of golden force.

Source: [68/90] Lumens

>Lesser Manifestation Source: [18/22] Lumens

His **Lesser Manifestation** bounced across the ground and Wei grunted with discomfort. and he felt some of its monochromatic luster fade, lumens hissing free from cracks spreading across his projected avatar. Wei scrambled to his feet, realizing that even the weakest of these demons of pride offered certain dangers. As he rose, he saw more supplicants approaching, flanked by the

three Bearers, and then his **Omniscience** revealed additional movement behind from past the two vast doors awaiting at the base of the staircase leading to the next sanctuary.

In walked another three supplicants, followed by a single Bearer. They were the only additional demons to enter the fray, but Wei suspected whoever he killed would be soon replaced by the ones waiting in the darkness beyond. Nevertheless, his **Lesser Manifestation** had served its purpose admirably. It had revealed all the threats he was facing and destroyed the Proclaimers. Now it was time for him to fight at full capacity.

But before that, Wei struck at conceptual reality once more, forgoing the need to sprint towards the throne. As space collapsed, the distance between him and the split throne was unmade, and the young master seized the unawakened Eidolon with his Lesser Manifestation. Immediately, he felt a new sensation burrow into his mind. New characters spilled across his perception as his system began to integrate with this foreign entity. But the supplicants were sprinting out for him, bringing their thrones to bear as they prepared to detonate themselves once more.

Wei would not let them have that pleasure. Instead, before the Eidolon even fully finished integrating with his System, he reared his arm back and flung as hard as he could. He used up every last bit of Source within his Lesser Manifestation, converting them to **Source Amplification** boosts for his Authority. He flung the Eidolon free, aiming at the black gate, aiming at the place his original body waited, and the new weapon tore across the air, empowered further by his **Vector Chain**. It impacted hard against the black iron, and with a thunderous crash, penetrated clean through the door.

Source: [68/90] Lumens

Authority Advanced > 13

[3/10] Aspect Advancements to Core Ascension

Just as Wei's lesser manifestation dissolved, the Eidolon blurred, its tip pointed directly at the young master's chest, and as his source stabilized, his hand shot up, and he caught it before it could run him through. Ellena yelped as she stumbled back and tripped over the risen head of one of the supplicants beneath them. A faint smile tugged at Wei's lips as the gathered demons reoriented themselves to discover the true threat unveiled in the hallway beyond.

"What is that?" Ellena asked, staring at the fluid three-headed trident he now bore.

"A promised gift," Wei replied.

Integrating Eidolon...

Initializing Class Selection