

William Yu: *John, it's me. I need a place to... I need to disappear for a while...*

John Bishop: *Hello, William. Nice to see you again, William. How'd the last job go, William?*

William Yu: *Oh, fuck off, you know how it went. Can't seem to ever get an easy goddamn gig in this life. Is this the part where you lip off to me and tell me I'm a fool?*

John Bishop: *No, I think I'm all done with that. Telling you doesn't seem to do anything. William, in all our time together, I keep thinking to myself, "Man, he's supposed to be smarter than this. I've seen him be smarter than this. I've seen him think things through." But then you keep making the wrong decisions.*

William Yu: *All right, all right. Yeah, I do. I do. But John, I need your help.*

John Bishop: *Are you still with the inheritors?*

William Yu: *Goddamn it, John—*

John Bishop: *You know the way to Earth is open, right? A dozen other Fulcrum Worlds just got destroyed. Path's clear. System War's gonna kick off in, I don't know, give it a year or so.*

William Yu: *Shit.*

John Bishop: *Yeah, William, shit. I guess congratulations are in order. Thanks to you, billions are gonna die.*

William Yu: *...Come on, John. You're being overdramatic. The inheritors are trespassers like us. They're not gonna be like that.*

John Bishop: *...*

William Yu: *John?*

John Bishop: *You know what, William? You're not stupid. You're just a goddamn liar. Problem is, after all the time you spent working for the company, I think the person you got best at lying to is yourself. Best of luck, brother. Hope I don't have to kill you someday.*

William Yu: *John. John. John!*

-Trespassers William Yu and John Bishop

William Yu cried as the spatial pocket within his reflective maze collapsed around him. His very being was squeezed out, ejected with a pulse of pressure along the strange Source-made surface created by his son's **Aspect of Relativity**.

He remained in his serpent form, his lower body slithering, negating the effects of his tumble. But already, Wei was upon him, **Intent** rushing first, his spear sailing out thereafter.

William cursed as he saw a glint of gold coming right toward him.

Concept Integrity of [William Yu's Speed]: 136/165 Integrity Points

Being flung out of a collapsing pocket of space left William's mind befuddled by chaos. Such was why he failed to ward off his son's first blow. The flowspear struck William's gut and bounced off his armored scales. The weapon lacked the stats to penetrate, and instead glanced off like a stone greeting actual armor.

Responding to the impact, William retaliated as the great bow he wielded came apart, its jade-like material glistening and thinning, turning into six short swords. William had spent a great many years in the Circle of Envy, and more than being able to merely transform his body, he could also recreate his weapon based on those he faced in the past. Ready himself, he lashed out, his first thrust a provoking jab, the others' predictive strikes anticipating where Wei might manifest.

Yet as his short swords cleaved into and through Wei's spear—his son's weapon bursting apart in golden sprays of ichor—the boy himself was nowhere to be seen.

At least not until William felt a soul-shaking blow strike him from under the gut. Each strike was like an explosion going off inside him. William cried out and tried to turn, and to his horror, he found even more of his speed lost. It was like parts of him were forever destroyed. No, worse than that, unmade.

Concept Integrity of [William Yu's Speed]: 78/165 Integrity Points

He remembered how fast he was, how quick he could react, but the extent of his true potential, how fast he could ever be, was forever more reduced by his son's onslaught. Despite this, he still retained an edge in **Speed** and experience, and adapted accordingly.

Once more he drew upon his shapeshifting skill as another arm burst out from his back, this one something akin to the mutated pincer of a demonic crab. The claw speared straight through Wei's chest, and the young master cried out as he was lifted off his feet.

Kicking briefly in the air, Wei redirected his Source into the limb impaling him and brought down a crushing elbow. In the same instant, however, his father shed the limb, ejecting it from his body entirely before triggering another skill, **Explosive Molting**.

The severed claw detonated within Wei, and William felt a spike of emotional torment flare at his very core. His son had been trying to kill him, but on some level he understood, and on some level he still wasn't ready to finish his boy.

Fortification Advanced > 13

[14/10] Aspect Advancements to Core Ascension

Brilliant colors of shadow and light poured free from the gaping rupture that left Wei's chest hollow. The young master flew back a good 40 meters as he landed upon a pile of shattered glass. The Shadescale armor he wore came apart along the sides of his torso. The damage it sustained was too substantial for it to remain intact. Yet, even before Wei landed, he was already turning in midair. William felt his breath catch with disbelief as his son's **Intent** spread wide.

Wei struck a stretch of reality and rather than landing far away from William, he blinked and crashed down right next to his father, tumbling to a roll as he rose to continue the fight.

William stared on as he took in the mutilated shape of his son. His right eye was entirely missing, leaking Source into this plane of relativity. His left, however, glowed and then dimmed, burning with hatred all the while. Wei took a staggering step forward as fortification had kept him alive.

Barely.

Before Wei's System Ascension, his attack would have destroyed him utterly. But now he was adapting to it, his **Aspect of Fortification** automatically attuning itself to the nature of his father's skill. It would allow him to resist the next explosion better, but even so, the young master doubted he would survive another explosion of that severity.

Source: [11/90] Lumens

To his fortune, however, his father failed to seize the opportunity. Instead, the man continued staring, staring as he abandoned the form of a multi-armed serpent, staring as the jade short swords he once held evaporated into greenish smoke.

Returning to his original shape, William Yu looked on as his face contorted in mere despair. "What have I done to you? I've... I've ruined my boy," he muttered to himself. Once more, he triggered his teleportation skill. Wei's Relativity clung to him by the barest of tethers, and tears formed in the Source around them.

>Relativity [38]/Direct Visual Vector Trace > 44% - 22%

>Aspect of Relativity [18+22] Resisting Anchor of Jealousy

His words made Wei's mind go blank. Memories assailed him. He thought of his past, of all he had experienced with his father, of the many things the man had taught him.

He remembered being carried on the man's back as a child, long hours spent hopping from cloud to cloud. He remembered peeking at his father's swordplay past his bedtime. His father knew he was there but didn't inform his mother. Instead, he continued going through his forms, keeping his speed slow so Wei could take in every detail. He remembered weeping into the man's chest as he failed his first breakthrough. The comforting words his father spoke to him thereafter, reassuring him that he wasn't a failure.

He remembered, he remembered, and all those memories were now tainted. "Ruined," Wei said, somehow managing to force the words out of a badly lacerated throat. "You... ruined... everything."

Wei staggered forward, indifferent to the prospect of death. Indifferent, and with his Source rippling around him, wavelengths of pressure washed out from his being as every ounce of his **Intent** surrounded his father. It didn't matter if he was on death's door. It didn't matter if the man had a higher level than him. He would see the man broken, whatever it took. Even if it took a miracle, Wei would find a way to manifest it.

Concept Integrity of [William Yu's Speed]: 78/165 Integrity Points

He took a step forward. His father took a step back. Quivering, William looked aside. He closed his eyes and simply laughed. "Fucking goddammit," he choked. "John was right."

Wei didn't care who John was—all he knew was forward. He stepped once more, and William triggered his teleport skill one final time. Wei's aspect of relativity shuddered and broke, like a frayed rope bearing too heavy a load.

>Relativity [38]/Direct Visual Vector Trace > 22% - 22%

>Aspect of Relativity [18+22] Failed to Resist Anchor of Jealousy

Suddenly, the trace connecting him to his father came apart, and the Source that composed the surrounding plane ruptured as William Yu began to dissolve into a swarm of countless purple butterflies. Taking a shaking breath, his father steadied himself and shook his head at his son. "This is done. You did enough. You did all you could. I'm proud of you."

"No," Wei said, trying to muster his focus, trying to add whatever strength he still had to his **Relativity**. He was close. His right leg stepped twice and he collapsed. It didn't stop him. He just kept crawling. He had cracked the foundations of the man's soul. He could still win this. "Coward," Wei snarled, "do not run from me."

He took two steps forward, and William shrugged. "You don't know me, Wei. You really done." Wei reached out, trying to seize the man by his throat, but the purple butterflies simply slipped between his fingertips as the presence of his father peeled away like rising smoke from within the grip of Wei's **Intent**. "Forget me. Build your System. Live your life. Save yourself." William Yu's final words were a haunting echo.

Wei barely heard him, Wei barely heard anything as the plane constructed by his **Relativity** crumbled. Suddenly, the world around him parted, and the sanctuary emerged from behind the screen of roiling Source. He was back where he stood. He was back, and he was screaming, rage pouring out of him, a thundering agony pulsing in the back of his skull, and vengeance denied.

Faintly, Wei found himself aware of the others stumbling back as he made his sudden return. Ellena took a step forward, but her daughter pulled her back. Roggi watched at a distance, his eyes wide, his mouth agape. Rafael's expression seemed unchanged, but a faint hint of fear was still betrayed by his trembling fingers.

Thinking came hard to Wei. He wanted to stop screaming, he wanted to master himself, but the anger seemed endless inside him. As he collapsed to his knees, another section of his Shadescale peeled from his back and clattered uselessly against the ground. Without a proper target to strike, Wei infused the floor with his **Intent** and began to strike it over and over. Its **Constitution** went first, then its **Strength**, then its Speed, and so followed all the rest. As the sanctuary began to crack and break, Wei found himself digging deeper and deeper into the foundations of the architecture.

His outbursts began as a crater, but in seconds, with each punch, a cubic meter of floor vanished as he tunneled deeper downward. Descending, his **Omniscience** revealed more floor, more matter, as far as he could sense. Though it was that he spent the better part of the next three minutes inflicting destruction upon the sanctuary.

When his rage finally ran its course, he was so deep and down that all around him was pitch black. Looking up, he felt as if a frog at the bottom of a well could still see the ceiling of the sanctuary looming above him, the faint paintings on the rooftop. His **Omniscience** revealed the group gathered around the entrance he made, but never approaching it out of fear and respect.

Omniscience Advanced > 18

[15/10] Aspect Advancements to Core Ascension

A sudden ache of shame twisted Wei's insides. He had lost control, embarrassed himself before others, failed in his task of revenge. Drawing in a shuddering breath, he found that he was crying. The self-loathing he felt drastically doubled. Swiping the tears away from his face angrily, he slapped himself, reciting his vow to inflict retribution on his father, to awaken this tower and break it once it knew the truth of its own mortality.

He had no time to be a boy. He had no time for such weakness. "Useless things," he said to himself. "Yes, useless." And with his statements made, and his sanity maintained, he climbed up the tunnel he had made, punching into the walls around him to create makeshift handholds.

When he reemerged in the sanctuary proper, he avoided looking at any of the others. "I apologize for my outburst," Wei said simply. "It will not happen again."

Ellena bit her lip as a worried expression came over her face. She took two tentative steps forward, spoke uncertainly. "Young sir—"

"I'm fine," Wei said, cutting her off. "Do not approach me. I don't need anything. I'm fine. I'm fine."

The former queen clearly didn't believe him, but she was wise enough to let matters be. The same could not be said about her daughter. "You are not fine," Agnesia scoffed, her tone filled with disbelief. "Wei, what was that? What happened?"

"It's not your business," Wei shot back.

"Not my business?" Agnesia said. "We are in this together. The only reason any of us are here so far is because you. We... we owe a debt. There is no reason for you to just... suffer alone." Cutting through her frustration and getting to the point, her temperature spiked around her, but the flames were not angry, only anxious. "You were trying to talk to your father, were you not?"

"Agnesia," her mother chided.

"No," Agnesia replied a little bit more forcefully than she should have. Her voice echo through the room, and the flames flared around her. Her mother flinched back. An apologetic look came over Agnesia. "No," she repeated, more gently this time. "Wei, I will not force you to say anything, but you are not well. You are clearly..."

The young master walked away from her and finally remembered to activate his **Lesser Hollow Mind**. Doubtless they were as horrified at his appearance as his behavior. The state of his body just slipped from him while a Core Ascension screen splashed across his vision. But Wei delayed his improvements while his Source began to return. His wounds closed and his body reshaped itself to wholeness as he made his way across the room, splashing through the spring in search of the demon present. Agnesia tried to follow him, but her mother managed to stop her. He didn't want to talk about this. He knew she meant well, but he didn't want to talk about this.

"We need to focus on the path ahead," he suddenly said. "Raphael," he called out, searching for that damnable lich.

"I'm here," Rafael said, his voice cheerful, though standing a full forty meters away from Wei, on the opposite side of the room, right next to the portals. "What do you need?"

"Find us a path," Wei growled. "The more conflict, the better. We need to get our Specializations. We need to reach the top of this damn tower."

"Path of Wrath it is then," lich said, sounding uncertain despite his words. "All the demons you could ever hope to break."

Giving a incoherent grumble, Wei sought the merchant in the corner of the room. His arms still bore the scars of his previous battles, and his resolve was unbroken. Everything just broke too easily. The world was like glass. Useless, fragile, fragile. What worth were fragile things?

As he stood before the merchant, the demon lifted a finger and greeted him. Wei didn't waste any time. "I need artifacts. Show me your wares, now."

Immediately, the merchant righted itself and directed its palm towards Wei. There, at the center of the hand, materialized several screens, and options began to spill across Wei's vision. He also noticed his sins recorded in the upper right corner as well. Another screen, another menu, another system connected to Mephelean.

Mephelean. Harbinger. Where was that blasted fool?

Ponderous footsteps sounded behind Wei as the young master slowly turned to regard Roggi. "Have you something to say, too?" Wei said coldly.

"Me? No," Roggi said. "I'm just here to see if I could get you to buy me something."

The young master stared at him with incredulity. Finally, Wei's missing eye returned, fused together from building Source. "You... I..." He couldn't find the words. The audacity.

"I figured now was a good time," Roggi said. "You are emotionally a mess, after all."

Wei just kept staring, and so did the rest of the group. "Have you no decency?" Wei croaked out.

Roggi looked down at his body and grabbed a fistful of fat. "I used to, but ever since I picked up this weight problem..."

And impossibly, Wei laughed. It wasn't a genuine chuckle, just one of disbelief. "That is your excuse?"

"I can come up with a better one."

"I... I will see if they have anything. I will see," Wei managed, turning his thoughts to replacing his damaged artifacts, potential new upgrades, and his Core Ascension thereafter.