

**Mou Ze:** *Why do you always choose the Elixir of Speed?*

**Wei An Wei:** *Because, Master Mou, it allows me to act first and often last.*

**Mou Ze:** *Hmm, an adequate explanation, but my other concoctions are also good, if I might say so myself. The Elixir of Cloud-Walking, the Silubrious Brew of Giant-Size, the Gale Lung Potion. Do these not fascinate you, young one?*

**Wei An Wei:** *They do, Master, but you will not pick them, but I do not pick them.*

**Mou Ze:** *And why is that?*

**Wei An Wei:** *Because though they offer new avenues of power, rules are most often won between those at the strongest foundations. The Outer Court Disciples, they are slow, undisciplined. You can give them several Elixirs at once, and I still do not think they will match me.*

**Mou Ze:** *Hmm, boastful, but likely true. However, young Master, though you are wise about the foundations' combat, it will do you well to understand that when all things are equal, or when you have little option left, the one with greater creativity, options, or surprise usually prevails. Give yourself a gift. Do not merely be stronger, faster, or smarter.*

*Be the one with more choices.*

-Master Mou Ze and Young Master Wei An Wei of the Drowned Sky Sect

43

Specialization (II)

Seven massive wolves tore across the battlements in explosions of force. Wei felt the wrathful essence erupt from their bodies, and only when they got within seventy meters of his perception did he notice the cannon once extending from their backs now protruded from their rears. It was a most peculiar shift in their forms. The weapon they once used as tracking artillery was now something akin to propulsion.

From the other two forts, more missiles were fired, the demons clearly indifferent to the continued safety of their fellows.

Wei consumed a **Velocity Charge**. He accelerated upwards, watching as the Warwolves shot past where he once stood. One of them clipped the very edge of the battlement, and an eruption of stone scattered into the air. About this time, the first of the missiles approached, the closeness between the forts granting them shorter travel time.

But Wei was uncowed. There was something he wished to test.

Composing a **Source Catalyst**, he infused sixteen percent of his source into his Eidolon once more, but rather than letting his will spike, he transferred everything into speed. At once, the world around him lurched to a halt, though he could still feel a growing pressure build within his Eidolon. Missiles, once blurring through the sky, now moved as if in slow motion.

The vanguard Warwolves themselves might as well have been frozen. Wei consumed Seven **Velocity Charges**. All of a sudden, the dynamic was inverted. Instead of being the target, Wei was now the missile, and he struck each of the demons with impossible force.

### **Velocity Charges: [32/40]**

His drastically increased **Relativity** caused time itself to peel around him, allowing him to move seemingly a fraction of a second ahead in the future. Not a single Warwolf responded in time. Wei didn't even bother breaking their concepts. He simply tore through them, weapon first, burrowing through hardened demonic gristle and erupting essence at ever-increasing speeds. In three seconds, he extended his intent to the next fort over, a mere 458 meters away. Once the distance was captured, he slashed into it twice, and space itself shrank once more.

He found eight more Warwolves gathered upon the new fort's battlements. There were also other demons here, some Collectors gathered in front of an equally dilapidated fort. Likewise, Wei felt an oppressive flow of power emanating from its inner depths and decided that he would investigate after he obtained his specialization. For now, he had levels to gain and foes to cull.

In two seconds, Wei consumed ten **Velocity Charges** this time, his momentum only building. The top side of the battlements exploded beneath him, his sheer acceleration piercing through the barrier of sound. The Warwolves disintegrated before the tip of his flowspear. He didn't tunnel through these demons so much as splattered them.

Power swelled in Wei as he felt his **Authority** advance twice. Comparatively, the growth to other Aspects seemed only minute, and the young master wondered why.

### **Authority Advanced > 20**

### **[12/10] Aspect Advancements to Core Ascension**

There was little to say about the Collectors. They stood in two groups around the fort, too slow and shambling to respond. The young master created a **Vector Chain** between them and loosed his spear. He didn't even bother to resolve them in person. Instead, he focused on extending his **Intent** to the last fort, about 630 meters away. It took over three strikes to break this concept of distance for some reason. A spike of interference impeded his Source.

As Wei materialized 160 meters above the final fort, he realized why. The final fort was far less ruined than the others. Upon arriving up close, he felt the sheer power emanating from it.

### **Bastion of Bloodshed Lv. 65**

The same fiery worm-like tendrils that piloted the Collectors crawled and burrowed across the obsidian structure of the fort. The aesthetic presented was somewhere between arteries and vines. Though parts of the building were cracked and fractured, rather than boundless darkness, Wei saw what looked like living tissue bubbling out in dangling dollops. He suddenly got the feeling that the fort wasn't quite a fort. Rather, it might have been a shell for a greater demon on the inside.

Cracks began to spread across his Eidolon. Wei dismissed his weapon, but the overload continued to build. Resummoning the Eidolon, he severed his link to the **Catalyst**, and all the universal essence he infused into his class rushed free like a displaced tide. The pressure faded. Time snapped back in a startling instant. The Warwolves suddenly noticed Wei. In the distance, an equal amount of missiles blinked out of existence. Once more, these Warwolves began their transformation.

Wei accelerated into the first of their number, plunging spear-first through their spine and collapsing an entire section of the battlement beneath him. The Warwolf struggled and writhed beneath him for a second before he twisted and swept his spear tip free. The feeling of parting vertebrae caused the demon to spasm, kick, and then go still. Once more, a menu filled Wei's mind's eye, and the young master grinned in satisfaction.

#### **Eidolon > Lv.5**

#### **Allocatable Points [10]**

#### **Select [1] Starting Skill**

- >[Minor Tyrant's Stand]
- >[Summon Minor Demon of Pride]
- >[Minor Hammer of Scorn]
- >[Chain of Conviction]
- >[Minor Throne of Rulers]
- >[Minor Castigator's Smite]

Putting all points into **Speed**, he used his **Omniscience** to peek out from the shroud of smoke, concealing his person. He would select the Skill later with his next Core Ascension.

He had sunken a good three meters through the stone walls. The other Warwolves were fast approaching. They accelerated into his sphere of awareness and seemed to have no difficulty discerning his exact position. Perhaps they could sense his essence. Perhaps their eyesight was just that good.

But it didn't matter. Wei extended his **Intent** and created a Source-made barricade of his own. Once more, he grasped the concept of distance and didn't break it immediately. Rather, he waited. Waited until the wolves approached its threshold. Waited as he focused the endpoint of his intent on the stone surface nearby.

The first of the Warwolves arrived, surging through the air as their fur burned. Wei could feel the heat coming upon him, see the light peeking through a curtain of dust. Just as the tip of its snout passed through his intent, he shattered the concept with a casual jab of his spear. Suddenly, the wolf found itself displaced across space. It impacted hard against the surface of the battlement. A sickening crack followed. More stone shattered, and the demon went tumbling as its body twisted and spun, scraping against the wall.

The other six arrived at this point, and Wei burst into motion himself. Leaping back, he threw himself off the collapsed parapet as he constructed a **Vector Chain** once more. Throwing out his spear, his Eidolon snapped through the dust just as the Warwolves approached.

The first one was unprepared, didn't even have time to turn. The flow spear punched clean through its skull and emerged from the back of its head. A spray of ichor and essence painted the open air. The other demons reacted, twisting, altering their flight paths, though the immediate two after the first one were still found wanting. The flow spear opened a War Wolf's throat and buried itself deep into the ribs of a third.

Though the vector chain was incomplete, the War Wolf's plated ribs killed all the flowspear's momentum, so Wei dismissed and resummoned it in two thoughts. The other three Warwolves shot over the walls, undeterred by the deaths of their fellows, their only compulsion to seek the young master's life. But once more their paths were intercepted. A bridge of **Intent** burst apart in an echoing detonation, and suddenly the first wolf to cross the wall caught a slash along its side, losing an arm in the process. Wei swung his spear back and partially gutted the creature before the next one twisted awkwardly in the air to swipe its paw at him.

He pivoted hard and shifted his spear, using its shaft to parry the blow. But though his strength had been drastically increased by his System, there was still one problem with Wei: mass.

The young master found himself launched back as the last of the Warwolves came for him. Paws extended, jaws wide. But at two meters of distance, he decided to give it an appetizer worth having. A **Minor Bolt of Judgment** flashed free from his spear and shot down the War Wolf's throat. The projectile of will turned to pure kinetic force. It detonated halfway down the wolf's throat. Wei saw black blood rupture from the underside of its jaws to the upper section of its chest.

The wolf tumbled, and only then did Wei remember to mark it with his **Minor Icon of Domination**.

He cursed himself for forgetting about his newest class skill. To be fair, he had been more fixated on his system, but he needed to use everything to his advantage. Immediately, he felt more arrogance drain out from his Eidolon, but at the same time, his weapon's Aspects began to climb. The progress was slow, but as they were added to his System, the effects of his relativity and proximal acceleration were drastic, and the already sluggish Warwolves moved like they were trapped in a sea of molasses.

Extending a pathway of **Intent** beneath him, Wei stomped on the concept of distance and dug into the top of the battlements. Rocks exploded beneath his feet as he ground himself to a rough halt.

The final wolf was still accelerating towards him when he opened his legs in a perfect split while lifting his spear high. He didn't need to do anything this time. The wolf opened itself along the edge of his spear, and the creature's content spilled all over Wei. Disgusting though it might have been, Wei felt pride in his performance. Twenty-four level six demons dead in less than twenty seconds. He didn't count the Collectors because they were inadequate prey, but yes, his power was growing, and drastically so.

Focusing on his **Omniscience**, he noticed he was incorrect in his assessment, and that a final War Wolf was still alive. It was the one that had the spear stuck in its ribs earlier. It limped as it galloped through the dusty haze. No hint of fear, nor hesitation in its movements. Despite being the last demon standing, its confidence remained intact. Or perhaps all it knew was war, and could never turn away. Creating a final **Vector Chain**, Wei threw his spear off to the right.

It suddenly twisted at a hundred and twenty-degree angle, shooting clean through the wolf's neck, before turning a hundred and eighty degrees through its midsection, then its back, then its chest, and then its head. The chain changed vectors over six times within the wolf. By the time the demon reached Wei, it splattered apart against his legs in several pieces, the largest of which was its torso, with Wei's spear still lodged deep in the Warwolf's chest.

Reaching out, the young master withdrew his Eidolon and swiped the blood away. Quite a substantial performance, if he said so himself.

However, a sudden shift of essence caught his attention as he regarded the fort. Two massive obsidian doors swung open, and looking inside, he saw crimson sacks of flesh and what looked to be sin incubators extending from the earth itself. Six Collectors marched out from the open doorway. The young master frowned at their sudden arrival.

Was this how more demons of Wrath were spawned into this world? He assumed that the distant Sin-Incubators were the only points of arrival for new demons. But clearly, this fort had its own level and produced legions of its own accord.

As he continued looking beyond the doorway, he saw what seemed to be massive tentacles and flicking tongues nudging more Demons of Wrath out.

A sense of disgust pervaded the young master, and he found himself of a mixed desire. Part of him wanted to see if he could kill this supposed level 65 demon. It didn't seem to be a direct threat, doing little more than produce lesser demons. But another part of him suspected that there was more danger than met the eye.

And if he ventured too deep inside, he might not be able to make it back out. He had been on a winning streak against the Warwolves, and further built the foundations of his system and class. Yet it was important for him to keep his focus. His original intent behind slaying all these demons

was to reach level five so he could claim his specialization. Specialization that would further boost the potential of his Eidolon.

**"Warning!"** Mepheleon's voice echoed through the sky. For a second, Wei thought the Harbinger had returned until he heard the rest of the sentence. **"A hunter might be dropping in soon. All sinners in the Moongrave, you have about, oh, 45 minutes or so to clear as much as you can before the hunter arrives. Remember, be greedy about what you can claim, but not foolishly so."**

A sneer pulled at the young master's features as he wondered where the Harbinger actually was. This was a recording of some kind, made evident by the fact that it repeated twice more. The only difference in the final statement was the hunter arriving in forty-four minutes rather than forty-five. Opening his chat menu again, Wei sent a mental message to Rogi.

[Chat]

**Wei -> Roggi: "Are you at level five yet?"**

**Roggi -> Wei: "Just about. I spent a lot of time killing those Collectors. Not much of a fight though. Saw a bunch of missiles go up in the distance, that be your doing?"**

**Wei -> Roggi: "Yes, there were large wolves that had fired seeking rockets. Their lives are now resolved."**

**Roggi -> Wei: "Ho, bloody brat. Keeping all the fun fights for yourself, I see."**

**Wei -> Roggi: "I'm keeping you and the others safe. If you want to kill some werewolves, then just beat me to them."**

**Roggi -> Wei: "Right, I'll take you up on that."**

Wei snorted.

**Wei -> Roggi: "Don't disappoint me then. Regardless, there should be no more artillery wolves, so you and the others can head towards the Specialization Rift now."**

**Roggi -> Wei: "Hey."**

**Wei -> Roggi: "Yes?"**

**Roggi -> Wei: "You got any idea what you want to specialize into? What you want to do with that class?"**

Wei eyed the Collectors, as more and more of them continued flitting out. No Warwolves stood among them, but Wei wondered if that would change soon. What did he want from his class? What did he want to specialize in? Looking at his spear, he considered what might give him the greatest advantage. He needed to be faster, stronger, more powerful, wiser, perhaps.

More than anything, he needed every part of himself to be greater, or at least capable of facing threats that far exceeded him. His father, the Knight of Lust, the Inheritors, he was like a carp entering a cold and unforgiving sea. He required an edge above all other edges, and that was predicated on his performance in the specialization rift. Wei didn't intend to disappoint.

**Wei -> Roggi: "That will be determined by the trials that await us. You?"**

**Roggi -> Wei: "Yeah, something diet-related, maybe. Maybe I can swap out the sudden obesity for, I don't know, a larger nose, or a promise to never shower or something."**

**Wei -> Roggi: "And what class would that be called? The Envious of Foulest Stench?"**

Both of them paused for a moment.

**Roggi -> Wei: "You know what, I can see that."**

**Wei -> Roggi: "You know what, I can see it being called that too. Heavens, I hate this place."**