

Judge Ygwamawe: *Let this recording stand as the third attempt to censure Seeker Shotin Kazahara on the counts of insubordination, ignoring direct commands from a superior body, assault on a superior citizen, unauthorized seizure of Guild property, libelous slander of another citizen, inappropriate language in an official forum, kidnapping of a fellow citizen, unlawful interrogation of said fellow citizen, and... secondhand public urination via nu-dog on said tortured citizen. Would the accused like to make any statements before the proceedings begin?*

Seeker Shotin Kazahara: *Yes. Clans. Citizens. All gathered in this courtroom... before I am to be judged, I would like to put forth a question: are these really crimes when done to a lackey from Clan D'Rongo?*

[Gasp; clamor of indignation]

Judge Ygwamawe: *Order! Control yourselves! Guards! Guards!*

Asei D'Rongo: *Draw your glaive, you—*

[Missed swing; Pelvis shattering; Asei D'Rongo screaming in pain]

Seeker Shotin Kazahara: *Well, damn, Ygwamawe, looks like “kicking a D'Rongo's balls into his guts” is going to be on the sheet as well, huh?*

Judge Ygwamawe: *...Add it.*

-First Successful Censure Trial against Seeker Shotin Kazahara

17-12

The Rash Abides (III)

RESURRECTION - 100%

Avo didn't expect the world to be swallowed by chaos once more upon his return but welcomed the fact he wasn't trapped in Shotin's pocket anymore. Matter evaporated from the space around him and the Woundshaper began to assemble where his sheathe once stood. Judging from the way space shivered around him and the heavy weight pressing on his Domains of Space, he guessed another paradox just occurred.

[Well, well, well, looks like another paradox just went off,] Corner said. **[Damn shame we didn't get to use the girl to pull that trick. Might've worked, getting her to play possum by walking up to Shotin while we “played dead” before casting ourselves through her.]**

+*Might've,* + Avo replied. A brief feeling of lament passed through but faded. There risks in such a plan as well. Unknowns. How fast Shotin Kazahara could react and what canons he had to bear remained questions to consider. Still, Avo was a predator unmatched in the Nether. It didn't

matter how good Shotin was, how many Incubi he had helping him, or how heavy his Frame. The only fate was to burn.

Considering the devastation around him, a worrying suspicion settled on him. The last time a paradox happened was because of Draus. If this had been caused by her again, then...

Her ego-ID flashed across his cog-feed. He accepted her call in an instant.

{Done bein' dead? I got eyes on our girl—damn she's goin' fast. Get over here quick—we got hostels movin' in fast. Paladins and Exorcists from the look. No sign of our Godclad either. Think he went Incog again. Gonna want backup.}

He was in motion before she even finished talking, a feral expression spreading across his face as lightning crackled through his flowing currents and radiance emanated from his blood. *{Good. Pull back. Let him get close before closing. Got a session in her mind. Want to burn him for my Conflagration.}*

{Synced.}

The air around him crackled as he Boltstrode and activated his Incog at the same time. The district blurred around him as he used his DeepNav to pinpoint his destination. Yet, as he rematerialized, he found himself more than five kilometers southward from where he wished to be and about to smash through a cluster of shanties packed with FATELESS.

His acceleration alone should have obliterated the entire area from its shockwaves with the impact leaving little more than a hollow crater afterward. What happened instead was one miracle counteracting another. Light cleaved through the world as the Woundshaper shone like a beacon, its tower-like form now a lighthouse for all to behold. Brightness spilled off its lightning and coated the world around it in a protective glow. As the air thundered from the collision, as a scar of fire made by sheer speed erupted into the world, the few hundred people living across five storey ghettos made out of trailers, dismantled barges, stolen containers, and golem chassis survived without a single scratch.

**Shineguard Grafted to [Woundshaper]
(Blood/Matter/Biology/Luminosity/Lightning/Protection) - 1200 THAUM/c**

CANON:

(Protection)

->FORTRESS OF LUMINOSITY: Allows the user to project an emanation of light that renders all physical objects basked by its glow invulnerable to harm (as dictated by the user); generates heavy Rend for every second canon is in effect (0.88%/s)

Hubris: The canon needs a persistent source of light in the environment or on the user to imitate or thaumic backlash will be triggered.

HELL [FOURTH CIRCLE] - 1200 THAUM/c

CANON:

(Luminosity)

->**SHADOWBREAKER**: The user creates a seed of light bearing all their Rend that can be planted in a shadow or darkness; only one seed can be created at a time; the light will continue to spread through all darkness or shadows and eradicate any object or entity caught within the darkness.

Daemon: If there is an insufficient amount of darkness consumed, a Daemon of Luminosity will manifest.

Rebuilding his Domain of Luminosity and taking out Zein's Harmonize canon proved to be a wise idea. Especially with how well the Fortress synergized with his Sanguinity.

"Ah," the Zephyr said, sounding genuinely glad for once. **"Finally, old one, you have done something worthy of worship."**

The Woundshaper, radiant with its new power, tread a path between pleased and annoyed. **"It is always good to be made greater, master, but... those lives could have gone to better purpose."**

"And there she reveals her debased nature, her foundations unchanging."

"Silence mule. Sulk in your darkness. Quiver before my light."

"I'll quiver only when you reach the required height."

"MY DEATHS ARE GREATER! MY MASS IS GREATER! MASTER FAVORS ME MORE!"

Reorienting himself, Avo executed a series of short-ranged jumps to combat the instability of space. In his DeepNav, he monitored Draus and Dice's position before noticing new and unknown profiles trespassing into his awareness. Peeking over at Draus' visual feed, he watched as she soared to engage a squadron of twenty oncoming Exorcist drones passing over Dice.

Her Liminal Frame flared and the cold buried its fangs into the district as the temperature dropped. The Exorcist drones were expendable scouts, sent as recon. Too bad they didn't get to see much before the jaws of a frost-made bear the size of a building froze and shattered their shells.

A new presence pushed into Avo's Sanguinity and he felt his Domain of Blood rattle as something—or *someone*—of considerable thaumic mass encroached. His Conflagration offered no screams about an encroaching Godclad, indicating their Heaven was not yet fully manifested, but he already knew they were here, and not the other way around.

Good.

Dice, for her part, did as he advised her in case they got free. She was dashing forward at nearly two thousand kilometers per second and rising, force building on force inside her as a fractured Scaarthian icon shone over her, its symbol a spear punching through a mountain.

Even with a hundred tons to his Haemokinesis and his Celerostylus active, she was blindly fast and getting faster.

The vaguely humanoid form of her Heaven enshadowed reality around her. It had five arms, six legs, and three heads, its body made not of skin, flesh, or bone, but the alloy of gleaming weapons. From within her being sang the sounds of clashing steel to the rhythm of a rising heartbeat, each object she broke building to her destructiveness, each exertion of force compounding, never diminishing.

Dice had requested the Runebreakers he just claimed from the knot as her gift—returning his Sangeist for now until he made a second Cyclor available for her. The modification pleased Avo as well, granting another layer of potential subterfuge to wield against Shotin, who was expecting a blood-based Heaven by this point.

Even though things didn't turn out that way, the girl clearly chose well. A trail of broken drones and a mangled golem lay scattered along her warpath down the main avenue of Veng's Stand. She stuck to the streets as to avoid smashing through any communities as he had almost done earlier, each of her sending plascrete flying upward toward layer two.

His HUD flashed a swarm of slow drones poured out from the skylanes running between the higher districts. A fast-moving signature snapped out from their midst, closing on Dice.

Godclad. Paladin. Had to be.

Avo took a moment to isolate them in his Sanguinity...

Paladin Riche Kassamon smirked down at the poor, unfortunate Fallwalker lumbering on the ground. They must've thought they were so *fast*. Little do they know.

Drawing up his Heaven of Speed, he prepared to drink the velocity of every last person in this district that wasn't him and add it to his own.

And command told him to wait for backup. Like he needed to— *wait*, why was the air around him so red? And did it just twit—

His mind ignited a microsecond before his body vanished in a puff of blood.

[What the fuck! What the fuck!] Paladin Riche Kassamon. He tried to trigger his Heaven but it wasn't there. **[What—where the fuck! How—]**

Avo infused his memories into the Paladin's template, and the newcomer began to scream and rattle as the trauma of its new reality settled.

+It's not that bad,+ Avo grunted.

{Perspective, Avo,} Calvino chided, regarding the Paladin with sympathy. *{And did you really need to do that?}*

+Didn't torture him. Just killed him. He'll resurrect. Paladin useful for the gestalt.+

Another spasm of horror passed through Kassamon. **[What? I'm trapped here? In your mind!]**

[Welcome to the nightmare,] Abrel deadpanned. **[It never ends unless the ghoul does. But then we do as well. Hooray.]**

[Abrel Greatling?] Kassamon asked, noticing her presence. **[Wait, but aren't you—]**

[Yeah. The same thing happened to you too just now. In a couple of seconds, your original self will get up just fine, and we'll still be here: simulations of our consciousness dedicated in service to the godsdamned creature that killed us.]

[...Holy shit.]

[Yeah. "Holy shit" is right.]

Reaching through his Sanguinity, Avo disassembled every last Exorcist drone he could before find his attempts rebuffed by the knots now closing in on Dice from every direction. He had almost regained all the ghosts he lost from Shotin's Skimmer from all the jocks and Incubi he burned earlier. It made it easier for him to hold back from devouring the Exorcists as well.

{Small mercies,} Calvino cheered.

Just then, he felt Chambers and Kae enter his Woundshaper's threshold as well, approaching Dice at very low speeds in a cheap aero. Somehow, he doubted Kae was responsible for such an inefficient approach. She needed to be more assertive. Maybe having her beat Chambers to death once or twice would harden her confidence.

{Avo...} Calvino chided.

+*What? Just something she can choose to do. He'll probably enjoy it as well.*+

{It pains me to know that you're probably right.}

Maintaining course as the waif's shadow, he waited and followed in her trail. The edge of the district was fast approaching. She had less than ten kilometers of room left before the city ran out and she was treading the Layer itself. Digging through the Paladin's memories, Avo knew the phase gates were already active. Not that such a thing would stop her for long. There was a fixed limit to how much force she could build to, but it wouldn't ever go down from that. Not unless she was paradoxed or accumulated too much Rend.

If nothing unexpected re-directed her path.

Something burst around Dice, and suddenly she was gone. Snatched from where she was in an instant. The ground cracked. The atmosphere exploded. Electricity surged out from Avo's veins and danced through his Sanguinity. As he brushed the blastwaves aside, while tracking Dice's new trajectory back into the heart of the district, her progress was nearly undone in an instant.

Shotin. It had to be him. He did the same thing earlier when Avo was trying to escape the block—some kind of Heaven or Force or Directionality, perhaps.

It didn't matter. Avo turned in pursuit. Yet, not one second later, a tsunami smashed through the Nether as a district-level Thoughtwave Bomb swept through the world, breaking the effects of his Incog. He barely spared himself a sudden death with the activation of his Crown, and in a moment of Conflagration-enhanced focus, maintained the course and unleashed his Zephyr's Hell.

A pocket of stasis formed around Dice and she lurched to an unnatural halt. Reality around her deformed as the Zephyr's nine heads neighed in unison, its Rend vanishing in an instant just as the thoughtwave swept through Shotin, their presence a mere five hundred meters away from Avo.

He lashed at his foe with his haemokinesis. Nothing. His Sanguinity slid from the armor around them like they did the Shineguard's light.

Avo shifted strategies. Lightning coursed through him. Spikes of blood exploded from his being.

An enormous eagle manifested where Shotin was and redirected the salvo right back with amplified velocity. Light flared around the Woundshaper as the constructs shattered. Avo manifested a Sanguinity-made claw and seized Shotin from behind, imbuing it with the same light that protected him. His adversary struck out at the appendage and the indestructible rang against the invulnerable.

Shotin made two quick gestures and Avo felt his claw and body plunge down into the foundations of the district itself. Manifesting a new construct within the reach of his Crown, Avo ejected his mind and infused his consciousness within the shard and Boltstrode as he transferred the mass of his main body along the way.

As he crackled back into existence beside Shotin, he laid eyes on his adversary for the first time, their armored figure protected within a glowing armor, as if fresh from the forge.

Avo reached out to download Shotin using his Datacaster only to find his foe out of range in an instant.

A beam cut out through the air—a thread of black fire that pierced clean through a nearby figure coming up behind him. A body fell in two pieces past Avo.

[I think that was my partner,] Kassamon muttered.

Avo ignored it and Boltstrode. Only to find himself wrenched in the opposite vector. Leaping constructs again, lightning coursed through Avo as he tried to catch up, but found himself too late.

Shotin was heading for Dice—going to reach her first reaching a hand out as he prepared to snatch the discombobulated girl from the ground.

Another beam cut through the air. This one struck the Seeker dead in the chest. Entropy essence splashed off his glowing armor, but the unanticipated attack knocked him into a spiral. But before he could get far, Dice grabbed him instead and flung him toward Avo.

Hissing internally with glee and pride at the girl's actions, Avo's confidence swelled further as a blizzard formed around him, freezing multiple approaching golems and drones solid as he strode to reach Shotin.

DISTANCE: [753 METERS]

DISTANCE: [531 METERS]

DISTANCE: [232 METERS]

Then, just as his Crown slipped over the Seeker's form, just as his Conflagration crept forth to welcome the newest member of the gestalt, Shotin's armor broke open into tendrils of darkness and wrapped themselves around him.

WARNING: FOREIGN SOUL DETECTED

UNIDENTIFIED GODCLAD DETECTED

CLASSIFICATION: SPHERE VI [EST. 5941 THAUM/c]

->WOUNDSHAPER, THE AWAKENED

(BLOOD/MATTER/BIOLOGY/LIGHTNING/LUMINOSITY/PROTECTION)

Shotin had no idea how a Sphere Four Godclad—some kind of Sang in a sleek-looking bio-rig—could be this much trouble. Even without his Parallelist, his Heaven of Speed and War should have been enough to settle this. But here he was, venting his Hell into said Sphere IV to stall for time.

As shadows wrapped themselves over the blood-made tower, he turned and triggered his Heaven of Speed to grab the girl. Enough of this madness. He needed to get out of here before—

His Metamind screamed. He shifted left—not fast enough. A lance of entropy cleaved clean through his left ankle and his pain editor worked overtime. Biting back a string of curses, Shotin calmed himself and accepted that this was just one of the days that life broke down his doors to fuck him hard in front of the whole city. Nothing for it. He just needed to survive and get out of here—

The girl flung an aero at him. Shotin sputtered and swiped it aside. He barreled into her a moment after, grabbing her by her midriff only for two pinpricks of pain to sink into his hand. His eyes widened as he caged Dice in a field of inverted speed and looked at his hand. Her damn nu-kitten bit him! Two clean marks right on his favorite hand.

“Come on...”

His hand promptly froze and shattered. He sighed and tried to dash away with the girl.

This was when he reached his boiling point, for just as he was about to leave, a civilian model aero slammed directly into his ribs and pinned him against a nearby lamppost. Shotin spat a mouthful of blood and made a pulling motion. Two people burst out the windshield of the circular aero as he booted it off his body with his remaining leg.

One of them properly turned into water—and Shotin redirected their flow into the sky before they could wash over him.

The other, however, made Shotin’s thoughts grind to a halt in entirety, for held between his very fingers, was the one he had been searching for.

The man’s face was bruised and bloodied, caked with broken glass, but the grin—the ugly mop of blonde hair... Shotin knew him! Shotin was hunting for him.

“Aedon ‘Fucking’ Chambers,” he muttered.

Then, for no reason at all, the half-strand pulled his pants down and pulled out his penis.

Shotin’s eyes widened in horrified disbelief. “What the fuck?”

LUSTAWAY ACTIVATING

Quail Tavers killed her drone feed and tripped over her own feet as he collapsed at her new firing position. “What the fuck.”

Draus dove behind a building as a stream of rockets exploded behind her. One of her arms was gone—the cost of taking her shot at Shotin between distracting the authorities. Sneaking a peek over using the Manta, she found her eyes locked to Chambers’ visual feed as she saw him holding his cock and pointing it at Shotin. “Godsfucking—”

A missile hit her.

Armor Integrity: 16%

The horrified only worsened as Chambers’ member promptly caught fire.

The acolyte leaned in. “You should’ve stayed home today, Silver.”

And then he sprayed a deluge of aratnids from his groin.