

Alright, that's it, everyone's... oh... oh, no... No! NO! AGHHHHHGHHHG—

-Paladin Baers upon entering Veng's Stand and contracting the Rash

17-13
Outbreak

An important thing to remember when someone was spraying burning aratnids into your mouth using their cock was to keep your mouth closed. This was a lesson Shotin quickly learned by experience as the first of the unnatural rat-spiders pried at his face, palps brushing his inner cheek.

The chains of shock shattered. Outrage exploded inside him while he deluded himself, ignoring the pitched peals of his Lustaway. The swarm bit at his eyes, squeaking and hissing as their unnatural fangs actually pierced his skin, injecting clusters of *something* under his flesh.

Through it all, Aedon Chambers cackled, howling like a hyena as his laughter cut through the air. The noise promptly turned to a shriek of agony as something inside Shotin snapped.

Scattering the aratnids from his body with a flick of his wrist, the Seeker's hand cracked through the air, and his Heaven of Speed cawed as two vectors of speed tore at Chambers. The first was anchored to his body and drove him down, crumpling the aero behind him from sheer force. The second anchor was attached to the acolyte's testicles, and Shotin charged it with every last ounce of acceleration his Heaven was capable of and loosed it skyward in a random direction.

The first force buried Chambers into the folding vehicle as the second uprooted his genitals from his groin like a burning, gore-rooted turnip. Horrifically, just before the member broke off with a sickening snap, Shotin noticed it twitch and *extend*.

"Oh, you sick mother—"

Things quickly grew worse.

A spurt of blood and fire blasted out with the castration but the act was a pointless one. More fire erupted from the wound and from its heat poured even more bioforms seeking Shotin's flesh. It was like cutting a hole into a hornet's nest—he just made a bigger opening for them.

The bugs and newly forming flesh-coated abominations were the least of his worries, however. The true danger signaled itself as Chambers' howling cries turned to a long drawn-out moan. An outbreak of reddened dots popped and opened as a bloody line along the side of the man's face, distorting into something that looked like...

A sore.

No.

Cold dread filled Shotin's stomach. He felt a spike of pure agony flare under his chin as his flesh began shifting against his will. "Oh, no," he gasped, smacking a two-headed lizard as it shoved its face into one of his rapidly forming wombs. "No. No, no, no—Jaus, fuck, no!"

Chambers face deformed to support the beginnings of the Rash as he suddenly sat up like a man possessed, laughing at Shotin's retreating form. Fluid pooled around his skin and sealed him in some kind of liquid armor, only exposing his growing wombs to the world. The Seeker tried to respond, but *ineffable* pain spread through his bone, his flesh tearing beneath his tattered suit like fissuring chasms, amniotic fluid fountaining from the rapidly forming sores. The swarm of creatures clawing and biting at his eyes was an afterthought now. He drove the acolyte through the pavement itself and stumbled for the nearest flame, mind blank of everything but his growing suffering.

He needed to burn the affliction shut. Caulterize the plague. The burning wreck of what used to be a golem called to his attention from across the intersection. A sudden wetness spilled down upon him before he could reach it. He felt a lightness tap his Domain of Seas before the droplets fused into a river and shunted him away from his salvation. He redirected the waters around him part before the Heaven vanished a second later as the other Godclad collapsed out of her manifestation, wailing in abject torture.

She flopped out from the droplets and crashed down on the shattered street mere meters away from him, face contorting as she wheezed with her torment. Their eyes met and he noticed the clan mark over her right eye—*Kusanade? Vezosos?* He couldn't remember—it was hard to think. He considered accelerating a nearby rock through her eye but the thought vanished as a small hand clawed out from where his ear was.

An anguished noise escaped from him as he seized the homunculi by the arm and tore it out. His equilibrium went as a series of crunching pops rattled across the side of his skull. The world spun and danced as he chunked the half-formed infant onto the grounds, his inner ear melded to its half-formed stomach.

If there was any solace to be taken about looking at the malformed fetus grown from his flesh, it was the fact its hair was still slick and cheeks were still sharp. Then a swarm of aratnids poured over the mewling infant and sank their teeth in supple flesh.

Let it be known that Shotin Kazahara remained charming even as a stillborn homunculus.

Shapes and blurs passed through his cog-feed as he fought to keep himself standing between every step. He couldn't keep from flopping on his face when a golem crashed not two steps away, showering him with shrapnel. Through it all, Chambers' damned creatures were back again, chipping at his skin while the Rash consumed his insides at an alarming rate.

Just how much lust did that bastard have? Most outbreaks progressed slower than this. With Chambers it was like being at the epicenter of a fusion bomb—all his metaphysical lust feeding the Fallen Heaven to its fullest capacity. In the corner of his eye, he spotted the girl he spent so much effort chasing—Dice—tearing a cluster of ingrown infants out from her thigh. Seeing double and hearing little more than a persistent ringing, he couldn't tell if she was crying or merely screaming.

At least her bloody cat was helping her. Trying to bite through the mess of umbilicals hanging out from her body.

His chest struck the wreck first and only then did he remember where he was going. Something in the back of his mind screamed for him the manifest one of his Heavens—to spare himself more torture. Remembering that it didn't matter, that the Rash would cling to his body even when it was stored in his Soul, rendered that idea worthless.

This was a suffering of more than biology. Wombrash would have its keep once it touched you, and nothing but extreme burns or thaumaphagic treatments would be enough to preserve the body. Right now, all he had was the first option. When the choice was a bit of heat or shitting misshapen babies out from your pores, the decision was simple.

Shotin shoved his face into the fire, and the following hurt came as a relief.

REND CAPACITY [DAWNFORGE]: 44%

“I'm gonna kill that sonna—” Tavers clenched her teeth as pressed her fusion burner over her newest sore. Her pain editor was top of the line. The kind of aug that could be adjusted on the fly.

It didn't help.

This wasn't the first outbreak she got caught up in but damned if it weren't the worst.

The drones had already been cut out of the sky by thoughtwave bombs, now the piloted golems were crashing down too. Poor bastards. They probably didn't expect to go out this way when they woke up in the morning. Good thing they disrupted the district's Nether—the last thing she needed was for the outbreak to spread. Choke her coming escape even more before the end.

She winced as a pitiful cry sounded from her left armpit, pain blossoming throughout the left side of her body. Great. Another bastard wanted out. She sighed.

There were just days this city kicked down your doors and just started fuckin' ya with a burning pike. Nothing for it.

Her bivouac was hosted in the bombed-out remains of someone's living room. Before that, it looked to be a scavenged part of a mawship. Strange how things buried deep down end up topside again. Collapsing the plates of her combat-skin back around her body, she placed her trust in the armor's auto-med systems to keep her together until the run was done.

She just hoped Mellow and the others weren't caught in the district when the shit went down.

Picking up her Hellgun, she braced it against the window and noticed that the half-strand that started this mess was approaching the Ori Godclad now, blocking her shit.

"Jaus," she breathed. "What the hells were you thinking?"

Chambers was not thinking: Chambers was *acting*.

Ever since he faced Naeko, felt the oppression of a higher 'Clad, a thought lived in the depths of his mind—a nuclear option that anyone could use, but were too inconvenienced or fearful to do so.

Wombrash was a destroyer. *Wombrash* incapacitated and choked entire districts, requiring an entire rapid response force that existed as one of the few remaining cross-Guild organizations in existence today. *Wombrash* was feared.

But Chambers wasn't scared. Chambers was a Godclad now, and Godclads were spared the consequences of death.

Armor Integrity: 43%

The Meldskin managed a wonder, stopping him from getting crushed like a bug by the bastard's Heaven. Cracks pooled as his helmet snapped back together, the armor exposing his sores and the homunculi hanging from them. They bounced against his body like strange fruits, each clawing and squealing their indignity at being alive, dirty mops of hair shining a rusted gold in the dim light of approaching sirens.

Spotting his target cooking themselves in an open fire, Chambers' face broke into a savage grin as two gnarled knots of writhing flesh dropped down from his wrists. The two newest additions to his temporary family wept aloud, unprepared for the fate he was about to inflict on them.

Life gave him fucked-up fetuses, but now he was going to use them and kick some Silver ass.

He walked past Kae—her eyes rolling into the back of her head as she squirmed with discomfort. Kneeling next to her was that FATELESS girl Avo was supposed to me—Coin or Chopsticks or

something. She was on her side, plucking dead baby after dead baby out from herself and the Agnos, a look of delirium weighing on her features. Just beside her, a nu-kitten with monkey arms on its back sniffed at the fetuses, winking curiously.

The cost of victory was high. But this was gonna be worth it. He would make this worth it.

Drawing on his Heaven, he ignited their sores and turned their homunculi into kindling. Only he needed to accept the burden of lust now. Only he *could* bear the raw *size* and *power* of a Ninth Sphere in his body.

Coming to a stop just behind his enemy, Chambers' eyes narrowed and something flopped out from under his right nipple, its small fingers clawing at him viciously. He held out one of his wrist-tethered fetuses like one would a sword, frowning as it dangled instead of pointed.

"What's wrong bitch," Chambers said, snicking as he activated his Heaven again. Wings of fire expanded out from his back as a sea of creatures poured into existence. "Feeling tired? Don't wanna fight anymore? Well too bad, because your ass is mine today. And I'm about to put a *baby inside it.*" He paused and considered his words. "B-break a baby against it."

The shoulders of the enemy Godclad sagged. Seated inside the flaming husk of a ruined, a certain calmness radiated from their person—like they had transcended pain to arrive at a new level of existence.

Chambers frowned. Then promptly swung both his homunculi down on the half-strand's head. The two pseudo-infants, realizing their fast-approaching end, screamed once more before they exploded in a welter of bursting viscera over the man's skull.

It didn't do anything.

Shotin looked down at his shoulder as a wet flap from a dead baby slid down his chest, staining his already charred suit with mucus and blood. Sighing, he turned to face whoever he was about to kill and winced as his damaged ear popped, its inner organ partially healed.

Once again, he found Aedon Chambers directly across from him, this time encased in smooth armor of fluid white. It strangely shared some resemblance to the hull of a voidship.

"What," Shotin sighed, "the fuck... is wrong with you? How aren't you dead? I drove you into the ground. I tore your cock off."

A chuckle

A chuckle escaped from Chambers as his pale armor flowed over and back under his skin. “Coldtech armor, consang. It hardens in response—”

Shotin triggered his Heaven of Speed one last time. He pulled at a loose stone somewhere behind Chambers. The plascrete shock snapped into his hand as it punched clean through Chambers’ skull. A clean gouge ran from where his nose was through the back of his head. Stumbling back, the acolyte blinked once and tried to say something as he toppled.

The rock went under his chin and shredded his face into flaps before he hit the ground.

Staring at the blood gushing forth from his body and the spasming of his legs, Shotin mantled the edges of the golem and stepped out. A scar was scabbing the face of reality. The piece of shit had another Cycler in him. Because of course he did. Of course some Low Master acolyte had all these ontologies, equipment, and implants.

A pause passed through him as he turned his eyes on the other Godclad Chambers came with. Something didn’t make sense here. The tech was definitely too advanced for a random anti-Guild outfit. And the woman... he knew here from somewhere... seen her face in a report before.

But he never got the chance to have the epiphany he needed. The Rend capacity of his Dawnforge chimed as it reached empty in his cog-feed, and Shotin gave a shuddering whimper in response.

REND CAPACITY [DAWNFORGE]: 0%

Oscillating waves of blood exploded across the district as blades of blood finally cut the Woundshaper free from Shotin’s Hell as he manifested his impenetrable armor back around himself.

Something inside him *gave*. He was done. Fuck this shit, he was going home. He just needed to kill Chambers and he could go—

But that meant surviving that *godsdamned Sang* first.

“Break!” he screamed as he dashed away from the Woundshaper, his Heaven of Speed slipping past eighty percent while another cluster of infants exploded out from the ripening drum of flesh that used to be his inner thighs. “Give me a fucking break!”

[How is shit getting more fucked every time we come back!] Abrel growled through gritted teeth. [And why is the Agnos—oh, godsdammit Chambers!]

The half-strands template took a moment to respond. **[What? Wha—oh, holy shit the pain!]**

All of Avo's consciousness was joined in a shared scream as the Woundshaper itself quivered, its body involuntarily constructing miniature spires of haemokinetic matter. **"Master! What is this... this sensation!"** Unamused by the labor pains building behind his right eye, Avo hissed and focused on trying to kill Shotin instead. At least it looked like they were affected as well. As was everyone else in this district.

{Chambers!} he screamed across his ansible, turning an entire street into a rising hammer that he used to batter the Seeker from below. No answer. No damage.

Shotin flung a half-hearted stream of debris at him, but his heart wasn't in the fight anymore. He was turning hard and fast upward away from the district. Lightning fractured reality around Avo and a few more bolts than normal forked out from him. His templates—sans Corner, Abrel, and Elegant-Moon—were roaring in pain.

He tried to stride after his quarry, but an irresistible force flung him in the opposite direction and he found himself resetting his form using his Sanguinity again.

A gulf of fifty meters expanded into a kilometer even as Avo drew more mass into himself, thaums, and Rend building. Peeking a look over into Draus' feed, he saw that she was cauterizing Rash-sores on someone who looked to be a golem pilot.

Just as he prepared to cast her a message, he felt it. All around him, currents of spatial reality stilled and existence returned to relative normalcy.

Far ahead, Shotin came to a sudden halt, turning in mid-air to face Avo. He wasn't fleeing anymore. He didn't have to.

"Alright." Shotin's words rumbled forth from the very air itself, the heat of his frustration and rage suffused beneath the fabric of space. Unsheathing the power of his Parallelist, Avo winced as discomfort pressed against his Heavens of Signals and Air for the third time that day. **"I've been having... a really... shitty day so far... And I've just about.... Had... Enough!"**

The stacks fell.

Shotin spasmed.

His armor vanished.

And a mound of writhing babies exploded out from inside his skull.

All the minds inside Avo went quiet as they watched the Seeker fall from the sky. Template-Chambers broke the silence with a chuckle. **[Saved by the rash.]** A severed cock promptly fell from the sky and bounced off the Woundshaper's body. **[Oh, shit! That's my dick!]**