

Anna: Tough, the boss.  
Snow: Huge, also Tough  
Spider: Tech specialist, skinny  
Shogun: GAD  
Dozer: GAD

They had followed a zig-zagging route, the five agents. Disguised as curious urban explorers with heavy packs, they had made their way through Paris, winding down through tunnels, sewers, subway lines to the lower catacombs. In position by the entrance, Chief Agent Anna Maris, plus a rather muscular woman who towered over her and three men, two of athletic build, one a little on the skinny and short side, geared up in their blue, grey, and black BDUs, fished close range SMGs, knives, shotguns, halon grenades out of backpacks and duffel bags, secured miniature rebreather units to their gas masks, keeping them on their hips in case they were needed. and prepared to enter. Anna took point, carbine pressed to her shoulder and eyes ahead, her weapon-mounted flashlight switched on.

The public tunnels were clear enough. There were regular tours, so monster presence was decidedly light. They caught nothing more than a few reptilian tracks. There were people, of course, guarding anything outside the light and protection of the city - but the Secret World had its own techniques for dealing with the concern of mortals. Money changed hands, a distraction was made, and soon the group was heading deeper, and deeper.

There were golems - bent amalgamations of bones held together by tendons of magic and intent. Enough bones down here to create an army of them. The first was staggering, spindly.

The team exhibited no panic, no shudders, no surprise. No pause of "What is that" - they had all seen worse, stranger. All that needed to be understood was it had to be taken down fast. Every one of them had worked together in Kaidan - fought the horrors there. They worked as one as they encountered the spindly, staggering golem, Anna and two of her men raising their guns, firing short, controlled bursts of rounds hexed with what could best be described as *elemental force* into it, as the other two members of their squad watched their flanks, stood ready for if anything should crawl out of those bones...

The thing last a minute, if that, before clattering apart. It had gotten in a few solid hits - it was huge, after all - but the team worked together well, and took it down effectively. It clattered into bones and dust, the only remaining bits of light crushed out under the huge woman's boot.

The next golem, and the one after that, they went down just as cleanly. One might get the impression that such constructs were more-or-less naturally occurring down here, born by the magical weight of so many dead.

They headed deeper. It was chilly here, under the earth, and they could hear water from...somewhere. All the expulsion of energy had a consequence as well: there was occasionally a fall of dirt that impeded their progress, got in their eyes and mouths.

Keep moving, reloading. Snow and Dozer got their shotguns ready, Anna stuck with her carbine but used her machete in a pinch, fighting alongside Shogun, Spider stuck back, and used small black heli-drones and wires to scout ahead. In interesting spots (Namely the oldest, biggest bone piles) he etched invisible techno-magical glyphs to monitor the area. They moved at a steady pace, aim true, ammo use efficient.

As they moved deeper, they slowed their pace down, took time to reload, check each others' status before pushing forwards. The dirt was an annoyance, left some coughing and - occasionally, maybe, lead them to backtrack, seek alternate routes as they headed deeper. Spider got out his air-reader to check the air for signs of moisture, as well as a sonic tracker so they could seek out the source of the sound of the running water.

Down here, this far below the earth, it could be anything. There were water mains above them after all...then again if that's where the water had leaked, why so? Where were stressors in the earth of which those walking the streets above were not aware? As they headed deeper and deeper, that's the image Spider started to put together. Something (or things?) was moving down here, under the earth. Something was shifting earth, or making a way for itself, far below the streets, below the subways - in some cases, below the sewer level, even. A few hundred metres ahead, his readings indicated there may be a more open space - well-reinforced.

Anna comments, "... Think this might be worse n' the Temps even figured." They... follow the projected movement of the *thing*, winding through the tunnels to see if they can't find an entrance to the more open space.

Or failing that, make one.

Snow's rather skilled in controlled demolitions, after all, and knows how to make a hole in a wall without bringing the whole place crumbling down. Hell, if it's fragile enough she'll just use the sledgehammer she brought to do so.

Snow knew her stuff. The tiny device she'd placed on the wall managed to take it down, offering entrance to the larger open area, according to the readings - after they made their way carefully through a claustrophobic of sharp rocks. It moved into an small area of razor-sharp crystals, all softly glowing. With the lights they carried, they could see what the crystals might not have illuminated: strange markings and glyphs on the walls of this place.

Paris, after all, was a layer-cake of a city. When had this place stood in the sun? Had it ever?

Spider, ever *fascinated* with these sort of things, began to sketch down the markings and glyphs - especially any that featured prominently. Snow and Dozer stood guard, and Shogun regarded the room with a sort of - mystified detachment. As for Anna, she looked around too, examining the glyphs and crystals, seeing if there were any other things that looked like ways in or out... Resting a hand on her machete, after doing a cursory examination, she brushed her gloved fingers along the markings, tracing them.

The crystals seemed to resonate with magical energy. Whatever they had going on, it was far too layered, too complex to understand with what they had going on. There was a steady humm about the place, something one couldn't hear, quite, as much as sense in the bones. The glyphs were old, very old - but seemingly from this Age, as far as Spider could tell. There were strange creatures with twisting and coiled bodies - but they were all surrounded by the hills and gardens found far outside the city. There was a woman of some sort, who approached the serpents, holding out her hand to them. There was a river...

Then...well, then the wall was broken apart, by the sledgehammer they'd used to get in here.

The team took their time, idly examining - Spider noting - the unusual glyphs.... then... at a sudden sound, Anna, Snow, and Dozer snapped to shine their flashlights upon - whatever was on the other side. Tense and ready. Spider startled, but snapped to attention, his pistol raised as he stuffed his notepad into his belt. Shogun slowly turned and readied himself. Anna moved forwards first, taking point...

It was a shaggy beast, lumbering with a snuffling, rumbling sound. It looked..hairy, somehow, in the dusty beams of light. It had a lumbering gait, legs stumpy and tortoise-like, set widely askance to the body in reptilian fashion. In contrast to the shaggy body, the head and neck were smooth and reflected the light, as off scales, perhaps. It had been unaware - until the team moved. Slowly, it swung its heavy head around, strange shimmering eyes huge and wide in the lights. It reared up, startled.

Anna's mind briefly flashed to the footsteps she heard. She eyes the beast, her gaze cold, predatory, examining how it advanced so she could maneuver accordingly depending on what it did next. The rest of the team stood, likewise, fanning out through the room as they faced it. She said nothing. Just waited.

It

The thing moved with panic, with sudden fear. It reared up again, slamming it's stumpy legs to the earth. Dust started to filter around them. It lashed it's thick, muscled tail, knocking some of the crystals do they skittered over the floor and shattered. There was a strange pulse of magical energy. It thumped toward them, eyes wide with startled panic, pained by the light.

Charging monster - scared or no, it probably wouldn't let them leave unperturbed. "Take it out." Anna hissed, tone cold, devoid of emotion. The team took another step back in their scattered

positions, Snow moving to intercept the beast with a well-timed shotgun blast, and hopefully give it pause before she dove out of the way, the others unloading as Anna readied her machete and ran towards it, aiming to dive down beneath if it should swing to intercept her and cut deep into the back of its leg to slow it down.

That shot caught the poor thing strait in the throat, and it gave a strange, bleating cry that almost seemed to have the sound of creaking metal in it. Anna went for her dive, but that swinging tail swung the thing around, catching Anna with one of those huge legs, sending her tumbling. Her machete caught in the thick skin of the leg, twanging and vibrating up her arm.

Anna grunts as she hits the ground, and tightens her grip on her machete. Suddenly a golden glow shoots down the blade, illuminating it, and sending a small, destructive shock of anima into its leg, before Anna lets go, rolling away as Shogun aims for the creature's eyes, and Snow discharges another shotgun blast into its torso. Anna is quick to regain her footing, reaching for the pistol in the holster on her hip, drawing it out, aiming for the wounds she and her squad have created. She knows she will not cause it much harm, even if the rounds *are* hexed with literal hellfire, but she hopes to at least piss it off, turn it to face her. The other members of her squad continue to fire upon the creature, short controlled bursts aiming for the softest-looking points on its flesh.

It does face her - barrelling toward her, throwing its enormous bulk against her. The fire hardly seemed to slow it down. Well, the shotgun had some stopping power, at least, but it didn't seem as wounded as it *ought*. Was it enraged? The thick tail thumped at the wall as it turned, knocking loose another piece of the stone. As it's strangely covered hide hit Anna, she felt a sudden, sharp pain. There were tiny punctures in her - wait. Was that hair at all? It was stiff, and had managed to punch through her thinner gear, somehow.

Anna lets out a grunt of pain as it slams her, and she drops to the ground, the gun leaving her hand. She's bleeding and a little dazed but she's not going to take time to recover, instead reaching to draw a knife from her tactical harness and hold it at the ready as she swiftly moves to her feet, not even *perturbed* by the pain... And inclines her head at her squad to hold fire, as she lets her eyes meet the beast's, defiant. The squad complies... confused... then she inclines her head again at Snow. She seems to *know what to do* as she hurls a small timed demolition charge from her pack upwards, and the other members begin to back off towards the edge of the room.

The charge will detonate, and given the structural integrity and age of the place, it'll send a good sized chunk of ceiling and wall crashing down on the monster. Anna will dive, swiftly, out of the way, so she isn't crushed too.

By some wonderful luck - or perhaps it's skill and care - it goes just as Snow intended. A chunk of the ceiling above them crashed down onto the creature, pinning it with a massive, shuddering

crash. Dust and dirt rained down on them, getting into Spider's delicate equipment and getting in all their eyes and mouths all over again.

When the smoke cleared, the thing was still caterwauling, still making that horrible sound. It thrashed and wailed, its tail thumping the earth and thrashing wildly.

Under her gear, Anna could feel the site of those wounds *burning*, and *itching*.

The pain's - somewhat dulled by the healing effects of the anima circuits, as Anna gathers herself and checks herself and her team, "Any wounded?" she intones, emotionlessly. Spider fiddles with his equipment, attempting to fix it, muttering angrily as he notices that a few pieces have been pretty jammed up with dust. Snow, meanwhile, looks *pissed*. Without saying a word she picks up the sledgehammer and makes her way to where the monster lies and with a mighty blow - or several - proceeds to strike its skull until it stops moving. Anna raises no objection. She sucks in an uncomfortable breath, trying not to think about her injuries as the adrenaline of battle fades from her.

It doesn't, though. It doesn't stop moving. Just that wailing, that agonised cry at every blow. It can't *do* much from where it is - though the thrashing tail does leave a few of those quills stuck into Shogun's arm.

Anna finally says, "... Snow. It ain't gonna die, an' I ain't gonna waste *ammo* on th' damn thing." She'd at least go to recover her machete from the rock pile/the creature's leg if she *can*, yanking it out and sheathing it, looking the thing over closely as she does so. Snow grunts, and starts collecting her gear. Anna walks over to Shogun, who's nursing his arm, and looks to Dozer, "Take a look at his wounds, an' help get em' outta here if y' need to. We came down here t' find intel, an' that's what we *did*. Spider, get a picture of that thing an' leave a scry-glyph, then we go. Snow, you guard th' rear 'case that thing gets up, I'll take point." She barks out her orders and the squad complies like the finely oiled machine it is. Anna absently scratches her side, gritting her teeth and sucking in through them, before reaching into her belt to pop some - well, pills that're a chemical cocktail of painkillers and stimulants, should keep her going til they're out. Once everyone's in order, the team begins its trek back up.

The leg closed bloodlessly. There was almost no harm on it at all besides a few deep gashes on the tail. There was a rumbling. A sucking out of air, as if something was moving - slow, ponderous - through the earth. It seemed to come from all directions at once. Tiny pebbles skittered across the incline of the floor, and a few of the crystals *cracked*.

Anna takes point. She hears the sound behind them, "Snow, watch our six. That thing comes after us, don't fuckin' *hesitate* to bury it." She clammers her way up through the opening they made in the wall, helping the wounded Shogun up with her. There's the occasional pained grunt but - Anna is not the sort to let something as minor as *pain* stop her. "Doubletime it." She says, moving out ahead, carbine held close, shouldered, as she begins to weave her way through the

tunnels, using footprints and subtle little marks left by Spider (a small chalk line, a rock turned so-ways) to navigate the team back upwards, out of the chamber and through the Underground.

The team moved **carefully** through the tunnels, feeling tremors spread here and there around them. Something was...moving. They headed up, leaving the pinned creature behind them, still wailing helplessly, thrashing and crying.

Spider should have seen it coming. His drone was still zooming in circles around them, but it was flying scattershot, one side still fizzling and crackling with current. By the time anyone heard a sound, the jagged tunnel to one side was already a writhing, squirming mass of scaled flesh.

Dozer moved first, turning to cover the wall to their left, with a quick hand-motion to the others.

Anna and the others swiftly turned, weapons raised. "Hold." She says, hissing through her teeth, moving after Dozer, Snow covering their six as she was ordered to. They don't round the corner. Not yet. Simply stay ready to move, quiet, tensed, prepped for whatever's about to lash out at them. Anna's holding her fire for when she knows she won't just be wasting ammo.

They seem... on edge. Restless. There are flutterings of papery wings here and there, making a shivery swish, *tshtshtshtshhhh*. An organic static. Bright eyes blinking at them in the swinging light.

Spider looked around, his eyes wide. "You guys...hear that?"

There's movement. It's fast. So fast.

Deep breath. Can't see it. Know it's stalking. "... Yeah. Guns ready. Stay alert. Let's *move*." Anna moves around Dozer to take point again, moving through the tunnels. Slow, Careful. The team checks the walls with their flashlights, fully expecting an ambush anytime soon.

From the side and from behind you, they come. How many? A mess of slippery, slithering winged bodies, long thin tails whipping through the air.

"Switching up! Cover me!" Dozer and Shogun move to cover the side, and Snow the rear, the first two firing suppressing bursts from their SMGs into the oncoming throng, as Snow loads exploding, fire-hexed shells into her shotgun, using them to thin the mass advancing from the rear. Anna swaps over to incendiary rounds and joins in, short, controlled bursts into the oncoming creatures, likely ripping into them and setting them alight.

There were no sounds, this time. No crying, no screams. Just that whirling, insane mass of whipping tails and long, thin necks. Delicate wings shredded like paper, and the thud of bodies dropping was a steady heartbeat under the *ratatat* of gunfire, the sub-audible throb of the shells.

And fire - the fire lit the place in nightmarish visions. When the fire flared...it had to be a trick of the light.

Spider cried out. There were *pictures* in that writhing mass of wings and tails, there were *words* just under the skin of sanity, pushing to get out. His voice broke as he cried: "*WHAT'S THAT NOISE?! GUYS!*"

Anna checks her shoulder as she reloads, gesturing. Back up. Move out slow. Her turn to glance over their shoulder, watch their six, as she returns to firing, holding off the throng. There's a wince as she hears Spider begin to panic. Bad memories. She's had someone in Crab Squad lose it before. She will *not* let it happen again. "*SPIDER! IT'S TH' SOUND OF THINGS YOU NEED TO FUCKING KILL! GET YOUR SHIT TOGETHER!*" she growls, angry. Check her shoulder again, turn, "Watch our six an' goddamn *move*, Snow, if he flips out, *knock him out and carry him.*" She hisses, coldly, as they pick up the pace.

That ended up happening. Spider freaked out, and Snow let her rifle swing round to apply a sleeper hold. More and more of the serpents went down, but more and more of them slithered up, out of the standing pools, out of holes in the walls dripping water.

The air was thick and choking. Made the lungs ache. Why hadn't they noticed before? In one of those surreal moments when time seemed to slow in the flickering strobe of the rounds, Anna could see a cloud of strange, curling smoke puff from the mouths of one of them, before its tail whipped out to wrap her throat.

Some covered the others with bullets, knives, as they backed up and slipped on their rebreather masks, switching, taking turns, like the well-oiled machine the squad was, Snow forcing Spider's on. Anna reached swiftly for her sheathed machete to slice the tail off as it wrapped around her throat, her other hand letting her rifle swing down as she reached to *grab* the stub, violently yank the creature in, stomp it to the ground, and *shove* the machete down into it in a swift, lethal blow before she swiftly turned around to sheathe her weapon and apply her rebreather as well.

The cloud was starting to thin. The floor was hard to traverse - the mass of bodies and limbs and hacked-up bits was bloody, wet. Water had started to seep into the room when they weren't paying attention. Dozer slipped in gore and went down, hauling himself up with a grunt of effort. The air was thick, and the moment the masks were on, it was immediately clear just how noxious the air had become. Snow moved for the exit, Spider slung over her shoulders. His favourite robot lay frizzing out, under the pile of dead serpents.

It was hard, but step by step, the others covered their exit from that chamber. Eventually, they managed. And yet. The moment she had a second to think, Anna's mind flashed back to the strange, surreal illusion that there had been pictures in the strobing light.

When she blinked, she could still see them behind her eyes.

Room. Finally. Time to reload. Catch her breath. The little flashes of... something... she could catch... Disturbing. Strange. But now wasn't the time to ponder visions. Whatever *trick* was played on her wasn't at the forefront of her mind - she'd encountered enough of the strange and terrible to learn that if one thing helped, it was laser like focus on the task at hand. She was hurting, winded, and didn't know exactly what she was seeing but - it didn't matter. Not til they were out. She stood, watching the exit with Dozer, "... All fine? ... We are *leaving*." She stated, simply, turning, continuing onwards through the tunnels to try and retrace their steps, find a way out. Everyone stayed ready, knowing damn well that something could leap out at them *anywhere*.

Everything they encountered on their way back up went down with the ease of that first bone golem. Just bones, just shuffling, dead meat. Fair enough. They hardly went through a single clip. And when they saw the installed fluorescents the Public Catacombs, everyone breathed easier. And when the first weak shimmers of actual daylight filtered down on them, they were filled with sudden, sharp awareness of what a true relief it was to be above-ground, to have daylight on their faces. To have clean air.

Even if the air was full of clove smoke, and the daylight was fading fast...

(fin)

((woo! :D That was fun. Horrifying, but fun! :D I'm gonna wait a couple hrs before Anna MENTIONS it to anyone for realism's sake since... y'know she's gonna be spending her time down there!))

I forgot to write this in: they can hear running water. there are \*many\* standing pools, some quite deep.

Status

bottom of the doc