

Professor Leiter sets a breakneck pace for the deli. You're forced into a jog just to keep up.

She's utterly silent, except for the order she snaps out at the deli counter for soup and a sandwich. She also avoids looking at you, even when you sit down across from each other to eat.

"Don't," she says, when you open your mouth to talk. "Don't even think about it. Neither of us is going to say a word until we're done eating, at which point I will hopefully be slightly less angry with you."

"So," Leiter says, once you've both finished eating. Her expression is carefully neutral. "The case. Any thoughts?"

There's a lot to think about, but one subject in particular comes to mind.

"The whole case smells funny," you say. "The long scratches on the walls? Someone or something surviving a three-story drop? It points to something...inhuman. Possibly even supernatural, if you believe in that sort of thing."

Leiter's eyebrows lift. "You'd be surprised what I'm willing to believe. In fact —"

A gut-curdling scream rips through the air before she can finish.

Leiter is up and out of her seat before the scream has fully faded away. It's all you can do to run after her.

The streets outside are in chaos. Most people seem to be running for safety, although a few are frozen in place by fear or confusion. The area is hardly packed, but even a dozen people can fill the streets if they're running frantically enough.

Now that you're not behind the deli's glass window, you can hear more than just a scream. There are distant crunching sounds, and a metallic shrieking, like nails against a metal chalkboard. It's all coming from the direction of Ma Shanks's.

You and Leiter round the final corner and skid to a halt. There, amidst brick buildings, is a creature straight out of a nightmare. It's the sort of creature you're more familiar with than you'd like.

Its form is twisted and ugly in a way that turns your stomach. Black pustules bubble up along its black, curving over its shoulder to cover half its face. The rest of it is fleshy and discolored, like its whole body has been bruised repeatedly.

The ropey muscles underneath its mottled skin tense and shift as the creature picks up a motor coach and throws it halfway down the street.

Leiter swears under her breath. You glance over and see that she isn't staring at the creature, but at the alleyway directly behind it. There, crouched in the shadows, is the homeless woman who did her best to warn you about all of this.

"We have to get that...thing...away from her," Leiter mutters. She looks to you. Her expression is grim, her eyes wide. "Do you want to be the bait, or should I?"

“I’ll be the bait,” you say before you can think better of it.

Leiter nods and darts off to the side, out of the creature’s view.

And then it’s just you, a rampaging monster, and the few dozen feet of cobblestone street between you.

The monster’s misshapen head swings towards you. For something without discernable eyes, it certainly seems to know exactly where you are.

Your sick fascination quickly takes a backseat to abject terror as the creature charges towards you.

You duck to the left, but not quickly enough. The monster’s claws rake across your back. The force of the hit knocks you across the street, where you tumble to a painful stop on the uneven cobblestones.

The monster isn’t done with you yet, though. Its thundering footsteps grow louder and louder with each beat of your heart.

You fumble for the gun in your pocket and barely manage to draw it before the monster is on you. Its massive claws bat you aside even as you pull the trigger, sending your shot wide and your body rolling across the ground.

Every inch of your body hurts. And still the monster isn’t done. You can hear it closing in again, and there isn’t time to reload your gun.

Something collides with you from the side just before the monster’s claws can make contact.

“When I said ‘bait,’” Leiter hisses, “I meant a quick distraction, not life-risking heroics!”

Over her shoulder, the monster rears back for another mighty swing.

Leiter makes a wordless but impressively aggravated sound. She pushes you aside and pulls a knife out of her skirts to deflect the creature’s oncoming blow.

To your surprise, the monster reels back, clutching a now-bubbling wound on its arm.

“I trust you won’t tell the university about this,” Leiter says breathlessly, sparing you barely a glance before lunging forward to slice at the creature again.