

## The Wren Anthology

*Meet Wren, Kira's big sis and guardian of South Ward. Follow her as she continues her ten year crusade to annihilate organised crime within the city.*

### It Never Ends

The moon hung high over South Ward.

The rats had been busy building their nests this month, infesting all the old corners and walls they could slip into

She remembered coming here not long ago when it was still a laundromat. All it took was a month for it to go out of business, be abandoned, fall into disrepair, then into new ownership. The spider tattoo on their faces told her enough, this was a New Syndicate hideout, and they weren't here to do business.

Neither was Wren. She didn't do business, didn't cut deals, didn't play nice.

Maybe once. Maybe years ago. She'd played this game a thousand and one times now.

There was only one way this would end.

A man at least twice her height saw her approach the door.

"Who the fuck are you?"

The poor sod didn't even have time to react. Wren charged and kicked him with such force he broke through the door and landed on the other side, ribs shattered.

Ten New Syndicate members turned, swearing, surrounding her.

Most carried weapons; knives, shortblades, some long metal poles and bats and a few with guns. She'd interrupted them right before a night raid...

"Are we really doing this? Your friend's got permanent injuries and I haven't even warmed up yet."

"You break into our base and try fuck with us? We'll skin you alive bitch!"

She cracked her knuckles. "Then let's get this over with. I got my little sister waiting for me."

They came at her, at least three or four at once.

At least they weren't doing that dumb one at a time deal.

Wren dipped her hand in a nearby basin full of water, still full from the building's previous owners. Knives and clubs raced towards her, but Wren knew she didn't need to block. She had just been waiting for them to get closer.

In an instant, the basin's water boiled and Wren threw it out to burn their skin and blind them from a cloud of steam sweeping through the room.

Gunshots fired, peppering the back of one of their own, shouts and commands filling the air.

"Get her! It's just one fucking woma-!" he never got the chance to finish, not when his arm was broken inwards at the elbow. Wren threw him to the ground, darted towards the next, swept his legs, stomped his windpipe, a blade came from behind and Wren spun to kick it out of his hand and then lay three more kicks to break three different sets of bones before moving on.

Before they knew it, the steam cleared and they were all on the floor.

Was it over yet?

No chance.

Wren burst through each room, each corner, each tunnel of this infested nest and exterminated the rats one by one.

This was her city. She came here ten years ago and made a promise; that she'd make it safe the only way she knew how. The guards were long gone, she had no other allies, it was just her.

Wren punched through a wall and dragged another man back out before ending him.

They were criminals, thieves, killers. She knew the danger they'd cause. South Ward would never be safe, but no matter what she did they kept coming back.

Wren caught a man's gun and watched as it glowed red hot, warping the barrel, molten metal melting onto his hands...

She had something to protect, someone to keep safe. Kira would never be able to live a normal life if these gangs weren't stopped, and Kira should never have to live the life Wren did.

Wren lashed out, bright flames flaring from her feet and from her hands, sweeping across the entire room.

It had been ten years and she never had the chance to even breathe. When will this end? When will it end?

Wren grabbed his head and smashed it into the corner of a basin, an axe kick delivered to the temple leaving a painful *snap*.

Wren cleared room after room, a flame sweeping across a forest of trees rotten to the roots, she flung tables so hard they exploded on impact with their target, used brooms like staves to shatter teeth, crushed skulls against walls, bent limbs backwards, set whole floors ablaze, unleashed a thousand blows again and again to the wet sacks like they were punching bags hearing the squelching impacts again and again and she incinerated bullets midair before they could even land and she went to another room and brought the ceiling down on them over and over and no matter how many she killed and how many tunnels she emptied those fucking rats kept crawling from the woodwork over and over and they never learned their lesson and they never realised when they were done and when one finally snuck past as she was distracted and stabbed her in the gut?

"I... have had... ENOUGH!"

An aura of impenetrable heat swept out from Wren in that moment as she clenched her fists, the sheer pressure of it throwing all of them backwards. They could run, they could hide back in their holes but they HAD THEIR CHANCE and she wasn't going to waste another moment longer in this rank pit.

"You knew the risks coming to MY district. I've told you all a thousand times over a decade that I won't allow it. What did you think I was saying? DID YOU THINK IT WAS A JOKE?!"

Wren held her hands together, marking movements with each finger into distinct martial forms. Some might have called them seals, or gestures, or runic components, or just about anything else. Wren didn't care. All she knew was that it would stoke the flames of her inner energy, bringing them to their melting point, moulding and channelling it with the tiger, ox, whale, crane, mantis, monkey, and finally serpent signs. Her fingers clutched together and drew up the last remnants of her inner flame up through her neck, flaring from the lungs, and finally shot out through her mouth!

**[ROARING DRAGON BLAST!!!]**

Wren's aura ignited, and when her inner flame collided with the floor it expanded into an incredible surge of intense, unstoppable power.

The foundations of the buildings shuddered and heaved on all three layers, the whole thing shifted and listed and began to crumble under its own weight.

Glass exploded from the windows, a shockwave shredding the floor apart and scattering all furniture out as if a bomb had been detonated, annihilating everything in its path.

Raging flames swept across the room and roared skywards, melting and incinerating every single living in the building's radius.

Of course, it always had to end one way.

Wren stood in the epicentre and gazed at the destruction.

She combed through the ruins and confirmed there was no one left.

The weight lifted from her shoulders.

Finally,

Maybe it was over,

Or at least for now.

### **A Little Jaunt Down to Midtown**

While Kira and Rosie were fast asleep, drifting memories of their secret swirling in their mind and wondering if Wren heard them they had no way of knowing that Wren's window had already been cracked open and left behind an empty bedroom.

The Cult of Burning Shadows, not that they'd ever admit they were a cult, were a loose end. She'd played it off the best she could but Rosie's comment had shaken her awake from what was meant to be her downtime. There was at least usually a couple of weeks between incursions, flushing out a rat hole meant the next would take some time to be infested. But the return of any group meant a loose end. Her reputation was a deterrent, and if gangs knew there was a chance she couldn't finish the job meant she'd have a lot more work on her hands down the line. Thankfully, she wasn't alone in wanting this city kept clean.

There were many ways into Midtown, but even Wren didn't know every entrance. Unless you could just ask the ground to move politely like *someone*, you probably kept to the reliables. Wren came to one abandoned building, a library picked clean then left to rot after a string of looting in the immediate aftermath of the Cataclysm, and climbed up to the highest shelf to find one copy of *Traveller's Guide to Stormwind*. She tugged on it and heard a bolt shift behind the wall. Wren pushed the whole shelf aside to reveal a tunnel lit by fluorescent lamps and made her way in.

Many Midtown tunnels were dusty cloying places carved out long ago, or strings of passages through adjacent basements and cellars smashed through to create patched-together paths, but this one you'd be forgiven if you mistakenly thought it was on the surface. Sure it still had a bit of that Old Town grime, but the path was well maintained with lights and supports regularly checked and replaced and even signage pointing what way to go.

It didn't take long for her to get to a central plaza right underneath where the real one was in Old Town. This place was The Crossway, both a meeting place and a junction for the people who came through here most often and there were major highways to every other part of the city. It was said that anyone travelling through Midtown could have the time of their journey

cut in half if they made it down here rather than on the surface. The direct route is always the quickest.

Wren knew the people here were criminals, but as she said to Rosie, collapsing the tunnels to prevent the rat holes forming in the first place could collapse the city. Like a parasite the host was slowly drained of life, but removing it could kill the host entirely. She'd been in the game long enough to know you sometimes just have to play the hand you're dealt. She exchanged discourteous glances with those robbers and thieves. Just because this place was a sanctuary it didn't mean she had to play nice. Her look told them all they needed to remember. *Stay off my turf, or get ground into dust.*

Wren didn't leave The Crossway though. Instead she went straight under a tunnel to a more lavishly decorated place away from the eyes of other criminals and reserved only for high priority guests. As always, a burly frontman guarded the door.

"Let me in." Wren growled. She couldn't stand the hollow formality they draped themselves in, the almost corporate levels of bureaucracy they hid behind to pretend like they were anything else than what they were. But smugglers who ran Midtown were a lesser evil, they only traded inanimate goods, and Wren would rather take 'honest criminals' who held their word like their honour than killers who didn't even pretend.

The frontman, dressed in a suit with black glasses, crossed his hands over themselves said "If you want a meeting with the executive we need to arrange it in advance. You know this."

Wren scoffed. "Doesn't mean I'm gonna listen. Let me in. This is important."

He adjusted his glasses. "The rules are the rules, I'm afraid."

It's a good thing he was ready for this, clenching his gut tightly in preparation for Wren's fist to arrive swiftly and on-time. He doubled over, clutching his abdomen and wheezing to catch his breath. He'd stand no obstacle to her now.

Just another pointless formality.

Wren came into the executive's office. It was a boardroom suite, well furnished, paintings, plants, an oak table, cushioned chairs, the sort of thing you'd build if you had lots of money and a reputation to uphold as being both respectful and hospitable.

The executive had already heard her behind the door. "I really wish you would not abuse my doorman every time you come in here." He said, checking the ends of his sleeves.

"Only knocked him out for a second rather than snapping his leg in half, so call that a respectful gesture. He should know by now to just let me in."

"Ah, but appearances..." the executive folded his fingers together and gestured at the chair on the other side of his desk and put the thought aside. "But sit. Our special relationship affords you impromptu meetings like this."

"Don't think I'd call it special, Sidaris."

Wren bared her teeth in disgust as she sat down. If this was to her liking that special relationship that put them on a first name basis would crumble faster than this roof... but this man and this culture ate into her. She was the host, and they were the parasite leeching off her. Removing them would be even worse.

Wren folded her arms. "Cult of Burning Shadows. You seen 'em?"

Sidaris flipped through his ledgers and records. "Which one were they again? Had so many cults..."

"Loved sucking Deathwing off. Arsonists. Tattoo on their wrist."

“And what did it look like?”

“A mountain with a flame atop it. Like a volcano.”

“Hm.” The executive ran a tight operation and like all successful men was an avid bookkeeper. Anyone his couriers spied or spotted during their deliveries reported it straight to management. When the lines of territory in Midtown shifted, when one party extended their grasp too far or were snuffed out he knew. But he shook his head. “Didn’t you end them two years ago?”

“I thought I did. But I heard someone saw a guy with that exact tattoo.”

Sidaris chuckled and clicked his pen before jotting down some notes on his pad. “Ahh, Wren... if people hear you can’t even finish the job...”

“I know! Which is why we need them gone before anyone else hears about it.”

Sidaris replied. “Yes... I suppose that would be a problem wouldn’t it. I know you’ve never found it palatable dealing with the *likes of me*. The strong, immutable Wren, who does everything she needs to protect her community. Of course we’d never cross paths if we did not need each other... but we do. I need the Surface neat and tidy as much as you need Midtown the same. It’s a symbiotic relationship.”

Wren squinted. “Is there any reason why you’re reminding me?”

“Only to suggest that I may need your help soon in turn... only my respect for you means I do not intrude upon your home. Can I trust that you’ll answer if I send a letter instead? Of course... any competitors you remove for me is one less gang that could infest South Ward too.”

Wren saw her hand and played it the best she could. “Fine. I’ll keep an eye out.”

Sidaris smiled. “Then I will keep an eye out for remnants of this Burning Shadows cult too... but I can tell you now there have been no sightings of them since you obliterated their stronghold the first time. Their reach likely only extends to the Surface... and that’s your turf.”

Sidaris left the matter in Wren’s hands, and she was quick to wipe her hands clean as she emerged from the tunnels and came back into South Ward.

If this cult was really about to reignite, she wasn’t going to let Kira and Rosie deal with it. Wren had a reputation to uphold, but her sister’s safety meant everything... and she’d do anything to protect her.

## **Rage Harmony**

*Only through harmony can you cultivate power.  
Power stems from the chi inside all living things.  
From the gut it flows to the corners of being; body, mind, spirit.*

*But harmony cannot come without clarity.*

*Through clarity, balance. And with balance, harmony.  
There is no clarity in anger. Rage disrupts the balance.  
Your fury will lead you to ruin.*

Another one of Stonestrike's lectures rushed through Wren's mind.  
Just like all the others, she forced it out.  
She'd been dead for ten years now.  
It had been ten years since she tried to kill Wren for who she was.  
So why the hell did she still live in her memory?  
Why should she get to be a ghost and haunt her?  
When she was the one who pushed her away in the first place?

She always hated me, Wren remembered.  
She was scared about what fire really meant.  
She was scared about what I could become.  
She was wrong about harmony, I can find clarity in rage.  
Wren had found balance easily enough without meditation and reflection.  
So why the fuck did she feel so unsettled?

Wren punched a sandbag off its chain, picked up another one, started working on it.  
Something was wrong. Something she didn't have the words to explore.  
Her mind jumped to anger again, and sent another bag reeling.  
There was a font of something in the space under her mind, but nothing dried it up.  
It stayed, and lingered, rotting, and festered.

Wren carefully wrapped her hand around the door handle, but chose to knock instead.  
"Kira.  
You home yet?"

Only a draft through an open window replied.  
Wren stepped in to find Kira's messy room.  
She tried not to come in here, knowing Kira needed her private space.  
But this time what she found wasn't her sister, telling her to get the fuck out.

She saw her work clothes for the week, freshly laundered.  
She saw the sculpt she had made of Rosie's visage hidden under the frame of a bed  
unmade, the covers still warm.  
And of course she saw that window. Opened just wide enough for someone to climb through.

Wren sat down on the bed and pressed a tight fist against her forehead, trying to nurse the throbbing anger that rushed through it.

Kira hadn't just gone to a friend's house without telling her.

She had been here, again and again.

She had so many opportunities to talk, so why didn't she?

Not even to say hi?

Wren realised the reason her old master haunted her,

Wasn't because her spirit still lingered,

But she had been reborn,

And her name was now Wren.

She found something and tore it in half.