

When you first awaken you realize very quickly that something is wrong. Your body is sore all over and there's this awful ringing in your ears. Not to mention that, as opposed to your bed or even the cot you had grown familiar with back in the barracks, you seem to have, at some point, fallen asleep on a very solid stone floor.

A cough escapes your lungs. There's soot and dust everywhere. Just where were you? You figure this is about a good time to get up, fighting your heavier than usual body to do so. It gives you the opportunity, at least, to look yourself over. Thankfully all of your limbs are, in fact, in check and still attached to you. Fingers too, and while you don't take off your boots you get the feeling all of your toes are still on.

Now that that was done, there was several other issues to deal with. Your surroundings are... not very hospitable, to say the least. Debris and shattered concrete for as far as you can see. The ceilings are practically caving in; it's a miracle more than a third of the lights are even working.

Right, of course. Now you remember.

You, a member of XCOM. A proud soldier fighting against the 'alien' menace infesting and dominating the entire planet, one of the only resistance to their tyranny. You had been assigned to a squad to halt a supply line and...

Your head hurts. Yeah. The state of things gives you a good idea of how that particular mission went. You couldn't hear any gunfire or explosions or any of the telltale signs of ongoing combat, so you could only assume one side had wiped out the other before you woke up.

There was no reason to stick around, lest more forces show up to do 'clean up'. You reach into your belt and pull out your radio. Nothing. Probably too far underground.

You look behind you, to the mountain of crumbled remains that reached passed and through the convenient gaping hole in the ceiling. You turn back around. Forward it was, then.

You appeared to be on an old train track of some kind. Could be a worse place to fall. Hopefully there's a way out. Or better yet-- although you realize the sheer unlikelihood of such a thing-- a way out that isn't swarming with *them*. You doubt they'd have mercy even if you WERE just a medic.

The list of things that could possibly happen to you now keeps getting bigger and not many of them are good. You were nothing if not an optimist, though, so there's that.

The track stretches on for a painfully long amount of time. On the bright side you didn't have to worry about trains considering all the debris in the way. This place seemed really old. You're

pretty sure this place hadn't seen the light of day or any signs of life beyond you since before first contact.

The tunnel keeps going, deeper and further. You'd only been walking for a minute or so, but the soreness through your body tells you it feels like an hour. You have to rest.

Your back meets the wall as you flop against it, sliding down onto the grimy floor beneath you. Your legs ache, thanking you for this momentary pause. What was there for you to do in this situation?

You could somehow climb your way out of this literal hole you had fallen into, alternatively you could wait and hope someone came to get you, but that would be impossible; there was no way they knew you were even still alive, and you don't even know how long you've been out.

You hope the rest of the squad is alright. God, if they weren't...

No, you shouldn't think about that. Optimistic thoughts, right.

Regardless of your optimism and the issues present, there was one thing you couldn't deny; you were in for the long haul, and XCOM troops weren't exactly prepped for 'extended field duty'. The most you had in terms of rations were a few energy bars tucked between all your meds...

You were craving one now, actually. You must have been out for at least a couple of hours, right? Possibilities of concussions aside (you'll have to remember not to fall asleep in here and do a full examination on yourself once you assess the situation) you can feel your stomach starting to fight you for dominance. Not one to argue with yourself, you slip your pack off of your back and look through, fetching out the happily wrapped bar. You weren't sure if it was your delirium or the situation, but the small snack might as well have been a 5-star meal, because that's what it looked like to you.

You sigh as you grip the bar, its wrapper crinkling in your hand, sounding particularly loud in the overwhelming dark and quietness of the ruins.

But then it wasn't nearly as quiet.

You reach for your gun before realizing you don't have it. You didn't even bother to look for it after waking up. Shit. You look towards the noise. It seemed to come from around a particular hill of destroyed metal and stone nearby. Forgetting the snack bar you slowly stand, trying to be as quiet as possible. The noise had stopped, but it wasn't just in your head, right?

Taking a risk you decide to call out. Nothing responds. For a while. Then you hear it. Some sort of shuffling noise, the sound of movement, and the sound of pebbles and rubble hitting the ground.

What do you do?

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No, a foolish question. Of course you had to go see. More than likely it was someone else who had also fallen down here. You absolutely needed to make sure that whoever it was, they were unharmed. You don't waste any time, calling towards the noise once more, telling them to hang on. You round the corner and look around. You don't see anyone.

Well, that's not true. The better thing to say would be... you don't see anyone alive. Several bodies had fallen here. Thankfully, none of them human, but that didn't make you feel better. You walked towards one of the corpses and looked at the crumpled heap of xeno before you. The guys at research would probably love all these specimens, but you? You didn't really want to be sealed in this giant tomb with alien bodies.

You looked across the area. There were plenty of them, oh yes. You could only imagine what sort of blast would have been big enough to cause this huge a collapse. On the bright side, you thought YOU had it bad, but these guys? Hah!

The ground shook beneath you, as if to remind you that, oh yes, you very much did have it bad.

Then you hear it. Some kind of... noise. Something that sounded inhuman. A mix between a grunt and a hoarse, violent cough. You freeze. Not all of these things were dead, it looked like. And you had no weapon, or close quarters training...

You nervously look behind you, towards the source of this noise. Then you see *it*.

One of the ones that look like snakes. *Vipers*, they're called. Your first instinct was to jump away. You had never seen one up close-- and for good reason. In most cases, being this close would mean death for the untrained operative. You dropped your guard, however, when you got a good look at it.

It was on the ground. You couldn't see the long snake-like tail the creatures were known for, considering this one in particular was half buried under who knows how many tons of concrete and metal. All you could see was its head, and its arms outstretched as if in its last moments of life it had tried to pull itself free of its tomb.

What a horrible way to go. You couldn't help but pity it as you moved closer. You could see a bit of blood pooling from underneath it. You wondered if it died before or after the fall.

And then you realize that it hadn't died at all. Its eyes opened slowly, those cruel red slits gazing right at you. Your blood goes a bit cold and you can't help but step back slightly. It was pinned,

trapped, but there was something in its eyes that told you it really wished it wasn't so it could reach you.

Its claws scraped along the ground as it glared at you. You could see it open its mouth... before it coughed violently, lurching and gasping under its prison. Its arms went limp, then, and you could see the hostility in its eyes whither away as it gazed along the floor. In its place... what did you see?

Fear. Sorrow. Pain. The realization of its own sorry state had hit it like a truck.

It had given up. There was no fight left in the being not of this world. No way out. It would join its comrades and die in here, while its sworn enemy just watched it suffer.

You stepped forward as that thought zipped through your mind. You could see the Viper raise its head slightly. There was a quiet hiss as it gazed towards you, as if in defiance. It wouldn't let you revel in its pain. It would sooner try and take its own life. This time you ignored its glare as you kneeled closer to it.

You were a doctor, dammit. This was just too sad, even if it was the enemy. It wasn't the enemy NOW. It was an injured soldier. Your outstretched hand was met with hostility as it hissed once more, glaring at you with death in her eyes.

You quickly explained that you just wanted to help. It just continued glaring. Did these things speak English? You repeat yourself, emphasizing the word 'HELP'. You explain you're a medic. Its glare softened slightly, replaced with confusion. You motion to the cross on your uniform and backpack. This seemed to get through to it. Instead of hostile it just looked confused, yet there was a flicker, of what you think was hope, in its deep crimson eyes.

You held your hand out. It stared for a long, pensive moment before resting its own long digits within your glove. Its long nails dug into the material slightly, but you ignored its claws and instead worked to pull the Viper out from all the rubble. It hissed and screeched in pain but regardless toughed it out as you began to pull it free. You could hear the mountain of junk crumbling as it wormed out from underneath, and soon you could see its upper body. You were horrified to see the cracks in its armor, and the visible gashes in its scales underneath.

It coughed violently and let out a pitiful wail as you dropped its hand. It fell to the floor and shuddered, tucking its head in as it seemed to be biting away the pain. Its body heaved slowly, breath rising and falling unsteadily.

As carefully as you could you tried to lift it, kneeling down and slipping your arms under its own to pull it up. It was as heavy as you imagined as the Viper could do nothing but drop into your arms, hanging limply. You could hear its pained hisses, and feel its breastplate against your

body. You ignored the latter and walked backwards with it. You could see its tail drag along the ground behind it as the debris shifted and toppled slowly.

Finally, the Viper was free. And in your arms. You give a few deep breaths before gently lowering down, setting it on the ground. The obvious solution, of course, was to begin treating these wounds immediately. You tell the Viper everything would be okay, despite not even being sure if it could fully understand you. You set your medkit down and begin pulling out everything. You weren't a vet, but you could only hope it's' more humanoid half was at least vaguely similar to that of a human.

Alright. Now just time for treatment. You turned towards the Viper, seeing it lying on the ground. Its eyes were partially unfocused, but seemed to be looking at you in curiosity, in hope. Good. Keep that hope.

You swallow nervously before eyeing its armor. Its eyes moved towards a particular piece. You got the message clearly and found the mechanism hidden within to release the armor, and you quickly began to remove the constricting pieces.

Its scales- the ones not covered in bruises, scratches, and blood at least, were softer and smoother than you imagined them being. Particularly those on the front, as you realized once that part of the armor also came off.

Another thing you realized was that it-- the Viper-- was most definitely female. Unless the males of this particularly species grew mammaries, of course, and quite hefty ones. You didn't want to think too hard about that, or much of anything, actually. You were in the middle of treatment, dammit!

*She* didn't like the disinfectant or sprays you administered onto the wounds covering her body. Especially not her back. God, it was like a warzone under that metal. A part of you thought about how you'd have to take her to get some real medical attention once you got out, before you reminded yourself the sheer absurdity of that happening, much less the absurdity of what you were doing now.

Using your supplies on an enemy combatant! Of your own free will, even! At least, you were sure it was free will and not, say, evidence of a possible concussion.

Regardless you managed to clean and cover every visible wound. The Viper practically had more skin covered in bandages than she originally had covered in armor.

That should do it. This is all you could do for her, but from what you could tell, it was enough. She'd survive.

Good thing too. Your supplies had been absolutely raided treating this one. And you don't think your poor heart could handle any more scares. She nearly bit your head off when you tried feeding her the painkillers. She seemed to REALLY like those once you finally got them in her rather impressively intimidating mouth.

Now she was just calmly lying on the ground. Her body rose and fell slowly and steadily as you eyed her figure. It was impressive- in the scientific way, of course. Smooth, sleek, built for speed, yet you could see the subtle muscles in her form, and the way her humanoid torso seamlessly transitioned into her long, graceful tail at her hips.

You take a glove off as you sit next to the resting form of the Viper, rubbing your aching head with your hand before sighing. What a mess you both got into, you tell her. She just looks at you, her eyes telling you nothing about what she's feeling at the moment. Well, they do tell you one thing. She's tired. You are too, honestly.

You take out that snack bar you had held back from and finally slip the wrapping off. You bite into it and instantly feel as if heaven had come down to greet you, savouring the treat for the moment. You hear a gentle hiss at your side and see the Viper. Your eyes meet. For a moment, you forget that she's technically your enemy. With a bit of reluctance you reach into your bag and pull out another wrapped bar. You aren't sure if she even eats this kind of thing, but...

You give it to her. Well, more like you leave it by her side, before your back meets the wall as you relax.

You really hope things get better from here.

You hear the sound of a wrapper opening to your side, and that's all before you doze off entirely. Everything fades from your mind as the world goes black around you.

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You stir, your body sore, tired, even more than before. Your eyes feel heavy and your lips are chapped. There's an awful taste in your dry mouth. You almost just want to return to your slumber, to leave this awful world of the awake. A hiss of some kind stirs you further, and your instincts slowly return, telling you to wake up.

Finally you lose the battle, a pained grunt leaving your throat as you open your eyes. You see blood red orbs with dark slits in them with yellowish scales surrounding them. You stare into them, your addled mind taking a bit too long to register what you were seeing.

And then with a shout you stumbled back, head hitting the wall behind you as you move away from the Viper. Her gaze follows you as you end up crawling back a couple of feet. Your heart is pounding as you both watch each other, you in fear and her, while not freaking out, certainly a bit startled from your very sudden outburst.

*What was she doing? Why was she so close?* Your mind races as your heart takes too long to calm itself down from that scare. You had nightmares about something like that happening one day. Waking up to find an unfamiliar, dangerous face above you... and you had just lived it.

Your hand is on your chest as you calm yourself. The Viper continues watching. After you finally assure yourself that you weren't about to get maimed, you sit up with a groan. Your body is fighting you. Perhaps you were more injured than you originally thought. Sleeping in a tomb covered in debris isn't a very good environment for resting.

You notice the Viper keeping her distance. Her body is relaxed, claws hidden. Funny. Vipers were rather large and intimidating, but at the moment this one seemed to be doing her best to make herself look small. Non-threatening. The lack of that intimidating uniform that was their armor did a good job in that as well.

You weren't sure what she was doing getting in your face like that, but you feel as if she wasn't planning on doing anything bad. Maybe. Her expression is unreadable. Regardless, you decide to go with your gut and tell her that you were fine. Whether or not she understood, you don't know. Her cold gaze remains on you still.

You cough, and she raises her head slightly in attention. With a ragged sigh you steel yourself and force yourself to stand. You wobble on your feet a little from the sudden action. Right. This was no time for naps. The both of you were injured and there was next to no food to go around and even less water. You didn't want to die here and you were sure she didn't either.

You ask her if she can stand. She just looks at you oddly. Right, there was that issue. You hold your hand out to her. She stares at the offending appendage, her eyes thoughtful. Finally one of her own hands raise up slowly. You resist the urge to tense up as those long, sharp digits stretch, lest you offend her somehow. Who knows how many times those hands have killed a human, have killed one of your allies, whether directly or from the pull of a trigger.

You resist those thoughts as you feel her hand in yours. You gently grip her rather slender and feminine hand, and in return her long fingers clasp around your hand. She finally stands, although she shakes as she lifts herself up onto her tail, her hand squeezing yours as she uses the wall and you to support herself. A hiss of pain escapes her maw as she rights herself, standing taller than you. Her hand remains in yours while the other crosses over her stomach, just under her breasts.

You squeeze her hand to get her attention. You tell her that you need to go. The both of you would escape, together.

After that, you weren't sure what would happen, but at least you wouldn't be dead down here.

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It was a few minutes of walking (for her, slithering) before either of you realized you were still holding hands. You let go of her hand a little too quickly and cleared your throat, apologizing, and in response she looks at you perplexed before examining her own hand. Right, she probably didn't really care. Alien. You forgot about that.

You pause as you realize that you had, at some point, gotten used to her enough that it slipped your mind that she was an alien. That she was different. One of them. You wonder if it had something to do with your head injury. Or maybe the idea of the two of you being trapped together had let you lower your guard a little. You had even gotten used to referring to her as a 'she'. Not that it was easy to forget about that fact what with her main choice of dress being the bandages you had put on her.

You were staring. You chide yourself to cut it out and daydream a little less. At least until you were out of here. If whatever was waiting for you out there wouldn't be the end of you, anyway.

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Your time spent walking comes to a halt as you enter a coughing fit. Your ribs were aching, screaming at you from all this exertion. You needed water. You needed rest. Really, you could think of a lot of things you 'needed' right now. The air in here wasn't doing you any favors either. At least you weren't surrounded by ruins anymore at this point. Now it was just really old and decrepit tunnels. You had zero idea where you could possibly have been now.

You shudder, your eyes shut tight. Felt like you were coughing up a lung, here. You feel a pressure on your back and open your eyes, seeing a scaly tail next to you, and a red stain on the floor at your feet. That wasn't good.

You swallow, the taste of iron in your mouth notable, and straighten yourself out. The Viper doesn't remove her hand from your back. You chance a rather strained smile at her and tell her you were fine. Regardless she stays by your side. There was no time to waste in here, you realize. You search your bag for the last of your medicinal supplies. Some painkillers would have to do to at least make it easier to ignore your sorry state. Swallowing the pills down you continue moving.

You notice the Viper stays rather close to you. Is she worried over you? You could only imagine what she was thinking at this moment. Being rescued by a human, her enemy, and then



watching that human crumple over on himself. And you thought you had it rough trying to figure out just what was between the two of you!

Suddenly, something grabs your hand. You look down to see her hand grasping yours tightly. You look up at her, and see her staring at you, rather closely in fact, as if gauging your reaction. You sigh in exhaustion and turn forward, squeezing her hand back as you move forward, together.

You pull out one of the last energy bars in your pack and offer it to her. She stares at it, then looks to you. You smile and wave the wrapped up bar a little. She gingerly reaches out for it. To your surprise, instead of taking it, she instead snaps it in half between her hand and your's. She gazes at you, hissing softly.

She wanted you to eat, too. You're surprised, honestly. You figured she would have a much bigger appetite than you did. Who knew Vipers were so keen on sharing...

Regardless, you eat your half of the bar, taking small and careful bites. You watch as her long, forked tongue tastes the bar and then pulls it out of the torn wrapper. You see her fangs, long and sharp weapons, rise out slightly before she tugs the entire snack into her mouth. She savours the taste for a while before swallowing the bar whole.

You keep your eyes forward when she looks back at you, silently nibbling your own snack.

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Your legs felt like jelly, yet you didn't care. Your entire body felt so heavy, as if the earth was pulling you down, yet you didn't care. The bright light ahead hurt your eyes, yet you didn't care. You basked in the light's warmth. This literal light at the end of the tunnel. Yet, it wasn't the kind the darker part of your mind was expecting.

You laughed. Your companion looked at you strangely as you laughed and laughed. Then she rushed to catch you as your legs gave out. You were grateful for her catch, especially since she herself was straining from her own injuries, and ignored the fact that her strong grip wasn't doing your ribs any favors.

You had more important things in your mind. You point at the light ahead. The only light you had seen since waking up down here. It was the exit. You found it. You were going to be okay. Both of you. You struggle to stand, but just end up falling into her arms again. She felt warm.

You had to lean on her slightly as you both walked. You could feel a breeze. You moved together, your heart pounding as you could only imagine what awaited you.

The two of you exit into a grassy hill. Glancing behind, you see what you imagined was an old, forgotten sewage drain. Not what you had expected as your exit strategy, but neither of you were really paying attention to directions.

She helps you sit down on the hill. You take a deep breath, before coughing loudly. She places a hand on your chest and you shake your head, laughing.

You lean back until your back gently meets the grass and dirt below. You look at her, and after staring into your eyes for a while she lowers herself to the ground and rests next to you. Freedom. You look to the side, seeing her chest rising and falling slowly and steadily. You look at your surroundings and realize something.

You were both alone out here. You were preparing for the worst, that you'd somehow stumble into a patrol of *them*. But there was no one. And there didn't seem to be anyone anywhere near here. Just grass and some trees in the distance.

You realize something else. You pat down at your side for a few seconds before pulling out your radio. You could finally call in some help! But then another thought hits you.

You could get rescued, but what of her? Would they help her, spare her, just because of your word? She was the enemy, after all. She'd be taken in, imprisoned, maybe even studied and given up to the science lab, and...

Your word wouldn't mean anything. They'd probably just think you were suspicious too. You shut your eyes, gripping the radio tight.

You open them again and look over to her. She's sitting up a bit and staring at you, or rather, your radio. She notices you watching and turns her gaze to you. Her expression... no, it's clear. She's nervous. She knows what the radio is, who it could call. She's more than nervous, she's afraid.

You decide that you don't like it when she looks so scared. So weak.

You sigh, staring straight up into the cloudy sky as you put the radio aside. You stretch your hand out a bit next to you, laying it on the grass. You can feel her eyes gazing into you. You chuckle tiredly and wiggle your fingers a little. After a few seconds, you feel her hand rest in yours.

You squeeze that hand tightly and she squeezes it back. You didn't need to understand each other's words to reach your agreement.

You had gone this long together. What was the harm in doing so for a while longer? It'd be difficult, but you had the feeling it could be done.

You pretend not to notice her moving closer to your side, and instead relax as in the corner of your eye you see her tail coiling around you slightly. You pull out the last of your 'rations'. She splits the bars in two and you both share them.

You'd survive. Together.