## ZCOM: Rise of the Resistance

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### Summary

Twenty years have passed since Earth unconditionally surrendered to the Aliens at the end of the First Invasion. In the two decades since the Alien established Advent administration seemed to have brought mammal kind into an era of peace and prosperity. It is all a lie.

An Advent raid on the fringe settlement of Bunnyburrow has left many of Judy Hopps’s family dead and her home razed to the ground. Drowning in despair the young bunny had given up, until a mysterious organization reached out to her, claiming to have fought the Aliens since the First Invasion. XCOM.

Judy is willing to do anything to make the world a better place, even if it means becoming the first bunny to become a soldier in the resistance. Things become even more dangerous when she meets a Reaper shrouded in unsettling rumors and a twisted past. A mammal that was long thought dead, killed during the First Invasion. Victory against the Alien menace seems outlandish with this motley crew of dissidents and renegades but Judy is willing to fight the Aliens to the bitter end.... If she can survive her comrades first.

### Notes

Hey Ya'll!

Untraveled here, and it is my pleasure to present my first attempt at fan fiction. I'm a big
zootopia fan and I needed a break from my other writing project and what you see before you is the result. Imagine my surprise when I found not a single Zootopia XCOM crossover anywhere, especially considering all the weird fan fictions out there so I decided to rectify the problem and write my own. This is the first part in a projected series, though keep in mind this just something I am doing on the side so there will be no telling the release schedule, but I will do my best.

Side Note: I am looking for someone to help me in this undertaking. God forbid I let this die as I am tied up IRL with my job and such. Send me a message if you are interested in helping, even if it is only for a short time!

Enjoy.
“Accessing the feed now.” A chipper female voice reported.

A live feed of a drizzling downtown street fizzled to life on-screen with a faint click. The nocturnal cityscape was submerged in hues of blue and static shadows against a backdrop of twinkling lights and reflective rain puddles. It quickly faded as translucent lines of code scrolled across the camera feed.

“...Though I don’t know for how long.”

The hacker’s frown was audible, though she stuffed it behind the well practiced mask of a focused professional. The screen switched to another angle. i already passed them by.

“Are…. are you seeing this?” She stammered. “This is way too much security, even for Advent.”

“That is no ordinary gene therapy clinic.” A low growl replied. “They were telling the truth.” He added in an astonished tone.

“Or they are leading us into a trap.” The female snarked with a loud roll of her eyes. “A really obvious trap.” The screen split into a plethora of different camera angles giving almost full coverage of the gene therapy clinic detailing just how out of depth they really were.

“We’d need an army to march in there right now.”

“Shen, I think I have a better idea.” The middle aged timberwolf growled around a smirk as he straightened up from staring at the screen before him, his pointed ears flicked to attention. The wolf was tall for his species with a scar running down the right side of his muzzle, his sharp features were flecked with grey and toned muscles spoke of his rigid dedication to fitness even at 55 years of age. The tan combat uniform he wore was neatly tucked in with every detail squared away, the only indication of weariness came from the circles under his eyes and the limp way his gray tail hung behind him. The wolf pushed a button on an earpiece.

“Reaper, this is Central.” The wolf gave the screen one last pensive look as he weighed the burden of what he was about to order.

His hesitation was only for but a moment, hardly long enough for someone to think anything of it, but An-Yi “Skye” Shen, the arctic fox sitting at the controls just in front of Central Officer Wolford, knew the grizzled veteran better than most. She glanced back at Wolford with sadness in her deep blue eyes, she knew that narrowed eyed look, it was the same type of haunted look that drove him to the bottle.

He hated this.

She knew that, but there was nothing to be done. They needed to know what was in there, so someone has to do it, even if the person in question has to do it alone. She watched his chest expand with a long, slow breathe to steel his resolve, then his spoke a single word with the power of a courtroom gavel.
“Go.”

“......”

“U-um…” Confusion and concern was evident on Shen’s face as she rapidly tapped through the numerous camera feeds in a vain attempt to find their lone operative. “W-where is he?”

“Reaper, report!” Wolford barked into his earpiece. Again he was met with deafening silence.

A rumbling growl rose from the pit of Central’s chest. He was not in the mood to play games, but he grudgingly realized that when dealing with eccentric types like the lone operative out in that rain-soaked street the only way to get them to cooperate was to…. Well, feed their eccentricism. The exhausted and stressed timberwolf kneaded his temples with his free paw to stave off the migraine he felt growing there.

“A-agent….. Agent Blueberries, This is Central.” His voice squeaked in embarrassment at the operative’s ridiculous codename.

In an almost pleading voice he begged into the earpiece, “Go.”

If Shen hadn’t just so happened to have been staring at the camera angle aimed at the rear of the clinic she would have missed the black blur tumble from the top of a nearby apartment building. She gasped as what she realized was their operative plummet streetward before catching a paw on a pole and spinning off of it in an incredible acrobatic display fit for a squirrel. As soon as the blur slingshot from the pole it vanished into the shadows.

Agent Blueberries clung to the underside of a pavilion overlooking the street below, his mask’s eyepieces giving off an eerie glow, a common feature of all Reaper gear. He watched patiently as a pair of Advent foot soldiers marched around the building below him, their bodies were clad in a bullet resistant body glove accessorized by thick composite armor plates complete with utility pouches and ammunition.

One of the troopers was a wolf judging by his size and body type, along with the wide, fuzzy muzzle thrust out from underneath Advent’s signature red and black helmet that covered everything but the mammal’s muzzle and ears. The second trooper was much smaller, only reaching just above his wolf companion’s waist, a weasel of some kind perhaps judging from the thin snout sticking out from underneath that helmet.

Both mammals carried Advent standard issue magnetic rifles, though the weasel’s was a bit smaller. The rifle looked too tall and blocky for the Reaper’s taste but he knew firsthand the results of standing in front of the business end of those weapons and he was in no hurry to relive that experience.

As the two troopers vanished around the corner the Reaper took quick stock of his surroundings before zeroing in on what he was looking for, an air conditioner grate just a few feet away on the same wall he clung to. He pushed off the wall and caught the grate with his claws. It took about ten seconds but it felt like an eternity before the Reaper freed the grate from the wall allowing the Reaper to slide inside and replace the grate with a soft clatter. The heated clamor of a heated argument guided the Reaper through a short maze of winding ventilation shafts before finding his mark, a glass casket with a green glow backdrop.

Three mammals were in the dark laboratory, a fluffy sheep and a deer clad in lab coats and an armed Advent officer. The sheep was kneeling on the floor frantically fiddling with one of the tubes feeding into the glass casket as the deer argued with the officer a few feet away. The officer
was a greater one-horned rhinoceros clad in blood red advent armor with a matching red sash draped down his left shoulder. Despite the impressive difference in height the deer stood up straight and looked the towering rhino officer in the eye, even though his trembling was obvious.

“...Of course we know how critical this is to the Avatar project! But with the accelerated timeline you’ve placed upon us mistakes are bound to happen!” The frizzled white-tailed deer in a lab coat pleaded his case to rhinoceros. The argument was interrupted by another pair of Advent troopers marching into the dark chamber.

“Voz Mortan, Natal!” The rhino officer boomed. He thrust a stubby nail at the cowering deer signaling the closest trooper to latch onto the now panicked deer to drag him from the room.

“No! Please!” The Deer begged as he was forcefully escorted from the lab.

One of the Advent troopers, another wolf, stayed and loomed over the sheep with magnetic rifle in paw as the unfortunate scientist meekly scrambled to finish his work. He half turned to look up at the frowning trooper and spoke up in a trembling voice.

“No need for, for any of this. I will do what you ask of me, I just need additional time-!” A hiss of fabric parting and a wet crunch interrupted the sheep’s bleating.

“D-did you say….. something?” He turned to look up at the trooper in confusion.

The stunned sheep watched as the wolf’s arms sagged before the canine flopped to the floor like a sack of wet noodles. The sheep let out an involuntary bleat of terror as he spotted the smaller creature that rode the slain Advent trooper’s shoulders to the floor. The Reaper’s expression was hidden behind his glowing green mask as he cocked his head to the side much like a curious pup would do before he ripped his blade from the trooper’s spine, the sharpened steel glistened a sickly orange in the dim laboratory light.

“Y-your one of those!” The sheep cowered before the medium sized mammal that stalked ever closer with his bloody blade raised above his head poised to strike. The Sheep stumbled backward with his hooves shielding his face.

“Wait! You, you must understand, I. had. no. choice!” The Reaper’s silence was deafening but his blade spoke the answer as it sang through the air toward the sheep’s neck.

“Agent Blueberries, report!”

The Reaper’s blade stopped cold, the steel tickled against the sheep’s wool. The scientist stared wide-eyed at the blade, as if confused as to why it wasn’t already buried inside his throat. In a sudden jerk the Reaper spun the blade around and smashed the blunt pommel against the sheep’s temple knocking the unlucky mammal out cold.

As the sheep toppled boneless to the floor the Reaper turned his attention to the glass casket before him. He stepped ever closer as if in a trance until he was nearly nose to nose with the cold glass, and the towering mammal suspended inside, trapped in a full body suit that covered everything but two swirling horns that stuck horizontally from the brow of the suit’s mask. The Reaper slid a black furred paw inside his hood and clicked the earpiece nestled there.

“Central, this is Agent Blueberries. I have visual confirmation.” The Reaper’s voice crackled and fizzed like a poorly tuned radio.

“Are you sure?” Wolford growled.
“Reapers are always sure.” Agent Blueberries shot back.

“I’ll take your word for it. Cover your tracks and get the Hell outta there. They can’t know that we were here.” Central felt the corners of his lips peel back in a satisfied snarl. “...Yet.”

“Understood. Agent Blueberries out.” The Reaper released the earpiece and paused to look up at the mammal trapped in that suit, his emotions hidden by the mask clasped around his muzzle.

“Hang in there Chief.” The Reaper said in a quiet whisper.

“This is where the real war begins.”
Judy Hopps has been training relentlessly for weeks for the day she had been dreaming of since she was a kit. She had endured weeks of harsh training and even harsher treatment at the paws of her fellow resistance trainees. All that is left is the "Road to Hell", the final combat simulated obstacle course all trainees must complete before they can call themselves part of the resistance. But the morning of the big day finds her nervous and uncertain.

Can Judy find the inner strength to survive the Road to Hell and become the first bunny in the resistance? Or will she fall flat on her ears under the pressure?

-----Chapter 1: Between a Rock and a Hard Place-----

The sweltering heat rose off the scorched earth in distorted droves. Barely a shriveled weed would dare sprout in a place like this. The North American Dust bowl was a massive expanse of dead land that had infected most of the central continent with a hunger rivaling a starved hippo in a desert oasis.

The sun was barely peeking over the horizon and already it was tickling 110 degrees Fahrenheit, a stark contrast to the near freezing temperatures from a couple hours before.

Long fingers of sunlight reached out over the desolate desert to claw at the deep fissures of a massive canyon so deep and wide it was a wonder the ground didn’t simply swallow in upon itself. No one, not even Advent, was dumb enough to settle way out here in this hellscape. Well….

“There… has gotta…. Be… an easier…. Way…. Up….” An exasperated voice whined between desperate gulps of the dusty air.

A pair of long gray ears with black tips flipped over the lip of a small fissure at the edge of the canyon, the furry appendages swiveled to and fro like radars before the bunny they were attached to popped her head out, her button nose twitching all the while.

The doe’s eyes were a sparkling, innocent amethyst that shone in the early morning sun.

She flinched as the first rays of sunlight bled over her crack in the earth making her see spots. She shook her head and blinked furiously to clear her eyesight sending her long ears flapping about. When she could finally see the doe scrambled out of the dried earth and leisurely looked towards the sunrise.

The grey bunny’s beautiful eyes widened in quiet awe at the enrapturing expanse that stretched above her. For a moment she thought she had walked into a painting, wide, gentle brushstrokes of pinks and violets dyed the blue canvas over a backdrop of vibrant yellows and strong reds.

When her lungs finally remembered how to do their job the distracted doe sucked in a breath and looked down at her clothes with a devastated groan.
“Noooo! I got dust everywhere! I’m going to be on laundry duty till next harvest!”

In desperation the doe frantically scrubbed her filthy clothes and bare fur, but it was a futile effort, she knew that. But she hated the way the tan particles marred her soft gray fur and the chaffing that came with being covered in the stuff during combat training was just the worse!

The bunny looked down at her filthy clothes in horror. “God, this is never going to come out!” She moaned.

Her dusty uniform looked handmade (mostly because it was, there were no uniforms for mammals her size, so her mother had to make one for her.) with large but neat stitching holding her green cargo pants and tan shirt together with a shoulder harness that carried a sheathed combat knife over her left breast just inside her shoulder.

The doe had wrapped her paws and feet in coarse fabric to gain more traction and keep from cutting herself on the dusty rocks. Bunnies lacked the footpads of more predators so even though they are known for their speed they had next to no traction and this bunny was no different.

“Well… no use crying over spilled carrot juice.” The doe sighed, resigning herself to her fate once she returned home. Laundry duty in a desert settlement like this was no joke.

The doe started her usual stretching routine by wrinkling out the kinks in her legs, back, and aching arms. Just the climb up to the surface was a workout all on its own, however this bunny wasn’t satisfied with just “good enough”. She came out here to run and rutabagas be damned if she wasn’t going to run!

“That should be good enough.”

She pulled her heels back and worked her legs loosely with a satisfied grunt before she took off at an easy jog while being mindful of the deceptive cracks that grew out from the canyon.

The rabbit felt a trill of excitement go through her as the blood roared in her toned muscles. Today was the day she graduated from basic training! She had only been in the program for just a few weeks, but it already felt like an eternity since she had stepped onto that jump ship along with a motley collection of recruits just like her.

The doe smiled softly at the astonished faces of the other recruits as she marched on board the cramped jump ship with a small duffel bag slung across her back. That will teach them to underestimate this bunny!

Then, like a raincloud on a sunny day the memory of why she boarded that jump ship clawed itself to the forefront of her mind. Her legs grew weak and her smile flagged to a frown as she came to an uneasy stop.

She suddenly felt ill just at the thought of what happened. She clasped her paws on her knees as a bout of nausea overtook her. She closed her glassy amethyst eyes.

“Please…. Please stop. Make it stop. Please make it stop.” She begged as if it were a mantra against the bale rose up her throat.

“Come on Judy you’re stronger than this. Come on, you’re stronger than this. You’re not some cute token bunny.”

Finally, the nausea faded away little by little, until all that remained of the panic attack was her ragged breathing and trembling limbs. Time to call it quits for this morning. She couldn’t afford to
be an emotional wreck today of all days. Today was the day she showed everyone what she could do!

Today was the day she showed them that she had been worth saving.

“Time to head back I guess….” Judy took a long shuddering breath and turned back towards the canyon, her steps unsteady but her ears standing high.

Two hours and almost fifty loads of filthy laundry later found Judy deep underground at the very belly of the canyon. She and the twenty other recruits were on the impromptu parade field in the center of the settlement where they were attending basic training. The settlement was made primarily of jackrabbits and a small herd of Oryx that had immigrated from Asia before the first Alien war.

The buildings were built into the very rock itself in a very rough and tumble approach to construction. It didn’t have to look pretty, it just had to work (most of the time). The warren of jackrabbits had family members that had died during the war and once it became obvious that earth was losing they had retreated to the most secluded place they knew along with trustworthy members of their community.

Judy stood at a painfully rigid position of attention in the front row of their formation. The other recruits literally towered over her, the closest mammal her size was a bobcat and the tips of her ears barely reached to his chest. Throughout her six weeks of brutal training she had been scorned and belittled by almost everyone here, the ones that had not opted to simply pretend that she didn’t exist.

Most nights the young bunny had curled up in a tight ball and quietly cried herself to sleep as she was feeling isolated and very much alone. She was used to drifting away in a big pile of her family members but now she slept in the cold with no one to acknowledge her much less hold her. Despite the hardships she had never given up, now the fruits of her labor and suffering were just within her grasp.

A lanky dust brown canid emerged from a long green tent at the front of the formation, his back was crooked with age and his limbs looked withered, but his brown eyes were still sharp and his tongue even sharper. The silence was deafening and almost palpable as the elderly coyote ambled towards the formation.

His uniform was from a bygone era, its solid green fabric was worn, and his cap crinkled from long years of use, but none dared breathed in front of this mammal much less point out his outdated uniform, whether that was because of respect or fear was up for debate.

The coyote stopped a few paces short of the formation, every recruit dutifully keeping their eyes straight and their gazes trained on the green tent beyond the coyote.

Judy could hear the tension buzzing in the air. It was an irritating buzz that hang about her ears like a gnat, but she fought the urge to move with every fiber of her being. The consequences of even the smallest break in discipline could potentially be dire, so with her back taut and her ears standing tall she stood as still as a statue patiently waiting for an order.

The coyote was quiet since his appearance from the tent, but his icy gaze spoke volumes. He was waiting for something, but what? He paced back and forth in front of the recruits with a frown etched into his thin muzzle his gaze sweeping over the nervous recruits.
Finally, as if on some silent unseen signal, the elderly mammal began to speak, his voice was a sudden and as vicious as a whip.

“Twenty years!” He barked abruptly and scaring several recruits out of their fur. “Twenty fuckin’ years since Earth lost to the Aliens. No, since WE lost to the Aliens. During those years I had lost all hope of ever being a free mammal again.” The coyote’s voice shivered and cracked with a wave of emotion.

“I have lost far too many friends and family. My parents. My brother and sisters. My sons. My… My grandkits… They died because I failed. They died because I lost. I lost, and I gave up.” The old coyote sniffed and wiped his tired eyes with a shaking paw to compose himself.

“I was hard on you. Perhaps unreasonably so, but I did so out of love. I do not want any of you to grow into the mammal that stands before you. I love you all as the grandkits that I no longer have…”

The coyote stopped in front of Judy and for the first time since she had arrived to basic training she saw a smile spread across that old canine’s muzzle. He met her wide amethyst gaze with moist eyes and a tender smile.

“You will not fail me.” He said to her before he put his paws to his lower back and wandered away from her to met every recruit’s astonished gaze.

“Even if we lose to the Aliens again, even if we all die, you will not have failed me. You would have fought to the bitter end… If that dark day does come than I will face it gladly knowing that we had tried. I never would have dreamed I would find a family again… yet here you are.”

The coyote turned his back to the formation, his paws clasped together against his back as his shoulders jerked in quiet sobs. The recruits stood in stunned silence as they watched their drill instructor struggle to bring himself under control. Judy’s ears fell against her back as a knot of conflicting emotions that she didn’t quite understand tangled up in her throat, choking the wet sob that squirmed in her chest.

The coyote took a deep breath and squared his shoulders before spinning around in a perfect about-face, the recruits all shuddering at the all too familiar glint of madness dancing in his eyes.

“Alright, enough mushy shit. You didn’t come all the way out to this godforsaken ass crack in the ground to hear an old dog cry. I want every single tick ridden furbag strapped in armor with grubby paws on weapons in front of the Road to Hell in five minutes. MOVE!”

At the instructor’s signal the formation scattered like kits caught muzzle deep in the cookie jar.

Judy yelped as she was shoved and kicked out of the herd of larger mammals madly scrambling to be the first one in front of the exam course. The doe hit the ground hard, pain shot up her hip as she fell badly on her right leg, leaving the limb tingling as if it had fallen asleep.

“Aaah.” She caught her cry of pain and turned it into a grimaced groan as she picked herself up and quickly limped away after the mob of recruits unaware of the elderly coyote watching her.

“Poor thing.” The instructor shook his head sadly. He cocked his muzzle over his shoulder at the tent and spoke again in a loud voice. “Are ya sure that bunny is up for it?”

“Yes.” A low growl replied.

The tent flap parted to reveal Central Officer Wolford clad in his casual uniform with a
semiautomatic pistol holstered securely on his right hip. The timber wolf pensively watched the doe’s bobtail scamper away towards the fissure where the obstacle course was built.

“What exactly makes you so sure?” The coyote asked as he and Wolford made their way towards the course at a leisurely pace. Wolford’s teeth flashed in a knowing grin down at his brother in arms.

“Believe it or not Kevin, but out of all the recruits Judy Hopps holds the highest Alien kill count.” The timber wolf laughed at his friend’s stunned expression. The coyote quickly recovered his bearing and his ears swept back in a show of sympathy.

“The poor thing.” He said once again.

Wolford’s smile evaporated as memories of a crying bunny covered in her family’s blood and clutching a smoking assault rifle flashed before his eyes.

“Yes… the poor thing.”
Chapter Summary

The Road to Hell. Just waiting in line proves to be a challenge for Judy as she grapples with her past trauma and her rising nerves. The tension reaches an explosive boiling point when Central Officer Wolford, the mammal that both saved Judy and sponsored her entrance into the resistance, suddenly arrives to watch her attempt the course.

Things can possibly get any worse. Right?

Chapter Notes

This ain't no place for a cute bunny.

How is Judy going to survive fighting the Aliens if she can't even survive her allies? Let's find out!

“Come on! Come on! Where is it. Where is it?!?”

Judy tore through her bags and closet in a panic. She had found her rifle an X-9, a beat up relic from the first invasion, just fine but she was missing something else just as important.

The longhouse where she had the other recruits were housed were lined with large mammal sized bunks with two lockers set at the head of each one against the wall. Judy bit back a hiss as the splintered floorboards bit into her soft hind paws in her race around her grossly oversized bunk to find her mysteriously absent body armor.

“Hey cottontail!” Judy whipped her head around to see Peter Osei, a rather small black bear, crack an maddening grin down at the little bunny, his sharp canines flashed behind thin black lips.

“Tell me, can bunnies fly?” Peter quipped and crooked a claw towards the rafters above where a set of tiny body armor was tacked to one of the beams supporting the roof. The black bear barked in laughter as Judy’s eyes widened and her lips drew back in mute disbelief.

“Two minutes left cottontail. Tick tock!” Peter sang over his burly shoulder on his way out the door with his assault rifle casually slung over his shoulder leaving a hopping mad rabbit staring dumbly up at the ceiling.

“That- Those JERKS!” She snarled. Her ears drew back against her shoulders and her arms quivered in outrage.

Judy stomped her foot as almost predatory growl scratched up her throat. In a burst of anger unlike anything she had felt before Judy sprang onto her bunk and scrambled up one of the posts like a savage beast onto the top mattress until she was about seven feet from the rafters.

She eyed the distance then backed up to the foot of the bed to get a running start. The grey doe shot
across the bed and used the wall as a springboard to give herself just enough height to reach the wooden beams holding up the roof. She had misjudged the distance though and her chest smacked painfully with the wooden beams.

“No, no, no, no, no!” She pleaded in a hitched voice as she began to slide off the beam. Her dull claws dug into the weathered wood slowing her short journey off the wood just enough for her to heave herself onto the beam.

“Whew… Oooh when I get my paws on them-!” She growled to herself and pounded the beam with a free paw. She clambered onto her hind paws and tottered precariously towards her body armor.

Judy took a deep, calming breath. “Well, it’s not like it could get any worse.”

Her optimism lasted about three more steps until she was close enough to see the huge nail pounded through chest of her body armor firmly tacking it into the wooden beam behind it.

“Oh come on!”

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“Hopps! You’re three minutes late!” Kevin roared.

“Sorry sir!” A small cloud of dust kicked up behind the bunny as she slid to a stop her drooping ears flushed in embarrassment. Judy’s mad dash from the barracks left her panting heavily and her limbs trembling.

“I was….. Delayed.” She shot a venomous glare at a smug looking Peter Osei before snapping to a rigid parade rest.

“I don’t want to hear your excuses Hopps just start putting muzzle to dirt. Now.” The lanky coyote snapped.

Without another word Judy fell down into a front leaning rest and began doing push ups at a steady pace, shooting the mammals responsible for her misery another well deserved glare.

The coyote may have been getting on in years but he was by no means new to the antics of recruits. The spry elderly mammal followed Judy’s scowl and whirled around to face the line of smirking recruits fighting hard to hide their grins. “Aaaaad all of you! Don’t think for a moment you are getting off the hook! If one of us gets down-?”

A collective moan drifted from the recruits. “-We all get down….” They mumbled as paws hit the hurt and grunts of exertion filled the air.

After a couple very long and painful minutes Kevin waved them back to their feet. “Alright, git up. We are burning what little daylight we have that actually reaches down here so let’s hurry the hell up.”

As the recruits groaned from burning arms and weary backs Kevin caught something weird about Judy’s apparel.

“Hopps! What in dust devil’s name did you do to your armor? It’s got a big ass hole through the middle of it!” As the bunny opened her mouth the coyote groaned and dragged a paw down his face. “Nevermind. Just…. just get in line Hopps and try not to destroy anything else. There’s just not enough hours in the day for the smoking you deserve for wrecking your equipment.”
Judy flinched as if she had been slapped in the jaw. The only thing worse than their drill instructor’s anger was earning his disappointment. Her shoulders sagged in guilt and her eyes dragged to her toes. She hated disappointing the people she looks up to even if it wasn’t her fault. Even Peter, the one responsible, realized he had gone too far now he was actively avoiding everyone’s gaze with his stubby ears pulled back.

Kevin however, wasn’t having any of it. “OSEI! GIT YOUR RAGGED TAIL UP TO THE STARTING LINE!”

How that much air could fit inside such a thin coyote was beyond Judy but she failed to care at seeing the bullying black bear squeal like one of her infant siblings. The other recruits sniggered as the stocky black bear shuffled to the barrier that separated them from the course. Kevin marched over to Peter and peered up at the mammal that towered over him.

“Osei, you understand the objective?”

“Yes s-sir!” The black bear cradled his assault rifle to his chest with one paw and slid into a smart parade rest for the coyote as he replied in a sharp bark. “Get to the end of the Road to Hell without getting hit with as many kills as possible in the fastest time possible! Sir!”

“Good.” Kevin cracked a satisfied grin at the rapt answer and waved over his shoulder. “I will have Wolford over here check your weapon then you are good to go.”

The air seemed to have been sucked from the canyon as every recruit paled and with the breath driven from their lungs from the shock. Wolford. THE Central Officer Wolford. HERE?! And he was personally checking each recruit’s weapon and watching them complete the course?! Judy suddenly felt very ill.

Wolford however reveled in the pliable tension he had caused among the recruits simply with his presence. Seeing the terror on these hapless mammals faces never get old. The hardened wolf of war appeared from seemingly out of thin air behind Kevin with a snaggle tooth grin stretch across his muzzle.

Peter was visibly trembling as Wolford stepped up to the black bear. Peter was just a hair taller than the lean timberwolf so they stood eye to eye. Peter looked as if he was about to cry as Wolford took his assault rifle from his paws to work the bolt back to examine the rifle’s cleanliness. He grinned at the terror in Osei’s yellow eyes as he grunted and hummed periodically throughout his examination. Finally when he had his fun Wolford slapped the bolt closed and pushed the rifle to Peter’s chest.

“Good to go rookie.” The Wolford grinned and slapped Peter’s shoulder. “Go get ‘em.”

“Y-yes sir!” With a speed even Judy was jealous of Peter shot off to the barrier and slung his rifle in anticipation for the green light, his claws twitching from nerves and anticipation.

“You ready Winnie the Pooh?” Kevin drolled was he thumbed a steel whistle in his paw.

“Yes Sir!”

The whistle’s shrill squeal stabbed at Judy’s sensitive ears like nails on a chalkboard. When she shook the disorienting ringing in her ears Peter had already scampered up the barrier into the Road to Hell.

For several heart pounding moments all was quiet, though Judy’s incredible hearing could pick up Peter’s claws scrambling against wooden obstacles and his adrenaline fueled grunts of exertion.
She knew the silence wouldn’t last though but for some reason when the gunfire shattered the silence she still squeaked and jumped back with her paws pulling her ears down around her cheeks.

The gunfire was simulated by speakers and some civilian volunteers armed with loud paintball guns placed throughout the Road to Hell so it was harmless but too many hits from paintballs meant failure. Soon Osei’s rifle clattered back a burst of return fire.

His rifle was loaded with simunition, a non-lethal paint round designed to be fired from a real rifle. Though, judging from the squeal that ripped through the air simunition was far from painless. By the end of the day these poor volunteers will be an anthill of bruises.

“HELP!” A panicked shriek drowned out the hissing of paintball rounds and for a moment Judy thought Peter was in real trouble until she realized it wasn’t his voice. It must have been another of the hare volunteers.

The terror in his voice seemed real. Very real. Judy was already halfway up the barrier before she found a pair of huge claws enveloping her tiny body, and a timberwolf shouting her name.

“Hopps!” Wolford’s intense growl snapped the struggling rabbit from her reckless race to that cry for help. When Wolford saw her glassy amethyst eyes came back into focus he cracked a grin.

“Hopps, it’s okay. It’s just part of the simulation. It’s just part of the course, understand?”

The flustered rabbit seemed to deflate as a wave of relief crashed into her system, flushing out the adrenaline from her veins. “I-I’m sorry sir.”

“Don’t worry about it Hopps, just get back in line and calm down.” Wolford set her down gently and smirked. “Though, I do like your instincts. But do try to rein yourself in a bit.”

“Yes sir. Thank you sir.” She mumbled, her eyes on her feet and her drooping ears burning a deep scarlet.

Though it seemed like an eternity Peter actually completed the course in about seven minutes, just inside the benchmark of ten minutes. The black bear stayed at the finish line however so the other recruits couldn’t press him for answers or see how many times he had been hit by paintballs.

Next up was beautiful jaguar with glossy black fur by the name of Ana Ramirez. She completed the course in under five minutes, beating out Peter’s record. The remainder of the recruits followed this pattern though there were a couple who didn’t make the ten minute mark. This was all well and good but every time that Horrifying scream for help split the air Judy had to fight to keep from bolting, sometimes she couldn’t tell whether it was towards the noise or away from the gunfire but she did as she was told and suffered through it.

Until it was finally her turn.

“You ready Hopps?” Wolford towered over the nervous bunny.

“Yes sir!” She declared with all the confidence she could muster. She thrust her rifle over her head for Wolford to inspect and he accepted it gladly. He took the small variant of the X-9 assault rifle with a nostalgic smile hovering about his grayed muzzle.

The X-9 was the standard assault rifle for XCOM during the Alien’s first invasion. It’s archaic design was offset by its ease of use and adaptability. This particular X-9 was modified for small sized mammals, something the current standard assault rifles could not yet do, and was chambered in .17 Hornet, a smaller cousin of the standard 5.56 NATO rounds the current XCOM assault rifle use.
Wolford was just as through in his inspection of Judy’s rifle as he was with every recruits but his usual teasing and grunting was absent, in its place was a tiny frown and a, expression of intense concentration. He was being extremely hard on Judy, he looked in every tiny crevice and crack for evidence of carbon or other filth that littered the relic of a rifle.

To his immense joy he found absolutely nothing. Judy’s weapon was clean as a whistle, the best one out of all the recruits. Not that he was going to tell her that. Nothing good came from inflating a nervous recruit’s ego right before the infamous Road to Hell. He knelt down and handed the rifle back to the nervous bunny.

“Good Job Hopps.” Wolford was too large a mammal to pat her shoulder as his paw alone covered half of her entire body so he settled for a gentle pat between her bouncing ears. “Go get ’em rookie. Make me proud.”

“I-I will sir!” Judy’s heart soared at his words. She bounced on her feet as a bright smile revealed her large front teeth. “I won’t let you down!”

“I know you won’t Hopps, just keep calm and do your best.” With those last words of encouragement Central Officer Wolford padded off to the observatory deck on the left-paw side of the course leaving her alone with Kevin. The coyote’s head was cocked to the side in a pensive expression of curiosity, though when he realized she noticed his staring he straightened up.

“Ready Hopps?” He asked with whistle in paw.

“Yes sir!” Judy shouted. This time she was ready for the whistle’s shriek as she tuned out the ringing in her ears and bolted for the barrier.

Judy hit the wooden obstacle like a furry cannonball and scrambled up the horizontal logs almost just as fast. Bunnies were not inherently strong climbers but she had been practicing constantly during her daily trek to run on the desert surface. She made it over the barrier and found herself in the middle of a ramshackle suburb street. Buildings of steel and wood were slapped together in a haphazard manner with windows, blind spots, and deadly funnels everywhere with every surface coated in a rainbow’s worth of paint splatters.

“High ground. High ground.” Judy chanted under her breath.

She brought her rifle to her chest and shot off towards the nearest building, a two-story house. Instead of going through the house’s interior the bunny opted to leap to the closest outcropping of sheet metal to use as a springboard. Her padless foot nearly caused her an embarrassing and quick trip back to street level but her climbing tape snagged enough traction to hold her steady.

Judy took a deep breath and sprang to a window sill then to the house’s rooftop. Now that she had the high ground Judy felt much better about her chances at completing the course…. Until she realized she had just wasted almost an entire minute climbing one stupid house.

“Fertilizer!” Adrenaline pumped wildly into her tiny body giving Judy a vicious burst of speed as she sprinted across the rooftop. Without a single stutter of hesitation Judy flung herself from the house’s roof to the neighboring building. She hit the sheet metal roof hard, the impact jarred her legs enough to seize in pain.

A squeak of surprise slipped from the bunny’s lips as Judy curled into a ball around her rifle and rolled across the rooftop to avoid hurting herself further. She gathered her feet under her and gave them a quick shake before bolting off towards the next building.
After crossing the next three buildings without incident Judy was actually feeling optimistic. Though, not if any trigger happy volunteers had anything to say about it.

A paintball whistled just past her skull, jarring the young bunny from her thoughts, suddenly her whole world was a clattering symphony of hissing paintball guns, harsh roars of laughter, and simulated gunfire. Judy froze, her racing heart threatening to burst in her chest.

Then the anguished cry of a terrified mammal clawed at her ears then her training took over.

Judy ducked a flurry of orange paintballs from a tan hare wearing goggles in a second floor window and returned the favor. Her X-9 kicked against her shoulder as a burst .17 Hornet simunition rounds screamed out of the barrel, two of the three blue paint rounds hit their mark dropping the hare like a sack of potatoes.

A rush of excitement unlike anything Judy had ever felt before rushed into the potent cocktail of adrenaline and high-struck stress wildly pounding through her veins. She had never been this excited. She had never felt so alive! A feral grin split across her lips as the crazy bunny shot across the rooftop bobbing and weaving to avoid the hailstorm of incoming paintballs.

Judy was so carried away by the rush of combat she had almost forgotten about the scream for help. She smacked her back against a mock of a chimney and listened for the mammal’s cry for help, her long ears swiveling like radar dishes.

“There!” She heard him again, he was close. He seemed trapped in the building next to her on the second floor. Judy bolted from cover and lowered her ears to duck under a burst of paintball fire in her mad dash to the edge of the roof. She spotted an open window easily within leaping distance and went for it, tucking her limbs in to keep from striking any sharp edges on the way in.

Judy sailed through the window into the second floor and rolled flawlessly to her feet. The interior was naturally darker than the outside but her poor vision made Judy rely solely on her hearing until her eyes could adjust. She spotted a pair of wide hazel eyes under a window on the far side of the building and brought her rifle to her shoulder.

“Hey! Sir! Are you alright?” She walked as slowly as she dared with the maelstrom of speeding paintballs with her name on them sailing in through the windows and spattering onto the walls. The hazel eyes blinked in surprise at the bunny’s question. “Sir! You were screaming for help, do you need help?” Judy asked as calmly as her pounding heart and ragged breathing would allow. Finally the hazel eyes bobbed.

“Yeah! Y-you are actually gonna try to git me outta here?” The owner of those hazel eyes turned out to be another tan furred hare with black tipped ears much like Judy’s.

Judy’s recruit laughed at the question. “Of course! Can you run?”

“Alright then! Follow me!” Judy ducked under the window and brought dragged the hapless volunteer down the stairs to the first floor.

“Okay! Keep close and whatever happens do NOT stop running. Understand?” Judy shouted over the deafening clatter of simulated gunfire and rapid spitting of paintball guns. The hare bobbed his head and lowered his ears to his back just like Judy had done with an exhilarated grin plastered on his face. Judy flashed a smile matching his excitement and pointed to an open window.

“Ready? Go!” Judy pulled her rifle to the building across the street and plugged the towering oryx
wildly spraying her building with paintballs. The desert antelope squealed as a tight pattern of blue paint smacked into his chest eliminating him from the battle to nurse his new collection of bruises. Judy didn’t have time to celebrate as she and her charge leapt out a side window into the street.

Judy didn’t know how much time she had left but she suddenly didn't care. She had finally saved someone from the Aliens! Sure, it was only a volunteer in a training course but it still made her feel better about herself.

“There! I see the finish!” The volunteer shouted, a paw thrust at the end of the street. A rush of adrenaline poured into her flagging stamina reserves, spurring the tired bunny on.

Fifty meters. Only fifty meters left.

A burst of orange paintballs spattering the dust around them jolted Judy from her thoughts.

“Get inside that house!” She pulled the wide eyed hare into the nearest building and flung herself after him just in time to avoid a second burst of paintballs. Judy stumbled and rolled to catch herself, forcing her to scramble on three paws to the wall her companion had pressed himself against, a paw pressed against his thigh.

“You alright?” Judy asked between gulps of air. “You hit?”

“Yeah, I got hit in the leg.” He sighed. “Dammit! And you and I almost made it too!” He moaned in disappointment. Judy scrunched her nose in thought.

“W-wait. Are you out?”

“No, I just can’t walk on this leg anymore. Its against the rules.” He shook his head and shrugged. “You did good though, no one else even tried to get me out. Funny how the smallest mammal here had the biggest heart, huh?”

If Judy wasn’t lost in her own little world her blush would have bleed through even her thick grey fur. Instead she nodded her head and slung her rifle to her hip.

“Okay, get up.”

“Okay- wait. What?” The hare stared at the bunny’s outstretched arm like it had turned purple and sprouted wings.

“Get up so I can put you on my shoulders. I’m carrying you.” The volunteer raised his paws and backed away as Judy got closer to pick him up.

“Wait.. are you serious?” He asked in a increduulous whisper.

“Yes.” came her kurt reply.

“W-well…. Okay, try not to get me hit or drop me please?” He begged.

“No guarantees.” Judy smirked. “That said I’ll try not to.” Once the hare was balance precariously across Judy’s shoulders the bunny steadied herself for the madness that was about to ensue.

“Hey, quick question.” The hare’s breath rustled the fur on Judy’s cheek. “Have you ever done this before?”

“Nope! Heeere we go!”
When Judy appeared from cover she had expected a storm of paintballs to descend on her like bees to honey but the unusual sight of a hare draped across her shoulders left the volunteers a bit dumbfounded at the ridiculous sight. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth Judy took off like a bullet down the street jolting the volunteers from their confusion.

“Get her! Shoot that bunny!”

“But She’s carryin’ James!”

“So? Paint’ll wash out won’t it?”

“Noooo!” The hare clutched to Judy’s back to keep from falling as angry orange paintballs hissed through the air just past their ears.

“Come on! Come on! Almost there!” Judy’s legs were on fire and her back and arms felt like wet noodles as she pounded across the dusty street with James yelling incoherently in her ear all the while.

Then she felt a painful splatter on her right heel.

“Carrot sticks!” Judy sputtered in pain as a second paintball smacked into James’s flank making the unfortunate mammal flinch and tumble from her shoulders.

“James!” Throwing caution to the wind Judy threw herself over the hare’s balled up body as a rain of paintballs hissed through the air to find their mark. The angry orange projectiles drilled painfully into Judy’s side as she shielded the hare beneath her as best she could under the never-ending rain of paintballs until a shrill shriek of a whistle cracked through the air.

James tentatively lifted his head from the dirt. “I-is it ov-”

“HOPPS!” A furious growl ripped through the air. Judy stiffened and looked up to see a furious Kevin standing over her with a wicked fire in his eyes.

“YOU FAIL.”

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Two hours had passed since Judy had failed the Road to Hell now she found herself alone in an empty longhouse, the other recruits already had graduated and moved on to their new units. She was the first recruit ever to have failed to even complete the course.

“The first ever!” She moaned and buried her head in her paws as tears stained her white paw fur. “I’m *hic* I’m such an-an idiot! *hic* L-l-like I could actually make the world a B-b-b-better place…..”

The does sobs echoed sadly in the lonely building. She failed. She had failed and it was all her fault.

“What-what *hic* What I-I’m I gonna do? W-w-where am I g-g-g-gonna go? Home?” She snorted. “Y-yeah right. Th-they’ll all just l-l-laugh at me a-and call m-m-me *hic* useless and st-st-stupid
"I don’t.” A low growl shook the sobbing bunny from her helpless moaning.

“Central O-Officer W-Wolford?” Judy squeaked as the timberwolf quietly slipped through the aisles of empty bunks to kneel in front of Judy until they were eye to eye.

“I saw your little stunt out there.” He said in as gentle a growl as he could muster. His well intended words had the opposite effect as the bunny’s crying redoubled, fat teardrops poured from her watery amethyst eyes like a shower.

“I-I-I’m So *hic* so sorry! I f-failed y-y-you. *hic* I-I-I-”

“Enough.” Wolford snapped, cutting off Judy’s teary apology. Her wide watery eyes stared pitifully at his soul, her entire tiny being was begging him for his forgiveness. He may be a battle hardened badass but even Wolford was helpless against a woman’s “puppy eyes” regardless of their species. Thats cheating.

“Hopps, I forgive you.” Wolford gently patted the hiccupping doe’s head. “But forgiveness is not why I came here.”

“I-I-It’s not?” Judy stuttered.

“No,” Wolford pointed a claw at a very confused bunny. “I came for you.”

Judy’s body went rigid as she struggled to comprehend what Wolford had just said. Than, very slowly, the meaning of his words dawned on her.

“Y-y-you *hic* f-for me? B-but sir I-I-I-I failed?!” Judy drew her knees to her chest and clutched them for dear life as once again her whole world had just been turned upside down. Wolford chuckled.

“You may have failed to complete the Road to Hell Hopps but it was not due to your incompetence.” He cracked another of his rare smiles. “You failed the course only because you tried to do the right thing, even though you technically did get the civilian and yourself killed in the process.”

Judy stared up at the scarred timberwolf as if she were hypnotized. Her limbs gradually uncurled from her body as he spoke, her eyes wide in disbelief.

“I heard you say you want to make the world a better place?” Judy hiccuped and mutely bobbed her head. “Well then Ms. Hopps, I only have one question left for you.” He leaned in close with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

“How do you feel about living on an airship?”
Chapter Summary

Judy arrives to New Providence for her first mission and everything seems to be going according to plan.

Until it doesn't.

Chapter Notes

This chapter's a bit lengthy so I divided it up into two parts.

Let me know your thoughts and please if you have any questions or comments just post them below or send me a message and I'll be happy to reply!

Enjoy!

Operation Gatecrasher

“The excitement continues to build as city centers across the globe prepare for the 20th anniversary of Unification Day.” The silky feminine voice of a charming whitetail deer rippled from the ancient computer’s fizzling monitor. A video of one of Advent’s military parades marching down a street of adorning fans filled the screen.

The blissful smiles plastered on the muzzles of those ignorant fools made Judy’s stomach buckle against her spine.

“Despite repeated attacks by fringe elements Advent facilities in New Providence thankfully remain unaffected.” The newscaster’s sickening smile faded out as footage of came to the forefront.

“Advent again assures all citizens that today’s celebrations will continue as planned.”

“Perfect.” Central Officer Wolford clicked the computer off, pitching them under a blanket of sudden darkness, the only source of light was what filtered in through the cracks in the boarded up windows.

Rabbits had very poor night vision so Judy was practically blind in the darkness when compared to the rest of her squad. Peter Osei, the black bear and Ana Ramirez, a lithe and rather fiery jaguar along with Judy Hopps herself were hand picked by Central Officer Wolford for this daring (suicidal) mission. This operation was the very definition of insanity. A four mammal fireteam against a literal army just to bust into some gene therapy clinic and grab some poor sap that had been kidnapped years ago.

And if things weren’t crazy enough this was Judy’s first ever mission.
The bunny sighed wistfully as her mind drifted to her bunk back in the dustbowl canyon. Hard to imagine only two days had passed since her little emotional episode after the Road to Hell fiasco. Those were the good ol’ days…. Judy snorted and shook the cobwebs from her mind. No, those days were horrible. She had suffered both emotionally and physically during those agonizing six weeks out in the desert at the paws of her “comrades”. Judy couldn’t see him but she shot a heated glare at Peter Osei’s direction anyway.

No way in greener pastures was she willing to forgive that prick for the shit he pulled.

Ana Ramirez on the other paw, was in the “pretend the carrot farmer doesn’t exist” camp during basic training. Though she never actually gave Judy the cold shoulder the jaguar certainly made it clear that she wanted nothing to do with the dumb bunny bouncing around the canyon wanting to play soldier with the big mammals.

“With allies like these who needs enemies?” Judy thought bitterly.

“Ahhhh people!” Wolford’s barking snapped the doe from further self-deprecating thoughts. “You know what to do. Osei, you and Ramirez with hook up with our contact, he can get you close to the clinic but it’s all on you to mop up the Advent forces securing the therapy clinic. You engage when Hopps and I give the signal.”

“What’s the signal sir?” Ramirez purred.

“You will know it when you hear it. loud noises, gunshots, and mayhem. Trust me, It’ll be hard to miss.” If Judy didn’t know any better she could have sworn the aged and hardened combat veteran giggled.

A trill of thankfulness for being on this wolf’s side mingled with an elated pity for the Aliens unfortunate enough to have earned his ire. A similar revelation skittered through Osei and Ramirez before the predatory pair quipped a curt affirmative and shuffled in the dark to gather their gear with grins of anticipation curled back on their lips.

“Hopps, you and I have the fun job. We get to set off some Advent fireworks.” A quiver of excitement shook Judy’s tiny body.

Wolford’s confidence flushed much of her apprehension towards this crazy mission but if the legendary Central himself was leading the charge into battle she had total faith that they would succeed.

Whether they will live to tell about it though was a completely different matter altogether.

----------------- [2 Hours Later] [20:03:07 Hours][New Providence Square]-----------------

Glittering spires of glass and steel gorged into the nocturnal skyline like jagged teeth ripping into smoggy flesh. The denizens of New Providence, Central America swarmed about the streets in a fervor resembling a beehive dunked in honey. This city that never sleeps seemed to have taken a double shot of espresso as beams of light pierced into the heavens to dance against the cloudy overcast that choked the full moon from view. The festive night breeze had a icy nip to it, though few mammals noticed as the smoggy air pulsed with hypnotic beat as music bands performed all over the vast cityscape of twinkling lights and dancing shadows. The city was a glittering predator dancing in a swirling starfield of smog and void.

And Judy was walking straight down the toothy maw into the belly of the beast.

The frigid sidewalk bit through her hind paw fur making every uncertain step deeper into the heart
of the bustling city painfully cold. The painful chill made the doe stiffen and bristle, putting her further on edge. Judy was a country bunny after all, she had never been in a city like this before. She was way out of her depth, like a fish floundering about on desert sand. The pounding beat of a far off concert rippled through her sensitive ears putting the tense rabbit even farther off kilter. Soon every tiny noise became an Advent trooper looming over her shoulder and every shadow hid an Alien just out of sight. It also didn’t help knowing that in a few minutes her stress induced paranoia was about to come a reality.

Judy pulled at her clothes for the hundredth time since she had stepped out onto the crowded street. She was given new clothes just for this mission since her torn jeans and threadbare flannel button downs stuck out like a sore thumb out here in the city. A pair of black slacks hugged her flared hips a bit too tightly for her taste while her dark blue blouse pressed around her like a vice and the low cut V-neck showed just a little too much of her white breast fur for her taste. The only thing she couldn’t really complain about was the thick synthetic leather jacket that adorned her shoulders. The jacket had some weight to it and was quite warm and even though Judy knew it was silly she felt as if the jacket was her armor against the world since no one else was her to stand by her side.

“Geez. A little lonely there Jude?” She chuckled to herself and checked her watch, her tense smile evaporated. “8:10, er- I mean 20:10. Five minutes until it…. Starts.” It certainly didn’t help her nerves knowing the pentagon shaped X-4 charge pressing uncomfortably in her flank had enough destructive power to level a city block.

Judy shook herself from her inner squalor and squared her shoulders, her long gray ears standing tall and her fists clenched. “Let’s get this done.” She closed her eyes and took a breath before pressing her earpiece.

“Crasher 3 approaching position, ETA-” Judy flicked her ears towards the roar of a huge audience cheering in a concert in New Providence Square just a few city blocks away. “-Three minutes.”

[Crasher 3, this is Central. ETA acknowledged T-minus 3 Mikes. Break. All units report in. Over.]
[Crasher 1, Osei. Roger.]
[Central, this is Crasher 2, Ramirez. Last message is a good copy.]

Judy hesitated for a moment as this little exchange felt far too much like kits playing soldier until she realized that this was the real thing. “T-this is Crasher 3, Hopps. Acknowledged.”

[Keep your ears down and your heads on a swivel people. Crasher 1, Crasher 2, wait for our signal to engage. Central out.]

Judy spotted the harsh crimson glow of Advent holographic traffic dividers and street scanners flickering at the end of the street with a constantly growing crowd of mammals of all sizes squeezing and impatiently. The angry red glare gave the doe pause. This wasn’t a game anymore. Mammals were about to die for real and she was going to be the one with more blood on her paws.

[Crasher 3, where are you?] Judy squeaked and her paws shot over her short muzzle as her heart sped into overdrive. She smacked a paw against her hammering chest and swallowed her surprise before pressing a shaking paw against her earpiece.

“T-this is crasher 3. Approaching position now.” Judy chuckled weakly trying to dispel the trembling in her voice. “You were right. Heh, they’ve definitely got their paws full tonight.”

[Stay focused.] Wolford’s voice rumbled.
Judy tottered to the Advent holographic barricade on week knees where she spotted Central’s scarred grey muzzle through the throng of excited mammals waiting in line for the concert. The timberwolf was dressed in a long wool trench coat with plenty of room to hide all sorts of sharp and pointy things that go stab in the night. Wolford’s exhilarated gaze flickered to meet hers for a fraction of a second before returning to studiously stare at the back of the cheetah in front of him. She watched him discreetly lift a paw to his earpiece making it seem as if he was itching a scratch.

[Prep Gatecrasher, 60 seconds.] Wolford pulled his paw away without waiting on a reply.

Judy shivered at the tiny feral grin that lifted the corner of his muzzle as he shuffled to the front of the line were a metal detector and a squad of Advent troopers were screening the concert’s patrons for entry. As soon as he was waved through the metal detector the device squealed in panic and the Advent troopers swarmed around him like angry wasps with rifles honed in on the wolf’s smarmy smirk.

The crowd’s attention was on the tense confrontation at the security gate as was the Advent troopers who were malingering about the checkpoint drawing their eyes away from the nervous bunny that pressed herself against barricade’s projector, her noses twitching madly as she watched the Advent forces swarm her fearless idol. She struggled to keep from bolting prematurely to her objective with her explosive cargo now clutched to her chest with shaking paws.

“Mor Balaten.” The Advent Officer in command of the security checkpoint padded forward until he was nose to unconcerned smirk with Central Officer Wolford.

Wolford silently shifted a paw to his hip and regarded the Officer with mild interest which infuriated the crimson goon. The Advent Officer butt-stocked Wolford in the chest forcing the grayed wolf to his knees. A ripple of fear and shock swept through the onlookers which is why no one bothered to notice the little gray rabbit dart through the holographic barricade and slide under the troop carrier’s undercarriage.

“Come on… Come on… Got it!” Judy hissed through a sweaty smile as she punched in the activation code and X-4 charge blinked a steady green. She spared a glance around the troop carrier’s front tire and saw Wolford wink in her direction and stand up. Yup, it’s time to leave.

Judy scampered from the undercarriage with no regard to stealth as she put as much distance as she could between the explosive and herself as she could with the trigger wrapped in an iron grip, her thumb poised over the button.

[Now.] Judy closed her eyes, pulled down her ears and pressed the trigger.

Then her whole world exploded.
As the saying goes, if something can go wrong everything will go wrong.

A/N: I am looking for any interested in assisting in writing this project. The last thing I want to happen is for ZCOM to die, either by lack of time, inspiration, or support. If you are interested in becoming a co-author, an editor/ beta reader or simply want to throw around ideas and brainstorm feel free to message me. I need all the help I can get.

“-.t u-.!”
Huh? What was that? Everything is spinning. Can’t… Can’t quite remember which why is up. Weird…. Everything hurts but…. But I kinda don’t really care….where am I again? Something about a concert I think?

“-Opps! L-.... Go!” That scary voice sounds…. Sounds familiar…. Like a wolf….. Wolford? Wait WOLFORD! Judy’s eyes shot open to a wide frown stretched across Central’s scarred muzzle.

“Hopps!” Wolford shook Judy’s shoulders and roared, jolting the bunny back into the land of the living. “Pick your fluffy little tail up, we need to go NOW!”

Judy tried to talk but all that came out was an incoherent sputter as she crawled to her feet and shook her head to clear the ringing in her ears. The street was void of any civilians, Judy wasn’t sure how long she had been incapacitated but surely it couldn’t have been more than a couple minutes. She blinked furiously to get her world back into focus, it was a frustratingly tough process. It seemed when she had been thrown by the explosion she had hit the pavement and gone all crosseyed. She had been so busy trying to make sense of her surroundings she missed Central throw off his trenchcoat revealing where he had strapped a myriad of weaponry to his torso.

“Hopps! Here.” Judy looked up just in time to catch her X-9 assault rifle and a couple magazines of .17 Hornet ammunition. The real thing, not the simunition she had been accustomed to, these rounds were made with the intent to pierce and kill.

“Let’s go Hopps. I hear gunfire coming from the clinic. If we don’t hurry we’ll be late to the party.”

“Roger sir. Right behind you!”

The rattle of gunfire stung Judy’s sensitive hearing like pins through her eardrums. Two distinct
explosive bursts of ballistic firearms staggered around each other was a telltale sign that Crasher 1 and Crasher 2 were alive and putting up a good fight somewhere in the plaza up ahead, however the four answering whirring blasts of magnetic Advent weaponry worried Judy. As she and Central pounded pavement towards the gene clinic Wolford ripped his rifle from his chest and slammed a large capacity drum magazine into his weapon and ripped a round into the chamber. His assault rifle was a custom build with aftermarket furniture replacing just about every part of the firearm and just feeling that familiar weight in his paws nearly made his heart melt into a puddle as a wicked bloodthirsty grin stretched across his scarred muzzle.

The apex predator has arrived on the field.

Judy’s muscles burned and her bruises ached but it was little more than superficial next to the blood roaring in her ears and the terror that stretched her eyes wide, but she swallowed that fear and kept her violet eyes trained on Central’s ragged grey and white tipped tail as he sprinted around the corner.

When she rounded the corner Judy had just enough time to register Osei and Ramirez huddled behind a four door sedan parked in front of the gene therapy clinic before she had to duck behind a pillar to avoid stray bullets. The plaza was strewn with slain Advent troopers as if they were street litter. Judy risked a quick peek around her pillar and spotted the surviving troopers taking cover in the plaza’s central garden trading gunfire with the operatives.

“Mors Valaten!” The surviving rhino Advent Officer had rents from ballistic impacts shorn into his crimson armor.

He hefted his massive magnetic rifle to his shoulder and squeezed a clattering burst into the sedan and snorted in satisfaction at the cry of pain from behind the car. In reveling in his short lived victory the armored rhino failed to spot the grinning timber wolf bearing down on him and his troops. Central vaulted over a planter and hip fired his rifle. The 5.56 NATO rounds were small for a rifle round but they were still a high velocity round that tumbled on impact with flesh. The rhino’s damaged armor failed under the ambushed spray of automatic rifle fire. Generous gouts of bright orange blood splattered the grass and impact ridden pavement before the berserk wolf shoulder checked the dying mammal that was easily four times his weight where he squeezed a final burst into its head. The remaining troopers froze in shock at Central’s impossible display, making it easy for the timber wolf to cut them down where they stood. Wolford turned back to his soldiers and slammed a fresh magazine home.

“Lets go people, no time to waste!”

“C-crasher 2 is down!” Dread tore into Central’s joviant attitude as Osei’s grief stricken cry shook the plaza. “S-she’s…. She’s fucking dead!”

Judy’s ragged breathing caught in her throat making her tight chest cry angrily for air. She followed behind Wolford in a daze to the blood splattered sedan. What she saw she knew would follow her into her nightmares.

Ramirez’s glossy black fur was matted were the magnetic rifle rounds had ripped through her like she was wet parchment, her body armor caught a single round dead center judging by the huge dent that caved her chest inward, however that was not the worse of the damage. The young jaguar’s face was, for lack of a better word, mulched where two magnetic rounds had ripped into her. The right side of her jaw was completely missing as well as her left eye, the entire back of her skull had been spaced by the round’s extreme velocity. She never stood a chance.

“Leave her.” Wolford said as he kneeled nest to a crying Peter Osei. The black bear’s jaw hung
open in shock, an expression that matched Judy’s. Was Central truly this callous?!

“B-but sir!” Osei cried. Wolford cut him off with a growl.

“I said leave her! There is nothing you can do! She. is. Dead. and we have to move now, otherwise we may end up joining her tonight.”

Wolford snorted in anger at his failure to save Ramirez in time but tucked his emotions behind a mask of professionalism so he could drink them away at a later date. He reached down Ramirez’s bloodstained uniform to retrieve her ID tags.

“Hopps!” He barked. “Get the door. Osei, cover the rear.” He slapped Ramirez’s ID tags into Peter’s chest for safekeeping, and perhaps a tiny bit of closure before viciously kicking the therapy clinic’s doors off their hinges to the steel security door at the rear of the building.

The exchange Judy had just witnessed floored the bunny. It took an immense strength of will to pull her eyes from Ramirez’s mangled corpse to the door beyond the clinic’s threshold. This felt like a dream, no, a very ugly and very lucid nightmare. She felt as if she was walking at the bottom of the ocean, her body refused to cooperate with her brain as she stumbled into the clinic in a daze. The first signs of shell-shock but she was fighting it, though she didn’t know for how much longer.

“Hopps.” Judy slowly turned glassy eyes up to meet Central’s sympathetic gaze. “I need you with me. I can’t do this without you. Are you with me?” His words were like jumper cables on a dead battery, though her stress still held her in an exhausted state.

“Yes sir, I…” She couldn’t stop herself from turning her eyes back to the still warm body of Ramirez laying on the curb. Judy swallow the bile that rose to her tongue and locked eyes with Central with a reignited fire in her violet eyes. “I am with you sir.”

“Good.” Central spared her a tiny smile of appreciation before a neutral expression branded over his face. “Now get this door open.”

“Roger!” Judy slipped a modified smartphone from her pocket and hit an Infiltration Application. The Application was devised by the Resistance’s best brain trust for special combat units with the purpose of hacking to Advent systems. As long as there is an open link nearby the invasive transmitter grafted into the smartphone could force a way into Advent’s system for a short time. This was perfect for opening locked blast doors and vaults similar to the door before them. Lines of code scrolled across the smartphone’s screen for a few seconds before the phone chirped happily and the door opened with a heavy click.

“Moving to secure the package.” Wolford slung the sliding door open and when in first with his rifle pulled tight to his shoulder as he swept the room for threats. Judy emulated him as best she could to cover his back but it proved unnecessary. The lab was empty, save for the occupant in the glass casket of course. Central approached the towering figure that loomed above him against the sickly green backlighting.

“This is the place.” He whispered into his earpiece, his normally powerful growl turned to an emotion fueled whimper. Judy’s eyes widened in awe.

“My God. He’s… He’s real.” She whispered. “How do we get him out? I can try hacking into the system a-” Not one to stand on ceremony Wolford swung his rifle into the glass casket shattering the coffin into glittering sharp bits. Central threw his rifle and caught the enormous figure before he could strike the floor. Two swirling horns protruded horizontally from the top of the full body
suit, indicating the mammal inside as some kind of bovine.

Wolford was strong but even he could only manage to throw the bovine’s upper body onto his shoulders with the suit wrapped legs still dragging the floor. He stooped to grab his weapon and cracked a grin at Hopps. “Let’s head ho-”

Ratatata!

The street outside erupted with the whirring blister of magnetic weapons fire accompanied by the rumble of an Advent jumpship’s anti-gravity engines.

“We go company!” Osei screamed and returned fire.

“Firebrand we need immediate emergency evac!” Wolford roared into his earpiece.

[Acknowledged Central, the plaza’s too hot for an extraction but I can swing around to the back of the clinic and pick you up there.]

“There’s no back door!” Judy cried as a burst of magnetic rounds ripped through the lab’s walls like a knife through butter. She screamed and hit the floor before scrambling for cover beside the only door to the lab.

“Shen! We need options yesterday!” Wolford dragged his cargo behind a stack of computers as a stray round screamed across the room and slammed into the far wall. Judy didn’t know who this Shen was but she hoped to God he (she?) had something in mind.

[I-I’m sorry Central. The front’s the only way in or out, otherwise we would have gone in the back, you know that!] A female’s distressed cry crackled over the channel.

“SHIT!” Wolford cursed. “SHIT, Alright. Alright, come on THINK. There’s gotta be another way out!” Wolford desperately racked his brain for options. Judy paled at the sight of her fearless idol panicking. Was she going to actually die here?

[PerHaPs I cAn Be oF AssiStAncE?] A crackling voice popped and fizzed over the commlink jerking the doe from her despair. Wolford instead snarled in fury.

“Who are you?! Where did you get this frequency?” Static laughter filled the commlink’s channel.

[WhaT iS It wiTh WolvEs And tHe HowLiNg? Do yOu WaNt mY HeLp or nOt?] Judy was floored. Here she was in the middle of a gunfight and this.. This.. animal was twisting their arm for a little cash! Something in the little bunny snapped and she mashed her earpiece.

“Listen here you filthy low-life we are out here DYING while you are pinching your pennies and grabbing for ours! Tell us what we need to know or there won’t be anyone left for you to extort!”

“HOPPS!” Judy flinched at Wolford’s furious shout. Her eyes snapped to his rage fueled snarl. He pressed his earpiece with an expression of grim acceptance in his eyes.
“Alright “Agent Blueberries” or whatever the hell you like to call yourself. What do you want?”

[I thOughT yOu’D nEveR aSk.] The Reaper’s laughter grated Judy’s ears like razors on a chalkboard. [thReE fAvoRs, redEemAble at AnY tImE. WhaTeVer I waNt, wHerEveR I wAnt, whEneVer I WanT it. tHis iS my pRicE. ThRe is no rOom For nEgoTiAtioN. cHoOse qUicKly John. ThIngS arE looKiNg uGly frOm wHerE I’m stAndiNg.]

“Sir!” Judy cried in desperation as a burst of magnetic round splintered through the wall and clipping the door frame she was cowering behind. Wolford hesitated and saw at the tears in the doe’s wide terrified eyes. He grit his fangs and set his jaw. The price was heavy. Too heavy, but Judy spoke the truth. If they didn’t get the Reaper’s help there would be no one left to pay his price. The price was high, but it was better than ending up dead.

“Fine.” Wolford snarled. “I accept your deal you damned devil, now what’s your plan?”

[Duck.]

“Wha-?” Judy sputtered in confusion and was instantly punished for her hesitation when the entire back wall of the lab exploded in a maelstrom of heat and flying fragments of twisted metal. The bunny fell on her tail and gaped at the new backdoor blown in the side of the building, with freedom and safety hanging just outside like an enticing morsel strong on the end of a fishing pole. The Reaper’s smug chuckle fizzled over the commlink.

[I’d Run iF I wEre yoU.]

“Let’s move! Hopps! Osei! Go Go Go!” Wolford roared over the stuttering crack of gunfire.

“Just go!” Peter screamed over the deafening cacophony of magnetic weapons fire. “I’ll hold them off just go!”

“Osei don’t be a damned hero!” Judy pleaded. She couldn’t be sure but it sounded as if the black bear laughed.

“Ya know, I never did apologize, did I little rabbit?” Judy peeked around the corner and gasped as the ragged crimson holes in Peter’s chest as he pressed his back against the sedan’s engine block. The black bear met her gaze with a cough and cracked a bloody grin.

“I’m sorry Judy Hopps. Remember me and Ana will you?”

Judy could only let out a tiny squeak of agony as her heart was torn to shreds. Peter closed his eyes with a smile and bunched his legs with his smoking rifle at the ready.

“Good bye.” He gurgled before unleashing a primal warcry as he leapt over the sedan’s hood and shredding an Advent trooper with a barrage of rifle fire.

“Hopps! We have to go! Osei’s made his choice. Don’t let his death be in vain.” Wolford hauled the package to the breach in the back wall and called to her over his shoulder. He looked skyward and pressed his earpiece. “Firebrand, where the hell is our pickup?!”

[Almost there Central. Twenty seconds.]

The roar of twin turbine engines filled the lab’s confined space as two spike platforms attached to ropes hurtled earthward into the pavement.

[Get in!]
“You don’t have to tell me twice. Hopps, let’s go.”

“Y-yes sir.” Judy bounded over to the platform as her body tingled with relief at finally reaching safety. Until a burst from an Advent Officer’s magnetic rifle drilled into Central’s back.

“GAAH! FUCK!” Wolford howled in pain and whipped around with his rifle in one paw and the trigger held down splattering the walls with a line of wild bullet holes. The Advent Officer was a timber wolf just like Central with a grin on its muzzle as it hopped behind the doorway to avoid Wolford’s salvo. Judy froze in panic with one foot on the platform and her rifle hanging loose in her paws.

Was this really happening?

“Firebrand! Lift me up and get a gurney for both of us! Hopps Get your tail on that platform NOW!” Judy snapped out of her panic and stepped on the platform as Wolford’s bloodied form zipped to the Skyranger hovering overhead. Judy pressed a paw to her earpiece.

“I’m on, send me up.” Judy held onto the cable as she sped skyward.

As if she could really get away that easily.

Her breath caught as she found herself face to face with a flying Advent Officer as he leapt from the roof of the therapy clinic and crashed into her midair. Judy screamed as the platform went onto an uncontrollable swinging spin. The city’s glittering lights blurred like a psychodelic hallucination as she held onto the cable for dear life with a snarling Advent Officer’s fangs and claws dug into the platform and clawed for purchase into its bunny prey.

An incoherent scream of terror unlike anything Judy had ever hear much less thought she could produce herself ripped from her throat as she hauled her rifle to bear and pressed the trigger. The old X-9 bucked in her grip as it dumped an entire magazine’s worth of .17 Hornet ammunition into the predator bearing down on her with wicked delight in its eyes. In just a few short seconds her rifle clicked over an empty chamber and her world became quiet as she found herself with an spent assault rifle and a grinning wolf with a paw wrapped around her assault rifle’s barrel where he had steered it skyward. Not a single round had struck him.

“As Morotel.” He chuckled as he wrapped his talons around her throat, slicing through her skin and crushing her airway. “Die.”

Cru-Crack!

The echo of a mighty thunderclap bellowed across New Providence. Judy felt the claws around her throat stiffen before relaxing its hold. The doe tasted a strange coppery sweet tang that trickled onto her tongue. She looked up and saw the confounded frown on the Officer’s muzzle as he stared at the huge hole in his chest. A gout of bright orange blood gushed from his chest as a gurgle bubbled from his lips and he tumbled from the platform into empty oblivion.

Judy didn’t remember the rest of the ride up, the next thing she knew she felt paws grab her shoulders and gently guided her safely into a seat inside the Skyranger as a stag pressed stinging medicines to her lacerations and bandages around her wounds. When she become coherent enough to string two thoughts together she found two hours had already passed…. And that she was soaked from black ear tips to white toes in the Advent Officer’s orange blood.

She didn’t remember when the tears started to fall but she never stopped crying until one of the medics became fed up with her bawling and rammed sleeping pills down her throat and her
nightmares finally claimed her.

------[New Providence, Central America][20:35:13][Rooftop Across Gene Therapy Clinic]------

“Was that… A bunny soldier?” The Reaper chuckled and shook his masked head. “Nah, I gotta be seeing things again.”

A black tipped russet tail flicked happily under his trench coat as the Reaper picked up his M700 sniper rifle and quickly disassembled it into a briefcase he had set aside. With his weapon safe in the battered metal container the Reaper clicked the radio strapped across his chest.

“Hey Finn. It worked. I got the leverage we needed.” The Reaper let the radio go and waited for the reply. He wasn’t kept waiting for long, a few seconds later a deep baritone growl rumbled over the radio’s speaker.

“Ya actually pulled it off? AH! You hustled John Wolford? Damn, I didn’t think you were serious.” Finn’s deep voice held a modicum of awe and respect. The Reaper chuckled, his mask sputtered and popped madly in its attempt to scramble the quiet laugh.

“You know me Finn. I may seem like I’m playing but I’m always serious.” His static laughter died instantly, his joviant attitude replaced by a deathly serious growl.

“I held up my part of the deal Finn, now it’s time for you to honor yours.” Finn’s deep baritone grumble almost shook the radio from its strap.

“Gaaaaah. Fine. Fine. I’ll….. Agree to talk with Wolford about this truce he’s been proposin’ with those Advent Puntos…”

“Skirmishers Finn. they’re called Skirmishers.”

“I know what they’re called!” Finn’s snarl failed to even get a twitch from the Reaper, though the wag in his tail did quicken. He seemed to enjoy getting on this guy’s nerves.

“Set up that meeting Finn.”

“I can talk to Wolford over the phone but ya know I can’t be jumpin’ continents with the Reapers keepin’ me saddled here at Home Base.”

“That’s not a problem. I’ll do it.” The Reaper waved a paw dismissively.

“Are ya sure that’s a good idea, Ni-?”

“I said I’ll do it.” The Reaper snapped, silencing his compatriot. “Just…. Just set up the meeting and call me when it’s time to move. Please buddy?”

“…….Fine. I’ll take care of it. Stay safe out there, I just got ya back, I don’t wanna lose you for another twenty years.”

“I’ll be careful Finn. Outrider out.” The Reaper clicked the radio off and scooped up his briefcase before vanishing into the night.
Chapter Summary

Judy learns the hard way never mix drugs with the aftermath of combat stress.

The results could prove.... Fatal.

Chapter Notes

Nightmares are a nasty thing. even in your dreams you are never safe from fear and pain.

In place of awkward flashbacks interrupting the main story I decided to write out the backstories of certain characters as separate side series in the form of "Nightmare Chapters".

No matter how far you run, nor how fast your feet can carry you, no one can outrun their past.

-Untraveled

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 6

Nightmare of Fields and Ash

She had missed this. She had missed this so bad it hurt.

The earthy musk of turned earth and manure. The sweet tang of cut crops. The hauntingly beautiful whistle of a chilly breeze sweeping through freshly harvested fields on a warm, sunny day. The hypnotizing rustle of leaves and needles from the ocean of pine trees surrounding her all overwhelmed her homesick heart.

A chilly breeze tickled through her gray fur, sending a trill of contentment from her toes straight to her black ear tips. She did not dare open her eyes in fear of losing this moment. She could feel familiar soil stir and crunch under her feet and hear familiar sounds of the wilderness surrounding her family’s farm. A tiny smile full of relief and joy spread across her muzzle.

She was finally home.

Judy opened her shining lavender eyes and was left breathless at the vibrant blue yonder that stretched across the horizon. A wash of strong greens battled and mixed with rich, dark soil and deep brown bark from the pines and the occasional old oak that stood eternal vigil on the outskirts of the Hopps homestead.
Her warren was in the center flanked on all sides by a myriad of well worn foot paths snaking through different plots of farmland. The warren was born into a gentle hill rise that stood proudly in the flat plains surrounding it with a number of barns and ramshackle sheds scattered about the massive property. This is her kithood home, the place Judy and her 275 brothers and sisters grew up. Words could not describe the emotional maelstrom battling in her heart, though the smile on her lips pretty much summed up how happy and overwhelmed Judy was.

However, despite the powerful wave of nostalgia and contentment there was a tiny little voice tucked in the darkest visage of her mind that set her on edge. It’s nasty little whispers tugged at her erect ears, its words were too faint to understand but its seething gurgle made its message clear.

This was too perfect. Something is wrong.

Before Judy could pick apart why this snake of unease was slithering into her mind a familiar and jubilant cry interrupted anymore thoughts of doubt.

“Judy!” Her father’s energetic yowl carried across the breeze, drawing her small, content smile into a wide grin. “Jude the Dude!”

Her grin faltered as that hated nickname from her kithood. Now at barely twenty years of age that nickname heated her ears to a warm pink. If anyone else were to utter those three words Judy would have plowed a foot straight into their muzzle…. But this was her father Stu Hopps, he was a very emotional and sentimental rabbit without a single malicious bone in his body. He was a clueless goof, but he was her clueless goof.

“Hey Dad!” Judy bounded over and was nearly bowled over by the older buck that snagged her into a fluffy bunny-sized bear hug.

“Oh Jude, its so good to see ya! You were almost late for supper!”

“Dad… you’re…. crushing…. me….”

“Oh! Sorry!” Stu released his daughter, allowing her creaking ribcage to spring back to its natural shape. Judy pat down her pink flannel shirt to make sure everything was back in its original place. Stu shot her a sheepish grin.

“Come on Jude. Your mom’s waiting inside, and you know what she’s like when your late for supper.” He shuddered darkly. Judy’s ears sprang up as she giggled at her father’s antics.

“Yeah, ‘The wooden spoon of death’. I remember. I’m right behind you Dad.”

As Judy followed her father to the house that little voice piped up again, souring her happy grin with a creeping sense of Déjà vu.

*Why do I get the feeling that I’ve seen this all before?*

She was so focused on the convoluted emotions that swirled in the pit of her stomach the distracted doe had somehow made it through the warren’s foyer and had found a seat at the outrageously long dining table without even noticing.

Judy was quick to rein in on her surprise though, she wiped the dumbfounded stare off of her face and squared her shoulders with a smile…. Only the dining room was empty. Her smile vanished, and her brows furrowed as the tiny voice of misgivings began to scream and roil about its dark corner.
“Dad?” Judy called. Her ears draped down her back as sweat poured down them. Her heart rate picked up. The voice was right, something was off about this. “Dad? Mama?”

When the ghosts of her echoing voice died Judy was already halfway out of her seat with her only thoughts of bolting for the door.

“Hey bun, where are you going?” Judy froze with her legs swung out of her chair and a paw on the backrest. Her ears flopped around her back and her nose twitched as she spun around towards the sweet ring of her mother’s voice.

Bonnie Hopps was standing in the doorway to the kitchen with a steaming tray in her mitten wrapped paws and a concerned frown on her face.

“Mama?” Judy glanced around the empty dining room. “Where is everyone? Where’s the kits?” She turned her widened eyes back to Bonnie, pleading for a rational explanation. “What’s going on Mom?”

“Hey now bun, calm down.” Her mother sidled over to her distraught daughter and placed the tray in front of the disoriented bunny. A steaming blueberry pie proudly sat atop the tray, its enticing aroma made the panicked doe’s head swim. Her mother gently guided her back to her seat. Judy took a deep breath, letting the scent of her mother’s fresh baked pie

“No one else is here because they’re all at the carrot festival with your father, remember? And didn’t that nice James Leaps boy ask you out on a date there?” Judy shot her mother an incredulous stare.

“The carrot festival? Mama, I followed Dad in here just now! And James he…..” Judy furrowed her brow. She was forgetting something. Something important and it was staring her straight in the face. “he……”

“Oh, now that can’t be right….” Bonnie scratched her plump chin.

The faint electronic chime of a doorbell caught the two does attention. Bonnie’s face split into a smile.

“Oh, that must be them!”

“Who? Who are you talking about Mama?” Judy looked back and caught a glimpse of Bonnie shuffling towards the front door. Judy slid from the chair and hurried to catch up, she was unwilling to stay in a creepy dining room void of its usual hustle and bustle. To her surprise when she crossed into the foyer it suddenly got dark and Judy lost sight of her mother.

_Did the power go out?

“Mama! Mama, where are you! I think someone tripped the breaker again!”

No answer.

“…. Mama?”

Alarm bells crashed and clanged in the does head as the blood drained from her face. The distance between the dining room and the front of the warren was a couple dozen yards at most, so why hasn’t she bumped into anything yet?

_WHATS GOING ON?!_
“Jude, you okay?” A savory voice chirped. Just the sound of his warm, husky rumble sent excited chills down the doe’s spine.

And filled her with a sickening dread and sorrow like nothing else could.

No…. Anyone but him… Please God, anyone but-

She remembers now, why this was all wrong, this creeping sense of Déjà vu. This all happened before. She was reliving that day. The day everything fell apart.

Judy opened her eyes to dusty brown fur, shining hazel eyes and a broad crème colored chest.

James Leaps was tall for a rabbit (almost hare sized) and was nearly a head taller than Judy, so he had to tilt his chin almost to his chest to look into his horrified girlfriend’s vibrant amethyst eyes. James flashed his charming warm smile and Judy fought desperately to keep her tears from spilling onto the dusty road beneath their feet.

The day was winding down into dusk as the sky filled with streaks of pink and soft orange tinted clouds. The happy clamor of the carrot festival danced in the evening breeze as the couple stood on the old country road just outside the Leaps family farm where the festivities were held.

James felt Judy stop. He turned to her and lost himself in her beautiful eyes.

“What’s wrong babe?”

“J-James?” She squeaked around the strangling knot of despair. James tilted his head in another one of is disarming expressions Judy had come to adore. Though now that curious expression of concern had the opposite effect.

“What’s wrong?” He asked around a chuckle. “Fox got your tongue?”

Judy hadn’t realized they had been walking paw in paw. She immediately shoved him away and clutched her arms to her aching heart.

“This…. This isn’t real. This can’t be real…” In a mammoth sized effort, she looked up at her boyfriend and her heart shattered to pieces all over again at the hurt expression on his face.

“W-what’s not real Jude?” He asked in a pleading voice. “Babe, you’re scaring me. What’s wrong-?”

“YOU’RE DEAD!”

James jumped back in shock as the doe before him clenched her fists and held her eyes closed as she yelled. The grey fur around her eyes were stained dark as tears finally managed to force themselves free. Her body quivered and trembled and her breathing was ragged and shallow.

She took one long shuddering breath and thrust her paw out like a spear, as if she meant to pierce through the illusion around her.

“You’re dead!” Judy clawed at her watery eyes and thrust her finger at the carrot festival. “They’re all dead! Advent KILLED you! They k-k-killed you right here! Right in front of me on THIS ROAD And-and-and you told me-”

Judy tried to take a breath but all that came out was a sob. She looked through her tears at the distorted face of her boyfriend and she found the strength to pull air into her lungs.
“You told me to run and save myself.” She hung her head in shame and cried.

Strong, familiar paws wound their way around her back and shoulders. James’s almond like scent filled her burning lungs and she collapsed into his chest and wailed, no longer caring that this was all a dream.

She missed this so much it hurt.

“Shhhhhhh…” Judy felt his chest rumble against her cheek. He felt so warm. So real.

“You know…” Judy hiccupped and rolled her head up to look into his handsome face.

“This is all your fault.”

Judy’s eyes widened in horror.

“What?”

James’s tender smile twisted impossibly wide grin. Razor sharp rows of shark teeth filled his maw as his warm hazel eyes pulled into thin snake slits. Judy felt viciously sharp talons dig into her back as the nightmare that was her deceased boyfriend pulled his prey closer.

Judy tried to scream but the air she breathed in burned her throat and tasted like hot ash.

“You did this to me Judy. You KILLED me.” The nightmare titled his head skyward and laughed.

“Everyone’s dead because of you!”

Judy thrashed against the claws that ripped at her back. The worst was not the teeth or the feral grin that pulled across that terrible maw, it was James’s familiar almond scent. This monster had the scent that had comforted her, the scent of the buck she loved belonged to this…… thing.

James ripped the struggling doe off her feet until they where muzzle to muzzle. Those reptilian eyes drilled into her terrified violet gaze. The monster’s smile broadened. Unhooked one set of talons from the doe and thrust the bloody appendage down the country road.

“I wonder how your mother feels, knowing that his little girl is to blame for all of this?” He growled, his voice sounded like razors in a rusty blender. “How can you and her LIVE with yourselves knowing that you survived when all of the others at the carrot festival DIED saving you?”

Without warning James sank his talons into Judy’s cheek and forced the screaming doe to look. Judy’s scream caught in her throat.

They were in front of the Hopps warren, her home.

Bodies, gore and blood painted every square inch of the hill as rolls of smoke and flame bellowed from the windows and doors. The barns were little more than blackened skeletons and angry embers as the once pristine fields burned and died under a relentless shower of ash and hot, choking air.

N-no…

[Something is wrong. Pronk, what did you do to her?]

James yanked the doe’s head around and caressed her cheek with a talon stained bright red in her
own blood.

[I-I don’t know what you mean sir. Nuthin’ should be wrong I-]

“**You did this.**” James whispered, his teeth grazed along one of her velvet soft ears making the doe jerk and buck in panic at knowing what was coming next.

[She’s having a GODDAMN SEIZURE Pronk! What in the fiery Alps did you force down her throat?!]

“**Oh, now babe, don’t fight it.**” James chided her like a naughty kit as he drew one of her ears into his maw. “**You used to LOVE when I nibbled on your ear. Remember?**”

Judy bucked and fought harder to escape the nightmare reflection of the one she loved.

[I-I gave her some sleeping aids sir! That’s all! I SWEAR!]

“No! PLEASE! JAMES DON’T DO THIS!” Judy begged and cried as his teeth clamped down on her ear harder and deeper. “**PLEASE!**”

[Those sleeping aids are for wolf-sized mammals Pronk! She’s barely the size of my paw! You just force fed her a lethal dose! Bucky, get your hide over here. We need to pump her stomach and get her system flushed now!]

The pain was unbearable as the rows of shark teeth shredded her ear and pulled the thin fleshy appendage free followed by a spray of ruby red blood that coursed down her back and into her pink flannel shirt.

[Hold her down! We don’t wanna hurt her more than she already is. Strap her down into the gurney. Hurry!]

“Don’t cry Judy,” James cooed as he greedily slurped down her shredded ear like jerky. “**You’ll soon join me, your father, and most of your siblings in the afterlife. Then you’ll make everything right.**”

[We’re losing her! Get the paddles! Get them NOW. Hold her straight. 3. 2. 1. CLEAR!]

Everything was growing dark. It all felt…. So far away. The pain. The terror. The heartache…. She felt a tiny smile break out on her muzzle. A sweet, sad smile.

[Don’t you die on me Hopps, stay with me. 3. 2. 1. CLEAR!]

She was almost home.

[CLEAR!]

It’s so warm here….. the darkness felt like a soft blanket caressing her tired body as she felt everything slip away-

[CLEAR!]

-Into darkness.

[CLEAR!]
I am still open for those looking to assist on this project, even if it's just an email or message throwing around an idea or cool thought.

I'm open to your creative ideas and unique opinions. Don't hold back!
Chapter 7: Operation Gatecrasher Aftermath

Chapter Summary

The bloodied remnants of Gatecrasher finally arrive to the Avenger, an alien supply ship retrofitted by XCOM as a mobile command center. Judy Hopps is unconscious from one of the Paramedics force feeding her wolf-sized surgical sedatives, a mistake that nearly proved fatal. Central Officer Wolford speaks with Skye Shen, the chief engineer about the state of the Avenger and reminiscing about Skye's kithood.

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A/N: Hey Y’all! Untraveled here.

For those reading this on Fanfiction.net this is may be the first time you are actually hearing from me. If so thank you for your time and attention, now on to business!

Kazooman (AO3): Thank you for your constructive feedback. I forget that many readers may never have even heard of the XCOM games much less know anything about them. I will do my best to better explain the world better, and I’m glad you like my story! People like you make writing stories worth it.

pt1oef (FF): Thanks for hanging in there literally since I first posted this story over a month ago on FanFiction.net. I apologize for the cliffhanger in the last chapter, but the last chapter was titled a “Nightmare” for a reason! I also want to thank you for suggestions of titles for this fanfic. I probably would have been too lazy to actually give this story a proper title if not for you. You rock.

Zeaza (FF) (chapter 5): Thanks for giving me and this story a chance, I’m glad you are enjoying it! As for earth’s mammals reacting to the reptilian Alien forces…. Well how would you react id you can face to face with an angry 7 foot tall snake lady with a plasma rifle? Lol.

P.S. If you are interested in throwing your two cents in with the story or simply want to ask a question to put it in the comment section.

Comments are always welcome, and I will do my best to give you a proper reply!

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Chapter 7: Operation Gatecrasher Aftermath

[Avenger, this is Firebrand. We are touching down now. Three casualties on board, two in stretchers and one ambulatory. Over.] The Skyranger’s pilot reported over the radio.

[Firebrand, this is the Avenger. Good copy, additional paramedics are already on deck to receive
the wounded. Doctor Tygan is on standby getting Med-Bay spun up for the Commander’s arrival. Over and out.]

Firebrand, the cougar queen pilot, swung the nimble jumpship in a smooth, tight circle before easing off the throttle. The Skyranger fell from the sky to hover less than twenty feet from the ground as it skirted along the desert floor. The craft’s twin thrusters kicked up a scorching hot cloud of dust as Firebrand artfully glided her jumpship sideways across the landscape towards a deep crack in the earth several hundred yards across.

When the Skyranger slid off the desert sand into empty air Firebrand tilted her jumpship’s blunt bow skyward as she flicked a switch, releasing the Skyranger’s three landing skids.

As she was swallowed into the crevice’s shadow Firebrand caught a brief glimpse at what appeared to be an enormous warehouse with four monstrous sized inverted hover-thrusters and a wide landing pad at its stern.

The gargantuan aircraft seemed considerably alien with its otherworldly four thruster propulsion system and sleek, graceful hull that looked like it was constructed of liquid metal flowing over a cast of a Skyranger magnified to a hundred times its original size. The bow of the craft was blunt with a cylindrical power core glowing a soft blue hue that scattered across the cragged crevice walls. The ship’s main twin inverted turbine thrusters, each the size of a football field, protruded from the flowing hull of the ship with two smaller engines at its stern.

Though it cut an intimidating figure the gargantuan engines lay dead, leaving the ship grounded in the deep crack in the earth’s crust. This disconcerting detail did not escape the Skyranger’s pilot as she pulled her jumpship to a low hover over the larger vessel’s landing pad.

Inside the Skyranger’s hull the overhead lights blinked from green to red, the color change was accompanied by a deep-toned beep that signaled to the mammals inside that they were landing.

“When we land get the Commander off the Skyranger fast! We don’t want lose him when we are so close!” John Wolford barked.

“Yes Sir!” A bulky caribou paramedic answered seconds before the Skyranger touched down with a shuddering roar of twin turbine engines and landing gear scrapping against tar-mac.

The Skyranger’s ramp lowered and the jumpship was instantly swarmed by a hive of medical personnel of all shapes and species. Organized chaos was the order of the day as the hot desert crevice shook with a disorienting cacophony of shouts and pounding of paws on tar-mac.

Central let out a weary but satisfied sigh as the huge cape buffalo in the stasis suit was wheeled away in a gurney by no less than seven mammals milling around him. He gasped in suppressed pain and clased a paw to his side.

His shirt had been cut away leaving the aged timber wolf bare-chested with a firmly bound mat of bandages pressing against a couple of ragged bullet holes stuffed with combat gauze, wounds courtesy of that Advent officer. The magnetically accelerated rounds had thankfully missed anything vital but still left a trail of traumatized flesh in its wake leaving the graying timber wolf in a considerable amount of pain.

The rest of the medical team had already vacated the Skyranger and were currently mulling over the Commander’s gurney as the stasis suit clad bovine is rapidly wheeled into the ship’s belly
towards the prepped Med-Bay, leaving Wolford hunched over in his seat with an unconscious Judy Hopps strapped in the last remaining gurney.

Wolford cocked an eyebrow and glanced around at the now abandoned landing pad with an annoyed frown stretched across his scarred muzzle.

*Did those bubble-heads seriously just leave me with an over drugged bunny? Seems some remedial training and corrective counseling is in order.*

Wolford’s pain-addled mind wandered to all the creative punishments he could cook up for those unfortunate medics that left two severely wounded soldiers stranded on the landing pad. Images of crying mammals running laps around the crevice with logs on their shoulders pulled a tiny grin onto his lips as the Skyranger’s overhead lights flickered out and the whining turbine engines died.

The hiss of the jumpship’s cockpit door sliding open jerked Wolford from his wistful plans of revenge. Firebrand had a gold furred paw on the door frame and a confused turn in her head. The cougar was still wearing her black pilot helmet along with a matching flight suit of matte with tin red accents that clashed with her glossy gold fur.

“Are you waiting on something sir?” She asked, her voice muffled by the helmet.

“You forgot your helmet again, Carla.” Wolford smirked.

“Wha? Oh! Shit, I fly so often I always forget to take the damned thing off.” The cougar hastily snatched the pilot helmet off and tucked it up under her arm. She shook her head and did her best to play off her embarrassment, though the deep shade of red inside her round ears did little to hide it.

Wolford’s weak chuckle was quickly cut by a pained groan.

“Sir, where is the medical team? You’re looking kinda green… and so is that rabbit you have on that stretcher.”

“That gaggle of chuckle-heads you call a medical team took off with the Commander.” Wolford leaned back in his seat with his eyes closed and head tilted upward. He did his best to keep his breathing even and shallow to avoid moving too much and aggravating his wounds.

“Turns out trying to suck up to the new mammal in charge is more important than some tired old war-dog and a rabbit OD’ed on force-fed sedatives.”

“Is she still alive?” Carla asked.

She frowned and leaned over the gurney to sniff curiously at the unconscious bunny occupying it. Wolford grunted an affirmative and cracked an eye open to look at the cougar pilot.

“She should be… Fine. One of the paramedics, Pronks, shoved some wolf-sized sedatives down the poor girl’s throat. No one noticed his error until the seizures started. she started foaming at the mouth and thrashing around in her seat, scratching at her bandaged wounds while screaming and crying like she was being eaten alive. It took three of us to get her into my gurney and tied down. It took even more to induce vomiting, pump her stomach, and get an IV in her arm to flush her system.”

The timber wolf dragged a paw down his face. He was absolutely drained; this ordeal had taken a lot out of him. Losing half of his team, both of them fresh-face rookies at that, was a considerable loss both to personnel and morale. Hopefully Hopps could make a full recovery fast. He needed
new people, the only soldiers he had left were either recovering from injuries or already on various missions throughout the north and central American continent, he simply can’t afford to lose anymore mammals.

Carla checked the IV bag handing above the sleeping bunny and found it empty.

“Should… we wait ‘til someone comes to get you two?” She asked. Wolford sighed and shook his head.

“No, Hopps needs immediate medical attention. Have Tygan take a look at her after he’s done with the Commander, though I don’t know how long that will take him, truth be told.”

“What about you?”

“I’ll manage.” He flashed the pilot a tired but still charming smirk. Carla was about to say something else when she had cut off by another female’s shout.

“Oh, I don’t think so!”

An arctic fox in overalls and covered in smudges of soot and machine oil stormed across the landing pad and up the Skyranger’s ramp with an angry snarl on her slender muzzle. Burning blue eyes bore into Wolford’s hazel gaze, firmly pinning the bigger canine in his seat. The arctic fox marched past a stunned Carla and right up to Central where she put her paws on her hips and fixed him with a glare.

“John, what are you still doing up here? Have you been shot?! Why in karma’s name aren’t you sitting in Med-Bay?”

Wolford found his voice rather quickly and met the vixen’s glare with a tired smile.

“It’s good to see you too, Skye. As for why I’m up here instead of down in Med-Bay is that all the medics decided to go drag the Commander down to Tygan. They just left me and Hopps here high and dry.” He watched the fiery arctic vixen’s hackles lower as she grasped the situation. Skye Shen, XCOM’s chief engineer, was well known for her driven work ethic and emotional personality, qualities that have endeared her to many of the crew.

“Those numb-skulls!” She fumed. “I hope you have a good punishment lined up for them John or else I’ll end up using their useless hides as target practice for my weapon prototypes.”

Wolford turned his head in a thoughtful expression, one of his ears perked up while the other lay flat.

“Huh, that’s actually not a bad idea.” He hummed. “I’m sure at the very least they’ll get plenty of cardio.”

The wounded canine hauled himself to his feet and very nearly fell muzzle first with the first step. Skye Shen may be half the timber wolf’s size but she’s stronger than she looks. She managed to catch him with her paws over her head.

“Sweet Maid Marian, why are you so heavy?” Skye groaned.

“It appears my pride is weighing me down a bit more than usual tonight.” Wolford righted himself but put a paw on the concerned vixen’s shoulder to keep his balance. The pained wolf shot her an appreciative smile and turned to Carla.
“Thanks Shen. Carla, mind wheeling Hopps down to Med-Bay? I’ll be right behind you, it may just take a while.”

“No problem sir. I’ll get the carrot farmer down there safe and sound, just don’t be testing gravity on your way down the steps. We just got the Commander back, but that don’t meet jack unless we got you to keep us afloat.”

The cougar’s snarky comment drew a chuckle from Skye and a frown from Wolford.

“I appreciate the vote of confidence, now get your tail in gear before I have you join the rest of the medical team in target practice tomorrow.”

“Yes Sir! Moving Sir!” The cougar shot him a faux two fingered salute and quickly made herself scarce with the gurney and its unconscious bunny doe occupant in front. When her skinny feline tail whipped around a bend and vanished Wolford began his slow journey into the belly of the ship while leaning heavily on Skye for support.

“How’s the Avenger?” He asked, breaking the suddenly uncomfortable silence between them. Skye shrugged, her blue eyes wandering just as her thoughts were.

“This ship is still grounded until I can get an Elerium power converter. But the rest of the retrofitting has more or less been complete, at least complete enough to get the Avenger off the ground.” She sighed.

Her normally sharp, clear blue eyes became clouded in a sad sort of reminiscence. Just as Shen knew him well enough to read his emotional tics he knew hers as well. He literally knew her all her life. Her entire kithood was spent in his presence, before the alien invasion at least.

“Your father would be proud.” He said, his voice barely above a whisper.

He felt the young vixen flinch under his paw at the mention of her parent, the fur around her neck bristled before relaxing. Her scent soured in a flash of anger before dampening to the salty musk of sorrow.

The old timber wolf gently squeezed her shoulder.

“I’m sure Nick would be too.”

Skye snorted wetly around a sudden flood of tears. She wiped a paw across her snout and sniffed.

“You really think so?” She asked around a teary smile.

“I do. He may not have shown it, but he cared about you. You had a special place in that snarky con-mammal’s heart.” A sad smile stretched across Wolford’s muzzle as memories of days long past filled his mind.

*Has it really been twenty years already?*

“It’s Uncle Nick’s birthday in a week.” Skye mumbled. “Uncle Nick and Dad’s birthdays are only a few days apart.”

“Do you want to do something special this year?” He asked.

“Like what?”

“pawpsicles?”
Skye snorted, and wiped her running nose in vain, her tears dried the fur around her eyes into crusty discolored rings of white.

“Uncle Nick did always love those… He never did tell me why though.” She sniffed.

“I know.” Wolford said soothingly.

“…He died on that mission before I could ask.”

“I know.”

“Maybe we can make the pawpsicles out of strawberries and spirits?”

“I think Nick would approve.” Wolford chuckled. “Your father would too for that matter.”

“I miss them John.” Skye whimpered.

“Me too Skye.” He said in a tiny voice. “Me too.”
Eeh, What's up Doc?

Chapter Summary

Commander Bogo is rushed down to Med-Bay where Doctor Jack Tygan and Central Officer Wolford discover some unsettling details and are reminded that with the Aliens, not everything is ever as it seems.

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A/N: Hey Y’all!

So, this chapter is rather short because I chopped it off a bigger chapter since it did quite flow right. I will be posting the remaining parts soon.

Now, let’s get straight down to business.

Those of you that are familiar with the XCOM franchise know that customizing your soldiers is half the game. I was brainstorming for character ideas and struggling to do so when it hit me, why should I be the only one to create characters when I have you guys for reinforcements!

So here is the deal. To create a character for ZCOM I need these few things:

1. Name, Age, Gender, Species
2. Appearance
3. Brief history (i.e. lived in the woods since the invasion until found by XCOM scouts)
4. Basic personality traits (i.e. Optimistic, Clumsy, Womanizer)
5. At least two positive traits (i.e. Good with a rifle, funny, fearless)
6. At least two flaws (i.e. Hates foxes, fear of fire, alcoholic)

You can either post your character in the comment section. I look forward to what you come up with!

For those of you who have never heard of the XCOM franchise, don’t sweat it, if you have a character that you thought of but don’t have the writing skills to put them into a story I will find a way to make them fit. I love a challenge!

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Chapter 8: Eeh, What’s up Doc?

“Wheel the Commander in quickly! There is no telling the sort of damages twenty years of muscle
atrophy has caused.”

A dark gray hare adorned in doctor’s whites and a pair of sleek bifocals balanced on his muzzle stood atop one of the desks that populated the Avenger’s Med-Bay directing the surge of personnel rushing into his domain.

The hare looked to be in his early thirties with three black stripes on each cheek and matching black ear tips. The dour frown the large lapine worn was magnified by the authoritative air that hung about him like a cloak. Though his manner of speaking was quieter and nearly bordering on regal his confidence in his actions and the rapt crack in to his voice demanded obedience much like Central Officer Wolford.

The lapine doctor threw his finger at a tall observation table surrounded by a disorienting collection of machines and tubes.

“Set him down here, quickly!”

Within seconds the large cape buffalo wrapped in the orange stasis suit was lifted from the gurney and set on a steel observation table with as little jostling as possible. The hare leapt halfway across the room in a display of agility well known for his kind and landed on the observation table without even a slight stumble, giving the impression that hopping from countertop to countertop was a typical practice for the lapine doctor.

The hare leaned over his patient’s concealing helmet as to look for a way to loose the damnable suit that restricted his ability to treat his patient. He felt about the seam where the suit’s face plate met the thick plastic and pulled. To his surprise the face plate came loose with a sucking slurp followed by a surge of noxious clear liquid that burst from the suit like pus from a festering wound.

The room filled with moans and wet gagging as the clear viscous liquid poured out, releasing a revolting stench of moist shit, piss and countless other bodily fluids filled the Med-Bay’s modest space. It appears that forcefully removing the Commander from the capsule has played havoc on the stasis suit’s life support functions resulting in the unpleasant odors the doctor and the medical team had just discovered.

The hare seemed unfazed by the stench, even though he was the one closest to the source, instead he chose to hurry the stasis suit’s deflation by finding the zipper running down the center and ripping it open. The orange suit peeled like a banana as the remainder of the thick, disgusting liquid flooded over the table and rushed into the drains set into the table and floor.

The doctor looked up at the gaggle of mammals that had collected at the Med-Bay’s door as they coughed and gagged from the stench. The doctor’s short muzzle pulled into a small scowl of distain.

“If you can’t handle a little ripeness than please find your way out of my Med-Bay.”

When none of the medics moved nor even acknowledged the hare’s command his scowl deepened with a shadow of irritation taking over his bespectacled eyes.

“You are distracting me, so leave.”

That seemed to have gotten some of his audience’s attention as several of the medics held their breath and shot the doctor distrustful sneers. A muscular red kangaroo hopped forward, his long muzzle twisted in a snarl.

“Just because you left Advent and got vouched for by Central don’t mean we trust you, Tygan. Not
enough to leave ya alone with the Commander.” He crossed his arms across his chest and stomped his powerful hind paw for emphasis. “We ain’t going anywhere and there ain’t nuthin’ that can make us.”

“Is that right?” A canid growl dripping with anger sent the large marsupial rocketing up in the air in fright.

The kangaroo and his posse of medics spun around and found themselves nose to nose with a very unhappy Central Officer Wolford leaning on an equally angry Skye Shen. The pair and apparently caught up to Carla as she had to take the long way around with Judy Hopps still out cold in the gurney. Wolford’s barely restrained snarling sent a shower of cold sweat poured down the kangaroo medic’s nape.

The Kangaroo’s scoop like ears flopped back as he backed away from his superior with his paws waving him away defensively.

“Sir! I meant no disrespect-!”

“Out.”

“Meep!” The gaggle of medical personnel squawked and bolted from the door in a whirlwind of fur, tails, and hooves. In seconds the cries of the fleeing miscreants died, leaving the five mammals in a blessed quiet, except for one unfortunate soul.

Central clamped a paw onto a trembling Oryx who had been valiantly attempting to avoid eye contact with the grizzled combat veteran.

“Not you Pronk,” Wolford leaned in close and growled into the terrified medic’s ear. “You are going to take care of Hopps and you are not to leave her side until she wakes up. And if she doesn’t- “

Pronk stifled a gasp of pain as thick canid claws dug into his skin.

“-well, lets pray it never comes to that.”

The Oryx looked fit to collapse into a blubering mess when Central mercifully released him, leaving his shoulder angrily stinging from the claw marks he left behind. Central felt a trill of vicious satisfaction at Pronk’s blank expression of horror at the implications of his words. The wolf cracked a grin and looked at Carla, who was mirroring a similar smirk on her own muzzle.

“Carla, you can hand over the gurney to our gracious volunteer here, so you and Skye can get some rest.”

The cougar queen bobbed her head obediently and relented Hopps over to the near catatonic medic. Skye however was less cooperative.

“I’m staying.” She grabbed his paw that was leaning on her shoulder and pulled. Wolford shook his tired head.

“No, you are not. There is little you can do here and don’t think I haven’t heard about your poor sleeping habits.”

“My sleep schedule isn’t any of your business.” Skye retorted.

“Shen, I’m afraid it is my business.” Wolford snapped. “You haven’t left your workshop in over 72
hours! Don’t make me order you.”

The softer tone at the end of Wolford’s plea pulled at the stubborn arctic vixen’s conscience. Her rebelliously rigid ears wilted, and she cast her eyes to her feet.

“Fine.”

Wolford hated pushing around the younger mammal, after all she was practically the daughter he never had, but she was still part of his responsibility as interim commander of XCOM. Though the dejected droop in her ears and tail did pull at his heart strings a bit too tight, tight enough at least for him to offer an olive branch of sorts.

“How about this, when anything with Commander Bogo changes than I will call you down immediately. Does that sound good?”

“I suppose….” She may have tried to sound defeated but the slow wag in her bushy tail and the tiny upward curl in her lips gave away her true feelings.

Ugh, why do females have to be so complicated? Wolford had to fight the urge to roll his eyes but settled for scuffing up the fur between Skye’s ears, fully aware of how much she hates when he does that.

He first caught a whiff of the stench coming from the clear liquid even from down the hall and the foul odor only grew worse. Predator species tended to have extremely sensitive noses so the stench that permeated the Med-Bay was nearly enough to send even him scampering away in search of a toilet to hand his head over.

Skye, in her hesitation, caught a whiff of the stench wasn’t faring nearly as well as the timber wolf and clenched her arms around her stomach and gagged, her tongue arching from her mouth as she heaved. Carla however had actually slipped on her pilot helmet to block out most of the smell and led the suffering arctic vixen from the room before she had a chance to add her dinner to the toxic airborne cocktail.

Central fought down the nausea somehow managed to swallow the knot of bile that squirmed up his throat.

“I apologize for my peoples’ blatant disrespect, Doctor Tygan.” Wolford apologized thickly. He was keeping his breathing slow and shallow to avoid choking on the pungent air.

“Apology accepted.” The doctor replied curtly. Wolford felt a flash of jealousy towards Tygan’s duller sense of smell, the hare seemed fairly immune, while just a tiny sniff was enough to send the room swimming around the wounded wolf.

Wolford prayed that this exam would go by quickly.

“How is the Commander looking?”

“I was about to find out myself. If you could, help me rid the Commander of this suit.”

“With pleasure.”

With Wolford’s help the nude Cape Buffalo was freed from his fabric prison, allowing Doctor Tygan to begin examining his patient. The hare turned away from Wolford and scurried over to his collection of machines to pull out his audio recorder and his “Doctor’s tool bag” of monitoring devices.
Tygan slung the bag across his front and knelt down to the buffalo’s head. The bovine’s muzzle was nearly as large as the hare’s entire body, making the unconscious mammal easily dozens of times larger than the lapine doctor. Small size does have its advantages however, thus allowing the hare to get closer observations than mammals larger than he.

Doctor Tygan clicked a tiny recording device peeking out of his coat’s breast pocket and began to speak as he examined his patient.

# Doctor Tygan, Patient Log Number 107 #

Name- Adrian Bogo

Date of birth- April 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1970

Date Declared MIA: March 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2015

Age at Date of Disappearance: 45 Years Old

Date of Recovery: July 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2035

Age at Date of Recovery: 65 Years Old

Initial Examination:

Personnel records from before the Alien’s invasion confirm the patient to be Adrian Bogo, former Commander of XCOM.

Commander Bogo was brought in wearing a stasis suit of some sort filled with an unidentified liquid that smells of refuse and any other manner of bodily fluids.

First impressions of patient health are rather miraculous. No real signs of muscle atrophy or decay and besides a slow heart rate (no doubt a result of drugs) there appears to be nothing outstanding about Commander Bogo’s health.

The one thing that does stand out to me is that despite Commander Bogo’s advanced age. Should this prove to be a delayed result of residing in that stasis suit for two decades remains to be seen.

Evidence of cranial surgery is present at the base of the skull, just above the nape of the neck. It appears to be a chip of some kind, an implant similar to the one I had during my tenure at Advent’s research facility. The purpose of such a device on a comatose prisoner are currently unknown.

Attempting immediate removal of the implant may prove fatal, though the alternative of leaving the implant in is foolish and just as risky.

# End Log #

Doctor Tygan clicked the recorder off jerked back in surprise at the slack jawed expression of shock on Wolford’s face.

“What’s wrong John?” Tygan asked. The hare’s question caused the wolf to catch his jaw and close his mouth, though his round eyes only grew larger in disbelief. He swallowed to wet his suddenly dry mouth.

“He looks like he hasn’t aged a day since he was captured.”
Wolford’s bizarre observation pulled at the nagging thought that had been biting at Doctor Tygan’s own mind.

He was right, by all accounts Commander Bogo should be a little over 65 years old. The mammal on the aluminum table before them looked mid to late 40’s tops. The exact age range of the Commander Bogo that had led XCOM over twenty years prior.

Somehow the Commander hasn’t aged in twenty years.

The implications of what this means was unsettling at best. If the Aliens had found a way to slow the aging process than there is no telling how many others are trapped just like the Commander had been. At worst, the Aliens may have even found a way to cheat death.

Doctor Tygan swallowed dryly and did his best to push that spiraling train of thought to the back of his mind.

“We can deal with the details later John. We need to remove the implant. Can you keep his head turned?”

Wolford frowned.

“I don’t like this Jack, this is too risky.”

“There is no other option!” The hare shot back. He thrust a finger at the stubborn timber wolf. “We have no idea what that device is capable of. It must be removed and quickly! Hold him still and I will do it myself.”

Wolford reluctantly took hold of the buffalo’s curled horns and turned his head to allow Tygan access to the small chip of metal and plastic protruding from the Commander’s skull.

Wolford quirked an eyebrow at the bizarre surgical tool the doctor had produced from his tool bag.

“I take it this is considerably easier than when you had your chip removed?” The wolf asked.

Despite the deadly serious situation Doctor Jack Tygan snorted in laughter.

“Yes, it is. Not having to reach behind my head while trying to look at what I am doing the reflection of a couple of old bathroom mirrors is a relief. That and I actually have proper tools here instead of a dull kitchen knife and a pair of rusty tweezers.”

As he spoke the hare unconsciously ran a paw across a nasty patch of crisscrossing scars at the back of his head.

Wolford noticed this and politely coughed to draw the doctor from his musings. Tygan blinked at the wolf and shook himself from his thoughts to the task at paw.

“Hold him still John and let us pray all goes well.”
Chapter Summary

Judy wakes to find herself safe on board the Avenger. After being examined for any lasting damage Shen and Tygan butt heads before being abruptly summoned to the Avenger's Bridge by Wolford. Judy tags along in hopes of meeting the Commander, whom she had been a part of rescuing during Operation Gatecrasher.

When Judy arrives on the bridge she witnesses Wolford arguing with a tiny fennec fox with a bad attitude and a voice many octaves too deep. Appearances prove to be deceiving as this pint-sized vulpine proves to be the leader of a faction known as the "Reapers". Now, where as she heard that name before?

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A/N: Hey Y’all! So, to start things off there is a lot of world building and explanations in this one, so the chapter is longer than usual, I hope you are not too overwhelmed. Also, I want to thank the 7 readers who had submitted their own characters to ZCOM’s dossier. Thank you so much! When a reader’s character makes an appearance in ZCOM your name will be credited here in the Author’s Note.

Since we are on the subject I would love to hear more from you guys (and Gals)!

To submit your very own character into the ZCOM dossier I need these few things:

1. Name, Age, Gender, Species
2. Brief history (i.e. lived in the woods since the invasion until found by XCOM scouts)
3. Basic personality traits (i.e. Optimistic, Clumsy, Womanizer)
4. At least two positive traits (i.e. Good with a rifle, funny, fearless)
5. At least two flaws (i.e. Hates foxes, fear of fire, alcoholic)

Post your character into the comment section below!

If making a soldier or fighter isn’t to your taste than you don’t have to! Your character can be some shifty hustler, or a merchant, or maybe a mad scientist type, or just a regular mother on some fringe settlement living with her children.

I can’t wait to see what you all come up with!

Once again, thank you for your time and attention, now onward!

-Untraveled

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Chapter 9: Ghost Transmissions Part 1
Waking up in a hospital bed is nothing like in the movies. The odds of waking up surrounded by loved ones is slim to none and the journey from dreamland is rarely gentle or cute.

The first thing the brain processes is often smell, it is the sense most closely tied to memories, the sharp tang of medical tools and strong alcohol-based sanitizers overloaded the nose. Next comes taste, though the tongue only tasted of dryness and sour stomach acid. Touch closely followed, a hard pillow sized for a far larger mammal enveloped the head and long ears as crisply pressed bed sheets crumpled and slipped under paw. As soon as the body had processed the fact it was laying an unfamiliar bed in an unfamiliar place a symphony of hums, steady beeps, and the snores of a nearby large mammal flooded the ears, despite being buried in the uncomfortable pillow. Finally, the brain grasped that waking up was an inevitability and the sense of sight returned, registering closed eyelids-

-and pain, a nearly overwhelming amount of pain.

Judy whimpered, her natural instinct to move away to try and escape from the source of her pain caused her to roll back and forth in her bed and push away the covers while refusing to open her aching eyes. When the burning in her throat and behind her eyes failed to abate and her mind caught up with her body Judy realized that rolling around and moaning in agony was getting her nowhere, so she took a deep breath and tried calling for help.

But try as she might all that came out was a strangled cough, her words catching somewhere between her neck and her mouth like a sluicegate closing against a flood of water. She tried again and again but still no words could escape her lips. Panic built up in her chest like a growing worm squirming to find a way out.

Breathing suddenly became more laborious as her lungs rebelled against her and constricted themselves, forcing her to take faster, shallower breaths.

Judy thought she was dying, she begged that it was over soon.

Thankfully her thrashing and gasps for help woke up whoever was napping in the room. The voice sounded drowned out and distant, but she heard him nonetheless.

“D-Doctor Tygan! She’s awake!” An obnoxiously loud shout rang in her ears.

“Alright, I’m coming. Pronk, you are done here, go see Central Officer Wolford.” A smaller, more refined voice replied.

“W-what?” Pronk squeaked in disbelief. “Why?! I’ve been up with this dumb bunny for hours! So why do I have to- “

“Not my problem. Go report to Central.”

“But-!”

“Do not make me repeat myself again.”

“…. Y-yes Doctor….”

Before Pronk’s hoof steps had vanished from the room a pair of firm but gentle rabbit sized paws guided the suffering doe back to her uncomfortable pillow.
“You are safe, Miss Hopps.” The quiet and refined voice of the doctor said. “You are safe and sound. I know it hurts so just focus on the sound of my voice and take slower, deeper breaths.”

“And please, restrain yourself from crushing my paws into uselessness, I AM a doctor.” He chided with a pained edge to his voice.

Listening to Doctor Tygan’s voice did help Judy center her attention from her pain idled thoughts, at least enough to realize she had a white-knuckled grip around his fingers. With a considerable effort she released him and opted to dig her blunt claws into the hard mattress as she rode out the throes of agony that lanced across her compact body.

It could have been a few seconds, or an eternity she didn’t know, but when Judy did win the fight against her rebellious lungs to get her breathing under control the pain did recede, if only by a couple margins. She unhooked her death grip on the mattress and placed a paw on her chest and took a shuddering breath, she took solace in the feeling of her paw rising with her inhale and slow exhale.

She was going to be okay, she was going to be just fine.

“Miss Hopps?” Judy jerked against her pillow. She had completely forgotten she wasn’t alone.

“Have you calmed down?” Doctor Tygan asked.

Judy nodded, she didn’t want to risk aggravating her burning throat and angry lungs.

“Can you manage opening your eyes Miss Hopps? I turned down the lights, so you should not feel too much discomfort.”

Judy felt the crusty rings of sleep that had hardened around her eyelids as she pried them open. The first thing that caught her attention was how official everything looked.

The walls, floor and ceiling looked were steel and gray composite material that looked neither cold to the touch or uncomfortable to walk across, even with the tiny ridges pressed into the floors to give them traction. Everything in the room surrounding her rhino-sized recovery bed looked new and well maintained. Each machine was placed with a purpose in mind, Including the patient monitoring device that, until she had accidentally ripped out the electrodes and blood pressure clamp in her desperate thrashing, was keeping tabs on her condition.

Than she set her wide amethyst eyes on the mammal that had calmed her down, her surprise elicited a tiny gasp.

_Doctor Tygan is a hare?! I thought I was the only rabbit to join XCOM!_

Judy’s shocked expression didn’t escape the Doctor, but he didn’t realize that he was the cause. He assumed she was feeling overwhelmed with waking up in such a nice, albeit unfamiliar, environment. The only place you could normally see such a nice medical facility was in Advent’s hospitals.

Since she was supposedly from a fringe settlement there is a very good possibility that Miss Hopps had never actually been inside a structure that wasn’t riddled with rust and on the verge of collapse. Fringe settlements are often many miles from the closest thing that would even be considered “Civilized”.

It would not be a stretch to call where she lived little more than wilderness, a fact that the Advent propaganda machine was more than happy to point out on their television and radio broadcasts.
Doctor Tygan shook those irrelevant thoughts from his head with a tiny sigh. He pulled his tool bag over his hip and knelt on the mattress next to the wide-eyed doe.

“Can you speak?”

Judy unstuck her tongue from the dry roof of her mouth and swallowed with a pained grimace.

“A little, I think.” She croaked.

“Good,” Tygan flashed her a professional smile before tucking it away from his muzzle. He held a paw up and dug out a tiny flash light. “Blink a few times for me then keep your eyes open please.”

Judy did as she was told and Tygan began a swift examination to check for any sort of ill effects. Her responses were normal and besides a few lacerations around her neck that had been bandaged appropriately, (At least some of the medics weren’t a complete waste of space) so it seems the only real wounds left untreated were psychological, and Tygan was no therapist.

She seemed alright, but he was not going to take any chances, so he put his bag to away in favor of a clipboard with her personal information on it.

“I am going to ask you a few questions to make sure that you haven’t sustained any sort of traumas missed during your rather hasty treatments. Is that fine?” He looked at her over his glasses. Judy bobbed her head mutely and he turned his eyes back to the clipboard.

“Can you tell me your name please?”

“Judy Hopps.” She murmured.

“Full name please.”

A tiny flare of annoyance was quickly extinguished by a breathless sigh.

“Judith Laverne Hopps.” She croaked. Tygan glanced up at her painfully hoarse voice, his expression softened for a moment before slipping back into his professional mask.

“Age?”

“20 years old.”

“do you remember why you are here?”

“I… I got hurt.” Judy narrowed her eyes and looked off into space as she pieced together what happened. “I… um, the last thing I remember was taking a few pills from one of the medics, I think? It’s all fuzzy…”

Even though he had heard what happened Tygan couldn’t help the flash of anger and outrage that crossed his face, though he swiftly wiped them away.

“Yes, that was Pronk Oryx-Antlerson. He had given you a potentially lethal dose of drugs to put you to sleep. It very nearly killed you had Central Officer Wolford not intervened while you were enroute on the Skyranger.”

“Oh…. ” Judy didn’t quite know how to respond to that. Though, now that she thought about it those drugs may explain why her nightmare had been so…. real.

Doctor Tygan may not have been able to read minds but he knew enough about dealing with
traumatized patients to know when to leave well enough alone and move on.

“Do you know where you are?” He asked tenderly.

“…. No?” Judy tilted her head, causing her ears that draped down her back to fall around her arm in an expression that could only be described as adorable. Thankfully Tygan didn’t look up from his clipboard or else he would have been hit with a full dose of cute, a dangerous thing when dealing with emotional bunny does.

“You are on the Avenger.” He replied. “More specifically, you are in the Avenger’s Med-Bay.”

“I’m on the Avenger?!” Judy squeaked. Her ears springing to attention and her fuzzy paws curled over her delighted grin.

This time Tygan did look up and she actually got him to chuckle at her elation.

“Yes, I suppose it would be appropriate to say welcome to your new home, such as it is….”

Delight and excitement erupted in her core at his words. He called it her home!

“Thank you.” She whispered with a brilliant smile on her face, her buck teeth slipped from her lips and in full view, it was an innocent smile that took years off her drained and beat up visage. She looked like a kit again.

The hare felt his own lips tilt into a smile in reply.

Once the warm moment passed Judy’s smile faded.

“May I ask your name?” She asked.

“But of course,” The hare drew himself to his full height with his ears standing proud with a paw to his chest and glasses pressed smug to his face.

“I am Doctor Jack- “

“Jack Savage!” An irate bark shook the walls.

Both lapines flinched from the angry feminine shout, though in the doctor’s case he narrowly avoided taking a tumble off the bedside.

Once he untangled himself from his lab coat and bag the normally calm and collected doctor shot a rather heated glare towards the doorway.

“It is Jack Tygan. Doctor Jack Tygan.” The hare snapped impishly as he picked himself up off the mattress with as much dignity as he could salvage.

“In the future please refrain from using that infernal nickname, it is quite distasteful.” Tygan huffed as he straightened his clothes with a sharp tug. “Now, care to explain why you were sprinting all the way here bellowing at the top of your lungs?”

Judy’s nose twitched as her startled heart struggled to descend from its racing pace. She craned her neck to catch a glimpse at the owner of that loud feminine voice.

Then she saw a pair of sharp pointed ears above a narrow snow-white muzzle and her heart stopped dead in her chest.
“Well Doc, I wouldn’t have to yell if you hadn’t scampered off all of a sudden in the middle of briefing Commander Bogo.” Skye retorted with a roll of her blue eyes, the motion ended when her gaze landed on the bunny astride the hospital bed.

“Oh! She’s awake!”

Skye’s fluffy tail swished back and forth in an excited fashion as she bounded up to the bedside. The arctic vixen was just tall enough to set her muzzle on the mattress standing up, and she did exactly that to get a better look at the frozen doe gawking back at her.

“Hi!”

The vixen’s greeting was just a couple decibels shy of sticking an ear inside a punk rock band’s stereo system and with a rabbit’s already sensitive hearing it was scathing, like claws on a chalkboard. Both the doctor and poor Judy slapped their ears to their backs and screwed their eyes shut with hisses of pain.

Whether Skye realized she was the cause of their distress or not was up for debate, and if she did she clearly didn’t care, she simply stared at Judy with shining blue eyes while her muzzle rested on the bed and her feathery soft plume danced about behind her.

Judy clutched her already pounding head with a groan as she shook off the ringing in her ears. She slowly pried her eyes open and glared back at the culprit through half lidded eyes.

“You’re a fox!!” Judy yelped.

For a split-second Judy thought she saw hurt and surprise cross those curious blue eyes. snarky, heavy lidded expression dressed the vixen’s face. If Judy didn’t know any better, she would have said it was the face of a street hustler.

“Why yes I am. I suppose you have never met a fox before?” The arctic vixen asked, blessedly toning her volume down to more tolerable levels. Judy shook her head.

“I didn’t know foxes were still -er...” The doe stuttered to a stop, her brain finally catching up to her mouth. “…um, still around.”

The vixen’s snarky mask never even flickered, not even so much as a twitchy whisker. Instead the pure white fox wrapped her arms on the mattress and nestled her cheek on top.

“We may be hunted by Advent just for being born but it’ll take a lot more than that to get rid of us foxes.” The vulpine’s blue eyes sparkled in a deviously innocent manner. “After all, we aren’t called “Shifty” or “Sly” without a good reason.”

Judy’s ears burned pink in shame and her gaze stared listlessly in her lap. *I hadn’t meant to say it like that!*

“How are you feeling?”

“My throat is kinda sore, my neck feels like its stuffed in hot metal bands, and I hurt all over, but I think I’m okay.” Judy felt a tiny bit of relief in being able to answer an easy question. “C-can I ask your name?”

The bubbly vixen’s ears flicked up as a calm and controlled smile spread across her narrow muzzle.

“My name is An-Yi Shen.” When Judy realized she had tilted her head at the odd name and
quickly tried to play off her confusion the vixen simply giggled. “But my friends call be Skye.”

“Judy Hopps, it is a pleasure to meet you.” The doe hesitated for a short moment before thrusting her paw to the smirking vixen.

“I’m sure it is.” Skye’s pure white paws were smudged in a sticky coating of grease and metallic particles, something Judy realized too late as Skye found Judy’s paws too small to grab and instead opted to wrap her filthy digits around her entire arm and shook with enough energy to bounce Judy up and down in her bed.

Though she was momentarily distracted by the vixen’s “arm-shake” Judy noticed that Skye’s tone was guarded and loaded with a subtle sarcasm that left Judy unsure of where she stood with the energetic fox. She didn’t need too long to dwell on the vixen’s mood, she got the feeling pointing out her species’ systematic extinction just maaaay have something to do with it.

Judy’s guilt must have bled through onto her face because Skye mercifully relaxed her passive aggressive smirk and flicked her gaze to Doctor Tygan.

“Commander Bogo is still waiting on you at the command deck with Wolford.”

“Alright, I’ll go, it seems as though Miss Hopps is stable enough for the moment. I want you to rest.” His last words directed to Judy. He slipped from the mattress in a display of agility befitting his species and made for the door. He was halfway there when a tiny plea stopped him and caused his ears to swivel around to the suddenly small looking doe.

“Don’t leave me alone….” Judy squeaked flushed a deep red from her toes straight to the inside of her shaking ears. The doctor arched an eyebrow in mild disappointment.

Was this doe serious? I thought she was a soldier, according to Central she is already a killer! Now she’s acting like a scared kit?

“You will be fine on your own, you need to rest.” Tygan said firmly.

“Actually…” to both lapines’ surprise Skye cut in on Judy’s behalf. The arctic vixen flashed Tygan a winning smile full of teeth.

“I think she should come with us. Ya know, give her the tour of the place and get her some real food. She HAS been out for over 24 hours and IV’s only go so far with nutrition and hydration.”

Tygan’s neutral expression soured at the vixen looming over him with that condescending grin on her muzzle. He opened his mouth to retort and he was cut off again.

“Don’t you think so too, Doc?” Skye asked in a sickly-sweet voice as she closed the distance between them.

The hare averted his gaze and snorted. Thinking back, perhaps he was just feeling petty with Skye and her abrasively energetic personality, Judy was just collateral damage for his frustrations.

“Fine.” He sighed. “You can be the one to show Miss Hopps around the Avenger though, since I have a grumpy Buffalo no doubt impatient to get back to resting his head.”

“Sure, I don’t mind. Now just take that fuzzy-wuzzy little tail of yours and hop along now! It’s girl time. Shoo, shoo!” Skye shooed the fuming Doctor away like a naughty kit past his bedtime.

Tygan suppressed a growl and leveled a venomous glare at the grinning vixen.
“I am not your pet Miss Shen. I have had just about enough of your malicious and demeaning behavior.” His voice rose with every syllable.

“Yeah? Well bite me you Advent reject.” Skye snapped, her blue eyes instantly sharpening to an icy glare.

To the hare’s credit only his nose twitched a couple times when face to face with his natural enemy.

“Reject? I escaped from Advent and at considerable risk of my own life took a great deal of Advent’s research with me!” He shouted with a stomp of his foot.

There was no way to tell how long their bickering would have worn on but thankfully no one had to find out as a ravenous bunny stomach growled in indignation at being neglected for so long causing both mammals to snap towards Judy as her ears burned with embarrassment.

The thunderous gurgling was like a bucket of ice water for the two heated mammals as if finally dawned on them that they were not completely alone in their fight. Skye recovered first, she schooled her near snarl into an icy smirk as she brushed a greasy paw down the back of her neck to try and smooth down her raised hackles.

“Ahem, I better get our carrot farmer something to eat.” Skye coughed and turned away from a shamefaced Tygan.

“Yes, that would be best.” He looked at Judy. “I apologize for that unseemly display Miss Hopps, due to my past occupation it seems I still have a ways to go to garner everyone’s trust. I hope our disagreement does not give you the wrong impression. You will find that despite our differences and opinions every single mammal here is dedicated to combatting the Aliens and freeing Earth from Advent’s occupation.”

The hare bent into a small bow and swept swiftly from the room towards the command deck. Skye scrubbed a paw against a cheek, ruffling the fur there and sighed.

“He is right, I may not trust him or really like him, but we are on the same side.” The vixen held a paw large enough to envelope most of Judy’s back to help the doe from the mattress. Skye kept her paw close when Judy’s feet hit the floor in case the doe stumbled.

“Tygan and I are comrades, just like you and I now are.” The fox smiled, and a paw and Judy stuck her arm in for another arm-shake.

“Thank you.” The doe murmured around a bashful grin.

[Chief Engineer Shen to the command deck, Chief Engineer Shen to the command deck.]

Skye’s smile vanished with a concerned frown in its place.

“Come on, food will have to wait. John wouldn’t ask me to the bridge without a good reason.”

“Oh… Oh, okay. Right behind you!”

Normally Skye would have sprinted down the maze-like halls and up the three flights of stairs, but she settled for a hasty jog as she had an unsteady rabbit in tow. Judy was thankful for Skye’s consideration; her poor head was spinning as they dodged and dipped down hallways and stair cases seemingly random. If she had been by herself, she would have been lost within the first two minutes. It boggled her mind that this was actually a small portion of a massive airship’s guts.
Finally, Skye bounced up one final set of stairs and dodged around a couple coyote technicians deep in conversation into the Avenger’s bridge. Judy was panting, and her limbs shook but she was right on the energetic vixen’s heels. She realized that they must have made it to their destination and wiped a paw across her brow and tugged at her bandages constricting her neck.

When she caught her breath, she looked up around her and found it taken away all over again. Judy was struck speechless and in awe at what she saw. The Avenger’s bridge was a cavernous atrium centered around a reverently placed tactical holo-projector with a 3D image of Earth flickering in place at the apex of the room.

The holographic Earth was the beating heart of the Avenger and her crew’s efforts. It seemed to serve as both a reminder of what XCOM is fighting for, just as much as it served as a tactical map for the resistance’s efforts.

The bridge was a hive of bustling activity with every surface adorned with computers, monitors, meters, servers, weapon racks, tactical data, radios and a plethora of unfamiliar pieces of equipment Judy couldn’t even begin to fathom the purpose for. The doe looked up and found a second story to the bridge’s interior with two sweeping steel framed staircases at the stern of the room. The second floor was a platform that wrapped around the room with the Avenger’s viewports allowing in a dim trickle of sunlight into the otherwise artificially lit interior.

Judy was pulled from her slack jawed daze by a paw wrapping around her arm and tugging her towards the back of the room on the bridge’s bottom floor were a group of mammals were huddled around a very large computer screen.

Right of the bat Judy recognized Wolford’s back as the wounded timber wolf leand on the computer’s keyboard with a large swath of bandages that bulged the right side of his usual tan combat shirt. Standing off the side with his arms crossed and a frown etched into his features was Doctor Tygan, he looked to have been excluded from whatever discussion was taking place.

The final mammal as someone Judy didn’t recognize. He towered over Wolford, the tall canine barely came past his belt line, and nearly every other mammal in the room by a far margin with two swooping horns that sprouted from a layer of sterile white bandages around his head. The stranger’s chest was almost as wide as he was tall with rippling muscles and huge forearms that must each weight as much as Wolford.

When they were just a few feet away Skye leaned over and whispered softly into her ear.

“That’s Commander Bogo.”

A jolt of nerves and irrational fear punched through Judy’s chest. She grabbed one of her drooping ears and fiddled with the end.

That’s THE Commander Bogo! Cheese and crackers, what am I supposed to say? what am I supposed to do?! I- I don’t feel so good…

An almost primal panic fought for control of her body that screamed for her to turn right around and squeeze herself in a corner as far away as possible from the massive cape buffalo. It didn’t make any sense why she would feel this way about a bovine when she is walking right next to her historical arch-enemy, but no matter how much she tried to rationalize her feelings about it she only felt deathly nervous about being in the same room as the Commander, and she hadn’t even look him in the face yet, let alone actually talked to him!

I am so dead.
Skye pulled a trembling Judy with her and respectively stepped off to the side of the mammal huddle with Doctor Tygan to wait. Judy’s nose twitched as if someone had hooked her up to a motor and hit the accelerator. Regardless of her near tunnel vision and empty stomach full of nausea inducing butterflies Judy tried to listen in on the heated argument taking place mainly between Central and the mammal on screen.

“You are too trusting John.” A very deep baritone growl shook the computer’s speakers. “The Skirmishers are Advent. Advent is the enemy, and the enemy is food.”

Unease slithered up Judy’s spine. She didn’t like that voice. Not one bit. But her curiosity got the better of her, so she turned her head towards the obviously private conversation and took a peak as discreetly as possible. What she saw confused her more than anything else.

A desert tan fennec fox sat on the other end of the video conference with a wall mounted with the heads of unsettling and otherworldly creatures, none of which she could identify. The tiny fox had an elbow propped on the table with a huge cigar nearly as large as the fox’s arm that trailed a thin line of smoke in the air as he waved his paw around.

Judy was confused as to who that ridiculously deep voice belonged to because there is no way that pint sized predator could possibly be the one that voice belonged to.

Wolford rolled his eyes and glanced up at the ceiling hoping to find the patience to deal with this infuriating argument. He seemed to have found it because for the umpteenth time during this conference call he managed to school his frustration into a mildly annoyed grimace.

“Try not to bring that up when we meet with them. Volk.” He reprimanded the scowling fox as he crossed his arms.

The fennec Todd’s eyebrows rose in astonishment. When his voice rumbled over the speakers Judy’s eyebrows followed suit.

“You? Take their side!” The fox snarled. He shot a paw to the wall of mounted heads behind him. “After all we’ve seen these years?!”

His last words thundered across the bridge’s atrium causing every single mammal in the room to go silent and turn their heads toward the video conference.

Wolford felt the eyes of every single mammal bore into his neck. He fought to keep his fur from bristling in anger. He couldn’t let his emotions get the best of him here. Not when for the first time ever Volk had actually answered his calls and agreeing to discuss an alliance. This was too important, and everyone knew it.

Wolford let his anger out with a snort and swept his arms open in a complacent manner.

“Look, I’m not exactly having drinks with ‘em.” He admitted before putting his paws on his hips and fixed the pint sized vulpine with a glare. “BUT, the Skirmishers did hold up their end of the bargain. Without the intel they provided your operative never would have been able to find Commander Bogo in that gene therapy clinic.”

“What about you?” He thrust a claw at the glowering fox suddenly unable to meet Central’s eyes.

Volk went silent. The air seemed to thicken from the tension as the fennec looked off to the side and propped his muzzle on his arm and took a long drag from his cigar. Electric anticipation crackled in the air as every mammal in the room dared not to even breath.
It seemed as if the fox moved in slow motion as he breathed out a pluming cloud of tobacco and ground his spent cigar into a nearby ash tray. A deep, heavy rumbling sigh shook his frame and met Wolford’s gaze. Volk suddenly looked exhausted, worn, and just so tired of it all, but his eyes hardened and when he spoke Judy could practically taste the threat each word carried.

“I will send my best mammal to act as the Reaper’s representative for this meet with you and the Skirmishers.”

Wolford fought to keep his piercing scowl as a relieved smile threatened to break out, but Volk’s voice cut off any further celebration.

“But know this. If my representative is so much as scratched during this little exchange, or if I don’t like what he has to tell me- “

The fox leaned in close to the camera and pulled his lips back into a snarl full of razor sharp teeth.

“I’ll bite yo’ face off.”

Before Central could open his mouth to reply Volk slammed a fist down onto his console, severing the connection.

The room was still baring down on Central as he took a deep breath and raked a paw down his muzzle. At first Judy thought he looked upset but the huge grin that bloomed on his face said otherwise.

“I think they might actually show up.” He murmured.

He glanced around and like magic the room erupted into excited chattering and movement as if someone had finally hit the play button again, though now there was an optimistic air that mingled with the serious aura.

“Who was that?” For the first time the cape buffalo beside Wolford spoke. Judy was not surprised that the massive bovine sounded much like the tiny fennec fox did, with a voice that carried a natural air of authority that made her fight the instinct to snap to attention like she had so many times in basic combat training.

“Commander, that was Finnick Volikov. “Volk” to his friends.” Wolford explained to the towering cape buffalo. “He is the leader of a resistance faction known as the “Reapers”. He and his people are a big part of the reason why you are standing here today.”

He turned back to the computer and began pulling up what appeared to be three separate profiles on screen.

“Volk leads one of three major factions operating independent from us that we consider a legitimate threat to Advent. The “Reapers, the “Skirmishers”, and the “Templars.” Together they would make one helluva fighting force.”

“Too bad they all hate each other.” He sighed.

A photograph of Finnick scowling from beneath a dark hood briefly crossed the screen before being replaced by another photo of what appeared to be by a Lynx Advent Trooper with a strange twin bladed gauntlet submerged in the chest of an Advent Officer.

“The Skirmishers are the other faction I am hoping to form an alliance with. They are Advent Defectors. No one’s been big on working with these guys, knowing where they came from, but we
would have never managed to find where they were keeping you without their intel.”

The timber wolf stepped away from the console and gestured to the photos.

“Both the Reapers and the Skirmishers have agreed to suspend hostilities between each other provided XCOM acts as a go-between.”

He led Commander Bogo over to the hologram of Earth and typed a few commands into the display, showing the general locations of Reaper and Skirmisher territory on the North American continent.

“Since the Reapers are only sending a single operative we have agreed to allowing this lone representative to choose the meeting place. Volk told me that this Reaper will signal where the meet will happen in a few days’ time.” He said.

“How will this Reaper signal us?” The Commander asked.

“Volk was not clear on that.” Central shrugged. “All he said was that “You will know it when you see it.”, Whatever that means….”
Chapter Summary

Judy attends her fallen comrade's remembrance ceremony and meets with part of the Avenger's motley crew, meanwhile Central Officer Wolford discovers a mysterious signal originating from a location he had hoped never to step foot in again...

A/N: Hey Y’all! Untraveled here!

So, it took me a couple weeks longer than I would have liked to finish this chapter, but I was hit with a serious case of writer's block, but after several attempts and a couple complete rewrites I have finally finished it!

As always if you have a character you wish to see featured in ZCOM than please put them in the comment section below! I love to see what you, my dear readers, have to offer.

To submit your very own character into the ZCOM dossier I need these few things:

1. Name, Age, Gender, Species
2. Brief history (i.e. lived in the woods since the invasion until found by XCOM scouts)
3. Basic personality traits (i.e. Optimistic, Clumsy, Womanizer)
4. At least two positive traits (i.e. Good with a rifle, funny, fearless)
5. At least two flaws (i.e. Hates foxes, fear of fire, alcoholic)

Post your character into the comment section below!

As a side note every character does not have to be a soldier, there is an equal, if not greater, need for other characters. Your character can be some shifty hustler, or a merchant, or maybe a mad scientist type, or just a regular mother on some fringe settlement living with her children. Every character you give me is important and I can’t wait to see who comes up next!

Now, enough with the stalling, let’s get to the real reason why you here, Ghost Transmissions, Part 2!

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Chapter 10: Ghost Transmissions Part 2

“Commander, this is the mammal I was telling you about, our first rabbit soldier, Judy Hopps.”

When the drama from Volk’s conversation died down Central decided it was as good a time as any to introduce Judy to Commander Bogo, as she may not get the chance to later on. Judy’s awe and bewilderment at how fast her life had changed had her head spiraling and her emotions in disarray.

To think this day started off with her dying and strapped in a gurney.

Her trepidation only worsened as Commander Bogo turned his fierce, calculating gaze onto her.
Judy could feel him assessing her worth, her usefulness. She was painfully aware that if he didn’t find anything he liked she could very well find her cottontail dusting the ground by the Avenger’s landing gear with nowhere to go.

Bogo glared down his wide, scarred muzzle at the young bunny that was clearly fighting with herself to meet his gaze. Were he a lesser mammal he would have thought she was terrified of his size, however he had learned the hard way that is not always true with smaller mammals.

*Wilde certainly proved that much all those years ago…*

“You were part of the mission that is responsible for my rescue?” Bogo asked, his voice was still raspy and wet from 20 years of disuse, even if he couldn’t remember anything from that time gap. He tried to speak in a soft tone but all that he accomplished something akin to a humming growl.

The doe’s trembling ears smacked down over her shoulders, possibly because he sounded angry. Judy shrank back from the bull towering over her, her head dipped below her shoulders. It took every shred of determination and stubbornness she possessed in her tiny body to keep herself straight and her arms stuck firmly to her side.

“Y-yes sir! But…” The words stuck in Judy’s throat as her ears wilted and her eyes dulled. “…I didn’t exactly do much. That was-…”

*Remember Me and Ana, will you?*

“-Was Os-Osei and R-Ramirez.” She croaked in a broken whisper.

The normally stoic cape buffalo’s steely glare softened into a pitying frown of grudging understanding. Commander Bogo did not even know the mammals who had given their lives for his, and he will never get the chance. Judy was suffering from survivor’s regret, a vile, unrelenting parasite that, given the chance, will eat her soul from in the inside out. However, Bogo was at a loss as to how he should handle this, thankfully Wolford already had something in mind.

“It is a bit soon,” The timber wolf interjected, causing the distraught bunny to sniffle and look at him and drawing the Commander’s own curious gaze. “But I suppose it is a good time as any for the Memorial Ceremony.”

“M-Memorial Ceremony?” Judy hiccuped.

Skye’s slightly greasy padded paw gently circled around the doe’s shoulders and pulled her towards the hallway.

“Yeah, to honor and remember the… fallen.” The vixen explained. Her ears flicked as a stab of sorrow wretched into her heart. “We etch their names into the “Wall” down in the Avenger’s bar and hang up whatever mementos they left behind. Come on, I’ll show you.”

“I’ll put the word out that the Memorial Ceremony’s in 20 minutes.” Wolford called as Skye and Judy disappeared into the maze-like hallway.

Two flights of stairs and a couple left turns later found Judy in a room considerably smaller than the massive atrium that was the center of the Avenger. The Avenger’s bar seemed have been a cargo hold during its days as an Alien cargo vessel, now 30 foot by 120 foot room was converted into a watering hole for the Avenger’s freedom fighters and crew.

A bar stretched about half that distance and a motley collection of mismatched tables and chairs mostly for larger mammals were scattered haphazardly about the bar’s floor. A wall scarred with
the names of dozens of mammals and ragged polaroids of happier times ran the length of the room opposite the bar top.

The bar itself was of a peculiar design with accommodation of a wide range of mammal sizes in mind. The counter was made of metal with a textured rubber around its edges with stools that could be raised up to allow mammals of wildly different builds to share in food, drink, and companionship.

The wall behind the bar was decorated with rows and rows of alcohol secured in cleverly designed cubbies that kept the bottles from shifting when the Avenger was in flight with a professionally outfitted stainless steel kitchen encroached in the far corner that was flanked by a large freezer and refrigerator.

The bar was currently sparse in its patrons, despite its size in the belly of the converted Alien airship. Only a thin scattering of eight or so mammals nursing a drink here or there gave Judy the impression that it must be sometime before lunch as most the Avenger’s crew must be working.

The lack of staring mammals set Judy’s high strung nerves to a dull buzz as she allowed Skye to lead her over with a light paw to the bar’s counter where the pleasant purr of a humming Jaguar dressed in a loose white tank top, jean shorts, and a stained white apron messaged Judy’s inner ears in a cathartic manner.

Judy found her barstool sunk into the floor at a height she found convenient to plop down on and for a moment glanced around for any indication on how to get the curious furnishing to rise up to the countertop that loomed overhead. She found her answer as she caught a glimpse of Skye stepping on a lever at the stool’s base to bring the stool to her height to seat herself and holding a button on the side of the stool to rocket herself upward.

With a few seconds of blind groping Judy found an identical button on her own stool and squeaked as she lost her balance and clamped onto the soft felt less the upward momentum topple her from her perch.

When she arrived at counter level Judy was met with Skye’s blue eyes twinkling with a knowing light, but she had the good grace to keep her teasing for a later date. She knew Judy was in a delicate place and as much fun it would be to poke fun at the starry-eyed honey bun, the poor thing needed a few moments of peace to find herself and recollect her violently shaken composure.

Judy’s miniscule squeak of fright did not go unnoticed it seemed, as the pleasant humming abruptly stopped and the spotted Jaguar slaving over the stove in the corner wiped his sweaty brow with a handkerchief and slapped a towel over his shoulder with a plate of eggs and a peculiar veggie hash in one jet black paw.

“Alistair! Eggs ‘n nibbles up!” The jaguar chimed in a throaty tenor heavily laden under an accent Judy failed to identify.

“Appreciate it Oncason!” A copper and black furred arm reached between the doe’s ears and rudely brushed them aside to accept the plate of food.

Judy pulled her ears down her back and turned in her seat with a frown on her face. What appeared to be a cross between a wolf and coyote hybrid dressed like something straight out of a 90’s punk band slipped into the stool right next to her and tucked in, his coarse copper colored tail flicking back and forth.

“Excuse me.” Judy piped up, drawing the mammal from his meal and pulling Skye’s attention at
the same time.

The wolf/coyote’s ear flicked to the sound of an unfamiliar voice. He swallowed a bite and spun to face the rabbit. Judy had just enough time before he open his narrow muzzle to note that one of his eyes were gray and the other was green and his face was crisscrossed with old pale scars. These little details quickly became insignificant once the canine started speaking however.

“Well hello! I’m afraid I didn’t see you there. Now how did such a cute little bunny like you manage to sneak aboard, hmm?”

Judy’s nerves were already stretched taut from her ordeal as it stood, having some rock band wannabe throwing around the C-word certainly did not help.

Skye cringed at the accidental insult and sucked her teeth. This was not going to end well.

“First of all, don’t call me cute.” Judy jumped to her feet and pointed at the amused canid resting his head on his paw. “Second, I did not sneak aboard. I just came back from a mission. Third, I do not need some garage band reject that can’t seem to make up his mind whither he’s a coyote or a wolf to get all pawsy with me and INVADE MY PERSONAL SPACE!”

As the last vestiges of the little doe’s irate monologue died Judy was left standing astride her stool breathing like a winded racehorse with her fists clenched and her neck lacerations torn open and staining her bandages a light crimson.

The wolf/coyote was struck dumb by the sudden outburst. He was in his stool leaning away as far away from the crazy rabbit as possible. His tail sprang straight as a rod and bristled like a feather duster with his ears folded against the back of his head and at a complete loss at what to do.

Thankfully the Jaguar behind the counter did. Sorta.

“Bahaha!” The spotted jungle cat smacked a black paw on the counter. The feline wheezed in laughter with his huge vice of sharp teeth on full display. “You had it comin’ Ali’! You had it comin’ and she sure as hell let ya have it! Ahahaha!”

He smacked the counter once more and reined in his mirth and tucked his teeth behind his lips, though one snaggletooth still found its way into the big cat’s smirk.

He offered a paw to the baffled doe staring at him. One of her ears stood at attention while the other stuck out as if it was unsure of what to do with itself.

“Nathan Oncason. The Avenger’s best Bartender and the self-proclaimed resident therapist.”

Despite being a tenth of his size Judy felt an instant companionship with the jungle cat that she had only felt before with other bunnies. Somehow, she felt on equal footing in every respect with the suave bartender. No wonder he was considered the onboard therapist, self-proclaimed or not.

“Judy Hopps. It’s a pleasure to meet you Mr. Oncason.” Judy managed to wrap her paw halfway around the Oncason’s pointer finger and shook it warmly.

Then she looked down at the paw in her grasp and a tiny gasp slipped involuntarily from her lips. Oncason’s ear flicked and a sympathetic and somber smile. Judy’s paws shot to her muzzle and her ears drooped behind her.

“Oh! I’m- I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to stare.”
The spotted feline chuckled and waggled both paws above the counter to show the remorseful bun.

Several of the bartender’s fingers were either missing or cut off at a joint with pink scar tissue topping the shortened digits.

“Do not fret Rookie. It’s normal, I get stares all the time.” Oncason spread his mutilated paws wide to better show the damage.

“This is a gentle reminder of asking too many questions, curtesy of your friendly neighborhood Advent Peacekeepers.” He snarked with a wiggle of his paws.

For some odd reason they reminded Judy of a piano missing several keys. The only fingers that were left alone were his thumbs and a pointer finger on his left paw, the rest were randomly diced down to the fuzzy nubs the doe saw today.

“I… I don’t know what to say.” Judy admitted. Her bleeding neck throbbed an angry reminder at being momentarily forgotten.

“You do not have to say anything, everyone here has their scars and crosses to bear. I think you’ll fit in just fine Hopps.” Nathan slipped Judy a wink and sidled over to leaned on the counter in front of a smirking Skye.

“So, what do I owe the pleasure of your presence here so early in the day, An-Yi?” He purred with a mischievous smirk of his own.

“As you wish Skye. So… Sex on the Beach?”

“Oh God yes.” The vixen moaned in relieved anticipation and rested her head on the chilly aluminum counter, her blue eyes closed and a relaxed smile on her face.

The Jaguar swept a thin Highball glass from under the counter and wiped it down with a moist dishrag. Judy’s long rabbit ears sprang to attention and heated to a deep burning crimson, her mouth open in confusion. Her eyes bounced between the Jaguar and the Smiling vixen in silent astonishment.

*Are these two really talking about m-m-mating here?! And a Jaguar and a Fox no less!* 

“I, um… We are close to the Ocean?” Judy’s hesitation drew the pair in question’s eyes causing the shamefully curious doe to flush and fight the urge to bolt from the bar and swan dive off the Avenger’s landing pad.

“No, I can’t say we are really close to the water here.” Oncason was a bit slow on the uptake but Skye immediately caught on to what was going through the blushing bunny’s naughty little head.

Without lifting her head from the counter Skye turned to rest her cheek on the surface instead to lock eyes with the jaguar bartender with a playful spark in her eye.

“Hey Nathan, can you make it rougher than normal? I’m feeling rather restless and I got an itch for something… harder.”

“Sure…” The jaguar knew that he was missing something, but he decided to let it go for now and turn back to mixing the frosty cocktail with a more potent vodka than he would normally use.
Meanwhile, poor Judy looked red enough to pop. The rabbit was valiantly attempting to hide her burning face behind her ears as he pulled them down and groaned from embarrassment. Worse off, Skye wasn’t quite done with the bunny soldier yet.

“Hey Nathan, mind doing it right here? I’m sure Ms. Hopps would like to see exactly what those magic paws of yours can do.” She purred.

An involuntary squeak escaped the doe. Alistair was doubled over in barely contained mirth on the other side of the blushing bunny.

Still clueless as to what was going on Oncason shrugged and complied, setting the tall glass in his paw filled with crushed ice on the counter and expertly poured and stirred the remaining ingredients into the fox-sized highball with a swiftness born of many busy nights and countless hours in tiny bars strewn all over north and south America.

“One Sex on the Beach, with a little extra kick.” Oncason slid the frosty peach colored cocktail in front of a widely grinning vixen. Skye clapped twice in giddy glee and took an appreciative sip and melted into her seat with a long sigh.

“Oh Nathan, you magnificent mammal! What did I ever do to deserve you?” Skye cooed before diving back into the sweet alcoholic concoction.

“Alright Skye, I think the rookie is at her limit. she looks red enough to pop outta those bandages.” Alistair chuckled.

Judy felt lightheaded for sure and braved a peak by pulling an ear to the side and shooting Skye a look of bewildered betrayal. The fox didn’t seem to care in the slightest, but the sudden horrified face of dawning realization finally descended upon Nathan’s spotted muzzle.

“Ahaha! I get it now, you thought that I was offering to bend our dear chief engineer over the bar when we were discussing her drink!”

“Good Foxy Jesus Nathan, you are usually on the ball!” Skye swallow and snorted in a fit of laughter. “What happened to you?”

The jaguar wiped his brow with his handkerchief and rolled his eyes. “Well excuse me for being polite to the newbie. She looks like she’s been through a lot.”

Nathan leaned on her elbows over the counter to face the scowling bunny. Judy was pissed for being embarrassed for her inexperience in bars and being taken advantage of by the sly Vixen currently moaning into her frosty beverage.

“I apologize Hopps, I’m afraid our dear Skye takes after her beloved Uncle Nick rather than her father when it comes to dealing with mammals.”

“Uncle?” Judy glanced sideways at the vixen. “I don’t remember seeing any other foxes here besides that bat eared one in the video conference.”

“You wouldn’t see any other foxes onboard,” Skye’s voice was quiet and calm, but there was a venom that dwelt behind every softly spoken word.

“Because they are all dead.”

Judy’s chest seized, and her breath caught in her throat. What could she say after that? Sorry? Wow, I had no idea! Or how about, that sucks but at least you aren’t dead yet! No, she just had to
ask. Stupid, Blind Dumb Bunny!

She could have easily figured it out on her own just by looking around. The walls in the bar were plastered with frozen moments in time with the smiling faces of mammals no longer walking this Earth.

While the mute bunny struggled to salvage the conversation, Skye slid from the stool and pulled an ancient, filthy photo that was pinned to the wall and clambered back to the bar.

“This is my family.” She said, spinning the photo around to show Judy.

The photograph was old, very old. The gloss finish was long gone, and the edges were frayed, and fold marks crisscrossed the smiling faces in the picture. There were three foxes in the photograph posing on a park bench in front of a weathered red brick ice cream shop. Judy guessed the little arctic vixen kit with happy blue eyes that sparkled even through the faded ravages of time. The little kit was perched grinning giddily on the knee of an elderly arctic fox with auburn eyes and a red fox lounging over the armrest with a half-lidded smirk on his thin muzzle.

“That’s me.” Skye tapped a claw on the kit bouncing on the older tod’s knee. “That’s my father, Raymond Shen. And the snarky devil over there is Nick Wilde.” A nostalgic smile pulled at the vixen’s lips.

“He is not really my uncle, but he had his wife Mary used to take care of me when Dad was busy with work. Doctor Raymond Shen was the chief engineer for the original XCOM project during the first invasion 20 years ago so he was rarely home.”

“And the apple didn’t fall far from the tree. Doctor Shen couldn’t be prouder.” Nathan added. Skye beamed and swelled at the Jaguar’s praise.

“Why do you call that red fox your Uncle?” Judy asked tentatively.

“Well Uncle Nick practically raised me along with his daughter when me and dad moved to Zootopia before the invasion.” Skye lovingly ran a thumb over the crimson furred vulpine smirking back at her. Now that smiling face was nothing more than a ghost from a happier time.

“He was a soldier in the XCOM project with the highest confirmed Kill Count in XCOM.” Skye’s blue eyes shown with a sad sort of pride.

“Wolford says that the mammal that beats Uncle Nick’s record gets his callsign, in the 20 years since he died on his last mission no mammal has managed to beat him yet.”

“What was it? The callsign I mean…” Judy leaned closer to get a better look at those fiery emerald eyes with a fascinated turn in her head and her little pink nose twitching.

“Outrider.” Nathan Oncason answered, drawing her gaze from the photo.

The Jaguar had his back turned to the counter as the clicking of bowls and silverware tickled the bunny’s hearing. When he resurfaced from the front of the fridge tucked against the stove with a large salad with ranch dressing in paw. Just the sight of the fresh green leaves and carrot shuddings sent a wave of saliva washing up Judy’s mouth.

Oncason noticed her desperate stare nearly burning the glistening leafy greens in his paw and he chuckled.

“You looked hungry and since Doc Savage has a no alcohol rule for recovering patients I’m afraid
water or juice is all I have to sate your thirst.”

Judy swallowed thickly and flicked her tiny tongue across her lips before digging in with gusto, but even as through the heavenly tastes and crush of her salad her curiosity got the better of her once again.

“Who’s Doc Savage?”

“It’s Doctor Jack Tygan.”

“How did a hare like him get a name like that? I thought he was a scientist.” Judy asked.

Skye giggled and forgoing the straw stuck her muzzle into her drink, savoring both the frosty taste and lighter topic of conversation. When the vixen resurfaced she had a sly smile on her face and a happy twitch to her tail.

Her smile stretched wider as the mammal in question padded up from behind with a scowl on his face.

“Why don’t you ask him yourself?”

The dirty look the hare shot the grinning vixen only served to send her tail spinning behind her. Judy could have sworn that if Skye’s fluffy appendage wagged much faster she would be airborne.

“Yeah Doc, why do you have that nickname?” Alistair chimed in, his heterogeneous eyes dancing with mirth.

“I would rather not...” Tygan grumped, crossing his arms and turning his striped face away.

“It’s because of all those Advent Bug-burger wrappers John, -er- I mean Wolford, found under his desk.” Skye snickered.

“Oh.” Judy’s stare went blank for a few seconds as her brain took a moment to process what the vixen said before it clicked.

“Wait, you eat meat?!” She sputtered.

Tygan’s ears burned a painful cherry red before falling across his back, his head still turned away in an adamant inability to meet the rabbit’s shocked eyes.

“Those Advent bug-burgers were for scientific purposes of course…”

“That’s not what John said when he caught you in the latrine with half a burger shoved in your mouth.” Skye sang, her playful voice like a hammer squashing the hapless hare’s tattered dignity flat once more.

“alright, alright, leave the Doc alone,” Oncason chuckled. “don’t want him going savage on anyone in my bar. Hey doc, if you feel the need to maul a mammal take ‘em out by the cargo hold first will ya?”

“I am never going to live this down, am I?” Tygan sighed.

“Never.” Skye snarked. “Now come on up grumpy buns, I see Wolford and some of the others are here for the remembrance ceremony.” Her gaze softened as she turned to a nervous Judy. “You ready?”
“No.” The doe squeaked. She pushed her half-finished salad away and took a long shuddering breath. “But I really don’t have much of a choice, do I?”

Judy nearly jumped out of her fur when a gentle and slightly greasy paw squeezed her shoulder.

“If it makes you feel any better, this never gets any easier.” Skye said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Thank you.” Judy mumbled.

Wolford limped over with as much dignity as a wounded timber wolf could muster and presented a couple of dog tags, the engraved tin tinkled and chimed as the names Peter Osei and Ana Ramirez swayed and bumped against each other.

“As neither of Osei’s or Ramirez’s families are present it falls to the one closest to them to add their names to the Wall and embroider their memories and sacrifice into our hearts, so we may never forget why they died and what we fight for.”

The wolf’s voice carried a sovereign power Judy could only compare to a priest before his congregation. The importance that every mammal present showed, even the ones not involved, calmed her nerves and gave her the confidence she needed to press on just a step further.

*Ya know, I never did apologize, did I little rabbit?*

Judy took Peter and Ana’s dog tags and lowered her chair to the floor. For the first time since she had woken the doe’s legs felt firm and her steps with purpose.

*I’m sorry Judy Hopps.*

Judy walked through the throng of XCOM soldiers, every mammal parted the way for the doe and none dared utter a word as this silence was hers, hers and the fallen soldiers she would soon put to rest.

She stood before the Wall and looked up and saw rows upon rows of dog tags, some bloody and bent, some shiny and pristine, hung from their hooks bearing the weight of a mammal’s entire existence on their chains. She found two empty hooks low to the ground enough for her to reach.

*Remember me and Ana, will you?*

With her vision blurry with tears and her chest heaving from bare contained sobs Judy hung Peter’s name next to Ana’s, they would be side by side here on the Wall just as they were side by side in death.

With no more reason to keep her composure the bunny collapsed to her knees and wailed shamelessly at the loss of mammals that had barely tolerated her but paid the ultimate price for her life.

“I’ll remember you.” She swore to herself. “I will never forget as long as I live.”

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“Sir, you may want to take a look at this.”

Back on the Avenger’s bridge Wolford was recuperating from the emotional Remembrance Ceremony.

You would think after hundreds of similar ceremonies I would be used to it by now, but it never gets any easier. Uuugh, I need a drink. He thought to himself before turning his attention to the Ocelot technician addressing him.

“What is it?”

“I think I found something sir, some kinda encrypted signal, but I don’t really know how to operate these old receivers.” The tiny feline admitted sheepishly.

“Alright, show me.” Wolford leaned over the ancient pre-invasion computer the Ocelot had been working on as far as his gunshot would allow.

The timber wolf may be getting on in years, but he always had a good head when it comes to memorization, even if he hadn’t touched 20 year old “legacy” equipment like this since he headed the first XCOM project.

After a couple of minutes refamiliarizing himself with the equipment Wolford’s paws danced across the keyboard, bringing up the scans the Ocelot had been attempting to decipher.

“There! See it?” The technician bounced in his seat and pointed to a faint blip on the outer ranger of the Avenger’s sensors. “It just… showed up about an hour ago, I thought perhaps it was just a glitch until the computer started trying to de-code the signal. Someone’s transmitting something, I’m sure of it.”

“Good job Felix.” Wolford flashed the technician one of his rare smiles and pulled the strange signal up on the main display. “I’m going to use the Avenger’s main computer to speed up the decryption process.”

“Central, you found something interesting?” The floor shook as the tell-tale hoof steps of Commander Adrian Bogo announced his presence. The timber wolf nodded in a brief sign of respect to the cape buffalo and pointed to the screen.

“Does that code look familiar to you?” Wolford asked.

“Yes, it appears to be an XCOM emergency beacon, what of it?” Commander Bogo asked as he crossed his massive arms over his bulky chest.

Wolford shook his head and snorted.

“Yes, its an XCOM emergency beacon, but don’t you see what is wrong with that?” He asked and gave the Commander a look as if it should have been obvious. When Bogo failed to answer Wolford sighed and pointed a finger at the faint signal pulsing a steady beat on the scanner.

“It is an XCOM emergency beacon from 20 years ago.” He explained. “It’s on a channel we used during the first invasion, and Felix here said it just came online an hour ago.”

Bogo’s eyes widened in realization of the bizarre situation, but before he could say any more the computer beeped, and a row of code scrolled across the screen.
“What does it say?” Wolford asked Felix, the Ocelot could barely contain his excitement at being apart of something so cool with both Wolford and the legendary Commander Bogo asking for his help.

He leaned in to his own smaller computer screen until his nose nearly touched the monitor.

“I can’t really read most of it sir. The emergency beacon seems to have been corrupted or damaged before whatever mammal turned it on, but I can make out two things, but…”

“Is there a problem Felix?” Wolford asked with a tense edge to his voice. The Ocelot jumped and gulped.

“N-no sir! No problem here! But... I mean... well…”

“Just spit it out Felix.”

“A name sir!” The Ocelot nearly shouted. “The only thing I can read it just one name.” He swallowed and took a deep breath.

“It says Outrider.”

The silence just uttering that callsign inspired swept through the entire mammal filled room was like a vacuum. You could have heard a pin drop. When Wolford found his breath again he leaned against the main computer for support as he barely found the strength to speak again.

“And… And the other thing Felix?” He whispered.

“The signal sir,” The Ocelot answered in a tiny, scared voice.

“This Signal is coming from Zootopia.”

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A/N: I hope you all enjoyed this chapter as much as I did writing it! So, whenever I use a character created by a reader I will put that featured Character’s Dossier here with the creator’s name. Give these guys a round of (virtual) applause, they are awesome!

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ZCOM Character Dossier

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Creator: SmugBeverage (AO3)

Name: Nathan Oncason
Age: 27
Gender: Male
Species: Jaguar
Brief history: Worked as a bartender for several years, passing along and disseminating information before being recruited by Resistance forces

Basic personality traits: Laid back, attentive, affable

Positive traits: Highly social, excellent teamwork, active interest in maintaining morale, mixes a mean drink

Negative traits: Poor leadership skills, struggles in hot environments, lacks initiative

Creator: dethwulf_Zero (AO3)

Name: Alistair Stålvarg

Age: 25 Years Old

Gender: Male

Species: Red Wolf

Appearance: Tall for his species, Scars across face and back, Heterochromatic eyes (Steel gray/Deep green), Likes dressing like his father’s favorite grunge bands (ripped jeans, Tee shirts, and flannels)

History: Before recruited by XCOM Alistair lived in relative peace out in a fringe settlement with his family. As the eldest of three brothers Alistair often treats mammals smaller than himself as younger than himself, regardless of their actual age. A big family guy with a stubborn view on life that has caused problems when dealing with mammals from other walks of life and points of view. A heavy drinker off duty, though he curbs his habit when on mission, though he has been known to suffer from withdrawal when on longer scouting missions.

Basic Personality Traits: Outgoing, Athletic, Self-conscious and insecure

Positive Traits: Tough, Fearless, Kindhearted

Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Overbearing at times
Chapter 11: Ghost Transmissions Part 3

Chapter Summary

Wolford leads a crew out into the Fringe to the Black Market, an elusive underground network of merchants and mercenaries that buy and sell anything and everything in rebellion of the Advent Administration. Judy learns a little more about the mammals she is serving with in XCOM and she is not sure she likes what she sees.

A/N: Hey Y’all, Untraveled here!

So, this chapter is actually shorter than I would have liked but I feel it necessary to split it up, just because I can. I plan on burning through the next chapter and following up quickly so keep your grubby little claws crossed!

Be warned this chapter is more geared towards a little world building and introducing more characters, many made by your fellow readers! I had to rewrite most of this chapter a couple times to get everything to flow and fit so feel free to let me know what Y’all think. Comments are love!

As always if you have a character you wish to see featured in ZCOM than please put them in the comment section below! Just a reminder that not every character has to be a soldier, every story needs its roguish hustlers, shady merchants, and regular mammals just trying to survive! I love to see what you, my dear readers, have to offer.

To submit your very own character into the ZCOM dossier I need these few things:

1. Name, Age, Gender, Species
2. Brief history (i.e. lived in the woods since the invasion until found by XCOM scouts)
3. Basic personality traits (i.e. Optimistic, Clumsy, Womanizer)
4. At least two positive traits (i.e. Good with a rifle, funny, fearless)
5. At least two flaws (i.e. Hates foxes, fear of fire, alcoholic)

Post your character into the comment section below!

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Chapter 11: Ghost Transmissions Part 3

“Are you sure this is the only way to get what we need? I mean I can think of half a dozen fringe settlements who has a Semi-truck we could borrow.” A black furred coyote huffed.

Wolford fought to keep his rolling eyes from pulling a muscle.

“For the fifth time Adriana, we don’t have the luxury of a cross country road trip on the off chance one of these fringe settlements might have a Semi big enough for us to use. Tell me, do any of these fringe settlements of yours also just so happen to have an Elerium power converter laying around?”

“Well damn! Sorry I said anything.” The coyote shuffled uncomfortably in the passenger seat and
turned her golden brown eyes out the window with another huff.

Adriana Whifur knew John Wolford was right but that didn’t mean that she had to like it. Too many strangers for her taste. Just the thought of exposing her back out in the open with so many mammals made her shin crawl. The black furred coyote pulled her green recon cowl tighter around her head and shoulders and triple checked the Glock on her hip and the hold-out .38 revolver strapped to her ankle.

I never hurt to be over-prepared.

The XCOM veteran’s fidgeting pulled Wolford’s attention from the road for a moment. His grayed muzzle pulled into a small frown. He let one paw guide the wheel and the other rest on Adriana’s trembling paws.

“How are you recovering? Those shock burns healing right?”

The coyote spared the timber wolf a brief glance before gently shedding his paw from hers.

“Yeah, I’m doing just fine. That Shock Lancer only grazed me, really. The damaged skin is still pulling weird and my leg keeps fucking twitching, but Doc says I’ll be right as rain in time for the mission.”

“Good.” Wolford let her push him away.

She just needs some space. He was still feeling guilty for pulling her early from recovery for the upcoming mission but her knowledge of Zootopia’s layout will be invaluable for navigating the super-city’s decaying infrastructure. Not many mammals with intimate knowledge of Zootopia were still alive after the city was lost 20 years ago and no one was crazy enough to go live there since.

Zootopia is firmly in the center for the largest “Lost Zone” in the western hemisphere. During the initial invasion the Aliens bombarded the entire landscape with mysterious “Fog Pods” that corrupted and drained the life from everything around it.

Wolford had little interest in finding out what exactly the purpose of these fog pods served but about 18 years ago the resistance started receiving reports of bizarre creatures rising from Lost Zones all over the globe, and Zootopia was the worst of them all. Wolford was hesitant in taking these reports seriously, though one situation in particular stands out in his mind and at least gave these sighting some authenticity.

It was a report from about 18 years ago from a splinter cell led by Marcus Cross, a veteran from the original XCOM project. When he and his crew infiltrated the lands around Zootopia He reported encountering what he could only describe as Zombies.

Wolford was friendly with Cross before the first XCOM fell, but the stresses of battle always brought in a myriad of “sightings” like this, so officially XCOM disregarded Cross’s report on the grounds of lack of evidence. Unofficially Wolford would be a fool to throw away potential intel. Zootopia and the rest of the Lost Zone was a huge Unknown, last thing he wanted to do was go into the very heart of unfamiliar territory blind and floundering.

He swung the beat up old pick up around a bend and gripped the wheel tighter when the weathered old truck hit a decrepit dirt road. Gravel spewed from beneath the tires and tossed them against the undercarriage along with a pluming cloud of dust. Adriana flinched from the crackling noise from the rocks smacking the truck, but she soon relaxed back in her seat.
Getting blown up one too many times in convoys will do that to a mammal.

“I hate these damned backwater podunks. I mean how hard is it to set up in some city center or small town with actual roads?” Adriana muttered over the truck’s rattling journey.

“You know just as well as I do why the Black Market can’t just set up shop next to places like that. It draws too much attention.”

“Hmph, if we would have gone to one of my contacts in the Fringe we wouldn’t have to be bouncing down roads like the energizer bunny.”

“One more complaint and I’m throwing you out the window and making you walk.” Wolford deadpanned.

“Boooo.” The coyote snorted.

With a sudden jerk the truck hit the edge of a broken blacktop and the rattle of rocks against the undercarriage ceased. The only sounds now was the crunch of crumbling road underneath the tires and the creaking of the suspension leveling out the otherwise bumpy ride over potholes and cracks.

Adriana kept her gold flaked brown eyes to the forest blurring past. Long pauses and comfortable silences were many and spontaneous in a soldier’s line of work, however shit can start flying in an instant. Contrary to how it is portrayed in movies combat is vicious, ugly and often over in a matter of minutes, or even seconds. There are rarely any heroics in combat, only a mad scramble for cover, the burning of fear induced adrenaline, and the primal rush to survive by any means necessary.

Adriana Whifur has seen too many friends and subordinates die to truly relax in a situation like this. All it took was a mammal with intent and a gun to snatch her life from the passenger seat of the pickup, and she could do nothing about it.

She checked her pistols for a fourth time, just in case.

A tiny mumble and the creak of a straining seat belt behind her seat pulled the twitchy coyote’s attention.

Three mammals were strapped in the back seat of Central Officer Wolford’s truck, Gregor Grizzoli, a cranky grizzly bear that Adriana had worked with on quite a few occasions, Felix Haddison, an Ocelot technician from the Avenger, and that insufferable rabbit recruit Wolford has been parading around. All three of the mammals were in various states of exhaustion as everyone but the bunny had been trading places driving, she had been too small to see over the dashboard, even with Wolford’s tallest booster seat, so she had slept almost the entire journey.

Adriana’s lip curled in contempt at the fresh meat curled in a half sort of fetal position around her oversized seat belt. The rabbit doe was mumbling in her sleep and her feet and ears flopped and kicked sporadically with whatever carrot-filled dream she was in. Whifur had nothing against prey specifically, but there was no place for a bunny in XCOM’s ranks, Judy Hopps simply did not belong.

“She’s going to get eaten alive.” The coyote internally snorted before forcing a more neutral expression over her anger and tuning away from the three slumbering mammals.

“We are here.” Wolford announced.

He pulled the truck off the highway into a decrepit, vine infested suburb. Rusting vehicles, long
abandoned years ago, lay scattered across the roads and weeds, some even found their resting places buried in the cookie-cutter double-wides lining the winding streets. Wolford turned into one such house with an attached garage, the former resident’s minivan crumpled into what was once the living room.

Judy snorted herself back into the real world and woozily bobbed her head around until she regained her bearings and slipped from her seatbelt with her X-9 rifle held against her chest.

The XCOM troops popped open the doors and slipped from the truck, their feet kicking up a decade’s worth of dust and mold. Forgotten tools and random bits lay strewn across the garage, everything backlit a filthy green by a window crowded by creeper vines in the back of the building.

“Where’s the black market supposed to be now?” Grizzoli asked in his scratchy baritone voice.

Judy wondered how a mammal could so easily wear all that ballistic armor and equipment underneath that huge jacket and not keel over from heat stroke. That and the way he gripped his rotary cannon and casually swung the triple barrels around put Judy on edge, a trill of anxiety that stabbed her right behind the base of her ears.

“A half mile north, maybe less.” Wolford replied as he straightened his own equipment and weapons, his custom assault rifle and a wicked single bladed sword strapped to his back. “The black market holed themselves up at the docks by the river. Pier 8 if I remember right.”

“Why not just drive up to the docks rather than stopping half-a-fuckin’-mile away?” The grizzly growled in irritation.

Wolford ignored him for a moment to stick his muzzle out and check for any strange movement out in the abandoned suburb. When he deemed the coast was clear he held his rifle in one loose paw and waved everyone to follow in a loose V-shape formation.

Felix jumped in and answered the grizzly in Wolford’s place.

“Too much activity in one area is a great way to get yourself found, and the black market is all about staying under the radar. It’s common practice to park well away and approach on foot.” The ocelot explained.

The little jungle cat was clearly not comfortable in field work, it was painfully obvious even to a rookie like Judy. The way he wore his ballistic plate carrier underneath a bland gray hoodie was almost painful to watch in a way the doe couldn’t explain. It just looked wrong. She was nervous just watching the engineer awkwardly cradling his shotgun in his fumbling paws.

“bet’cha a raisin cookie and half a ration the cat shoots himself in the foot.” Judy heard Adriana whisper to her grizzly bear companion.

“Your on.” Grizzoli chuckled quietly.

“Lock up the chatter.” Wolford ordered.

“Remember, we are here to negotiate for a Semi-truck and a trailer large enough to transport the Skyranger and if we are lucky enough Felix can find us an Elerium Power Converter to get the Avenger up and flying. Everyone understand?” Once he saw every head bob an affirmative Wolford cracked a small grin and turned away at the tip of the V formation, but not before giving one last warning.

“Keep your eyes out and heads on a swivel. It’s not just the Aliens we got to watch out for.”
At that last comment Judy tensed and held her rifle in clenched fists, her tail quivering from nerves.

“Except for you squirt, just your ears will do.” Grizzoli chortled, pulling a snicker from Adriana.

“Shut it Grizzoli.” Wolford growled.

The grizzly’s jaws closed with a loud snap and Whifur’s chuckles died in her throat, out in the field no one talked back to Central.

Judy did take Grizzoli’s words to heart though, after a few moments of silence as they traversed the dead suburban ruins the tension did loosen from her shoulders somewhat and her ears swiveled back and forth, straining to catch anything out of the ordinary.

Thankfully her vigilance proved unnecessary as the only thing she could hear was the shuffling of clothing and the rattle of weapons against hooks and buckles. The eerie neighborhoods and decaying building proved harmless for the moment. Only a couple times Wolford had raised a paw to halt the formation because he thought he had seen something, the other time the formation scattered in a heart-pattering rush as a bowing roof and suddenly caved in on itself, the rotten wood and drywall splintered and smashed with a thundering crack.

The suburbs may had been empty and harmless, but no words could describe the relief Judy felt at leaving those decaying houses to rot in peace.

About ten minutes later the gentle lap and swish of rushing water joined the lonely silence, announcing their approach to the docks.

Contrary to what the doe had read in books and heard in stories the docks were made of the same concrete foundation as the rest of the pier. She had been expecting wooden planks that stretched out over the water but given that 20 years had past she thought it fortunate that she had been wrong, last thing she needed to do was embarrass herself by stepping on a rotten plank and taking an unwilling drink from the river below.

The docks were lined with similar warehoused on both sides of the river, the buildings dark and overgrown by creeper vines and cracked by resilient plant life intent on crushing and reclaiming the land. It was sad in a way, the empty buildings and abandoned piers that were once a bustling center of commerce were now nothing more than husks of broken dreams.

Judy could hear snippets of hushed voices and muffled conversations from her right, the rest of the rotting buildings stood silent and empty.

“Sir, I think its over there.” Judy called up in a little voice, a finger pointed at a huge crumbling concrete warehouse with a faded “8” painted on the side.

Wolford sniffed the air, for what exactly Judy wasn’t sure, but he must have found it as he rolled his shoulders and relaxed his posture. He waved his squad over and padded over to the building’s guard house. A weasel and a ram were lounging inside the 5 foot by 5 foot shack with their battered and filthy weapons leaning up against the door out of their reach.

The weasel was halfway into dreamland with his head hovering just over the desk, his yellow eyes blurry and drooped. It took him several seconds to notice the group of heavily armed mammals loitering just outside his window and several more to realize that they weren’t hallucinations. Wolford proved too impatient to wait for this slacking fuzzball to return into wakefulness, so he pounded the window with a fist, sending the panicked weasel and ram clattering to the floor.

“The fuck?!” The weasel cursed. He rubbed his smarting head and hopped back into his seat. “The
To wake you the fuck up.” Wolford replied coolly. “We need to get in and you two are supposed to be in charge of the gate, yeah?”

The weasel opened his mouth to retort but stopped himself. A sly little grin spread across his thin little muzzle.

“Yeah, sorry. Can’t let’cha in, you don’t look like Big’s mammals and I don’t suppose you got an invitation?” He asked sweetly.

“Invitation?” Wolford glanced at Grizzoli who shrugged his massive shoulders and shook his head. Wolford turned back to the grinning weasel. “What invitation?”

“Well, ya see recently we’ve had to be more… selective on who our customers are. If ya ain’t got an invitation than you need ta leave. Unless…” The weasel cast an appraising glance at a glowering Adriana, his hungry gaze sent a slimy shiver of revulsion down the black coyote’s spine. “Unless of course you can pay the toll.”

“Toll, eh?” Wolford’s voice shrunk to a whisper. The weasel took this as a sign he was winning this exchange.

“Yeah! I can let’cha all in, I would just need to inspect that suspicious looking coyote standin’ next to ya in the closet for about ten minutes or so.”

“Is that so?”

“Yup, just ten minutes. Ain’t that a cheap bargain for lettin’ y’all pass? So, what do ya say?”

His answer was a timber wolf’s fist smashing through the window.

Wolford’s claws clamped around the weasel’s throat and dragged the gurgling mammal through the shattered glass. The ram froze, struck dumb by the wolf’s sudden and savage attack.

In the few seconds he wasted staring at the furious timber wolf proved vital. By the time the stunned ram snapped out of his terror induced stupor and dove for the shotgun leaning against the back door the black coyote his friend had his eyes on had flown through the smashed window and planted a flying double kick in the center of his back, sending the burly sheep sailing through the doorway. The ram’s face dragged a bloody trough through the dirt, leaving the sheep stunned and gasping for air.

“Grizzoli,” Wolford’s cold eyes never left the struggling weasel wheezing and choking against his clenched claws. “Open that fucking gate.”

“With pleasure.” A toothy grin split Grizzoli’s lips. He slung his rotary cannon and gripped the chain-linked gate in his huge paws. With a single grunt and a powerful jerk, the grizzly wrenched the entire gate from its electrically operated mount and tossed the twisted metal frame in the dirt next to the groaning ram.

“Ya know I could have just pushed the button to open it right?” Adriana snarked from the guard house.

“mhmm. Nah, tearing it off felt better.” Grizzoli sniffed.

Suddenly the back door to the warehouse burst open and a flood of tattered mammals swarmed the
court yard with a huge variety of weaponry all pointed at the huge grinning grizzly with the downsized minigun held casually in his paws.

“Get on the fucking ground!” A Dingo with dust brown fur and clad in a myriad of loose cloth and camouflaged wrappings barked.

The Australian wild dog rushed forward fearlessly with a battered and well-loved X-9 assault rifle tucked to his shoulder. He stopped just out of Grizzoli’s reach and kept his rifle trained on the bear’s chest.

“I said get on the ground, or me and my boys’ll cut you down.” He snarled.

Grizzoli’s head tilted as he stared at the snarling dingo, a considering expression on his muzzle.

“Roman?”

The dingo jumped, and his snarl slacked into a confused frown. Wolford popped up from behind Grizzoli with the Weasel still gasping him his vice-like grip. A broad smile split the wolf’s scarred muzzle.

“J-John?” The Dingo stammered, his rifle turned to the dirt. “Is that you?”

“Ravenshoe!” Wolford tossed the weasel next to the ram and laughed. “Holy shit, I thought you were dead!”

“I thought you were dead!” Roman blubered. “I never thought I’d ever see you again after XCOM.”

“Who said XCOM stayed dead?” The wolf chuckled.

“Fair enough.” The dingo cast a curious glace at the mess around him. “So, what are you doing here Wolford? Because having my front door ripped off its hinges was the last place I would have thought to meet you after all these years.”

“Well, I was here for business but…” Wolford sent a murderous glare in the weasel’s direction. “After one of your mammals tried to extort one of my mammals for sex, now I’m not too sure.”

“What?” The dingo snarled. The other security mammals behind Roman eyed the weasel with varying degrees of contempt and disgust.

“H-h-he’s lyin’ boss!” The weasel whimpered. “I ain’t done nuthin’ like that!”

“Yes, he didn’t say “Nuthin’” like that, did you?” Adriana appeared from the guard house with a sway in her hips and a swing in her black and ash white tail. The coyote stood over the terrified weasel with a paw on her hip.

She flashed Roman a coy grin. “He only wanted to inspect little ol’ me in that supply closet over there for ten minutes or so.” She smiled down at the wide eyed weasel. “Ain’t that right honey?”

The weasel knew he was fucked, no matter what he said, so all he could do was gulp down his choking terror.

“Weaselton, is that true?” Roman asked, his quiet voice heavy with barely suppressed rage.

“C-come on boss, you ain’t gonna believe some random bitch over one of your own, right?”
The Dingo quivered and shook with a fury so hot that it skipped from blind rage straight to cold clearness.

“Raymond, Kevin.” Two polar bears in matching sweat pants, tank tops, and huge automatic shotguns snapped to attention. “Scrape this slime out of the dirt and throw ’em in one of the shipping containers for Mr. Big to sort out later.”

“What?” Weaselton squeaked. “No, no, nononono! Come on Roman, you can’t do this to me!” He scrambled away on his tail from the approaching polar bear twins. “Come on mammal, I’m one of you!”

“Anyone that thinks it’s okay to pressure others into mating with your filthy hide ain’t one of us… But it isn’t my call.” The Dingo grinned. “That’s Mr. Big’s.”

The weasel whimpered as huge polar bear paws dragged him away into the warehouse along with his terrified ram accomplice.

Judy was standing off to the side next to poor Felix, her jaw clenched and her rifle trembling terribly against her chest.

John Wolford, the scary, grumpy, but otherwise gentle mammal that had pulled her from the smoldering ruins of her home had moved with such rage and violence that she now struggled to recognize the laughing timber wolf in front of her. It was like he had flipped a switch somewhere and became a completely different mammal.

She had seen him tackle a rhino and mow down an entire squad of Advent troopers back in New Providence but for some reason that hadn’t felt real. Not nearly as real as dragging a helpless weasel, a fellow mammal, through a shattered window and then strangle him without a shred of remorse.

*If he can do that to another mammal, someone who isn’t even our enemy, is XCOM really better than Advent?* Judy found that she didn’t have an answer.

She passed a paw across her throat, her fingers tracing the lacerations from another wolf just like the one she was following.

*Are we really the good guys?*

“Hopps!” Wolford calling her name snapped Judy from her soul searching. The timber wolf was looking at her from over his shoulder with a concerned light in his eyes. Her drooping ears perked, and her shaking knees steadied.

*No, he may be rough around the edges, but Wolford is not evil. He wouldn’t burn down a farm and slaughter a defenseless family. He saved me. I can put my trust in him. I owe him that much.*

“Coming Sir!” The doe bounced after the chuckling timber wolf with renewed energy and a lighter heart-

-And a quiet little prayer that everything would be alright.

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A/N: Shout out to all the awesome readers that allowed me to use their characters in ZCOM. I am humbled to be able to take something that someone else has created and bring them to life. Y’all are awesome!
ZCOM Character Dossier

Creator: Carbonrap45 (AO3)

Name: Adriana Whifur
Age: 35
Gender: Female
Species: Coyote

Appearance: Black fur and deep golden-brown eyes with a lean muscular physique. Dresses light in favor of mobility and stealth, often seen with a recon hood and half mask with a shemagh around her shoulders.

Brief History: Grew up on the streets of Zootopia before the invasion. After capture by an Advent raid early in their occupation of earth Adriana escaped from custody and has been on the run ever since with extensive experience in paw to paw combat.

Personality: Paranoid, determined, lets slip little about herself while willing to talk to others

Positive traits: Empathic to those that suffered under Advent, has knowledge of combatting most Advent trooper types.

Flaws: Has little faith in new recruits and often refers to them as “fresh meat”, paranoia tends to flare up at the worst of times.

Creator: prof.ganki.gaming (FF.net)

Name: Roman Ravenshoe
Age: 38 Years old
Gender: Male
Species: Dingo

Brief History: Roman was born to a very poor family in Russia. When it became apparent that the Alien’s arrival was imminent Roman jumped at the chance to join XCOM as soon as he turned 18. He volunteered for the Cybernetic Enhancement program headed by Chief Engineer Raymond Shen, Skye’s father. Roman became one of the pawful of survivors of the program when Earth surrendered to the Aliens. Roman fled to the wilderness to avoid capture and lived with a tiny fringe settlement until an old acquaintance recruited him into the resistance to work in the Black Market.

Basic Personality Traits: Calm, Optimistic, Bit Flirty

Positive traits: Cybernetic enhancements, Intimidating Presence, confident in leadership role

Negative traits: Severe PTSD episodes, Stubborn and resistant to change, Unable to maintain his
Cybernetics making them prone to failures

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Name: CommanderOps (AO3)

Name Gregor 'Brick' Grizzoli
Age: 40
Gender: Male
Species: Grizzly Bear

History: Gregor was a fresh face heavy weapons specialist when the XCOM Headquarters was assaulted by the Invaders. He and his comrades/squad buddies that also were freshly promoted to some specialist was tasked defending a maintenance tunnel. They bravely held it till the dreaded sound of skittering from above. He was the lone survivor of a squad of six that escaped with the other survivors of the base. He continued to dutifully serve what was left of XCOM, but as the years go by and the more comrades he lost he became slowly numb to the loss of the life that he regards any new rookie as just another number to the wall. He was denied the rank of Sergeant based upon the mixed review of his leadership, leading successful operations but at the cost of an injured/dead rookie.

Basic Personality Traits: Serious, Reserved

Positive Traits: Heavy Weapons Specialist, Strong, Prior War experience

Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Hates Robots of any form, PTSD with Chrysalids.
Chapter Summary

Wolford and his squad meet with one of Mr. Big's Requisition Officers to broker a deal for the equipment necessary for an upcoming mission, during the encounter more information comes to light concerning a mammal calling himself Outrider, the same Callsign the late Nick Wilde used during the First Invasion.

A/N: Hey Y’all! Untraveled here!
I apologize for the long wait, my job caught up with me, so I had to buckle down and slog through, now that I’m all caught up IRL I can once again focus on my writing!

This is the last slow chapter before things begin to get messy for our favorite Freedom Fighters, so hang in there!

As always if you have a character you wish to see featured in ZCOM than please put them in the comment section below! Just a reminder that not every character has to be a soldier, every story needs its roguish hustlers, shady merchants, and regular mammals just trying to survive! I love to see what you, my dear readers, have to offer.

To submit your very own character into the ZCOM dossier I need these few things:

1. Name, Age, Gender, Species
2. Brief history (i.e. lived in the woods since the invasion until found by XCOM scouts)
3. Basic personality traits (i.e. Optimistic, Clumsy, Womanizer)
4. At least two positive traits (i.e. Good with a rifle, funny, fearless)
5. At least two flaws (i.e. Hates foxes, fear of fire, alcoholic)

Post your character into the comment section below!

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Chapter 12: Ghost Transmissions Part 4

“So, John, what brings your carcass back from the dead and kicking down my front door?” Roman Ravenshoe asked with no small amount of ironic mirth curled in his grin.

An amused snort slipped from Wolford’s snout.

“I need to find a Semi-truck with a large tractor trailer. You know anyone who can help us out?” The timber wolf asked.

“Actually, I think I know the purrrfect mammal for the task.” Roman replied. He held the door open and let his security team in first before disappearing into the dark interior and beckoning for
them to follow.

The dingo clad in loose fitting wraps and a myriad of tactical gear lead the XCOM squad through the warehouse lobby and into the main warehouse.

Every square inch of the cavernous construct was stuff with all manner of junk, weapons, stalls, shops, and boxes as a plethora of mammals milled around the cramped aisles. The animals inside were varied in every sense of the word. Prey, predator, canid, Cervidae, huge, small, it did matter. If they existed at least one was here.

However, there were two things that every single mammal inside had in common, everyone was armed, and everyone was looking over their shoulder.

Judy’s sensitive ears rang painfully from the clamor and bustle of hundreds of mammals in an extremely enclosed space yelling at each other from a foot away. The sound was deafening, but the smell was even worse.

Judy scrunched her nose in disgust and silently thanked the heavens she didn’t have a canine’s powerful nose. She noticed her four companions, all mammals with strong senses of smell, with equal expressions of displeasure and revulsion on their muzzles.

Fortunately, Roman seemed considerate of their plight and beckoned them to follow as he swiftly made a path through the cramped crowds. Judy’s head was spinning from all the noise and mingling crowds of mammals that pressed all around her. It was only the presence of Sergeant Grizzoli that kept her from being swept away, the large grizzly’s paw never drifted far from his huge rotary cannon’s trigger. If he were to actually fire the minigun he would be able to sweep the entire warehouse and in just a few seconds grind anyone foolish enough to put a paw on him into a fine red mist.

Roman led the squad to the back of the warehouse where a dingy little office hid behind several stacks of crates. Roman pulled the dented metal door and waved everyone inside.

The little room was a dreary affair with a single naked bulb fighting a losing battle with the flickering shadows stalking the stained walls and moldy corners. A wrap-around desk sat beside a set of metal double doors that did a very poor job of muffling the dull roar of a hundred animals babbling and arguing over countless shady conversations and risky deals.

A clipboard held aloft by a huge striped paw hovered behind the grimy desktop. Roman raised a cloth wrapped paw and rapped the counter with his knuckles. Normally the sound would have been a dull knock just loud enough to garner attention, however the unexpected and sudden ring of steel knuckles against aluminum jolted everyone in the room except for Wolford.

The unfortunate feline lounging behind the desk had it worst, usually the instincts ingrained into large cats from primal ages long past would be an advantage, however in this case…. Not so much.

The metallic clang startled the Tigress, her claws instantly extended and dug into whatever she had been holding onto. With one paw latched to her armrest and the other pun cushioned into the clipboard the tigress tried to leap from the sudden sound with her back and limbs rigid only to get tangled up in her chair, tumble over and sprawl into the floor with the rebellious piece of furniture tenaciously holding onto its victim.

The poor beat up cat laid on the floor let out a pitiful whine. Roman snickered and leaned over the desk his arm making a similar metallic clinking sound.
“Morning Fangy! Good to see you’ve got everything under control here.”

“Screw you Roman.” The Tigress grumped with her smarting muzzle plastered on the nasty concrete floor.

“Afraid your trying to climb the wrong tree kitty, I already got a girl.” The Dingo snarked. “Went you’re through with wrestling with furniture I have a few mammals I think you would be very interested in meeting.”

The tigress growled and with all the scraps of grace she could muster she extracted herself from her chair-bound prison and picked herself back up. She flicked her muzzle and felt her nose for any blood before turning a crooked eyebrow at the smaller, grinning dingo.

“Allright Robo-dog, who are the sorry saps that had the displeasure of smelling your rusty hide?” The Tigress asked as her snake-like tail flicked saucily behind her.

Wolford took this opportunity and padded up to the desk with a paw extended in greeting. The tigress’s green eyes roved casually over the trim, rugged figure of the older timber wolf across her desk. Uniforms of any sort outside of what Advent issues were a rarity these days. There were no more militaries or governments on Earth aside from the Advent Administration so the crisp and sturdy military fatigues this stranger was wearing only made him stand out. She took a quick glance behind him at the other mammals dressed in a similar regalia.

She frowned, these mammals were not normal, who in their right mind would dress a cute little rabbit up in a tiny soldier costume and arm her to the teeth with a little pop-gun? There must be something wrong with these guys.

She turned her attention to the grizzled Wolf before her. She may be a Bengal Tiger but the canine before her stood just shy of her 8 foot height with a coiled musculature typical of his kind, lean but clearly powerful.

She finally noticed his paw still hanging over the desk waiting for her, she pushed her misgivings about the odd group to the back of her mind and took his paw in a firm grip and pumped once.

“Pleasure to meet you, I’m Natalie Fangmeyer, one of Mr. Big’s Requisition Officers and representative in the Black Market.”

The timber wolf’s scarred muzzle cracked into a lopsided, roguish grin.

“The pleasure is all mine Natalie, I’m Central Officer John Wolford, Executive Officer of XCOM.”

The tigress politely bobbed her head as he spoke to give the illusion she actually cared. She was actually mid-nod when everything the wolf just said caught up with her, then her jaw dropped, and the color seemed to drain from her fur.

“D-did you say XCOM?” Before he could answer that Fangmeyer leaned over her desk until she was a few whiskers shy of booping his nose with her own. “You’re John Wolford? THE Central Officer Wolford?! I thought you and XCOM were dead!”

“Hehe, seems you found yourself a fan-girl John!” Roman chortled, much to Fangmeyer’s dismay.

“Wha-? No, I’m not… I mean…. Ghah! Whatever shut up Roman.” The older Tigress’s face ignited from a pale white to a bright red faster than a traffic light. Fangmeyer slumped back into her chair and hide her face shamefully behind her recovered clipboard.
“Sooo… what can I do for you?” She asked bashfully from behind her clipboard. Roman burst into another bout of laughter at her odd behavior, earning him a glare from the jungle cat that promised serious payback in the near future.

“I am in need of a Semi-truck with a wide tractor trailer at least 25 feet wide, 60 feet long, and 20 feet high. Think you can help me in acquiring one?”

The the change in subject the previously flustered Tigress instantly fell back into her role, she set her clipboard down, squared her shoulders, and met Wolford’s gaze with a calculating, professional frown.

“I can get you anything you would need, given enough time of course.” She said, pressing her thumb to her chin in thought. “When do you need it?”

“In two days.”

Fangmeyer blanched. “only two days? That will severely restrict what I can do and even if I can find one for you it will cost you. I may have to pull a few strings and grease I few paws. Any reason why you need it in two days?”

“I bet I know.” Roman said with a smirk. He crossed his arms and leaning against the desk, with a smug, knowing expression.

“Outrider.”

Wolford and everyone in his squad flinched at the name.

“How the hell do you know about that?” Wolford nearly snarled, his lips peeled back threateningly.

Roman didn’t seem impressed, though his tail did flick nervously behind him.

“You really think you’re the only ones with the old XCOM scanners?” He snorted with a roll of his eyes, then a wide grin spread across his thin muzzle. “You’re going to Zootopia, and if memory serves, the prototype Skyranger Mark 2 didn’t have the range of the original dropship, so you need some way to get the Skyranger within range of Zootopia for a fast Ex-Fil when shit hits the fan… Sound about right?”

“Y-yeah, that’s the long and short of it.” Wolford admitted with a long suffered sigh.

Fangmeyer’s brow furrowed. “Why Zootopia of all places? Its not just any Lost City, it’s THE Lost City. Those Alien Fog Pods made that place uninhabitable, why meet with the Reaper’s Ace there of all places?”

“Wait,” Wolford’s brows arched. “How do you know who Outrider works for?”

“Well, I met him.” Fangmeyer replied with a shrug. “Not that I really know who he is though. Not when he’s wearing that mask and trench coat.”

“You met him? How?” Wolford leaned in.

“It was about a year ago, out in the fringe.” The Tigress’s green eyes lit up as she dove into her narrative, it was clear she had told this story before, and now she had to opportunity to show off for her hero!
“I was in transit with a cache of supplies for one of Mr. Big’s clients. We had been dodging Advent patrols by taking out footpaths through the forest when we heard gunfire coming from the direction of an Advent Supply Depot. It took me and five of the security detail about ten minutes to reach the site, but by the time we got there it was already over.” Fangmeyer paused for dramatic effect.

“It was a small Depot, only five or so buildings with a little motor pool and an awning over the supplies waiting to be loaded onto trucks and shipped out. We had avoided the depot mainly because of the Armored Mech’s garrisoned with the platoon of Advent troops stationed there. Whoever chose to attack that mini-fort had to have more than a few screws loose and a death wish—”

“-but, that’s when I saw him.”

“He was under the awning lounging on his back on top a stack of rations. There were open packets of food next to him, so he must have eaten before we got there and put his mask back on. He had an almost comically huge revolver hanging loose in one paw and a sword strapped to his hip. He didn’t even look at us, but somehow he knew where we were.”

“I called out to him, asked him what happened, he said he got hungry and found this place, so he got some food.” Fangmeyer chuckled. “I said, “No, I mean what happened to the troopers in the depot.” He pointed to the rest of the depot and said he gave them all an early retirement. That’s when I saw the bodies.”

Fangmeyer’s chuckle died into a serious frown. “This guy waltzed up to the depot and proceeded to dismantle and dismember every single trooper and Mech with a sword and a revolver- by himself.”

“He said that we are welcome to take the rest of the supplies and when I asked him for his name, he told me Outrider. After some digging I found he was one of those Reapers.” The tigress relaxed her frown and tilted her head in curiosity. “So, you need this Semi-truck to meet up with this Outrider?”

“Yes.”

“Great, then tell you what, if I get what you need, then in two days’ time I come with you to Zootopia.”

Wolford frowned. “I don’t think that’s—“

“I’ll put in a good word with Mr. Big.” Fangmeyer cut him off. She leaned in close to the timber wolf. “You need what we have, we want what you and the legendary XCOM can do.”

A genuine smile spread across the tigress’s face. “You fought for us during the first invasion, even though we lost XCOM was still a symbol of hope for a lot of mammals- me included. Now that I know XCOM is being revived and I have an opportunity to be a part of it there is no way I am not going to do all I can to help.”

Wolford eyed the eager Tigress in a whole new light. She must be only 10 or so years younger than him, so that makes her in her mid-40’s, give or take. Someone her age rarely feels so strongly about idealistic beliefs, especially in this line of work. She was not stupid, this much he can tell, this tiger is a rare breed of crazy, the kind of crazy Wolford needs to win this War against the Aliens.

“You got yourself a deal Fangmeyer.” Wolford Said with a grin.
The Tigress’s smile grew wider, her huge teeth glittering in the dim light. The cat looked close to
snatching the old wolf up in a bear hug, though she thought better of it. She dragged a shaking paw
over her ears as she took a long breath to calm herself down and rein in her excitement.

“Will that be all Mister Wolford?” She asked politely.

“Please, call me Wolford, John, or if you’re feeling really formal, Central. Hearing someone
calling me mister makes me sound old.” Wolford asked.

“But you are old.”

“Adriana?”

“Yes sir?”

“Shut up.”

“Yes sir…”

Fangmeyer giggled, the girlish way the huge, muscular predator was acting drew another odd look
from Roman, though the cyborg Dingo didn’t laugh this time. He had never seen the normally
stone faced requisitions officer act like this. He began to think Fangmeyer was attempting to
seduce perhaps mislead Wolford, so she could pull a fast one over on him.

Then her scent hit him like a club over the head.

‘Perhaps Ill sit this one out and let Fangy off easy… just this one time.’ He thought.

“It was great to see you again John, but I better get back to it.” Roman said, pulling Wolford’s
attention. He turned to leave but stopped and looked over his shoulder.

“Before I go… How’s Doctor Shen and little Skye doing?”

The air of anticipation that buzzed around the Squad died. Roman frowned at this. What happened?

“Doctor Shen…. Passed away. Skye’s XCOM’s Chief Engineer now.” Wolford replied sadly.

“I bet she’s making her old man proud.” Roman said, doing his best to stifle to stab of sadness that
tore up his throat. Wolford gave a weak laugh.

“Yeah, she our regular little poster girl.”

“I see nothing has really changed then!” Roman chuckled.

“You think Skye could take a look at my implants someday?” He asked hopefully. “My limbs have
been giving me trouble lately and it’s gotten to the point where its interfering with my work.”
Roman felt it was distasteful to ask but he didn’t know when he would hear from XCOM again.

“Of course, It’s the least we can do since you sacrificed your well-being for the war.”

“Yeah, that job did cost me an arm and a leg.” He snarked as he rolled up his sleeves, revealing
steel cybernetic arms underneath the green and brown wrappings.

Adriana choked. The black furred coyote pounded her chest and coughed as she struggled to
control her laughter.
“That’s— that’s terrible!” She managed to slur.

Roman shot her a lopsided grin and sauntered off with a pep in his step, though every now and then his leg fuzzed and jerked.

Wolford watched the dingo leave and then turned to Fangmeyer with a contemplative tilt to his head.

“Fangmeyer, I’m curious. While you were digging for information on Outrider did you manage to find out what species he was?”

The tigress shook her head. “I’m afraid not, though he had to have been a feline of some kind, no way a canine is that flexible, and he could retract his claws like a cat too.” She said while extending her own curved talons. “He was smaller, about 4 foot, so maybe a lynx or bobcat of some kind?”

“What about a fox?”

“What do you mean?” She asked.

“Well, foxes can retract their claws.” Wolford replied with a shrug.


“Just…” Wolford shook his head. “Nothing, it’s nothing....”

A/N: Who is this new Outrider? Is Nick Wilde really dead after all? What is awaiting our heroes in Zootopia? Does Fangmeyer suddenly have a taste for Timber Wolf? Am I going to answer all of these questions here and now?!

No. the answer is no. You are all going to have to suffer for a while yet. Its for dramatic effect, you understand. I gotta get my rocks off somehow. =P

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ZCOM Character Dossier

Creator: Carbonrap45 (AO3)

Name: Adriana Whifur
Age: 35
Gender: Female
Species: Coyote

Appearance: Black fur and deep golden-brown eyes with a lean muscular physique. Dresses light in favor of mobility and stealth, often seen with a recon hood and half mask with a shemagh around her shoulders.

Brief History: Grew up on the streets of Zootopia before the invasion. After capture by an Advent raid early in their occupation of earth Adriana escaped from custody and has been on the run ever since with extensive experience in paw to paw combat.
Personality: Paranoid, determined, lets slip little about herself while willing to talk to others

Positive traits: Empathic to those that suffered under Advent, has knowledge of combatting most Advent trooper types.

Flaws: Has little faith in new recruits and often refers to them as “fresh meat”, paranoia tends to flare up at the worst of times.

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*Creator: prof.ganki.gaming (FF.net)*

Name: Roman Ravenshoe

Age: 38 Years old

Gender: Male

Species: Dingo

Brief History: Roman was born to a very poor family in Russia. When it became apparent that the Alien’s arrival was imminent Roman jumped at the chance to join XCOM as soon as he turned 18. He volunteered for the Cybernetic Enhancement program headed by Chief Engineer Raymond Shen, Skye’s father. Roman became one of the pawful of survivors of the program when Earth surrendered to the Aliens. Roman fled to the wilderness to avoid capture and lived with a tiny fringe settlement until an old acquaintance recruited him into the resistance to work in the Black Market.

Basic Personality Traits: Calm, Optimistic, Bit Flirty

Positive traits: Cybernetic enhancements, Intimidating Presence, confident in leadership role

Negative traits: Severe PTSD episodes, Stubborn and resistant to change, Unable to maintain his Cybernetics making them prone to failures

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*Name: CommanderOps (AO3)*

Name Gregor 'Brick' Grizzoli

Age: 40

Gender: Male

Species: Grizzly Bear

History: Gregor was a fresh face heavy weapons specialist when the XCOM Headquarters was assaulted by the Invaders. He and his comrades/squad buddies that also were freshly promoted to some specialist was tasked defending a maintenance tunnel. They bravely held it till the dreaded sound of skittering from above. He was the lone survivor of a squad of six that escaped with the other survivors of the base. He continued to dutifully serve what was left of XCOM, but as the years go by and the more comrades he lost he became slowly numb to the loss of the life that he regards any new rookie as just another number to the wall. He was denied the rank of Sergeant based upon the mixed review of his leadership, leading successful operations but at the cost of an injured/dead rookie.

Basic Personality Traits: Serious, Reserved
Positive Traits: Heavy Weapons Specialist, Strong, Prior War experience

Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Hates Robots of any form, PTSD with Chrysalids.
The Foolish and Ignorant

Chapter Summary

When Skye sees Judy and her team off to the mission to meet a mysterious contact in the fallen city of Zootopia the arctic vixen stumbles across a shocking secret.

One that Commander Bogo is willing to imprison her to keep from uncovering.

What could be so important Bogo would lock away XCOM's Chief Engineer to hide? And what does it have to do with Nick Wilde, a mammal who's supposedly been dead for over 20 years?

A/N: Heeeey Y’all! Long time, no see! Untraveled here!

So as you may have figured out I was absent for a while from ZCOM, but that does not mean I was wholly absent from writing.

For a while I was jammed firmly behind a wall of writer’s block, so I decided to take a step back and think on what I wanted ZCOM to be. In my absence I switched back to writing some of my Original Work over on RoyalRoad.com. (I’m also under the name Untraveled on RR.com as well. My novel is “The Castaway Isle”. Check it out if you find you have a craving for a little more reading.)

Now, shameless self-advertising over and done with I want to talk a little about this chapter. The Foolish and Ignorant was originally one single chapter, but due to the sheer size of the damn thing I decided to split it into 2 parts, so look forward to Part 2 soon.

This chapter was emotionally exhausting to write, but it was also immensely satisfying. But be warned, these next 2 chapters are going to be pulling on all the wrong heartstrings.

Symptoms include, but not limited to, teary eyes, frustration, irrational hate for fictional characters, cursing of a certain author for writing the damn thing, and stabbing pain right in the feels.

You’re welcome.

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As always if you have a character you wish to see featured in ZCOM than please put them in the comment section below! Just a reminder that not every character has to be a soldier, every story needs its roguish hustlers, shady merchants, and regular mammals just trying to survive! I love to see what you, my dear readers, have to offer.

To submit your very own character into the ZCOM dossier I need these few things:

1. Name, Age, Gender, Species
2. Brief history (i.e. lived in the woods since the invasion until found by XCOM scouts)
3. Basic personality traits (i.e. Optimistic, Clumsy, Womanizer)
4. At least two positive traits (i.e. Good with a rifle, funny, fearless)
5. At least two flaws (i.e. Hates foxes, fear of fire, alcoholic)

Post your character into the comment section below!

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Chapter 13: The Foolish and Ignorant Part 1

“Ok, reworked your repulsors from some of the part I salvaged from your old engine, should fix that stabilization problem you had.” Skye muttered with a grunt and another turn of her wrench.

The Arctic Vixen was in her natural habitat, the Engineering Department, or just Engineering for short.

Shen’s workshop was little more than a cleared out section of the Avenger’s cargo hold with several rows of tools, computers and gadgets littering the workspace, some on top of the workbenches, others finding a place elsewhere. (Mostly on the floor kicked underneath a desk during one of Skye’s random moments of inspiration)

One of the young Chief Engineer’s largest concerns with her job here aboard the Avenger is the lack of, well other engineers.

Most of her personnel are on the bridge working the Avenger’s communications arrays or maintaining the retro-fitted Alien air ship’s countless integrated systems. As a result, more often than not XCOM’s Chief Engineer finds herself the sole creature in an Engineering Department built for a dozen mammals.

Thankfully, she never really minded the seclusion and remained diligent in her R&D projects, several of which have already come to fruition. The Med-kits that at least one soldier carries on a mission is one such example, another is the Avenger’s operating System, though most of that credit does go to her father, she was the one to implement it after his death.

But her proudest achievement, and one that very well be key in turning the tide during many of XCOM’s missions, was the Gremlin.

On the outside this little boxy drone seems rather tame and unassuming, but its strong suit isn’t its combat abilities, but rather its utility out in the field.

Skye designed the Gremlin drones to hover and dart across the battlefield while providing remote hacking capability, close range stun weaponry, and are even the ability to equip Med-kits and fly them out to separated wounded soldiers, all at the press of a button and a simple voice command.

However, with any game-changing technology there’s always a plethora of bugs.

Nearly a year of development and trial and error has spawned only a single functioning Gremlin drone, a glitchy little bugger Skye has lovingly dubbed “Rover”.

“Come on Rover, you can do it!” Skye cheered the little robot on and grunted as she cranked the wrench one last time.

The boxy little contraption began to shiver across the table, shaking the audience of tools and parts piled around the edge of the counter before four little pads on delicate looking arms splayed out and Rover shot into the air and barreled towards the door-
-Straight at a very surprised Buffalo rounding the corner from the hallway.

Skye’s eyes widened in horror. She tripped out of her stool and cried out with her paw outstretched as if to stop the little Gremlin careening towards her new visitor.

“Oh! Commander!”

To his credit Commander Bogo was fast for his age, and his reflexes hadn’t seemed to have dulled since his 20 year tenure as a fancy wall decoration. He bent his head to the side as the mischievous little robot shot past him, grazing his horns in the process.

He glanced behind him to make sure the speeding little gizmo wasn’t coming around for a return trip to finish the job. He turned around and crooked an eyebrow at the arctic vixen grinning sheepishly back up at him.

“Sorry ‘bout that Commander. He kinda just… got away from me.” She chuckled weakly and wrung her grease smeared paws nervously.

“You’d be surprised with how difficult it is to get the Alien’s tech to talk to ours.”

The muffled hum of Rover’s hover pads made the buffalo duck again, letting the robot toddle over his horns and spin around to face him.

The robot had a face of sorts. Its auditory and visual sensors were designed like a mammals, with two “eyes” that flickered like a camera lens in tandem with a few protective metal plates, giving it the impression it was blinking.

Rover’s eyes shuttered a couple times, as if it was taking pictures of the dumbfounded buffalo before zooming around to hover just behind Skye’s shoulder, almost like a child would hide behind its parent in the presence of a stranger.

Bogo eyed the robot wearily for a moment and grunted.

“Its fine Shen, as long as your little monster over there doesn’t try to brain me again.”

Skye coughed guiltily. “Yes Commander. I’ll be sure to tell Rover off later.”

Bogo nodded solemnly. Be wasn’t completely sure Skye was kidding either when she said that, though it made little difference.

“So how can I help you Commander?”

“I came down here to let you know the Black Market Representative just showed with the Semi-truck. Once the Skyranger is loaded Wolford and the Mediation Squad is rolling out. Best say your good byes now.”

“What? They’re leaving already!” Skye exclaimed. She dove for a bent and battered pocket watch laying on the table. “But its only—…. Ah, 0900.” Her bright blue eyes squinted at the little device suspiciously. “Have I really been down here for 19 hours?”

“ ‘Friad so. The bartender, what’s his name? Oncason? Asked me to retrieve you before you waste away in your little den from lake of food.”

Skye snickered. “Nathan asked you to get me? Commander, you do realize you’re everyone’s boss, right?”
“True, but I’ve learned early in my military career never to piss off the guy cooking your food or mixing your drinks. Couldn’t hurt to have him owe me either. The less I pull rank to get things down the happier everyone will be.”

“Maid Marian above! I never realized when the Aliens stuffed you in that casket they turned you into a monk too!” Skye laughed.

She pocketed the watch and tried to wipe some of the crease that clung to her paws on her shirt.

“Any other tidbits of wisdom you wish to bestow upon this foolish, ignorant vixen, O’ great horned one?”

Skye and Rover followed the cape buffalo out of Engineering and down to one of the Avenger’s side entrances. Bogo opened the door and looked over his shoulder with an evil smile on his face.

“Yeah, Don’t snark the guy that controls your liquor ration cards.”

“Right, the Foolish, Ignorant Vixen is shutting up now.”

Bogo stepped down the smaller ramp and his smile faded, followed by a weary sigh.

“I Swear, I see more of Wilde in you with each passing day. Even in death that fox still finds a way to get under my skin.”

Skye stumbled a little at the sudden mention of her beloved “uncle”. A soft, genuine smile broke through her smug mask.

“Thank you.” She said simply, words failing to express the glowing happiness in her chest in being compared to the mammal she looked up to most.

Bogo grunted in response and moved on. Skye followed suit, her tail swaying contently back and forth behind her.

The 20 story deep fissure the Avenger sits in was mostly flat at its bottom with the occasional crack or protrusion here and there with a winding path that lead to the surface. Three vehicles were parked on a flat patch being prepped for the mission, two older pickups and a semi-truck with its blue paint mostly scrapped off.

The Avenger absolutely dwarfed the vehicles. The semi-truck didn’t even measure up to one of the huge airship’s equally massive landing skids.

A crane groaned and whirred loudly overhead as it lowered the Skyranger, XCOM’s jumpship, from the landing pad on the Avenger’s aft. A wheeled platform waited below for the jumpship so everything to be pushed into the flatbed trailer to conceal the vehicle while in transit.

Skye and Bogo approached a swarm of mammals of various species orbiting around A familiar and rather grumpy timber wolf and an imposing tigress. Both mammals seemed to be holding an interesting conversation while simultaneously conducting this symphony of controlled chaos.

Skye’s sharp eyes caught the way the Tigress’s serpentine tail wiggled and danced in time with John Wolford’s words, and how every now and then the Cat’s paw would find its way to the wolf’s back or shoulder.

The vixen felt a naughty grin creep onto her muzzle. Interesting, very interesting… But that was ammunition better used against the crabby old wolf another time.
Most of the mammals milling around the parked convoy were support personnel loading supplies and installing communications equipment. The combat team participating on the mission were also present, though they only had to throw their packs into the back of the trucks they were riding on and to conduct preliminary checks on their gear and weapons.

Commander Bogo made a bee-line for his Second while Skye wandered over to the trucks to check the equipment being installed. Two radios, older refurbished pre-war models, were being pushed into place and hooked to their power amplifiers by an impala technician in yellow tinted combat fatigues while a whitetail deer screwed flexible antennas to the rear of the truck.

“Hey guys, how’s it goin’?” Skye asked.

The impala perked his head up and glanced back at his Chief with her gremlin hovering in tow. His horns were shortened to a modest taper to avoid catching on anything, a common feature on many of the horned mammals on board the Avenger. His black nose twitched above a polite smile.

“Hey Chief Shen! We’re just finishing the radios here. Felix is around here somewhere with the Combat Field Computers and the comm security codes. We should have our boys and girls ready to roll in 5 mikes.”

Skye smirked proudly. “Sweet! Well I better let y’all get back to it. Not like I’m needed here. Bye!” She spun around and waved over her shoulder.

The impala waved and turned as Felix Haddison, the Ocelot Technician, bounded over looking sweaty with computer tablets clutched to his heaving chest and an apology on his lips.

Skye strolled around, reveling in the busy enthusiasm that hummed in the air. There was an excited urgency about the mammals as they prepped the convoy for war. Though everything was chaotic there was a certain beauty to it all.

It was with this Maelstrom of chaos spiraling around like a hurricane that drew Skye to the second to last tan pick-up in the convoy, the only place in this crevice that held an air of calm, like the eye of a storm. That, and a pair of drooping gray ears and legs dangling from the truck’s open back seat.

“Hopps?”

Judy’s ears stiffened. Her paws clenched tightly in her lap and pulled to her pockets with a guilty quickness. She was fast, almost fast enough for Skye to miss the glitter of gold shining from the lonely rays of sunlight stretching from the surface above.

“Oh! S-Shen! Hey.”

Judy stammered and fumbled for her beat up old rifle in the floor board beside her out of habit. When she had her weapon cradled in her lap she looked back up at the frowning arctic fox with a painfully fake smile.

“So… you came to see us off?” Judy asked fidgeting nervously.

“Something like that…”

Skye glanced at the tiny golden chain dangling inconspicuously from the doe’s pocket with narrowed eyes.

“What’s that thing you have there?”
“What thing are you talking about?” Judy asked innocently. Skye rolled her crystal blue eyes.

“Don’t play dumb Judy. I’m talking about that necklace you’re hiding.”

“Oh, that thing…”

Judy’s strained smile evaporated. With paws shaking with emotions not even she could identify the doe pulled the golden chain free and held it with a tight fist.

“It’s… this… I-I mean, I…”

Judy found herself at a loss of words. Tears pooled in her dulled amethyst eyes, though she didn’t even seem to notice. She squeezed her eyes shut and twin tracks of salty liquid dampened her cheeks. Then with a considerable effort she opened her paw.

It was a ring.

A little silver engagement ring sized for a rabbit. Or a certain Hopps.

“Oh God.”

Skye blanched in horror. She kneeled down in front of the hurting little bunny with a knowing sadness in her eyes. With a tender gentleness likened of a mother consoling her kit Skye took Judy’s paws and clasped them over the engagement ring.

“I’m sorry.” Skye murmured. “I know what its like to lose someone you love too.”

“Heh.” Judy chuckled bitterly and sniffed. “Yeah, I know you do.”

“You wouldn’t see any other foxes onboard, because they are all dead.’” Judy shook the memory from her emotionally unstable mind. When Skye’s family photo flashed behind her eyes the doe let out a whimper.

“Does it get any… any easier?” Judy asked in a weak voice. Though she wasn’t expecting some magical way to halt the pain in her heart it still hurt when Skye shook her head sadly.

“It never gets easier, you can only take it one day at a time. Everything will fade in time.”

“E-everything?”

“Yes…” Skye squeezed her own eyes shut to keep her tears from falling. “Everything.”

Judy stared out into space in resigned contemplation for a few long moments. Once she felt ready enough to face other mammals Judy wiped her puffy eyes and running nose with her combat top’s sleeve. She looped the necklace over her ears and around her neck, her precious silver ring disappearing safely against her heart.

Skye climbed to her feet as the doe seemed ready to go. A parting remark was already sliding down her tongue when the bunny soldier piped up.

“Hey Skye.”

“Hm?” The vixen turned a sideways eye back. She didn’t know what to make of the conflicted frown on Judy’s face. It must be troubling her as even her little pink nose was twitching rapidly as she thought of what else to say. Judy kept Skye’s curious eye.
“I… there’s something important about this mission that I need to tell yo- “

“HOPPS! WHIFUR! GRIZZOLI! STALVARG! FRONT AND CENTER!”

With a speed borne more from weeks of hellish training Judy bounced from her seat and took off like a shot towards the circle of mammals gathered around Commander Bogo.

Halfway into her sprint the doe frowned and skidded to a halt. She looked over her shoulder towards Skye with a torn expression on her face. Skye shook her head and made shooing motions.

“Go on, tell me about it when you’re back from Zootopia. Just make sure to get here in one piece!” Skye said with a supportive smile.

Judy’s replying smile was conflicted, guilty almost, but she swallowed whatever she wanted to say and bounded away with her rifle pulled tight to her chest.

Skye sighed and ran a paw down her muzzle. Time to go she supposed. The other technicians were busy ferrying their equipment back onboard the Avenger, leaving the mammals assigned to the mission to their business. She better do the same, she didn’t want her or Rover to get in the way after all.

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Skye made her way inside, leaving Bogo to his brief, and trailed straight to the bar with dreamy thoughts of warm food and maybe a drink or two. Her fur puffed as she met with the chilly air conditioned interior, a stark temperature contrast to the arid heat outside. Rover’s optical sensors snapped closed a few times to adjust to the difference in lighting.

The Avenger seemed rather empty without Whifur and the other XCOM veterans on board. Most of XCOM’s battle roster are still recovering in their quarters from various injuries from previous missions.

Central’s been working Hopps way too hard, even if we are desperately undermanned. She’s still just a rookie, Hell she had never even held a rifle up until a few weeks ago!

Skye cast a glance towards the soldier’s quarters as she passed down the empty hallway. Grunts and snores snuck past the ajar bulwark door.

“……you heard…… Outrider?”

The rasp of hushed whispers made Skye pause mid-stride however.

Outrider? Skye thought. Are they talking about Uncle Nick?

Skye’s curiosity got the better of her, as she crept closer her stomach grumbled in protest. It was firmly against this spur of the moment detour from Oncason’s magic stove skills.

Skye shoved it down, she was curious to a fault, most explicitly so when Uncle Nick was involved. He was a bright light in her otherwise bloody, dreary childhood, even though she knew little about his life away from her days in his care.

The vixen slinked as close to the open steel door as she dared with her ears straining to catch every syllable. She held her breath in anticipation.

“Nah, that’s bullshit.” A slow, smooth voice purred. It was higher pitched than Nathan, so it had to
be a smaller feline.

*Zak Primrose perhaps?*

“No, really. I was on the bridge when the Central and the Commander found the beacon on the scanner.” A deeper growl answered. It was less of a purr like most felines, more of a rumble.

*Is that Leroy? What is he talking about? What beacon did Central find on the scanner?*

“Well, what’s the deal with all this hush-hush business?” Primrose asked. “I mean, why order us to explicitly keep Shen in the dark about all this? What’s the point?”

“Dunno, must be something about avoiding getting her hopes up.” Leroy guessed.

*The Commander said to do what?! Why! Don’t they trust me?*

“But… If what you’re saying is true we should all be out there in-masse to get to that beacon, right?” Primrose pressed.

“Apparently not. Both Central and the Commander both stated that it was impossible.” Leroy remarked.

Primrose huffed skeptically.

“Come on, this is the *Nicholas Wilde* we are talking about here. If any mammal could survive for this long it would be him.”

*What.*

Skye didn’t even notice when her legs buckled from beneath her and she landed on her tail with a loud thump.

*U-Uncle Nick… could-could be alive!*

“Is someone out there?”

When Leroy stuck his large striped head out of the doorway he caught a glimpse of a familiar snow white tail and a boxy little robot fleeing down the hall.

“Well… Shit.”

-------

Skye didn’t know how she made it to her workshop. She didn’t even remember getting up off the hallway floor.

In her blind panic her body made for the place on this ship she felt safest- her workshop.

Now she was slumped over her worktable with her head buried in her arms. Skye felt like she should be outside chasing down Central’s convoy, or maybe out in the Bar celebrating with Oncason. After all, Uncle Nick could be alive!

If that was so, why did she feel so numb?

But, and this was a huge but, both Commander Bogo and Central Officer Wolford kept this from her. Kept her in the dark about her Uncle’s possible survival. Why? What was She missing?
Skye sighed miserably. She couldn’t find the energy to care.

No… No, she did care. She was just so FURIOUS that she was struggling to process it all.

Skye had accepted Uncle Nick’s passing years ago, just like she was still dealing with her father’s death.

Something soft gently nudged against Skye’s cheek. She rolled her head over her arm. If she wasn’t feeling so shitty she would have cooed.

Rover was hovering next to her with a slightly greasy red handkerchief offered to her in its little robotic arm. It was bobbing softly on its four hover pads blinking expectedly at her, hoping she would take its gift.

At least someone here isn’t lying to me…

“Thanks Rover.”

Skye gently took the little strip of crimson fabric from the gremlin and kneaded it in her fist. It helped some.

“Okay, you’re right Rover, I need to suck it up and find out what the Hell is going on.” Skye patted the boxy robot on its head and made for the door. “And I know just who to ask.”

“Ask who what exactly?” Commander Bogo’s gravelly voice rumbled from the doorway.

Skye froze on the spot. Commander Bogo was leaning on the doorway much like he had less then an hour earlier, though this time his amicable attitude was nowhere to be seen.

Skye recovered from her surprise and fixed the imposing bovine with a thinly veiled mask of icy rage.

“I think you know exactly what, Commander.” She snapped.

Bogo’s eyebrows rose at the vixen’s audacity.

She’s even more like Wilde then I had first thought.

Bogo sighed. He wanted to avoid this conversation most of all.

“Nicholas Wilde is dead.” He said with an air of finality.

“Than why are there crewmembers saying otherwise?” Skye asked with her eyes narrowed dangerously. Bogo didn’t so much as twitch.

“They are loose-lipped, ignorant fools who don’t know anything.”

“Than why don’t you care to enlighten this Foolish, Ignorant Vixen?” Skye sneered in barely suppressed rage.

A very un-prey-like growl rose from Bogo’s throat.

“You know enough. This Outrider is NOT Nicholas Wilde. He died fighting the Alien menace valiantly to his last breath 20 years ago. That. Is. All.”

“But-“
“I SAID THAT. IS. ALL. SHEN.” Bogo roared.

He towered over the defiant arctic Vixen with his hooves curled in anger. The walls shook from his shout and Rover hid behind Skye in fear of the huge cape buffalo looming over them.

Bogo’s nostrils flared as he breathed like a winded, well, buffalo. He straightened his huge muscular frame and pierced Skye’s silent icy glare with one of his own.

“I never want to hear any more about this Outrider business. Do I make myself clear?” He said in a far calmer, but equally as scary, tone.

“Crystal.” Skye hissed.

She stomped her away past the buffalo towards the Bar.

When he was sure she had left Bogo let his weary shoulders sag and his eyes trailed up to the dull gray ceiling.

“Did I really make the right choice back then, Raymond?”

---------------

Skye wasn’t heading to the Bar.

No, she suddenly wasn’t hungry for food anymore, all she craved was Commander Bogo’s personal computer and the files on its encoded hard drive.

But first she needed a plan.

She knew Commander Bogo spent most of his time in his quarters when he was not in the gym or on the bridge. Though he seems fine Skye was well aware of the toll being trapped for 20 years in that status suit had taken on the tired cape buffalo. She needed a way to keep the Commander busy long enough for her to hack onto his computer and find what she needed.

She had very few options in this regard. Bogo wasn’t an avid drinker nor a known glutton so Oncason was out. None of the training rooms held much of an interest for him beyond familiarization and with his still recent arrival back to XCOM Bogo has yet to truly establish a routine.

That left her one final option, and how she loathed stooping so low, but it was worth it.

Skye headed for the Med-bay.

The door hissed open, revealing a mostly empty Med-bay with a few mammals on sterile beds and a few nurses milling about a hare staring at a series of charts.

“Doctor Tygan,” The hare’s black tipped ears snapped straight and swiveled in her direction. “I need to talk to you… in private.”

“E-excuse me?”

The hare found himself at a bit of a loss. Where were the scathing remarks? The irritating nicknames? Something was amiss and Tygan wasn’t sure he liked it.

He set his charts down and spun in his seat to raise an eyebrow at the peculiar sight greeting him.
In short, Skye looked like shit. Her fur stuck out at odd angles with a dead look in her eyes and her tail trailing along the ground behind her as an orange and black gremlin hovered over her shoulder.

She was fiddling with a greasy red handkerchief in her paws and looking up at him with desperate puppy eyes on par with anything a bunny doe could dole out.

That’s cheating.

Tygan sighed. He can’t believe he was about to get suckered into this but might as well hear her out.

“Let’s step outside.”

Once they were relatively alone he fixed a clinical eye on the distressed vixen.

“What do you want Shen?”

“I need a favor.” She asked.

“No.” Tygan refused immediately.

“But you didn’t even hear what I had to say…” Skye whimpered.

Tygan didn’t voice it but he was finding this whole reversal of roles between them extremely entertaining.

“I don’t have to hear what you want from me.” He shrugged. His jovial demeanor died a little bit at the defeated, downcast look in the vixen’s eyes.

“Please.” She whispered. Her voice cracked.

Skye was a good actor, but no way could she be this good. This pain was real.

“Okay, okay, I’ll listen to what you have to say at least.” Tygan felt like he was going to regret this later. His guilt eased as her ears perked up in hope.

“I need you to keep Commander Bogo busy for a while. B-but not for too long! I mean for- for like… ten or fifteen minutes, tops.” Skye blistered at the suspicious implications her request suggested, but she was too frazzled to care.

Tygan took some mercy on the poor vulpine. He closed his eyes, turned his head upward in thought and sighed deeply as he weighed his options.

“I’m not going to ask you why you need the Commander distracted because I know you won’t answer, so I will not even bother.” He admitted. “So, what is this favor of yours worth Mrs. Shen?”

“A favor of your own to collect on a later date, no questions asked.” Skye fired off immediately. She was desperate.

When her offer was met with silence she sighed and ran her claws down her ears and neck.

“Fine. One small favor- and one Advent Bug-Burger.” She relented.

“Done.” Tygan instantly replied without a hint of hesitation. He cracked an eye and peered sideways at Skye’s relieved smile. “Ten or fifteen minutes you said?”
“Y-yeah.”

“I will attempt to buy you twenty.” Jack Tygan declared. “However, no promises. The Commander seems to be a temperamental beast at the best of times. He seems to be in a mood recently.”

Tygan had already turned to walk back into Med-Bay when a pair of greasy arms scooped him up from behind into a crushing bear hug. He felt a narrow soft furred weight rest between his stiffened ears.

“Thank you.” Skye croaked. Her muzzle vibrating pleasantly against the hare’s head and neck.

“You… are welcome.” He replied carefully. “Care to set me down? It would be difficult to draw away half a ton of grumpy bovine while being coddled like a stuffed animal…”

“Oh?” Skye sheepishly released her victim with a weak chuckle. “Sorry… Got a little excited.” She scratched the back of her head awkwardly.

“It was of no consequence.” To the surprise of Skye, and even himself, Tygan chuckled at her odd behavior. “Go. I will hale him over the intercom, though I don’t have any control if the Commander decides to leave early, and I will have no way to warn you.”

Skye shook her head and flashed him a rare friendly grin.

“No, this is enough. Thank you.” She turned to the faithful little robot hovering just behind her left shoulder. “Come on Rover. Let’s get this over with.”

Tygan stared at the arctic vixen’s retreating back. Skye is such an odd creature. Somehow she manages to be crude, scathing, and thoroughly irritating while somehow simultaneously being among the gentlest, and caring mammals on board the Avenger.

The notoriously spontaneous arctic vixen has countless emotional barriers wrapped around her heart. However, even as she does her damnedest to keep the world out Skye can’t seem to help but try to fix other mammal’s hearts, almost as if they were another discarded trinket to be put back together.

They may butt heads and match wits on the daily but Tygan doesn’t hate the softer, more genuine side of the vulpine Head of Engineering.

*May as well get this over with. Hope whatever Skye needs to get done she does it quickly.*

“Bucky! Get the Commander on the intercom. Tell him it is urgent!” The hare spun on his heel and disappeared into Med-Bay with a determined glint in his eye. He will see Skye’s little request through.

After all, Bug-Burgers were at stake.

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[Commander Bogo to the research lab, Commander Bogo to the research lab.]

An artificial female voice crackled over the speakers, pulling a small smile onto Skye’s lips.

*Thanks Tygan. Maybe you ain’t so bad after all? For former Advent anyway…*

Skye padded quickly past the Command Bridge and followed the stairs to the upper bow of the Avenger where the Commander’s Quarters resided. She found it easily enough, though the door
was locked.

Not that locks mean much to the mammal that built the damn things.

Skye plucked a few tiny tools (Tiny hooks, a few miniscule Allen wrenches, and the like) from her belt pouch and fiddled with the analog lock until she found a set of her impromptu lockpicking kit that fit the bill.

She had only ever seen lockpicking in some old movies she had watched once upon a time with either Uncle Nick or her dad, but she understood the concept.

Apparently, she had a talent for it. Just a few minutes of jiggling and the lock spun and snapped open with an intensely satisfying click.

Skye had only been inside the Commander’s Quarters a few times, most of which to install the very computer hardware she came to hack into, so she was familiar with the layout.

Commander Bogo hadn’t been back long enough to really settle in yet, so most of the furniture and mementos are from Central Officer Wolford, the room’s previous occupant.

Old weapons, cherished photos of days gone by and the grinning faces of the mammals (Uncle Nick among them) immortalized in those snapshots of a happier time.

Skye forwent her trip down memory lane in favor of the desktop bolted to the desk against the far wall.

She skirted the badly made bed and glass casket filled with some of Wolford’s nostalgia trophies and climbed into the cape buffalo sized desk chair, her diminutive size forced her to stand instead of sit to reach the keyboard, but it mattered little to her. Rover enthusiastically bobbed after her like a giddy pup.

“Alright, lets see what you’re hiding…” Skye cracked her knuckles and her fingers danced across the keys. The screen flickered to life. Skye pulled her Administrative privileges (originally intended to let her access into accounts to fix issues) and Bogo’s desktop pulled up.

This was the slow part. There was no set standard for storing information on a personal computer, so Skye had to try searching for keywords in an attempt to find the relevant files.

Searching “Outrider” did the trick.

Only a single folder with two files, a Personnel Dossier and a video file.

A sudden wave of anxiety crashed into Skye as the reality of what she was about to look into. Two files, the only evidence of the what the mammal that practically raised her in her kithood had accomplished.

With a shaking paw Skye clicked the Personnel Dossier.

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[TOP SECRET] [CONFIDENTIAL]

-RECORD START-

[XCOM Personnel File # 713 Nicholas Piberius Wilde]
Seven lines.

Everything that was the amazing mammal that was Nick Wilde, loving husband, overprotective and doting father, and incredible fighter summed up in seven lines of plain text.

This is it?!

Is… Is this all I will be someday? Just a few brief black and white words in some forgotten text file?

A knot twisted in her throat, strangling the sob that bubbled at her lips.

Like ripping off an emotional band-aid Skye screwed her eyes shut and closed the Personnel Dossier. She couldn’t bare to look at that pathetically small text file any longer, her heart would break all over again if she did.

Her breathing came up ragged and uneven, almost like she had just finished running a marathon in 100 degree heat, but Skye forced herself to keep going. Uncle Nick would have done the same if it were her.

Just as she was about to open the video file a muffled curse about rambling hares echoed from outside the door, sending Skye’s blood pounding in her ears.

Shit guess my time is up.

“Rover, come over here and plug in, quick!” Skye hissed in a panic. The little drone buzzed over and clicked into a USB port with a little arm.

Skye hit the copy hotkey and stared as the processing bar filled painfully slow, all the while heavy hoof steps shook the room with an ever increasing intensity.

“Come on… Come on… Yes!” the instant the file finished copying over Skye pulled Rover from the computer and hit the power button on the monitor, hiding what she had been doing.

Skye’s tail hit the couch not a moment before the door slid open, revealing a surprised Cape Buffalo raising a perplexed eyebrow in her direction.

“Shen? What are you doing in my presumably locked personal quarters?” Bogo asked with narrowed eyes.
Skye prayed to all the foxy deities that her poker face would hold.

“I came to talk to you Commander.” She said with all the (false) honesty she could muster. “I... wanted to apologize. Ya know, about earlier.” She explained with a downtrodden expression on her face.

Bogo sighed and closed the door behind him.

“No, you do not have to apologize. Perhaps I was a bit too heated as well.” He admitted.

He stepped aside and waved towards the door.

“As long as we can put this *Outrider is Wilde* business behind us I see no need for an apology.”

It took all the self-control Skye had not to glower at the deceitful buffalo before her. Instead a small, polite smile twisted her lips.

“Thank you, sir.” She opened the door but hesitated with one paw on the door frame. She poked her head inside at look at the buffalo one more time.

“Commander?” She piped up. “Is there... Is there no way this Outrider that Central is meeting with could be Uncle Nick? Like, *any* chance at all?”

“No.” Commander Bogo’s immensely muscular frame deflated as with the sadness in his voice. “There is no chance Wilde is alive. I am sorry.”

“...Okay... Thank you Commander.” Skye barely registered Bogo’s grunt in response before she and Rover beat a hasty retreat from the Commander’s Quarters.

Bogo ran a hoof tiredly over his muzzle and sank into his desk chair. He clicked and wiggled the mouse a few times, but the screen remained dark.

*Odd. I don’t remember turning this off...*

Bogo hit the monitor’s power button. The words “File Transfer Complete” flashed ominously in the center of the screen over the one video file Skye was never to see.

The keyboard screamed and bent as a huge hoof smashed it to bits and a low bellow shook the Avenger.

“SHEEEN!”

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“Hey Rover, how long do you think it’ll take the Commander to figure out what we were doing?”

“SHEEEN!”

“Ah, apparently the answer’s less than thirty seconds. Run!”

Skye scampered from a hasty power walk to a full blown sprint down the hall. The quaking of a rapidly approaching hoof beats sent cold sweat dribbling down her spine.

“Go! Wait for my signal!” Skye flung a paw towards the Command Bridge. Rover took off like a shot towards the Bridge while Skye fled down a flight of stairs towards her workshop.
Bogo saw the vixen and her drone separate at the junction. He disregarded the floating hunk of junk and barreled after the fox.

Skye weaved and dodged the slack jawed mammals staring after her fleeing form in confusion before a huge enraged cape buffalo simply bowled them all aside.

“SHEN! STOP!” Bogo roared as he side stepped a rhino and vaulted over a cowering ocelot technician.

Naturally Skye ran faster.

Yeah, definitely a lot of Wilde in that one. Perhaps too much.

Bogo saw the vixen slip into her workshop and he followed after her, blocking her escape.

“SHEN!” Bogo shouted in anger. “Give me that file immediately.” He seethed.

Skye was leaning limply against her own work computer with her head resting on the corner of the desk and tongue lolling from the side of her mouth. She was panting as she pawed at the stitches that plucked at her side. Cardio was never her strong suit.

Skye gulped in a mouthful of air and shook her head at Bogo.

“No.” She spat, her tongue still flicking about her mouth. Bogo growled and stomped up until he was literally towering over the small predator.

“That wasn’t a request.” He rumbled.

“Not-not until you tell me what was on that video.” She shot back.

“This is your last chance. Give. Me. The. File.”

“No.”

The anger on Bogo’s face slipped into a defeated sigh of resignation.

“Fine. Then you leave me no choice but to detain you.” Bogo grabbed for the vixen but in an explosive burst of desperate agility Skye slipped through his legs. Bogo whirled around and growled at the vixen glaring up at him with an all too familiar defiant expression.

“I need to know what’s on the video. Either you tell me the truth, or I play it and we find out the hard way.” Skye snarled.

“I’m afraid you no longer have that choice.” Bogo growled.

The sly Hustler grin that split Skye’s face sent a chill down the buffalo’s spine.

“Actually, I do have that choice.” While looking straight into Bogo’s wide, dread filled eyes Skye clicked the communicator on her belt.

“Rover,” She grinned wider up at the thunderstruck buffalo.

“Do it.”

A pause, then every screen in the Avenger flickered to life.
And horrible, terrified screams spilled into the speakers.

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A/N: Aaaaand scene!

Dramatic Cliffhanger, you're welcome. Mwahahaha!

Now, back to your suffering!

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I wish to thank every single person that put in a character for ZCOM. Y’all are amazing and I am honored to be trusted with someone you have created.

Character Dossier

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*Creator: Carbonrap45 (AO3)*

Name: Adriana Whifur
Age: 35
Gender: Female
Species: Coyote

Appearance: Black fur and deep golden-brown eyes with a lean muscular physique. Dresses light in favor of mobility and stealth, often seen with a recon hood and half mask with a shemagh around her shoulders.

Brief History: Grew up on the streets of Zootopia before the invasion. After capture by an Advent raid early in their occupation of earth Adriana escaped from custody and has been on the run ever since with extensive experience in paw to paw combat.

Personality: Paranoid, determined, lets slip little about herself while willing to talk to others

Positive traits: Empathic to those that suffered under Advent, has knowledge of combatting most Advent trooper types.

Flaws: Has little faith in new recruits and often refers to them as “fresh meat”, paranoia tends to flare up at the worst of times.

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*Creator: Leroidatboi (AO3)*
Name: Leroy (no last name)

Other: Male, late twenties (27-29), Bengal Tiger

Appearance: Green eyes, sharp claws, stripes.

History: Before Advent took over, Leroy was a sniper stationed at a local military base on home rotation. Because of where he was stationed, Advent was quick to round up the remaining fighting forces for immediate assimilation. Leroy managed to escape with nothing but the clothes on his back, his rifle, and his trusty hatchet; which he used to “alleviate” (murder) as much of the Advent brainwashing as he could before escaping.

Basic Personality Traits: Quiet & Reserved, solitary and tactical

Two positive traits: Survivalist, Calm under pressure, great aim

Two Flaws: Fearful of recapture by advent, Zealously hates Advent (blood for the blood god), Nightmares of the horrors he had witnessed.

Creator: dethwulf_Zero (AO3)

Name: Alistair Stålvarp

Age: 25 Years Old

Gender: Male

Species: Red Wolf

Appearance: Tall for his species, Scars across face and back, Heterochromatic eyes (Steel gray/Deep green), Likes dressing like his father’s favorite grunge bands (ripped jeans, Tee shirts, and flannels)

History: Before recruited by XCOM Alistair lived in relative peace out in a fringe settlement with his family. As the eldest of three brothers Alistair often treats mammals smaller than himself as younger than himself, regardless of their actual age. A big family guy with a stubborn view on life that has caused problems when dealing with mammals from other walks of life and points of view. A heavy drinker off duty, he curbs his habit when on mission, though he has been known to suffer from withdrawal when on longer scouting missions.

Basic Personality Traits: Outgoing, Athletic, Self-conscious and insecure

Positive Traits: Tough, Fearless, Kindhearted

Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Overbearing at times

Creator: Syxx (AO3)

Name: Zak Primrose

Age: 25 Years Old
Gender: Male
Species: Ocelot

Appearance: Average height and weight for his species. Single large scar across the bridge of his muzzle. Blue eyes. Wears a set of old fatigues and webbing

History: Before his enlistment Zak spent most of his childhood practicing his stealth and marksmanship. As he got older he took what he learned and put it into practice, targeting Advent VIPs and ambushing patrols

Basic Personality Traits: Reserved, Sarcastic, Cautious
Positive Traits: Skilled Sniper, Calm in any situation.
Negative Traits: Smokes Cigarettes, Drinks any time he’s off duty,

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Name: CommanderOps (AO3)
Name Gregor 'Brick' Grizzoli
Age: 40
Gender: Male
Species: Grizzly Bear

History: Gregor was a fresh face heavy weapons specialist when the XCOM Headquarters was assaulted by the Invaders. He and his comrades/squad buddies that also were freshly promoted to some specialist was tasked defending a maintenance tunnel. They bravely held it till the dreaded sound of skittering from above. He was the lone survivor of a squad of six that escaped with the other survivors of the base. He continued to dutifully serve what was left of XCOM, but as the years go by and the more comrades he lost he became slowly numb to the loss of the life that he regards any new rookie as just another number to the wall. He was denied the rank of Sergeant based upon the mixed review of his leadership, leading successful operations but at the cost of an injured/dead rookie.

Basic Personality Traits: Serious, Reserved
Positive Traits: Heavy Weapons Specialist, Strong, Prior War experience
Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Hates Robots of any form, PTSD with Chrysalids.

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Chapter Summary

Nick Wilde's fate is revealed.

When every monitor on the Avenger flickered to life it was like looking at a window into a circle of Hell.

For the Veterans from the first Invasion it was like reliving a nightmare.

Speakers shook and trembled on their mounts as screams of agony and terror ripped from the throats of mammals that had been dead for 20 years.

The old recording shook violently as the Zootopia of old was bombarded from afar by fog pods. Alien bio-weapons that crashed into streets, businesses, homes and unlucky mammals fleeing in panic.

When the pods opened a sickly green mist erupted from its prison like a feral animal. Any unfortunate soul close to the fog pods when they opened were ensnared by the unearthly abomination and dragged into the green mists screaming as the life was drained from their bodies, leaving nothing left but a crumbling gray husk curled forever in the throes of agony.

This was Hell on earth.

This was the last days of Zootopia.

This was Haven’s fall.

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[OPERATION HAVEN FALL]

[DATE: 03 MARCH 2015] [TIME: 01:32 LOCAL]

[LOCATION: ZOOTOPIA]

***************

[Helmet Camera: Colonel Nicholas Wilde] [Designation: OUTRIDER]

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“CONTACT LEFT! CONTACT LEFT! FUCK, GET DOWN!”

A salvo of green plasma bolts blink through the dark rain drenched street of downtown Zootopia. The clatter of XCOM’s conventional firearms respond in kind with their own brand of hot metal death. Each shot’s violent report vibrating deep in Nick’s chest, rattling his guts against his spine.
Nick’s helmet mounted camera bounced wildly as the vulpine soldier sprinted through the heavy downpour, the rain making everything seem to go static. his heavy breathing drowned out the plasma bolts’ impact and his squad’s gunfire.

It was 30 minutes after 0100 in the morning, the only thing keeping the fox from misstepping or running into something in the war torn streets was his natural night vision. Something his squad mates were lacking.

A glint out of the corner of Nick’s peripheral vision was the only warning the red fox had as a huge bulky Alien leveled an equally massive rifle in his direction.

Instincts borne of dozens of battles had him working on auto-pilot. His body moved without conscious thought. He splayed his arms out and his padded knees scraped the asphalt as he turned his hail-mary dash down the street into a baseball slide into home base.

Sickly green flashes and the hiss of burned ozone cooking the air where his head had just vacated, the plasma bolts narrowly missing him by a hairsbreadth as Nick slid across the rain soaked asphalt.

Before his momentum died his sidearm was already drawn and trained on the creature’s head. The 9mm semi auto barked three times, the small caliber rounds drilling into the Alien’s thick flesh, severely wounding it.

The bulky Alien roared in fury and sprayed a hail of plasma fire at the fox, but Nick’s slide had taken him behind the cover of a large mammal sized four door sedan.

The car rocked from the Alien’s gunfire and the stench of melting metal and plastic scorched Nick’s sensitive nose. The Alien’s weapon was literally eating away at his cover, but the fox seemed wholly unconcerned with his situation. He clicked his headset with a free paw.

“Hey Lucky, found our trigger-happy unwelcome guest. Mind taking care of him?”

“Yes Colonel!” An enthusiastic, youthful bellow shook the tod’s headset. Nick chuckled and checked his weapons.

“Whenever you’re ready Lucky, just take the shot.”

A booming clatter ripped across the night times street. The muzzle flash of a massive light machinegun lit up the grinning face of an American bison as he mowed down the Alien keeping Nick pinned down.

The Helmet Camera followed as Nick peeked around the sedan’s melted engine block, giving Skye and everyone else on the Avenger a good look at the carnage.

Each of the large rifle rounds punched through the Alien’s armored torso, rending it into an orange swiss cheesed mush. The extraterrestrial didn’t even have the chance to scream before its lungs were mulched and it collapsed to the rain soaked sidewalk.

Nick hauled himself to his feet and spared a glance at the creature that nearly took his life.

It was a Muton. A bulky mass of muscle, green armor, and rage with the vague shape of a rhino around its shoulders, though its face was that of a spider mixed with a shark.

“Good job Lucky. Fine shooting.” Nick casually slung a two fingered salute in the bison’s direction.
Lucky’s face brightened, and he stood a little taller at the fox’s praise, his hooves gripped his light
machinegun a little straighter.

If someone had told Nick a year ago that mammals, and specifically prey mammals, would not
only tolerate his presence but look up to him he would have scoffed and hustled them out of their
wallet’s contents.

Now, it was a different story, though, if given a choice, he would give this all up just for things to
go back to the way they were before the Alien invasion. He missed his wife, daughter, and the
peaceful days spent with them both in his arms.

He also missed not getting shot at by monsters falling from the sky almost as much, though he
would never tell his wife that. She worried enough as it was while taking care of little Vivian and
Skye.

His eyes unconsciously tracked to a photo taped to the inside of his helmet’s visor. A quaint little
family portrait with his wife and daughter. All three of them grinning like fools while tangled up on
the photographer’s chair.

The ewe that took the picture had the sourest expression he had ever witnessed on a sheep’s snout,
it was so bad even Mary, a mild mannered vixen of legendary proportions, had started giggling
right along with him. His little girl didn’t know what was going on, but she loved to laugh with her
parents. Next thing they knew they were panting and pawing at each other in breathless laughter.

They didn’t even know that the sour sheep had snapped the picture, but Nick fell in love with it had
decided she deserved a tip, regardless of the prey mammal’s clear distain for foxes.

Nick braced himself and took a breath. Not now Wilde. You can miss them later.

He clicked his headset.

“This is Outrider. EVAC route is clear.”

Two heart beats later and Commander Bogo’s low, grouchy rumble shook in Nick’s ear.

[Outrider, this is Command. Saw it all on the Helmet Cams. Good work Gibson.] The bison’s wide
grin somehow stretched even further at his hero’s praise. Commander Bogo was the young
bovine’s idol.

[Tomson, Grizzoli, secure the VIP.]

“Yes Commander.” A Wildcat with brown fur and black stripes clipped. Tomson and Nick didn’t
really get along that well, though both were bitter cynics with similar views both quarreled
constantly.

Despite this they did work well together, a fact both the fox and the wildcat loathe.

Tomson waved over Grizzoli (the same Gregor Grizzoli that Skye knows, though 20 years
younger).

“Mr. Emmet, we have to go. Follow us.” Tomson tucked his X-9 assault rifle under his shoulder
and offered a paw to the small mammal leaning against a dumpster.

“You all made short work of our uninvited guests. I’m just glad XCOM’s on earth’s side.”
An older otter accepted Tomson’s paw and pulled himself to his feet with a grunt of pain. A bloody bandage clung to his side and his normally neat business suit was soaked from the rain and shredded into uselessness from Tomson’s first aid.

Though he still carried himself with a sense of authority Nick could see the slight tremble in Emmet’s knees. The otter was putting on a tough front, but his wounds were taking a toll on his body.

*He’s not long for this world if we don’t get to the Skyranger soon.*

A crack of thunder and a flash of lightening overhead lit up the sky, giving the Helmet Camera a momentary view on the devastated state of the cityscape around them. Husks of burned out vehicles and bodies littered the street. Some were gored from their fellow mammals fleeing in panic, others bore neat holes or exploded limb from Alien weaponry.

Others were partially devoured by some unearthly monstrosity that fell from the sky. Exposed flesh hung loose from gnawed bone with ribs pulled open and heads cracked, spilling their contents onto the rain soaked concrete. The blood and viscera dyed the streets of Zootopia crimson.

It was as if the city herself was crying tears of blood.

Nick’s gaze froze over the small crumpled corpses of a male wolf shielding his mate’s body with his own. Both were eviscerated beyond recognition, the female gutted, and the male’s severed head held in her lap, both pairs of eyes clouded in death.

Then the moment of clarity ended, the cragged bolt of lightening winked out, plunging the city back into a sea of roaring rain and darkness, hiding the ugly reality behind an impervious curtain of night.

Even though XCOM and all of Earth’s militaries fought valiantly against the Alien threat the truth is cold.

Earth was losing.

“We need to go.” Nick was the first to break the silence. “We need to go now.”

He pulled his sniper rifle to his chest and took off down the street at a trot as he thumbed his headset.

“Outrider to Command. We have the VIP and are enroute to Savanna Central Station for EVAC. How Copy? Over.”

Commander Bogo’s powerful growl rumbled over the radio. His voice was a bedrock operatives clung during any of XCOM’s missions. When the Commander spoke mammals jumped with a quickness, when an order was given it was followed without hesitation.

Every single mammal in XCOM had an unbending loyalty and trust in Commander Bogo, even a cynical reformed criminal like Nick Wilde.

[Outrider, this is Command. Good copy, Charlie Mike. Break. All units be advised local forces are currently engaged throughout the city with Alien forces, assist them if able and escort any survivors to Central Station for EVAC by train out of the city. How Copy? Over.]

“Roger Command. Good Copy, proceeding to EVAC and assisting any taking their boots to our uninvited guests backsides. Outrider Out.”
Wilde flicked a paw forward, his usually smooth, joking, charm stripped away, revealing the ruthlessly fury and cold calculating mind that he hid under his affable leniency. It was just another mask he wore, one he could take off and simply replace with a different mask.

If other mammals could see what was under those playful emerald eyes and easy smirk they would be running in the other direction.

“Gibson, take point. Grizzoli take the 9 O’clock. Tomson, take the 6. Mr. Emmet, stay with Tomson. I’ll take the high ground at 3 O’clock.”

No one spoke against the fox tod. No one dared cross him or crack a joke. He may act casual and look relaxed but there is a reason Nick Wilde had the highest kill count in XCOM.

The storm worsened. The helmet Camera’s recording fizzed and shook, making those on the Avenger watching the 20 year old recording a little disoriented as Nick sprinted through the punishing torrent and practically flew up a rusted drainpipe to the rooftops above with an agility even rivalling squirrels.

As soon as his friction taped hindpaws hit the rooftop the squad took off down the street as Nick flung himself from rooftop to rooftop with an ease and relaxed demeanor of a morning jogger through a park. Even when several stories up in the air in the middle of a hurricane force thunderstorm and inches from plunging to his death Nick was calm and casual.

It was the sort of nonchalant indifference to danger only the crazy or truly insane possessed. No one was quite sure which Nick was, though few wanted to find out.

A coughing symphony of frantic gunfire close by drew Nick’s attention. A flash and a roar a few streets over shook the boulevard. Gibson brought the squad to a halt and Nick slid to a kneeling position on the roof of some dilapidated department store.

[Command, this is Lucky. We got friendlies and mess of freaks tangling a couple streets over. What do we do? Over]

[Lucky, this is command. Flank them. Tomson, take the high ground when we get eyes-on. Grizzoli stick with the VIP. Gibson, you keep point and light up anything that’s furless and ugly. I’ll bring up the rear and support. Move.]

Skye clapped a paw to her muzzle as she watched her Uncle Nick from 20 years ago slowly lean over the roof’s edge and let gravity take him. A muffled scream escaped the arctic fox as the sidewalk rose up to meet Nick.

The wily fox was not trying to commit suicide however. In an unreal test of strength and flexibility Nick caught a dead street light with a free paw and spiraled down the pole to kill his momentum. When he neared the bottom he let go and hit the street at an easy stroll without so much as a break in his easy stride as he followed his squad towards the furious gunfire.

When the squad made it to the gunfight it became apparent that the survivors were losing. ZPD officers were clumsily fumbling with unfamiliar conventional sidearms instead of their usual tranq weapons and they suffered severely for it. A dozen civilians cowered behind a collection of plasma bolt riddled vehicles as the mammals in blue feebly held off the vastly superior Alien forces.

A collection of Mutons and knee high gray creatures with comically large heads attached to feeble little bodies, Sectoids it looks like, were systematically dismantling the survivors with little casualties of their own.
As the squad was rushing into position one of the ZPD tigers took a plasma bolt to the face, his jaw and cheek exploded. Flesh and skull hissed and fizzled as the cat screamed and fell behind the car clutching his face. An elk in a black track suit saw the officer fall and in a panic made a dash for the alley before a flurry of plasma bolts blasted through his abdomen and spilling his intestines across the rain soaked streets.

The huge deer crumbled to his knees in shock and mechanically tried to scoop his guts back into his ruined stomach until his grey matter was spaced out the back of his skull by a plasma bolt and his suffering came to an end.

“This is Tomson. I got those fucks in my sights.”

[Let ‘em have it.] Bogo ordered.

A savage grin split the cat’s lips. “With Pleasure.”

Muzzle flashes and clattering gunfire from the storefront roof cut through the one sided stand-off. A sectoid’s bubble shaped head burst like a watermelon and a muton’s arm and knee shattered into oblivion, its savage bladed plasma rifle clattered to the ground.

All movement came to a grinding halt as the muton bellow and crumpled into an orange blooded heap. The Aliens stared in confusion at their screeching comrade.

That second of stunned hesitation was all the opportunity Nick needed.

The powerful .300 Winchester Magnum rifle punched against Nick’s shoulder and the massive 220 grain full metal jacketed round roared out of the barrel at nearly Mach 3. The air shuddered as the sound barrier shattered with a deafening crack and a massive fireball from the lit up the night an instant before a muton’s head exploded into a foundation of orange gore.

The muton’s head splattering across its buddy’s shell shocked face seeming to flip off the pause button and the Alien’s ranks descended into chaos.

The child sized Sectoids scampered into a cowardly retreat and the mutons scattered for fresh cover as Tomson unleashed another salvo of assault rifle fire across their line, killing the wounded muton and splattering a second sectoid’s insides across the door of a minivan.

A Sectoid vanished underneath a huge hoof pounding into the pavement, orange hued viscera spewed across the rain soaked sidewalk.

The retreating sectoids stared down business end of Gibson’s machine gun in horror. the huge bison having appeared like a specter from a side alley with a maniac grin on his snout.

“Sup.”

Gibson chuckled darkly at the blank expressions that gawked up at him before pulling the trigger. The 7.62 NATO rounds tore through the Aliens with a vengeful fury.

The knee-high frail naked gray bodies ruptured and burst under the salvo, shredded organs and orange blood splattered the sidewalk like some psychopath’s abstract painting.

The survivors cowered behind their meager cover as Nick and his men made short work of the Aliens with brutal efficiency. The ZPD officers had the good sense to keep their heads down as the bullets whipped through the air and otherworldly screams tore from the throats of the dying invaders.
A muton’s chest imploded, the invader slumped face first into a puddle, its rifle fired wildly as its limbs jerked wildly in its final death throes.

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Rifle’s bolt twisted and pulled with a single motion. the spent cartridge spun free with a satisfying ping. Nick rammed the bolt home with a fresh round stripped from the magazine and the firing pin primed.

Another fleeing muton broke cover from behind a burned out sedan, its rifle spitting green plasma wildly in Nick’s direction. A section of brick exploded a few inches from Nick’s foot, the plasma bolt cutting through the rock like butter and blasted out from the roof behind here he was kneeling and narrowly missing his bushy red tail.

The close brush with death did not even elicit a twitch from the vulpine as he leveled his weapon at the offender and pulled the trigger.

A mad purring laugh rumbled from Nick’s chest as he relished in his weapon’s recoil and the geyser of orange gore that burst from the back of the Muton’s skull. The deep rumbling noise crackled eerily over the recording, sending a chill up Skye’s spine. It was an evil laugh, a vile warped perversion of elation and savage delight.

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“CLEAR!”

The hammering clap of Gibson’s machinegun died, settling the bloody battleground into a shocked silence. Nick racked another fresh round home and clipped his rifle to his chest to make his descent to the street below.

A couple of the ZPD officers, an older male coyote and a mare with a scar across one eyebrow, made their way towards Gibson as he approached the survivors. The police officer’s blue uniforms were bloody and torn, their equipment missing in some places with their paw and hoof wrapped tight around their pistols.

“ZPD! Halt! I-identify yourselves.” The mare stammered as she struggled to crane her neck back to look up at Gibson in the face. Her eyes glanced nervously every now and then down at the huge (and still smoking) machinegun in his hooves.

“Special Forces.” Gibson replied with the typical answer to that question.

“Special forces?” The mare looked down at her coyote partner. He shrugged, and she turned back to the huge bison with strange body armor and massive and very illegal weaponry.

“Special forces with who?” She asked.

“That’s classified, I’m afraid.”

The pair of officers turned to see an oddly familiar red fox in similar body armor with a sleek black sniper rifle strapped to his chest. The coyote’s jaw dropped.

“W-Wilde?” He asked. The mare choked and gawked in disbelief at the grinning fox.

“Hey Officer Whifur, Officer Whinnybright, Long time no see.” Nick waved.
“What the fuck are you doing here you lowlife scum?!” The mare snarled and drew her pistol at the vulpine soldier.

Nick looked completely unimpressed.

“Well I was just saving your sorry tails from getting your inside disintegrated by a bunch of little grey men from outer space, but who’s counting?”


“Make me.”

“ENOUGH!” Officer Whifur snapped at his partner, his hazel eyes icy. “Jessie! Get a hold yourself! He just saved us!”

The mare stared in outrage at her partner.

“This FOX is a fucking criminal!” She hissed.

“He just saved us.” He countered.

“This fox a felon with an illegal firearm!” She shouted in exasperation.

“You do know that ‘this fox’ is standing right here?” Wilde replied with a roll of his eyes. “Oh, by the way, Whinnybright, its unconvicted felon thank you very much. None of those charges stuck.”

“You son of a bitch!” Whinnybright snapped.

Suddenly pain exploded from her head and everything turned white. When the mare came to her senses she was sprawled on the ground staring into twin pools of icy emerald fire.

“Care to repeat that little pony?” Nick whispered sweetly in the terrified mare’s ear. Her mute, wide eyed stare and trembling ears was all the answer he needed. Officer Whifur watched in surprise but did nothing to assist his partner, even he was offended. Calling someone’s mother a “bitch” was one of the worst insults you could utter to a canine.

“Good girl.”

Nick hopped off the stunned officer’s chest and started barking orders to the two other soldiers that materialized from the rainy gloom like phantoms from a nightmare.

“Grizzoli, get a head count of the survivors. Gibson, how are you on ammo?”

“I have a belt and a half colonel!”

“Just call me sir, kid. Take point, same as before. Tomson!”

“Yes sir?”

“Get with any wounded and try to get them on their feet and be quick about it! We’re running out of time before the Skyranger is back in range for pick up.”

“On it.”

“Thanks. Officer Whifur?”
Nick turned to the coyote. The police officer had a conflicted frown on his muzzle but met Nick’s eyes with an open expression.

“‘Yes?’”

“How many officers do you have left?”

The coyote deflated and looked away in sorrow.

“Including me? Five. We lost contact with a few of the others while they were on patrol throughout the city districts so all the officers you see here are the survivors from Precinct 1. The chief of police and most of the others didn’t even make it out of the building when the Alien’s started hammering us with those damned fog pods and Aliens started dropping all over the city.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.” Nick said. To the officer’s surprise the ex-con actually sounded sincere.

“What about your family?” Nick pressed gently. “Are they alive?”

The coyote seemed thankful for the change in conversation.

“Yeah, yeah. My wife’s fine. She’s with my little Adriana over there, by your grizzly bear.”

“Good.” Nick nodded.

“What about you?”

“What?”

Nick was caught off guard by the question. He wasn’t used to receiving any sort of concern from other mammals, least of a from a cop. It took him a few moments to catch on to what the officer was asking about.

“Oh, my family? They’re safe. We moved out of the city when I got offered this gig.”

The older coyote snorted.

“Some gig. Never thought a street hustler would end up being me and my family’s savior.”

Nick chuckled.

“I know the feeling.”

Their pleasant conversation was interrupted by Tomson’s shout.

“Hey Wilde! We’re as good as we are going to get while out here in this damned rain! Let’s get moving!”

“Sounds good! I’ll call it in.” Nick clicked his headset.

“Command, this is Outrider. Civilians and five local law enforcement secure. Waiting on further orders. Over.”

[This is Command. Good job mammals. Proceed with escort of the VIP with civilians in tow. Big Sky will pick up at Savanna Central Pavilion. How Copy? Over.]

“This is Outrider. Good Copy. Charlie Mike with escort of civvies and VIP to EVAC site. Outrider
The survivors groaned to their feet and started the march down to Savanna Central Station with Gibson leading the way and Nick trailing behind with Tomson to guard the rear.

For some odd reason lost on Nick Officer Whifur hung back in the rear with him after spreading the surviving police officers along the perimeter. Nick felt uncomfortable about the coyote officer’s scrutinizing stare boring into the side of his head.

The fox looked in every other direction except towards his inquisitive admirer. Eventually he ran out of places to look at and his eyes trailed up to the thunderstorm overhead.

*Seems the rains finally letting up for now. Though... why does that thundercloud over there seem strange?*

A huge billowing behemoth of thunder and angry dark grey clouds rolled across the night sky. Lances of light raced across the inside of the huge cloud formation as it approached the city, cutting through the storm like a knife.

“I’ve seen you before.”

Nick was shaken from his musing of odd cloud formations by a teenage female coyote, about 15 years old or so, with a look of disdain on her lips. Her gray tank top and shaggy green shorts clung wetly to her lithe frame.

“Yeah?” Nick asked, not quite understanding what this young stranger was getting at.

“Yeah, now I remember.” The coyote spat. “you’re a criminal! I saw Daddy arrest you.”

“Adriana!” Officer Whifur snapped, pulling the rebellious coyote’s scowl from Nick to himself.

“What? Its true!” She exclaimed to her father.

“Mr. Wilde was never convicted of any crimes, as frustrating as that is, but he did just save us, so show some respect.”

“No its fine Officer.” Nick chuckled. “Your daughter’s right to be cautious around mammals like me. You wouldn’t have had to arrest me otherwise.”

“Paranoia is never a good trait to encourage.” Officer Whifur grumped with a curl of his lips.

“Paranoia kept me and my family alive for this long.” Nick replied. “In times like these being overly cautious is a necessity.”

“Speaking of cautious.” Adriana cut in with a sly grin on her narrow muzzle. “Dad, I want a gun.”

“No. absolutely not.” Officer Whifur put his foot down on the matter. “You’re only a child and, even if you weren’t, guns are illegal unless you’re a police officer.”

“But dad-“ She pleaded.

“I said no Adriana.” Officer Whifur cut her off.

“Fine.” Adriana turned her icy gaze to Nick. “Hey you. You’re not a cop. Can I have one of your guns?”
“Adriana!” Officer Whifur looked about to smack some sense into his daughter.

“What?” She threw her arms up in the air. “He’s some kinda ex-criminal right? That means he used to be a bad guy. Bad guys always carry a bunch of guns, so that means he has to have a few guns on him, right?”

Nick chuckled, interrupting whatever Officer Whifur was about to say.

“Well, you’re not wrong there kit.” Nick reached down to his right ankle and tugged a small hold-out revolver from its concealed holster.

“It’s a memento from my days as a ‘bad guy’.” He explained to a wide-eyed Adriana. “It’s not much, just an old .38 snub nose pistol. This little thing saved my life, and my family’s, more times than I care to count.”

He carefully passed the small revolver over to the young coyote, who took held it with shaking paws as if it were some venerated relic.

“It’s only got six shots though, so make sure you hit what you’re aiming at.” Nick cautioned. “But remember to listen to your dad. He has more experience than you with guns, can you promise me that?”

“Y-yeah…” The young coyote mumbled in a small, dazed voice. “Yeah, I can do that. T-thank you.”

Adriana wrapped her fingers around the pistol’s molded rubber grip, her eyes wide in awe at the weight of the small weapon and the power she now wielded. It scared her a little.

“Mr. Wilde, a word?” Nick was pulled aside by a scowling Officer Whifur.

“What do you think you are doing?” The coyote snarled in a harsh whisper. “You just gave my daughter a bloody gun of all things!”

“I just gave your daughter her best chance at surviving this mess.” Nick shot back. “Can you guarantee that while you’re running around trying to protect every mammal here you can always be there to keep your daughter safe?”

Officer Whifur’s mouth opened but no words came out.

“I thought not.” Nick continued. “Someday your daughter is going to have to learn to fight for herself, and she even came to you first. She wanted you, her father and protector, to show her how to fight. Instead she had to rely on some stranger, someone she saw you arrest, to give her the means to protect herself.” Nick narrowed his emerald eyes into a venomous scowl at the stunned coyote officer. “You should be ashamed.”

Officer Whifur looked away, finding himself unable to hold the fox’s piercing gaze.

“Perhaps… Perhaps you are right. Thank you for showing me what I have to do.” The officer admitted.

All further conversation was cut off by an excited shout from the front of the survivors.

“Look! I see Savanna Central Station! We’re almost there!”

A cheer rose up from the exhausted survivors. The train station was a beacon in the dark city. Its
back up generators still powering the massive spire shaped building, giving life to the lights shining through its massive windows and its trains that were running non-stop to evacuate as many mammals as if can from the devastated city.

All that was between the survivors and freedom was the central pavilion, a wide circular expanse that lead up to the majestic train station.

“Come on! Let’s go!” An excited badger shouted and dashed across the pavilion towards a barricade manned by a scattering of local military and the surviving members of the ZPD. The badger was soon followed by a group of other zealous mammals whooping and hollering in joy at finally reaching sanctuary.

The mammals guarding the barricade noticed the commotion the mammals were making and opened the barrier for them.

“Damned fools.” Nick rolled his eyes skyward. “They were lucky no sniper had picked them off running full tilt out into the open like that.”

[All units, this is Command. Big Sky is inbound to your location, ETA 10 seconds.]

Nick cast his eyes skyward as a sleek VTOL with twin engines and swept back wings circled around the station to prepare to land in the center of the pavilion.

“Alright, my ride’s here. I can’t wait to get back.” Nick sighed.

“Do you think its safe?” Adriana asked nervously. Nick shrugged and chuckled.

“I think your idiot friends up there cleared that for us, unless the Aliens are waiting for something…”

Nick said as he watched the strange thundercloud he had seen before roll right over the train station. A deep rumble shook the air as lances of colored lights raced across the huge cloud and collected all in a single spot.

No.

His eyes widened in horror.

“WAIT!”

Nick shouted with his arms waving in the air as the rumbling hum deepened as dread grew heavy deep in his chest.

“RUN!”

He roared at the mammals staring at him skeptically from behind their safe barricade. What was this fox doing, telling them what to do? They were safe behind a barrier with a mountain of guns and soldiers. What could this shady criminal be doing, sprinting towards them and telling them to run?

Nick pointed to the sky, towards the huge “thundercloud” hovering directly over the station.

“IT’S A TRAP!”

The confused expressions on the soldiers’ faces were forever burned into Nick’s memory.
One of the wolves opened his mouth to curse the fox outright before a huge beam of energy engulfed the train station, incinerating the massive building and all its occupants, erasing them from the face of the Earth.

A massive shockwave blew Nick off his feet. The heat followed the fox tumbling through the air, singing his red fur and turning the ground around what was once the train station into slag.

Skye yipped in emotional pain as she watched Nick smack into the pavilion and skid across the pavement, leaving a streak of blood in his wake. The vulpine soldier landed bad on his shoulder, his arm wrenched into his ribs. The impact left him gasping for air.

“N-no…” Nick gurgled. His eyes stared at the mountain of magma glowing in the night time darkness. They’re gone, all of them. Nick closed his eyes. How is he going to get the rest of the civilians away to safety without the train now?

[Outrider! Outrider, Report!]

Commander Bogo’s concerned voice over Nick’s headset pried the fox into action. With a wince and a small groan of pain Nick clicked his headset.

“It-it’s okay. I’m okay Chief…” Nick panted. “I’m alive.”

[What was that? What did you see?]

“A warship.” Nick struggled to draw breath. “Those… those fucks blasted the fucking train station with a god-damned warship.”

[This is Big Sky. I managed to gain some distance from that huge UFO’s weapon. I’m coming around for another pass for EVAC. ETA 60 seconds.]

Nick turned his eyes up to the massive construct hovering ominously over the city. The huge energy blast cleared the clouds that concealed it, revealing a huge set of rings with arcs of power jumping from one ring to the other.

Nick struggled feebly to rise to his feet but failed to get off his knees.

“I got you colonel.” Huge hooves wrapped around the fox’s back and effortlessly lifted him to his feet.

“Thanks Gibson.” Nick said. The bison grinned.

“Come on col- sir. Let’s get-“

“GIBSON! BEHIND YOU!”

“Wha-?”

The bison barely turned around in time for a massive wall of taut muscle encased from head to toe in blood red armor to smash headlong into him, carrying both Gibson and Nick off their feet into a brick wall.

Nick was lucky. He had enough advanced warning to push off of Gibson’s flank right before impact. When he smacked into he wall his helmet took the brunt of the abuse, though Gibson was not so fortunate. The wall cracked and crumbled from the huge impact. The Bison wheezed from having the air knocked from his lungs.
A berserker, fuckin’ wonderful.

The massive Alien roared in rage and cocked back his arm, twin blades affixed to the berserker’s gauntlets flashed in the magma’s red light. The massive weapons smashed into the young bison’s skull, sending one of his huge horns spinning and cutting a swath of flesh and fur from Gibson’s face.

The young Bison screamed in agony and thrashed his remaining horn, the curved point caught the Alien under the chin, jerking at off of him.

Gibson held a hoof to his bleeding face. He felt the base where his severed horn once sat.

“Fucking Aliens… and your… fucking… cheap shots…” Gibson wheezed. The berserker roared and charged.

“Go… to… Hell…” Gibson shook the blood from his eyes and rose his machinegun to his hip and held down the trigger. The huge weapon sputtered out a salvo of high powered rifle rounds, most of which finding a permanent home in the berserker’s flesh.

But even that didn’t stop the crazed monstrosity. The huge berserker ignored the bullets tearing into its armor and body and swung with its bladed gauntlets, the sharpened metal punching into the bison’s shoulder.

Gibson roared in pain threw a wide left hook into the behemoth’s helmeted face. The vicious blow actually took the Alien off its feet and wrenching its blades free of Gibson’s shoulder.

[Wilde, get that thing’s attention!] Commander Bogo shouted over the radio.

“Got it Chief.”

Nick found his opening and snapped his rifle to his shoulder and fired. The berserker’s shoulder whipped back from the heavy round’s impact, the taut muscle underneath the compromised armor exploding out its back in a foundation of orange gore.

The berserker snarled and barreled straight for Nick, a mistake the cost it dearly.

With a guttural bellow Gibson lowered his head and charged, catching the Alien under its arm and straight into its exposed flank. The bison felt bone and flesh buckle from the impact, leaving the Alien in breathless agony.

Gibson flicked his head, slinging the berserker to the ground where he and Nick filled it full of holes until both mammals’ weapons ran dry.

“Y-you alright colonel?” Gibson asked between gulps of air.

Nick checked himself.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just lost most of my pistol’s magazines, the rest of me is rattled but alive.”

The spinning whine of Plasma rifles split the silence. Sections of pavement kicked up and exploded around the two XCOM operatives, forcing them to take cover behind a building about a hundred yards away from the survivors and the rest of the squad.

“Shit, it’s another trap!” Tomson swore over the radio.

[Outrider, this is Command. Get to a vantage point and take out those snipers!]
“No problem chief!” Nick turned to Gibson with a sly smirk spreading across his muzzle.

“Hey Lucky, mind fastballin’ me to the third floor window?”

Gibson’s bleeding face split into a smile matching his superior’s.

“With pleasure colonel.” He laid his hoof out for Nick to step onto it and curl his legs like a spring. The fox chuckled.

“My Lucky, what enthusiasm! It’s almost like you can’t wait to get rid of me!” Nick snarked.

“Perish the thought colonel. Now I don’t have to wait to get rid of you! Ready?”

“Do it.”

With a grunt Gibson slung the fox skyward as Nick snapped his legs off the bison’s hoof like a springboard. He caught the third floor window sill and vaulted inside with his rifle already pressed to his shoulder.

“This is Outrider. I got eyes on the uglies taking pot-shots. Three Mutons on rooftops. I think I see more movement over there too. I think we are about to have a lot of company.”

[This is Command. Waste ‘em. Give the survivors cover fire until Big Sky can get them all onboard.]

“Right. Firing.”

The first muton’s cranium burst with a pop. The corpse tumbled from the edge to splat on the street below.

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The second muton was not as stupid as its fellow and dove for cover behind a metal beam, though that proved useless as its mass was still visible around the slender metal plate. Nick put a round through its knee to make it fall then drilled a second round through its heart.

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The last sniper received a fist sized hole through its throat, decapitating the monstrosity in the process, its head spun away into the darkness as its body crumpled to the floor.

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[This is Big Sky coming in for a landing. Hurry it up, this jumpship isn’t meant to take too many hits.]

Tomson and Grizzoli went first with Mr. Emmet. The wounded otter had to be half-carried across the pavilion to the Skyranger waiting for them.

[VIP secure, send over the civvies next.]

While the civilians dashed across the pavilion Gibson limped to the Skyranger and took cover beside the ramp with his machinegun at the ready.

About half of the civilians made it across when Nick felt the building he was in tremble.
That’s not good.

A sudden crash and the building groaned and buckled in on itself as something down in the floors below smashed the building from the inside out.

“IT’S A SECTOPOD!” Tomson shouted in panic.

“I can see that!” Nick snarled into his headset as the room he was in tilted inwards, the furniture surrounding him began to slide across the floor, threatening to take him with them.

Who wants to live forever anyway?

Nick flung himself from the window. The same window that was three stories off the ground. The fox spun in midair and squeezed his eyes shut and waited for the impact.

The breath was knocked out of him and his back lit with fiery pain as he impacted onto the hood of a wolf sized sedan and bounced off onto the pavement. He landed and tried to roll with the impact but all he succeed in doing was wrenching his tail something fierce and collecting a new set of bruises.

Well, I’m not dead. Somehow.

Nick struggled to force some air into his screaming lungs and climb to his feet. He gripped the sedan that saved his life and pulled himself up.

The building he was in collapsed with a thunderous roar and a huge wave of dust that peppered Nick with stinging bits of debris.

The ground trembled, causing the sedan to bounce a little across the asphalt. A massive metal foot smashed into the ground with a booming thud.

A two story tall robot with two bipedal legs and a huge energy cannon stood up from the collapsed remains of the building it just destroyed. It’s body was a glossy silver pod with a single crimson eye shining in Nick’s direction.

“Fuck.”

Nick scrambled away as the plasma cannon unleashed a salvo of energy bolts. The air popped and hissed as the plasma superheated the air, catching it of fire.

[Command, I got to take off. If the Skyranger takes a direct hit from that Sectopod we’re all dead.]

[Roger Big Sky… you-you are clear for takeoff.]

“What?!?” Nick snarled into his headset. “You can’t leave! What about all these people you’re leaving behind?! What about me?!”

[…]

“Chief!” Nick roared into his headset and ducked a burst of plasma bolts that seared a trough into the pavement.

“Commander!” Gibson piped up over the radio. “Let me go and help take that thing down!”

[NO! Gibson you board the Skyranger. That’s an order.]
“But-“

[NOW GIBSON! Big Sky, take off immediately!]

“NO!” Nick roared as the Skyranger’s ramp clamped shut with a hiss and the twin engines roared to life.

“BOGO YOU FUCKING TRAITOR!” Nick screamed. “YOU CAN’T LEAVE ME HERE! I HAVE A FAMILY YOU BASTARD! I HAVE A WIFE! I HAVE A DAUGHTER!”

[I’m sorry Wilde.] Bogo’s voice was heavy with regret. [But the risk is too great. I’m… I’m sorry.]

“NO! BOGO, YOU CAN’T LEAVE ME HERE! BOGO?!”

Skye stumbled back as her Uncle Nick pleaded, begged for Bogo to save him.

“WOLFORD?!”

The arctic vixen fought to tear away from the screen, but she was rooted to the spot, forced to watch this nightmare unfold until the end.

“SHEN!”

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[COMMANDER BOGO SEVERED CONNECTION]

[RECORDING END]

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As the screen froze and Nick screams for mercy died stunned silence consumed the workshop. The quiet only broken by Skye’s sobs.

Commander Bogo closed his eyes and let out a long sigh. He didn’t want her to find out this way.

He turned and reached out for the Vixen’s trembling shoulders as she buried her head in her paws and cried.

“Shen, I-“

Skye savagely struck his hoof aside. Her chest heaved in sorrow and her eyes reddened as hot tears poured down her cheeks.

“Traitor.”

Her voice was barely above a harsh whisper. She stared up at the mammal responsible for her Uncle Nick’s death with fury in her blue eyes.

Bogo opened his mouth, but Skye beat him to it and slapped him with all the strength she could muster.

The buffalo’s head jerked from the blow, his cheek burned where her paw had struck him. He looked up in time to watch the broken hearted vixen flee from the room crying.

Bogo looked down at the floor and took it all in. He deserved this. The anger, the hate. He was
responsible for it all. He betrayed Nick Wilde and he died a very violent death for it. He died hundreds of miles away from his family.

He couldn’t even give them a body. The only thing left of Nick Wilde was an empty pine coffin and an XCOM flag.

Theses thoughts stuck with the cape buffalo as he marched from the workshop to the Command Bridge.

When Commander Bogo looked up [RECORDING END] flashed accusingly from every screen in the room and every eye in the room was on him.

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Character Dossier

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Creator: Carbonrap45 (AO3)

Name: Adriana Whifur
Age: 35 (Age during Operation Havenfall: 15)
Gender: Female
Species: Coyote

Appearance: Black fur and deep golden-brown eyes with a lean muscular physique. Dresses light in favor of mobility and stealth, often seen with a recon hood and half mask with a shemagh around her shoulders.

Brief History: Grew up on the streets of Zootopia before the invasion. After capture by an Advent raid early in their occupation of earth Adriana escaped from custody and has been on the run ever since with extensive experience in paw to paw combat.

Personality: Paranoid, determined, lets slip little about herself while willing to talk to others

Positive traits: Empathic to those that suffered under Advent, has knowledge of combatting most Advent trooper types.

Flaws: Has little faith in new recruits and often refers to them as “fresh meat”, paranoia tends to flare up at the worst of times.

Creator: Thelegendliveshere (AO3)

XCOM DATABANK RECORDING BEGINS

Name: Rory “Lucky” Gibson
Age: 41 Years Old (Age during Operation Havenfall: 21)
Gender: Male
Species: American Bison
Appearance: Shorter than average, lost left eye and horn sustained from service within XCOM, dark grey eye (remaining), rich brown coat.

Personal Service History: Prior to the initial Invasion of Earth Rory lived and worked within the
central United States with his father Chase Gibson as an automotive mechanic. He preferred such quoting “A good life need not be an exciting one, but one filled with purpose and self-satisfaction.”, however his home quickly became a target for abduction raids by the aliens. He was only one rescued and recruited by XCOM, where he began to take vengeance for his broken home. His nickname “Lucky” was derived from his sole survivor combat status and personal experience. When XCOM was discovered it cost him his second home, his left eye and horn, as well as his pride. Now twenty years have passed, but there are whispers “XCOM LIVES”. Personality Profile: Devoted, Sage Advice Quotes, Father Figure, Team Player. Positive Traits: Mechanical and Explosive expertise, Prior War Experience. Negative Traits: Overly cautious, Personal Distain for Advent and Ex-Advent Personnel. Wolford note: If we can find him, Rory would be an invaluable asset to XCOM. it is unknown if he is fit for combat duty after the raid on home base, but his experience would more than make up for it. Maybe Shen could use the help in engineering…

XCOM DATABANK RECORDING ENDS

Name: CommanderOps (AO3)
Name Gregor 'Brick' Grizzoli
Age: 40 (Age during Operation Havenfall: 20)
Gender: Male
Species: Grizzly Bear

History: Gregor was a fresh face heavy weapons specialist when the XCOM Headquarters was assaulted by the Invaders. He and his comrades/squad buddies that also were freshly promoted to some specialist was tasked defending a maintenance tunnel. They bravely held it till the dreaded sound of skittering from above. He was the lone survivor of a squad of six that escaped with the other survivors of the base. He continued to dutifully serve what was left of XCOM, but as the years go by and the more comrades he lost he became slowly numb to the loss of the life that he regards any new rookie as just another number to the wall. He was denied the rank of Sergeant based upon the mixed review of his leadership, leading successful operations but at the cost of an injured/dead rookie.

Basic Personality Traits: Serious, Reserved
Positive Traits: Heavy Weapons Specialist, Strong, Prior War experience
Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Hates Robots of any form, PTSD with Chrysalids.

Name: Scott Tomson
Age: 48 (Age during Operation Havenfall: 28)
Gender: Male
Species: Felis silvestris (wildcat)
height: 3 feet 2 inches
Fur pattern: brown with black strips
eyes: amber brown
Personality Traits: a cracked Stoic mask that hides a broken mammal

Back Story: Before the invasion to say Mr. and Mrs. Tomson had it all was not far from the truth they ran a small corner store that had the income for them to live comfortably as that prepared to
welcome a bundle of joy to the world.
The invasion hit Tomson's world like a storm, Tomson had been out buying new stock for the store when the attack came and was all but over by the time he got back to his store to find his wife crushed under rubble of the floor above, the invasion had come and taken Mrs. Tomson and left Mr. Tomson a husk.
when X-com started looking outside the military for volunteers Tomson signed up without question the aliens has crushed his world now he was going to crush them, it did not take long for Tomson's comrades to learn of the fury that had consumed him he fought with an almost reckless abandon till the mission that changed him.
Tomson and his comrades where responding to alien attack on civilian populated zone well in transit the Squad was informed to hold on use of explosives as their where still civilians in the builds, on mission Tomson saw an opening to take out two squads of combatants with a grenade, Tomson tossed the grenade it took the aliens but also brought down the build near them.
Reports later confirmed that a family of five had been killed by the buildings collapse, opening Tomson's eyes to the rage that had possessed him and how made him no better than the monsters that took his wife from him, this changed Tomson but before he could start to atone for what he had done X-com was disbanded.
Now twenty years later as firebrand landed at the encampment, it is "The Call" and he will answer, always. the rhino and panther looked on as the feline briskly walked up to Wolford, Tomson stood to attention and saluted "Scott Tomson reporting for duty, Sir!"

Good Traits:
1. experienced with most standard-issue X-com weapons and gear preference being an assault rifle and sword.
2. Quick working mind lets Tomson adapt to un for seen circumstances quicky and efficacy.
3. expert in Pistol Marksmanship with one of his wife's last mementos a small sidearm that is always loaded and never far from his side even when he sleeps and showers.

Negative Traits:
1. willing to draw his firearm to get his point across in an argument.
2. not willing to carry grenades in any form or use grenade launchers.
3. cannot deal with flirtation from females (or anyone) often ended with a hiss from Tomson making most women back off, when that did not work a raised paw baring not only his claws but his wedding ring did.
Chapter Summary

Judy Hopps and her squad descend into the tunnels under Zootopia on their way to intercept the beacon and hopefully the mammal that set it there, Outrider. She discovers that there is more in the darkness below than just shadows, perhaps some secrets a better left buried.

A/N: Hey Y’all! Untraveled here!

I’m so pumped! On AO3 ZCOM has over 1,300 hits and 69 kudos! I mean WHAT?! That’s incredible! (and extremely humbling. Ya know, no pressure and all that.) not to forget the awesome readers on FF.net either. Over 1,100 views and over 20 subscribers! HOLY CRAP!

Thank you all so much for all the support. I can’t say this enough but you all make all this time and effort writing and editing worth it.

Y’all are awesome.

So! Enough mushy shit.

Tonight I have another long chapter for you, and not going to lie… it’s a bit of a doozy.

Fear not! Everything in ZCOM is not all gloom and doom. I hate terminally tragic and depressing stories with a fervent passion. They just ain’t fun to read.

That said the darker the night the brighter the dawn’s light. (Sounds rather poetic doesn’t it? Its almost like I know what I’m doing. Lol)

This is the chapter before the season’s finale. Its at least a 2-parter so I expect to round season 1 of ZCOM out at about Chapter 17 or 18.

If all goes well I think you all will like what I have in store!

Now, on with the show!

(More Author’s Notes at the end.)

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Chapter 15: Nine

“How long has she been sitting in front of the computer?”

“Oh, Commander. Um, Shen showed a while after the… video and sat down in front of that terminal. Its been hours since she last moved and if anyone tries to move her she… well…”

“I understand.”
“Are you going to remove her Commander? That’s the terminal set up for the Outrider Beacon Mission.”

“No… No good would come of it. Inform me the second Operation War Banner goes live. I doubt I can keep Shen from becoming involved with the mission, but I will not allow an emotionally unstable operator conduct the mission unsupervised and possibly jeopardize the operation.”

“Yes Commander.”

**********

Click…click…clickclick…click…click-click-click…click…

9 pulls of the trigger. 9 clicks of a hammer over a revolver’s empty chamber. Always the same irregular pattern.

Click…click…clickclick…click…click-click-click…click…

The hammer’s sharp snap was almost painful in the thick stressed silence inside the armored pickup. The convoy had set out a few hours ago and any attempts at conversation were quickly culled by the tense anxiety that pressed down on the XCOM rebels.

Five mammals were piled into the rear pick-up. Four of them were the operatives selected for the mission. Adriana Whifur, Judy Hopps, and Gregor Grizzoli filled the back seat with Alistair Stålvarg in the passenger seat as one of the Engineers, a bored looking opossum in a yellow t shirt and similarly dyed military fatigues with a 9mm semi-auto pistol strapped to his hip.

Adriana and Alistair were both pulled early from recovery, Adriana from shock burns courtesy of an Advent Stun Lancer and Alistair from a plasma bolt to his abdomen.

Both mammals were nearly recovered and did their best to hide their discomfort but the subtle twitch that rushed through Whifur’s leg was a clear indicator that she was still feeling it.

Adriana Whifur cradled her ancient .38 hold-out revolver reverently with the cylinder swiveled open and its six chambers free of ammunition.

Whifur was dressed in her usual setup. Dark baggy clothing and a woodland camouflaged shemagh and a recon hood pulled down around her neck. She chose a shotgun for her primary firearm this mission, though she still strapped on several back up weapons, including the holdout revolver she is currently playing with.

Alistair was clad in torn jeans and his “lucky” Linkin’ Bark band T-shirt. His light body armor was mostly ceramic and fit over his chest and back, leaving some of his midriff exposed to allow for more flexibility. His assault rifle sat upright between his knees.

Gregor Grizzoli was in red and gray standard issue XCOM “juggernaut” armor. The grizzly was a walking tank of Kevlar and armor plating with his custom rotary cannon decked out with a laser sight.

Judy was dressed in her own handmade uniform her mother had stitched before she left home to join the resistance. A dull tan t-shirt with form fitting military fatigue of the same color. Her body armor was a custom order, so it fit her trimmed curves and modest bust well, despite the damage done to it.

Adriana Whifur cradled her ancient .38 hold-out revolver reverently with the cylinder swiveled open and its six chambers free of ammunition.

The black coyote’s entire focus was on the old weapon. The blued finish had long since rubbed off
the metal, leaving blotches of grey steel dully glowing through the obsessively polished surface.

Small chips and pits marred the little pistol’s edges, a sign of constant use and abuse. The only pieces not beat up were the front and rear sights, both having been replaced at some point for glowing triennium night sights.

Adriana’s gaze bored into the old weapon, her mind in another place entirely as a haunted fire flickered behind her golden-brown eyes.

Her finger flexed back the trigger as if in a trance as the little hammer slowly rolled back to play its owner’s bizarre, seemingly nonsense cadence.

Click…click…clickclick…click…click-click-click…click…

“Could you knock that off Whifur. Some of us actually want to sleep before we get there.”

“Fuck off Gregor. I do what I want.”

Click…click…clickclick…click…click-click-click…click…

“Look dust-dog. If you insist on clicking that damned revolver can you at least round it out to an even 10? It’s stressing me out.”

“Heh, don’t tell me the big tough teddy bear’s feeling angsty over one little trigger pull? Your OCD is pretty unattractive Grizzoli. You should get over yourself.”

Click…click…clickclick…click…click-click-click…click…

“I swear to all that is holy Adriana I will end you.”

“Kiss my fuzzy copper ass Greg.”

*Snort*

The two scowling operatives break out of their glaring contest and look down to the bunny doe seated between them.

Judy fought to avoid the staring operative’s piercing gazes as she tried her best to hide behind her paws and willed herself to just melt into the cracks in the car seats.

“You find somethin’ funny rabbit?” Grizzoli bared his huge maw of razor sharp teeth. Judy fearfully looked up at her massive superior officer with wide eyes full of worry.

“N-n-no sergeant!” She forced out with a considerable effort.

The bear glowered over the shaking bunny curling in on herself in the middle seat. A quick slap across the back of his stubby ear had him snarling straight into Whifur’s unimpressed scowl.

“Quit being a fuckin’ dick Grizzoli, she’s only a rookie.”

Grizzoli snorted in distain and shot another demeaning glare at the small mammal seated next to his huge frame.

“She’s scared shitless of me and I ain’t even an Alien! She shouldn’t even be here. Fresh meat just ain’t good for anything else but getting’ eaten alive.”
A growl rose from ashen copper furred coyote.

“Shut the fuck up Grizzoli. Keep talking shit like that and Central will boot your ass out to dry and let the Reapers have you.”

“hmph. At least the Reapers ain’t letting fucking rabbits in their ranks.” The bear curled his lip in disgust and leaned closer to Judy’s shocked face.

“You should just stayed in your filthy little hole where you belong and be content with shagging your brothers and popping out an army of kits like the rest of your kind.”

[THAT’S ENOUGH!] Wolford’s booming snarl burst over the radio static.

Alistair Stålvarg was twisted around in the passenger seat, his mismatched eyes staring an angry hole through Grizzoli’s head. His lips drawn out into a thin line and the radio’s handset aimed towards the conversation in the backset.

The clever maned wolf had keyed the radio’s handset, letting Central Officer Wolford into the whole conversation, even though he was in another vehicle.

[Sergeant Grizzoli.] Wolford’s voice lowered in volume, but the low growl that shook in every syllable was evidence enough of how pissed he was. [Next time we stop, come see me at your earliest convenience.]

Unspoken words of anger rumbled in the back of Grizzoli’s throat, but he bit back his retort.

“Yes. Sir.”

The grizzly leaned his wide head back against the seat and settled back with his eyes closed. His bulky body armor’s collar helped prop his head up and keep him from lolling to one side while he tried to rest. Even though he looked relaxed the curl in his lips and the faint hint of bared teeth gave away the violent thoughts running through his head.

Judy didn’t feel all that comfortable having to sit right next to the bitter grizzly. Even though she was strapped in her body armor she could easily fit inside just one of his massive clawed paws. Paws strong enough to pulp her with a casual squeeze of his fist.

The rabbit doe’s eyes lowered to stare dejectedly at her traction taped feet. The coarse white strips wound around her hind paws was a comforting pressure around her limbs.

The snug sensation was like wearing a snug jacket around her shoulders, much like the jacket she wore during Operation Gatecrasher. It helped to keep her grounded.

A stray strand of black thread tickled the edge of the doe’s peripheral vision, drawing her gaze down to the sloppy patch job over the hole in the center of her body armor.

It was the same hole made by the nail Peter Osei had driven through it right before her disastrous run in the Road to Hell during the last day of Basic Training.

Judy’s bottom lip quivered as memories of the black bear took hold of the forefront of her mind. she took a tiny shuddering breath to keep the sudden well of tears from spilling down her cheeks.

Judy never learned to sew from her mother and no one down in the armory bothered to repair her compromised armor. (“what’s the point?” the nasty shrew in charge of equipment maintenance had sneered, his beady little eyes dripping in contempt for the rabbit doe that had dared trespass
into his tiny domain and held her rended armor out in both paws. “even if I do stitch this shit back
together and you get tagged by a bullet a cute lil’ bunny like you’ll just get scrambled. Like a can
of sardines under a hole press, hehehe!”

So with no other option Judy had to do the best she could, which was a pathetic mess of random
black thread knots holding the baize colored fabric together.

No one asked about the damage, nor commented on the awful repair job. Judy wasn’t sure whither
to count that as a small blessing or as yet another example of how unwelcome she was among
XCOM’s ranks.

***************

[This is Wheel Main, Status Check. Over]

[Wheel Main, this is Wheel 1. Systems green. Riders Green. Equipment Green. Over.]

Alistair leaned over and snatched the handset from the top of the radio mount.

“Wheel Main, this is Wheel 2. Systems green. Riders green. Equipment green. No one’s been
eaten yet. Over.”

Judy’s lips turned into a small grin and Adriana snickered in the back as Grizzoli looked out the
window and scowled.

Wolford’s gravelly voice crackled over the radio’s speakers again.

[All Units be advised, we are rolling through Lost Territory. Break. Intel on this place is virtually
non-existent, so we don’t know what’s out here. Keep your weapons hot and your heads on a
swivel. Break. ETA to Target Location, 20 Mikes. Wheel Main Out.]

Judy watched from her low vantage point seated in the middle the pale blue sky outside the vehicle
blur into a sea of green. According to the convoy brief a large pine forest surrounded Zootopia.

Even though the Aliens had turned most of the forest into an ocean of flame the quick growing
pine rapidly reclaimed what had been destroyed 20 years ago, leaving the road the convoy now
traveled down cracked and overrun with vegetation and deep potholes.

The truck jerked, and Judy’s butt left the seat for a moment before her seatbelt locked and slapped
her back in her seat right on her cottontail.

She winced and fought the temptation to coddle her throbbing tail. She had been bouncing right on
her cottontail in a similar manner all day, leaving her sensitive bob raw and aching.

She can’t wait to get out of this truck and away from this opossum that seems hell-bent on hitting
every hole in the road just to watch in amusement as the bunny in the back caught airtime.

Judy saw through the windshield the semi-truck list to one side and veer off into the woods. The
opossum turned to follow.

Judy clutched her rifle to her chest and patted her vest to make sure her spare magazines and Med-
kit were where they were supposed to be as the turn of relatively flat asphalt gave way to the
rumble of tires over an uneven dirt path.

Judy did her best to hang onto the seatbelt to keep from vibrating out of her seat.
The trees crept over the windows and bore down over the convoy. The semi-truck’s large box trailer snapped through the layer of low hanging branches, throwing sap filled debris back onto the rear vehicle’s windshield.

A shot of unidentifiable anxiety shot through Judy as the pine needle filled branches choked out the sky and plunged the XCOM rebels into a world of shifting shadows and soft green light.

[Wheel Main. This is Wheel 1. Pulling into the Perimeter of the Target Zone. Requesting Shepherds for Recon. Over.]

[Wheel 1. This is Wheel Main. Good Copy. Wheel 2, send the troops for Recon of Area of Operations. Over.]

Adriana and Grizzoli already had one foot out the door by the time Alistair clicked the handset.

“Wheel Main. This is Wheel 2. Good Copy. Shepherds swinging through for Recon. Wheel 2 Out.”

Judy threw her seatbelt off, grateful to be free from any more bouncing she let a happy sigh slip her lips. The small doe tucked her X-9 rifle under her arm and bounded out Adriana’s side.

Almost immediately after landing onto the forest floor the small rabbit was swallowed up by the undergrowth that dominated the forest, much of the vegetation being as tall she was.

Adriana, being a black coyote and almost twice Judy’s height, could still see over the plants that choked the earth, though she also struggled to navigate the temperate jungle almost as much as Judy.

Alistair and Grizzoli fared far better. To the maned wolf and grizzly bear tangled plants that reached to their knees were little more than a minor annoyance.

Adriana narrowed her eyes and scanned around until she caught sight of a miffed rabbit tugging her assault rifle from the clutches of a vine. She snickered at the battle between adorable bunny and ensnaring nature, but she left it at that. They had a job to do.

Besides, I can just get the footage later from the cameras set in our chest rigs. This is comedy gold.

“Hey Hopps, quit playing with your food and let’s jump to it. We ain’t got all day.”

The cuddly death glare the burned into the back of her head nearly had Adriana in stitches. She grinned madly as equally cute curses from the rabbit behind her struggled through the undergrowth that towered over her. Judy’s progress along the convoy had slowed to a crawl, and she was literally the first few steps outside the truck.

Adriana’s grin wilted into a resigned sigh.

This is going to take a while.

**************

“Wheel Main. This is Shepherd 1. Coast is clear. InFil Point is secure. Over.”

[Shepherd 1. This is Wheel Main. Bringing the Vic’s around now. Set up a perimeter and stand by. Wheel Main Over and out.]

The XCOM operatives spread out to the edges of the clearing and laid down on their bellies with
their weapons trained into the forest beyond.

The section of forest Wolford had marked for the starting point for the mission looked much like any other part of the forest. Though they were considerably closer to the waterways and wetlands that surrounded Zootopia the trees blocked the view.

However, if one knew where to look a gentle rise in the undergrowth hid an unassuming concrete pipe jutting from the ground at a 45 degree angle. The suspicious piece of out of place architecture was ensnared by brambles and a thick swath of plant life, making it nearly impossible to find without prior knowledge.

The sharp hiss of the semi-truck’s airbrakes releasing echoed through the sea of silent wood followed by the growl of the large diesel engine. The front pickup, Wheel 1, swung into the clearing first and parked facing the way it came.

The semi-truck, Wheel Main, pulled past Wheel 1 and parked in the center of the clearing with one last hiss of air before Fangmeyer killed the engine.

Wheel 2 spun around and parked on the other side of the entrance in a similar manner to Wheel 1.

They had preplanned this all out during the convoy brief. If shit hit the fan they needed to be ready to get out of dodge in a hurry and no one wanted to play traffic conductor in the middle of a firefight.

The second the trucks were parked mammals in combat fatigues swarmed from the vehicles. Even though the XCOM engineers weren’t meant to be combatants every single mammal that went to the field had to be at least familiar with a rifle.

However, due to the severe shortage of proper body armor and a means of weapon manufacture any mammal not a soldier had to resort to whatever they could scrounge up. XCOM’s armorer did his best to keep everyone outfitted but it simply wasn’t possible yet.

XCOM desperately needed to make sure this meeting between the Reapers and the Skirmishers went well. The Reapers had extensive influence throughout the black market, while the Skirmishers had intimate insider knowledge of Advent protocol and weaknesses, after all, if the stories were to be believed, they were once Advent themselves.

Commander Bogo and Central Officer Wolford were well aware that without outside support the fight against the Aliens will eventually crumble. It has taken nearly 20 years just to get to this point, they couldn’t afford another 20 years for a second chance.

Wolford and Fangmeyer sprang from the semi-truck’s cab with an agility unlike of mammals their age. A couple more mammals slipped down from behind them and rushed off to unload the set up the equipment strapped in the back of the pickups.

Wolford headed over to the side of the box trailer to a set of levers above the coupling attached to the Semi.

“Stand clear!” He called and threw the lever.

With a mechanical whine the walls of the box trailer fell away revealing the Skyranger hidden within, its outrigged engines detached and set inside the jumpship for transport.

As the engineers rushed with a careful hurry to set up the temporary command center for the mission Central called the XCOM operatives over into from the semi-truck for a final mission
Though she had no real business being there Fangmeyer stuck to the grizzled wolf’s side, something Wolford suspiciously didn’t seem to mind.

Judy extracted herself from her defensive position and tried to wade through the tall undergrowth between her and the rest of the operatives gathered around Central.

In a moment of weakness she remembered Whifur’s earlier jab about her struggle with the plants and actually tried jumping over the tall greenery instead of marching through it.

To her infinite embarrassment, it worked. A fact only made the flare of humiliation that scorched through her as she bounded across the clearing with ease even worse.

“Nice to see your just jumping with enthusiasm to get this mission underway Hopps.” Alistair snipped.

Judy bounced in a patch of flattened weeds and dutifully ignored the grinning maned wolf as she hid her bright red ears down her back.

“Ugh. Never do that again. Please.” Adriana grimaced. “Words can’t describe how terrible that joke was.”

“Cut the chatter.” Wolford commanded, his gravelly voice neither forceful nor harsh but carried with it a natural authority that made very mammals stop and listen.

The way the old wolf took command excited Fangmeyer, the single outside audience present. Her serpentine tail flicked in delight as she watched the timber wolf gracefully take charge and every eye turned to him expectantly.

The irony of an old cat being ears over tail in puppy love was not lost on Natalie Fangmeyer, but the tigress found herself not caring in the slightest at this revelation.

Still, she did have business being here, if this deal were to be successful she knew Mr. Big would want a piece of the action. Though his influence throughout the black market was also considerable the Reapers were an elusive bunch.

There was one rule when dealing with the Reapers, they came to you for a deal, never the other way around. But if she could somehow get her paw in the door Fangmeyer was optimistic this could change, at least of Mr. Big.

In the meantime however, the tigress figured she better pay attention to the brief. She liked being in the know, even if she didn’t know half of all this military jargon any of these mammals spouted.

Judy fiddled with her rifle in a subtle attempt to find an agreeable place to let it hang from her vest. She lacked the clips and chest rigs her larger comrades had. She was simply too small to use what XCOM’s armory had in stock.

In the end she resorted to slinging her rifle under her right shoulder and letting it hang. It felt natural enough and she hoped it wouldn’t get in her way when they moved.

“Lieutenant Whifur.” Wolford’s domineering growl plucked Judy from her embarrassment fueled distractions. Her ears stood erect and her amethyst eyes honed in on the mammal that she respected.
Wolford was wearing his usual wardrobe of tan t-shirt and combat fatigues. A small utility harness was wrapped around his broad shoulders with a vicious looking combat knife strapped over his left breast.

An ancient and well-loved large caliber pistol Judy swears she had seen before but fails to remember where was holstered on his right hip.

In his claws was a clipboard with a stack of papers filled to the edges with countless paw-written notes and small drawings.

His brown eyes were tilted towards Adriana, who was nodding and pulling something from her baggy green fatigue’s thigh pocket.

“I got’cha sir.” Whifur casually reassures him as she freed whatever she had been rooting around for from her pocket.

Judy raised an eyebrow in curiosity at the ratty old cloth. The blackened copper coyote had pulled from her pocket. Though her head only reached to the canid’s waist Judy could see snippets of a crudely scrawled pictures and a few notes among the blotches and stains that marred the worn fabric.

From the way the coyote tenderly thumbed the material it must be precious to her, for whatever reason.

“"This is a map of our route through the maintenance tunnels that run underneath Zootopia.” Whifur explained. Every mammal present craned their necks to get a better look at the cloth map draped over both of her paws.

“It’s pretty simple. We take this emergency entrance over there-” Whifur crooks a claw at the cement tunnel hidden behind its curtain of shrubs. “-into the network under the water that surrounds the city and basically we go straight until we start seeing Mammal-hole covers.”

“Why the map than, if it’s so easy?” Alistair asked.

“Its just in case parts of the tunnel are collapsed. There’s several alternate routes marked on here.” Whifur said and tapped a claw on a set of notes beside the hastily drawn cloth.

“What gives you the incredulous impression that your little scrap of stains is reliable?” Grizzoli asked skeptically. “seems to me some rutty filth dug it out of the trash and called it information.”

The grouchy grizzly stumbled back as Adriana’s lips peeled into a sudden snarl, shocking everyone at her abrupt change in mood.

“I got this from Nick Wilde,” She growled with fire in her eyes. “After you all left him there to die with us might I add.” She gradually fought her hackles down and her curled lips pressed into a thin line.

“This little scrap of stains was the only thing that got me and my parents out of Zootopia alive.”

Judy’s legs twitched at the venomous wrath that rolled off the black coyote like a scorching zephyr.

Whifur whipped her gaze away from the stunned grizzly and did her best to play off her charged
emotions. She prodded a subtly shaking claw at the map with a falsely calm air in hope that the rest of her audience would move on from her outburst. Thankfully everyone present was smart enough (even Grizzoli) to let it lie. None were willing to call her out, and cautiously leaned in towards the map and the suddenly moody Coyote that held it.

“Once we are in we take the first left here until we find maintenance tunnel 6B…”

**************

“God is smells awful. It’s like someone left their tuna salad in the sink to fester for a year.”

“Nah, Smells like your musty swamp ass after stepping out of the shower.”

“Yeah, fuck you too Adriana.” Alistair laughed, his jovial barking bounced and whispered back in a thousand insidious little voices inside the dark tunnel.

It was quiet in the cramped confines of the concrete subterranean world Judy and her comrades found themselves lost in.

No sound rose from the walls to greet them, other than the drip of water seeping through the cracks of the underwater maintenance tunnel Judy felt as if they were trespassing into the corpse of some long dead titan. Hundreds of bundled cables and tubes, the veins of what was once part of a thriving Zootopia, ran along the walls in neat, choreographed rows. Caged bars that once defended spartan fluorescent lights stuck to the ceiling as solemn reminders of the dead city above.

Judy found herself wondering if Whifur had struggled in a dark identical to this when she and her family had fled through these same passageways 20 years ago, or if the city had yet to sputter if final breath.

The bunny soldier was second in the four mammal team lined front to back in the tunnel, with Whifur in front guiding with Alistair and Grizzoli bringing up the rear.

The XCOM operatives had their flashlights attached to their weapons to keep their paws free. Every member heavily relied on them. Even the canid members of the squad that were gifted with night vision failed to see beyond the sinister darkness that swallowed them whole.

The four separate beams of light constantly rolled across the walls and floor less in an effort to spot any alien threats or sharp objects but more to stave off the rapidly encroaching fear of the unknown.

Every time her tiny spot of light swept across the decrepit, moldy concrete Judy half-expected to see dead, clouded eyes and a mouth full of glistening teeth grinning hungrily back at her.

She never did of course. The idea that her nightmares would follow her from her dreams to the waking world was ludicrous, but the place she found herself in now, the very bowels of a dead City and the grave of countless lost souls, made the possibility seem a bit less outlandish.

“Hold on, got another airlock.”

Whifur’s warning sounded tinny against the cold wet rock and rusting pipes. The scrape of paws sliding to a halt made Judy’s ears jerk uncomfortably.

“Stålvarg, help me out here? It’s a bit stuck.”

Sure. Scoot over a bit Hopps.”
Judy shuffled over as the maned wolf stepped around her to take hold of the wheel Whifur was struggling to turn. The maned wolf and the coyote grunted and pulled in unison.

The wheel squealed in protest as its dissolving gears ground against each other and pulling the locking bolts open for the first time in nearly two decades. The heavy door sang an agonizing eulogy as it swung open, the single high pitched moan stabbed into Judy’s eardrums. Her long black tipped ears flopped to her black and draped uncomfortably down her stiff body armor.

“There,” Adriana slapped the dust off her paws. “Grizzoli, prop the door open and set a marker, will you?”

“hmph.”

Without looking back to see if the grizzly actually moved to do what she said Whifur stepped into the corridor and pulled her shotgun to her shoulder and flicked its attached flashlight.

Judy followed after the coyote. The doe had to hop over the lip of the airlock into the hall.

“Meep!”

Judy nearly had a conniption when a layer of slime splashed up her legs and clung to her fur. Her body went rigid, her back snapped straight and her tail and ears stuck to attention and every inch of her fur bristled in alarm. Her nose twitched at a hundred miles an hour and her breathing came shallow and fast as her heart pounded against her ribs.

What happened in here?

Instead of getting any answers when the squad found the airlock at the end of the hall they only found more questions.

The six inch steel door was warped inwards from something massive impacting it from the other side. Several thumb sized holes were randomly scattered across the dented door. The punctures looked too clean to be from conventional weapons, that left either plasma weapons or some kind of vicious spike or needle like claw.

Filthy water, dyed a sickly red from the rust, gushed from the punctures and splashed to the slime covered floor where drains set into the tunnel would struggle to siphon away.

“Ugh, part of the tunnel flooded. Wonderful. Well, at least we don’t have to meet the thing that did that to the door… Hopefully.” Alistair grimaced as the slime and water sloshed up his hindpaws and legs. “Hey Whifur, you sure that map of yours is any good?”

…

“Whifur?”

“Hm?” The female coyote broke from her trance and stared over her shoulder towards with a wide unfocused gaze. Her dilated pupils pushed the gold from her eyes and her limbs trembled.

Alistair sloshed over and gently shook the frozen coyote.

“Whifur? Adriana, what’s wrong?”

“Oh… nothing… it’s just…”

“Just what?”
Adriana turned her black consumed eyes up and looked through Alistair’s own mismatched gaze.

“…I’ve been here before.”

Judy stepped as lightly as she could to keep from disturbing as much of the sludge that coated the floor. She wasn’t that successful, but it kept anymore from riding up her waist.

The bunny doe clicked her rifle’s light to life and shined it on the balled up map in the coyote’s shaking fist.

“Is… Is there a way around, Ma’am?” The bunny asked in a nervous, tiny voice.

Judy’s uncertain tone struck a cord in Whifur. The coyote closed her eyes and shook herself, her bristling fur relaxing.

“Y-yeah. There’s a way around. Its…” Whifur spread out the map in the beam of Judy’s flashlight and traced a route around the blocked airlock. “Right. We go right.”

The black coyote squinted down at the hastily scrawled notes pointing out one of the alternate routes. “There’s some kinda side tunnel that opens from the side. Small thing, note says here its gonna be a tight fit.” She flashed Grizzoli an apologetic half-smile. “Sorry Greg.”

“Hmph. I’ll deal.” The grizzly snorted and clipped his rotary cannon to his chest rig. “Lets get this over with.”

They found the airlock to the side tunnel easily enough, but Judy realized that Whifur may have down played just how tight of a fit it was going to be for Grizzoli. He had to scrunch his knees and curl his torso and shuffle sideways just to fit through the doorway. Once inside it would be impossible for the grizzly to turn around.

Whifur decided to stick to the order they were currently in with her in the front, Hopps right behind her with Stålvarg and finally Grizzoli bring up the rear, his bulk effectively creating a seal around the pipes further constricting the narrow corridor.

“I found the door we need I think.” Adriana crotched down to use Judy’s rifle flashlight to study the map. “Yeah… yeah this is it. We should be around the breach. Hold on, I think I can get this one. This door looks a bit less rusted.”

With a bit of elbow grease and a little leverage the wheel gave, and the door groaned open. A collective sigh of relief escaped the four mammals-

—until the stench of rot and dried decay that bellowed from the open door punched the operatives straight in the gut.

Judy lurched over to the wall with a paw on her stomach as she fought her bucking stomach from emptying onto the floor.

Alistair and Adriana didn’t fare much better, but they did manage to keep their composure. Both canines had experienced similar environments in the past.

Grizzoli was the sole member seemingly unfazed by the stench. The only clue his sense of smell was intact was the subtle curl in his droopy lower lip.

“Ulk… oh God… Wha- uglk… what IS that?” Judy swallowed down the vomit that repeatedly crashed up the back of her throat.
No way was she going to puke here, in front of her seniors. She would never forgive herself for showing that kind of weakness.

“Something died.” Grizzoli rumbled with a roll of his eyes. “Obviously.”

“Make that a lot of somethings.” Alistair gulped down the bile burning his throat and took a tentative step into the newly opened hallway.

Silence consumed the dark corridor. The only sounds were the scuffle of Alistair’s hindpaws against cold concrete. Then a tiny whisper broke the silence.

“What happened here?”

Judy was still struggling to breath but downed her apprehension and dread and padded softly to the open door, her heart once again pounding violently in her chest and roaring in her ears. She bumped into Adriana. The black coyote once again frozen in horror at what she saw. Judy reluctantly turned her flashlight towards the corridor.

Bodies.

Or more specifically the rotted remains of what were once bodies. Dried greyed flesh clung to smashed and cracked bone. Horribly disfigured skeletons of medium and large sized mammals were strewn haphazardly down the shadowy tunnel. The bones glowed an eerily ethereal white in the flashlight’s meager beam as Judy passed over the decades old remains.

The mangled state of the bodies was not the only unsettling detail.

Twisted husks, the kind reminiscent of humungous insects, rested on the insides of the many rotted corpses sprawled across the tunnel. Though the withered exo-skeletons were crumbling and paper-thin in some places Judy could still make out what looked like huge scythe-like limbs curled in among the husks with bubble-like compound eyes set above a set of terror-inducing fangs.

“Chryssalids.” Grizzoli spat in disgust from the doorway.

“Why are Chryssalid hosts down in the tunnels?” Alistair asked to no one in particular. “The hosts were killed before the larvae could mature and… hatch, so someone had to have killed them.”

A loud clattering of metal skittering across concrete made Judy and Alistair jump out of their fur. They both whirled their weapons and flashlights around to the source.

A battered and crumpled helmet. Adriana had accidently kicked the helmet while she was stumbling around in her shell-shocked trance.

“What is this?” Alistair stooped over to pick it up.

“WAIT!” The maned wolf snatched his paws away like the helmet was on fire. He stared in surprise at Adriana’s sudden outburst. The coyote scooped up the helmet in trembling paws as she muttered in a tiny pleading voice.

“please don’t let it belong to who I think it is. Please. Please. Please….” She turned the helmet around in her paws until she saw the name imprinted on its side. “…No.”

“What did you find?” Alistair pressed Adriana gently for an answer. He needed to get the distraught lieutenant’s head back in the game, but its clear revisiting the site of a traumatic experience was proving emotionally destructive for the poor girl.
The coyote closed her eyes and clutched the dented helmet to her chest and whispered in a hoarse voice.

“It’s Wilde.”

“Well fuck.” Grizzoli cursed.

With a grunt he freed himself from the doorway and crouched down to get a closer look at the smashed helmet.

“That’s definitely one of ours. Its an old helmet from during the initial invasion all right… wait.” Being mindful of where he was pointing his minigun the grizzly shined his attached light over the helmet. “Is that a camera?”

Whifur pried open her eyes and forced the lump in her throat down. She spotted what Grizzoli was talking about, a little black cylinder bolted on the left side of the helmet.

Alistair scampered over, eager to find a distraction from the foul stench if for but a moment. He knew Adriana was still too far in shock to really go anywhere quite yet and she’s the only one that can successfully navigate this damned maze.

Alistair unclipped a small touchpad from the hip of his utility belt.

“Here, lets see if I can pull any footage from the sim card.” He said.

He gently pried the helmet from the female coyote’s paws and fiddled with the ancient camera until he popped out the small bit of plastic and precious metal. Satisfied that the chip seemed intact he slid the sim card into his touchpad and accessed the files.

“Most of the data’s corrupt.” The maned wolf sighed. “Not that I’m surprised though, I mean this thing’s been sitting down here in God-knows-what and a pile of dead things for 20 years. I’m surprised it works at all.”

He tapped through a few more files dispassionately when his muzzle broke into a grin.

“Hey, I found something! Its only partially corrupted but it looks like most of the audio made it. Its also the newest file.”

Adriana swallowed dryly at the last detail.

“W-wait- maybe you sh-shouldn’t-“

*click*

**********

[O&ER@^ION HAVE& #(*L]
[DATE: 03 M@$CH 2015] [T!mE: 03:02 L*#AL]
[LoC@$!ON: ZO_To~!A]

**********

“MR. WILDE! PLEASE! MR. WILDE! YOU DON’T HAVE TO DO THIS! PLEASE!”
“Sorry Dusty, but that ain’t an option no more. Listen to your old man now and keep that little revolver safe for me?”

“WAIT! MR. WIL- [MUTE]

“Sorry lil’ Whifur, I hope you won’t hate me forever for thi-#*%^@*R( @^@(*%@

*********

[ERROR STORAGE CORRUPTION] [SKIP AHEAD]

[TIME: #3:04 /0cAL]

*********

SKREEEEE! SKREEEEE!

Horrible screeches of hungry delight spilled from the touchpad’s tiny speakers. The sharp back of a 9mm pistol drowned out the horrible nightmares’ cries if for but a second.

BLAM!... BLAM!

1…2...

“COME AND GET ME YOU OVERGROWN DUNGBEETLES!”

BLAM-BLAM!

3…4…

Another sound, a whirring whine of a charging plasma rifle, hummed in the background. The audio didn’t catch the discharge, instead a horrible wet squelch and the hiss of cauterized flesh filled the speakers.

“AUGH!”

The painful smack of a body crumpling onto concrete shook the microphone.

One heavy breath, two, then a defiant howl of savage rage blasted from the ancient recording of Nick Wilde’s last stand in the bowels of Zootopia’s maintenance tunnels.

BLAM-BLAM-BLAM!

5…6…7…
An anguished death scream ripped from the throat of some unseen alien. Its plasma rifle discharged wildly, though no sounds of an impact.

SKREEEE!


BLAM!

8…

A splat and the thump of a heavy body falling to the floor.

“One… Shot… left.”

Shallow, agony filled gasps and the sound of someone- Nick- dragging his dying body across the floor.

The video fizzled to life through a haze of static as Nick laid his back against the wall. The overhead lights were still working then, allowing a clear view of the blood and gore painted across the walls. The camera tilted to the side and Nick flicked the constricting helmet from his head. The camera spun and clattered to the floor at his feet.

The red fox looked exactly like he did in his old photo, red fur, sharp handsome features, and bright emerald eyes. in the Avenger’s Bar, with several notable differences.

His red furred arms were left bare beneath the conventional Kevlar and ceramic plate body armor that covered his muscular torso. The body armor’s tan fabric was blacked from an explosion and stained a dark crimson. Blood. mostly his, judging from the torrent of red pumping around the gaping hole in his abdomen.

The red fox looked tired, exhausted. The trail of blood beside him told of the short distance he dragged himself.

His chest heaved, and more blood dripped from his lips as his shallow breaths turned into desperate gurgles. His head lolled to the side and his once bright emerald eyes drifted closed. A hungry screech jerked him awake.

SKREEE! SKREEEEE!

Nick sleepily looked up as more mangled shapes, unfocused both in his eye and the camera’s, and the scuffle of stumbling hooves and paws marching reached his ears.

The fox closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He opened his eyes and with a trembling paw
pressed the smoking barrel of his gun against his temple.

One breath. Two and the fox threw the pistol to his lap and cursed as death closed in around him, marching ever closer.

His dull green eyes drifted towards the helmet, straight at the camera.

With a groan Nick leaned forward and plucked the picture of his family from the helmet’s visor and laid back with a small smile on his face. A trail of crimson rolled from between his fangs and a spurt of blood leaked from between the fingers pressed against the hole in his gut.

“I’m sorry…” He whispered to the photograph. “I never should have left you.”

His gaze never left the little photograph of his wife and daughter’s smiling, happy faces as he laid his head back and pressed the pistol’s barrel against his temple.

“Mary, Vivian. I love you.”

Then Nick pulled the trigger.

…9

A/N: As promised, more notes.

This chapter’s theme revolved around PTSD.

I pulled inspiration from some of my co-workers and my own personal experiences. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a bitch. I don’t claim to have PTSD, however the nature of my work IRL puts me in harm’s way and many of my brothers and sisters struggle with PTSD on a daily basis.

If you were observant you would notice Adriana Whifur and her “tick”. She has the compulsion to click her pistol in the same pattern as Nick Wilde during his last stand. She heard the gunshots and heard his last words through the radio. That experience haunts her even 20 years later.

Childhood trauma doesn’t have to be anything this dramatic. In fact most forms of PTSD are subtle. Maybe you don’t like walking on the side of the road because you saw someone get hit on the side of the road? Or perhaps you don’t like the color yellow because your abusive step-father’s favorite shirt was yellow. So in your subconscious you associate the color yellow with pain.

The most common form of PTSD in my line of work is similar to this. The most common “tick” I noticed from battle-weary soldiers is the ingrained hatred of having someone stand right behind them, even if they are several yards away and not even close to them or facing them. It’s not a very noticeable symptom, the fear of showing your back, even to people you trust with your life, but it’s a symptom nonetheless.

-------------:Footnotes:-------------
If you had trouble keeping up with some of the dialogue in the beginning them perhaps these notes can help.

Radio speak is commonly portrayed in military and cop movies, books, and video games, but rarely do they get them right. The principles of radio etiquette vary from different walks of life. For instance, Military radio etiquette and Police radio etiquette are similar in design but vastly different.

Cops frequently use codes over the radio for certain actions or situations. (i.e. 10-97, 10-13 etc.) U.S. Military forces do not use codes. The only time we use numbers is in specific situations and never as a code. Most commonly we say numbers over radios to identify coordinates or direction based on a unit’s location.

In the case of ZCOM it uses the Military model of radio etiquette. Its flexible and appropriate to the situation.

Here’s the basic layout for a line of Radio dialogue.

1:Central. 2:This is Outrider. 3:I spot a squad of enemies due west of my position. 4:How Copy? 5:Over.]

1:Who the speaker is talking to (the Recipient) 2:Who the speaker identifies as 3:The Radio Message 4:Confirmation the recipient got the message (“How Copy” means repeat what the speaker said.) 5:Indicates the end of the radio transmission. (“Over” means the speaker is handing the conversation to the recipient. “Over and Out” means the speaker is ending the conversation and handing over the conversation to the recipient.)

--------------end:----------

Any further questions about the story or how something works? Ask me and I’ll do my best to explain.

***************

-----:Character Dossier:-------

Thank you for the AMAZING support and the AWESOME characters you have created and allowed me to use.

I can’t thank you enough. Y’all make all this work worth it.

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Creator: Carbonrap45 (AO3)
Name: Adriana Whifur  Age: 35 Gender: Female Species: Coyote
Appearance: Black fur and deep golden-brown eyes with a lean muscular physique. Dresses light in favor of mobility and stealth, often seen with a recon hood and half mask with a shemagh around her shoulders.

Brief History: Grew up on the streets of Zootopia before the invasion. After capture by an Advent raid early in their occupation of earth Adriana escaped from custody and has been on the run ever since with extensive experience in paw to paw combat.

Personality: Paranoid, determined, lets slip little about herself while willing to talk to others

Positive traits: Empathic to those that suffered under Advent, has knowledge of combatting most Advent trooper types.

Flaws: Has little faith in new recruits and often refers to them as “fresh meat”, paranoia tends to flare up at the worst of times.

Creator: dethwulf_Zero (AO3)

Name: Alistair Stålvarg
Age: 25 Years Old
Gender: Male
Species: Red Wolf
Appearance: Tall for his species, Scars across face and back, Heterochromatic eyes (Steel gray/Deep green), Likes dressing like his father’s favorite grunge bands (ripped jeans, Tee shirts, and flannels)

History: Before recruited by XCOM Alistair lived in relative peace out in a fringe settlement with his family. As the eldest of three brothers Alistair often treats mammals smaller than himself as younger than himself, regardless of their actual age. A big family guy with a stubborn view on life that has caused problems when dealing with mammals from other walks of life and points of view. A heavy drinker off duty, he curbs his habit when on mission, though he has been known to suffer from withdrawal when on longer scouting missions.

Basic Personality Traits: Outgoing, Athletic, Self-conscious and insecure

Positive Traits: Tough, Fearless, Kindhearted

Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Overbearing at times

Name: CommanderOps (AO3)

Name Gregor 'Brick' Grizzoli  Age: 40 Gender: Male Species: Grizzly Bear

History: Gregor was a fresh face heavy weapons specialist when the XCOM Headquarters was assaulted by the Invaders. He and his comrades/squad buddies that also were freshly promoted to some specialist was tasked defending a maintenance tunnel. They bravely held it till the dreaded sound of skittering from above. He was the lone survivor of a squad of six that escaped with the other survivors of the base. He continued to dutifully serve what was left of XCOM, but as the
years go by and the more comrades he lost he became slowly numb to the loss of the life that he regards any new rookie as just another number to the wall. He was denied the rank of Sergeant based upon the mixed review of his leadership, leading successful operations but at the cost of an injured/dead rookie.

Basic Personality Traits: Serious, Reserved

Positive Traits: Heavy Weapons Specialist, Strong, Prior War experience

Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Hates Robots of any form, PTSD with Chrysalids.
Judy and her team emerge into the cold, dead streets of Zootopia and split into teams to meet with the representative for the Reapers and the Skirmishers. Grizzoli's volatile and aggressive attitude towards Judy has the bunny doe worry for her safety. How can she fight the Aliens when she can't even trust her own comrades?

A/N: Hey Y’all! Untraveled here!

First off, I apologize for the delay. I am in the process of moving back from overseas, so I am constantly rushing about trying to get everything in order. As a result I haven’t had the energy to give ZCOM the attention it deserves, so I decided to take it slower to make sure you get the story you deserve.

On a happier note we are nearly done with Season one of ZCOM! Just one more chapter away from the Season Finale! Wahoo!

Its been a blast, but Holy Taliedo it’s a lot of work. I want to thank you all for the incredible support I’ve received through your messages and comments. Nothing brings a bigger grin on my face than seeing what y’all are saying about ZCOM.

I try am humbled and motivated to keep writing.

That said, after Season one is complete I am putting ZCOM on hiatus so I can solidify the plan for Season 2.

This, however, does not mean I am going to stop writing all together! In the mean time I will be mainly writing on “The Castaway Isle” my Original work, and my more recent Fan fiction project “Bits and Pieces”, as well as any projects that stem from it.

But, for now, enjoy!

-Untraveled

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Chapter 16: Operation War Banner Part 1

Judy had heard stories and seen old photos of the “Place where anyone can be anything”.

She was born just a month after the city was lost though, so any rational possibility that she would ever lay eyes on Zootopia were sparse and comically outlandish.

About as outlandish as meeting a dead mammal in the ruins of said mega-city, though any pretense
Night reigns eternal in the dead city of Zootopia. Even though it was mid-day the sky was dark and foreboding, drowning the devastated battleground in shades of shadow and green.

The Fog Pods the Aliens had bombed the city with 20 years ago were to blame. The radioactive weapons churned the curtain of smog that hung over the city and twisted it into an oppressive, choking shroud that blocked out the sun, turning the city trapped underneath into a dark and frigid place.

Jagged, rusted bones of war-torn skyscrapers clawed bleeding rends into the oppressive smog clinging to the carcass of the once great city. Now all that remains was rotting superstructures and decaying remnants of the slaughtered that still littered the streets among crumbling fog pods and expired Alien corpses.

One shove and a grunt, then two and the mammal-hole cover popped out of its depression and ground against the asphalt like a lid sliding from its sarcophagus.

A pair of massive brown paws emerged from the street’s underbelly and dragged along with them a frowning grizzly bear in thick layers of body armor and a menacing minigun strapped to his chest rig. Grizzoli’s scowl deepened as he took in the broken street and the dried husk of a deceased canine, the grayed body shriveled into obscurity.

With a grunt of disgust and a curl in his drooping lip Grizzoli crushed the corpse’s dried head with a paw as he clambered to his feet. The skull crumpled to dust, the sudden movement disturbed the rest of the body into collapsing in on itself.

His actions didn’t go unnoticed however. Judy had nimbly bounded from the cold iron ladder and onto the street a half second after, his grunt pulled her attention to his paw pulverizing the corpse.

Several emotions roiled up into the little bunny doe’s chest at witnessing her superior desecrate the murdered canine’s remains, indignation and anger chief among them, but what was she to do about it? Tell him off? The idea was laughable at best, and potentially fatal at worse.

With a guilty heart and the sick taste of helplessness in her throat Judy squashed down her righteous anger and averted her eyes from the grizzly’s callous destruction.

Thankfully Grizzoli had failed to notice Judy’s accusing glare.

This mission has everyone high-strung as it was, there was no telling what the already volatile and deeply prejudice veteran would do to her in a place void of witnesses.

The possibilities scared her on a level she never thought possible. Judy had always saw herself fighting along side her fellow mammals and weathering the Alien’s onslaught together, even despite her unwelcoming and even hostile reception.

But even then she had never even considered the possibility of one of her own “comrades” killing her in cold blood… but… the hate she saw in Gregor Grizzoli’s eyes made her fear him almost more than the Aliens themselves.

I’d… better not show my back to him. At least until we get back to the Avenger.

Judy was drawn from her morose brooding when Alistair’s red muzzle popped out of the mammal-hole with a grimace etched into his face. He hauled himself onto the blacktop with One of Adriana’s wiry paws clasped firmly in his own.
“Damn it Ali. I said I’m fine! I can get up myself.” The coyote grumbled.

“Nope.” The Red Wolf snorted and cracked a smarmy and upbeat grin. Alistair was determined to get Adriana past the trauma she had just suffered down in those damned tunnels. “Not lettin’ you go ‘til you got your shit together.”

If the female coyote was still feeling off-kilter from finding Wilde’s video she was doing a decent job of hiding it.

If it wasn’t for the tight pinch in her voice and the slight tremble in her legs Judy would have been convinced Whifur had already gotten over it. Though she found it difficult to get the usually rough-n-tumble Adriana’s wide eyed expression of horror when they first found that smashed helmet out of her head.

It calmed the bunny doe down seeing that the coyote did somewhat recover her wits. Judy doubted fugitives like Adriana and Alistair would have lived this long if that wasn’t the case.

The ashen copper coyote snorted at Alistair’s declaration. She drew her paw from his fingers and sassily swatted his muzzle with her tail as she spun away.

“What are you talking about young’un?” Adriana purred in as smooth of a voice as she could muster. “I always have my shit together.”

“yeah, yeah. Whatever you old hag.” Alistair chuckled. “You good to call the ‘REP to Central?”

“If I have to.” Adriana sighed dramatically and turned away with a finger on her headset.

“Central. This is Shepherd 1. We are clear of the tunnels and are in Savannah Central Proper. Break. Standing by for further orders. Over.”

Judy turned her eyes away from her companions and scanned her bleak surroundings with a tense eye. Seeing the decrepit bones of the once great Mega-city she had dreamt about living in as a kit felt like her bright dreams of smiling mammals of all species co-existing in harmony were being tainted, dyed in dreary colors of ash and green decay.

Judy had lost herself so completely in the threatening shadows swimming in the edges of crumbling buildings and the dried husks of deceased mammals that she nearly squealed out of her long ears when Central’s gravelly voice rumbled directly into her ear.

[Shepherd 1. This is Central. Good to hear your voice. You ran past your ETA by nearly 30 mikes. What happened down there? Over.]

Adriana’s hesitation was loud. After a long moment the coyote clicked the headset and opened her mouth, but no words came out.

Alistair decided to jump in and take pity on the struggling coyote.

“Central. This is Shepherd 3. We found… Well, we found what happened to Wilde. Over.”


Alistair went to reply but Adriana cut him off, her voice burning with a seething heat.

“we found his helmet camera down in the tunnels.” she hissed through clenched teeth. “Where he bought me and my family time to run after you left us to die 20 years ago.”
[Aaaahh… Whifur, this is not the time for this. The Commander made a tough call and unfortunately Wilde paid the price. You know we had no other choice!]

Judy tucked her chin to her chest, where her heart twisted painfully in anguish as she listened helplessly as festering emotional wounds stirred up lingering resentment, causing the mammals of XCOM began to turn on each other.

Just when Judy didn’t think it couldn’t get any worse- a tiny, defeated female voice fizzled over the comms channel.

[Y-You found a camera?]

The net lapsed into a stunned silence.

Then in a choked voice full of dread Wolford asked, [Skye?]

[Wol- ahem- Central, you found evidence of Nick Wilde’s d-death? Over.]

“That’s right Avenger.” Adriana cut off Wolford before he could defend himself. She had a petty grimace on her face. “We found a… a video.”

[A Video? C-can you transmit it?]

Wolford’s unusually nervous voice crackled over the net.

[Skye, perhaps this can wait…]

[No! it cannot!] Skye snapped.

Suddenly another mammal joined the conversation. Commander Bogo’s legendary guttural growl rumbled over the channel, effectively cutting everyone else from the conversation.

[Primrose! Leroy! Get Chief Shen out of here!]

[H-hey! Wait! B-bogo! God dammi-!]

Judy felt her heart tear as the sound of Skye’s fighting faded into static.

I should have told her about Wilde when I had the chance…

Thankfully Judy wasn’t given the chance to dwell on her mistakes for more than a few seconds before she was ripped rorm her thoughts again.

[All Units! This is Avenger Main. Cut the chit-chat. We have a job to do.]

Every mammal jumped as the Commander’s voice boomed into their headsets. A bead of sweat trickled down Judy’s face as she reflexively snapped to attention. The over three operatives reacted similarly, though the most they did was stiffen for a moment.

[Shepherd 1, Shepherd 3-] Adriana and Alistair perked up. [-you will meet and escort our Skirmisher contact to the meet.]

[Shepherd 2-] Grizzoli turned his gaze and grinned down at Judy in anticipation.

A shudder of horror glided its claw down Judy’s spine.
Please no…

-Take Shepherd 4 and meet with this “Outrider”. How Copy? Over.

Judy closed her eyes in resignation.

“Carrot Sticks…”

-----------------

“Keep up Long-ears.”

“Y-Yes Sergeant!”

Sweat poured down the rabbit doe’s face, most of the salty liquid trailing down from her ears and down the bridge of her nose as she struggled to navigate the debris and smog choked streets.

Grizzoli chose to simply step over or through whatever got in his way, be it a crumpled car- or withered mammalian remains.

Judy’s shoulders began to ache from wearing her vest for several hours and her paws were beginning to cramp from clutching her rifle and sweeping around corners and darkened storefronts.

More than once the rabbit doe could have sworn she heard something moving out there. A scuffle of feet or a kicked rock, but each time she halted to listen and peer out into the unnatural darkness that choked the cityscape Sergeant Grizzoli would berate her and snarl at her incompetence and skittish fear.

Worse though, Judy was beginning to agree with him.

[Shepherd 2, Shepherd 4. You are nearing the Beacon. What do you see? Over.]

Grizzoli clipped his rotary cannon to his chest and slid into cover inside a bombed out convenience store. His considerably bulk was only partially hidden by the waist high wall, the window had been blown out two decades prior during the city’s final days, the glass had long since disintegrated and scattered to the winds.

Judy’s tiny stature lent her a large advantage as she could pretty much pick and choose to hide behind anything and she would be completely hidden, sometimes even standing up.

I better… yeah… get a bit of space from him. Just in case.

The bunny hopped clean over the hood of a mid-sized sedan and huddled behind a sturdy looking maintenance van near the center of the street. It was close enough to keep Grizzoli in her sights but no close enough for him to “accidently” turn her into a rabbit-pancake.

That exact thought seemed to have crossed Grizzoli’s mind. His dark eyes flicked over to the rabbit nervously glancing between him and her surroundings like a hyperactive kid sneaking into the pantry for the cookie jar.

Why Wolford would ever think a fucking rabbit would make a good soldier was beyond him. She would be more use as emergency rations for the predators on board the Avenger, not a comrade in arms. It is a disgrace! Grizzoli snorted in disgust and looked away from the offending sight.

“Avenger. This is Shepherd 2.” Grizzoli rumbled as he scanned the empty street in front of them. “I don’t see anything. You sure we are close? Over.”
Central responded this time. Commander Bogo was handling the Skirmisher team.

[Roger Shepherd 2. You are looking for a large warehouse on the outskirts of Happytown’s docks. Now that we are set up back here we can see the signal appears to be originating from inside the structure. Over.]

Grizzoli straightened over his cover and saw the street ahead of them open up in front of them. Now that he knows what he was looking for he recognizes what he thinks is the edge of a large building.

“Avenger. This is Shepherd 2. I think I have eyes on the warehouse. It’s in the middle of a field though. No cover besides weeds and a fuck-ton of vines. What do you want us to do? Signal our approach or cross the field and paint a big-ass bullseye on my forehead?”

[Negative Shep- ZzzzzZ-]

Fear shivered down Judy’s spine as Wolford’s voice was drowned out and a garbled chuckle hissed into her headset.

[aS mUch As I wouLd ApPreciAte tHE gesTure GregOr. ThErE is nO NeEd to BOthEr wITh PaiNtinG anYwhErE- It WouLd be HaRD tO mISs youR uGLy MuG, eVEn fRoM whERe i’M sTanDinG.]

In an instant both operatives raised their weapons and they settled into an aggressive shooting stance, just like they trained. the scrambled voice fizzled and popped like an ancient out of tune radio in unsettling laughter.

[iMPReSSIve rEfLeXes. thOuLht wIThout knOwiNg whEre I am…]

The radio went silent, but the same scrambled laughter echoed hauntingly around the empty street, setting Judy’s fur on end. Her rifle’s stock dug into her shoulder painfully as she swing her head around wildly in an attempt to catch a glimpse of the ghost mammal stalking them completely unseen.

The creature’s voice was everywhere. Every shifting shadow was the creature dancing just out of sight. Judy’s heart pounded against her ribs and her breathing slipped into an uneven, shallow rhythm. Where was he? What was he?

Wolford’s voice broke through the static, anger and indignation at his channel being hacked sharpened his growl.

[How did you get this secure frequency?]

[aHahAh! sAme aS IASt tMe JoHN. XCOM’s nOT tHE oNIY kIT oN THe bLOcK wiTh cooL tOYs.]

[Agent Blueberries…] Wolford spat that ridiculous codename like it was venom on his tongue. The mystery mammal, in stark contrast, sounded delighted.

“So yOu DO rEmeMbEr lITtLe oL’ mE!” Agent Blueberries’s laughter grated painfully against Judy’s ears like sandpaper.

The garbled staticky voice sharpened and honed into a single point.
Judy whipped around and found her rifle trained on the chest of a wraith straight from the depths of her nightmares.

The gas mask that wrapped around its face and the long sleeves of its trench coat and pants hid the creature’s species, but the description from Fangmeyer was dead on.

A four foot tall figure in a black trench coat appeared in the center of the street. Twin orbs of a sickly green eldritch light stared into her soul from the darkness of its hood. One paw was slipped in the folds of its trench coat, the other loosely gripped a massive dark steel revolver.

The huge hand cannon was as long as the Reaper’s arm and the barrel’s bore spoke of the firearm’s huge caliber. It is fearsome weapon intended for large sized mammals, like Grizzoli, but the small sized creature held it as if it was as light as a feather, despite it being almost half its own size.

Judy felt her breath catch in her throat as the Reaper seemed to blink out of existence and close the distance between them until she was staring up into that horrible glow mask’s eyes with hardly a few inches between them.

When the Reaper spoke Judy had to fight to keep her hands from shaking and her ears upright and fearlessly straight. The only thing she actually managed was to keep her trembling knees form buckling from beneath her.

“So—” Those horrible green disks dipped up and down her figure as the reaper gave the rabbit soldier a once over.

Unashamed mirth danced among the Reaper’s words. “I wasn’t hallucinating back in New Providence. XCOM really did hire a Bunny!”

Judy’s cheeks ignited a deep red as the Reaper laughed. Her shameful blush burned sourly deep in her chest.

Even a complete stranger found her dream laughable. She was pathetic and stupid for even considering that she could make a difference. That she could save someone else from becoming as broken and alone as her.

I’m worthless….

“Well, hang in there carrot farmer.” The Reaper chuckled. Judy sunk even further into herself. She just wanted to disappear…

What the Reaper did next however, left her dumbstruck.

“I don’t want any more good soldiers dying out here. We are all in this together after all.”

Judy was too busy gawking in awe at the first mammal to ever whole heartedly accept her after she became a soldier to notice Wolford’s voice crackling to life over the radio.

[Agent Blueberries-]

“Please John!” The Reaper chuckled into the headset in his mask. “I think we’re past that point!”

Those ghostly green lanterns turned around to stare curiously at the flustered bunny doe fighting to
regain her composure. The mammal’s mask hid his expression, but the feral grin was audible in his last words.

“JuSt cAIL mE Outrider.”
Chapter Summary

Judy finally meets the mysterious and elusive Reaper known as Outrider, the very same Mammal that hustled her and Central Officer John Wolford during the bloody mission to rescue Commander Bogo in New Providence.

Temper rises as do the stakes as Outrider guides his disgruntled escorts to the Meeting with the Reaper's other sworn enemy, the Skirmishers.

A/N: Hey Y’all! Untraveled here!

I managed to write this one out while on moving, though I did the minimal amount of editing this time around. (I do my own editing. I will go down with my own mistakes!)

I have decided to split the last of this season into two more chapters, the next chapter and the season Finale. As Thehellion115 had pointed out this is one of the longest missions on XCOM 2, so you were right my friend! I do have to split this up into 3 or 4 parts.

I hope you all enjoy reading this chapter as much as I have with writing it!

Feedback is coveted and comments are love!

Chapter 17: Operation War Banner

The seconds after Commander Bogo had ordered Skye escorted from the bridge were the closest Bogo had ever been to being jumped by the mammals under his command.

Shen’s shrieking finally died away as the blast doors sealed behind her, leaving an air of tension on the bridge so taut the weary cape buffalo felt that as sudden movement would snap the faux peace and he would have an all-out brawl on his hooves. If he were a lesser mammal Bogo would have stepped back and beat a swift retreat to his quarters with his shotgun close by.

Unfortunately for him, Bogo wasn’t a lesser mammal.

With a small snort to release the hold his unease had on his chest Bogo’s eyes sharpened into his signature I-Don’t-Care scowl. He swept an icy glare across the room, daring anyone to speak up against his actions, both from the recording of Wilde’s betrayal and Skye’s forceful incarceration just moments ago.

Still not a soul moved but the deafening tension had been broken. Somewhat. Bogo still knew there
would be Hell to pay for his actions, but currently there were more pressing matters to attend to.
The bull steeled himself for the operation to come and clicked his mic.

“All Units! This is Avenger Main. Cut the chit-chat. We have a job to do.”

_and I pray all goes well._

[Shepherd 2, Shepherd 4. Escort the VIP to the meet. How copy? Over.]

“Central. This is Shepherd 2. Good copy. Moving with the VIP to the meet. Over and out.”

Grizzoli clicked off his headset and settled his heavy revolver cannon’s weight evenly across his shoulders.

“So, i’M a vIP nOw?” Outrider’s scrambled voice crackled and popped like a radio in a rainstorm. “I’vE bEeN CaLiED mAnny oF tHIrNgS, iMpoRTaNT wAs nEveR aMOnG tHeM.”

Judy’s ears flinched from the grating chuckle that rasped from the eerily glowing mask beneath the Reaper’s hood.

“Shut it Reaper.” Grizzoli snarled. His deep voice shook uncomfortably in Judy’s chest. “Your leader wanted you to meet with those Xeno-freaks to kiss and make up. Quit stalling and get going.”

The grizzly was clearly going for intimidating Outrider into falling in line. If anything he managed to make the Reaper's snark worse.

“WhaTEvEr yOu SAy cuPCake.”

A tiny ‘meep’ of fear slipped from Judy’s throat as a snarl ripped from Grizzoli’s lips.

He didn’t do anything about it though, not when everything he does is being recorded by the communication and monitoring equipment every XCOM soldier was wearing.

“Careful _Scav_ ,” Grizzoli snarled. A web of veins bulged beneath the thick brown fur covering his body as he loomed threateningly over the infuriating masked mammal tall enough to barely reach his kneecaps. “keep talking like that and I may accidently step on the wrong shadow.”

“I’d bE mOre wOrRIed AbOuT yOU tRIPpIng oVer yOUr owN PAwS anD IMPaLinG yoURseLF oN yoUr guN rAtHeR thAn stEPping On mE.”

Judy shrank away from the two predators (?) squaring off in the middle of the devastated street. Even though she was scared though, her conviction wouldn’t allow for her to just stand there and watch this mission devolve into bloodshed.

“H-Hey!” She stammered. Her breath hitched painfully in her throat as both sets of eyes whipped around to glower down at her. Her ears slipped down her back and her paws shook as she gripped her rifle tighter against her chest.

A cold sweat poured down her ears as she froze like a fool with her mouth open as she stared dumbly up at the angry mammals waiting for her to say something (or to squish her in Grizzoli’s case).

Like a prayer answered from above Wolford’s voice snapped over their headsets and cutting any
further conflict.

[Knock off the sidebar Shepherd 2 and get the Reaper to the Meet. How copy? Over.]

“You’re taking his side?!” Grizzoli snapped in disbelief. “Even after he left you and the Commander to die back in New Providence unless you rolled over and gave into his demands?! He’s scum!” Grizzoli snarled.

His massive claws flashed in the din and inched closer to the cool and unconcerned Reaper looking up at him.

[Shepherd 2. Are we going to have to have another discussion when you get back? Over.]

A growl rose up from Grizzoli’s barrel like chest, but he held his tongue.

“No sir.” He snarled into his headset. “Moving to the Meet with the… VIP. Over and out.”

The bear rounded on the smaller mammals with his lips peeled back against a maw of sharp teeth. A tremor of fear rippled down Judy’s spine at the fury on her supervisor’s muzzle. Outrider seemed unimpressed, judging from his relaxed slouch.

“We aIn’t GoT aLI dAy anD tHe mEEt Is iN TUNdRa TOwN.”

“Where is that?” Judy asked in as strong a voice as she could manage. It was difficult not to bolt to cover from the waves of hate drilling into her back from Grizzoli’s glare.

“AcROss ThE cItY mY liTtLe cArrOt faRmEr.” The Reaper’s right paw slid underneath the edge of his trench coat to rest on the handle of the massive hand-cannon strapped there under his shoulder.

“We gOt a LoT oF groUnD to CoVer aNd pLeNty Of nAStiEs to Go tHroUgh to gEt tHeEe.”

Dread settled over the fear of the Grizzly staring daggers behind her.

“W-what Nasties?”

As if on cue a shrill shriek of hunger and savage delight split the air.

The training instilled in her during Basic Training back in the desert had her rifle up against her shoulder and her ears quivering nervously without Judy even realizing until the Reaper’s static laughter snapped her out of her fear-induced reaction.

“That wOuLd bE oNE oF tHEe.” He chuckled remarked offhandedly. “YOUr pReSeNCe aLReAdY dIsTtuRbS tHEm,”

Outrider looked over his shoulder to shoot a scowling Grizzoli what Judy assumed was a condescending smirk beneath his mask.

“As if on cue a shrill shriek of hunger and savage delight split the air.

The training instilled in her during Basic Training back in the desert had her rifle up against her shoulder and her ears quivering nervously without Judy even realizing until the Reaper’s static laughter snapped her out of her fear-induced reaction.

That would be one of them.” He chuckled remarked offhandedly. “Your presence already disturbs them,”

Outrider looked over his shoulder to shoot a scowling Grizzoli what Judy assumed was a condescending smirk beneath his mask.

“AnD I’m sUre tHat hAd aBSOLuteLy noThIng tO do WIth tHe Big, baD BEaR roAriNg AnD biTcHinG at ThE tOp oF HiS luNgS.”

Judy tried not to flinch as the replying snarl shook the ground beneath her feet.

These two are going to be the death of me, If the monsters and Aliens don’t get to us first...
The walk through Savannah Central was stressful and unnervingly quiet.

After that first shriek from God-knows-where Judy didn’t hear a single thing out in the choking black.

Though on more than one occasion she could have sworn on her father’s grave that she saw shapes (Mammals? Or something else?) moving about in the edges of her vision.

When she scrounged up enough courage to broach the subject with Sergeant Grizzoli all she got in response was a snort of distain and a nasty abolishment.

Outrider however just chuckled darkly, as if he were amused, or even a little impressed.

Judy decided to ignore the giggling freak in the mask and tried to do the same to the icy shiver of fear that crept down her spine.

A couple hours later the Reaper had guided his XCOM escort through the districts and into the cusp of what was once a place called “Tundra Town”. The section of the city built for the more arcticly inclined residents of Zootopia.

From old pictures she had dug up as a kit Judy knew the place as it once was. Covered in thick drifts of snow and packed down ice on every surface year-round.

When Outrider led them through one of the surviving pedestrian entrances what she saw was anything but a winter wonderland.

Slogs of foul black sludge piled high everywhere in the district. The viscous fluid stained the once beautiful city region an ugly coal, while the stench that rose from the revolting cocktail of decay and mold was enough to turn even a weak nosed prey like Judy’s stomach into gagging knots.

“HeRe.” Outrider’s static husk and the thick gray bandana he held out to her helped turn her attention from the disgusting odor.

“What’s this?” She asked delicately.

Best not to breath too deeply. She tried that a few minutes ago and dry heaved with her paws on her knees until she could blink the tears from her eyes and lightly breathe somewhat through her mouth.

“It’S fOR tHe sMeIL.” Outrider snorted. The sound that came out instead was akin to a squashed kazoo attached to an airhorn.

“Oh.” Judy took the bandana and tied it off around her muzzle. “Thank you.” The thick fabric was meshed and did help, if marginally so.

She looked back up to the pair of eerie green orbs that stared out from beneath the shadow of his hood.

“What about you? Don’t you need this?”

Outrider snickered. “ThIs mAsk iSn’T juSt fOr sHow rAbbit. DoN’t You WorRy aBoUt liTtlE oL’ mE. I caMe preParEd. UnIlkE a cerTaIn uRsiNe WiLL WiLL noT be nAmeD.”

Grizzoli opened his maw to retort but the only thing that came out was a gag and a bit of soggy
“BeSt kEep yoUR mOUth cLosEd YogI.” Outrider snarked mercilessly. “laSt thInG wE neEd Is tHat pIc-a-niC baSkeT yOu sWalLowEd mAkiNg a reApPeaRancE.”

Grizzoli’s reply was a middle finger and a snarl that quickly turned into a moist whimper.

Judy’s mood improved marginally with the toxic grizzly getting his just desserts. That and the fact the foul stench prevented him from opening his mouth or to talk at all.

Despite it being daylight hours, it was the dead of night in the ruins of Zootopia. The cloud of irradiated smog that clung to the dead corpse of a city choked out the sky so completely not even the noonday sun could penetrate.

The only pinpricks of gasping light in this wasteland underworld were Judy and Grizzoli’s weapon mounted flashlights and the Reaper’s sickly green eye ports in his mask.

Judy tilted her head to the side and one of her ears flopped against her shoulder as she peered up at the wraith before her. His black trench coat seemed to bellow and flex against an unfelt tempest of shadows and smoke. His outline was blurry at best, no matter how hard she concentrates on him. If she had been without her flashlight on her rifle she would have been looking straight at him and she wouldn’t even know it.

Judy was sure the Reaper was still looking back at her, but it was impossible to really tell what he was thinking behind that mask.

“KeEP sTAriNg at mE liKE tHaT rABbIt aNd a GuY MIghT gET iDEaS.”

“Whatever.” Judy fought to keep her eyes from rolling, to only partial success.

A very small sliver of irritation bit at the intimidated awe the bunny felt towards the mysterious Reaper. As she burrowed farther into her thoughts that sliver grew into a blade that seared hot through her mystified impression of the strange mammal.

What Grizzoli had said before reminded Judy that this was the mammal that had left her and Wolford trapped in that gene therapy clinic while he hung out of sight and watched as She and her fellow trainees were torn to shreds by Advent.

Despite him being the first soldier that saw her as an equal this Outrider was no friend to her or XCOM, and if Judy had her way they would never cross paths again.

*He didn’t feel a shred of guilt or even tried to help as Osei and Ramirez died. He simply didn’t care. I don’t agree with Grizzoli on anything, but he is right about one thing. This guy is scum.*

A scowl twisted Judy’s lips and she turned her anger filled amethyst eyes away from the eerie figure beside her.

She was so deep in her musing Judy nearly jumped out of her gray fur when a clawed paw yanked her back by the shoulder and pulled her against the trunk of a midsized minivan.

Before she could ask why the Reaper suddenly decided to yank her around like a filthy ragdoll was cut off by a static hiss from beneath the operative’s hood.

“QuIeT.” He whispered. The Reaper’s voice burst from his mask in a rush of garbled buzzing.
Judy glanced over her VIP’s shoulder with a sense of trepidation as Grizzoli slumped behind the rusted-out vehicle beside them, his paws on his massive rotary cannon and a finger creaking dangerously against the trigger.

Judy caught herself from automatically spitting out what was going on but the steely grip Outrider had on her shoulder shut her up.

Both XCOM operatives watched the Reaper in anxious silence.

Though her fearful amethyst eyes never left the hooded creature next to her Judy kept her ears on a constant swivel, the sensitive appendages straining to catch the tiniest, softest whisper of whatever was out here in the dead citiescape.

For several long, tense moments she heard nothing. Grizzoli had already lost any sense of the charged apprehension that made his arms quiver and his trigger finger tighten. He now stared dead faced at the Reaper frozen stiff with his iron clad hold on Hopps’s shoulder.

Judy was ready to agree with the grizzly. This felt foolish, this Reaper was being-

Then she heard it.

**Ticktick- Scrunch- Ticktick- Scrunch**

A clatter of loose blacktop bounced across cracked roadway and the shuffle of unsteady paws soft sliding across asphalt.

The breath caught in her chest, coming out as a cut-off gasp.

Grizzoli tensed and the Reaper didn’t move a muscle.

**Ticktick- Scrunch- Ticktick- SCRUNCH!**

The bunny doe’s mouth drained dry as the shuffling *thing* came closer. She heard no breathing, no hiss of fabric against fur, only erratic, shambling footfalls.

The footfalls grew louder and louder, until they pounded in Judy’s hears like a drumbeat!

Then deafening silence.

“Where is it?” Grizzoli rumbled.

Judy vaguely registered the Sergeant’s question, but she was frozen fast. Her hears racing in her chest and the blood roaring in her ears.

Just inches from her face, on the rusted car’s brake light, were three long talons wrapped in ashen flesh and green veins.

Talons that weren’t there just a second ago.

**Ticktick-**

A skull appeared from behind the talons. Desecrated flesh clung to cracked bone as two sunken orbs of acid green stared slack from its eyesockets. Jagged, broken teeth stuck haphazardly from its ripped and rotted lips.

*Savage...*
Judy didn’t have time to scream as the nightmare snapped forward with such a speed and reckless ferocity no mammal could hope to match.

But its teeth never sank into her flesh, and those wicked talons didn’t rend her into ragged meat.

A whirlwind of black and green met the blur of shrieking gray and bone.

It was over in less than a second.

One moment Judy was staring frozen in terror as two sets of teeth encircled her frail, tasty body, the next the doe’s fluffy tail was bouncing on the asphalt and the savage monstrosity’s head landed next to her. The rest of the corpse crumpled into a pile of dry rotted flesh and brittle bone.

“Oh God.” Judy whimpered. One paw pulled frantically at her collar. Her clothes felt too tight and her body armor far, far too heavy as she struggled to suck in a breath.

She ripped off the bandana and desperately sucked in the rancid Tundra Town air.

“Oh God, Oh God, OH GOD!”

“KnOck iT oFf.”

A dark furred paw slapped across the distressed doe’s cheek.

The bunny’s ears snapped up quick as a whip and her dilated violet eyes were met with two more orbs of green. Though this time it was Outrider’s glowing mask that stared back at her.

“GeT yoUr sHit tOgeTher coTtoTaIl.” Outrider drawled. “It wAs onLy oNe LoSt tHis tiMe. HaRdly a rEasOn to loSe yoUr sHiT.”

The Reaper’s condescending attitude prodded the bunny doe’s frizzled brain back into gear.

Judy’s slack stare turned into an incredulous look of disbelief.

“That- that thing was dead!” She rasped, her head spinning and her stomach clenched as what she just said hit her. “That corpse just tried to… to…”

Her paw bushed up against something sharp. She looked down to her side and found her paw resting on the corpse’s decapitated skull, one of the teeth prodding her finger.

The savage’s eyes stared up at her with the same exact slack expression it wore as it was about to tear her into bloody little rabbit chunks. The doe’s complexion turned green underneath her gray furred cheeks.

“I-I don’t feel so good…”

Grizzoli looked as if he were about so say something but was interrupted when Outrider kicked the Lost’s head away from the rabbit.

“TaKe a mOmeNt aNd bReaTh tHeN.” The Reaper offered.

He stooped over and pawed over the discarded bandana back to her. Judy took it back and pulled the fabric filter over her short muzzle with a sheepish smile on her lips.

“Thank you.” She whispered. Already she was feeling better.
“Hm.” The masked mammal hummed casually.

The bunny doe’s eyes caught the fleeting glimpse of a thin blade (A sword?) as it vanished into he folds of the Reaper’s trench coat.

A chill ran down both XCOM operative’s spines.

Neither mammal had known Outrider had the blade, and neither even saw him draw.

_He is fast._

After Judy got over her initial shock appreciation flushed her ill complexion along with the uncomfortable weight of feeling indebted to the jerk that saved her life.

Grizzoli however felt a rush of sickening fear. Since entering this city after leaving those damned tunnels behind the jaded veteran had felt veritably invincible next to the laughably tiny “soldiers” he was forced to deal with.

This rabbit being one of the most revolting examples of how far XCOM had fallen.

Gregor was confident in his ability to intimidate and the power he felt when welding his natural superiority over these weaklings made him feel secure.

This damnable Reaper turned all that on its head.

The ravenous corpse the masked mammal had decapitated was nearly as large as Grizzoli himself. Though identifying exactly what species the rotting corpse was is a lost cause all Grizzoli could see was his own head rolling on the pavement with his body sprawled on the ground, lifeless.

If he had wanted to Outrider could have killed him in an instant. Grizzoli would have been dead before he even knew he was in danger, and that scared him.

He knew it, and worse so did Outrider.

[Shepherd 2, this is Central. We just caught all that on camera, but it was kind of unclear. What happened? Over.]

Wolford’s sharp growl burst over the radio. Grizzoli eyed the Reaper kneeling next to the still dazed Judy Hopps.

“Central, this is Shepherd 2. We met hostile contact with an unknown entity. Outrider neutralized the threat after it attacked Shepherd 4. She is recovering. Over.” Grizzoli answered in as neutral a tone as he could manage.

After witnessing the Reaper’s skill with a blade Grizzoli felt like he had been unknowingly treading onto thin ice only to find himself in the middle of a rapidly melting lake.

Wolford saved Grizzoli from plunging further into his humiliating train of thought.

[Roger Shepherd 2. Take 5 and-]

[Central!]

Three sets of ears jumped at the panicked shout crowding out the radio channel.

[Tygan?] Central asked in a concerned rumble. [What’s wrong?]
The hare’s refined accent did nothing to soothe the distress in his voice.

[I was over by the scanners relayed from Zootopia to the Avenger. We are picking up an unusual bio-signature surging up around both teams’ positions.]

[English Doctor! What does that mean?]

A low, feral growl shook Judy deep in her core. She looked up to the source of the guttural sound. Though she couldn’t see his face is was clear Outrider was on edge.

The Reaper interrupted Jack Tygan’s ramblings.

“It means we have a fucking problem!” Outrider snarled into his headset. “What the HELL is that other team doing?!”

A distant, thunderous boom echoed through the desolate streets as a flash of orange flame and heat lit up the oppressive curtain of smog overhanging the dead city.

“We’ll that answers that question.” Outrider deadpanned. His exasperated sigh coming from his mask as garbled stereo feedback.

“Central, get that Skirmisher’s escort on the horn, tell them to double time it to the meet. We are going to have to make this quick, especially if those trigger happy Xenofreaks keep blowing shit up in the middle of the largest Lost Sector on the fucking globe.”

[Outrider, say again. Lost Sector?]

“Yeah John. Lost Sector. A quaint little piece of Hell on Earth filled to the brim with the Lost, angry dead people more than happy to bite your face off.” Sarcasm and venomous spite dripped from Outrider’s lips.

[How many are we talking?]

“How many mammals did you leave in Zootopia when the aliens bombed it?”

[Over 20 million… Oh my God.]

“Ding Ding Ding! Give the wolf a prize!” Outrider snarled.

The masked mammal paced in a circle beside the headless corpse he had slain.

“When right this is the safest place on Earth from Advent and the aliens… But when you go blowing shit up…”

Judy trembled and whimpered in fear as Grizzoli visibly paled beneath his brown fur as the Reaper’s voice deepened into a harsh sneer.

“You idiot just kicked the fucking hornet’s nest.”
A/N: I will do my upmost to finish the next chapter and get it out to Y’all at a reasonable time this go around, though no promises… It’s a definite maybe.

Until Next time!

-Untraveled

-----Character Dossier:------

Name: CommanderOps (AO3)
Name Gregor 'Brick' Grizzoli
Age: 40
Gender: Male
Species: Grizzly Bear

History: Gregor was a fresh face heavy weapons specialist when the XCOM Headquarters was assaulted by the Invaders. He and his comrades/squad buddies that also were freshly promoted to some specialist was tasked defending a maintenance tunnel. They bravely held it till the dreaded sound of skittering from above. He was the lone survivor of a squad of six that escaped with the other survivors of the base. He continued to dutifully serve what was left of XCOM, but as the years go by and the more comrades he lost he became slowly numb to the loss of the life that he regards any new rookie as just another number to the wall. He was denied the rank of Sergeant based upon the mixed review of his leadership, leading successful operations but at the cost of an injured/dead rookie.

Basic Personality Traits: Serious, Reserved
Positive Traits: Heavy Weapons Specialist, Strong, Prior War experience
Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Hates Robots of any form, PTSD with Chrysalids.
Chapter Summary

Judy and Grizzoli escort their difficult charge to the rendezvous point. At first what appears to be a rocky start in negotiations between Outrider and the Skirmisher representative, however things appear to go to plan-

-Until they don't.

A/N: Hey Y’all! Untraveled here!

And boy do I have a doozy of an update here for you today.

The feels are real, and heartstrings will be pulled and yanked out at the roots.

*You have been warned.*

On a much happier note the most attentive among you may notice this chapter’s literary quality is much higher in comparison to previous chapters. This is NOT because I improved myself or anything constructive like that- I simply let someone better do it for me!

Yay for personal growth!

In all seriousness though a fantastic gentleman had approached me over instant messenger and offered his considerable skills as an editor to make this cobbled together trip down the proverbial rabbit hole readable and enjoyable.

Thank you TheWildestCanuck, you are awesome! I hope we can continue to work together in the future.

Now, onto the show… Enjoy.

-Untraveled

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Chapter 18: Operation War Banner Part 3
“He had a daughter you know.”

Natalie Fangmeyer tore her green eyes away from the hellish landscape displayed on the mobile command terminal and sent an inquisitive look towards the grizzled timber wolf next to her.

Or under her to be more accurate. In a moment of madness, the usually stoic tigress had plopped down in Wolford’s lap, landing back against his solid chest and abs.

A few seconds after she had settled into his lap an incredible rush of blood and embarrassment had raced up to her head. *What am I doing?!*

But what really kicked her for a loop was that instead of pushing her off or snapping at her, John simply settled back in his chair and snaked his powerful arms around her waist as he got comfortable.

For the first few minutes, Fangmeyer just sat there semi-comatose with disbelief. To her, it felt as if her brain and nerves were short-circuiting. But when the swarm of butterflies in her stomach finally settled down the tigress found herself melting into the wolf’s embrace.

The stares the odd pair were garnering from the technicians milling about went unnoticed by either predator, though most of the looks were of disbelief at witnessing Central Officer Wolford acting like a normal mammal and not a robot wrapped in fur.

Was it appropriate for John Wolford to be cuddling with a potential business associate? Of course not! Was anyone going to tell him that? Hell no.

“Hm?” Natalie blinked as his question finally registered. “Who are you talking about?”

Wolford’s eyes slowly roamed over the tigress’s face, turning the inside of her rounded ears red.

“Nicholas Wilde,” Wolford said at last. “Nick had a wife and a little kit before everything fell apart.”

“Why are you bringing this up now?” Fangmeyer asked with a slight tilt of her head and a curious flick of her tail.

“Well…” Wolford tightened his hold around her waist. “Out of the surviving Wildes, the only death we confirmed was his wife Mary Wilde. We never found Vivian, his daughter.”

Fangmeyer’s eyes widened. “Are you saying that this Outrider might not be Nick, but instead his missing daughter?!” She rolled the phrase around her tongue as if getting a taste for the information. “It- it seems plausible I suppose. More so than a mammal coming back from the dead. Why do you think that though?”

“If this was Nick Wilde he would be 46 years old. A little bit out of his prime to pull off the shit this Outrider has done.”

“Well, I don’t know about that.” Fangmeyer giggled and boldly stroked a thumb across Wolford’s knuckles. “You’re 55 and still kicking ass like you’re 30.”

John snorted in laughter and fell silent, just enjoying Natalie’s hesitant caresses.
“It’s been bothering me.” Wolford broke the quiet moment. Fangmeyer’s ears flicked in his direction at the sound of his voice. “This whole meet with the Reapers and Skirmishers, the shitstorm at New Providence…” Wolford’s eyebrows furrowed as a thought struck him. “What Outrider said during the Commander’s rescue…”

“What did he say?”

_What is it with Wolves and the Howling?_

“Nothing,” Wolford whispered hoarsely. “Nothing important… it’s just…”

The hurting wolf fell silent as he felt a large, soft paw settle over his own. Wolford reveled in Natalie’s warmth, both from her body against his and her paw over his own.

A small, near invisible smile curled Wolford’s lips as the unease and anxiety that pulled at him day and night fell into the background; becoming a dull roar for the first time since he could remember.

_“Please God,”_ Wolford sent up a quiet little prayer, _“don’t take this little piece of happiness from me.”_

_“Not yet, please God, not yet.”_

----------------------------------------

_“Keep your ears down and your head on a swivel. And whatever you do, do not fire your weapon. If either of you pull your trigger I will gut you like a fish and leave you to the Lost, am I clear?”_

“Y-yes, sir.” Judy squeaked out.

She was a tough doe by all accounts but having dead mammals try and eat your face off was just about where she drew the line.

_“It would be even crazier if I was talking to a dead mammal.”_ She thought to herself with a nervous laugh.

_You never did see his body down in the tunnels though._ A nasty little voice hissed from the back of her mind.

_“Not. Helping.”_ The nasty little voice sniggered in reply.

Sergeant Grizzoli’s own nasty voice startled Judy a little.

_“And why can’t we shoot these rotting freaks?”_ He asked with a sneer. _“You trying to get me killed little runt?”_

The masked Reaper turned his lantern gaze towards the hostile grizzly. Though she couldn’t be sure because of the mask, Judy thought Outrider looked unimpressed.

_“I’m trying to keep all of us from getting killed. Sound attracts the Lost. You shoot, you bring half the city down on our heads.”_

Outrider took a single step back into the shadow of an ambulance and vanished, his form melting into the dark as if he were a part of it. Those horrible green orbs stared out at them for a breath
before they too were consumed by the city.

As if he were a ghost.

Every shadow held his haunting gaze, and every tiny sound was his footsteps as he danced through
the dark just out of sight.

“KeEp GoIng,” the wraith hissed. Radio static burst and sizzled from everywhere and nowhere. “I
wilL clEaR a pAtH.”

Then he was gone.

“What the fuck was that?” Grizzoli whispered hoarsely.

His only reply was a mad cackle that sent a chill down Judy’s spine.

----------

Outrider was many things. Thief, Merc, Bandit, Murderer, and more. Judy had even heard some
eccentric old fool describe him as a demon of wrath set upon the Earth by the Devil himself. Judy,
Adriana, and a few others got a good laugh out of that last one.

She wasn’t laughing anymore.

The disturbing rumors and hushed stories that revolved around the elusive and mysterious Reaper
were a testament to his reputation.

But to Judy, someone like Central Officer Wolford was a legend and a force of nature. He was a
mammal to be respected, a mammal to be feared!

“But he… Outrider… is different.” Judy thought.

One thing the stories neglected to say was that Outrider was a mammal of his word.

“Clear a path he said.” The bunny doe sickly chuckled.

And clear a path Outrider did.

At first, it was a body here or there, near indistinguishable from the unmoving husks frozen in
death as they tried to flee from the unnatural force that drained the life from their flesh.

The only difference between a corpse and a Lost was the veins of toxic green that wrapped their
ashen forms.

Judy noticed something was off when something thick and viscous splattered up her leg. A rancid
green ooze coated the cracked asphalt and she had stepped right into a puddle of the stuff.

“Oh, pellets!” She gagged. “What is that?"

Then her eyes trailed up to the source, a massive elephant carcass with a devastating cavity carved
into its chest. A hole large enough for her to walk through, even with her ears perked straight, a
hole still leaking a slew of revolting green fluid.

“Oh God, that’s…” She felt her breakfast lurch up her throat.

“How in the Hells did a tiny mammal with one little sword do all that?” Grizzoli shuddered in
reluctant agreement. “He’s a fucking monster.”

If only that was all.

Half a block away the rotting remnants of an undead lion were freshly dismembered with frightening precision, the body slumped over the window sill of a desolate coffee shop.

A trio of smaller Lost, a couple marsupials and a medium-sized canid of some kind, were shredded-literally shredded- and left splattered on a bank’s walls in a gruesome display.

Four slain Lost turned to ten, and then twenty, then over forty before Judy gave up counting the casualties.

“It’s like Bunnyburrow all over again...” Judy whimpered.

Small and large, predator and prey, none were safe from Outrider’s wrath.

The scariest part?

“I didn’t hear a thing.”

Judy was a rabbit, her hearing being the pride among her species, much like their agility. Living on the Avenger was difficult for her. An enclosed metal container filled with mammals and machinery made catching a few quiet moments alone a challenge, even more so when she had lived in Bunnyburrow before it was destroyed. Metal echoes and soldiers weren’t exactly known for being all that quiet.

Out here though, in the corpse of Zootopia, the smallest scuff of a paw across rough cement was like nails dragging across a chalkboard... yet he never made a sound.

[ Eyes up. ] Wolford’s voice crackled over the comms channel. [ The location for the meet is up ahead, at the train station. ]

“This is Shepherd 2. Roger, moving on objective. Over.”

[ Where is the VIP? Over. ]

“Hell if I know...” Grizzoli grumbled under his breath just loud enough for Judy to hear.

The grizzly straightened up and clicked his headset again. “Outrider cleared the way to the meet. You... did see all that from our cameras right sir?”

[I did, though I admit I was a bit... (stop it, that tickles)... ahem. A bit distracted.]

“Riiight.” Gregor drawled. “Moving to secure the meet. Shepherd 2 out.”

[Don’t bOthEr sTanDiNg oN cEreMonY. ] A scrambled hiss surged over the comms channel. [ The sTatIon iS cLeaR, aNd iT WoUld sEem ouR frIendLy nEighboRhoOd dEmoLitiOns eXperTs aRe rIgHt oN timE. ]

Judy and Grizzoli sidestepped into an alleyway pockmarked by dismembered limbs and green ichor. It was easy to find the station, even without directions. All they had to do was follow the bodies.

Grizzoli’s mass blocked out what little ambient light slipped through the choking cloud cover, leaving Judy with a bizarre sense of claustrophobia in the tight alley.
After stepping over the nauseous remains of a few slain Lost, Judy and Grizzoli emerged onto a wide street across from the train station.

The Tundra Town station was a raised platform housed in a large sloped building with sweeping walls and ground to ceiling glass windows that gave Judy the impression she was walking into a glacier made of metal and stone.

More Lost were strewn across the train platform, though a few of the bodies seemed too decayed to be fresh. This platform must have been traversed more frequently than other routes through the city.

Judy supposed it made sense. The train system that ran around Zootopia was on a raised track that ran over much of the rotting infrastructure; making travel around the city a much less perilous experience than having to sneak from one Lost infested building and street to the next.

The lobby was an absolute mess. It seemed like all the carnage from out on the street was condensed into a single atrium.

Through the dim beam of her rifle-mounted flashlight, Judy could make out piles of desiccated corpses carpeting the cold stone floors. Alongside the corpses were a number of skeletons slumped over the front counter, likely dating back to the original invasion.

She had seen plenty of evidence of Alien weapon damage while sneaking through the city ruins. The charred holes and blackened rock left by Alien energy weaponry made the violence and the slaughter the Aliens had inflicted on their world painfully clear to Judy.

“They killed so many of us… these… these mammals never wanted this! They never asked to be gunned down for no good reason! They were innocent!”

A fire ignited deep in the bunny doe’s chest, a burning for retribution and… something else. It was a foreign feeling for the righteous Judy Hopps. It was a blinding anger of a sort she had never imagined she could ever feel.

She was so furious her body trembled. Though her voice was barely above a whisper her vow shook clear in the silent tomb.

“They will pay.”

----------

Though he had said they were on time the Skirmisher and his escort didn’t arrive for another twenty or so minutes. In the meantime, Judy and Grizzoli had found Outrider lounging lazily inside one of the train cars. The masked Reaper had stretched his lithe frame luxuriously across a row of padded seats with his arms tucked comfortably behind his head.

It irked Judy to no end.

“How can you be so nonchalant in a place like this?” She grumped from the floor with her arms crossed and her foot thumping in irritation. “It’s like you don’t care about this, about anything!” She snapped, her arms waving about her ears wildly.

“I liKe tO tHinK oF mYseLf aS laid bAck, mOre tHan hEarRtleSs.” He replied mildly with a shrug.

The bunny’s thumping foot stuttered to a halt, pulling Outrider’s curious attention. The reaper
rolled his head over, turning his mask’s eerie green lantern orbs on Judy’s furious expression.

Her amethyst eyes flashed in the dark as her lips peeled back, revealing her buck teeth in a furious snarl.

“**I hate you.**” She sneered.

“**AnD I doN’t caRe.**”

Judy opened her mouth to argue further but she suddenly found herself staring at an empty seat. The Reaper had already vanished from his perch and reappeared behind her, strolling out onto the platform.

Wolford’s rough growl crackled over the radio, cutting Judy off from pushing the infuriating Reaper further.

[Alright, everyone’s here. Let’s try and play nice today people.]

Judy padded after the Reaper into the open train platform. She found herself reluctantly fascinated by the hypnotic grace with which the masked renegade moved. He moved with fluid steps, almost like a dance over the rubble and rusted tracks; with an air of confidence and a sense of feral danger that was difficult to describe.

Nearly as difficult to describe as the being that emerged from the train car across from them.

Judy and Grizzoli both reacted without thought, their weapons snapped to their shoulders and trained on the familiar Advent armor the being wore as naturally as a second skin.

It was clearly an Advent soldier in white and red armor, though on closer inspection this particular warrior’s armament was very much not standard issue.

The being was medium sized and mammalian with a sleek frame befitting a powerful feline, a predator. Unlike most felines though, this one didn’t have a long serpentine tail. Judy didn’t know what to make of it.

The blank dome of the helmet it wore was adorned by a fur mantle around its shoulders. Throwing blades and magazine pouches sat snug on the being’s chest rig and utility belt. On its arms were bloodied wraps and what appeared to be a wrist blade and a grappling hook. Odd equipment matched by an odd weapon. A short bullpup submachine gun hung loosely in one paw as the being jumped down from the train and marched forward with military rigidity and precision.

“**Sssso, this is the bessst the Reaperssss have to offerrrr?**”

The voice that fizzled from beneath the Skirmisher’s helmet reminded Judy of a scratched disk stuck in a CD player.

The Skirmisher reach to his helmet with both paws and with a neat twist popped it off and tucked it under his arm.

It- the Skirmisher, Judy corrected herself- was a Lynx, but it was all wrong. the Lynx’s yellow eyes looked like the lenses on a camera, circles that spun and pulled back and forth as they focused on the small masked mammal before him. A web of hex shapes cut through the brown and white fur on his robotic face.

Though he held a blank expression the Skirmisher’s ticking, monotone voice still somehow
managed to sound condescending.

“I am… Underrrrwhelmed.” He purred.

“Well, FuCk yoU tOo.” Outrider sniffed.

The Skirmisher’s eyebrows rose in surprise.

“That’sss all you have to ssssay?” he asked.

“YuP.”

“Don’t you know whoooo I am?”

“YUp.” Outrider shrugged. “DoN’t reaLly cAre tO be hoNeSt.”

Somehow the Skirmisher’s eyebrows rose even more. Judy groaned.

“We are so dead.”

“Whoa, whoa, hold up here! Let’s play nice like Central asked.”

“Thank God. Alistair to the rescue!”

Alistair Stålvärg and Adriana Whifur appeared beside the Skirmisher, looking a little the worse for wear. Their clothes and fur were singed around the edges, most likely from the explosion they set off earlier.

Judy also noticed that all three of them were missing well over half of their magazines.

“What the hell happened?”

Alistair stepped to the center of the two opposing faction representatives with his arms wide.

“We need to make this alliance work.” The red wolf said, his gaze flicking back and forth between both mammals. “Now you two asked us to mediate the meeting, so the least XCOM asks is that we keep it civil.”

Static crackling laughter split the air.

“This iS us bEing ciViL.” Outrider chuckled. The Skirmisher bobbed his head in agreement, leaving Alistair awkwardly standing there with his arms out like a scarecrow.

“Oh…” He mumbled. “Okay, then. Please continue.”

The Skirmisher nodded and turned back to the Reaper.

“Forrr the sssake of diplomaccy I will introducce mysssself.” He pounded a fist against his chest. “I am known assss Mox. I represent the Skirmishersss. We are Freed Advent. Our goal isss an Earth free of the Aliens and their imposter godsss.”

“I am OutRidEr.” The Reaper said. “I agReEd to rEpreSent tHe ReaPerS in pLacE of VolK.”

The Skirmisher suddenly made a face like he had just been sucker-punched in the groin.

“You arrre Outrider?!” He cried in shock. The Reaper’s laughter sputtered and sizzled.

“That’s riGht.” The masked mammal placed a paw at his belt and bent elegantly at his waist.
“The onE aDd onLy.”

Judy could faintly hear a growl rise from Adriana’s throat at the statement. The former zootopian resident did not like some uppity fringe scav’ taking the name of her hero.

“I apologizzze.” Mox strode forward with a paw outstretched to shake. “Yourrr reputation prrroceeds you Outriderrr. It is an honorrr to meet the Reaper’sss finest warriorrr.”

“LiKewIse PraTal MoX.” The Skirmisher stiffened at the Reaper’s words as he shook his paw.

The faction representative separated and stepped back. Everyone visibly relaxed, as if a weight had been lifted from their shoulders.

They had done it! As fragile and new as this was there was finally peace between the Skirmishers and the Reapers.

Judy let out a slow breath. It was finally over.

“You good Hopps?” Alistair strolled over.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” She waved off his concern, though her chest swelled warmly from his kindness. “This mission though has been just… yeah…”

“You’re tellin’ me,” The red wolf sniggered lamely as he looked down his singed band t-shirt and burnt fur. “If I see another fire again it’ll be too soon.”

...

On the train, lieutenant Whifur was scowling down at her headset like it had stepped on her tail.

“Damn fiddly little fuck…” The ashen copper coyote slipped the headset back over her ears and clicked the mic.

“Central, you read?”

[ZzzZzz- uttin- zzZzZzZz- ut- ZzzzZzz – of there! -zzZZzzZ…]

“Damn!” She snatched the headset off and growled in frustration.

“I don’t like this. Something’s not right.” Unease welled up in the female coyote. She stuck her head out of the train car, her golden eyes settling on her partner.

“Hey Ali, hurry the hell up!” Adriana called. “Comms are out so we are getting outta dodge while we can!”

“Coming!” He cracked a smile down at the bunny and flicked his head towards the rest of the squad. “C’mon Hopps.”

“Yessir!”

Off to the side of the train car, Mox and Outrider were chatting, their body language was relaxed and companionable, though admittedly it was difficult to tell what exactly Outrider was thinking with that mask.

“I hope I never see you again.”
As he passed the odd pair Stålvarp noticed a magazine had fallen out of one of Mox’s pouches.

“Hey Mox,” The Skirmisher turned his camera like eyes to the red wolf pointing down at the ground. “You dropped something.”

“My thankss.” Judy watched Mox stoop over to snatch up his misplaced magazine-

-and then looked up as Alistair’s head exploded in a shower of blood and gore.

“ALI!!!”

------------------

A/N:

No one is safe! No one gets out of life alive! Mwahahaha!

Ahem. Got that out of my system.

I’d like to thank the readers that allowed me to use their original characters in ZCOM. You guys and gals are awesome!

Special thanks to Dethwulf_Zero. Sorry man, Alistair was one of my favorites and is really likable… So I had no choice! He had to die. Seriously though, no hard feelings I hope? Alistair is an awesome character and (very, very minor sorta kinda spoilers) will be a major factor in his surviving friends’ character development. Judy being chief among them.

On a completely unrelated subject, I am still accepting OC’s to put in the ZCOM Dossier, and a slot just opened. Any takers?

-Untraveled

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Editor’s Note:

Oooh, look at all this space, I love it! Who knew editors could be so pampered. Most authors keep us chained to our typewriters, with barely enough coffee to survive. As you may have guessed, I’m the mysterious Canuck that crawled out of his igloo to spread good grammar and maple syrup to deserving authors. I hope you all enjoyed this little test run, because I loved helping out our dear
Untraveled. See you all on the next one!

---:Character Dossier:---

*Creator: dethwulf_Zero (AO3)*

Name: Alistair Stålvarg
Age: 25 Years Old
Deceased: Slain 10/17/2035 Operation War Banner
Gender: Male
Species: Red Wolf
Appearance: Tall for his species, Scars across the face and back, Heterochromatic eyes (Steel gray/Deep green), Likes dressing like his father’s favorite grunge bands (ripped jeans, Tee shirts, and flannels)

History: Before recruited by XCOM Alistair lived in relative peace out in a fringe settlement with his family. As the eldest of three brothers, Alistair often treats mammals smaller than himself as younger than himself, regardless of their actual age. A big family guy with a stubborn view of life that has caused problems when dealing with mammals from other walks of life and points of view. A heavy drinker off duty, he curbs his habit when on mission, though he has been known to suffer from withdrawal when on longer scouting missions.

Basic Personality Traits: Outgoing, Athletic, Self-conscious and insecure
Positive Traits: Tough, Fearless, Kindhearted
Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Overbearing at times

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*Creator: Carbonrap45 (AO3)*

Name: Adriana Whifur
Age: 35
Gender: Female
Species: Coyote
Appearance: Black fur and deep golden-brown eyes with a lean muscular physique. Dresses light in favor of mobility and stealth, often seen with a recon hood and half mask with a shemagh around her shoulders.

Brief History: Grew up on the streets of Zootopia before the invasion. After capture by an Advent raid early in their occupation of earth Adriana escaped from custody and has been on the run ever since with extensive experience in paw to paw combat.

Personality: Paranoid, determined, lets slip little about herself while willing to talk to others
Positive traits: Empathic to those that suffered under Advent, has knowledge of combatting most Advent trooper types.

Flaws: Has little faith in new recruits and often refers to them as “fresh meat”, paranoia tends to flare up at the worst of times.

Name: CommanderOps (AO3)

Name Gregor 'Brick' Grizzoli
Age: 40
Gender: Male
Species: Grizzly Bear

History: Gregor was a fresh face heavy weapons specialist when the XCOM Headquarters was assaulted by the Invaders. He and his comrades/squad buddies that also were freshly promoted to some specialist was tasked defending a maintenance tunnel. They bravely held it till the dreaded sound of skittering from above. He was the lone survivor of a squad of six that escaped with the other survivors of the base. He continued to dutifully serve what was left of XCOM, but as the years go by and the more comrades he lost he became slowly numb to the loss of the life that he regards any new rookie as just another number to the wall. He was denied the rank of Sergeant based upon the mixed review of his leadership, leading successful operations but at the cost of an injured/dead rookie.

Basic Personality Traits: Serious, Reserved

Positive Traits: Heavy Weapons Specialist, Strong, Prior War experience

Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Hates Robots of any form, PTSD with Chrysalids.
Season Finale: No Rest For The Wicked

Chapter Summary

Everything has gone wrong.

In the outskirts of the Ruins of Zootopia Central Officer Wolford and his team are fighting for their lives.

Meanwhile I'm Zootopia negotiations between the Resistance factions descends into chaos when Alistair is brutally cut down.

Judy and her squad come face to face with one of the Alien's deadliest agents and their only hope is to put their trust in Outrider, an unpredictable underpawed trickster Judy has come to hate.

Is this the last sad gasp for Earth's last hope? Or the first breath of a newborn Resistance?

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The bar lights were dimmed, letting the shadows that crept at its corners settle over her like a comforting blanket. She felt better in the dark right now. No one could see her tears or her reddened eyes.

Her paws worked relentlessly, almost frantically, as she forced her watery eyes to focus and get this done. She had to get this done. It was pointless - silly even - she knew, but after what she saw, after what Bogo did to him, it became her mission.

Her snow white tail lashed back and forth in frustration. She soldered delicate electronics and built microchips by paw daily, so why, WHY was something as simple as this suddenly so fucking HARD?!

Her trembling fingers fumbled the pitcher of strawberry juice for the umpteenth time, but this time she wasn’t so lucky. The plastic container tumbled from her nerveless fingers and caught the edge of the table. Its top knocked loose and the container was sent spinning, ejecting its sticky red contents across the floor, the table and her own legs.

“Fuck,” she whispered. She was never going to get the red out of her fur now.

She delicately climbed from her chair to scoop up the pitcher, only for her elbow to catch the tray of paw-shaped impressions on the table and send it clattering to the floor with a painfully loud crash and another splash of red juice. She felt something snap and blind, helpless rage seared through her veins.

“FUCK!” she screamed. “FUCK! DAMN, DAMN, DAMN, DAMN!” She threw the pitcher to the sticky floor with a snarl.

“WHY?! WHY IS THIS SO FUCKING HARD?!” she demanded from the darkness as tears once more spilled from her crystal blue eyes. “TELL ME WHY! TELL ME!!!”
Her pleas were met with silence, broken by the faint patter of rabbit feet.

“Shen?” Jack Tygan’s soft, accented voice floated in timidly from the doorway. His species’ poor night sight prevented him from seeing through the gloom.

He may not have had good eyesight, but his hearing was exceptional. He could barely make out the subtle whisper of fur against cloth and Shen’s quiet choking sniffles.

“Shen, are you okay? Are you hurt?” Tygan pressed.

Still no answer. *Guess I have to do this the hard way,* he thought.

“Oh, I’m going to come in. Is that alright?” All he heard was a little hiccup so he decided it was permission enough. Tygan readied himself and cautiously tiptoed into the darkness, toward Skye’s heartbroken sobs.

Three steps in and he walked face first into a rhino-sized stool.

A watery giggle bubbled up from the dark.

“I-I’m over here silly.”

“Laugh at my pain would you?” Jack muttered as he rubbed his smarting nose. “If I didn’t know any better I’d think you hated me.” He added, trying to lighten the mood.

“...”

“Shen?”

“I... I don’t hate you. Most of the time. I did though when we first met but...”

“I’d love to find out exactly when this change of heart came about but I’m a bit preoccupied with violently hugging furniture at the moment.”

His attempt at mimicking her own dry humor was rewarded with a watery giggle.

“Better let me stick to being the funny one.” Skye weakly snickered. “I’m over here.”

“And where is here exactly?”

“What are you talking about? You’re looking straight at me- oh, you can’t see.”

“An astute observation,” Jack deadpanned. “Perhaps you are right, you should stick to being funny, I’ll be the smart one.” He was waving his arms around, blindly feeling for any more hostile furniture as he made his way towards Skye’s voice.

“Get back to me when you can reverse engineer an Alien cyber-network with no cypher on a dial-up connection.”

“I... Have no idea what you just said.”

“Huh, smart one he says. Boring more like.”

“Well not everyone can be as boisterous and colorful as you Shen.”

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you were jealous.”
“Perhaps I am,” Tygan admitted. His sudden honesty shocked Skye.

“What brought this on?” She asked.

“I figured you have had enough of others lying to you,” Jack explained with a slight heat to his ears. thank God not even Skye could make that out in the darkness. “Don’t get too used to it though.”

“Yeah, Heaven forbid if you were honest with yourself.” Skye giggled, pulling a chuckle from Jack as well.

Tygan’s merry mood was interrupted when his toe smacked into the edge of a stool leg.

“Eck,” He hissed and hopped on one foot in pain. He daintily set his smarting foot down.

“Can you help me?” He asked in a pitiful whimper.

“You’re hopeless.” Skye snickered. She did what he asked though and with a wicked grin on her muzzle snatched him by his paw and pulled him into a strawberry flavored puddle.

The hare yelped in a hilarious squeaky pitch as the sticky liquid soaked through his once pristine lab coat.

“Oh God! Shen, Why?!” He cried hysterically.

Skye did have a snarky comeback ready, but she was in no condition to say anything, she was too busy rolling on a dry patch of floor, yipping in laughter.

“Wha, wha, wha, what was that?” She wheezed as she clutched her aching ribs. “I-I’ve never heard anyone make that noise before!” She sputtered.

“Is this syrup?!” Jack exclaimed in an uncharacteristically high pitched squeak. “You just threw me into a puddle of syrup! Who does that?!”

“Me apparently,” Skye smirked through half-lidded eyes. “Misery loves company after all, and I’m covered from the waist down in the stuff.”

Tygan’s ears snapped in the direction of her voice. He crossed his arms over his red-stained chest and said something Skye had never imagined she’d hear slip from his mouth.

“Fuck you.” He muttered.

He couldn’t say anything after that, as Skye was too busy rolling on the floor howling for the next three minutes.

“What are you doing here in the dark Shen?” Tygan finally managed to ask once she calmed down.

“…Skye.” She replied.

“What?” Tygan asked in confusion.

“Call me Skye. Shen was my father.” The vixen implored in a vulnerable whisper.

“Okay,” Jack relented with a small smile. “What were you doing here in the dark Skye?”

“I was…” She stuttered. “It- it was silly and I was just being foolish.”
Jack’s ears sprung up in realization.

“You were doing those popsicles for your father’s birthday. I remember you saying something about that a week ago.”

“They are called pawpsicles, and yeah I was. It was for Dad and for Uncle Nick too. Their birthdays are only a few days apart.”

Though he couldn’t see it Jack could tell Skye’s eyes were closed in a dreamy, forlorn expression.

“Back when I was a little kit Dad and I would go to Uncle Nick’s place and celebrate both his and Dad’s birthdays at the same time. Aunt Mary would bake a blueberry pie and a cake and everything! Then I’d go off and play with Vivian.”

“Who is Vivian?” Jack asked.

“Uncle Nick’s daughter.” Skye sighed. “She was a few years older than me and had a knack for getting into trouble.” A wry grin crept over her narrow muzzle. “On those days Viv and I were practically attached by the tail. She would lead and I would be close behind, tearing up all of Zootopia with a smile on our faces.” She chuckled. “We were little monsters.”

“I wouldn’t doubt that.” Tygan snorted with a wry smile. “So, need some help?”

“What?” Skye blinked in confusion.

“With the pawpsicles.” Jack chuckled. “I want to help.”

“Don’t you have patients to, I dunno, doctor?”

“That’s what nurses are for.” Jack grinned. “Presently I believe this takes priority, for the time being. So lead the way, Skye.”

A bright smile spread over the vixen’s face. “Sure.”

Skye turned on the lights revealing the mess she had made and both her and Jack’s sticky situation. Skye pointed at him and guffawed at the scowling striped hare. Once they got their act together Skye quickly mopped up the mess and Jack collected the fallen containers.

Skye brought over the mixing bowl from behind the counter along with a tall bottle of vodka and a box of red fruit mix. Tygan’s eyebrows rose in suspicion.

“Dare I ask what the alcohol’s for?”

A devilish smirk split Skye’s lips. “What do you think it’s for?”

Jack looked down at his stained lab coat and pants and tentatively sniffed. A long-suffering sigh of resignation slipped from his lips.

“How many are we making?” he asked. Skye grinned and her tail swished back and forth in excitement.

“Till I run out.” She wiggled the bottle. It was almost as tall as Jack. “I’ve already gone through four so far.”

Jack’s eyes bugged out.
“FOUR?!?”

“Hey, you said you wanted to help.” Skye sniffed, completely unconcerned by the mayhem her frozen treats could unleash.

“I have heard of spiking the punch, but this is ridiculous,” Jack sighed. “Where did you even get the idea for this?”

“Uncle Nick,” Skye shrugged. “He used to run a pawpsicle stand and if some mammal was being a jerk, he would slip them a pawpsicle spiked with moonshine. I never found out who he got it from but two fox-sized pawpsicles could knock an elephant out flat.”

“Sweet bunny Jesus what did I just get myself into?” Jack asked the heavens.

“Hey, quit whining and get mixing,” Skye snarked, waving a wooden spoon in front of his nose.

“Fine, fine…” Jack grabbed the spoon and hopped on the table to start mixing as Skye poured in the ingredients.

It was a tender moment, one that stuck in Skye’s mind for a long time. She had never expected Tygan of all mammals to come through for her, but she found that underneath that stiff collar of his was a thoughtful and sweet male. She actually found herself feeling better, not great per se, but her Lapine companion’s presence was a comfort. Like all good things, however, this moment had to end.

This one ended with flashing red lights and a blaring alarm.

“What’s going on?!” Jack shouted over the alarm’s booming squeal. Emergency red lights flickered on, illuminating the bar in a crimson glow.

The alarm abruptly cut off and Commander Bogo’s voice boomed over the intercom.

[All senior personnel to the command bridge immediately. Operation War Banner has been compromised. Aliens have ambushed the meet and Central Officer Wolford’s position is under hostile fire.]

“No…” Skye choked.

[I repeat all senior personnel to the command bridge immediately. Operation War Banner has been compromised…]

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“GET FIREBRAND AIRBORNE NOW!” Wolford roared over the deafening gunfire.

He ducked behind the mobile command console as magnetic rounds raked the forest floor around him.

“How did they find us?!” Fangmeyer shouted from beside him. They were trapped out in the open, thankfully the Advent troopers hadn’t completely surrounded their position yet or the odd pair would have been pulped from the start.

“It doesn’t matter right now!” Wolford drew his pistol and fired around the console. One of the rounds struck a trooper dead center but all it did was make the armored canid flinch and respond with a burst from his own weapon.
“Sir!” Felix shouted from behind the semi-truck. “Firebrand is already in the cockpit but the ship’s not ready! We- we-!”

“Got it!” Wolford turned to the surviving mammals huddled behind the trucks.

“Esmar! Hunter! Covering fire! Send ‘em back to Hell where they belong!”

“Yes, Sir!” An odd-looking golden furred wolf in combat fatigues shouted.

“Finally.” A scarred opossum grinned and slapped a fresh magazine in his Mini-14 marksman rifle.

Czer Hunter was one of Fangmeyer’s security detail and had been complaining the entire trip about the lack of bodies needing to be put down. Now, all that separated him from an overwhelming target-rich environment was a truck wheel and the order to take care of business.

“Popping smoke!” Wolford unclipped a green cylinder from his waist, pulled the pin and tossed it between the Aliens and the grounded Skyranger. The grenade bounced twice, and thick white smoke erupted from its bottom with a hiss, obscuring the Aliens’ line of fire.

Hunter rotated around the wheel he was leaning against and smoothly rolled into a supported firing stance on his elbows. The bloodthirsty opossum didn’t bother with looking down his sights, he had been using his Mini-14 for so long it had basically become an extension of his being. Aiming had become as simple as pointing his finger.

His first careful burst of rifle caught a coyote Stun Lancer high in the shoulder and took a chunk of its neck for his troubles. The enemy didn’t seem to realize they were being fired on. They were too fixated on killing Wolford and Fangmeyer.

“Hey, Freak! I don’t see you helping!” Hunter sneered at the odd shaped golden wolf next to him.

A booming Lion-like growl rose in the strange colored wolf’s throat.

“I’m waiting.” Esmar growled. “I ain’t gotta take shit from some piece of road-kill with a cute pea-shooter.”

“Waiting for what?”

A distinct pinging sound pulled the opossum’s attention to the edge of the forest in time to see a trooper staring down at the tripwire it had just triggered.

The forest and the unfortunate trooper erupted into a ball of hell-fire.

Esmar had already vaulted over the truck’s hood with his Rotary Cannon spinning out a wall of armor-piercing rounds across the platoon of stunned Advent Troopers before the last pieces of his victim had even hit the ground.

“Oh, that,” Hunter mumbled.

[Central! This is Firebrand! Felix got the couplings unhitched!]

“Go! Go! Go!” Wolford roared into his headset. “Get to the meet! If they found us here I bet the Aliens found them too!”

[Roger. You better get out alive John, cuz I ain’t gonna fly back here to scrape your ragged old pelt off the ground.]

The Skyranger’s engines burst to life with a high-pitched whine. Firebrand gunned the throttle and the aircraft’s thrusters roared, kicking up a plume of dead foliage and superheated exhaust as the sleek ship rocketed skyward, riding the tailwind towards the smokey skeleton of Zootopia.

Season Finale: No Rest For The Wicked

“ALI!!”

Time stood still.

Alistair’s body hit the floor as warm crimson splashed from the horrendous wound. Shattered glass pinged and hummed against the cracked concrete soon after the gunshot that ripped through the Red Wolf.

Judy felt more than heard the broken glass smash to the ground. She watched Adriana’s horrified expression of disbelief scrawl over her face in slow motion. Her golden eyes widening and her mouth wrenching open in a terrible scream.

Then Judy felt a set of claws grip her shoulder and everything sped up at a double-time into a chaotic maelstrom of fear and confusion.

The claws threw her into the train next to Adriana just as the concrete floor she had been standing on exploded from a magnetic projectile.

The bunny hit the cold rusted floor and kept her body curled tight as she rolled. Her back slammed against a pole driving the air from her lungs for a moment.

Her vision swam but she looked up in time to see Outrider, a paw still outstretched from throwing her, draw a massive revolver from the shadow of his trench coat. The huge firearm was about as long as his arm, its menacing bull barrel reflected his mask’s eerie green light in the gloom.

In a single smooth motion, the small mammal drew the massive revolver and leveled it towards the rooftops and fired.

A deafening report and a brilliant flash roared out of the black hand cannon. Even from this distance, she could feel the revolver’s power shake deep in her chest.

“Get to coverrr!” Mox’s robotic shout jolted Judy into action. She took a breath, thankful for her body armor taking the brunt of her impact.

“No! We have to save Alistair!” Adriana cried hysterically. She leaped from the train, all thoughts of caution or common sense thrown to the wind.

“GreGoR! RestraIn heR!” Outrider snarled and dove behind a pillar as another hail of magnetic rounds smashed into the train station.

Grizzoli snatched the panicked coyote back into the train with a massive paw. Whifur bucked and fought wildly against his grip.

“No! I have to get to him!” Adriana screamed. “I won’t let this city take any more from me! Let me go, please! Alistair! Ali!!”

A group of magnetic shot smashed into the train, a few of the shards ricocheting off with a screech.
“Do you sssee anything?!” Mox asked. The augmented Lynx was huddled behind half cover down on the tracks, next to the raised pedestrian platform.

“MaYbe!” Outrider chanced a peek around his pillar and ducked his masked head back as the concrete next to his face exploded. “I thiNk I sEe tHeM!” Outrider hefted his pistol. “FirE oN My mArK!”

Another volley of projectiles smashed against his pillar.

“NOW!”

In unison, the Skirmisher and the Reaper jumped from cover and concentrated fire on a dilapidated apartment building through the smashed window. Mox’s submachine gun barked in controlled bursts while Outrider’s hand cannon lit up the night with a mighty thunderclap.

Though her ears were ringing from Outrider’s weapon Judy could have sworn she heard a faint snarl of anger and surprise as the apartment building was hammered from the combined salvo. She poked her head out over the window of the train and spotted a lanky silhouette tumble from the rooftop.

“You hit it!” she shouted. Her elation was cut short when the metal siding right next to her head exploded in a shower of sparks and fragments. Her heart stuck in her throat and she fell on her little bobtail, her chest rising and falling rapidly in shock

*I almost died.*

“If yoU dOn’t Get yOur bLooDy hEad dOwn, You’Re thE oNe tHaT’s goNna gEt HiT!” Outrider shouted.

The Reaper spun out his hand cannon’s cylinder and loaded fresh rounds from the bandolier wrapped around his waist.

We need to get out of herre.” Mox turned to Judy, who had taken Outrider’s advice to heart and plastered her small frame against the train’s wall. “Do you have transssport?”

“I- Yes, but we c-can’t get in touch with Central. The- The jumpship is there with him.” Judy explained in a trembling voice.

“TheY mUst have bEen hIt too,” Outrider grunted. “KnoWing JoHn thouGh, he wOuLd do eVerYthiNg in hiS pOweR to sEnD tHe SkYraNgeR anYwAy.”

Judy had to agree with him. Wolford always put the troops first. Something in the way Outrider spoke bothered her though, but what was it?

“ThE CouRtyArd ouT fRonT of thE sTatioN.” Outrider jabbed a thumb to the exterior of the building. “We gO oUt thE Way we cAme In anD sEt Up a lAnDing z0ne.”

“What about that sniper?” Grizzoli rumbled. In his arms hung a defeated Adriana, her eyes staring blankly at the growing pool of blood around Alistair’s crumpled body. “That scum is still out there.”

Mox carefully stood from his cover with his submachine gun held tight in his gloved paws. “We will have to deal.”

Judy felt her heart jerk in her chest as she watched the Skirmisher expose himself, but after one
second, then three passed in tense silence and nothing happened.

“Let usss go.” Mox hissed.

A sharp click made every mammal freeze.

“Outriderrrr?”

Judy’s eyes widened in horror. The Reaper casually held his hand cannon in one paw, its huge barrel trained on Mox’s head and the hammer cocked back.

Haunting green lantern orbs stared into artificial golden eyes for a single heartbeat. For a moment it seemed their gazes were trying to convey some silent thought. Mox’s ear flicked.

Then the Reaper pulled the trigger.

A wisp of purple smoke spiraled behind the Skirmisher’s back and for a split second a pair of demonic purple eyes materialized from Mox’s shadow, illuminated by the revolver’s blinding muzzle flash.

The bullet zipped passed Mox’s cheek and somehow passed through the smoke-shrouded figure with a whoosh and the eyes vanished in a violet flash of light.

Mox was already moving when Outrider pulled the trigger. He flicked his gauntlet and a metal cable spooled from its housing with an angry zip.

The grappling hook snapped through the air with a crack like a bullwhip. The cable spun out across the room towards a distorted corner of shadows.

The wicked hook struck the empty space in a shower of sparks revealing the sword that had blocked the unorthodox weapon.

Judy and the other XCOM members gaped in shock as a lanky purple skinned creature in otherworldly armor holding a huge shotgun and a short sword appeared in a flash of violet light and smoke.

The thing Judy could only describe as a nightmare.

It had no fur; its skin was a sickly shade of purple with pulsing veins of a similar color trailing along its body. Its limbs were far too long and its eyes were sunken in their sockets. It had two feline-like ears and a bare tail like a cat, but its face was all wrong. Its nose was reduced to two vertical, reptile-like slits above a muzzle full of razor-sharp vampire-like teeth.

“No one has ever done that before.” The creature hissed in a voice reminiscent of curled nails on a crumbling chalkboard. “And NO ONE SHALL EVER DO THAT AGAIN!”

“ShuT Up.”

Outrider’s hand cannon roared and recoiled in quick, violent, chest shuddering successions. He emptied his revolver’s other five rounds so quickly it nearly sounded like a single gunshot.

The creature screeched in rage as two massive slugs struck her chest plate while she blocked another with her blade in another feat of impossible speed. The other two grazed the demon and left her reeling.

She snarled and disappeared in another flash of unholy light, leaving flecks of purple energy in her
“What the hell is THAT?!” Grizzoli roared.

The rebels slowly converged closer to each other. Judy’s heart was pounding wildly in her chest and her breath came in shallow gasps. Grizzoli let Adriana fall from his arms as he hefted his rotary cannon in his paws. Whifur fell to her knees, her legs like jelly. Nearly oblivious to the danger she crawled over to her fallen partner’s body and with shaking paws tugged Alistair’s bloodstained dog-tags free from his pulverized neck.


“I remember her.” Outrider sniffed. “I haVen’t meT hlm, But otHer REapeRs haVe rEpoRted of aNoTher liKe heR. ThEy arE caLled ThE Chosen. ThEy arE ThE Undying.”

“What iss the plan Outriderrr?”

The Reaper jerked up in surprise at Mox’s question. With an almost uncertain tilt to his head, he turned his lantern like orbs to each mammal behind him. every set of eyes were looking up at him for guidance.

He looked down at Judy last. Though she couldn’t see past his mask she could feel his gaze settle on her anxious amethysts. She was sure he could see her fear. Her long ears draped down her back and her nose twitched rapidly in time with her trembling little tail. She was terrified and desperate for an anchor. She had just lost Alistair, one of the few mammals she felt safe with.

Whatever Outrider had seen in her eyes brought him to a decision, the eerie green light behind his mask seemed to flare brighter. Judy felt his gaze slip away from her. He flicked his revolver open and methodically reloaded each spent cartridge with another.

It almost seemed like a prayer of sorts for him, a prayer and a promise.

*What thoughts are going through his mind?* Judy wondered.

He clasped his Hand-cannon closed with a flourish, then he spoke, his scrambled, static voice confident and hot with a fiery vengeance.

“Get tHe lanDing zOne reAdY anD cLeaR of LoSt. I wilL dEal wiTh tHe AssaSsin.”

A mad cackle rose from the shadows.

“YOU ARE WELCOME TO TRY!”

“...”

Outrider didn’t rise to the Assassin’s provocation. Gone was his snarky and smug attitude, only a cold calculating rage remained of the mammal beneath that mask.

He stepped once, his trench coat fluttering in his wake as he vanished into the dark like a ghost.


“Are you really going to trust that filthy Scav?” Grizzoli blistered.

“Yesss.”
Grizzoli growled but followed them regardless.

The first time Judy had passed through the train station’s atrium it was like a tomb, though the bodies were still there it was no longer as dead as before.

Gaunt ashen creatures, tortured shadows of those that had once dwelled in a peaceful Zootopia, wandered the devastated interior. Their frames lit the dark by the glow of their sickly green eyes and the pulsing veins that wrapped around their limbs like a spreading virus.

Mox confidently led the squad down the steps into the atrium and deliberately kicked a discarded can across the floor. The aluminum container bounced and skidded with a loud clatter and in unison, every Lost spun in their direction and charged.

“Aim forrr the head.” Mox gargled as he lifted his submachine gun and swiftly put a pair of the wretched creatures down with an accurate burst of metal fire.

Terror and apprehension rose in Judy’s throat as the crumbling monsters scrambled hungrily towards her with vacant, empty expressions frozen on their dead faces.

Flashes of far more familiar faces, frozen with similar slack and empty expressions, came to the forefront of her mind. Her Father, her brothers, and her sisters. Her boyfriend. Their corpses twisting and snarling as they stumbled towards her with teeth bared and dead eyes staring unseeingly back at her.

It was Bunnyburrow all over again.

_No Wolford to save you this time._ That familiar nasty little voice that hid in the dark corner of her mind hissed gleefully.

_She doesn’t need him!_ Another voice in her head shot back. Like the other voice it sounded just like her, but confident and determined. _This time she is not alone!_

_I’m... I’m not alone._

Judy glanced at the mammals next to her, their intense expressions illuminated by the muzzle flash of their weapons. She knew some of them didn’t like her, Grizzoli despised her, but it didn’t matter, their opinions were not what was important.

She gripped her rifle and pushed the stock to her shoulder as her pounding heart slowed and a calm settled over her troubled thoughts.

_I am not alone._

She trained her sights between the glowing eyes of a decayed tiger, a predator many times her size and weight. She pulled the trigger. She felt her rifle buck against her shoulder from the recoil and the tiger’s head exploded in a cloud of dust and green gore.

_Not anymore._

“’I feel as if we have met,’ the Assassin hissed. ’Have I killed you before?’”

“ThAt’S mY liNe.” Outrider snarled.

Outside the atrium Outrider found himself in a dangerous and bizarre game of cat and mouse, only
both players were the hunter.

Using every technique, every experience and every ounce of skill he possessed Outrider dove and weaved through the shadows after the invisible specter, even as she stalked him in kind.

It was a dance of sorts, both partners fought for the lead in the waltz and rhythm. On occasion, a flutter of a trench coat or the flash of sickly purple eyes opened in the dead city’s shifting shadows.

“I have never met another so talented!” The Assassin exclaimed in glee. “Besides myself of course.”

The demon crept into the depths of a dark little corner and calmed her breathing, her body stilled and her heartbeat nearly stopped as she listened for her mysterious opponent.

At first, she heard nothing. Did he run away?

No… no, there it is, the click of claws on stone. The fool.

A shark-like grin split her lips.

“I admit,” She commented, her voice dripping with false remorse. “I enjoyed our little game. It is truly regretful that I must bring it to an END!”

Her muscles uncoiled like a spring as the assassin exploded from her hiding place and pounced on her prey, her blade flashing in the green ambient glow.

She hissed in glee as her blade sunk into her victim, only instead of blood a cloud of dust burst onto her face.

It was a Lost! A trick!

Alarm bells in her head screamed a warning and she threw herself to the side as she drew her longsword from her back in the same motion.

Steel screeched against Alien alloy as Outrider’s own sword struck the Alien’s blade inches from her face.

The assassin savagely kicked the Reaper square in the chest, sending the small mammal tumbling back, clutching his ribs.

“GRRREAAGH!” The Assassin swung her longsword in a vicious chop.

The winded Reaper didn’t bother blocking the deadly blade and rolled out of the way. It seemed the right choice, even when swung one-handed the longsword cut through the asphalt like butter. If he had tried to block the blow Outrider would have been cut in half.

“NicE sWord,” Outrider observed, his mask’s lantern orbs glowing eerily from the depths of his hood. With unearthly speed, he drew his hand cannon. “My tUrn.”

The revolver violently kicked in his paws as he fired at near point-blank range. Somehow the Assassin contorted her body in a display of grotesque flexibility and blocked the huge slug from punching a hole in her face. She took the bullet straight to her chest plate instead, the hot lead screamed shrilly from the ricochet.

The Assassin spun her twisted body further and kicked Outrider’s revolver wide so she could bring her own blades to bear. She wielded both swords with ease and frightening accuracy. Her every
move was vicious and efficient.

Outrider went on the defensive, in an impressive feat of instinct, experience, and training the masked Reaper dodged, spun and weaved around the Assassin’s onslaught. Impressive as it may have been even Outrider could only last for so long.

The Assassin feinted an overhead chop then pulled her short blade in a sudden uppercut.

Outrider stumbled back to avoid the blow and barely flinched as the weapon cut a nasty trail across his abdomen and chest. He threw his Hand cannon skyward and let himself fall back onto his free paw. The muscles in his arms bulged and tensed before he launched himself into a one pawed backhand spring and skidded a few paces into a graceful crouch where he snatched his thrown hand cannon out of the air and fired.

The Assassin cut the round out of the air and swung her sword only to find Outrider nowhere to be seen.

“Do yOu kNow Why I sEt uP a mEetIng wAy ouT heRe AssaSsiN?” Outrider asked. His crackling voice coming from nowhere, and everywhere all at once. She couldn’t pinpoint it.

“ThIs iS my hOme yoU naKed sLitherIng RAT . No maMmaL aLive knOws ZooTopia liKe I dO.”

A deep, static laugh fizzled and hissed from the city’s depths.

“You’re On mY tuRf nOw!” Outrider laughed.

The Alien snarled and tried to fade back into the shadows.

“Now, nOw. No ruNninG! WhaT wOuLd tHe ElDeRsa Say?” Outrider chastised her like she were an amusing child.

A thunderous explosion rocked the street and a violent muzzle flash of fire lit up the artificial night.

The Assassin’s efforts were thwarted by the massive bullet that smashed into her back like a rhino’s hooved fist.

“You can’t kill me !” The Assassin sneered and rolled away as another slug smashed into the asphalt, missing her by centimeters. “By the glory of the Elders, I am IMMORTAL!”

Another thunderous report cracked across the dead streets, though once again the Assassin blocked the huge round with a deft flick of her blade. Her lips peeled back into a vicious grin.

“The Elders have demanded all were to die this day.” She declared. “No matter how valiant your efforts they are all futile in the face of the GODS!”

“The only face I see is one even a mother couldn’t love.” Outrider deadpanned. “Here, let me rearrange it for you.”

His hand cannon discharged with a mighty thunderclap, but the bullet only met with wisps of smoke and cold asphalt.

“Hahaha! So determined, so rebellious, so bloodthirsty! ” The Assassin cackled, her voice disembodied. “You are wasted on these mortals. Come with me. Surely my masters would draw out your true potential.”
“FuCK yoU.”

“So be it.”

Far off in the distance Outrider noticed the low roar of thrusters growing closer every breath.

“As much fun as it has been to trade blows with you Reaper, I am afraid I suddenly have a bigger fish to fry.”

With one last peal of laughter, the Assassin’s voice faded away into the dark.

_Damn! That rutting rat is going for the transport!_

Outrider unsheathed his claws. The unnaturally sharp talons had a silver sheen to them and when he sank them into the brick siding of a building they cut through with ease.

He scaled the building with squirrel-like grace, his coal dipped russet tail flicking back and forth to keep his balance as his powerful limbs worked.

Throwing himself onto the roof the Reaper sheathed his claws and began to sprint from building to building, sometimes on two legs, other times on all fours. He flowed over the decimated cityscape much like the shadows that called this wasteland home.

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The Skyranger gracefully swept overhead with a deafening roar. The thrusters of the agile jumpship swiveling in a coordinated maneuver to slow the aircraft and hover several stories over the plaza.

The operatives found themselves neck deep in Lost. The undead abominations swarmed them like cockroaches converging on a feast. The ashen corpses were throwing themselves into the rebel’s line of fire, many actually sprinting straight into their barrels.

Judy heard the Skyranger’s engines and cheered as the Firebrand spun the jumpship overhead and opened its belly.

[Heard Y’all were in need of a pick up!]

Firebrand chirped over the radio.

“Where’s Outrider?!” Judy shouted.

“Fuck him!” Grizzoli snarled. “That assassin freak got him. If not her then the Lost did.”

“How can you say that?!” Judy snapped back, surprising even herself at coming to the unsavory Reaper’s defense.

“Look, up therrre!” Mox cut down a Lost with a short burst from his firearm and pointed up to a nearby rooftop.

Two silhouettes were dancing back and forth along the rooftop. The smaller of the figures kickflipped off the other and Outrider’s features were illuminated by his revolver’s muzzle flash as he fired at the Assassin mid-flip.

The Assassin reeled back from the impact and swiped her swords, catching Outrider’s outstretched
blade and cutting through it like it wasn’t even there.

The shorn edge spiraled high in the air and embedded into the asphalt inches from Judy’s feet.

Though he was putting up a hell of a fight it was becoming apparent that Outrider was losing. He was getting hits in but they just weren’t enough.

Up in the rooftop Outrider’s breath was coming up ragged and shallow. He was quickly growing tired but this Assassin just never stopped!

He was outmatched, he knew that. He had hoped his home advantage was enough to tilt the scales but even that couldn’t make up for the Chosen’s incredible weapons, near impervious armor, and tireless stamina. But just because he was outmatched didn’t mean he was beaten.

When in doubt, cheat.

He intentionally staggered back after his blade was broken, hoping the Alien was as prideful and confident as he thought.

She fell for the trick and lowered her guard ever so slightly as she grinned and advanced on his hunched form.

Gotcha.

When he had staggered back Outrider had reached against his side like he was winded and defeated. He had holstered his revolver in the process and instead of holding his side his fingers wrapped around a small cylinder.

He whipped the device from beneath his coat with explosive speed.

The device smacked anticlimactically against the Assassin’s chest plate with a dull thud.

The Assassin rose an eyebrow.

“You thought that a little knife would defeat me?” She sighed in disappointment. “Perhaps I was wrong about you.”

“Well, you are wrong.” Outrider rasped. The Assassin stared at him skeptically. A static chuckle hissed from beneath his mask.

“That wasn’t a knife.”

He slowly withdrew a small remote trigger from his coat and the Assassin’s eyes widened and looked down at the Claymore attached to her chest.

The claymore blinked red once and exploded in a flash of fire and incredible force.

The Assassin screamed in agony as the explosion scorched her skin and shredded her face and neck, but somehow, impossibly, her armor remained intact even as the building she and Outrider stood on was ravaged by the concussion wave.

She was thrown off her feet from the discharge and staggered to her feet.

She blinked through the smoke and saw a pair of lantern green orbs rushing at her through the choking debris.
She screeched and struck at the mask. Her blade cut through with ease and the green orbs separated and fell away as Outrider’s mask clattered to the crumbling rooftop.

What?

She didn’t have a chance to process what she had seen when a black and red blur erupted from the smoke and slammed his broken blade into the side of her knee.

The sundered steel weapon sank into the unarmored joint and was violently dislocated with a brutal twist.

The Assassin’s scream of agony sent chills down the operatives’ spines.

She blindly swung her longsword at the blur but instead, pain lanced up her arm as metal claws sank into her fingers before they were ferociously torn from her hand in a burst of purple blood and bone.

A fist smashed into her cheek, sending her reeling. Her ravaged knee buckled as she stumbled.

She had just enough time to realize her heel was hanging off the edge of the building when a snarling missile smashed into her, sending both the Assassin and the Reaper plummeting off the rooftop.

The freefall was fast and the impact was brutal.

The Assassin smashed into the Asphalt with a sickening crunch, the weight on her chest tumbled off her in a sloppy roll to soften his impact.

The Reaper was on all fours, his breathing ragged and his limbs trembled from exhaustion. In a herculean feat of will, he staggered to his feet.

As Outrider straightened up his hood fell to his shoulders revealing a pair of pointed russet ears. When he turned to face the defeated Chosen her eyes widened in disbelief.

“N-no…” She gurgled. Purple blood frothed from her lips. “It- it’s not possible… You are dead…”

“No rest for the Wicked.” Nick snarked.

His narrow muzzle quirked into a smug smirk, revealing shiny metal fangs.

His grin did not reach his eyes. Only emerald Hell-fire stared down at the Alien.

“He-H-How?” She croaked.

Nick Wilde chuckled good-naturedly and drew his hand cannon from the bloody folds of his trench coat.

He pressed the barrel between the Assassin’s eyes. He leaned in closer, revealing a scar right above his temple where a bullet had grazed his skull.

“It’s called a Hustle Sweetheart.”

Then he pulled the trigger.

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A/N: Hey Y’all, so this is the final Author’s Note for this season of ZCOM and Holy Crap I actually stuck with it and finished it!

This project has been a joy to work on and that is only possible because of the readers, all of you.

I am going to take a break from ZCOM for a while but in the meantime I will be working on other projects I’ve been dying to try out.

How about another Zootopia/ video game crossover that no one has asked for!

It’s been a blast, guys and gals! I can’t wait to see where these untraveled stories will take us.

-Untraveled

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Editor’s Note:

Ah, another chapter, another grammatical purge. Hmm, what’s this? My favourite documentary?!

- And here we see the Common Canadian Editor (Mapleleaficus editorensis) in its natural habitat. Since expanding across the literary continent, they have become masters at stalking their prey; the typo. In recent years, they have hunted their natural prey almost to extinction, with efforts being made by editorless authors to recuperate typo populations. The M. editorensis has also developed an addiction to coffee, driving them into a savage frenzy when placed in front of an unedited manuscript. -

Oooh, I love that one. It really hits home, eh? Anyway, I’m glad to be a part of this project in my own little way, and I can’t wait to see you folks again in the next season!

---: Character Dossiers :---

Thank you so much to all the amazing readers that have submitted their characters and allowed me to weave them into the ZCOM universe. I am deeply honored. Y’all are awesome!

I am still accepting characters into the ZCOM dossier for next season. The sooner I have them the easier it is to work them into the world!

I just need these few things.

Name, Age, gender, species, brief history, at least 3 personality traits, at least 3 positive traits, and at least 3 negative traits.

See y’all soon!

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Creator: dethwulf_Zero (AO3)

Name: Alistair Stålvarg

Age: 25 Years Old

Deceased: Slain 10/17/2035 Operation War Banner

Gender: Male
Species: Red Wolf

Appearance:

Tall for his species, scars across the face and back, heterochromatic eyes (Steel gray/Deep green). Alistair liked to dress like his father’s favorite grunge bands (ripped jeans, Tee shirts, and flannels)

History:

Before being recruited by XCOM, Alistair lived in relative peace out in a fringe settlement with his family. As the eldest of three brothers, Alistair often treated mammals smaller than himself as though they were younger than himself, regardless of their actual age. A big family guy with a stubborn view of life that often-caused problems when dealing with mammals from other walks of life and points of view. A heavy drinker off duty, he curbed his habit when on mission, though he had been known to suffer from withdrawal when on longer scouting missions.

Basic Personality Traits: Outgoing, Athletic, Self-conscious and insecure

Positive Traits: Tough, Fearless, Kind Hearted

Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Overbearing at times

Creator: Carbonrap45 (AO3)

Name: Adriana Whifur

Age: 35

Gender: Female

Species: Coyote

Appearance:

Black fur and deep golden-brown eyes with a lean muscular physique. Dresses light in favor of mobility and stealth, often seen with a recon hood and half mask with a shemagh around her shoulders.

Brief History:

Grew up on the streets of Zootopia before the invasion. After capture by an Advent raid early in their occupation of earth Adriana escaped from custody and has been on the run ever since with extensive experience in paw to paw combat.

Personality: Paranoid, determined, lets slip little about herself while willing to talk to others

Positive traits: Empathic to those that suffered under Advent, has knowledge of combatting most Advent trooper types.

Flaws: Has little faith in new recruits and often refers to them as “fresh meat”, paranoia tends to flare up at the worst of times.

Creator: CommanderOps (AO3)

Name Gregor ‘Brick’ Grizzoli
Age: 40
Gender: Male
Species: Grizzly Bear

History:
Gregor was a fresh-faced heavy weapons specialist when the XCOM Headquarters was assaulted by the Invaders. He and his comrades/squad buddies that were also freshly promoted to specialist roles were tasked with defending a maintenance tunnel. They bravely held it until the dreaded sound of skittering from above. He was the lone survivor of a squad of six, escaping with the other survivors of the base. He continued to dutifully serve what was left of XCOM, but as the years went by and he lost more comrades, he slowly became numb to the loss of life. As such, he tends to regard any new rookie as just another tag on the wall. He was denied the rank of Sergeant based upon the mixed reviews on his leadership, leading successful operations at the cost of high casualties for rookies.

Basic Personality Traits: Serious, Reserved
Positive Traits: Heavy Weapons Specialist, Strong, Prior War experience
Negative Traits: Chronic Alcoholic, Hates Robots of any form, PTSD with Chrysalids.

Creator: CzH (AO3)

Name: Czer Hunter
Callsign: Ghost-Overwatch
Age: 31
Gender: Male
Species: Possum
Appearance: Bulky, Long scar across left eye

Brief history:
A former PMC who had the opportunity to be in one of the later established Advent zones, he was able to hear of the dark things being done via a number of contacts. This led to him and his team establishing themselves out in the wilds before being found by Black Market scouts. They subsequently returned to their original trade and operated as an on-loan security detail for various havens or as force multipliers for Resistance ambushes. They were recently acquired as a team by Wolford to bolster rookie teams and those sent on vital missions.

Basic Personality Traits: Quiet, Focused, Prickly
Positive Traits: Experienced Soldier, Confident in combat leadership role, Unusually accurate with a rifle
Negative Traits: Abrasive attitude towards outsiders, brutal to anyone perceived as a threat, Reckless when faced with overwhelming odds

Creator: Erik+Olson (AO3)
Name: Erik Esman  
Age: 21  
Gender: Male  
Species: Wolf-lion hybrid  

Brief history:

Erik was branded as a freak by some, but others believed that he was a miracle, that he was special. He worked part-time as a caregiver with his mom, a lioness, looking after a family friend. When the Aliens attacked, he lost his wolf grandpa.

Basic personality traits: Kind, helpful, sometimes laid-back, caring, compassionate, curious.

Positive traits: Believes in peace but is willing to fight for what's right, never gives up, likes cleaning or fixing things, artistic, open-minded, high morals, sticks up for others, good with puzzles and riddles.

Negative traits: Stubborn, easily angered by bullying, Naïve to a fault.

Physical traits: Hazel eyes, golden brown mane, retractable claws, wolf-like muzzle, dark fur.
It was like he had stepped right out of Skye’s photograph, wrapped in a nightmare and wearing the grin of a devil.

No…

“It- it’s not possible… you were supposed to be... dead…”

The spidery, cat-like nightmare gurgled wetly. Her chest jerked and her limbs twitched grotesquely, her brain screaming at her crushed body to shred the black-clad red fox standing victoriously over her head. Luminescent purple ichor bubbled and frothed from between the seams of her armor plating.

“No rest for the wicked,” the fox sniffed, his voice a smooth and ferally masculine purr, like poisoned honey dripping from a razor’s edge.

A familiar smug grin spread across his face, savage steel teeth shining between his bared lips. Even though his chest heaved and his limbs trembled from exhaustion his stance was relaxed and his grin easy. He looked young, no gray fur, his features sly, agile, dangerous.

No way…

“H-how?” The Chosen half-snarled, baring her needle-like teeth in one final defiant act.

The red fox chuckled, the humming rumble shook deep in Judy’s chest and sent chills down her spine, her instincts gone haywire.

The gray bunny watched in morbid fascination as her natural predator drew a massive revolver from the shadow of his bloodstained trench coat. The huge weapon nearly as long as she was tall, a sickly green ambiance reflecting off the black bull barrel like a razor against the backdrop of a destroyed city.

The Reaper pressed the barrel right between the assassin’s eyes. Even though she knew it was inevitable, the alien’s ethereal purple gaze never left those pools of emerald hellfire staring hatefully down at her.

He’s…
“It’s called a hustle sweetheart.”

BLAM!

The world ground to a halt as the Reaper’s weapon roared and the assassin exploded in a shower of violet ethereal light, her body crumbling away into tiny purple flakes, starting with the hole between her eyes.

The fox’s face was blank, no sense of victory, no twinge of satisfaction or happiness, just a mute expression of indifference perhaps even more impenetrable than the mask he had worn before.

He stood still as he watched the assassin fade away into nothing, the violet light played off his young features as if he were underwater.

The dying unholy glow danced and swirled across his sharp, handsome features, battered and shredded trench coat, metal claws and teeth, and the tiny scar above his left eye.

It was as if he had stepped out of Skye’s photograph wrapped in a nightmare and wearing the grin of a devil.

_Nicholas Wilde is alive._

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A/N:

Hello dear readers! Fancy seeing y’all here!

As you may have noticed this Epilogue is rather… short. Well, FEAR NOT!

_ZCOM Season 2_ is here! For those on Fanfiction . net nothing will change, other than the story’s updated title.

However for those reading on AO3 will find the sequel as a separate work titled “ ZCOM: Ghosts and Shadows “.

I Hope to see y’all in the comment section soon!

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Editor’s Note:

Oh deary me, this makes things interesting, eh folks? Hold onto your hats, storms are a brewin’.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!