

The trek to reach a city ended up taking two weeks of walking through the wilderness. The pack ran out of power on the second day. After dealing with the crash, the fights, and his father's ghost, these travels were a welcome reprieve, bringing back memories of his youth, spent in the Samalian wild, learning to survive.

The city was large enough he wouldn't attract attention, but he still stole some clothes to cover himself when he reached its outskirts. The first thing he did upon accessing the Network was order some specialized tool from a discreet supplier he dealt with. Then he looked for information about his escape.

He found nothing.

He wasn't surprised the public feeds didn't mention anything, as the Sayatoga wouldn't want that kind of publicity. But even the bounty hunter's boards were silent on it, and that worried Tristan.

While it was possible they thought he had died in one of the ships destroyed during the escape, they couldn't be stupid enough to just accept it. The expense to put a bounty on the boards wouldn't even register on their ledger. That they hadn't done it meant they were planning something.

At least this meant Mitch wouldn't be expecting him. He had an office in the capital, which was only a short shuttle flight away. All Tristan needed now was to wait for his order to arrive, and visit a costuming shop.

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When Tristan entered the Legal Enforcement Office, he no longer looked like himself. Dye had turned his fur matte black and made it itch. The pants he wore were old and well-worn, but still presentable. He hunched a little, which made him look smaller, and wore an expression of tired efficiency.

The officer at the desk by the open door stared at him. Tristan looked around the large open space, littered with desks, and more officers. By the time he made it to her, she was still staring, mouth opened. He stood before her, looking at her with a kind smile.

"Err...hello," she managed to say, once she got over her surprise. "Welcome to Sector Three Enforcement office. How can I help you?"

"Hello," Tristan replied, his voice a little higher and raspier than normal. "I am Durak Boran. I am with the Samalian Security Division." He handed her an ID and waited for her to run it through the system. His expression of almost boredom spoke of someone who had gone through this ritual many times.

She read what came up, nodded in satisfaction, and handed it back to him. “How can I help an officer of the Security Division?” She said it like she did regular business with them, even though she probably had never heard of it before today. The ID had passed the scans, so everything was in order. Therefore they were old friends on the same side of the law.

“I am looking for a human arsonist who burned down six commercial buildings back on Samalia. I have reasons to believe he passed through here and might still even be here. I am hoping I can go through your list of suspected arsonists.”

“You could have sent us the information. We would have been happy to do the search ourselves.”

He smiled at her. Just a tightening of the lips and curving at the ends, no teeth showing. Humans tended to get uncomfortable when he gave them an open-mouth smile. “I know, but I like to do my own work. And on my salary, this is the only way I get to visit other planets.”

She nodded and smiled at him, open mouth, revealing her blunt teeth. He knew from experience they couldn’t do much damage. “Well, if you want to give me the information, I’m certain I can find someone to look through our files. You can relax, see the sites, and we’ll contact you one we have the results.”

“Thank you.” He handed her the data slate. “This is everything I have accumulated in my search. His MO, the materials he prefers, and the businesses he burned down. I wrote down the best description for him I have, as well as the ship I think he arrived on.”

Her smile became brittle. “Description? Don’t you have a picture of him?”

“Oh yes, there is. It was taken by one of the security cameras. It was old, and the image is not very good.” He pulled up a grainy picture on his pad, pointing to a small form in the distance. “That is him. You can see his orange hair.”

She returned the slate to him. “You know, since this is your case, why don’t I see about getting you authorization to look through our files instead? I really wouldn’t want you to risk getting bad leads because someone here didn’t do a good job.”

“That is quite kind of you.” Tristan waited patiently while she talked to someone on her comm. While he hadn’t been certain they would let him in, he had built the file as to make it as difficult as possible for anyone using it to actually find anything, while being done according to Legal Enforcement standards. The human’s dislike of hard work could always be counted on to get him in.

If that hadn’t worked, the virus embedded in the slate would have

given him remote access to the office's database. He wasn't worried about them finding the virus; this was a government organization, not corporate.

"Mister Boran?" a human male in an Enforcement uniform asked as he walked toward him, hand extended.

Tristan looked at the hand for a moment, playing the part of someone who wasn't familiar with the gesture. He extended his hand, mimicking the gesture, his claws extending automatically. He retracted them. The human changed hands and shook his.

"I'm officer Tramble. I'll take you to an office where you can go through our files. I hope that will be satisfactory."

"Oh, I am sure it will be," Tristan said, giving him a closed-mouth smile. "I am glad you can help me. I had been told I might have trouble since I am... not from the area."

"Not at all," the officer said, with forced joviality. "We're always happy to help another Enforcer, no matter what their original jurisdiction is." He opened the door to a small office, with an empty desk and terminal. "You'll have access to all our investigation files, as well as a list of suspects. I expect you're familiar with the system."

"I am," Tristan replied. "After all, we all use the same system at this point."

"That's true. I'll leave you to it. If you need any help, the comm's next to the terminal. It'll link you with the entrance desk, and she'll be able to help." With that, he left.

Tristan sat, and started his search.

He needed explosives. He could have obtained those through one of the many contacts he had; they would have pointed him to a supplier on this planet, probably even in this city. That was how he'd obtained the ID. It would be simpler than what he was planning, but also too easy to have that trace back to him afterward.

By getting what he needed from known criminals and making the evidence of the theft disappear, his use of the explosives would only go back to that to them, and they wouldn't be in any condition to deny his involvement.

He took the information on four suspected arsonists, and a confirmed one, just in case the others turned out not to be innocent. He preferred going with someone unknown. It was harder to recreate the MO of someone who had been well-studied.

He found what he needed in the home of the third suspect: a secret room in the basement with a workstation covered in timers, power supplies, and wires. There was even an almost-completed bomb for him to study.

Since he didn't have any procedures to follow, he had broken into each house and discretely searched them. The security systems had been good, middle to high-grade Dovinals, but they had only slowed his entrance, not stopped it.

He'd waited for the houses to be empty. He didn't need the complications of dealing with someone the system considered 'innocent,' especially not when he couldn't know how long he would be on the planet. Being wanted for a crime when he was multiple systems away didn't bother him, but when he was still on world, that could make his life far too complicated.

The searches had been quick, but thorough. He'd been in and out before the occupants returned, except here. He didn't have to hurry here.

He studied the bomb, memorizing how it was assembled. He had recreated six of them by the time he heard someone enter the house. From the search, he knew the man lived alone, so he didn't have to worry about grabbing the wrong person.

The man didn't expect the assault and wasn't able to offer much resistance. Tristan placed the unconscious man at the workstation, seated, with his head resting on the table. He hadn't killed him since the investigation would be able to tell if he had been dead or alive at the moment of the 'accident.'

He set a timer on a bomb for two minutes. The others didn't have them, but the explosives would react to the first explosion. The investigation team would most likely conclude he was getting ready for a job when one accidentally went off, causing a chain reaction. When they found his materials at another explosion site, they would figure it had been set up before his death.

He found a bag, grabbed most of the tools there to rebuild his toolkit, then started the timer and left the house. One other stop, to remove that itching dye out of his fur, and he'd be ready to go visit his old friend.