

*“Xen, what are we looking at?” When no response came Anita turned to face her youthful partner whose nose was practically buried in the holographic display projecting before them. Their hair was teal, they were daydreaming again.*

*“Xen!” She repeated, louder this time but to no avail. Scowling in disapproval she reached her hand through the hologram and snapped her fingers with the force of a small firecracker.*

*Xen bodily recoiled with a muffled squeal, their hair turning interesting shades of yellow and orange before settling into a muted red streaked with black highlights. Their eyes flickered from the display to Anita and back, they reminded her of a kicked puppy.*

*“I don’t like it when you do that.” They muttered with all the dignity they could muster in their slightly oversized DCI uniform.*

*“And I don’t like it when my partner drifts off into lalaland instead of working.” Anita retorted, turning back to the corpse before them. “What are we looking at?”*

*Xen tossed a few windows from their holographic display to the HUD of Anita’s glasses. “Yildiz Marcanos, He/Him pronouns, age thirty-seven.” They read off with only a moderate amount of petulance in their tone. “Immigrated here from Samarqana fifteen years ago.”*

*“Occupation?”*

*“Engineer for a construction firm, looks like he worked on a bunch of recent infrastructure upgrade projects.”*

*“Citizenship record.”*

*“Clean, not even a parking ticket and no known medical issues or significant augmentation.”*

*“No augments, in this day and age?”*

*“You don’t have any augments Ma’am.” Xen points out.*

*“And as you so love to remind me, I’m old.”*

*Xen’s hair turns slightly pinkish in embarrassment. “I have nev-”*

*“And the bullet holes?” Anita demands, cutting them off.*

“Small caliber lead rounds, traces of chemical propellant, likely some sort of primitive handgun.”

*Anita tapped her chin thoughtfully.* “That’d be almost quaint if it weren’t so suspicious.”

“I agree, nothing like that has been made in the Comuna in my lifetime.”

*Anita snorted* “Shut up Xen, you’re not old enough for your lifetime to be a worthwhile metric.”

“...I’m nineteen.” *Xen whined.* “Why do you keep treating me like a child?”

*Anita reached out and ruffled their hair, eliciting an eyeroll and the red in their hair brightening a few shades.* “Because you are a child, no matter how high your aptitude scores were. Regardless you’re correct, a weapon like that hasn’t been commercially manufactured or sold in the Comuna in decades. So either our murder weapon is an antique or it’s an import.”

“Do you really think something like that could make it through customs?”

“Xen, so long as there are people willing to buy an item there will be smugglers finding ways to bribe or cheat their way through customs, especially with all the chaos on the border.”

“...If you say so Ma’am.”

*A vidfeed winked into existence on both of their HUDs.* “If you two are quite done I’ve finished interviewing the wife.” *Javier reported.*

“Anything useful?”

*Javier shook his head.* “She left for work last night and he was dead on the floor when she came home. Her transit pass records verify that and she couldn’t think of anyone who’d have a motive to murder her husband.”

“So about what we were expecting.”

“Yeah.”

“Oh well, Xen have the drones finish up here and plug Beeper into the security system so he can look at the recordings from last night.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Javier have a couple drones go around and ask the neighbors if they saw or heard anything last night.”

“Will do, I’ll meet you back at the office.”

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*Javier hummed a tune as he carried the tray of coffees up the steps of the Department of Criminal Investigation’s regional office. His left cyberleg bounced idly as he inserted his free meat hand into the door’s biometric scanner and waited the necessary three seconds before his HUD buzzed and the door unlocked.*

*Maria was working reception today and he gave her a wave as he made his way through the lobby to the elevators, then it was up six floors and across the grid of desks filled with other DCI agents working on their own cases or their lunches to find the desks of himself and his partners nestled in the very back corner.*

“Special delivery!” *He announced, Anita nearly left out of her seat to take her drink.*

“You’re a lifesaver Javier.”

*He just laughed, setting another drink that was honestly probably more creamer than coffee down in front of Xen who was deeply absorbed in something on his holographic display. And then another that was entirely black next to Beeper’s avatar projector. “Thank you Javier.” Beeper said, the projected image of an octahedron flashing blue as he spoke.*

“You’re welcome guys.” *He replied as he sat down, taking up his own drink and settling in to get comfortable. “So, find anything interesting in the security system Beeper?”*

“I did not.” *The digital lifeform replied. “In fact I did not find anything in the security records at all, they were erased.”*

“Interesting.”

“Oh please spare me your puns.” *Anita groaned.*

*Javier held his free hand up appeasingly. “Alright, alright. Well the neighbors all said they didn’t hear or see anything happen.”*

*Xen piped up.* "Time of death was likely around three AM, the neighbors were likely all asleep at the time of the murder."

"Hard to sleep through gunshots kid." *Javier replied.*

"You would be surprised at what organics are capable of ignoring."

"Shut up Beeper." *Anita ordered.* "So we're dealing with a gunman and a hacker, seems like somebody wanted this guy dead for a reason."

"A reasonable conclusion Ma'am." *Beeper agreed.* "Could it be organized crime related?"

"I doubt it, we haven't found anything suggesting Mr. Marcanos was even remotely connected to anything suspicious." *Javier replied.*

"...Anti-immigrant prejudice?" *Xen suggested quietly, hi-their, Javier frowned as he mentally corrected himself, hair turning bright pink.*

"In the Comuna? I suppose we've seen it before but this seems more like a hit than a lynching."

"I'm with Javier." *Anita agreed.* "This wasn't some random act of violence, this was planned and prepared for. Was anything stolen from the residence?"

"Nothing that we could find, he even still had his wallet on him."

"Work related then?" *She ventured.*

"Possibly, Beeper look for all the records you can find on the company he worked for, see if you spot anything suspicious."

"Yes Ma'am."

"Javier head down to his office and talk with his coworkers and boss, you know the drill."

"Will do."

"Xen, get a list of family and friends together. We'll see if there's anyone else who might know something."

"Yes Ma'am." *Xen mumbled, hair turning a dejected purple.*

“You’re gonna have to learn how to talk to people if you’re gonna hack it in the DCI Xen.”

“...Yes Ma’am.”

*Javier chuckled, Xen was the latest addition to their investigative team and had been at the job for about two months now. They were a good kid and they’ll have a bright career ahead of them once they overcome a few of their more childish habits. Anita for her part had been his partner for the past four years and he trusted her quite literally with his life considering what they’d been through together. He did at times wonder if her treatment of Xen wasn’t a little less than strictly professional since they were the same age as her daughter, but eh, it’s probably nothing to worry about. He finished his drink and collected up his and Anita’s empties and Beeper’s still full cup for disposal. When Beeper had first joined them about two years ago he was quite confused when Javier bought him one when on a group coffee run, Javier had explained it to him that the point of the coffee was as much symbolic as it was literal. The team drinking coffee together was a sort of bonding ritual and it was important to include him in that regardless of him being a digital lifeform. Beeper had told him ‘Organics are strange creatures’ but Javier was pretty sure the DL enjoyed the gesture deep down inside.*

“I’ll see you three later, I’m gonna get back to work.”

“See ya Javier.”

“Goodbye Javier.”

“Bye Javier.”

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