

The Casual Sentinel

Niles Honore regarded his son with the scrutiny one would expect from a hated enemy. “So, explain to me why you want me to redirect this assignment from the Wraiths, and give it to you?”

“The covert assignments squad has limited resources, and I have it on good authority they are pushing the extent of those resources already,” Timothy answered coldly, keeping his voice level flat and his thoughts tightly guarded. For all he knew, he father was in on this apocalyptic cult and its activities. “I currently have no assignments.”

“Pardon me if I have an extremely hard time believing you wish to pursue one of the most wanted pirate clans in the galaxy because you are bored.”

Timothy had to play this right, making it seem like he was being coerced into disclosing his motivations. If he appeared too cooperative, it would arouse suspicion, and there was enough of that already. “In debriefing after my actions against former Tenant Jamison Argole...”

“Your unauthorized, against-protocol, and protected by archaic codes of conduct that should have been repealed centuries ago *murder* of Tenant Jamison Argole, you mean,” Niles interrupted crossly.

“During the debriefing...” Timothy continued, refusing to be baited, “... I was informed that a great majority of the people Argole was associating with were members of the Blood Hawk clan. I want to know the extent of that connection, and if possible, cut out the brain of that entire organization.”

“And what makes you think you’ll be successful where three Galactic Alliance investigations, one current campaign by that same galactic body, two separate Solarian and *five* Kiros sting operations, and however many specialist missions have failed?” Niles questioned, ticking each element off on his fingers.

“I have come to the conclusion that the Blood Hawks are defending and insulating themselves against such large scale campaigns. They disconnect the different operating cells so that any acting group elements are too large and bulky to follow the chain of command before it dissipates,” Timothy explained. “One Knight, working on his own, might not trigger the organizational alarms they have in place.”

Niles stiffened in surprise, only his rigorous training and emotional composure keeping him focused. “You plan on doing this as a solo mission? All by yourself?”

“Yes, sir,” Timothy answered, avoiding using the family honorific. “It has the added benefit of if I fail, I won’t drag anyone else down with me.”

Niles frowned, again finding his son blocking the father’s thoughts. In that regard, Niles had Timothy taught well... perhaps too well. There was more to this; there always was with Timothy. In fact, Niles was often disturbed by the degree to which Timothy’s actions, reckless on the surface, wound up either demonstrating deep planning or a startling confluence of fate.

Niles wasn’t deaf; he had heard the whispers. The blessed “miracle” Honore child was taking all the steps needed. He became a Knight upholding the “sacred code” against a superior. He was an upright, noble young man. Surely, the family line would securely be maintained in the leadership of the Knighthood.

Already, there was pressure among the other premier families of Solaria to acknowledge Timothy was in line to earn the right to succeed his father; an appointing of appointing, in order to quell the concerns and a potentially rough struggle of succession. Niles wasn’t getting any younger after all, as *every damned nobleman* sought to remind him at least twice a gathering.

Niles wasn't blind, either... he knew all too well what Timothy represented, even if no one else, could see it, perhaps not even Timothy himself. "It" wouldn't allow anything short of total success... no matter what task Timothy took on himself. A pirate clan, an *army*, it wouldn't matter.

"No. I need you here," Niles finally declared.

Niles could see the tension build within Timothy, even as his son kept it carefully restrained. Thank the Creator, Timothy learned how to harness and control *that*. Niles had strenuously insisted on emotional control throughout Timothy's younger life, and sent the young man into Knighthood training in part because of it. The level of difficulty required the constant control and diligence Timothy would need to prevent...

"You don't need me here, and you know it," Timothy insisted. "Personally, I don't care what political power play you're trying to prevent here, or what leverage you're trying to keep. The Blood Hawks are a concern. I have the means and the plan to deal with them. You really can't afford *not* to send me."

Niles sighed and leaned back... he could *order* Timothy to return to his post, and was reasonably certain the young man would obey the order... until he had half the opportunity to rightfully abandon it and do whatever he damn well wanted, with or without Niles' guidance.

"What do you want me to say?" Niles shrugged. "You're right? Because you're not. I could give this to the Wraiths like I had originally planned."

"But you won't."

"Just... don't get yourself killed," Niles grunted in resignation, sliding the datapad containing the mission particulars across the desk to his son. But even as he said that... he wondered if that wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing.

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One thing Timothy quickly learned about the Blood Hawks was that they blended into parts of society that would not be expected of interstellar pirates.

This was no seedy tavern or dimly lit warehouse. This was a wonderfully normal, middle-class café in a perfectly mediocre Demodian suburban environment on the planet of Erguise, one of a handful of colony worlds the Demodian race managed to secure.

It was a beautiful day, the planet's sun shining brightly and reflecting off the pearl white walking surfaces and shimmering silver magnetic roadway. Every pedestrian and diner was dressed cleanly in white-collar finery. Had Timothy not known four Blood Hawks were at the table on the other side of the patio, he would never have guessed they were pirates.

Like everyone else, they were dressed sharply, neatly groomed, and had all the appearance and professionalism of four typical office workers sharing lunch during a break. The female among them had a flawless pressed skirt that Timothy found to be well maintained even by his own meticulous standards.

Yet just a casual reading of their surface thoughts, coupled with the information he had uncovered over the last forty-three cycles, revealed that little lie for what it was. Unfortunately, delving any further into their minds would require focus and concentration that would likely tip them off they were being watched.

"Mister Vasher?"

One of the many advantages a psionic had was an uncanny ability to "feel" when someone was talking to him or her. People of the Erani race tended to make great undercover

operatives for whatever organization hired them... it allowed a seamless and natural response to aliases that would otherwise take years of training. Yet even as Timothy turned to answer the summons of his current alias – Alex Vasher – he was surprised momentarily to note that it was not an employee of the café who spoke to him.

His first, cursory glance told him the man was Kiros, the sister religious sect to the Solarians. Golden metallic shaded eyes, double canine teeth in his smile, and the slight point to his ears confirmed the shared Erani heritage, while the much deeper skin tone was the identifying figure to the Kiros people.

As most religious “rivalries” go, the Solarians and Kiros did not have the best relations. They didn’t even have decent relations. In fact, if not for the Galactic Alliance finally rising to prominence and creating a centralized governmental body roughly eight hundred staryears ago, the Kiros and the Solarians would probably still be in a state of open war... provided one or both of them hadn’t been completely eradicated by this point.

In light of that, Timothy hoped this man would forgive him for being somewhat suspicious and coming off rather cold. “Considering merely being within arm reach of me is no doubt cause for a categorical interrogation of your unholy interaction with a Bannor-worshipping fallen animal like me, I trust you have good reason to bother me beyond exposing me to the light of your truth.”

“Well... I suppose you could say I offer enlightenment; but I suspect it’s not what you presume or expect,” the visitor replied, and gestured to the chair across the table from where Timothy was sitting. “May I?”

Timothy nodded, and passively flipped an encouraging hand towards the white, plastic lounge chair while keeping half an eye (figuratively speaking) on the thoughts of the pirates still amiably chatting across the patio.

At that point, he noticed the Kiros man was unusual in some respects. He was a rather plump fellow, quite unlike the normally svelte figures Erani generally possess per their genetic inclination. That, and he seemed to have no qualms about sitting at the same table as a Solarian.

“Firstly, may I inform you that those four have been ‘sleeping’ for almost two staryears, and there isn’t any indication that the Blood Hawks are going to ‘wake up’ any of their operatives in this sector by the end of this staryear? I don’t think they will yield any information outside of horribly outdated at best,” his guest noted casually, almost as if he was discussing the weather.

Timothy now turned all his attention to the portly Kiros man. “Really.”

“Like most government or military organizations, you’re all playing with information that is half a staryear old or more. While that isn’t a terribly large problem with stable bodies like the Solarians or the Kiros or the Galactic Alliance, you’re hunting an organization that turns over their middle management and even higher level leaders approximately every five ten-cycles. The Blood Hawks don’t keep bases... they don’t have a grand strategy or specific targets. They flow with events more than shape them. You need dynamic information if you wish to keep up.”

No longer bothering to keep up appearances, Timothy’s focus narrowed on the Kiros, prepared to make a very deep scouring of the man’s mind, forcefully if needed.

“Oh, I certainly wouldn’t be able to keep anything from you,” his guest said, throwing up his arms in supplication. “I am a mere layman among my people, a member of a vassal family to the nobility, not even worth training the meager talent I might have... and certainly of no chance against the prying psionic eye of a peerless pedigree Solarian Knight like you.”

There was a mischievous twinkle in the Kiro's man's gold eyes as he finished, "Am I correct... Mister Timothy Honore?"

"It appears you have me at a disadvantage," Timothy stated deliberately to hide any vocal cues.

"Well, I most certainly don't wish any suspicion that would prevent a good working relationship," his Kiro's guest said with a masked smile that still managed to feel genuine.

"Dentin Arthur, at your service."

"Very well, Mister Arthur..."

"Sir Arthur, if you please," Dentin corrected. "I have a wonderful wife and family."

Timothy frowned... sometimes he hated the familial title nonsense the galaxy had come to adopt. There really was no "undefined" clause, and so you often wound up irritating or insulting someone in nothing more than casual conversation far too easily. "Very well, *Sir* Arthur..." he corrected crossly, not bothering to hide his irritation. "I suspect you intend, judging from your previous line of conversation, that you are interested in either providing me with this 'dynamic information' you spoke of or pointing me in the direction in which to find it."

"And you'd be correct. So what do you say we leave these four to enjoy their lunch in peace, and I can help you find what you really seek?"

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Timothy was not expecting to be led inside the café building, towards the GalNet consoles. The Galactic Network was a pretty general thing... it was literally in every home in the developed galaxy... it was the source of all information for the layman, and a den of hacking and misuse of resources for anyone with more intimate knowledge of how it worked... and certainly not the place he expected Dentin to go.

He tapped a passing server on her shoulder, and asked, "One light berry giacano, if I may. Anything for you, Mr. Honore?"

Timothy shook his head. "I'm fine. Thank you."

As the server retreated back to the bar, Timothy watched somewhat bemusedly. "I'm not sure what you think of Solarians, but I can assure you I've seen a GalNet console a few times in my life."

"The point is not the console, but what I plan to show you on the console," Dentin replied brightly, using the projection keyboard to tap out address commands.

The screen momentarily went black, and for a moment Timothy thought the screen might have malfunctioned. He was so used to flashy introductions and grandiose displays that it took him a moment to realize that whatever location Dentin had linked to had a keep it simple approach, with nothing but a green glowing command prompt underneath plain green lettering in a basic font saying "Welcome to Sentinel – please input User Identification".

From that prompt, Dentin typed in;

➤ *DArt*

"It's based on my name," Dentin explained.

"Yes, I gathered," Timothy replied.

➤ *Confirm identification with retinal scan.*

Dentin complied, turning his eyes up towards the glowing red bar scanner at the top of the display.

➤ *Identification confirmed. Greetings, Sir Arthur; Query, Add, or Amend?*

“It’s a fairly simple interface. Rather straight to the point, really.”

“If only you were the same way,” Timothy quipped.

Destin grinned cheerfully. “Very well. Sentinel is the galactic free information network. Here, you can find out about nearly anything you set your heart on. Tidbits from around the galaxy, distributed and proliferated by our members, all localized in a central place.”

“You’re awfully candid to be discussing a secret spy network in broad daylight in the middle of a busy eatery,” Timothy noted.

“Ah, but we’re not. There’s nothing secret about us, and we don’t spy. None of the information we deal is classified or stolen. It is all legitimately acquired through first person sources.”

“Then why is it I’ve never heard of this?”

Dentin chuckled, “Well, I suppose we are ‘secret’ in one fashion. We keep hidden in the simplest way imaginable; we don’t advertise or try to hide.”

Timothy paused a moment to ponder that, and sadly found it made far too much sense. The general cross-section of the galaxy wouldn’t give one half demitick’s attention to something that wasn’t flashing, shining, or with huge arrows pointing at it and saying “look at me,” and even then there would be no guarantees. Meanwhile, intelligence agencies (at least on Solaria) wouldn’t be turned its way unless it was demonstrating it was covering up something else.

“And this is supposed to help me find active Blood Hawks?”

“You would be amazed how seemingly unconnected information and an observant mind can piece together the truth of the matter,” Dentin explained. “Tidbits that on their own seem innocuous paint a clear picture when viewed from the proper perspective.”

Dentin then snapped his fingers as if he suddenly had a bright idea. “Tell you what... take my place here, and you can take Sentinel for a trial run, and if you like what you see, then we can set up an account of your own.”

“How about you tell me why you are helping me first,” Timothy declined, crossing his arms stoically. “No one is so agreeable and open for no reason.”

For the first time since their meeting, Dentin’s face turned grim. “An information network such as Sentinel is only as strong as the people who are members. Up until recently, we’ve been content with merely taking on whomever and letting the network evolve in chaotic fashion. But recently, a handful of us have discovered a direction, a purpose for Sentinel’s existence.”

Timothy sighed impatiently. It was truly amazing how some people could use so many words and not say anything at all.

“You know who Gregor Krennan is, right?”

Timothy snorted, and said, “Him and the Premier of the Galactic Alliance I would wager are the two faces everyone in the galaxy would recognize.”

“Krennan recently completed an acquisition deal that will grant him executive control of over half the GalNet channels for public broadcast. On top of that, I suspect he’s also managing

most of the illegal activity as well. This is what our media and general information has come to... a handful of people taking a stranglehold on what the entire galaxy sees and hears.”

“And how exactly do you plan to fight one of the wealthiest, most influential men in the galaxy?”

“By preserving free information, as untainted from slant or bias as we can. But to do that, we need proven leaders to champion the cause, people with clout who can’t be bullied. People... like you.”

And finally, they were getting to the heart of the matter. “Why me?”

“You are an influential Solarian, even if you don’t realize it. Your name alone would carry respect among the people in your sphere of influence. We need such strong recognition among all the galactic races. When we vetted potential Solarians, you were the only name that really ever emerged as potential. The other Solarian candidates are too heavily immersed in the stagnant culture...”

Dentin froze when he became aware of the narrow glare Timothy delivered. “Not to say that the Kiros culture is any better, mind you...”

For once, the Solarian Knight grinned. “I know all too well the shortcomings of my people and my background,” he replied candidly. “So you want me to be a central figure in your noble endeavor of free information? Why should I?”

Dentin rubbed the back of his head nervously. “Because from all accounts, you have a noble, upright heart... the blessing of youth, I suppose. I am sorry; I did not mean to push all of this on you all at once, nor do I expect an answer immediately or even soon. Please, I invite you to try the resource I am offering. I think you will understand its value best that way.”

All soliciting aside, that was rather the reason Timothy tagged along. Approaching the console, he noted the screen abruptly froze, and an error message appeared on the next line.

➤ *Error, identified user not current user. Authorization required.*

Dentin slapped his forehead. “Right, my apologies. I am still present, and authorizing current user on my user identification.”

➤ *Authorization Accepted. Query, Add, or Amend?*

“Any particular instructions I need to know?” Timothy asked, looking down at the virtual projected keypad.

“It performs much like your typical GalNet full search; it’s just more refined and draws from specific, trusted users rather than anyone with console access.”

Timothy took a breath, and began.

➤ ***Query***

➤ *Insert search words then parameters.*

➤ *Search for:*

➤ ***Dewin Rio (name)***

➤ *Parameters for search:*

➤ ***Last 5 cycles.***

“Interesting... looking for a specific person, and not the leader,” Dentin commented from over Timothy’s shoulder as the latter sent the query into the network.

“As you noted yourself, the Blood Hawks shuffle their leadership structure frequently... except for a handful of people; Regis Gallan’s most trusted lieutenants. I chose Rio because our ‘outdated’ intelligence has had him pretty much attached to Gallan’s hip the last three staryears. I can’t imagine that is something that has abruptly changed.”

During that exchange, the query results appeared on the console display. There weren’t many results (fifteen by the count he was given), but considering Timothy was expecting there to be *none*, he had to admit it exceeded expectations.

He also couldn’t verify the validity of these results until he matched them up with other potential sources, but it appeared that it at least provided a reasonable starting point. “I very well might access this later with more detailed requests, if I may.”

“Of course!” Dentin answered, fishing into the front pocket of his suit pants. He emerged with a small plastic card, and handed it over to Timothy. “This contains the information needed for guest user identification, as well as protocols to contact me... whenever you reach a decision. One more thing, the guest identification only allows you to query the network, but I suspect that’s all you’re really worried about at this moment.”

Timothy didn’t reply, tucking the card away in his own pants pocket.

“And... I suspect I’ve already overstayed my welcome as it is,” the Kiros man said with a slight, respectful bow. “I shall leave you to your devices, and I hope for a positive reply. Good day.” Dentin then shuffled off out of the café.

The oddity of such deference between a Kiros and a Solarian was not lost on Timothy. He only needed a surface scan to confirm that Dentin was sincere, and not an agent for some Kiros intelligence agency; the man’s mind had remained open and unobscured from start to finish. He obviously also believed heavily in what he was doing if he was willing to cross the boundary and associate with people of the Solarian faith.

He was definitely curious about the sort of information this “Sentinel” had on him... but he would wait to make that query for when he was in a more private locale.

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Once Timothy returned to his hotel room and accessed a secured channel, he sent the “tips” he had received to the respective intelligence departments for confirmation... and that wait gave him the opportunity to sate his curiosity. He followed the connection instructions, and inserted the guest identification. Sure enough, the first line after logging in read;

- *Guests only have query privileges.*
- *Insert search words and parameters.*
- ***Timothy Honore (name)***
- *Parameters for search?*
- ***None***

Even with the data processing speeds available at that point in civilization, checking and hashing over what could have been years of logged information took time. Granted, only ten demiticks... but time was still time.

The results were unimpressive. There were only twenty matches, and all of them more dealt with his general comings and goings... seventeen dealing with when he left his station at the Knighthood headquarters, and the final three detailing deviances in his routine around the capitol city of Centris on Solaria.

Whatever information this group had to think he was a suitable candidate for their little club clearly wasn't available for perusal. Timothy found this troubling, and he started to run through possibilities of who he knew that would have offered the sort of insight they felt they had.

In truth, there weren't many people he was close to. Outside of his duties, there were few he interacted with, and he had very little contact with his family ever since he left the clan manor upon his acceptance into the Knighthood. In fact, the only person he ever really confided with was Emmitt, and Francisca didn't seem like the type to associate in such sub-societies.

It was thinking about Emmitt that reminded him of the disturbing prayer book he had shown the older Knight not too long before. Timothy had long since disposed of the thing, not wanting anybody potentially linking him to that apocalyptic subset of the Solarian faith, but he remembered the words all too well.

Turning back to the projection again, Timothy started another query.

- *As we end the world to usher a new beginning (phrase)*
- *Exact phrase match?*
- *Yes*
- *Parameters for search?*
- *None*

The search came up with nothing. Timothy wasn't terribly disappointed by this, whoever the Endtimers were, they were taking great pains to remain secret. His own subtle investigations had turned up several possible members, but no confirmed members outside of the now deceased Jamison Argole and Solarian Adjudicate Nathan Sumner, who had received a promotion to Lord Adjudicate on Solaria. Most of Timothy's "suspects" in fact were merely people Sumner had associated with. It was likely that Jamison Argole was a gross exception rather than the rule.

This left him with little to do at the moment, and none of the usual diversions for normal citizens of the galaxy had ever held much interest in him. And so, Timothy Honore knelt in the northwest corner of his room, and went through the meditations and prayers he had been neglecting since leaving Solaria. They were rituals meant to be dutifully performed by every faithful Solarian, but the longer he distanced himself from the Honore clan, the more he felt it was all rather pointless posturing. Even now, as he went through the motions, his mind was more blank than anything else.

It wasn't that he didn't believe, necessarily. It was an awfully big universe to have happened by complete chance. But if there *was* this great, all-loving, all-good, all-knowing, all-present, all-encompassing power... why would He (or She, if Timothy listened to his mother's bemused ramblings) need followers to go through such silly hoops to "speak" to the Creator God?

For a race of people who valued efficiency in form and function, they got real uptight if their prayers and meditations were suggested to be wasted effort... Timothy had learned that from a very young age; just one contradiction in a collection that defined the Solarian faith and its people.

Further self-analysis was interrupted by the trill of incoming communication. The virtual console and display flashed to life the moment it detected Timothy's approach, and the bust of a Solarian man rendered upon the display.

"Knight Honore, I am Agent Donald Reghir of Solarian Intelligence Command, reporting on the verification request you submitted."

"Go ahead, Agent Reghir."

"Sir, as far as we can determine, these tips you received are indeed accurate. Every single one of them, in fact," the intelligence officer declared, an arm manifesting on the display as it rubbed the back of his head nervously. "We're... nevermind, sir."

"No, please continue."

The agent seemed willing to do anything but. Nonetheless, he did say, "It's... we're wondering who your informant is, sir. Even the most reliable of tip sources we have aren't one hundred percent accurate."

Timothy chuckled. "I'm not at liberty to answer that question at this moment, Agent. But for what it's worth, those tips I asked you to verify were heavily filtered already. I suspect that would explain the high hit rate."

"I... suppose, sir. Very well. Is there anything else?"

"No, that will be all, Agent Reghir. Thank you, and let your team have a round at your favorite establishment on my expense account."

"That's very generous, sir."

"Not like I use it," Timothy replied with a dismissive huff. "Someone might as well. Ending transmission."

The display faded into a translucent blue cube, and Timothy leaned back into his chair, pondering his options. He still wasn't sure just what to make of this Sentinel group, but it was clear they provided near impeccable information. It could be a useful tool, depending on who wound up using whom.

Only one way to find out...

He reached out with his right hand, a keypad projection flashing to life at his fingertips. Consulting the card Dentin had given him, he copied over the contact information, and opened communication.

Dentin responded to the contact almost immediately, startling Timothy with the promptness. "Ah, Knight Honore! I must say I wasn't expecting to hear from you so soon. What can I do for you?"

"Actually, that was going to be *my* question," Timothy said with a slow, flat tone. "What exactly would you need from me?"

"As of right now; nothing," Dentin answered. "We might not ever need anything beyond the ordinary from you. You'd be protection... not in a physical, hired hitman sense... but a metaphorical one. Our place in the galaxy is less likely to be threatened if we have influential, powerful people who consider themselves members."

"Really? That's all?" Timothy was skeptical, naturally.

"Well, we'd also ask you provide whatever non-essential information you can; certainly nothing that would make you uncomfortable supplying to the network. We aren't worried about quantity... merely quality, accurate, and free information."

"I reserve the right to withdraw my membership at any time?"

“We’re a loose collection of sentient beings from all walks of life, not some cabal,” Dentin answered with a scoff. “We wouldn’t have the time or means to enforce membership even if we wanted to.”

“All right. I’m in,” Timothy said, crossing his arms and leaning back.

Dentin visibly brightened. “Wonderful! I will send you your user information immediately! Thank you so much! I hope this will be the start of a wonderful friendship!”

“Well, let’s not get too far ahead,” Timothy said, a hint of a smile creeping up his cheeks; amused at the Kiros man’s enthusiasm. “But I do hope that neither of us regrets this partnership. Ending transmission.”

Timothy hadn’t even been able to count to ten after closing the communication when another trill indicated he had received a text message from Dentin Arthur. He supposed it was better to be wanted than not and opened the message, wasting no time setting up his account and getting right to work.

He already had a fairly good idea how to make this resource work to his advantage, and he suspected this was the power in Sentinel that Dentin and his ilk also saw, and deemed it worth defending.

While the underbelly of galactic civilization took great pains to hide themselves from prying eyes of governmental bodies (and did so very well), they often felt they had no reason to hide from the layman... this opened up a dearth of information on movements and activities that wouldn’t have been available to him before.

And while the individual pieces of information weren’t of much value... if you knew what you were looking for, the pieces combined to form a much bigger picture. In this case, two hours of study and querying the database had given Timothy more insight into the Blood Hawks and how their leadership moved than a full briefing series with Solarian Intelligence.

Timothy’s gut feeling had been right, by his estimation. While the upper echelon of leadership within the pirate clan didn’t change, their order of importance did. Regis Gallan switched his right-hand man with considerable frequency, following that person while the others ran interference to keep law enforcement busy.

Currently, that number two was Dewin Rio, and if he had correctly picked out the pattern of movement, after every big score the pirate clan made, Gallan celebrated his “victory” at any one of three taverns on Altair, in the city of Iomet. Judging from the past celebrations, Timothy would peg their next visit to be at an establishment on Iomet’s north side, a corner shop called “The Sultry Siren.”

With that knowledge in hand, Timothy booked travel to Altair, where all he had to do was wait...

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Seven cycles after landing on Altair, his wait was over.

Altair Planetary KrenNet (a horrible name for a rather horrible news network) interrupted their general news theme with an important breaking news bulletin.

“As of 7.62 of the planetary late ten, a freighter envoy carrying precious metals was attacked and pirated on route from the mining planet of Alderbarren heading for Arcadia. Early reports suggest the notorious pirate clan, The Blood Hawks, as responsible for this violent theft. This is the fifth such attack from the clan in the last seventy-five cycles, and various enforcement agencies across the Galactic Alliance continue to be ineffective in slowing down their efforts,”

The generic female reporter (Timothy hadn't bothered to remember her name) said. "We now go to our pirate activities expert, Johan Perfect, for further analysis. Johan... what can you tell us about this sort of attack? Does it follow a plan or is it a type of think as you go strategy?"

"Now, I've got you," Timothy said to himself, turning off his comp unit, and sitting up to prepare himself for a night on the town.

He eschewed his combat armor, as it would no doubt draw attention, and he needed to get close to Gallan without setting off too many alarms. The pirate leader would likely take off at the slightest provocation, after all.

He doubted that Gallan would head straight to his destination, which was a good thing, because Timothy wanted to be in position to confirm the pirate leader was going to be present before moving in. Scoping out the tavern in question had given him a clear mental image in which to teleport quickly to where he could stake out any arrivals.

He made such a step immediately upon exiting the hotel, his destination being a rooftop of a commercial building down the street from The Sultry Siren. From that vantage point, he would be able to see everyone coming and going out of both entrances... providing Gallan didn't have some secret entrance into the establishment.

In that case, he had his psionic senses tuned to pick up heat signatures from anyone approaching from underground or out of sight. Computerized surveillance would be more accurate and effective, but he didn't want to risk the possibility that Gallan would have sweeps done to discover any such devices. While psionic energy detection had been developed by Arcadians almost a hundred staryears before, it was easily fooled, and psionics that would pose a threat were so rare that most criminal groups didn't even bother with the investment.

Satisfied that he had all contingencies covered, Timothy knelt down just above the solid railing of the rooftop, and waited once again.

Fortunately, this wait was considerably less than seven cycles. Through the arriving guests, a particularly long luxury hover pulled onto the side of the roadway and powered down. From the second row of seating emerged a figure that Timothy had identified as Dewin Rio. He cased the exterior, his hand out in front of him, holding a counter-detection sensor; confirming Timothy's decision to not use surveillance equipment of his own.

Rio then went inside the establishment, and emerged three ticks later, gesturing to the hover across the street, where the target of Timothy's search finally emerged, along with a pale blue skinned Ubek. For a moment, Timothy found it surprising that Gallan would have such a small entourage, but then came to the conclusion that it was one of the ways he avoided attention. Traveling in large groups tends to get someone noticed.

Tonight, he would regret such lean protection. He subtly teleported down to surface level, into an alley blocked from view of the club, startling a homeless man who had thought the alley a peaceful place to catch some sleep. Timothy apologized for interrupting his nap, and stepped out into the walkway alongside the road. Checking himself over one more time to make sure he was properly presentable (as presentable as it gets in a questionable establishment such as The Sultry Siren), he walked across to the tavern, paid his cover charge, and waited for the opportunity to strike.