

Marlot showed his ID at the attendant monitoring the underground parking entrance. The apartment building was newer, on the outskirts of the city center. It catered to single people more interested in being close to their work than building families. The male he was here to see was a manager at a popular gambling house. The attendant assigned him a parking spot and Marlot drove to it.

The elevator was basic, the hall on the twenty-eighth floor immaculate, but without ornamentation; seemed the people living here didn't care to show their status.

He buzzed number fourteen, and a few seconds later a lynx a full head shorter than Marlot opened the door. He had a patch over his right eyes with three parallel scars visible above and below it.

"Vikor Growls?" Marlot asked, showing his ID. The lynx studied it, then nodded. "I'm Marlot Blackclaw. I'm wondering if I can ask you a few questions." Under his shirt, Vikor was solidly built.

"Sure, come on in." The male answered a growl in his voice that could be where his family got their name from. The living room was cluttered, plates on the low table before the couch, facing a large screen that played a muted movie. A couple walking in a field was all Marlot caught before it was turned.

Books and papers were strewn on a second chair, on shelves. The lynx caught Marlot looking and shrugged. "It's the end of a quarter and we're old style, so everything had to be tabulated manually."

Marlot didn't want to think about running any kind of business without computers at the forefront. "I'm wondering what you can tell me about a body you killed, Hardir Mixcoat, male, brindled wolf."

The lynx frowned. "I haven't killed a brindled wolf."

"It was five or six years ago."

Vikor stared at Marlot. "You're joking, right? I go through two bodies a month, three if I have to settle for something smaller. I don't keep track of my kills, unlike cub today, I'm not interested in trophies. I kill it, eat it, and forget it. I not saying I didn't kill that wolf, wolves do tend to have a good amount of meat on them, but that was at least sixty bodies ago. I couldn't tell you what I ate back then?"

"I understand. I'm just trying to account for an anomaly in the system," Marlot said, only realizing he'd lied after the words were out. It was too late to correct himself, and really, it wasn't exactly untrue. "Did you live here then?"

The lynx snorted. "Five years ago I was still a dealer. Even with how generous players can be, I couldn't afford this. I lived at the Bloodsworth apartment building." Marlot noted it. "It's an hour away." The lynx looked around, trying to orient himself. "I don't remember where about it is from here. I haven't bothered going back there."

"It's okay, the mapping app will tell me." That would let him work out if they'd crossed paths. Marlot brought up Hardir's picture and stepped to the lynx to show it to him; not within his personal space, but close enough to catch his scent.

Vikor studied the image, then shrugged. "Doesn't look familiar, but like I said. I don't keep track of who I eat." His scent said he was telling the truth.

The idea had been barely a scent on the wind, Marlot admitted to himself. It could be an actual glitch in the system. He tried to remember if five years ago the processing of the kill tax was fully automated. It should have been, but even that didn't guarantee flawless operation. And if Viktor had taken part in this, what was it, fraud? If Viktor was part of it, there would be other indications Marlot would uncover, but he had to remember that old kill wasn't his priority. It only mattered if it shed light on his current investigation.

Marlot handed him a card. "In case you remember anything."

Viktor took it with a smirk. "You really have high hopes for my memory."

Marlot shrugged. "You never know what will trigger something."

The lynx pocketed it. "Sure. If I remember anything I'll let you know."

In the elevator, Marlot found the Bloodsworth building. It was in the general area the Mixcoat family lived in, so they could have crossed paths. But even if they knew each other, it didn't explain why the lynx would do it.

"Focus Marlot, the body is in your freezer right now, resolve that so it can be processed out of it, and explain how he was killed twice afterward if you're that bored." He sent a message to the revenue department's IT for them to look into the possibility of glitches in the processing of kill tax five years ago and readied himself for the mocking reply they were going to return to him.