

Mission: Impossible

Part 1

The Cerberus buzzed like a large, angry metal hornet as its pilot navigated to a safe berth.

Behind it trailed a small transporter vessel, equipped with power cells and intravenous drips.

As the two ships landed, a group of engineers emerged from the transporter and began to open up ports on the nose.

"OK Orez, lower the charging pods." Cel said inside the cockpit of the Cerberus. Outside two pill-shaped objects slid from the underbelly. The engineers connected huge jump leads to them, leading back to the nose of the transport.

"Cerberus, are you receiving us?" crackled the intercom.

"Loud and clear," Cel replied, "Is everything in place?"

"Affirmative. We're sending a pulse now, modulate your power matrix to match so that we can get a constant flow."

The pads of the two machines flickered as energy was exchanged for a few minutes.

"Got it. Shut down your systems." Cel finally said through the intercom.

"OK, all done. You know where we are if you need us."

LostProphet entered the cockpit.

"Is everything ready?"

Cel shot him a disapproving look. "Yes. But I still don't see why you have to do this."

"It'll be fine, I promise." Prophet soothed. "Just set up the drips so I don't have to jackout and keep the hard drives spinning with the transporter's power, and we're golden."

Cel cast her eyes skywards.

"I know the technical details Captain. I'm concerned about your mental health. No redpill has been jacked in this long ... EVER."

"Hey, if Neo can enter the Matrix without even being plugged in I'm sure I can go a few days with the benefit of your support."

"But Neo was ..." Cel sighed, "Nevermind."

Prophet smiled wanly at everyone in the cockpit. Orezoen also had a disapproving look.

"Darianette is gonna look after me just fine. This mission is important to Lock, and it's important to me that we stay on his good side."

"Yeah, important that Lock buddies up to the machines." Orez growled under his breath. Prophet chose to ignore the comment.

"Let's go."

Part 2

LostProphet lay back in his chair and winced as the IVs were inserted into the plugs in his arms.

"We'll have operators here around the clock, and I'll be monitoring you."
Darianette said reassuringly as she brought up his vitals on the flat panels.

"Thanks" Prophet smiled, "Cel, how's the Cerb? All systems fully operational?"

"Of course, sir. Pads are offline and we're running on power saving mode until you get back. With any luck we won't even need to use the batteries on the transport."

Darianette finished her "pre-flight" checks and nodded across at Cel.

"Ready?" she asked.

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"Good luck."

Darianette slid the neural plug into Prophet's head and initiated the jack-in procedure. Prophet's eyes closed slowly, the real world intermingling with Matrix code. His body went numb for a second as the changeover took place, and then he was in.

Prophet looked down at himself. He was dressed in a sharp black Armani suit with a black shirt and tie, with stylish wireframe glasses.

Not bad, he thought to himself. Just as he used to look, which was of course the whole point.

Cel had hacked his RSI to give him shorter, jet black hair and a small black beard. She'd also applied some soft scarring along the right side of his face and down his neck. He also emitted the code signature of a bluepill.

He looked now as he did about a year and a half previously. The day before he met Neo he was dressed similarly. Though as he remembered it, the suit was charcoal grey, and it was Gucci.

The scars were supposedly from the car accident.

Picking up his briefcase he stepped out of the side street onto the sidewalk. He blended in perfectly. He followed the flow of pedestrians until he reached his destination.

Le Vrai. The restaurant of the Merovingian.

Part 3

LostProphet stood in the lift surrounded by other well-dressed slaves to the system. He got off at Floor 101 and heard hushed conversation strike up as the doors were closing. He smiled, a visitor to the Powerful Frenchman would give them something to talk about over lunch.

"Puis-je vous aider?" the Maitre'd asked with a slight weariness in his voice.

"Yes I'd like a table please. For one."

"Ah, I am sorry sir, tables are only available with a reservation or by personal invitation of the Merovingian."

Prophet smiled thinly. He withdrew a wad of cash from his jacket pocket.

The Maitre'd tried to retain his composure whilst eyeing the money greedily.

"I'm afraid sir cannot bribe his way into Le Vrai. Please make a reservation and we will be glad to ... oh."

Prophet put another identically-sized stack of cash on the desk.

"A table for one. Now."

The Maitre'd led him to a small table in the central area of the right-hand side of the restaurant.

As he left to go back to his post a man stopped him and whispered in his ear. They had a rapid conversation in French and the man went to the Merovingian's table.

Prophet busied himself with the menu. A few moments later the Maitre'd was back.

"I'm not ready to order yet."

"Sir, the Merovingian requests your company at his table."

Prophet sighed and adopted a world-weary expression, but got up and followed the small French man to the huge table at the end of the room.

There he was, the Merovingian himself. And Persephone of course, radiating beauty and raw sexual energy.

"I don't believe we've had the pleasure of meeting, Mr Hirst." the Merovingian said, standing and extending a hand.

Prophet shook it. "So you recognise me?"

A laugh.

"Come now, what is this? Of course I recognise you, my associates and I very much enjoyed your investments into our businesses not so long ago."

Prophet merely smiled. Being given the background to this mission was shocking. He had unwittingly financed the operations of the Matrix's biggest crime lord in his bluepill days.

"It was terrible to hear of your death in that terrible car accident. Fuel tank exploded, incinerating you, so I heard."

"Yes, it was a harrowing time for me as you can imagine." Prophet threw back, maintaining a steely composure.

"It interested my associates and I, however, as to why you had federal agents following you."

Prophet inwardly cheered. 'Federal agents'. So ol' Mervy didn't know that he was anything other than a bluepill.

"That's a mystery to me. I wasn't even aware of them. Now, if you don't mind, I'd prefer not to discuss the past."

The Merovingian smiled warmly, then adopted a hostile tone.

"Naturally. Let us instead discuss the present. Your sudden reappearance after more than a year of being dead, and showing up here for lunch with more money than most people make in a year."

He punctuated the end of the sentence with a small thump of his fists on the table. Clearly the removal of Edward Hirst from society had caused a bit of discomfort.

Prophet studied his cufflinks for a few moments.

"I'd been away too long. Needed a bite to eat when I got back into town. I've always wanted to eat here. As for the cash. Well ... I was a wealthy man you know."

A gun prodded into his neck.

"WERE a wealthy man. Your assets were liquidated after your death. There was quite the investigation into us, Mr Hirst. You caused me a lot of trouble. And for what?"

"I was insured for a lot of money. All my cash was tied up in investments and I couldn't get it out. If I died, the offshore account that got my money would make be a damn sight richer than I was. And I had something new to give my money to. And it's something that you'll be interested in."

The Merovingian waved away the gun wielder.

"Continue."

Prophet lifted his briefcase onto the table and took out a device. It looked like a PDA but the Merovingian's eyes lit up.

"My new business partners found one of these. They managed to tap some of its secrets but needed more equipment. I funded their research, and this is the result. This is actually a clone of the device they recovered. And it works. I'm told that you fully understand what it can be used for?"

"Let me see it." the Frenchman said, transfixed. Prophet shut it away in his briefcase.

"Not so fast. And before you get any ideas, this is rigged with an explosive device."

"Yes, yes, I know." he muttered, betraying the fact he could read the code, "What are the terms?"

"Terms?"

"Of the deal."

"There is no deal, at least not yet. My business partners want to meet you, so you can prove that you can do what they say you can do. Call me on this number when you've made up your mind."

With that Prophet stood up and walked away, smiling. Inside the bag was a machine device, used to manipulate code at specific points of the Matrix by machine agents. Nobody had ever gotten their hands on one before. For someone like the Merovingian, it was the holy grail of the Matrix.

Part 4

Prophet was back on the street a few minutes later. He knew they'd follow him, and this was the reason for his prolonged stay in the Matrix. He hailed a taxi and went to the nearest bank. A secure box had already been set up for him in advance.

Once in the vault, he took out a different key from his pocket and slid it into the lock.

The door opened, he placed the briefcase inside and closed it again. The key had locked the case inside a code prison. It would take several days just to hack through it, even for a man as talented as the Merovingian.

After the bank, he spent his afternoon wandering around Downtown. Now he was free, all the people rushing hither and thither seemed somehow strange. The machines' control of the Matrix stemmed from the Downtown district of MegaCity 1, and the people there followed the flow of code and, unaware, even manipulated it through their actions.

As the sun began to set, Prophet checked into a motel. He didn't want to go too high-class, though the receptionist looked a little confused at the expensive suit. He was used to sleeping on a hovercraft, or in Zion. Sleeping in the Matrix again would be weird.

Part 5

LP lay his head on the soft pillow and let out a sigh of pleasure. The beds in Zion and onboard the Cerberus were comfy enough, but nothing compared to the Matrix.

His day had been spent in medical tests and simulations for the mission so he was tired, and fell asleep almost immediately. It was the start of a bad night.

3am

Prophet opened his eyes and looked over at the clock. The red digits seared across his brain, he let out an involuntary yelp of pain and clamped his eyes shut again. His body was beaded with sweat, yet he was freezing cold. He scrubbed at his chest with the duvet then curled up and pulled it close to him.

5am

Prophet blinked his eyes open again and let out a bloodcurdling scream. A sentinel raced towards him, eyes red with the fires of hell, tentacles in the attack position. He flung himself sideways and hit the wall. The sentinel was gone. Rumbles echoed in his ears, with the low ominous thrum of hundreds of thousands of sentinels.

"The dock! The dock is breached!" he muttered aloud, thrashing.

There was a knock at the door.

He snapped upwards, fully awake, and answered it. It was the night porter.

"Sir, the couple in the room next to you are concerned, they've heard screams and loud thuds from your room. Are you alright?"

Prophet swayed slightly.

"Can I get you anything? Some water perhaps."

Prophet swayed sideways as a change of pace, but managed to utter a weak "Yes".

8am

LP hurried out of the motel, careful not to catch the eye of the night porter who was just finishing his shift. He felt dreadful, but had a schedule to maintain. Hailing a taxi, he headed in the direction of Le Vrai. He'd be there in time to catch the Merovingian at breakfast. A message was waiting on his cellphone requesting his presence there.

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"Edward, so glad you could join us," the Merovingian said genially as he approached the table, "Please take a seat."

"The device is in a secure location, if you're wondering."

"But of course. It would be foolish to place it anywhere else. I have thought about your proposal and decided to accept a meeting with your partners."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"However, there are some caveats. As you are undoubtedly aware, I am a powerful man. And there are some who would try and remove that power from me."

"I fully understand. Let's hear your terms."

"Firstly, I decide the location ..."

"Unacceptable. My partners are ... nervous of leaving their location."

"Then the game is off." the Merovingian said with a slight hint of anger.

Prophet shrugged and turned to leave.

"There are others who will buy what we are offering."

"What others." the voice hissed behind him.

"I'm sure you appreciate that I cannot reveal their identity. Suffice it to say, you are not the only potential buyer."

"Sit down, please Mr Hirst."

Prophet smiled and returned to his seat.

"You said there were other terms?"

"Hmm, indeed. I will take with me a number of personnel for my protection, travelling in my own vehicles."

"Fine. Guns are not allowed inside the compound."

"You will make an exception." the Merovingian said, eyeing Prophet with a steely gaze.

He shrugged, "OK, I think I can pull that off. Be aware however that our own guards won't hesitate to respond if you fancy killing my partners and running."

The frenchman laughed, "Please Mr Hirst. A business deal is a business deal."

"Quite." Prophet said, smiling thinly, "When would you wish to see what we have to offer?"

"Today."

Prophet was taken aback. He thought it would take a few days whilst the big man ran checks and tried to steal the device instead. Clearly the machines had picked the correct bait.

"I will contact my partners and make the necessary arrangements."

Part 6

The mini-motorcade departed from Downtown's most luxurious hotel at 20:00. The limo seating the Merovingian and Persephone had a number of his most trusted personal guards. Three cars in front and three behind took care of the rest.

Prophet sat in the lead car. Three heavy set men with tatoo'd faces sat behind him, machineguns on their laps. The Frenchman was taking no chances. It had taken all day to make the arrangements for this elaborate, overkill, number of bodyguards so they were leaving late. None of the party needed to sleep - they were all programs - but Prophet would let himself sleep in the car, to keep up appearances, and he was after all the only human.

As the motorcade reached the freeway the sun was setting, and Prophet found his eyes getting heavy. His head lolled to one side and a few minutes later the soothing motion of the car had sent him to sleep.

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Aboard the Cerberus

"He's gone to sleep again," Darianette said worriedly as she watched Prophet's monitors, "Last time we got some worryingly high neural spikes. It's like having a dream within a dream but god only knows what he was thinking about."

The monitors began to bleep.

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The Matrix

Prophet was jerked awake by a heavy slap.

"WHU??!" he mumbled, looking around wildly. The car was stopped and one of the tatoo'd men was leaning in through the front door.

"Are you okay man?"

"Err .. yeah" Prophet muttered, "Why? What happened?"

"Some fucked up shit. You were screaming and thrashing around back there. We had to pull over to get you out of it. You need some fresh air?"

They let him out for a walk, closely tailed by the guards. The motorcade had left the freeway and was now out amongst wasteland. Their destination wasn't far away.

After 10 minutes Prophet got back in the car and they restarted their journey. It was only 30 minutes more before they reached the target. The leading cars peeled off down a dirt track, the limo not far behind, and arrived at a large set of heavy metal gates.

Prophet stepped out and walked round to the drivers side, and placed his hand on a metal panel. The gates opened. He hopped onto the running board of the SUV behind and the group of vehicles drove through into a courtyard.

As the gates clanged shut behind them, Prophet smiled. He was halfway there.

Part 7

"Impressive, most impressive." the Merovingian murmured as the tour of the facility concluded.

"It is clear to me that you are genuine in your claims. And now, to business. I want these devices manufactured in bulk. How much currency would be needed to make say ... five hundred?"

Prophet smiled. "Ah, I was merely tasked with bringing you here. You'll be wanting to speak to my partners. I'll just go and get them, they're always so tied up in their work."

He exited through a door next to a set of blast doors, set in the rock on which the facility was built.

Inside, he said merely one word to the suited man. "Go."

The blast doors slid open slowly as the Merovingian and his 'entourage' walked towards them. Prophet watched on the surveillance cameras and almost laughed as he saw the expressions change.

The ambient light glinted off the sunglasses, the first telltale sign.

"Get out. GET OUT! IT'S A TRAP!" the Merovingian shouted, his voice still booming with authority and power.

Five agents walked emerged into the enclosed courtyard and were met with a hail of bullets. As the bodies dropped lifelessly to the floor, the same five agents emerged again. And again. And again. And again, until the clips were empty.

The agents walked around the pile of dead bodies and stood a few meters away from the infamous exile.

"You have been scheduled for deletion for a very long time."

"Indeed. But let us be realistic here. I have survived six reboots. Six anomalies. And you agents, almighty powerful agents fear to confront me. And so, what do you think this will achieve?"

"This is different. This time there is no escape, no sources of power for you to manipulate. You will be deleted."

The agents took a step forward. This was going to be interesting.

Part 8

The bodyguards of the Frenchman leapt at the Agents. They looked stupid but their combat algorithms were some of the finest ever crafted. They knocked away their guns quickly, forcing the machines to go hand-to-hand.

As they engaged, the Merovingian turned and ran. Prophet watched on the camera as he headed for the side door. It was bolted, so he was very surprised when he came crashing through it.

"How ..."

"I am master of the code, Mr Hirst! You have no idea how much power I possess." he spat, advancing on the lone figure in the room, "You sold me out, you miserable little human. I must admit I am impressed, very few people have ever fooled me. But those that did paid the price. That price is death."

Prophet cursed inwardly. It wasn't supposed to go like this. The Merovingian reached into his coat and pulled out a pair of submachineguns that definitely hadn't been there a moment ago.

He pulled the triggers.

Prophet span to one side and threw himself backwards, performed a neatly executed double backflip and hid behind a filing cabinet.

"Most impressive!" came a shout, along with the sound of cartridges being ejected.

Prophet flicked a mental switch. Hyperstrength. Leaping over it, he punched through the top drawer and swung his arm around in an arc. The heavy metal object flew threw the air, catching the exile square in the stomach.

"No .. no, something is not right here." he muttered as he got up, pushing the cabinet aside. He stared at Prophet, who grinned back.

"A wolf in sheep's clothing. What's up Merv, do I still smell of bluepill to you?"

The Merovingian laughed. A nervous laugh. His eyes flicked around the room as he weighed up his next move. He leapt at Prophet.

The pair touselled for a minute, neither gaining the upper hand, until suddenly there was a buzzing in Prophet's ears and he knew he was in trouble.

He was stunned.

The Merovingian stood back and began to laugh.

"You see, it is I who have the upper hand now."

He clicked his fingers and Prophet bent double with his head in his hands. Code Shock. His vision blurred then blanked out altogether, and as his feet regained movement he stumbled helplessly.

"Oh? Not feeling so well?" The Merovingian cast another hack and Prophet screamed. It felt like his flesh was burning, boiling away as the Code Infection set to work.

"It is such a shame for you. You were so, so close. I applaud you."

There was a searing, stabbing sensation in Prophet's head. The Merovingian had inflicted a Devestation Field upon him. It felt like his brain was being ripped in two.

Coughing blood, he fell to his knees. The Merovingian delivered a sharp kick to the chin and he collapsed, dead.

He heard footsteps rapidly running away, then the pain seeped away, and he was staring at a white light. The cellphone in his pocket was ringing.

Part 9

"Yeah."

"Jesus LP, he kicked your ass like I've never seen."

"Yeah, yeah. Just tell me what's happening."

"You're not gonna like it, but he got out. Those bodyguards were simulacrum and they were made well. A couple died but eventually they killed the agents."

"How did he get out?"

"Helicopter. He's heading back towards the city now. Some of his lackies have been trying to crack the encryption on the device you left there, with no luck so far." "What did the machines say?"

"It's fine. They acknowledge that they underestimated his strength - again - and apparently they expected you to get caught in the cross-fire ..."

"Nice."

"... but they definately WON'T be happy if that device gets into his hands. You need to get it to a drop point."

Prophet tapped on the console next to him, the only object in the white space that stretched on forever. His loadout was complete.

"Put me back in."

"Erm ... there's one other problem."

"Which is?"

"When you went to sleep ... Darianette is trying to figure out what the hell was going on but ... we don't know ..."

"Cel I don't have time. Just give me the short version."

"We don't know if we can get you out."

"WHAT?!"

"The encoding on your neural tranceiver has reconfigured itself somehow."

"Then you'd better figure out how to get around it. Now I need back in."

Part 10

The classic black Buick practically oozed down Main Street, towards the bank. Prophet smiled at the pedestrians who gawped, the sunlight bouncing back into their eyes from the polished chrome wheel hubs.

Pulling up outside the bank he stepped out, dressed from head to toe in black, his black leather trenchcoat hung heavy with concealed weaponry.

Placing both hands on the doors he pushed, sending them swinging open, and didn't break his stride as he got to the reception desk.

He loved making a good entrance.

"I'd like to get access to Box 101."

"I'm sorry sir, there was a power failure in that area of the building. Two engineers are up there looking at it right now."

"Thanks." Prophet smiled, walking towards the elevator.

"Sir ... sir! You can't go down there ..."

Prophet winked as the doors shut, and headed to the vault.

Inside the lights were indeed off. The safety locks were all disengaged. Prophet headed for his box, ready for attack. There was nobody there.

He reached Box 101 and put his hand in his pocket for the key ... time slowed. He felt the air moving to his right side ... he flicked to his right and grabbed the oncoming fist with his left hand. He circled round and brought his right hand down in a chopping motion. There was a scream of pain as the bone snapped.

The other hand clawed wildly for him.

Prophet grabbed it and pulled his attacker up close, delivering a couple of sharp headbutts. As the body fell to the floor he pulled out an FM900 and fired three times.

The woman said two engineers.

A boot smacked him in the small of the back and he stumbled forwards, tripping over the body. As he fell he twisted himself around, pulling out an FM11SK and giving a few squirts of the trigger. The dark room lit up momentarily, and as Prophet hit the floor the second hostile was dead.

He dusted himself off, slid his special key into Box 101 and retrieved the device. Now, to the drop point.

Part 11

As he ascended in the elevator, Prophet was back on the phone.

"Alright, I got the device, now where's the drop point."

"There's a machine operative waiting for you in the Kalt Corporation HQ, fifteenth floor."

"Why can't they just choose a damn street corner." Prophet muttered.

"Be careful. The Merovingian is back but we lost his trace - they'll be looking for you."

"Hmmm. In that case I'll need a quicker car. Anything in the area?"

There was a moment's silence.

"Got one. Registration I-M-one-three-three-seven around the corner. I've hacked the locks and ignition."

Prophet grinned and hung up, pocketing the phone as the doors opened. He gave a thumbs-up to the receptionist as he walked swiftly out into the street. Turning the corner, he found the car waiting.

Thirty seconds later a dark blue BMW M3 joined Main Street and set off towards Park East.

As he joined the highway, Prophet's phone rang.

"You've got company."

Prophet looked in his mirrors.

"I don't see anything suspicious."

"The sky, they've got a goddamn helicopter."

Prophet lowered the window and popped his head out. Sure enough there was a 'bird in the sky, and it was descending. Just keep driving. he said to himself, the noise of the rotors getting ever louder. Traffic in front of him began to swerve out to the sides of the highway. He craned his neck and saw the helicopter dropping towards the road.

"Not now, not today." he muttered, flooring the accelerator as he heard the sound of a machinegun. Bullets peppered the roof of the car as it surged forwards, whipping underneath the chopper as it was about to set down. "Ha! Gotta turn around now."

Using his horn to its fullest extent Prophet continued as fast as he could, but the helicopter was not far behind. It was when his rear window smashed in that he knew things were going to be difficult. Taking advantage of the moderately busy traffic he began to swerve in and out of lanes as fast as possible and erratically as possible. The back of the car was still taking heavy damage though.

Finally the Park East offramp presented itself. Prophet hurled the car across the lanes of traffic, narrowly avoiding several accidents and floored it as he entered the section of the city. The sound of the helicopter grew weaker - thanks to the buildings they had to fly higher.

Prophet was nearing the Kalt Corporation HQ. He turned onto the pedestrianised area, eliciting shouts from the people out there and dumped the car squarely outside the entrance.

As he was let in - Neo had a much more troublesome time getting inside - there were noises of other cars pulling up. Something sounded like trouble. Again.

As Prophet and the security guards waited by the revolving doors expectantly, there was only silence.

Calm before the storm.

A huge explosion flung him back across the floor. As the smoke was clearing, it was clear they had blown their way in, decimating the guards - the survivors were buried under rubble.

"We're taking the device." the leader of the pack growled.

Prophet stumbled to his feet, his ears still ringing, and adopted a defensive stance.

"We'll see."

Part 12

This mission was turning really ugly, really fast.

Prophet had no serious weaponry training - he was all about the hacking or the fists. There was only one recourse.

He focused his mind hard. This was going to drain his strength ...

Time appeared to slow down to a crawl, and Prophet began to run backwards. The exiles, guns already raised, began to fire. Usually, the code disturbance a redpill causes can, to some extent, deflect the path of bullets. Unfortunately LostProphet was still emanating a bluepill code signature which was damping this down. So Hyperdodge was the only option. It required immense mental focus, and nobody could keep it up for long.

Bullets rippled the air as they came closer, then changed trajectory and shot harmlessly away onto the floor. Most of them, anyway. As he felt his power waning, a bullet ripped through his shoulder. Then another. One impacted his right thigh, another tore a chunk from his neck.

He hit the doors of the elevator with a thud and frantically pushed the Call button. He heard the motors whine in the lift shaft, prayed that the doors would open in time. The shooting had stopped.

The exiles ran, en masse, towards the lone figure, forming a huge wrecking ball of computer generated flesh. The second before they struck, the lift door slid open. Prophet fell backwards, as he did so pulling two automatic shotguns from a holster on his back.

BLAM BLAM.
chunkclick
BLAM BLAM
chunkclick

The sheer weight of the exiles pushed the guns away, though some had fallen to the shotgun blasts. As the doors shut, there were three inside with him. "Let's play." they rumbled in unison. Prophet jumped for the escape hatch but was pulled back.

A huge fist crashed across his face, sending him reeling into a corner with stars floating around his vision. He spat teeth onto the floor as he took a hefty blow to the stomach. Doubling over he flailed out at his attackers. They laughed and pinned him to the wall.

"Now where's the device?"

"It ... it's in ..." Prophet began, watching the number above the doors of the elevator.

"WHERE?!" another exile grabbed his throat.

"Up my ass," Prophet muttered with a defiant smile as the doors slid open.

There were three muted thuds and the exiles fell to the floor. Prophet stumbled over them to the Agents and pulled the device from his inner pocket.

"Sorry, it might be a bit damaged," he coughed, rubbing his throat.

"Thank you, Mr Hirst. I apologise for the earlier inconvenience."

"Oh you mean my death? Nono, don't worry about it. I did my job."

"In an exemplary manner, Mr Hirst. Unfortunately we did not achieve our goal, but rest assured we will try again."

"I should hope so. And if I see that French bastard in the meantime, I'll make sure I let him know you'll be back."

The Agent smiled thinly.

"A report will be filed and delivered to your commander shortly."

"What are you going to do about them," Prophet pointed at the dead bodies, "And the big hole in the front of your building."

"It will be taken care of. We have ... methods of containing disruptions such as these. Do you require any assistance, Mr Hirst?"

Prophet spat some more teeth out and walked back to the elevator.

"I'll be okay. Just need to get to an exit and back to my ship."

Part 13

Prophet limped out of the backdoor, wondering why he wasn't starting to heal. The nearest phonebox was just a few yards away, and the phone was ringing.

He picked it up and pressed it to his ear. Usually there was an odd sensation, then the bulkheads of the hovercraft came into view.

This time it was different.

He was still looking out at Park East, listening to a hideous screeching noise.

"Hello? Hello?"

His cellphone rang as the screeching stopped.

"What the hell? We place you at the phonebox - did someone else pick up?"

"No dammit that was me! You didn't fix that damn encryption."

"OK, Darianette is working on it now. First of five combinations. But we have to disable the automatic jackout procedure."

"Cel I'm dieing out here!"

"It's the only way. Hang in there."

The line went dead.

Prophet slumped against the glass of the phonebooth, waiting for the phone to ring. As he looked around, he saw a heavily-built man walking purposefully towards him.

An exile.

"Christ don't they have anything better to do ..." Prophet muttered, slamming the door to the booth and hanging onto the handle.

The exile stood outside and grinned. Grabbing the handle he tried wrestling the door open, but Prophet clung on. The phone rang.

Screeeeettccchhhhhhhhhhaaarrrrrtttttt...

"Shit!" Prophet yelled as he hung up.

The exile punched the glass. It broke but held - shatterproof. Through the frosted mess, Prophet saw a black shape pressed to the glass.

Shit!

He ducked to one side as a bullet crashed through and out the other side. The phone rang again.

Screeeeettccchhhhhhhhhhaaarrrrrtttttt...

"Motherfuckaaaarrrrrgghhhhh!"

Today was just an incredibly, unbelievably bad day. So far he'd been killed, shot at by a helicopter, almost blown up, shot by a bunch of Merovingian hitmen, beaten up by them, and now he'd just been shot in the stomach by another. The phone rang again.

Screeeeettccchhhhhhhhhhaaarrrrrtttttt...

Prophet slammed the phone back on the hook as a hefty pair of hands burst through and grabbed him by the throat. In the ensuing struggle, he ended up being pulled out feet first. The phone rang again. Prophet's hands flailed wildly for it as the exile wrenched at his feet. He grabbed the dangling cord and just as his head was about to leave the booth, jammed it to his ear.

Part 14

His eyes snapped open.

"You guys cut it close, REALLY close," Prophet grumbled as the neural jack was removed, "How did I do?"

"Well, considering the circumstances." Darianette said, offering a cloth to wipe away the last of the blood that his mind had kindly 'generated' in his mouth. "Your vitals stayed pretty regular, even when you took those beatings. Sleeping though that was ... weird. I've never seen anything like it - it was almost the reverse of what we see when we pull someone out."

Prophet furrowed his brow.

"Well it would make sense seeing as you couldn't pull me back out ... perhaps that's something for Lock to ask the machines about."

"Speaking of Lock ..." began Jags who had just arrived, "I've just received a communique from Zion. Seems he got the report back from the machines and he's pretty pissed."

"Fuck him," Prophet snapped, "I did what I could. You know, taking missions from Tyndall doesn't seem so bad after that little trip. Cel, how much juice have we got in the tank?"

"Enough to fly."

"Then let's go home."