

Waking Abigail

Part 1: Haus

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11.30pm

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"Are we feelin' good tonight?!"

The roar of the crowd washed over the DJs with a hot energy.

"Come on you can do better than that!"

A bigger wave of energy.

"Alright! This next track is from an artist who started out right here at Club Haus. He was huge then and he..."

Abigail shut out the chattering of her fellow DJ as she cued in the next track and the assembled crowd went mental for the nth time that night. She sidled behind her colleague and headed out of the booth towards the toilets, weaving in and out of the frantic bodies until she reached her destination.

She made her way to the stall at the end of the row, and calmly locked the door. She reached for something inside her jeans, withdrew it, then sat on the closed toilet seat.

Abigail opened her palm slowly, seeing the syringe as if for the first time.

The liquid inside was vibrant green and inviting. She jammed the stubby needle into her arm and pushed the plunger gently.

The feeling was a thousand times greater than what her colleague was experiencing out there in the midst of the dancing crowd. Her body trembled as the mixture coursed through her veins, electrifying every nerve ending before the feeling finally subsided.

She sighed happily and stood up, placing the syringe back in the secret pocket. Better than sex, she mused as she flushed the toilet and went to wash her hands before rejoining the hysterical dancers.

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4am

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The cleaners had made short work of the litter and were onto the scrubbing and mopping phase. The management had left an hour ago, and Abigail's taxi was late.

She took her phone out for the fifth time and punched in the speed dial.

"Creston Cabs." said the voice at the other end.

"Hello, it's me. Again. Where's my fucking cab?"

"I'm sorry who?"

"Chaste. Abigail Chaste. Club Haus? Come on I get a cab every fucking weekend from you people."

"Hey, lady, we're running a little behind OK?"

"Screw you guys. Cancel the cab, I'll just walk it."

She snapped the phone shut angrily and stomped around outside the entrance for a minute. Still nothing turned up, so she zipped her jacket up and started to walk.

Cutting across the deserted main road she entered an alleyway. Halfway down she heard footsteps behind her. She shrugged to herself and continued.

Part 5: Safehouse

"You're becoming my guardian angel."

Prophet almost leapt out of his skin and the car shot across two lanes on the freeway, provoking lots of horn honking from the cars he just cut up.

"Jesus H .. I didn't realise you'd woken up." he said, steadying the wheel, "How do you feel?"

"I'm OK, I guess. Thanks for the coat by the way."

"No problem. I figured you might be upset if you woke up here with no clothes on. Are you sure you're OK?"

"Yeah, yeah I'm fine."

"What did you see?" Prophet said quietly. She shrank away from him and began to tremble softly. He reached out a hand and took her arm, hoping to reassure her. It seemed to work as she stopped shaking.

"I don't ... I don't know."

She started to cry quietly. Prophet pulled over onto the hard shoulder and stopped the car, provoking more honking from people who he decided were just idiots.

"I can help you. I don't know what they did to you but I can help."

She sniffed loudly and wiped her eyes on the sleeves of Prophet's leather trenchcoat which were far too long for her.

"Why? You don't even know my name. I don't know you. For all I know this could just be another part of their game."

"Then why do you trust me?"

"Because ... it feels right."

They sat in silence for a few minutes.

"Black tubes and pink goo."

Prophet stared at her.

"What?"

"It's what I saw. And I couldn't get out, so I started screaming, and I felt burning all over my body from where the tubes were coming out of me and then ... then I woke up in your car."

Prophet grabbed her and hugged her tight.

"Then I can definitely help you. Come on, I know somewhere safe you can stay until we can figure this all out."

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Abigail sat on the couch, still wrapped in the trenchcoat. She could hear voices from the kitchen getting louder. She stood up and walked to the doorway quietly.

"...was a potential you'd have no hesitation in accepting her!"

"That's a totally different matter and you know it."

"Sometimes you give me help when I don't want it. Well now I NEED your help. Please."

"What does this girl mean to you? Why is she worth this?"

"I don't know! But something tells me I'm right."

There was silence.

"Could you come in here?" said the female voice.

Abigail walked into the kitchen looking small and alone.

"I don't want to cause any problems. I can just go back home. LostProphet said this would be a safe place but ..."

"Nonsense, you're staying here with me." the Oracle said. "Cookie?"

"Where are you going?" Abigail said at the door. The Oracle had mysteriously provided some clothes that were her exact fit, and she had returned the coat to LostProphet.

"Back to where I came from." he said smiling, "But I'll be back as soon as I can."

He took a few steps before swinging back round.

"Wait," he laughed, "I still don't know your name."

"Abigail Chaste," she said, "But you can call me Abi."

Part 6: Research

"You've gotta look at this." Cel said as she hooked the neural jack onto its stand and hurried back to her chair.

"You decoded the item?" Prophet joined her.

"Yeah, and it ain't pretty. It's a type of drug, but it's been engineered by someone very clever. It heightens sensation and nerve stimulation - that's the standard drug bit. Someone taking it would just think they'd had a shot of ... well, whatever bluepills use for drugs, I guess."

Prophet nodded and studied the static screen of code, though it didn't mean much to him.

"However, the way it does it is pretty sinister. It works by over-stimulating certain points on the body. They ... correspond with the plugs that the machines put in."

Prophet took a step back.

"Woah ... they're stimulating the real world body?!"

Cel nodded gravely.

"But when Abi was in that room, she said she saw something ... and its either a BIG coincidence, or she saw the inside of her pod, wherever she is out here in the real."

"Abi?"

"Abigail, that's her name. Can we stick to the debrief please?"

"Right, I'm sorry. So what ... the machines are toying with something that can wake their batteries up?? That makes no sense."

Prophet began to pace the broadcast deck.

"Not wake up. Abi saw the real world but she wasn't released. The system ignored it, because she's still alive. And I don't think it's the machines. I picked up a phone off a dead guy in the building and I'm pretty sure I heard our favourite exile on the other end of it."

"Crap." Cel said flatly.

"Yeah he didn't sound too happy to hear me again either. But I don't understand it. Why would they want to do this? If the machines get wind of it they'll hunt him down even harder than before. And what good can they gain from scaring people half to death? It just doesn't add up."

Part 7: Realisation

Abigail stretched as she woke from a brief nap. The old woman that LostProphet had taken her to was sitting nearby, knitting.

"I wasn't dreaming it, was I? The tubes ... wires ... pink goo ..."

"What do you want me to tell you?" the woman asked.

"The truth."

She was silent for a moment.

"No, you weren't dreaming it. What you saw was real. Precious few have seen that and survived. I see something in you ... something powerful. An inner strength."

"Who are you? Who is LostProphet? I know I got myself into this mess but ... why are you helping me get out of it?"

The woman put her knitting down and adjusted her sitting position in the chair.

"I am the Oracle. LostProphet is a friend of mine. It seems he found you by accident, though everything happens for a reason. I don't yet know what that reason is but I have a feeling we'll find out soon enough. He is helping you because ... well, I'm sure you'll realise that soon enough too. He is a good man with a good heart who does what is necessary ... but I have a feeling he will do even more than necessary to help you find your way."

Abi chewed the words over for a moment.

"I'm nobody special, you know? Don't make that mistake about me. Other people have before - good people - and they've got burnt. I'm a junkie on some experimental drug, and now the people that make it are coming to kill me. I work three jobs and I'm still in debt, and I frequently have unconventional sex with strangers in nightclubs."

The Oracle smiled, "It's not who you have been, it's who you CAN be that's important."

There was a knock at the door. Seraph emerged from the hallway with LostProphet in tow.

"There's a dead prog..exi..guy on the street outside. I caught him coming in." he said, bowing his head to the Oracle.

"It is not safe for you to be here." Seraph lamented, returning to the hallway.

"He's right," Abi piped up from the sofa, "I don't want to get your friends hurt. They're bound to come after me sooner or later. They always seem to find me."

"I don't know where to take you." Prophet said, looking to the Oracle for help.

"Take me where you go." she said.

"I ... I can't do that so easily."

"I get the feeling it's more real than this place ..."

Prophet stared at her. She met his eyes and smiled, "I know that what I saw wasn't a dream, that this is more of a dream than anything."

She got up, walked over to him and took his hands, "I don't want to sleep all my life."

Part 8: Revelations

Seraph ushered them to the door and let them out.

"Be careful."

They travelled down in the rickety elevator and were soon free of the building. A black car was parked on the gravel pathway and they got in.

"Nice style." Abi said with a grin, running her hands over the worn leather, "Sixties gangster style."

LostProphet smiled, sometimes a bluepill's take on the "great awakeneds" was the most refreshing.

As he slid the key into the ignition and turned it, he caught sight of a figure in the rear view mirror and froze.

"Don't look behind us."

"Wh..."

"DON'T. Just stay calm. Fasten your seatbelt."

She did as she was told. Prophet clicked the car into Drive, and floored the accelerator.

A shot rang out as he ducked down, pulling Abi down with him. The bullet shattered the front and rear windows. The car slowly picked up speed.

"God damn automatics!" Prophet hissed. More shots rang out, some bullets dinging the bodywork and others passing straight through the smashed windows. Peeping over the dashboard, Prophet swung the car right and accelerated away from the blocks of flats.

They were quickly on the road, stuck in slow moving traffic.

"What's so special about you Abi?"

"Thanks," she laughed, "That's just what every girl wants to hear."

"I'm serious. Most of these scumbags would've given up by now. They want you badly. Tell me why. Tell me what those drugs did to you."

Abi sighed and squirmed in her seat. She looked across at him, his eyes inscrutable behind the glasses.

"Alright. But you'll see the real me. And you won't like it."

"I'll be the judge of what I like. Start from the beginning."

"Okay. I was working at Club Haus, a private party. Some uppity French guy and his weird friends. What did I care, I played the music, they danced, I got paid."

"The French guy danced?" Prophet asked.

"Well not him or his wife who, by the way, had the kind of cleavage most women would commit murder to have. They had a private box over the dancefloor. I didn't pay much attention at the time I've gotta say.

Anyway, I went out onto the floor to grab a drink and let the other guys do an hour on the decks when this tall muscley guy approaches me. We had a few drinks, we got along, I went back to the booth. At the end of the night he's still there waiting for me, so we went back to his place and I fucked him into the middle of next May."

Prophet's hands tightened around the wheel and his jaw set for a few moments. She saw it, said nothing.

"In between ... you know ... he gets out this small black briefcase and pulls out a couple of syringes. I'd done drugs before but only a few back in highschool. But somehow I'm so out of my mind that I say 'Sure, stick it in me'."

She laughed, "Funny how that seems to keep happening in this part of the story." Prophet said nothing and she looked slightly ashamed.

"Well he injects me with this green stuff and MAN ALIVE it was good. Don't get me wrong that guy was pretty good in the sack but this green drug .. it was like ten of him all at once. We carry on until we fall asleep, and when I wake up he's gone. I took a look around the apartment. There was enough in the fridge and enough crockery to make breakfast, but ... there was nothing else in there. It's like he'd rented an apartment just to get laid in."

Prophet took advantage of an opening in the traffic and accelerated hard. Too hard. He realised she was looking at him and forced himself to relax.

"I went home and later got a visit from this guy and some of his buddies. Apparently I reacted well to the drug ... in that I didn't empty my blood through my nose mouth and ... other orifices ... basically that I didn't die. They told me that I could have more of it. They just wanted me to check in every month at a certain location and report the effects. Of course then they also tell me that they'll pay me ten thousand dollars per month, and hand over five thousand of the first month's to encourage me."

"So you said yes?"

"Of course I did. I was working some pretty crappy jobs apart from the Haus gig. My boyfriend had walked out a year previous, I was ... I am a mess. After three months they tell me that at some point they'll need me to come in for a more extended test, but they didn't know when. I was fine with it until I saw one of those guys ... Dzar his name was, on the news. Wanted for rape, GBH, selling cocaine ... the whole works. That's when I got scared, but I couldn't stop taking the drug. I stopped going to the meetings, and then they showed up in that backstreet and tried to get me."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, Prophet digesting the information and Abigail feeling embarrassed.

"What effects did the drug have?" Prophet finally asked.

Part 9: Run

"Aside from the full-body orgasms? Well ... it was very weird. A little while afterwards, I'd get this sort of buzzing, humming noise in my head. Sometimes it'd feel like I was submerged in some sort of liquid, though I'd be totally dry."

"Heightened senses," LostProphet muttered.

"I guess but ... what the hell was I sensing?!"

Prophet's phone rang.

"Extraction team are in place, but I'm picking up exiles coming for you." Cel said.

"Where?"

"They're on the freeway. Cutting through traffic behind you."

"I'll handle them. Tell me where the team is, we'll get there."

"Stamos. I can send backup."

"No. I said I can handle them."

"Handle who?" Abi asked as he put his phone away.

"We're about to encounter some resistance. Can you drive?"

"Yeah, I can drive."

"Good then take over the wheel. This car doesn't mind if you scratch it, so feel free to drive offensively."

They swapped positions as the traffic started to move once again and Prophet clicked open the glovebox. He smiled - Cel had left a present. He examined the Bedlams, nodded approvingly and vaulted into the back seat.

"What are you going to do?" Abi asked, her voice now betraying some signs of fear.

"Whatever you do, just drive. You know Stamos?"

"Yeah, vaguely."

"Head there. Take my phone," he tossed it into the front of the car, "If I'm not with you when you get there, hide somewhere, anywhere. Make a note of your surroundings and dial Hash-Three. Tell the operator where you are and people will come and get you."

Prophet focused out the rear window as the traffic thinned. A navy SUV was tearing through the traffic, provoking the wrath of the commuters horns. He tucked the Bedlams into his belt and pulled on the back of the rear bench. It popped open, and he reached inside, withdrawing a rifle with a sniper scope.

"Try and keep the car steady," he said calmly to Abigail, leaning back against the front bench. The car behind them swerved rapidly into the other lane as the driver saw the weapon. The SUV was rapidly approaching. He focused, put his eye to the scope, and fired.

"SHIT!" roared out of the car as the bullet smashed the drivers-side wingmirror to pieces but missed the all important driver, "DRIVE!"

Abi put her foot down and the car raced forwards, shooting past an on-ramp as another SUV joined just behind them.

Machinegun fire peppered the roof of the car and Abi screamed. She watched in the mirror as Prophet withdrew the Bedlams and rolled out of the vacant rear window.

Standing on the rear of the car, he surefooted himself and unleashed the contents of both clips into the SUVs windscreen. It fishtailed wildly before smashing into the central reservation, its drivers lying in a bloody mess on the dashboard.

Prophet turned to look forwards as the second SUV skirted around the rear of the first and accelerated hard towards their car.

Inside Abi wrestled with the wheel as the SUV smashed into the back of the car and almost lost it all over again as LostProphet skidded across the roof down onto the bonnet.

"Keep driving!" he shouted, clinging onto the passenger-side wingmirror with one hand and trying to grip other side of the bonnet with his foot.

"I have to swerve!" she yelled back, seeing some slow moving traffic ahead. He nodded in reply and managed to pull himself back into the car, thankful that the exile had smashed the glass previously, as she tackled the obstacles, the SUV following closely.

"Take the next exit and head for Stamos." Prophet said, reloading the Bedlams and going back to the rear seats. He took careful aim and fired at the front wheels of the SUV as it made another ramming charge. The rubber exploded as it hit the car. As it started to snake, the front doors popped open and the exiles jumped. The sound of heavy boots on the roof of their car gave away their location.

Prophet fired upwards. One exile fell off the roof, bouncing as he hit the asphalt. The second stepped clumsily onto the bonnet. Prophet shot his ankles away and he fell back screaming, but as he tumbled away he tossed a small grey object through the window.

"Abi!"

He grabbed her and hauled her out of her seat, pushing against the front bench as hard as he could. They both emerged onto the rear of the car as it began to shed speed and drift over to the wrong side of the road. Prophet quickly got to his feet, hauled Abi over his shoulder and jumped just as the grenade went off.

They landed messily a few hundred meters away, rolling as they hit the ground. "I'm sorry." Prophet said, staggering up and helping her to her feet. "Don't be stupid, it's better than being blown to bits. I'm not even gonna ask how you jumped that high, or did ... any of that."

Sirens wailed in the distance as they observed the rolling wreck of flames. "We should go." Prophet said, tossing away his broken sunglasses. "Just one minute," Abi replied, throwing her arms around him and hugging him tight, "I still don't really know who you are. But I think you're wonderful."

He almost didn't hear the vehicle screech to a halt next to them, the doors pop open. Almost. Whirling around, Prophet adopted a defensive stance, but sagged immediately. The four burly men held machineguns. Kung Fu was good, but no match for that.

The man they now both knew as Dzar was the last to emerge. He walked up to them, and only when he was at arms length away did he whip out a gun and held it to Prophet's head.

"Ah, I believe I am addressing the great LostProphet. The man who is such a pain."

"You can't kill me." Prophet growled.

"No. But I can send you to a place that renders you completely unable to help this fine woman."

He flashed perfectly white, razor sharp teeth, and pulled the trigger. Abigail screamed as blood and brain matter exploded from the back of Prophet's skull and his legs gave way. She fell to her knees and hugged his limp body to her. Dzar laughed.

"I'll give you a moment with your friend then you're coming with us, you stupid bitch. I don't need this kind of."

He didn't finish his sentence as a bullet sliced cleanly through his neck, demolishing his spinal column and ripping his windpipe to shreds. He hit the floor with a heavy thud as the heavies with machine guns leapt back into the car.

"Get the girl!" the driver shouted. The rear door opened and one of them leapt out. He began to run across the path when another bullet hit him in the leg. "Fuck this!" he screamed, throwing himself with the minimum of grace back into the car which left rapidly, tyres screeching.

Abigail rocked slowly back and forth, shaking and sobbing uncontrollably. A minute passed, then a man approached her. She looked up, he was blonde, dark skinned, with a strange facial tattoo. Small round glasses hid his eyes, but she could see some sort of green code that seemed to scroll down them.

"Who, w-w-w-who? Who-what? What? Who are you?" she finally managed to get out.

"LostProphet says you're very important. He says you can see beyond the veil of this world."

"Look at him!" she screamed, "Those bastards killed him."

"There is some fiction in your truth, and some truth in your fiction. Not everything in this world is as it first appears."

She looked up at him again, vision blurred by tears.

"What should I do?"

He offered a hand.

"Come with me. His crew are waiting to show you the Truth."

"We can't just leave him here," she sniffled.

"Trust me. Trust what he told you. Trust yourself."

She took his hand and let him pull her up. As they walked away, she turned on hearing an odd noise.

The body was gone.

Part 10: Free

They made the short journey by foot, arriving at a dilapidated block of flats.

"Here?" Abigail asked her new companion, her voice tinged with disgust.

"It doesn't look pretty, but the phones still work." he replied with a wry smile, leading her inside and to the stairs, "Unfortunately the elevators don't."

They ascended five flights, emerging into a dank corridor, the lights flickering madly, coughing their last breath, casting eerie shadows.

Abi clung to the man's arm as they walked to the first door and entered.

The lights inside were on, she was glad of that. The room was filled with strange equipment - it gave the sense of being modern, but looked like a throwback to the early 90s. A group of people sat and stood at various terminals, working busily.

"Sit here please."

Abigail sat in the sole vacant chair and a woman attached some medical sensors to her, smiling reassuringly.

"My name is PBlade, you can drop the P. This is where I give you a choice, but I think we all know what that choice is. This is your last chance, after this there is no turning back."

"There is only one way out of this. I know this isn't real, that the real world lies somewhere else. I can never go back, they'll kill me."

Blade smiled and offered his hands, open with a pill in each.

"Take the blue pill, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. Though I have a feeling you already know too much to do that. Take the red pill, and see this world for exactly what it really is."

Abi took the red pill and swallowed it, ignoring the glass of water on the table next to her. Blade smiled, popped the blue pill back in his pocket and walked over to a screen.

She sat there for a minute, shifting uncomfortably when something moved in the corner of her eye. She turned sharply, saw the cracked mirror. Saw it start to melt ... she recoiled, then reached out a finger and touched it tentatively. It was like water. She withdrew it quickly, but found her finger covered in a silver goo.

"This can't be real ..." she breathed as it slowly began to replicate, crawling up to her wrist.

"Have you ever had a dream," Blade said, walking back over to her, "That you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?"

Her body went rigid as the liquid began to crawl up her arms and envelope it in silver.

"It's so cold," she whispered, "I ... I don't know if I want this."

"We've got a lock on her signal." said a voice from the other side of the room.

Blade clicked his phone open, pushed a key.

"Are you ready for her Cel?"

He obviously got the answer he wanted, nodding with a smile.

"We've got a fibrillation!" shouted another voice.

"Alright Cel!" Blade said into the phone, "Now!"

Abi screamed as hot pain burnt through her entire body, screwing her eyes tightly closed. Suddenly the pain stopped. She felt the same sensation as before - wet. Small objects all over her body. She opened her eyes and saw what she had seen lying on that table.

She tried to scream but couldn't, something was covering her mouth. Clawing out wildly she broke through the membrane on the pod and emerged into the warm air, pulling at the apparatus in her mouth and throat.

She flopped down on the edge of the pod, looking at her arms as if having never seen them before. She touched one of the black wires that protruded and withdrew quickly.

A humming, buzzing noise caused her to look up. The robot stopped in front of her, extending arms that grabbed her by the neck. She screamed as it did something to the huge plug in the back of her head, then passed out.

The next voice she heard was a familiar one. She opened her eyes, saw blurry metal outlines. The owner of the familiar voice came into view. She didn't know how she was seeing the man she watched die, but it made her feel good.

"Welcome to the real world, Abigail."

A shape appeared ahead of her. Her heartbeat ramped up the pace as it started walking towards her.

"Nice night for a walk, eh Chaste?" a voice growled behind her. She yelped in shock and a large pair of hands closed around her mouth. The other figure walked under a light and she groaned inwardly. He stopped just in front of her.

"Now what's a pretty girl like you doing out on her own at a time like this?" he said in a quiet but commanding voice. At the same time he nodded and the hands were released, but grabbed her arms should she try to flee.

"Taxi was late." she muttered, "That stupid bastard O'Neill probably fell asleep in his cab somewhere and missed the call."

"How insightful of you," said the man, pulling an object from his jacket, "He did fall asleep."

He thrust the object into her face. It was O'Neill's tag. Spots of dried blood decorated it. She felt sick.

"What do you want? I'm all paid up." she said shakily.

"It's time to find out exactly what effect the drugs had on you. Orders from the top."

She shook her head violently.

"No. No ... it's not time yet. You said I'd have more time!"

The man stepped closer. Abigail pushed herself backwards, leaning her weight against her captor, and kicked out hard, catching him in the chest.

He staggered back, then came closer, grabbing her face with one hand.

"You know the rules. You're gonna pay for that." he growled. The mystery hands clamped her to the spot, one covering her mouth as she let out a short scream.

The man ripped her jeans open and managed to get them off despite her struggles. He leered in the half light.

"I'm gonna enjoy doing you."

A large dark object thudded down behind him. He span round in time to meet a fist. He staggered to one side as it smashed into his temple. Using the wall as support to get his balance, he turned back and lashed out. The shadow figure caught his fist and quickly snapped the arm it was attached to.

Ignoring the screams of agony he pushed the man roughly aside. The other figure let go of Abigail and ran towards him.

He quickly pulled out a long, silver gun from his trenchcoat and planted a bullet cleanly into the attacker's forehead. Swinging around, he took aim at the broken armed man trying to run away.

Putput said the silver gun.

The man wailed as his kneecaps exploded outwards and collapsed to the ground.

Abigail shivered with fear, drawing her naked legs up to her chest as she sat against the wall, the dead body next to her leaking blood.

Her rescuer dropped the jeans onto her.

"Put these on, you'll get cold."

He offered a hand. She took it, let him pull her up.

"Who ... who? Are you?" she muttered, confused.

"I heard you scream, I just happened to be passing."

Abigail looked up. The two buildings either side of the alley were 12 storeys high.

"Passing ..." she said quietly, buttoning her jeans the best she could. "What is your name?"

"Call me LostProphet. Would you like me to escort you home?"

She swayed slightly.

"No, no. No I'll be .. I'll be fine. Thanks..thankyou. Thanks."

She walked slowly away, trying to hide the fact she was shaking uncontrollably as the adrenaline seeped away. She stepped out onto the main road, oblivious that her crippled attacker had vanished, and hailed a taxi that was driving by. She threw herself into the back seat and sighed as they sped away from the scene, not seeing LostProphet standing at the edge of the building above her, watching.

Part 2: Bath

The neural jack slid out of LostProphet's head as he yawned and stretched.

"Long night huh?" Brooch said as he returned to the operators chair to power down the system.

"Yeah. Hey, what was I fighting before? They were lupines, right?"

"One was. The one you capped twice after that nice little arm breaker was just a regular program. Well ... I say regular ... he was an exile."

"Huh. Don't see lupines cooperating with others very often. Where did that guy go?"

Brooch tapped back through the log files.

"Car picked up him by the look of things. System says his signal moved away rapidly before it got out of range. What was that all about anyway?"

Prophet hopped off the chair and walked over to the array of monitors.

"They were trying to rape some poor girl. Must've been about 21, 22 years old maybe. I just happened to be passing by when I heard a scream."

Brooch looked grave.

"Did they ..."

"No. I got there just in time it seems."

Brooch clicked the monitors off and patted LP's arm.

"You did good captain. She's lucky you were there. I'm off to bed. Goodnight sir."

"Night." Prophet replied, sitting down and powering the monitors back on. He cycled through his log files and found the code signature of the girl. A few seconds later he was running a search.

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Abigail lay back in the bubble-filled bath, watching as steam rose off the surface of the water, trying to forget yet at the same time concentrating on what had just happened.

LostProphet.

The name stuck in her mind. He had jumped ... jumped twelve storeys down ... and killed those men.

She froze suddenly, her blood running cold despite the hot bath water.

Dzar had still been alive. And she hadn't seen him when she hurried away. She knew then that he was still at large. Reporting back to his masters no doubt. She wouldn't have long left.

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Twenty minutes later the sky was starting to lighten, and it was time for sleep. She pulled down the blackout blind in her room and climbed into bed. Just as she was reaching for the lamp, the doorbell went.

"Fucking hell." she muttered, jumping out and throwing on a gown. She stamped out to the door and threw it open. She let go as she saw who it was and it bounced off the wall, slamming shut again.

She scabbled frantically at the deadlocks, shaking with terror, but it was no use. The man on the other side threw himself into the door. It crashed open and she was thrown hard against the wall, hitting her head. She blacked out instantly, her small body crumpling to the floor in a heap.

Part 3: Empty

LostProphet yawned and stretched as he left his quarters and entered the mess hall.

The ship was quiet. Orezoen and HotCandy were on their honeymoon, taking shoreleave for a couple of days. Jags had been spending more and more time in Zion at the behest of more senior decision makers than he.

He grabbed a roughly-fashioned metal tray, poured some of the nutritional supplement into it and sat down at the table. He found it easier to eat the stuff if you didn't actually think about what you were doing, so drifted off into a daydream.

He couldn't stop thinking of the girl. All night his head had been filled with the event, reliving it over and over. Something told him that he had stepped into something bigger than a simple assault.

The information he had sought out the previous night was fairly standard stuff. Regular bluepill living in a regular apartment leading - apparently - a regular life. He had checked out the surroundings, spent a while looking for lupine code signatures, but nothing showed up so he went to bed.

After washing his tray he headed up to the broadcast deck. Degu was jacked in, Cel keeping an eye on him.

"Hey. I was running a scan of a sector last night ..."

"Yeah I noticed the log file. Why on earth were you scanning there?" Cel said, arching one eyebrow.

"It's err...just something I wanted to check." he muttered, "Anyway, can you get me in there?"

"Now?"

"Yeah now. Don't want to use a hardline, just straight in."

Cel put her hands on her hips and gave him a stern look.

"Don't." LP said, "Just do it, please?"

**

The door to the broom cupboard clicked open and LostProphet stepped out casually. He walked down the corridor to the room he had followed the woman's signal to and found the door ajar.

"Hello?" he said, knocking gently. There was no reply, so he eased the door open and walked in.

"Hello! Anyone home?"

He stood and gazed around. Saw a spot of blood on the wall and tensed. Looking back at the door, he noticed that it had been forced open. Unholstering his gun, he performed a swift sweep of the apartment, but found nobody.

He flipped his phone open and dialed Cel.
"Pull up the code signature I was tracking last night. Scan the area for her."
"A 'her' huh? Well now I ..."
"CEL! Do it now this isn't a time to piss about!"
"Okay okay," she sounded a little hurt, "I've got nothing. Not in the building."
"Do a full scan."
"That'll take time ..."
"That was an order not a request! Get back to me."

Prophet pocketed the phone and began looking around the apartment. Tidy, neat, pretty stylish. But something was definitely lurking under the surface. He began to search the place.

Five minutes later, the phone rang.
"I've found her. I'm reading a faint signal at an Exile safehouse. There's some sort of blocking device around it, I can't read anymore than that."
"Download the location to my neural net," he said as he rifled through the bottom of the wardrobe, "I'll see what ... crap."
"What is it?"
"I've found something. I need to upload an object to you for analysis."
"OK. Creston Heights central is the closest hardline to you. It's pretty busy around there though..."
"I'll be careful."

Part 4: Interrogation

"Miss Chaste, it is unfortunate that such ... unpleasantness was experienced last night."

Abigail scowled up at the man in front of her. He was well built, wearing a smart pinstriped black suit with matching black shirt and tie.

"Do you know what they nearly did to me?!" she screamed, tugging at her restraints - they had tied her to a chair in the centre of the room. The man pulled a face and sighed.
"Unfortunately, yes. That was not part of the plan. You're lucky that you were rescued by ... that man. However, he meant it when he said we needed you. And here you are."

Abigail struggled more but knew she was going nowhere.

"Tell me, how do the drugs make you feel? May I remind you that holding out on us will only make things worse ... as you well know."
"They make me feel great," she snapped, "It's like multiple orgasms on tap. What's not to like."
The man smiled, "Anything else?"
"Heightened senses. Euphoria. But mostly the heightened senses. I keep hearing something ... it sounds like ... buzzing. Electricity. It's weird."

The suited man nodded again, then motioned two lupines over from the doorway.
"Take her to the testing area."

"HEY! I just told yomppph mrrrph mmmph!"

She struggled and kicked again and tried to dislodge the gag that had been swiftly tied over her mouth but it was futile. The lupines picked the chair up and took her away.

**

Two very large tattoo'd men stood motionless behind the large glass doors at the front of the building.

A black shape dropped down outside and unleashed a hail of bullets.

Two very large tattoo'd men lay motionless, surrounded by shattered glass.

LostProphet dropped his weapon by the bodies and walked into the foyer. Cel had managed to find the girl on the seventh floor, so he took the elevator.

*

The doors slid open quietly, and Prophet stepped out into the carpeted hallway. He readied his FM700 and tiptoed down the corridor to the first room.

Empty.

He hurried onto the next one. There was a man standing there looking out of the window, a phone plastered to his ear. Prophet shrugged and unloaded a clip into his back.

Immediately he heard running feet. He ran in and slammed the door behind him, engaging the lock and grabbing the phone from the dead hand.

"And to whom do I speak?" he said sweetly.

The voice on the other side was apoplectic with rage. Prophet listened to a stream of cursing in French, Italian and a little bit of Russian, then the dead tone.

The Merovingian. Again.

"I'm like a fuckin' magnet." Prophet said despairingly to the dead body, turning and taking down the lupines with his gun as they broke the door down. They writhed on the floor in pain. Despite headshots, they were still alive but very much incapacitated. It would be a while before their code regenerated.

"Lucky for you I'm out of silver bullets right now." he said, stepping over them and re-entering the hall.

He struck lucky on the final room.

It was large - the full width of the building, full of machinery and chemistry equipment. An elaborate distilling apparatus took up the entire east-facing wall. In the centre was a bed, with the girl on it. She was naked, and hooked up to equipment that was eerily familiar.

Prophet inadvertantly stepped backwards. Images flashed through his mind of the pods, of the tubes snapping away from his skin.

He shook his head as the girl began to scream.

Her eyes were wide open, her face a picture of terror as Prophet ran over to her. She clawed out, missing him by miles, clearly seeing something else.

He grabbed the thin wires and ripped them away from her, finding that they were just tiny electrodes.

Finally her screaming stopped, and her rigid body relaxed back onto the bed, her eyes still open but only seeing Prophet properly for the first time.

"You." she whispered, then passed out.