

Abi's Truth

The door slammed off its hinges and smashed against the opposite wall. The exile squad leader inside the room cowered in fear. He was unarmed, his guards should have stopped the intruder.

A black-suited man with a shock of brilliant white hair stepped through the doorway, a large gun in his right hand.

"Please ... please ... I'll tell you whatever you want!" the exile cried as the man raised the gun.

LostProphet ignored the bloody mess his gun had made of the exile's head and tossed the weapon aside. The computer in the corner was his primary goal. Hacking into it was easy - once you had studied the intricate code of the Matrix for long enough, this technology was primitive.

A ream of information, lists of files, appeared on the screen. Prophet jammed a thumbdrive into a port on the front of the machine and began downloading everything off the harddrive.

As he waited for the operation to complete, he clicked through one of the image folders.

A photo of Abi.

She looked more beautiful in the Matrix, but only because her hair was still short and boyish in the real world. Only a month had passed since she had been freed. Still feminine enough in every other way though, he mused with a smile. They had become ... close.

The computer beeped to acknowledge completion of the transfer as his phone began to ring.

Taking out the thumbdrive, he answered.

"The Oracle wishes to see you. It is urgent."

No mistaking Seraph's voice. He pocketed the phone and the information and attached a small device to the computer. He clicked a switch on it, the light changing from red to green. It began to whine as he left the room.

"EMPs are just so darn useful." Prophet said to himself with a grin as the lights went out on the floor. The computer was now totally useless. As was his mobile phone. Cursing himself for not jumping out the window, he made his way to the roof, and jumped.

**

"We should stop meeting like this," Prophet said as he was ushered into the Oracle's kitchen, "People will talk."

She didn't laugh.

"Problem?" he asked, taking off his jacket and hanging it on the back of a chair.

"I'm afraid there might be." she said, taking a long drag of her cigarette.

"It's Abigail, right? I've annoyed some important people."

"Careful LostProphet, you'll put me out of a job," she allowed herself a smile this time, "Abigail is indeed going to cause you some problems. Whatever the Merovingian's experiments did to her have ... altered her."

Prophet raised an eyebrow. Folding his arms he leaned back in his chair, sceptical.

"Of that I have no doubt. But she's free now. Her RSI is wiped clean. Free of any impurities of the system."

"No," the Oracle said abruptly, "It runs much deeper than that. Far more sinister. She is tainted, by nefarious deeds of both exile and machine."

Prophet stared at her, "What?"

"I can't say for certain. These are dangerous times, I don't want to say anything that will rock the boat anymore than certain people are already doing. Has she exhibited any unusual behaviour?"

"No. She's a lot faster than the standard bluepill we pull out, but there are always some that way."

The Oracle nodded gravely.

"Look over that data you commandeered today. Believe that anything is possible, even if you don't want it to be."

Prophet stood up and donned his jacket.

"I'm sorry but I'm in no mood for riddles. You have a message for me otherwise I wouldn't be here. Just tell me and I can go."

The Oracle sparked up another cigarette.

"She may be dangerous."

"To who?!"

"To you. To your crew. To the truce. All of us."

He glared at her behind his glasses, and stormed out.

As he descended in the elevator he tried to scrub out the sentence from his mind. But a little voice kept saying what he didn't want to hear.

She was never wrong.

**

Prophet chewed on the nails of his right hand, shifting uncomfortably as Cel sifted through the data he had recovered. She had gone through it whilst he ran a few errands for Tyndall, and she had found something worth looking at.

"Aha, here it is," she said, pointing to one of the screens on her right.

"What's it telling us?"

"Basically, the Merovingian wasn't the only one experimenting on Abigail. He was working with machine operatives."

"What?!"

"That's not the worst part. Whenever Abi injected herself with code, it triggered a real world event. The machines poured something into her actual body."

Prophet stopped chewing his nails.

"She was right," he said quietly.

"Who? Abi knew .."

"No. The Oracle. She said that Abi could endanger the truce. If Zion finds out about this ... if the machines find out we know ..."

"Hang on there sir. We don't know how high up this goes. For all we know they were rebel programs, acting under the machine radar."

Prophet began to pace.

"Alright ... okay, so I'll have to talk to them. We can straighten this out."

"That's not all." Cel interrupted.

"That's not all," Prophet parroted, "Of course it wouldn't be all. Nothing is ever fucking simple!"

Cel sat in silence as he fumed for a minute.

"Abigail still has this drug in her system. It didn't show up on the initial screenings but when I knew what to look for ... the problem is we don't know what it will do now she's out."

"Then it's time we found out." Prophet muttered, "Get in touch with Agent Pace."

* *

"Keep monitoring me at all times," Prophet said as Cel stood over him, readying his station for jacking in, "I want everything she says recorded. If we can, we keep this from Lock. If it goes wrong though ... he'll need to know."

"It can't go wrong. They've no way of getting at you." Cel said reassuringly.

"I dunno. Merovingian working with machines? If this goes all the way to the top, you can bet that French bastard gave the Agents some of that magical killcode that they accidentally gave the Assassin."

Cel lay her hand on Prophet's forehead and gently pushed him back onto the seat, "It will be fine," she said forcefully, sliding the needle into his skull.

* *

Prophet stepped into the meeting room. Agent Pace was already there.

"You're early," he said, taking off his glasses and nodding his head towards her.

"You're on time, LostProphet." she said, smiling and beckoning towards the table.

"Funny," he said as he sat down, "I've never been called my real name by an Agent before."

"Whether it is real or not is a matter we disagree on. I call you what makes you most at ease."

She unbuttoned her jacket and sat down, withdrawing her gun and placing it on the table. She cocked her head slightly, expecting him to do the same.

He smiled, removed his FM900 from his holster and put it alongside her Desert Eagle.

"As if I could even hit you." he said.

"Symbolic, more than anything," she replied, "Now to business. Your operator was very thorough with the information she provided me. Rest assured we are investigating this matter thoroughly."

Prophet sat back in his chair. He interlocked his fingers beneath his chin and rested on them.

"And you had no idea this was going on." he said sceptically.

"We had ... suspicions. We believe that a program in control of power plant substance regulations has been compromised. Unfortunately the program in question has vacated its storage. It is quite possible that the Merovingian made a deal with it to smuggle it into the Matrix if something like this occurred."

"I appreciate your candour, Agent Pace. However we need to find out what exactly this substance they pumped into her has done. Code manipulation is simple, and easy to purge once the RSI is free of the Matrix. This is not."

"Your operator gave me the details of your medical scans. Crude, but effective. We are working on a solution currently, our understanding of human beings is much greater than any of your greatest minds. The fact she is altered with our technology should help matters."

Prophet nodded solemnly.

"I am programmed to read emotion. I see you care very deeply about this girl. We will honour the truce, we will try and help."

"Thanks," he said, standing up and retrieving his gun, "If you need any other information, you know how to contact me."

* *

As LostProphet walked away from the building, a jogger smacked into him, sending them both sprawling on the pavement.

"Hey man, watch where you're going!" Prophet said with irritation. The jogger got up, and leant closely to his ear.

"The Starbucks on Fourth, ten minutes. Buy a large coffee and sit near the window, on the third table from the door."

Prophet clambered up, but the jogger was quickly gone. It was too crowded to engage in a chase. He looked at his watch. May as well. I could use some imaginary coffee.

Ten minutes later

A tall woman walked into the coffee house and casually looked around. She wore a long, form fitting black dress with a slit down the side. Her long black hair extended down to the middle of her back. She looked like she'd fallen out of a high class restaurant at 9pm into the middle of the day.

Prophet watched her buy a coffee, and was surprised to see her sit opposite him.

"And you are?" he asked, a bemused expression on his face.

"My name is not important. I have information you will find useful."

"Oh really," he said, still smiling, "Stocks and shares in the city?"

"Don't play around," she glowered, "Abigail. I know you met with the Agent earlier. That was a mistake."

Prophet narrowed his eyes, not that she could see them, "Why?"

"Because you don't know who you can trust. You certainly can't trust me. But I'll tell you what we were doing."

"Why?" he asked again.

"She's out now. We can do nothing with her anymore. You having this information is neither detrimental nor beneficial to us."

"Okay then, spill it."

"The drug was designed as a torture and a pleasure element all at once.

Sometimes we require information from minds plugged into the Matrix, and we need to play them. The methods are simple; cozy up to the target, supply them

with the drug in whatever packaging we like. The target feels good, feels happy, maybe gets careless. If not, then they are prepared for a larger shock dosage."

"What good does that do you?" Prophet asked, furrowing his eyebrows.

"Some minds can never be freed from the Matrix, they are too dependant on it. It is, however, amazing what results can be achieved when you force them to look beyond the walls of their prison."

Prophet slumped in his chair, "My god, you force them to wake up?"

"Only for a moment. But the experience is enough. They tell us anything we want to know. We haven't yet tested it on a free mind. It is so difficult to capture subjects nowadays with your new methods of emergency jackouts."

LostProphet stood up abruptly.

"You sick bastards." he hissed, and walked away. Her hand shot out and grabbed his arm.

"It's not just us. We worked with the machines don't forget. Question why they want such a tool."

"It was a splinter group. Programs gone bad ... like you. You think that the Merovingian will be able to distribute this drug into the real world now that the programs have gone into hiding?"

"Or have they?" the woman said softly, releasing his arm.

He walked quickly outside, breaking into a jog. By the time he was at the end of the road, he was running. He got to the intersection, kept running. A horn blared from his right.

Garbage truck.

He jumped, leaving the madness behind.

You have to trust somebody. Pace is the most obvious choice. Go with her.

As if on cue, his phone rang.

"LostProphet, this is Agent Pace."

"What can I do for you?"

"We need to see Abigail. Bring her to the Kalt Corporation building. Ask for Brown at the desk. You'll be shown to our floor."

click

**

LostProphet and Abigail stepped into the lobby of Kalt.

"We're here to see Brown." Abi said confidently.

"Walk through the detectors please." replied a guard, who looked like he'd welcome a quick death. They complied, and another guard took them to the floor that held Agent Pace.

"Thank you for coming so quickly," she said when they finally entered the room on the fifty-third floor, "Abigail, we will need to inject you with some code, it's only temporary.

"Yeah, sure thing." Abi said, rolling her up sleeve and accepting the needle.

//On the Cerberus

Cel frowned as she watched the screens.

"Hey Darianette, could you check on Abi's vitals? I think she just responded to some sort of signal in that code."

"Sure," Daria responded, walking over to Abi's chair and tapping the monitors, "Everything seems fine here ... hang on. Her temperature is rising a little. Could be nothing."

She brushed her hand along Abi's arm as she walked away and withdrew it sharply as she touched one of the plugs.

"What is it?" Cel asked.

Daria gingerly poked at the other plugs on her arms, "My god ... these things are burning hot!"

She ran back to the screens, tried to make sense of the situation but could see nothing.

"Her hair!" Cel screamed from the operator's chair as she saw smoke.

"It's singeing. Her cranial jack is ... its melting! You have to pull her out!"

//The Matrix

Abigail sat quietly whilst techs conducted various scans of her body.

"I guess the humans in this world won't see this kind of technology for a few years yet huh?" she said, looking at Pace, who merely smiled.

"Are you feeling OK?" Prophet asked nervously.

"Yeah, fine." Abi replied.

His phone rang.

"Yeah Cel?"

His face froze as he listened.

"Okay." he said, hanging up.

He put his phone away calmly, then whipped out a pair of guns in a flash and pointed them straight at Pace. She was already holding her weapon, aimed straight at him.

"What the fuck are you doing to her!" Prophet growled, pulling the hammers back on the weapons.

"This is necessary, LostProphet."

"Let us out of here. NOW!"

"You know I can't do that." Pace replied calmly.

Prophet swung the gun in his right hand to point at Abigail.

"What's going on?!" she shouted, fear in her voice.

"If I have to kill us both to get us out of here, I will." Prophet threatened.

The next second or two went on forever. He saw Pace's finger twitch, and pulled the trigger on the left gun. The opposing bullets left each gun together. That's when he pulled the right trigger.

//The Cerberus

They woke up together, gasping for air as the shock of near-death hit them both.

"What the hell is going on?!" Prophet demanded as Darianette pulled the jack from his skull and he stood up.

"Problems," she said, walking back to Abi's chair, "Her implants heated up. Burnt some of her skin, singed her hair. I gave her something to kill the pain for now."

"Hey! Her is lying down here. Can't you take this thing out of my head so I can sit up?" Abi demanded.

Darianette took a step back and sighed.

"No. It seems some parts of the cranial jack have fused with the implant in the back of your head. We can't remove it without getting you back to Zion for a full medical scan."

They stood (and lay) silently after this bombshell. Then the phone started to ring, then stopped.

"What the hell?!" Cel said, "It answered itself."

Prophet ran round to her, looked at the screens. Abi's chair was flashing red.

"Oh no ..." he whispered, looking over at her. Her eyes suddenly snapped closed, her head falling back onto the headrest.

"How the hell? She just jacked back in on her own!" Cel said, throwing her hands up.

"Or something pulled her back in." Prophet replied, running back round to his chair.

"Girls, get me in, and find her. Now."

* *

Abigail opened her eyes to find herself back in the room at Kalt. She was in a chair, but restrained this time.

"What the hell ... tell me what is going on here!" she demanded.

Agent Pace walked over to her.

"You're more important to us than you can possibly realise."

"Why?"

"We have successfully fused you to your interface in the real world, and bypassed the security systems on your ship. It wasn't difficult. Using you, we can tap into your navigational controls, your comm systems ... any computer systems connected to the network onboard your vessel. And the only way for them to stop us is to cut you off, killing you. They won't do that. They probably won't even figure out what's happening until its too late."

Abi glared at Pace and tried to pull herself free, to no avail.

"Why the hell would you want to do that?"

"There is an outpost on the surface. Your ship is going to destroy it."

"What?! I don't understand ..."

"It will reignite the war. This truce was never meant to last."

Agent Pace reached behind her right ear and pulled something. There was a flash of light around her body, and when it cleared, a dark haired woman in a black dress stood there in her place.

"Posing as the enemy is uncomfortable work," she said softly, tossing the small device she had removed to one side, "There are machines and exiles alike who believe the truce is folly. Do you realise that now humans are allowed to run amok in the Matrix without fear of retribution, it is us who are suffering the most? The Agents ... they pursue us relentlessly. Hunting us down for deletion. With the war in place once more, that will be over. We will flourish again."

She gusted to the technicians in the room, "Do we have access through her interface?"

They nodded and she made a small noise of satisfaction.

"Begin."

**

LostProphet popped out of the hardline at a run, a handsfree headset attached to his ear.

"I'm picking up her signal, but its fragmented." Cel reported, "We're getting a few glitches on our system, nothing I can't handle. They do seem to be pointing back at the Kalt building. I'd suggest heading there."

He kept running, passing in between pedestrians and outrunning the slow moving traffic. The towers of Kalt's complex loomed over the rest of the district; he wasn't far away.

**

Abi struggled feebly against her restraints. She could feel her whole body buzzing as the technicians pumped control data through her and back to the Cerberus.

**

"What the hell is going on with our systems today?" Cel muttered to herself as she tried to focus on pinpointing Abigails location.

The ship clunked and shifted.

"Degu, did you go to navigation?" she asked through the comm.

"Negative. I'm still down at the gun room."

"Well ... I think someone just moved the ship. Take a look would you?"

A few minutes passed before the answer came.

"Cel. The pads are powered up. They're in flight configuratio...oh shit. Cel we're moving. The ship is taking off."

"Well stop it!"

"I can't take manual control!"

**

LostProphet stood atop the building opposite the main Kalt building, his coat flapping gently in the wind. He knew he could make the jump - just about - but whether he could get the right floor was a gamble. He walked to the other end of the building and mentally prepared himself.

**

Abigail struggled further against her restraints, her skin beginning to feel like it was burning as her RSI was bombarded with data and her mind in the real world struggled to process it all.

As she focused all her strength, her entire body flashed with a golden light for a second. Shocked, she fell back into the chair.

"What the hell was that?!" the woman demanded as the technicians looked confused.

"We just got massive packet loss. It's like she just rejected everything."

"What was that flash of light?! I .. felt it too. A disturbance in the code."

"Yeah, code distortion. Just a ripple, nothing more. We're still on track."

The woman walked over to Abigail and grabbed her by the neck.

"I don't know how you did that, but do NOT do it again you little bitch."

Abi stared back at her defiantly and smirked until the woman let go and left. Now she had an edge. She began to focus her concentration and energy on repeating the feat.

If I do it when they try sending something huge ... maybe I can get out of here.

**

Prophet was back at the edge of his building. He focused on the floor he was aiming at, and saw something beautiful.

Window cleaners.

They were two floors down and four windows away to the right. This would be a lot easier.

He took a deep breath - for effect - and jumped.

**

"So you got with that girl last night dude?" Simon asked his colleague.

"Damn right, did you see her? She was all over me!" he replied, applying washing solution to the next window.

"So did you ..." Simon ventured.

"Dude, she could suck a golfball through a straw."

They were too busy sniggering to even comprehend what happened next. LostProphet landed between them. A swift palm to the chest sent Simon flailing over the side of the tiny apparatus, and a kick despatched his colleague a moment later.

He quickly located the controls, and began to move towards his destination.

**

The Cerberus screamed across the surface at terminal velocity. Degu was beaten, couldn't unlock the controls.

HotCandy had joined him at navigation, couldn't figure out where they were going.

"What's that in the distance?" Degu muttered, squinting out of the cockpit.

HotCandy brought up holographics, waited for it to map out what it saw.

"Oh shit. It's some sort of machine installation. On this trajectory we'll collide with it in about ten minutes!"

**

Prophet stood outside the room Abi was being held in. All the attention was on her. He took a small device from his coat and attached it carefully to the centre of the huge window.

He was preparing to descend when he saw the light, literally. The small figure in the chair began to glow.

*

"Stop it you stupid bitch!" the woman screamed at Abi, drawing a gun, "I'll kill you!"

Abi looked up at her and raised her eyebrows. She knew that wouldn't happen. Her skin was crawling and she felt surreal as her entire body glowed with light.

Segments of the air around her turned to golden code as the distortion ripped into the fabric of the Matrix.

*

Prophet watched as Abi disappeared into a ball of golden code. She would emit a wave of it, then it would destabilish completely, dissolving out of sight as the next wave came, bigger than the last. The woman inside was backing away fearfully. "It's not Pace ..." he whispered, suddenly becoming aware that he'd lost his handsfree device. Cel couldn't hear him anymore and he didn't want to risk using his phone.

The window began to vibrate. Slowly at first but increasing in intensity rapidly. Prophet realised at the last second what would happen.

Harmonics.

The window shattered into tiny pieces at the same instant as he spun around and crouched, trying to protect himself. It was over in an instant. Immediately he leapt through the window.

"ABIGAIL!" he cried, unloading his clip into the technicians. The golden wave didn't stop growing.

"Tell me how to stop this!" he yelled at the woman, grabbing her roughly. She looked scared.

"I .. don't know. We shut down transmission a few minutes ago!"

He pushed her aside, steeled himself, and walked through the golden code. The hair on his head singed. The floor underfoot was melting. Wind howled around inside the strange vortex.

"Abi, can you hear me?!"

She sat in the chair, tears streaming down her face.

"I can't stop it!" she cried, "It just keeps getting ..." she jerked forwards as another wave hit her, "You have to get out. It's coming."

"What? Abi what's ..."

"GET OUT!" she bellowed.

He reached out to her, and she suddenly recoiled. She stared upwards, her mind seeing something nobody else could, and then went limp.

Time slowed for LostProphet.

Everything around him appeared as scrolling green code. Abi's code was red. Then as soon as it had appeared, it was gone.

The golden code shrank back to Abi's body, then exploded outwards. Prophet was ripped from the floor and hurled backwards through the air, along with the contents of the entire floor of the building.

As he fell, he tried to move, to improve his chances of landing alive. His limbs wouldn't respond.

As he fell, his eyes began to cloud. Images of the hovercraft began to flicker on and off, and screams from Cel and Darianette accompanied them.

Unknown to him, Abigail had overloaded the systems onboard the Cerberus. They were both being fried alive.

The ground loomed closer. Sirens wailed as police, fire brigade and Agents all sped to the scene.

A moment later he slammed into the roof of a car and lay there, battered and broken.

He was aware of people screaming around him. Then suddenly he was onboard the Cerberus. Flames licked around his head.
Back into the Matrix. A police helicopter flew overhead.

Abigail sat in her chair. The floor was empty now. Windows blown out on all sides, contents showered over the streets below. She blinked, saw green code. One more violent spasm shocked through her body, and then the world winked out of existence.

**

Cel doused the flames as another console exploded. They were still hurtling on to certain destruction.

"Get to the rear of the ship!" she yelled into the comm.

Another console exploded and then, instantly, everything switched off.

The Cerberus dropped like a stone and impacted the surface. Due to its velocity it skipped off and took to the air again.

Cel hung on to anything she could and made it to the comm again.

"Mayday Mayday! This is Zion ship Cerberus, we are going down! Repeat we are going down! Send assistance!"

The side of the ship tore away like the lid of a can as they smashed into the surface again, the freezing air extinguishing the fires.

They skidded for hundreds of meters, encased in the dark metal shell, before finally coming to a stop.

Cel clambered over the wreckage to what was left of the jacking in stations. She reached Abigail first. Somehow the neural jack had freed itself from the fused metal and she slid it free. She checked for a pulse and a wave of relief washed over her.

She scrambled over to LostProphet.

A pulse, but a weak one.

**

"She's awake!" yelled a nurse as Abi sat up and vomited all over the floor. Lying back, she opened her eyes and gazed around blearily.

"What happened?"

Cel appeared in her field of view. She stroked Abi's hair and smiled weakly.

"Do you remember anything?"

"Everything," Abi replied, her voice shaking, "Everything up to completely obliterating the floor of that building, and then I was here."

"You saved us, but destroyed the Cerberus. Can you explain how that happened? We took off ... we ended up flying on a collision course with a machine outpost. What was that all about?"

Abi struggled to sit upright and accepted a glass of water that a nurse brought in.

"The exiles. They were using my neural interface to control the ship, somehow they figured out how to do it. I figured out a way to fight back. When I did,

something happened in the Matrix, like a bomb going off around me. I severed their connection."

"That shut down the core of the ship in mid-flight at top speed. Though I dread to think how much worse it would have been if we'd actually crashed into that thing."

Abi gazed around the room. LostProphet lay in the bed opposite. He was hooked up to a lot more machinery than she was.

"What happened to him?" she said, fighting back tears, "He was with me .. I told him to get out ..."

"Honestly? We don't know." Cel replied, "When the rescue ships came they stabilised him, but we've been unable to wake him. That's ... that's all I know."

A nurse walked over to Prophet's bed and studied the monitors, scribbled something on a notepad and walked away.

"You should get some rest." she said to Abi, then hurried away.

She caught up to the nurse outside the medical bay and pressed her for details on her captain's status.

"I'm afraid it's not looking good," the nurse replied, "He's in some sort of comatose state. As we can't get any data logs from your ship we have no idea if he was jacked in or out when you went down. The machine hardware in his head is cooked pretty badly, and the tissue around it is inflamed. Only if that inflammation goes down will we be able to see how bad the damage is."

**

The sun was setting on Tabor Park. Pigeons pecked around at crumbs scattered earlier by passers by. The chessman sat in the same spot he did every day, studying his game and playing against himself.

A figure strode slowly through the park. The steps measured, precise. Controlled.

The chessman looked up. The person standing before him was dressed in a brilliant-white Gi that seemed to radiate light. Tiny pieces of green code escaped from the hems and showed themselves through the artificial fabric of the Matrix. He sat down on the other side of the board.

"We shall play a new game." he said, nodding his head. The pieces rearranged themselves instantly. The chessman tried to look through his glasses into his eyes, but they were perfectly reflective.

"What happened?" he asked his new opponent, "Your code is complex, I've never seen anything like it before."

"An accident." came the reply, in a soft, calm voice.

"Are you really here?"

"No. Therein lies my greatest strength. Now I see the system for what it is. I have control now."

They sat in silence, playing chess for a long while.

Finally the chessman placed his pieces in a near-unbeatable move. His opponent sat thoughtfully for a few moments, then played.

"Checkmate." the soft voice said.

"Unbelievable," the chessman breathed, "Nobody has ever beaten that."
"My vision is unclouded. I will achieve what I must."
He stood up, a shining beacon in the dimming light.
"Thank you for the game."
He bowed his head, then vanished effortlessly into the sky, the arc of the hyperjump so high that he almost left vertically.

Another figure, lurking in the darkness, put a finger to his earpiece as he watched.

"We will continue tracking him .. for now."

**

The white-robed man strode onto Fifth Avenue from a side street. Pedestrians stopped abruptly, shrank away from him as if in fear.
He gazed at them as he walked slowly down the sidewalk. A patrol car coming the other way stopped and two policemen leapt out.
"Sir, please stop where you are."
He complied. One hung back, gun raised, as the other walked towards him.
"Quietly please sir, and we can leave these people in peace."

As he got closer, the man's right arm shot out, landing a punch squarely on the law enforcer's nose. His skull collapsed inwards and his body crunched to the floor.

Everyone, man and woman alike, screamed and ran for their lives. The other policeman opened fire. The man walked towards him as the bullets impacted and destroyed themselves against his body, and did the same thing.

Immediately sirens filled the air. The pedestrians had all fled.
It was what the Agents wanted.

Only one car arrived, a black sedan. The three dark suited figures stepped out a few yards from their target.

"You are an anomaly of this system, you must be purged." Agent Brown intoned.
They walked towards him as one.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked calmly.

"You are nobody. You are an anomaly of this system, you will be deleted." Brown repeated.

"I am the Lost Prophet. You cannot prevent what I am here to achieve."

Brown lunged at him. He blocked, parried, then drove his fists hard into Brown's chest. The Agent froze, his face panicked and confused as the hands disappeared inside him.

LostProphet withdrew, leaving the Agent to drop to his knees.

"Your code will soon expire. You cannot prevent what I am here to achieve."

**

Commander Lock flicked through the images of the stricken Cerberus on the panel in his office.

He thumped the desk. He didn't need this. Zion didn't need this. Their resources were already stretched thin enough as it was.

There was a knock at the door and he invited the visitor to enter. One of his aides dashed in with a PDA-like device in his left hand.

"Sir, it's a priority transmission from Echosnare aboard the Servo." he said, handing it to his superior.
Lock took it and waved him out, only activating the device when the door was closed.

"Commander, this is Captain Echosnare of the Servo. We have just received a call from within the Matrix, from an assistant of the Oracle known as Seraph. Something is seriously wrong in there and I think it has something to do with LostProphet. He requests that you send his new recruit into the Matrix as soon as possible."

The video feed closed. Lock sat back in his chair and sighed. He thumped the desk again.

**

One hour later

**

The door to the block of flats snapped open sharply when LostProphet was still a good twenty meters away. He entered, turned left to the lift which was already open and waiting for him.

The doors closed and he nodded towards the control panel. The buttons lit up, doors closed, and he ascended.

When he reached the Oracle's apartment, he found Seraph standing guard next to her in the kitchen.

"Now what have you gotten yourself into." she said in a motherly, disapproving tone.

"You know why I am here." LostProphet said, gazing around the kitchen. His clothing made Seraph look positively dirty.

"Yes, I know. So do those more powerful than you. Your Residual Self Image fused with segments of the code that were ripped from the Matrix when Abigail caused that rift. The Merovingian and his cronies have severely damaged the Matrix, it will take them a while to repair the cracks. I hope he learnt his lesson."
"That wasn't my question."

"I know. You are partly who you were. The rest of you is constructed of whatever your code fused with. You're a mess, LostProphet."

LostProphet sighed deeply.

"You are telling me what I already know. I am here for one reason only."

"Oh? And what is that?"

"Humanity is enslaved. I can bring freedom to our people, now that I have the sight. I require access to the Architect. You will take me to him."

The Oracle lit another cigarette and took a deep drag on it.

"I wasn't telling you that stuff you know. It was for your friend's benefit."

LostProphet wheeled around. Abigail stood at the entrance to the kitchen.

"I'm so sorry for what I did to you. But this isn't who you are."

"You cannot stop what I am here to achieve." he said dispassionately.

"When you told me about the Matrix, when I was free, you told me that the only way for us to survive was to work together with the machines. Find a balance, that's what you said."

She stepped forward, reached out and placed a hand against his cheek.

"You ... you cannot stop .. what I am here to achieve." he stammered, swaying a little.

"Please Prophet, listen to me. You're lying in Zion in a coma, and now I know why. Part of you is still locked inside. Come back home. To me." She stepped closer and kissed him.

"Abi ..." he whispered, falling to his knees.

She whipped out her phone.

"Echo, do you have it ready?"

"Affirmative. Ready when you are."

She helped Prophet to his feet and looked at the Oracle, who nodded to Seraph.

"Take him outside. Hurry, he won't have much time."

Together they hurried him downstairs and outside. The phonebox on the corner was ringing. They jammed him inside, and Abi took the receiver off the hook and pressed it to Prophet's ear.

There was a blinding light, then he was gone.

* *

Echosnare ran full pelt down the walkway to the medical centre, throwing pedestrians aside with his right arm - his left hand clutched the hard drive that contained the fragmented pieces of LostProphet's RSI.

No human fully understood the connection between the body, mind and Matrix. Echo didn't know if this would work, but it was the only solution.

He crashed through the doors into the medical bay, and managed to draw himself up sharply and through a salute to the waiting Commander Lock.

"I received your communicate a few minutes ago, captain. Is this the disk?"

"Yes, sir. I will brief you later on the exact situation, but suffice it to say, this disk contains the missing part of LostProphet."

Lock took the disk and disappeared into the ward.

Inside, LostProphet was still hooked up to the medical equipment, but was now also connected to a neural jack, giving him access to a localised construct.

Lock handed the disk over to a technician.

"How long will this take?"

"Hopefully only a few minutes, sir." the tech replied, hooking the drive up to a terminal and starting a loading program.

*

LostProphet opened his eyes and saw the white nothingness of a construct. He circled around, looking for something, someone. There was nothing.

"Hmmm, this is weird," he remarked out loud. He began to walk, then darkness enveloped him once more.

*

"We've successfully merged his RSI fragments, all data has been downloaded back to his brain. We should see some results soon, his mind was showing standard neural activity during that procedure." the technician reported.

Lock walked over to Prophet's bed and looked down at him.

"Can you here me captain?"

Nothing.

"LostProphet?"

Still nothing. Then his eyes snapped open.

"Captain? Captain this is Commander Lock, can you respond?"

Prophet sat upright, grabbed Lock's tunic tightly with both hands and stared at him, eyes wide and wild.

"Danger!" he gasped, "Matrix ... exiles ... agents ... Abigail!"

Lock fought to free himself and pushed Prophet back onto the bed.

"NOTHING IS AS IT SEEMS!" Prophet cried as his pulse skyrocketed and nurses ran over to him.

"He's going into shock! Let's sedate and stabilise him!"

* *

Two hours later, Prophet hadn't woken up again.

Abigail sat patiently and tearfully by his bedside, holding his hand, praying for a miracle. His mind showed normal activity but refused to wake his body up.

Everyone was baffled, and worried.

The machine implants were still an unknown quantity. They had successfully connected him to the reconstruction program, but couldn't know if he would be able to jack in again.

That's if he ever woke up.