

## The Meeting

Xenthi blipped the throttle of her bike as she downshifted through the gears, coming to a halt outside a derelict block of flats, a building which many awakened minds had seen before.

Dismounting, she entered the building and took the lift, instinctively, somehow, knowing what floor to take, and what door to enter when she got there.

Xenthi didn't know everything about her target but, to her mind, she knew enough. And she had murder on her mind.

The lift doors trundled slowly open to reveal the dim, dank corridor beyond. She stepped out, wondering why such an awesomely powerful figure should choose to dwell in such squalor.

The light above the door was blinking, as if a visual representation of the one she should open. As her hand closed around the handle, it winked out and Xenthi smiled - it was a sign.

To her mild surprise, the door opened when she turned the knob and she crept in quietly; the sound of a radio drifted from the kitchen, along with an old woman's singing voice, muffling her progress further.

Finally Xenthi reached her target. The Oracle stood at the stove, her back to her assassin.

"Hello, Oracle." Xenthi intoned in a voice fit for an Agent.

"Hello, Xenthi." the Oracle replied, turning around with the bubbling pot in her hand.

Xenthi hurled the knife.

The Oracle flicked the pot upwards in a flash, her apparent age belying her speed and agility. The boiling water splashed onto the floor and the knife bounced harmlessly off the metal.

Xenthi had already removed her bike helmet and flicked it into the air, withdrawing slightly to deliver a powerful kick that would send it hurtling at her target.

She stepped back into someone. White-robed arms closed around her midriff and suddenly the room was spinning, as her captor spun and hurled her against the wall of the living room. The plasterboard crunched inwards as she hit it, quickly picking herself up and adopting a kung fu stance.

"You must be Seraph," she growled as he came towards her for another attack. She timed the move perfectly and, with any other assailant, it might have worked, but not with this assailant.

Xenthi leapt into the air and shot out a leg to connect with Seraph's jaw. In one fluid motion, the small asian man caught her foot and swung her hard through the air, letting go at a precisely calculated point.

She crashed heavily into a cabinet with a shriek of surprised fury and scrambled amongst the smashed crockery in an attempt to get up.

"This will stop now," Seraph said softly, walking over to the cabinet and toppling it hard onto her.

Xenthi lay still.

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"Interesting," the Oracle mused as she exhaled, gentle wisps of smoke rolling from her tongue and drifting lazily towards their doom at the blades of the slowly revolving ceiling fan, "I've never been jumped by a Zionist before."

Xenthi gazed blearily and hatefully at the old woman sitting opposite her. Her hands were tied, and she flicked her head savagely to remove the blood that dribbled down her forehead.

"I would've had you if you'd been alone," she spat, glaring at the white-robed man standing behind the Oracle.

"Perhaps," she replied whimsically, taking another long drag on the cigarette, "Now then, down to business. I know that you hate my guts, that you hate all our guts, however artificial those guts may actually be."

"Ya think? Anybody could have come to that conclusion after what just happened," Xenthi snarled, struggling against her restraints.

"So much hate in such a fragile body. You'll do yourself an injury if you're not careful. Perhaps we should discuss it?"

"I have nothing," she spat blood onto the floor, "to discuss with you."

"Maybe so. But right now you're all tied up with nowhere to go. So maybe you can listen instead."

The Oracle stubbed out her cigarette and lit another one.

"They say those things can kill you," Xenthi muttered sullenly.

"I like living dangerously," the Oracle replied with a mischievous smile, her eyes sparkling with the energy and fire of somebody much younger, "Now, let me see. I know about the information that you received - accidentally, it must be said. Apparently you haven't had a chance to access the Zion Archives yet, see how it all began. Humanity isn't as blame-free as you appear to think."

"How do you know what I think? You don't know me."

"Oh come now dear, you come running in here, throwing your little knives and ruining my living room, not to mention the potatoes that I was preparing," she indicated the water on the floor and the potatoes on the sideboard, "and what for? You're on a Zion crew, and you know how most of them see me ..."

"I have no idea why," Xenthi snapped.

"... yes, it is a bit silly. But they do what they must, just as we all do. But to me, the only logical explanation is that you hate machines and all their creations. But the question is, for what purpose would you destroy me? I may have served a powerful purpose once, but now I am merely a guide, a voice that others can choose to listen to or to ignore. Unless of course, you're hoping to get to the Architect."

Xenthi's eyes flashed a recognition.

"Ah yes, of course. Let me tell you something, Xenthi. There is only one way to get to the Architect, and right now that way is closed. The Keymaker does not exist in this iteration of the Matrix, the doors that he once opened are sealed shut. Smith himself could not reach him, even with all of the powers he possessed. Ah, I see you are confused. Not been through all your training simulations?"

Xenthi's mouth flapped open and closed a few times.

"How can you come in here with enough conviction to kill when you don't even have the full facts? I suggest you go back to school, young lady. If you still want to kill me ... then make an appointment. Seraph."

Seraph walked around the table and undid Xenthi's bonds with a rapid flourish. She sat still, staring at the smouldering ashtray on the table, tears of anger, frustration and embarrassment stinging her eyes.

The Oracle and her eternal protector walked into the living room and began slowly to tidy the mess that the fight had caused. A few minutes later Xenthi walked sullenly past them and left the apartment. It was to be a turning point in her life, and the next few weeks would provide her with a hitherto unforeseen understanding of the reality of the conflicts that currently raged inside her mind.