

## Foray to the Surface World

Forks of 'lightning' arched out from the pads of the Cerberus as it rose slowly out of a huge chasm. Not that the pilots would have known - or cared - but they were emerging into the centre of what was, hundreds of years ago, known as MegaCity 1, and previous to that, New York City.

The electrical discharges from the pads struck out at the towering hunks of metal nearby; shells and fossils of buildings long forgotten.

A figure quietly walked into the navigation pod dressed in scruffy, tattered garments, a hood pulled over his shaven head.

"Cel, set her down in that clearing", the figure pointed through the grimey windows.

"Sure 'Prophet," the woman in the pilots chair replied, "Engaging landing gear."

The ship vibrated gently as the feet unfolded from its underbelly, and its tail began to swing round to point the vessel in the opposite direction. It was standard procedure. Even now with the truce, you always landed your ship facing the quickest "get out" route, just in case.

LostProphet clung to an overhead bar as the Cerberus touched down and shuddered violently. The landing dampers needed maintenance, but such a commodity was in short supply back at Zion right now.

"Where are the others?" Cel enquired, brushing away jet black hair where it hung over her eyes.

"Asleep. And that's the way it's going to stay." LP said firmly.

"It's protocol ..." the pilot began.

"Yes, it is. But this is distinctly an unofficial mission. I'm bending protocol to not put the others at risk."

"So you do admit there's risk." Cel pressed.

"Of course," LostProphet smiled, "But isn't that always the way."

With that he was gone from the navigation pod and hurrying to the lower deck.

Once there, he took a hydraulic control from the wall and opened a hatchway, which folded out from the hull creating a walkway to the surface.

Taking a gun from the rack nearby, he walked to the end of the ramp. A bitter wind ripped through his clothing and deafening claps of thunder rolled overhead.

"One small step for man ..." he muttered under his breath, stepping out for the first time in his life onto the surface, onto the world of his ancestors.

The ground felt ... like ground. He didn't quite know why he was surprised at this. Gradually he picked his way across the surface, until he was a few hundred yards from the Cerberus. The huge battleship looked like it belonged in this place, with its hull built from scrap metal, itself probably hundreds of years old.

He shook off the thought. It might look like this place, but at least it was still alive.

The gently humming, glowing pads confirmed this, and made him feel a little more secure.

Since he was freed, since he had gone through the "Desert of the Real" initiation program, he had wanted to stand on the surface for himself. Now he just wanted to get the hell away again.

As the hatch closed again, Cel was there to meet him.

"The link to the Matrix is strong up here, we could probably hack in if we wanted."

"How do you know that?"

"We got a message, routed through a Legerity operative inside. The ways we keep managing to use the machine's systems without them knowing never fails to amaze me" she said, a smirk betraying something else.

LostProphet stared her down.

"What's the message. Something tells me its not a regular bulletin"

"Bingo. Something's going down. Brooch jacked in before we left to come out here to investigate the strange Lupine sightings in the Shinjuku neighbourhood ..."

"And he saw nothing. This I know."

"... but we have confirmed intel of other weird sightings. Awakened's talking about "grey" being the only path, calling themselves weird names. They sound like machines plugged in, if you ask me."

As she spoke, they had been walking, now they were back at the navigation pod.

"So what are we going to do? I could jack you in here, take a look ..."

"No. Get us back underground. I ... don't trust this place." LP replied, looking sideways at the bleak landscape outside.

"It will be several hours before we can plug you in ..."

"I know. Just do it."

With that LostProphet stalked back to his quarters. Something had gotten to him just being outside. Confronting the past is never an easy experience.