

THIRTY

Jimmy started climbing the intricate fiberplast lattice at two in the morning. The Forbidden City colony swayed above his head. He badly wanted a smoke. The colony's layered, fiber-reinforced plastic nests were strung between the decaying iron and concrete pylons beneath a stand-alone, three-block-long section of collapsed Interstate 80. Spray-painted "1.26.87," this dark, sullen freeway fragment was near the crumbling ruins of the abandoned design center at the Highway 101 interchange, in the heart of the SOMA wildzone.

"The Deep 400s," the neighborhood was called, for the 400 Rabbits symbiont that had launched a midnight guerrilla attack from a blighted Bryant and 6th Street warehouse almost four years ago. A pair of miniature shoulder-fired cruise missiles with semtex warheads were fired at the affluent Treasure Island tower. The missiles had flown on parallel paths, following the broken line of the quake-buckled freeway and skeletal Bay Bridge. They took out six floors in the middle of the tower. Seventeen of the world's wealthiest people were among the thirty-two dead. The double blast, sudden and loud, had knocked Jimmy out of bed in Oakland. He'd watched the incandescent inferno from his living room, reflected in a still, black Lake Merritt. Damage from the explosions closed off full access to the tower's upper floors for more than three years while repairs were made.

Dim lights peered here and there through the tangled habitat of the Forbidden City colony overhead, allowing Jimmy to

pinpoint the entrance as he climbed. He could smell burning wax on a fetid wind.

He had stopped to ask directions from the tattooed and scarified street punk tending to the pyramids of candles illuminating the starwalk shrine a half block away, on 7th near Harrison. The intricate silvered face of the fully restored Treasure Island tower rose over silhouetted trees on ink-black Yerba Buena Island. Three new, obsidian-black antimissile and anti-aircraft launch rings girded the ultimate gated community for the super wealthy.

“Harrison and Sherman, westside entrance,” the punk had said. “Third cocoon on the left, after the turn.”

He fit in the earplugs, and had both the gun and tranquilizer quickshot drawn and ready before stepping into squatter territory. Unfortunately, everything was twists and turns in this slinky, unsteady hallway. He arbitrarily picked a sharper turn in the labyrinth, then counted down. He took a deep breath and slammed through the clinging door flap.

A beefy young man with long, stringy hair sat in his underwear amidst scattered garbage, smoking a pipe.

“Hey, man, you got no right busting in here,” he said, getting easily to his feet. Jimmy noticed a robe embossed with the Casino Doda logos on the habitat webbing’s undulating floor.

“Where’s Angel Cakes?” Jimmy jerked his gun with one hand and yanked out an earplug with the other, still crouching, because the ever-shifting floor wouldn’t permit a defensive stance. “Angela Katherine Steele?”

“I didn’t invite you,” the kid shouted, brandishing the pipe as he took a step. With the build of a wrestler, he had ten centimeters and fifty kilos on Jimmy. “Man, you better just leave. Now!”

The pungent eucalyptus smell, the violent flush in the young man’s cheeks, his swollen, unfocused eyes—they all indicated

the kid's thelema addiction. The drug produced feelings of excessive confidence, if not invulnerability. Jimmy knew the kid would feel neither pain nor fear, so when the kid took another step toward him, Jimmy shot him in the left leg. He'd aimed for and hit the meaty part of the thigh.

"Whyth'helldidjadothat?" The kid fell, and laughed.

Jimmy grabbed him, threw a chokehold around his neck, and jammed the gun against his right temple.

"Angie," he demanded. "Angel Cakes."

"Long gone, man." The young man giggled. Blood splattered on the webbing. "Hey man, lighten up. She ain't going back to the God Hive. She left for the Free City ages ago."

"Palm Springs?"

"Got it, man." The kid chortled. "If you're going after her, better beware. She got a black widow mouth."

The kid laughed hysterically. Jimmy dumped him and crawled out the way he had come. He called 911 on his audio skein to report the shooting, uncertain anyone would respond.