

began walking down the sidewalk. He saw that he was on the edge of the Queen Anne district, an area he'd visited during his college years just before the walls went up. Unlike the L.A. and San Francisco Zones, the neighborhood looked much as it did back then—a low-key mix of working-class grit and artistic creativity. Cargo pants and ripped jeans appeared to be the local fashion of choice, topped by oversized sweaters, hoodies or flannel shirts.

As far as Blake could see, there were no police around. Chilled from the rain and conscious of how his Matlock-issue button-down shirt stuck out in the world of grunge, he ducked into a thrift shop and shelled out a few dollars for a gray University of Washington sweatshirt. Feeling semi-invisible in its snug embrace, he set off for the Space Needle a half-dozen blocks away.

He'd nurtured a fantasy that Blue, Serena and Gully would be waiting for him at the old tourist attraction with open arms, but the pavement around the structure was wet and empty. Disappointed, he turned and headed back for Queen Anne, trying to figure out how he could safely pass some time. Like the other Urban Zones, the Seattle UZ teemed with musicians. People of all ages were busking on the street, banging away inside coffee shops and bars, or jamming in basement apartments, their amplified notes floating up out of ground-level windows. From what Blake could hear, all the famous Seattle-area groups were prominently featured: At least a dozen bands were channeling Nirvana or Pearl Jam, and he was also picking up snatches of Soundgarden, Alice in Chains, and Screaming Trees. Compared to San Francisco, many of the people seemed aloof or downright hostile, but the political activity was the heaviest he'd seen. Signs calling for a populist uprising were plastered on virtually every wall and lamppost, and the sidewalks were filled with men and women soliciting donations or collecting signatures for petitions.

In one small square, a woman stood on a milk crate giving an impassioned speech about the economy. "The super-rich are siphoning dollars out of the middle-class service sector," she screamed, "and what are they doing with it? Putting it into transnational companies that pay no taxes, and speculating in the markets with their super-computers—skimming more money every day off the investments held

by everyone else. They have just one goal, people: to make the rest of us poorer and poorer! Why? So we can be hired by *them* for next to nothing! Listen to me, Seattle, when I tell you that their collective assets are the modern equivalent of the Pharaohs' pyramids. Their boats and houses and private planes are temples to a religion of greed! Meanwhile we, the non-rich, stand here exposed to the rising waters and growing heat—the heat *they* refuse to do anything about, as they sit in their air-conditioned offices and homes!”

It was actually a decent summary of the Leveler philosophy, thought Blake, as he listened to the crowd murmuring agreement. Heading down the street, he came on a group staging an impromptu demonstration outside a second-hand music store, chanting the same “Set the Music Free!” song he'd heard in L.A. Half-wondering whether they were protesting the Rock Ban or the prices of the instruments in the store window, Blake kept walking, scanning the landscape for any sign of the police.

On the next block, a thin youth sat alone on a stoop playing an acoustic guitar. Blake stopped to listen as the kid leaned over the fret-board, singing in a plaintive tenor voice.

*Did you ever lose your mother's love?  
Did you ever lose your mother's love  
And cry for her in vain?  
Did you ever lose your mother's love?*

Closing his eyes, the boy launched into a soulful refrain:

*How can we maintain...  
In a world with so much pain?*

As Blake tossed a five-dollar bill into his open case, the youth set down his guitar on the steps beside him. “One day when this Rock Ban gets deep-sixed, I'm gonna be famous,” he said. He eyed Blake shrewdly. “You're new in town, right? How'd you like a guided tour? I know all the legend spots.”

“Legend spots?” Blake repeated, unsure what he meant.

“Sure. I can show you where Nirvana recorded *Bleach*, and where Pearl Jam played their first gig. I even know where Jimi lived when he was little.”

“What’s the charge?”

The boy shrugged. “Whatever you can pay.”

As the kid stowed his guitar into its case, Blake noticed his hands trembling. Then he saw the needle bruises on the boy’s inner arms and felt a pang of sadness. He hesitated, considering his options. He had plenty of cash, and there was no telling when Gully, or Blue, or whoever he was supposed to meet would show at the rendezvous point. Riding around in a taxi seemed safer than wandering the streets of a city he barely knew.

“Sure,” he replied. “Why not?”

Hailing a decrepit-looking cab, the two of them climbed into the back seat.

“My name’s Champ,” said the kid. He turned out to be a chatterbox, directing the driver into one neighborhood after another. True to his word, he led them to the old Reciprocal Recording Studio, followed by the Off Ramp Café, a series of flophouses where he claimed Jimi Hendrix stayed during his early childhood, and other points of varying interest.

Ninety minutes later, they found themselves back in Queen Anne. As Blake paid the driver, Champ tapped his shoulder. “We’ve done a lot of looking,” he said. “How about doing some listening instead?”

“To who?”

“Best Nirvana channelers in the Zone, that’s who.” Turning down a side street, Champ rapped on the small center window of a black metal door set into the side of what looked to be an old, abandoned factory. The door cracked a few inches and Champ quickly grabbed the edge of it, pulling it open to reveal a scrawny man in a Green River T-shirt, perched on a folding stool puffing a cigarette.

“We’re going to Paradise,” said Champ with a grin.

“Ten each,” the man said, holding out a grimy hand.

Blake forked over one of his hundreds and collected the change—Champ’s hungry eyes tracking every movement of the bills—then followed his young guide up five flights of a graffiti-lined stairwell, their