

## THE SERPENT'S KISS

by

Mark Terry

## 1

**7:47 A.M.**

The Serpent was coiled to strike. That was how he thought of it; how he thought of himself.

He stood on West Grand Boulevard in Detroit, leaning against the bus stop shelter in front of Henry Ford Hospital. Behind him the hospital towered seventeen floors of red brick, Henry Ford Hospital written in giant white script across the top of the building. It was a complex, actually, with at least half a dozen buildings and a couple parking garages, right there on the corner of the John Lodge and the Boulevard dominating an entire city block plus more if you counted the parking lots. It was a brisk autumn day, a hint of fall in the air, gray clouds scudding across the lid of the sky as if they had someplace important to go.

The Serpent wondered about the wind. He wondered if the wind would cause problems. It was a technical problem and he was pleased with technical problems. The whole idea had started

out as a technical problem. The wind, though, was a part of the technical problem that he hadn't given much thought to.

He wondered if he should study on it some more, but decided it was too late. There came a time in every experiment—every project—in which you just had to jump in and ... strike!

He liked that. Liked the melodrama of it. It didn't bother him that it sounded like something out of a bad movie. He thought it sounded cool. The Serpent.

He fingered the cell phone in his hand. It was a Nokia flip phone with the usual kitchen sink of additional nonsense built in—calendar, video games, calculator, voice recorder. The Serpent glanced at the tiny one inch by two inch screen of the phone and typed in the number. All he would have to do now was push the green call button. He was coiled to strike.

It was time to remind the world of the power of Aleph. It was time for Aleph to rise again.

The Boulevard was busy. Just down from the hospital was the Fisher Building, a gorgeous Kahn architectural jewel, forty-some stories tall of tan marble and sandstone with a green verdegri's copper peak, the very end of which was gold. He could hear the roar of cars on the Lodge, a highway sunk into a massive concrete canyon with forty-foot vertical concrete walls that split the city in two. In the Motor City, everybody drove. On the Lodge, 70 miles per hour was just getting started. Above on the surface roads was a different story. Cars jammed the Boulevard, going nowhere fast. Somewhere close a car had broken down. People were impatient. He could see it in their faces, the way they craned their necks. He heard the honk of horns.

A street person walked by, eyed him, heading for the corner in tattered black pants and an army jacket. He looked old, thin, with a scruffy white beard. Under one arm was a cardboard sign that said HUNGRY AND HOMELESS. The Serpent thought the guy was going to his day

job, there on the corner, spend eight, nine hours holding the sign as hundreds of cars went by, every twelfth car giving him a buck or a five maybe. How much did the guy take in each day? Fifty bucks? A hundred? More?

The Serpent shrugged his shoulders against a strong blast of cold wind and looked across the street at the Boulevard Café. They were all there, he thought.

The Serpent—he smiled at the thought—prepared to strike, his finger on the green call button.