



DIVIDED BY RESISTANCE

POWER

To execute Nirit, *The Elect* need power
— megawatts of it, Jules thought.

Power is their weakness. She slid into the narrow chase and closed the overhead hatch.

Hundreds of lightless conduits ran beneath Area B, for running cable to any point Up Top, but most were unused. Eighteen meager inches between the gravel bottom and the knotty planks above, and equally as narrow.

Perfect for a girl of thirteen.

Especially a late-bloomer, she smiled, lying motionless until the boots of the posse receded overhead, scrambling to secure the arena's exits.

Sooner begun, sooner done. She began wriggling along the dark crawlspace. At

first she swept sticky threads from her eyes and lips with an outstretched hand, but her face and hair were soon swathed in the spectral skins of spiders' webs.

Jule's bare arm and shins scoured the graveled way, and they'd be more scab than skin later — *If I live long enough to heal*. For now, every cut wept red, soil caking the openings like gritty caterpillars. She reached ahead, grabbed if she found purchase, and half-wriggled, half-pulled herself along, her feet inept in the narrow way.

After a time, she craned her neck and caught a glimpse of light from the building's Capacitor Bay. Rectangular, obscenely bright — forty feet away? A hundred? — bouncing up ahead in the blackness.

Jule soon realized that what she had taken for a large opening was in fact an iron grille barely big enough to squeeze through. Peering down through the slits, she saw the barrel-shaped Capacitor, purring in its gantry. She bashed a fist against the grille, and it clanged to the floor, eight feet below.

Growling a deep scorn, she rested her head against the ground to reach through the hole. Writhing, squirming, Jule maneuvered half her body out of the crawlspace, emerging high up in the Capacitor room wall. She strained to pull her hips through.

Something sharp bit the bone at her waist. She saw a twisted rusty piece of the grille assembly she'd punched through protruding into the opening. Her metalcloth vest had preserved her torso, but offered no further protection.

She pulled, defying the piercing agony. The rusty point penetrated her flesh. She had very little time. With each heave, the crimson line carved into her lengthened. Then Jule ceased struggling entirely, a ridiculous gargoyle facing the Capacitor. She wanted to draw her arm to herself, compact, dignified, but her strength failed, and the arm dangled lazily above the machine. Two feet closer, I'd have done it. I'm sorry, Nirit.

She studied a rivulet of blood snaking down her arm, the drops heavily — leisurely — relinquishing her fingertips, suspended, then splattering in a little pool near the Capacitor's kerauneutic leads.

She stretched her arm, screaming. In a few minutes enough blood collected on the panel to unite the shining gold terminals. The Capacitor's stored charge flooded the Area B Gridwork, overwhelming the measured flow civilisation requires.

The ceiling bulb flared, and Jule pulled herself free. It burst as she hit the floor.

She was alive. She had a chance. *Nirit has a chance.* On tattered knees she groped along the wall, thirsting for the surface.