



## The Courier (San Angeles)

By Gerald Brandt

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**The first installment in the San Angeles trilogy, a thrilling near-future cyberpunk sci-fi series**

Kris Ballard is a motorcycle courier. A nobody. Level 2 trash in a multi-level city that stretches from San Francisco to the Mexican border—a land where corporations make all the rules. A runaway since the age of fourteen, Kris struggled to set up her life, barely scraping by, working hard to make it without anyone's help.

But a late day delivery changes everything when she walks in on the murder of one of her clients. Now she's stuck with a mysterious package that everyone wants. It looks like the corporations want Kris gone, and are willing to go to almost any length to make it happen.

Hunted, scared, and alone, she retreats to the only place she knows she can hide: the Level 1 streets. Fleeing from people that seem to know her every move, she is rescued by Miller—a member of an underground resistance group—only to be pulled deeper into a world she doesn't understand.

Together Kris and Miller barely manage to stay one step ahead of the corporate killers, but it's only a matter of time until Miller's resources and their luck run out....

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## **The Courier (San Angeles) By Gerald Brandt Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the San Angeles series:

"*The Courier* is lean and mean as Kris's rugged ride, **ripping through plot and world-building at a relentless pace**... Brandt has created a darkly gripping vision of the future," ?B&N Sci-fi Fantasy Blog

"Brandt's **supercharged sequel** to *The Courier* continues the cyberpunk fun of the San Angeles series.... Brandt fleshes out an all-too-possible future of crushing poverty and corporate control, and the complex heroine who will lead us through to a better future." —Tor.com

"Brandt has created a fully-fleshed universe, filled with **high tension, memorable villains, and plot twists by the dozen**." ?Barnes & Noble

"It felt a lot like the *Bourne Identity* movie except with a sci-fi setting and a relatable young girl as the protagonist. *The Courier* is a **fast paced science fiction thriller, with a heroine you can really root for** and a world you can't wait to learn more about." ?The Heroine Bookstore

"Gerald Brandt tells an **impossible-to-put-down tale** and introduces us to an exciting heroine I'd love to see more of." ?University City Review

"The action does not let up. Brandt writes in a way that keeps the tale clear, and easy to follow.... **Quick and violent, engaging and intense**." —On a Dark Stormy Review

About the Author

**Gerald Brandt** is an author of Science Fiction and Fantasy. His first novel, *The Courier*, was listed by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation as one of the 10 Canadian science fiction books you need to read. By day, he's an IT professional specializing in virtualization. In his limited spare time, he enjoys riding his motorcycle, rock climbing, camping, and spending time with his family. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife Marnie, and their two sons Jared and Ryan. You can find Gerald online at <http://www.geraldbrandt.com>, on Facebook as Gerald Brandt – Author, and on Twitter @geraldbrandt.

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One

**Level 3— Tuesday, August 9, 2140 4:30 p.m.**

The tires of the motorcycle chattered on the broken concrete of the road, breaking the quiet electric hum of the motor. Chips popped from under the smooth rubber, ricocheting off the boarded-up windows that lined the street, leaving small white explosions where they hit the gray, weathered wood. An old woman pushing a shopping cart full of empty cans and bottles glanced back at the barrage, ducking behind her cart. I slowed down.

The bike hit a patch of fine sand and grit and I stood on the foot pegs. The stuff was always falling from the ceiling on the lower levels. My stomach took a split-second free fall as the rear tire of the bike slipped out from under me. The tire was beyond bald, showing threads in some spots. I should have replaced it months

ago, but money was tight. Shifting my weight, I pulled the balance point of the machine back and rode through the slide. The tires grabbed the road again and I twisted the accelerator to get more speed.

The city rose seven levels high. My little piece of it used to be Downtown Los Angeles, now it was just a small piece of a megalopolis that stretched from San Diego to San Francisco. The city never had a name that I knew of, just wards named after the cities it grew around. The roads on Level 3 were pretty bad, and they only got worse on the way down to Level 1, or as I called it, Hell. I had never been above Level 5. It was my dream to see Level 6 or 7, but access was controlled, and I knew someone like me would never be allowed in.

I found a smooth patch of asphalt, and the almost constant chatter was replaced by the wind whistling through the gaps in my cheap helmet. I stood on the pegs again as the bike hit another broken section. The smooth center of the tires slid until what was left of the knobbed edges found a tenuous grip.

Other couriers kept their bikes lean and trim, with powerful motors and sticky rubber tires. When they had deliveries below Level 4, they would weave their bikes along the street, swerving around the potholes, cracks, and other vehicles.

I didn't give a shit. My bike was old and tough and could handle the road just fine. And so could I. Ride the damn thing and get from point A to point B as fast as I could, or as fast as the crappy rear tire would let me. Get the delivery done and get on to the next one. That's where the money was— the little I got, anyway.

My day had started out like every other one. The alarm clock went off at five a.m., a piercing whine that could make small children cry. I was a pretty light sleeper, but I had found the thing in a dumpster on Level 5, and beggars can't be choosers. I crawled out of bed into the cool room. It was always cool on Level 2; that's what you get for living five levels away from the sun. The Lee family, the people who rented me my room above the fish market, never turned on the heaters at night.

Most of the stuff in my tiny room was scavenged. My bed frame was an old door raised on cinder blocks. The chair, placed by the crates I used as a table, had had a short leg when I found it. Now it had four short ones, but it was stable. The only new things I owned were my motorcycle helmet and the jacket. The helmet was a courier standard, the cheapest I could get in plain black. It had the built-in comm unit and barely serviceable enhanced night vision, along with the standard stuff.

The jacket was another story. I still hadn't paid it off. The interest the store charged me was atrocious, but it was worth it.

The jacket produced power from air. The manual said something about absorbing local electromagnetic charges and storing them in its built-in batteries. I didn't care how the thing worked, as long as it kept my comm unit charged and gave the bike a bit of extra juice when it needed it. The jacket came with a Taser. The thing was tiny enough to hide in the small of my back, and the jacket kept it fully charged. I called it a Taser, but it was really a hybrid between a stun gun and an actual Taser. If I needed to use it in close quarters, the probes wouldn't fire and I could jab it into someone. The way I always thought of using it was as a full Taser, shooting fifty thousand volts into a person from eight meters away. The secret was in how hard you pushed the trigger. In theory, if I screwed up, the jacket would help protect me. I had never needed to use it, but other couriers had, and that was a good enough reason to have one. The jacket was snug and stiff, so it didn't flap in the wind when I rode, but it was bulky enough to hide the fact I was a girl.

Some jackass switched lanes right in front of me, and I hit the brakes. On any other day, I would have been

hollering through the helmet and thumbing the horn, but today had been a good one. Dispatch had kept me on Levels 4 and 5. Cleaner air, better roads, a feeling of freedom created by the higher ceilings. A nice day to be on two wheels. For the first time in weeks, I'd had enough deliveries to pay the day's rent and be able to eat more than just rice. All I had to do was get the paperwork back to Dispatch and head home.

I was ahead of schedule, despite the long run Dispatch had sent me on. It was early enough for the Lees to still have the market open, which meant I would be able to get a hot shower, get some of the road dust off.

A good day.

## **Level 2— Tuesday, August 9, 2140 4:30 p.m.**

Quincy leaned forward, staring into the eyes of the man across from him. Goro<sup>o</sup> Kadokawa, fifth son of Takeshi Kadokawa, was already dead. He just didn't know it yet. Quincy still saw anger in those eyes, still noticed the red flush high on Goro<sup>o</sup>'s cheeks.

Goro<sup>o</sup> sat in his black mesh office chair, his shirt ripped open, buttons lying like wounded soldiers on the newly finished bamboo floor. Blood trickled from the small cuts Quincy had inflicted on the man's chest. Soon it would be time to escalate the process. Quincy could tell that Goro<sup>o</sup> still had too much pride, too much misplaced faith, to believe this could end badly.

Quincy raised the knife slowly, twisting it so the overhead lights flashed in the long curved blade, making Goro<sup>o</sup> struggle against the zip ties that held his arms and legs to the chair. He whimpered through the tape covering his mouth, twisting in the chair, almost as though he was trying to push himself through the back of it. Quincy pulled a corner of the tape away.

"Please . . . please no! I'll give you anything."

The knife moved closer.

"What do you want? Anything!"

The last word came out muffled as Quincy pushed the tape back into place and lowered the knife. He smiled.

It was all a ruse, he knew that. They all begged at first. Believing if they only said what he wanted to hear, they would be free to go on with their meaningless lives. They didn't actually start telling the truth until the reality set in. Quincy could always tell when that was: when the look in their eyes changed, when they stopped staring at the knife and started looking into his eyes. That was when Quincy worked best, increasing the pain and the blood bit by bit, until they would sell their own children just to make it all stop.

Goro<sup>o</sup> wasn't close to that yet— not quite. When he was, Quincy would start asking the important questions, see whether Goro<sup>o</sup> knew what was in the package or if he was just an unfortunate bystander.

Quincy looked over Goro<sup>o</sup>'s shoulder, out the window at the external ceiling less than a meter above him. He hated being on Level 2. Hated the stale, stinking air. Hated the invisible weight of the levels above him, crushing him, waiting to collapse and destroy the life he had created for himself.

He drew in a deep breath. The scent of blood, tangy and coppery, calmed him, filling him with longing, building desire in his veins. It mingled with the smell of the newly painted office walls. He liked the smell of

new paint. It always reminded him of a job well done.  
Quincy raised the knife.

### **Level 3— Tuesday, August 9, 2140 5:17 p.m.**

I rolled into the depot about fifteen minutes late, still thinking of a warm shower. A cop was parked just around the corner, waiting for a courier to zip out of the parking lot going too fast. He was there every day. Everyone knew it, but he never changed his pattern. One of the joys of working for the government, I guessed. The corporations would have run a tighter ship.

The building was a squat, ugly thing behind a strip mall. With its peeling gray paint and broken windows, it looked like it was about to fall apart at any second. Someone had spray painted *The World is Dyeing* in bright red on the side. I hoped so—the uniform gray of the lower levels was starting to get to me. I pulled in beside the only other bike there, a dirty blue hand-painted machine that was even older than mine. The motorcycle's owner came bolting out the door and jumped down the three concrete stairs just as I was done plugging my bike into the outlet.

“Yo, Kris, dude.” He paused. “Dudette. You don't want to go in there.”

Howie was a laid back “cool guy” who seemed to drift through life without any direction. His long, frizzy hair lay on his shoulders, still twisted and creased from the braid he kept it in while working. This was the most excited I'd seen him in a long time.

“What's up, Howie?” I asked.

“Dispatch has a late delivery. Get out while you can, man, I think she's looking for you.”

“Damn.” I kicked the tire of my bike in frustration. “I've got a hot shower calling my name and I gotta drop off my papers. You know how Dispatch is about her paperwork.”

Howie grinned. “Oh, man, good luck.”

A late delivery. Fucking great. And it figures Dispatch sent me on a long haul for the last run of the day. Sometimes I thought the bitch had it in for me, and shit like this reinforced the idea. Just soften me up with a day of smooth runs, and then wham! Nail me with a late delivery that will ruin my whole fucking day. I put my bike keys into my pocket, giving the golden figure on the key chain an extra rub for good luck. I grabbed the door handle, ready to barge in and tell her no. I hesitated. Maybe if I walked in quiet I could put the paperwork on top of the pile and get out before she saw me.

I pushed on the rusted steel door just enough to slip through and closed it softly behind me. The sound of Howie's bike winding up and leaving the parking lot came through the opening before the door latched.

The office was empty, always a bad sign, but pretty much what I expected. The old chairs and couches, covered in stains and crushed potato chips, seemed to smell even worse when the place was empty. Someone had brought in a plant a few weeks ago, probably trying to brighten it up. Now its brown leafless branches stuck out of the dry, cracked soil, looking deader than the building itself.

Dispatch's desk was hidden behind a half wall that cut the room in two. She wasn't sitting at it. She was

probably prowling the halls looking for the last sucker. Maybe it was a bathroom break. Maybe the delivery wasn't urgent and could wait until tomorrow. Maybe Dispatch had a heart of gold. Yeah, right. Still, there was a chance I could get out of here without being caught.

I dropped my paperwork on top of the teetering stack and tiptoed back toward the door.

"Kris, girlie. Could you wait a minute?"

The voice of Dispatch stopped me in my tracks.

Her voice always confused me. It was soft and maybe a little high-pitched and breathy. If you didn't look, you would have pictured a tall blonde, probably not natural, makeup caked onto her face, a tight skirt riding high up long legs and a bra that pushed her boobs right up under her chin. Instead what you got was Dispatch. A huge, swarthy woman, her face cratered and creased by age and, most likely, too many nights buried in a bottle. She grew a mustache better than most guys I knew, and she had a weird growth just under her chin that sprouted long, thick black hairs. Most of the time you didn't have to look at her, though. Usually her face was buried in her comm unit, or staring at one of those pulp rags that talked about three-headed babies and how Elvis, whoever the hell he was, was still alive.

I turned back to face her, feeling the dank air in the room fill my lungs. Dispatch stood in the hall, almost touching both walls with her hips. I think the walls were light gray once. Surprise!

"Kris, I got a late call. Just a quick run. Could you do it for me, sweetie?"

"Look," I said, taking a step back, "I'd love to, but I've been riding hard all day. I want to get home."

"It's just a short run, a pickup on Level 4 and a delivery on Level 2. You can take the paperwork home with you, honey, and drop it on my desk in the morning."

I just stared at her. Having Dispatch let you take the paperwork home with you was like being plucked off the street and taught how to fly a shuttle to and from the Sat Cities. Shit like that didn't happen, especially where Dispatch was concerned. I really didn't want anything to do with this. I turned partway back to the door and paused, feeling her stare on the back of my head. The bike really needed a new rear tire. The extra cash would help.

"I can drop the paperwork off tomorrow?" I asked, turning back, still not believing her.

"That's right, honey. I'll look for it on my desk in the morning when I get in."

I stared at my boots, covered in road dust, and thought about it. Level 4 wasn't too bad of a pickup, depending on where it was, and Level 2 was home as long as the drop-off wasn't at the edge of my area. Not having to come back up after the delivery was a definite bonus.

Maybe it wouldn't be such a bad run after all. Rack up another delivery and get a little more cash in my pocket. A lukewarm shower would work once I got home. I was used to them.

"The pickup client is a tipper, sweetie. I saved the trip for you."

I looked at the door, then back at her sideways. *Honey* and *sweetie* weren't her usual choice of words. Why was Dispatch being so nice? She had never been nice to me before. In fact, she was barely civil to any of the female couriers. It creeped me out, and I thought of just heading home. But I needed that tire. One day it

would slip again, or blow, and I would be in serious trouble.

Dispatch took a step forward, the smile leaving her face, replaced by a look of concern. "I know you need the money, Kris. Take this one, and I'll make sure you get more good runs, until things get better." She reached out and gently touched my arm before her look changed again, to the cold, calculating one I knew. "If you can't take the delivery, I'm not sure I'll have anything for you tomorrow, girlie."

I felt heat rush up my face. That bitch. I almost said the words out loud; instead I swallowed hard, forcing them back down my throat. It looked like I wasn't being given a choice after all. This was the Dispatch I knew. I waited until my voice would sound calmer before answering.

"Yeah, okay."

"Thanks, sweetie." The smile came back. Dispatch walked down the hall toward me and stopped at the desk. She stretched her huge bulk over it, reaching for the papers. "Here's the paperwork. The clients are both waiting for you, so you shouldn't have any problems."

I grabbed the forms and turned back for the door, looking at the pickup and drop-off addresses.

Fuck! The pickup was out of my area, way north. The closest up-ramp was under construction. I would have to take a detour, adding time to the ride there.

This was going to be a shitty end to my day.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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#### **Carissa Taylor:**

As people who live in the actual modest era should be revise about what going on or information even knowledge to make these keep up with the era and that is always change and move forward. Some of you maybe will update themselves by reading through books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know what type you should start with. This The Courier (San Angeles) is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, since this book serves what you want and wish in this era.



**Benjamin Torres:**

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**Willie Navarro:**

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