

this. As of this (re)writing, there's the original trilogy (Run Like Hell, A Deadly Quest, A Desperate Gambit) and the omnibus edition (The Cassidy Chronicles Volume One); soon, there will be The Road to the Stars (The Cassidy Chronicles Volume Two).

A few acknowledgements.

For my kids, just remember to keep working at what you love. Don't stop, don't give up, and whatever you do, don't listen to the people who tell you 'you can't do that'. You can. It just takes time.

For my father, who taught me one really important lesson - well, he stole it, but it's a good lesson anyways: 'Figure out what it is in life you don't do well. Then don't do it.' Okay, Dad. Got it.

Finally, my wife Michaela, who chafes at the time writing takes me away from her, but gives me the time anyways because she knows how important it is to me. It's not nearly as important to me as you are.

Adam



# REFUGE

BY

ADAM GAFFEN

## Author's Note

I began this story in 1992, while living in [redacted]. This was before Twilight and Blade, but after Teen, Boys and Fright Night. Somehow I stumble through elements of each and have carried them through, at last count, four incarnations of the story. There are also bits of Heinlein, Welles, the filmmaker George Pal, and others poking their heads into mine and saying, "HEY! I have an idea!"

Now, if I could only be that good at picking lottery numbers...

I hope you enjoyed this. It might not be the cheeriest story - in fact, it's downright grim. It's probably the earliest bit of writing - fiction, that I have in my mine that's still kicking around that might appeal to anyone other than antiquarians. It was also the longest 'long' story I wrote - fifteen thousand words, and the thought was absolutely staggering.

What's next?

I'm mostly living in Cass & Ken's universes these days; come on by! It's a much more hopeful place.

the final heat-death of the Universe, all the energies of life trailing off into a faint echo of the past, entropy triumphant. He and his machine, ghostly, still flitted forward.

As the power level edged towards the final zero, he drank the last of his food. Quietly, he injected himself.

"Only," he whispered, feeling the cool course through his veins. "I am the Only."

THE END

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He almost wished he had lingered another second at the spaceport, had given in to her wishes then. He had wanted that would have been quick, and guiltless.

Quickly, before he could hesitate, he injected the antidote.

When he was sure her heart had stopped, he carried her out, to where their house had stood those years before. Crying, he buried her, and sought forgiveness - from her, from his God, from all the victims, from the Only and the People and people. He set back in his machine and began his final calculations.

He accelerated recklessly, no longer heeding the fact that he was no longer conserving fuel for a stop which would never come. He was too far gone now; he may as well burn out as much as he could.

He saw the sun expand into a red giant, and then he saw it consume the Earth beneath him. He saw the sun's interior the inside as it pulsed around him. Then he saw the sun die, shrinking down to a tiny point that glowed brightly for many billions of years before fading into nothingness. He saw new stars, born from the ashes of others. He saw galaxies age, flare with super-novae, and dim, until there was nothing but blackness.

"Yes Donovan?" Jiltanith had been worried at first, but had gradually retreated into a mild form of insanity, a detachment from reality, trusting her husband completely, believing that this was all a game to play.

"This is our last fuel pack. We are also down to less than a day of food. If we start again, we may not live to see another time; the machine is breaking down, no matter how I try to fix it. But we can't live here, now. There isn't anything for us to live on." He looked at her. "What do you think we should do?"

She merely shrugged, said, "Whatever you wish, dear," and retreated into her own world again.

He saw her go and sighed. He knew what he had to do, of course. By now it was hopeless, there would be no escape for them, not physically at least. But he had foreseen this, and was prepared for it. Reaching behind the seat, he found a needle and a bottle.

*I wish I didn't have to do this!* his mind cried, remembering Emily and all of his other victims over the years. *Is this what being of the Only is about? Killing your wife, knowing that you too will have to die soon?*

## Chapter 1: Their Origin

As the eons marched forward and man evolved, they evolved by their side, a cousin species would, separated only by a quirk of diet. From the early days, when men were little more than apes, through the discovery of fire, and the wheel, and agriculture, they were there: through the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Ages, to the dawn of civilization. They helped build the Pyramids and the Labyrinth of Crete and the Parthenon of Athens. They existed with human empires, helped rule the Roman Empires, and the great civilizations of the Ganges and Indus rivers.

When the barbarians overwhelmed Rome, they were in the hordes swarming over the seven hills, the centurions dying in the streets. They helped create the Arthur legends in England, as well as the legends of the temples and their sacrificial rites. They rode with the Vikings on their voyages; they Crusaded along with Richard, Louis, and the Popes to ravage the Holy Land in the name of religion. They received Marco Polo at the court of the Great Khan and sent him back with tales of the incredible.

But this quiet existence was shattered with the coming of the Inquisition and the renewed militancy of the Church. Their kind, despite centuries of peaceful and largely unnoticed coexistence, was suddenly regarded as 'evil' and the 'spawn of Satan' rather than the intelligent, helpful, friendly people they were. What later generations would call 'The Persecution' began.

The first brought before the Inquisition were purely random, a few grains of sand upon a beach. As the questioning progressed, though, it became clear to the Inquisitors that there were, well, 'unusual' people among the masses. People who did not believe what the Church required them to believe. The concept of a 'species' hadn't been invented yet, but the Inquisitors were aware of the differences, and were soon adept at spotting them. The People were sought out and summarily burned, with only the barest pretense of a trial. No man raised a hand to stop this, in part because the Inquisition was after them as well, but mostly because it removed some of the pressure from them. So was enmity born in the People as they began, for the first time, to hide from Mankind.

## Chapter 8: End of The Line

They traveled another million years when they stopped next to feed and refuel. A quick meal and Donovan began to replace the pack. He had almost finished connecting the new one when he heard a noise above him. Having learned, he didn't hesitate. He leapt into the car, where Jiltanith sat, waiting for him to finish. He activated the accelerator just as a mutated creature walked into view. It was a mutated creature. The Age of Insects had returned.

They rushed forward in time again and looked for a place that they could live, occasionally drinking of their supply, replacing the fuel as necessary, repairing broken circuits and motherboards as best he could.

Once Donovan managed to catch a small insect and tasted its blood before throwing it away, he said "Copper-based," he muttered, and they set off. Ten million, a hundred million, a billion years later and still they could find no refuge. Finally, nearly a billion years into the future, they stopped again.

"Jiltanith, we have to talk."

"Will we be alright?" she asked nervously.

"Oh, just fine. But if we had lived there..." He shook his head solemnly.

And yet they did not hide entirely. Many desired human company, and refused to disappear. Instead, they changed their names and disappeared whenever they felt threatened, appearing well in another land. Unhappy as they were about their situation, they felt that it was better to do so than forgo their lives entirely. They continued to contribute to the world of humanity as well. The exploration and exploitation of the New World, the rise of the English as a true nation, the creation of the printing press were all assisted by the People.

Nowhere did they do more than in France, where religious discontent. The teaching of Martin Luther, the schism of Henry VIII, the anti-Popes at Avignon, the Huguenots and Calvinists and all the Protestant sects of the times; all these were pushed and produced. They developed in an effort to find a religion that would accept them, allow them to live freely again. As the forces of the Church retreated, and the differences were allowed to spread, a small glimmer of hope was raised for the People. Perhaps once again the world of Mankind could again live as brothers, together and discovering.

When the first colonists departed England for Roanoke, a disproportionate number were of the People hoping to flee. The plan was to reveal themselves after proving their worth in this most demanding of settings. All was well at first as the People and the men were occupied in the task of merely surviving. After a time, as the ship prepared to return to England for a new load of colonists and supplies, one of the People was told to accompany the crew, to report and recruit others. The great revelation would occur when the ship had been gone for three days.

The messenger departed, leaving a thriving colony of the People and humans. But when he returned months later, there was not a living soul to be found. All that was left of the colony, the only clue to their disappearance, was a single word, 'Croatoan.' The men were puzzled by this, it having no meaning to them in any language that they knew. But the messenger knew; it was a warning to him and the People. "Never again" was the meaning. And so it would be.

The Persecution continued, and the People continued to hide and flee, tear up roots every few

companions, returned. Seeing the Only enraged and he killed Jo'nso'n before they knew he was

Donovan took the chance and pulled open the door as M'tari and T'lar fired at the creature, killing it. Before they could turn back he had powered up the machine and was about to slide the control panel into the wall when M'tari leapt for the open window, his head twisted in rage, pushed inside. Donovan brought the control up quickly.

As the machine advanced through time, the body began aging - rapidly. Soon all that remained of the neck down was a skin stretched taut over a skeleton. M'tari's head, though, was still alive, and now frozen in a rictus of fear. Finally Donovan pushed the head out the window into the normal time stream. It fell away quickly.

Jiltanith was, thankfully, asleep. It was several hours before she awoke and asked, "What happened?"

"A disagreement dear. Nothing major, but I don't think it wise to stay there too long. Besides, it's mildly radioactive." She blanched at his lie.

The Commdor - commander, he guessed - hesitated for a moment before answering. "Machine your need we."

"Why?"

"Control still the humans the Great Beyond. Build able we are one of your machines are, enough move our army large, before the Great War go back could we, spaceships and humans in High Land destroy, Now to return. Then destiny we shall have fulfilled and rule able be! So told am I the Scientist Only by."

Donovan had heard enough, first to realize that he didn't want to stay here, and second that if he did stay here he would probably be put to death as soon as he tried to explain that travel backwards was impossible. But he couldn't simply attempt to run; he would be shot before he could take five steps. He had to wait for a distraction.

Moments later, still furiously trying to puzzle out how to distract his guards without getting killed in the process, his opportunity arrived. The first creature, curious about strange noises, and wondering about his

years to move away. A few found peace on the fringes of the colonies, and became renowned explorers. Some others decided to live their lives as humans. Some helped instigate the First American Revolution. Perhaps, they reasoned, a country dedicated to the concepts of freedom and equality would be a haven for them. Many thousands of the surviving People made the dangerous crossing to America, to try to find the peace that had eluded them for centuries.

Though the Persecution had all but ended, popular fiction reflected mankind's acquired fears of the People. Literacy, one of the greatest gifts of the People, now became their curse. Stories by Southey, Coleridge, Polidori, Le Fanu, and of course Stoker sensationalized the People and began a subtler Persecution. Lying below the surface, where most humans denied the People had ever existed, there was a lingering fear and doubt, ready to burst into a dissonant symphony of hatred at any time.

Nor had the members of the People forgotten the injustices done to them, or their anger. Rather than work for the chance at a tolerant future, some sought a future without humans. One of the first a

to make humanity prey. In the past, the People had always resisted the temptation to use their cousins as food, though they were more suitable than any other mammal. But this group was not concerned with temptation, or peace, or relationships. Their goal was the elimination of mankind, and if that meant feeding on them, then so be it.

These schismatics spread their beliefs. At their urging, wars were instigated, new means and strategies of killing devised. Attempts to negotiate lasting peaces were sabotaged. Fort Sumter, the battleship *Maine*, the Archduke Ferdinand, were all precipitated by actions of the People. The hateful ideologies and demagogues of the Twentieth Century were largely of the People, using the force of their kind's personality to sway humans to these destructive ends. Even when other factions were able to block their efforts from total success, the toll was still heavy.

Many millions died at the hands of the People - at the hands of those now called the Only, to distinguish from the rest of their kind who only wanted to coexist. The Only wanted just that, to be alone on the Earth, with no humans, none of the other People. All

*Hunh! They've lost most of the technology they had when the war happened. The stuff they had is now to be barely working now, at best, and pretty much broken. I wonder just how many of those guns they are pointing at me actually work?* He put that thought out of his mind quickly. Fool, it only takes one to kill you. How long did you know that we were here?"

"Yesterday knew we knew arrived when we did. Rush no need simply had we."

*Lies, thought Donovan. Maybe they knew there's no way that they wouldn't have been here sooner if it was at all possible! If we had decided to leave yesterday afternoon, then you would've found us again!* "How far away are you from?"

"Say you would a hundred miles south from here we." M'tari sounded irritated at the questioning.

*And yet it took them a day to arrive. They had to go down to animal powered transportation!* A woman asked. "And, last question: What do you want with me and my wife?"

and yet still fascinated by M'tari's beliefs. He mentally shook off his shock; M'tari was still speaking.

"...and need we your knowledge, your powers, to in our quest to help us to the Great Beyond."

"Whoa!" said Donovan. "Back up! First, I have some questions I want you to answer."

M'tari looked annoyed, but nodded. "Ask you may."

"Well, what was it that you killed?"

"Humans have to degenerated this world on that was. Released was the evil within them was the coming of the Zero Hour with, and changed it has them to true beings to reflect."

Mutations, translated Donovan. Descendants of the surviving humans, forced to live in radioactivity while the Only took the few non-contaminated zones. "How do you make them disappear?"

"Known to that is not one to low as I. The Scientist Only but barely can understand it repair them to."

through the Crazy Years of the Twentieth and First Centuries, the Only's efforts were largely by the continuous efforts of the People. The times were usually of one group or the other, a frantic battle being waged over the fate of humanity with none the wiser. Nor did they stand on a single 'side'; the Only would try to use whatever of humanity seemed most vulnerable to their power.

Eventually the People were unable to resist their effort successfully. The Third Global War, initiated by a small group of the Only, killed a billion and a half people on the globe before the People were able to bring it to a halt, at great cost. Once the war was stopped, they turned their attention again to American politics, an arena that they had overtly avoided for many years because of the strong influence of the People. With a large part of the population dead, the Only were able to speak more freely, feed on fear, and convince the remaining citizens that the time was right for a revolution for the world to be made a safer place. The American Revolution established a republic, but the Only dictatorship, eliminating one of the few re-

"safe" havens for the People. The Only revealed the existence of the People to the humans of America, stoking the fires of intolerance until they burned white-hot.

Most of the People had gravitated to America in the previous centuries, and were unprepared for the sudden swing to not just intolerance but violence. They were forced to go even deeper into hiding, suppressing their culture even more than they had, unable even to teach their children. The People began to die out, their culture lost, with only a few members left to spread the memories of who they had been. Even as a species needs to maintain a certain critical number to ensure successful continuation, so too does a culture. At long last, and through little direct action, part of the plans of the Only had succeeded.

None of the Only expected what happened next: the fury which they had directed at the People and humanity was turned back on them. Some of the People who had been discovered by this new Inquisition, in an effort to save themselves, had revealed both the existence of the Only and their practice of feeding on humanity. The People asserted

"Our kin? They called they the People; I a would you mention not their name, or talk even of. Weak were they and coward's deaths died; so we."

*So, the Only had succeeded after all, Donovan thought. "How did you survive?"*

"Prepared were we," replied M'tari, reverently. "The Glorious Only coming of the Great Ind'n'easha knew, and to follow it the Cold Death. In the isle Ind'n'easha built we our shelters, survive the Glowing Death. Of the Only All there gathered, the Hour awaiting. Laughed we to see death the human when it came; wept we the death of our necessary yet it was. Purified the planet the Cold and the Glowing Death, waited we, building, so our children our ways teaching. Began to reclaim world when ended the Cold Death. When strong we, wrest away Great Beyond from the humans of masters be." It sounded mechanical, almost as if it was a lesson learned by rote.

Donovan was scared and repulsed, disgusted himself for ever believing any of the Only's teachings.

Donovan was amazed; some of his people had survived! "They badly were losing to the forces of the other humans and our cousins. The spaceport destroyed you saw was one of the last on the planet, for the Angels forbidden all space travel long before had done."

"What of the spaceships, and the people in them? Where did they go? Are they alive?"

"Some to orbiting stations they went, and colonies that begun had been before being abandoned by the Angels. Others the High Lands to went, and"

"High Lands?" inquired Donovan, unsure of the reference.

"You it called Luna, I believe. Those peoples live still, even though merely human are they. The colonies in orbit destroyed all were all the missiles of the Angels by, most of our kin killing. But now the Great Beyond by the humans in the High Lands denied to us is; we leave cannot this ground. This is why-" He broke off suddenly.

"Who were your kin?" asked Donovan, curious as to which group of his cousins still lived.

that most of their kind did not, had never done. They were content with their diet of animals. Perhaps it saved some number of the People from being killed immediately, or perhaps it earned them a quick, agonizing death, but it only increased the fury of the Inquisition. Armed with all the weaponry of far beyond modern science, down to genetic identification, the forces of the New American Army, the 'Angels of the Lord', scoured the world, seeking these desecrations on the face of God's Earth." And so they began to find them and kill them.

The Only had never needed to fight directly. Their plots had been subversive, eroding from within, and so the frontal assault caught them completely unaware. No escape could be seen, and no One had fallen into the hands of the Angels ever survived to tell it. Or at least, there was no escape for most.

## Chapter 2: In The Dark

"Hurry, please!" The speaker was one of the Only, Jiltanith Anasenko. Her mate, Donovan, was rushing to complete his work.

"Tanni, shush! I can't work if you are constantly telling me that the Angels are about to knock on my door!" Donovan grumbled under his breath and returned to the delicate soldering.

The object of his attention resembled nothing more than an old Fiat on the exterior. The interior was mostly standard as well, down to the windshield wiper and light controls. There was a sliding bar where the shift would have been, but that was the only difference to the eye. The engine, however, would have had the physicists of the world arguing over it for years.

At first glance it was no more than an ungainly collection of wires, leading from one part to another with no apparent order. One cable, thicker than the others, led into the car and the slider. Another wire led to a tightly sealed container with the universal symbol of radioactivity on it. Various diodes were linked to motherboards cannibalized from obsolete home

At first there was no reaction, then the speaker grudgingly agreed. "Very well."

Donovan roused Jiltanith rapidly, told her not to say anything. "I'll explain later," and pushed her out of the car body. That done, he turned back, leaning against the door. "But first, my name is Donovan Anasenko. The people call me Donovan."

"I am Commdor Kaleel M'tari. The names of my subordinates are, Lootnan Galun Jo'nso'n and Sergeant T'lar." As he named them, each nodded their heads slightly, never relaxing their pose or the position of their weapons. "What know you do of the Great War of the Cold Death?"

Donovan was surprised at the rather poor name they held for the Ice Age, but managed to explain it. "Well, we saw a number of spaceships launched from the spaceport, then the spaceport was destroyed, leaving a large crater. Some time later the, um, Cold Death began. It lasted about a hundred thousand years. That's all I know about it." He paused. "What was the cause of the Great War?"

"It a final attempt was by the humans called the Angels' to defeat the rest of their kind and

The one in front lowered his weapon; the other two did not. "Yes, we do. But quite not as you understood it back then." The casual reference to the past did not slip by Donovan.

"You know that we're from the past? How?"

"I cannot how say, because you an unknown are to us, and therefore trust cannot we you; and because I do know not involved the exact process." He seemed to relax a bit. "However, I do know something it has to do with tachyons and antimatter. I'm sure that hold you no interest in how you were rescued." His voice indicated that, for the sake of their health, Donovan had better not. "Rather, would you to know care what has happened since you on your trip departed?"

This did interest him, but first he wanted to get Jiltanith out of earshot. He didn't want to risk upsetting her any more than he possibly could. He was also unsure just how far to trust them yet.

"Yes, I'd like to hear that, but let me help my wife into my machine, please? I'm not sure I want her hearing this, understand?" and he gave them a knowing grin.

computers; one even had "Foxconn" stamped on the side. Vacuum tubes, transistors, and superconductors nested together, linked in a bizarre fashion.

Donovan stood back, examined his work. "It should work. Can't say for how long, but hopefully it will be long enough."

"Then let's leave now, before the Angels get here!" Jiltanith stole a nervous glance over her shoulder, as if expecting the golden uniforms to appear behind her and demand she please come with them. "We can, right?"

Donovan sighed. He had had this discussion every day since he began work on the project. "Yes, we could leave right now if we want. But—"

"Then let's go!" Jiltanith's face showed her impatience. "Donovan, why should we wait?"

"I just don't think that we should go yet. We could keep working on it, maybe I can make it more efficient or use less power to travel farther, or just stockpile spare parts for it." He looked at the machine, then

to Jiltanith. "Maybe the Angels will never find us. We have been careful."

"Yes, I suppose it's possible, but..." The idea of waiting to be found before leaving scared her almost as much as the Angels did. She'd heard stories of what she heard they did to her kind. She thought of those now and shivered.

"Besides, we need to prepare the vehicle. I would like to be able to eat while we travel, and sleep as well, wouldn't you?" Donovan allowed her a smile, knowing that he had won at the mention of food.

*Come to think of it*, he thought, *I could use a snack myself*. He saw the raw, feral hunger cross her face. "Let's leave this for a while. I think it's time we took a break, don't you?" He took her arm before she could agree or dissent and led her back to their house.

"I think there's a little bit left in the last one we opened. I'll check." Donovan started for the pantry, to be restrained by Jiltanith's hand on his shoulder. "Not so fast," her voice throaty, the hunger evident. "Let's check together."

With no warning, one leapt at him, and was upon him when it suddenly - wasn't. Nor, he saw the other. It was as if neither had ever existed, a few impressions in the ground. Donovan moved cautiously, reasoning that if whatever disappeared between two creatures wasn't too picky about who it tar-

He failed to be vaporized. He started moving around him, but had taken no more than three steps when a voice called out in, surprisingly, English. All the thoughts of the Angels and illusions and fears rushed back to him, but he froze in place. Eventually he heard the voice say, "You turn may now." He moved slowly.

There were three of them. Fully human, but Donovan noted with relief. They were a bit taller than he, pale and thin, as if they had been underground for generations. The only striking difference was their eyes, larger than what would be normal. But other than that, there was nothing physically odd that Donovan could see. His intuition, however, was screaming at him. He decided to deal cautiously with them.

"You speak English."

even come close to fully closing their mouths. It was well that they couldn't, for all along the edges were teeth. Most were long and pointed, but a few were smaller and aimed outward, as if they were used as spears.

While he conducted his impromptu investigation, they did so as well, carefully looking him over, but keeping their distance. One, braver than the others, leaned close until Donovan could feel its breath on his face. Thankfully it moved away quickly when Donovan moved to cover his own nose. Whatever they were, it was certain they had never bathed!

They bent their heads together, and Donovan could hear faint noises, as if they were in conference. One seemed to be arguing against the other two, and occasionally Donovan could see a hand wave, gesticulating in an all-too-human manner. Finally the one arguing turned and left, apparently the loser. The other two turned back to face Donovan, who was becoming somewhat alarmed, wondering what could cause one of these things (although it was becoming difficult not to call them "men," despite the obvious differences) to simply leave like that.

He chuckled.

"Of course, dear. You're always so positive about food." He knew that he could be the same sometimes.

The door to the pantry swung open.

Lined neatly in cubbies along the three walls were seven bodies. Six of them were untouched. Stripped of their clothing, a drip bag of anaesthetic, a drug designed to slow metabolism dripping down their neck, other tubes with a spigots attached to their femoral arteries in the legs, the people in the cubbies resembled cadavers for all the life they showed. They were kept most carefully alive, in stasis, dreaming dreamlessly for the day that the spigots would be turned and they would fulfill the function they had been abducted for.

While Donovan grew up believing the goal was to eat. Only, he could not bear to bring unnecessary suffering to their food, hence the anaesthetic.

"Keeps the flavor sweeter if they aren't stressed the whole time," Donovan always said when his

would tease him about it. Personally, he was ashamed of this all-too-human weakness, but still he persisted.

The seventh body hung closest to the door. In addition to the bag of drugs, there was another connection running from a large baggie of saline solution, and there was an oxygen tube inserted into her neck. The veins showed only faintly, despite the near-translucency of her skin, because nearly all of the blood had been collected. Her marrow, working feverishly to replace it, had not yet been able to do so. What remained circulating in her was largely plasma and saline, with barely enough red blood cells to keep her alive despite the pure oxygen being forced into her. Like the others, her arms, legs, neck and torso were all strapped to a vertical board.

"I think this is the last time we can use her," commented Donovan as he connected the spigots to lengths of plastic tubing. "At that we'll have to filter out the waste plasma from her system before we can use it." He finished leading the tubes from the taps to a machine.

"Wha's it?" she asked sleepily.

Thinking quickly, fearing that she would be shocked into screaming or worse, into silence, he said to her, "Nothing, just go back to sleep." Much to her surprise, she did.

He took a close look at them. Scales and bony patches served as skin, which held a dark, bluish-purple hue. Their bodies were large, supported on two short, thick legs. Claws tipped the ends of the feet - five of them on each, he noted. Their backs were horribly curved, almost bent in half. Arms stuck out midway between their legs and their head, ending in surprisingly humanoid hands. Their heads drew his attention more of all.

Jutting forward a good foot from their bodies, their eyes were hideously ugly. Two eyes were mounted on protuberances, one on either side of the head. Their nose was little more than a large, divided hole in the center of the head. What little hair they had was insufficient to cover their ears, for there were none to be seen. Their mouths were large and wide, and rudimentary jaws were all they had, for they

for what purpose he couldn't begin to fathom. Everything they saw, and felt, and heard, could be explained if you built a conspiracy big enough. Everything, that was, except the stars. Not knowing what else to do, he took her in his arms and held her until her sobs subsided and she fell asleep. Then his mind began preying on itself.

*What if it is all an illusion, he wondered. Maybe we have been captured by the Angels, and they're just playing with us, trying to get information about us? Maybe the temporal accelerator didn't actually work, and we were gassed, and let loose in our minds? What if..?*

He shook his head.

*No, even if they had captured us, and all this is a drug-induced dream, so what? It won't change anything to us, he thought, and drifted off into sleep himself.*

He awoke to a scratching noise. Blinking against the sun, he looked around him. Standing - or more accurately, crouching - over them were three creatures. Startled he drew in his breath sharply, waking Jiltanith.

"Ready?" he asked. The gleam of Jiltanith's eyes answered that for him.

This was the part that he disliked the most. The anaesthetic he used was powerful and quick-acting, but it dissipated, keeping his prey nearly comatose but still unaware. To ensure he and Tanni didn't pass out, well, it was necessary to administer an antidote. Collecting the blood, which caused them to awaken, only took a few minutes, but in those few minutes they were aware of what was happening to them.

It was unfortunate but unavoidable, so he turned off the flow of the drugs and injected the stimulant into her still body. Within seconds her eyes opened, disoriented at first, but then focusing on the faces of Donovan and Jiltanith - one sympathetic, one enigmatic.

Then the fear burst into her and some sense of color returned to her skin. No noise could be heard from her, her vocal cords severed for the oxygen tube. She tried to struggle but, weakened as she was, could not get free of the bounds. A few moments was all that she could manage, then she slumped back in defeat, surrendering. Donovan turned the handles.

She could feel the blood flowing out of her. Too weak to move, she could only watch the two figures grow fuzzier in front of her, her vision blurring as her body tried to save her. All the blood remaining was shunted to her starving brain, but Donovan knew what he was doing. Gradually she lost consciousness, and never regained it.

Donovan watched the dying girl with eyes that threatened unaccustomed tears. He had never enjoyed this part. This girl - she had lived on a farm a few miles to the north, with a new husband. But one night she had wandered too far, perhaps thinking of the children that she might have, or of the crops that needed planting, or the color of the new dress she had bought. Suddenly she was taken, a hand across her mouth, a needle pushing her into sleep. That had been a month earlier.

The local authorities had searched the house, but had failed to see the door hidden behind the tall bookcase. And so, after the search had died down, Donovan rotated her - he remembered her name was Emily - to the front position and began extracting her blood. She awoke every time, of course, and was

"All right!" he exclaimed, laughing, giving Jiltanith a pat on the head. "It's inevitable. We'll stay here for a while." And so they

They discovered a pleasant creek a short distance away, and spent some time splashing and playing, acting as children, and then not so childish. Eventually they returned to the car, tired but emotionally renewed. Unfolding blankets, they lay under the stars, seeing vague reflections of the constellations they had known in the new part of the world. Jiltanith began weeping once more.

"What's wrong?" asked Donovan, concerned. "Nothing," she said. "I'm just thinking about it again. He had thought that the afternoon had washed away the ghosts in her mind, and hoped that this was just a final quiver, rather than a new onslaught.

"The stars," she sobbed.

"What about them?" he asked patiently.

"They've changed! They're different! It's just not the same," she said, and she tailed off into tears again.

Donovan thought that he knew what the problem was. Somewhere in her mind, she never really believed in his accelerator. It was all an elaborate trick,

"What if the radiation killed off all the humans? We are stronger than they are, so we could take more of it, right?"

Again he was doubtful. "The radiation probably killed all the humans, yes, except a very few. We aren't all that much more resistant. It probably killed most of the Only and People as well. The ones that did survive on Earth are almost undoubtedly mutated. Between the radiation from the bombs, the irradiation of the planet, and a thousand centuries of evolution..."

Her face fell, eyes losing their faint glimmer of hope. He couldn't do this to her, not until he knew.

"But it is possible," he conceded. "We certainly won't know if we stay in this time. We have to get moving again."

"So soon?" she protested. "It is so pretty here, and I haven't had a chance to relax in days -"

"Hours, dear, it hasn't been that long."

"- and I need a bath and you do too! And these clothes are a wreck, and -"

undoubtedly aware of her predicament. And h  
On a few occasions, Donovan spoke to her.

"This is how it has to be. We tried to live w  
but you wouldn't allow it. And if we can't live w  
then we will live without you and your kind." He  
be gruff, menacing, but he knew he failed.

Even as he said these words they rang h  
his mouth. He knew the real reason - this was  
the leadership of the Only kept their followers to  
the bond of blood. He drained her over a period  
weeks, until today he saw her eyes close for a la  
the question, *Why me?* still in them. He offer  
silent prayer to both his God and hers for her so  
he finished the job.

### Chapter 3: The Hunt

While the blood was being purified and separated, he lowered the body from the wall. It was light, as were all the bodies. No matter how robust they started, by the end they were only empty husks. He had no difficulty bringing it downstairs to the large furnace, burning hotly in the center of the basement.

He cautiously opened the doors, felt the blast of heat and saw the white flames lick upwards towards the new air. Careful not to get too close, he laid a metal platform against the lip, and placed Emily's body on it. Uttering another prayer, he tipped her body into the flames. He shut the door and went upstairs.

Jiltanith was already savoring her portion when he returned. Her eyes still gleamed, but not as coldly as before. She had poured hers into a large glass and was sipping at it delicately, but more than half was already gone. His half was at his place, his usual method - a bowl and a spoon - in front of it. First washing his hands, he sat and poured it into the bowl. A few spoonfuls was all he could manage, however.

"Besides, we know a few escaped, a Remember those ships we saw launching just the bomb went off? If I had to guess, I'd say they were going to rendezvous at an orbiting station didn't look to be capable of interstellar flight."

He decided not to mention all the problems with maintaining a viable orbiting colony the time that had gone by. "Maybe they went to the moon; the Lunar colonies were just getting underway when we left, remember that?"

She nodded again.

"Maybe some of the Only made it? If they had those ships, then they could have taken some of them. Maybe the colonies are all of the Only!" she said hopefully.

He wasn't so hopeful. He knew that space exploration was something that the Only's leadership had never taken seriously, preferring extermination of Earth to exploration of space.

"Perhaps," he said cautiously.

"As far as I can tell," he said, speaking what he had been puzzling out in his head, "Some fool decided that it was time to end it all, or at least destroy the spaceport. But if that was all it was supposed to be, then it spread too quickly for them to control. That Ice Age was a dead giveaway; there must've been a nuclear winter. Do you know how long we were inside that glacier?"

She shook her head.

"Almost a hundred thousand years." Her eyes grew wide with shock. "No, I'm not kidding," answering her question before she could ask.

"But, what about people? Animals? How do we find them?"

"Well, if there are any out there, we simply have to sit and wait for them to find us, or to colonize this area again. There are animals of some kind here; you can hear them in the trees all around us."

As if proving his point, a branch above them shook from some creature landing on it.

"Something wrong, dear?" Jiltanith inquired in a tone sweet but with an undercurrent of greed.

"No, I'm just not as hungry as I thought." "Would you care for the rest?" He already knew the answer. Jiltanith had an insatiable appetite. He knew that she would want to make love as soon as she was finished, and right now, with his thoughts still on the fate of the girl and the problems of his machinations, he simply couldn't.

"I want to do more work out in the garage," he said, standing. "A couple more ideas."

"If you're sure..." she said, already reaching for his bowl. "Thank you, love." She poured from the bowl into her glass and drank deeply.

Quickly, before she could finish, Dorian escaped out the back door and headed for the forest. What was it about this that had been bothering him recently? The drinking had never bothered him a few months earlier, but since then he had watched his mind circle the idea warily, stalking it, afraid to catch it too much.

Shaking his head, he directed his mind to his invention, their one chance at escape. How could he make it more reliable? In his testing, necessarily limited as it was, it failed every tenth time or so. Comfortably occupied, upon reaching the garage he began disconnecting some of the wires.

He was just finishing putting it back together again when he jerked his head up sharply, nearly hitting the raised hood. He listened, but could hear nothing beyond the normal night sounds of the countryside. Shaking his head at his foolishness, he closed the hood and was placing the tools in their cubbyhole when he heard Jiltanith's voice, tinged with panic, call out.

"Donovan! Donovan! Come to the house, quickly!"

He stood outside the garage and called back to her, "What is it?" He received no response besides, "Come in!" before she disappeared back into the house.

*What now?* he thought irritably.

They stopped. The rich smells of the forest surrounded them, welcome after hours spent in the machine. Sounds of life, motion in the trees, reached their ears, and Jiltanith wept for joy. Donovan was concerned with the beauty and resiliency of the forest surrounding him and moved swiftly to drink from the bag. Only after he had drained a bag did he notice the lack of regrowth.

He brought a pack to Jiltanith who took it gratefully. While she was drinking, recovering, he replaced the power source, noted how drained it was. He felt more than heard, his wife come up behind him.

"Hiya," he said cheerfully, turning to face her. "Feeling better?" He watched her face as she answered.

"Yes, some," she replied, nodding, an anticipatory smile on her face. He could see her desire, and she went the same way. *What the hell*, he thought.

Some time later, her head resting on his shoulder, she asked, "Donovan, what happened?"

### Chapter 7: A Nice Place To Visit...

Years passed rapidly. The overcast had become a permanent feature of their world. No men were seen, no efforts made to rebuild. Further into the future they plunged.

An Ice Age overtook them, encasing them in snow and ice, plunging them into darkness broken only by the faintly radioactive glow of the cauterized earth around them. Millennia passed, Donovan pushing his craft faster and faster, Jiltanith resigned to mourning, sobbing quietly to herself.

Donovan's expression was fixed into coldness, reflecting the ice around him, cursing the fools who had allowed this and thanking himself for not lingering overlong. And still they fell forward, until at last the ice broke above them and melted away. The ground, scoured by the action of the glaciers, became fertile again. Plants reappeared, strange in form but reassuring in their lush greenery. Gradually he slowed. He was unwilling to risk another catastrophe, but his hunger had grown again, and he needed to feed.

Mentally running down a list of the things that could go wrong, he set off for the house. A particular caught his attention, and by the time he was up the back stairs he was running, hoping that it was that, not yet.

Jiltanith was in front of the television, watching a newscast but hardly registering it any more. Donovan turned up the volume so he could hear about the moans.

"...Army has recently been seen moving north on State Road Fifty Eight," the announcer was saying. Behind him, a photograph showed the vehicle of the Angels, with the Holy Emblem on the sides, rolling at a good pace down a road.

"When questioned by reporters, a spokesman for the Army, also known as the Angels, merely said they knew of the presence of two people of the type called 'The Only' in the general area, and that they were being dispatched to apprehend them. 'The Only' was reported to be a group of vampires," he gave them the slightest hint of reportorial detachment, "Devoted to the eradication of the human race. Another group

vampires, 'The People,' depraved monsters though they are, have been useful in the hunt for these creatures of evil." He looked up, directly at the camera and the audience. "If anyone has information about these vile mockeries of humanity, they are urged to contact the Angels Search Network. The number is..."

Donovan turned the set off and put his hands on Jiltanith's shoulders.

"That means us," he said. "No other Only lives near Fifty-Eight. We have to get out of here now."

Jiltanith did not seem to hear him, and kept keening. "Tanni, listen to me!" He lifted her head with a hand.

"You have to help, do you understand?"

She nodded.

"Good. Get some clothes, heavy and light. Blankets. All the medicine you can. Don't worry about packing it, just bring it all down to the car as soon as you can. Got that?"

Where the spaceport had been simply nonexistent. A crater reached greedily toward them, short by less than a mile. They couldn't see the land. The land around them had been fused by the heat into blackened glass, stretching to the sides behind them as far as their vision extended. Sunlight was muted, barely able to penetrate through the clouds and dust at all. A dull grey was all that could be managed, even though it was, as nearly as Donovan could figure, mid-afternoon. If there was anything standing, he couldn't see it.

He increased the speed again and they plunged into their plunge.

and didn't move at all until the disfiguring light began to fade. Donovan cautiously put up his head and saw what no other person had ever seen - the interior of a thermonuclear explosion. By now the horrible energies had begun to dissipate, but the smoke and debris flew by with astonishing speed, the winds swirling in intricate patterns of violence, driving the tortured soil and ash before it. Faintly Donovan could see a single spot of brightness where the port was. Had been, he corrected himself. There certainly isn't one there any longer. He pushed the control forward, wanting to put as much time between them and the explosion as possible.

"Donovan? What happened?" she asked, still hiding her head.

"Someone used a missile on the spaceport. Nuclear or antimatter, one of the two. Big too. It had to be at least twenty miles away but we were still inside the fireball. My God!" The exclamation was torn from his lips. "Jiltanith, look!" She raised her head and gasped.

She nodded again and rose to her feet, the same.

"I'll drain more from the others, as much as I don't know when we'll be able to find food again," that he turned and headed for the kitchen, navigating her way upstairs.

### Chapter 4: The Awakening

The other six were not really prepared, and he didn't know if he could handle all of them at once, but he had no choice.

*Besides, he thought, if I can get a few pints from each, then maybe they'll all live.* He set to work, first securing them as best he could, then disconnecting their drug bags, injecting the stimulants, attaching the hoses and running them into the large valve on the top of the purifier.

One by one, they awoke and began their struggles and screams. Donovan was nearly deafened by the volume and had to stagger out for a moment to regain his equilibrium. When he reentered, he opened the taps on the first one, a man, about fifty years old, who had stopped struggling and was watching him carefully, and with interest. He tried to say something, but Donovan couldn't hear him over the cries of the others. With an abrupt gesture, he managed to quiet them.

"Thank you," said the man in a refined voice.

am asking you to shut down and tear it apart!" He was indignant, and he could see that he could hold her back for much longer. Sighing, he reached for the power supply –

When another brilliant streak appeared in the sky. They cringed at the phantom sound after it passed over them, Jiltanith automatically covering her ears.

After it had passed, she released the gas mask and grinned sheepishly, saying, "I guess I need to get used to this." But Donovan wasn't listening to her; his attention was claimed by the path of the rocket.

"Get down!" he cried, urgently, grabbing her arm and pulling her down to the seat with him.

"What? Donovan, what are you doing?" she asked, struggling to get up, but he held her fast.

"Just stay down!" he commanded.

There was a blinding flash, at first only from the direction of the port, but soon it seemed to come from all around them. Even protected by the time fields, they were they could sense the destruction around

through them, pushing them back. In an effort to get away from it, they returned to the car and activated the machinery. Donovan shifted to the lowest level, watching in normal time but cutting the sound completely. The sudden exodus continued unabated for nearly an hour, until the final ship climbed out and beyond their sight.

"What do you think that was about?" puzzled Jiltanith.

"I don't know," said Donovan apprehensively. He had a horrible suspicion he knew what it was, a memory, maybe, of a nearly-forgotten movie. "Maybe it was a load of colonists."

*Or refugees*, he thought.

"Well, now that they're gone, we can get out of this car and stretch, right?" Her hand was already on the door handle.

"Give it a moment, okay? Let's see what happens next." He hoped that this would keep her in.

"Why? If another ship launches, we could just duck back in and turn it on, couldn't we? It's not as if I

"I take it, then, you are one of those va  
The one the Angels are looking for?"

"Yes, I am," replied Donovan, noting that t  
was quite calm.

"I never truly believed the reports, until n  
you one of, I think they are called, the People?"

"No, I'm not. We call ourselves the Only." D  
wasn't sure why he was answering the questi  
he could find no harm in it. At least it was keep  
others quiet.

"Ah, so you aren't called the People." He s  
almost content, as if with this bit of informati  
was complete.

"No," corrected Donovan. "Some of us  
Only. There are others who don't believe as we  
they call themselves the People." He tried to  
contemptuously, but failed.

"There is a difference?"

"Yes. The People are weak, we are strong  
not hide any more, we will not allow you hur

treat us as criminals." Again the words sounded false to him.

"But you are vampires? You do drink the blood of humans? At least, I presume that is what you plan to do with that," and he indicated as best he could the pipes of his blood running down to the collection bin. He managed a faint smile.

"We do drink the blood of humans, yes. But we don't have to," he admitted. Mentally calculating that the man had had enough drained, he shut off the flow, began the next one, a younger man.

"Then why do you?" He seemed both genuinely puzzled and interested. "And I see you have stopped. Thank you."

"I don't want you to die," mumbled Donovan. "As to why, isn't it obvious? Your kind has tried to kill off mine for centuries, isn't it understandable that we would want to strike back at you?"

"But don't you understand that drinking our blood is why we pursue you?"

patrols around nowadays at least." He managed to convince himself. "Okay, we'll stop for a while," and again he geared down and stopped their motion in time.

There was no sound as they climbed. Nothing, no human sounds, no animal sounds, no singing, not even the wind.

"It's so quiet!" exclaimed Jiltanith, in little more than a whisper. "Why?"

"You said it yourself," replied Donovan. "There are no people around here, if any, are few and far between. And as you see," he said, gesturing at the fire-scorched earth with a sweep of his arm, "There aren't trees or plants around here for the animals to eat. Actually, I'd be surprised if there had been any appreciable sound."

As if deliberately contradicting him, a low rumble began to shake the ground. Donovan looked towards Jiltanith turned towards the source of the noise, the spaceport. A half-dozen craft were well in the atmosphere, another group just beginning to rise on their pads. The sound buffeted them, rolling over

from the ash, and when it finally cleared and died away, nothing could be seen of the city that had once been.

The only sign of life was that mysterious structure in the distance, which appeared to be untouched by the fire. Donovan slowed to six months per hour to get a better look at it.

"A spaceport!" he exclaimed, realizing what it was as a pillar of fire streaked from it and disappeared into the skies. Satisfied, he prepared to return to the higher speed.

"Wait," said Jiltanith. "Maybe the Angels have fallen. They haven't rebuilt yet, wouldn't that mean that they gave up, at least in this area? If there's no city, then there can't be many people either, right?"

She was pleading, and Donovan wanted to give in. Even though it had only been less than a day to them, almost two and a half centuries had passed in the world around them, and he wanted to stop to reorient himself.

"Maybe," he allowed. "It's worth a look at least. I certainly don't think that there are going to be too many

"We didn't start it!" Donovan exclaimed. "V with you for thousands of years, drinking the k animals. Can we help it if our digestion can't other foods? Then your Holy Church be Inquisition, and we had to hide. Well, some of want to hide anymore!" He shut off the second, the third, a middle-aged woman.

"I think I understand now. So if we would you alone, you wouldn't be drinking human blood could survive on animals' alone?"

"Correct. But you won't leave us alone." him off as he tried to reply, "Not you in perhaps. But the Angels won't stop until we eradicated, or at least that's what they p Donovan was genuinely angry now. "Why is Church always does this to us? What did we ev begin this?" Nobody answered him.

Finally the first man spoke up. "Well, I don how much it may mean to you. But, on behalf mankind, and especially the people in here, I, A Morton, beg forgiveness for our forefathers and you as well."

Shock was the only way to describe how Donovan felt.

"Th-th- thank you," he finally managed to stutter. "On behalf of the Only, I, Donovan Anasenko, accept and forgive you." He smiled. "I just wish that I could convince the others." The smile faded.

he sixth one, a young woman, screamed, "Well, that's all nice and fine and dandy, but what about us? Huh Donovan, old friend? What about us, hanging like sides of meat? Sure, Gus may forgive you but I sure as hell don't!"

"And who are you?" intoned Gus.

"Beth Kaygan. If he cares so much about us, then why won't he let us down?"

Donovan could feel the eyes of all six on him as he made the next switch. Straightening up, he addressed Beth. "Because the Angels are headed here right now. They'll be here in less than an hour, and we plan to escape. So I'm taking some food with us, rather than risk having to take it directly from someone's neck like in all the trash novels about us. Would you rather I

buildings seemed to fall into disrepair. The go on the Emblem was stripped off at some point. The facings fell, or cracked, and were not replaced with glass but what appeared to be plastic, or perhaps metal sheets.

An earthquake leveled many of the buildings around them, giving them back their view. Little was made to rebuild; most were left fallen, a testament of children's blocks. The city was brought back to a faint echo of its former glory, but the spires no longer stretched for the sky. The piles of rubble around them grew as damaged buildings finally collapsed and were ploughed away.

Even their preserve, as they had come to call it, was slowly being used. Their wall had never been rebuilt after the quake, and the far corner had turned into a garbage dump. Year after year, the dump grew larger and closer to them. Then, in the hundred and eighteenth year, not quite two hours after they had headed off again, a fire swept through the nearly deserted city, burning for months - yet taking them by in mere seconds. The skies were dark

For the next hour they watched. A flash fire cleared away the growing forest, and they could see down into the city. Buildings were erected, the Holy Emblem on the sides. More of the forest was cleared. Off in the distance they could see a large area being paved and built up, and discussed what it could be.

Gradually all the surrounding countryside was built up as mankind expanded, all save what had once been their land. That was left untouched, possibly because of the "foul creatures" that had once lived there. The Anasenkos were amused by the precautions being taken, especially the high wall, topped with barbed and electrified wires, and the large blocks of rock salt scattered around to prevent any plants from growing.

After the first century passed, and no signs of the Angels losing any power or control, they decided to continue for at least another century. The surrounding buildings grew taller, though no closer. Eventually one was built so tall in front of them that they could no longer see into the main part of the city. But they could see the spires of the tallest buildings, poking into the skies. As they passed through the second century, the

do that? Or are you willing to let me take a pin from you as painlessly as I can?" He turned the force of his personality on her. "Do you want to be responsible for more pain?"

"No, of course not. But I thought you said you could live on animal blood, didn't you? Or was that a lie?"

"I do not lie!" He paused, calming himself. "I can live on animal blood, and I would prefer to be sure that we will as soon as we get away. But I am here now, and I need as much insurance as I can get. Note, too, that I am only taking a little from each of you. I want you all to live, even you, Beth. So please do not tempt me, I might just leave the spigot open. He grinned coldly, then allowed it to melt into something slightly warmer. "I wouldn't do that. I only kill what I have to."

"And how often is that?" she shrieked.

He winced at the memory of Emily, her face consumed by the flames. "Too often."

Gus broke in. "Look, Beth, I don't think that this is really necessary. Donovan seems to be a decent chap who has had the bad luck to be born into a group that is oppressed and is fighting back as best it can. If anything, I'd think you would be grateful he isn't sinking his fangs into your neck, like the old movies show."

Beth slowly nodded. "I suppose so. I don't have to like what he is doing though." A thought seemed to occur to her. "Do you actually have fangs like the movies?"

Donovan grinned wryly. "Nope. Just another myth about us."

The one being drained, another middle-aged man, spoke up. "What are some of the others?"

Donovan asked, "And you are...?"

"William Owens. Bill." Then the other three replied in kind. The middle-aged woman was Margaret James, the young man was Joey Ventura, and the last, another young lady, was Sarah Evers.

"Well," began Donovan, "For one thing, we don't turn to dust in the sunlight. Holy water doesn't burn us,

took a single look, blanched, and tossed it as far as he could into the surrounding growth.

"Get into the car. Quickly!" He rushed to the car, collecting the tools and tossing them into the trunk. "Move!" he demanded when she had simply frozen in place, pushing her towards the door. She was still closing her door when he leapt in, gave it power, and moved into twice normal speed.

"What is going on?"

"That thing you picked up is a remote sensor, a different kind than the Angels used. And it was still active, broadcasting its information to somewhere. I can't guarantee that there is a force moving here right now. He scanned the area intently, trying to see beyond the bushes.

It wasn't long before he was proven right. The branches shook, then a whole company of sold-out machines, all displaying the signs and symbols of the Angels, came through, searching for them. "I don't know if that's safe yet," he commented wryly, moving the controls to the twenty-first position. "Let's try it for a century or so," he said.

"If you want to look around, go right ahead. I'm going to be busy for a while checking the connections." Jiltanith nodded and headed off towards where their house stood.

"Tanni!" called Donovan before she got too far.

"Yes?" she replied, already muffled by the leaves.

"If you see anyone, or anything suspicious, don't linger. Just turn around and come straight back here, understand?"

"Right. I'll be back soon." She moved off, the rustling of her passage fading quickly. Donovan turned to his creation and began to examine it. As usual, he became immersed in his work, and didn't notice when Jiltanith hurried out of the woods carrying a piece of metal.

"Donovan!"

He jumped, this time hitting his head. "What is it?" he muttered, rubbing the sore spot.

"What is this? I found it out there," and she gestured into the brush, handing the piece to him. He

neither does a crucifix. Garlic isn't a problem - and I personally can't stand it." Some smiled at this.

"Flying? Only the way you folks do it. A sword, the heart will kill us, but so will an axe to the neck or fall down a well. We do like the night; our eyes are a little more sensitive than yours. We are stronger physically and have greater endurance. On the whole, we're end up a little smarter than the average human. All of our, you could call them less-intelligent, less-endowed members have been weeded out." Some smiled at that.

"We live longer than humans as well - a few hundred fifty years, give or take. The oldest we've lived to be nearly four hundred, so it is possible to live for a very long time, but we're not immortal, die just like you. We have children and raise them, watch them and love them, just like you. Some of us are telepathic over distances; almost all of us are touch-telepaths. In fact, I'd say that you could say we are non-vegetarian Vulcans." There was a chuckle at that. "But we are more alike than different. We have the same desires and emotions as you. We simply have a different diet."

"Where do you come from?" This was Joey.

"I was born about fifty miles away." He enjoyed the look of shock on his face. "We evolved, just like you. But where you developed a strong stomach, ours never did. So we need our food in as easy-to-digest forms as possible. Blood is nearly perfect."

"What about you? Do you have a wife, or girlfriend?" Sarah asked this.

"Yes, actually I do. We can't "marry" by your laws; your churches don't accept us, plus other reasons. Like our birthdays. Gus, how old do you think I am?"

The older man studied him for a moment, thought. "Twenty-five maybe. Thirty, tops."

Donovan smiled again. "Nope. Just celebrated my forty-eighth birthday a few weeks ago. Now what would a registrar say about that?" He paused for a moment to switch to the last one. "But our church has married us, so she is my wife. Her name is Jiltanith."

"Any children?" asked Margaret.

managed to open the doors and climb out. Using their hands they pulled and ripped the leaves and branches away, until more than simply the outline of the forest was visible, forging paths to the back, and the blood

"Now," demanded Jiltanith, and Donovan could not resist. He opened the trunk then the refrigerator case within, handed a bag to Jiltanith, and took a bite himself. Before he was given in to the temptation to take more, he closed the lid, and the trunk. The lid had torn a corner off and was slurping green. Before long Donovan was as well.

Their thirsts slaked, they leaned against the trunk. "Peaceful, isn't it?" commented Donovan. "It doesn't sound like there is anybody for miles around."

"No, it doesn't. Perhaps this is far enough," asked Jiltanith hopefully.

"Possibly, but I don't think so. It's just not enough. People will probably still remember eventually that has happened. It's still within their ears for lifetimes." Mindful of Jiltanith's usual reaction to feeding - a renewed libidinous drive - he decided to distract her.

Sure enough there was a small gleam in his eyes at the thought of food. "It should be safe enough here to stop for a few hours, eat, and for me to look over the accelerator, just to check it for any damages, see if we need to replace the power pack yet. Suits you?"

He glanced over, saw that Jiltanith was just as eager to eat as he was becoming, and chuckled. "Right, I'll take that as a yes."

Gradually he brought the control down through the levels, the whine of the engine getting higher and louder with each drop. He let it sit in the first position until the noise had dropped back down to what he considered "normal" levels, then down to Neutral and cutting the power, almost simultaneously. They looked around.

Nobody was in sight. Nature had taken advantage of their absence and had grown wild, obscuring their vision in most directions. A few shafts of sunlight broke through the brush to reach their car, and the occasional hole allowed them to see glimpses of the woods beyond. Slowly, straining against the abundant foliage which had encased them, they

"No, not yet. We haven't had the time yet, someday we will. Jiltanith's younger than I am, thirty-five. Plenty of time." Yes, *that's one thing I have lots of, time. But not now.*

"Okay, nearly done. Look, I need to ask you something."

A chorus of voices said, "What?"

"I'd rather not put you back to sleep after this, and I'm tempted to let all of you down. But even if I want to, I can't quite trust you yet. Too many years, too many friends dead." They looked on sympathetically.

"However."

He turned to Gus. "If I let you down, disappear you, would you be willing to help me finish here, then I will give you the keys to let everyone else out, and to the closet where your clothes are." Mimi, Sarah and Beth all blushed, suddenly aware of their position. "I think I can trust you."

Gus' gaze was absent for a moment, lost in thought.

"You have my word."

Rapidly Donovan removed the tubing and the straps. He offered his hand; Gus took it and they shook. "Let's finish this, okay?" Together they set to dismantling the equipment.

"Donovan, are you almost..."

Jiltanith's voice trailed off as she looked into the closet, saw her husband talking to one of the humans, who was free! A fierce protectiveness broke over her, and she dropped the load she was carrying to rush at Gus. At the last second she was pushed away from her target and into the wall, knocking the wind out of her. She turned, wild-eyed, to face her assailant, and found her husband's face before her.

"Let me go!" she snarled, struggling furiously to get free of his arms. But although she had the power of anger behind her, he was larger and stronger than she, and he held her until she subsided.

"Jiltanith, listen carefully, because I am only going to say this once. Gus is not escaping, or trying to hurt me. He is helping me finish so we can get away.

## Chapter 6: Not Far Enough

They awoke several hours later. "Morning," he offered, stretching. "How are you feeling?"

She stretched in reply, muttering.

"What was that?"

"I said, I feel dead! Tired, hungry, cramped, just generally unhappy." Her face eloquently expressed her displeasure. "Where, or maybe I should say how, are we now?"

"I'm working on that," said Donovan, absentmindedly off into space. "Let's see, it's been eight years since we left, subjective time, so that means... fifteen years."

"That's all?" she said incredulously. "Eight years? And we are going to escape in this thing?"

"It's gotten us this far, hasn't it?" he replied, and immediately regretted it. "I'm sorry, I should have said that. I think it might be because I'm hazy on the details."

"Anywhere, just as long as we are far away from those horrible people!" With that she curled into a fetal position and sank into her own mind.

Donovan shrugged and set the control at the fifteenth position, and suddenly they were moving at almost two years per hour. Confident that nothing would go wrong, and still concerned with his mate's behavior, he lay down across the seat, holding her in his arms and fell asleep.

Understand?" There was no intelligence in her words, only an animalistic fury.

"He's... human!"

"Yes, he is. He is also decent and honorable. I have already told him that he is safe. I gave my word. Are you going to make a liar of me?"

"No, it's just that..."

"I know, you have been told that humans are good for nothing but their blood. Well, it's not true. Then, what were you going to say?"

Jiltanith tried to peek around one side but she couldn't. "Say? I was wondering how close you were being ready to leave. I have almost everything loaded in." She stared into his eyes, still looking at him. "Donovan...?"

"It's going to be all right, you can trust me. You can trust him. We're almost done here. With your help, it's taken me almost no time at all." He got her into an insulated container.

"Full up. Nearly three weeks' worth if we're careful. That should be more than enough." He stood, raising her with him. "Now then, finish loading the car, please?" She nodded and he kissed her quickly. "Good. Now scat!" She went.

"Sorry about that," he said, turning around to face Gus. "I guess she..." He stopped, stunned. All of them were down, and they looked displeased. "What? Why did you release everyone?"

Gus looked him over carefully, like a student examining the specimen before dissecting it. "Because we don't trust you, Donovan. Or, more specifically, your wife. If you hadn't stopped her, I would be lying here with my throat torn out, wouldn't I?"

All Donovan could do was nod dumbly. "And where would that leave the others? If I was the only one you could trust with being released, what would you have done? Simply left them hanging on the wall, exhibits?"

"I- I don't know." The admission was painful.

"What the hell? Those bastards!" Donovan, pounding his hands against the wheel and the horn, setting it blating. Jiltanith

"They blew it up! Just because they couldn't us, or anything that would help them, they blew house! Now, I understand why we need to get them!" He ranted on for a while, unabated, simply staring at him and the ruins of their Finally his torrent slowed and stopped, and back, consciously relaxing.

"Sorry," he said sheepishly. "But we certainly go back now. After those vandalizing, more vermin..." Visibly struggling for control, he s mouth.

"Sorry again. Look, we need to figure out what we want to do this. How far into the future should we go before it might be safe? A decade, a century, centuries? A millennium? More?" He looked hoping to drag a reaction out of her. This te towards catatonia was totally unlike her, couldn't quite put it all down to the shocks. "What do you think?"

forth. The bottom position is Neutral. In that we simply glide along with the rest of the world, unpowered."

The sun continued its flickering path across the sky as he talked, and the men and machines of the Angels faded beyond blurs into invisibility.

"The next one is two to the zero - or normal speed, and that looks exactly the same as Neutral. The only difference is that we have begun to assert some control over our speed. Two to the first is twice normal time, two to the second is four times normal, and on upward. Where we are now is two to the seventh, or a hundred twenty-eight times faster..." He was interrupted by a sudden flash all around them. Quickly he brought the control back down to normal speed, ignoring the sudden high-pitched whine.

The house was gone, destroyed. All that remained were a few blackened timbers poking up from the crumbling remains of the foundation. Gone as well was the garage around them. A few troops still patrolled, but there was nowhere near as many as the first days.

"Exactly. Now, Donovan, I hold nothing against you. I just couldn't take the chance. We're not going to do anything to you; I gave my word about that. We can't try to stop your escape, because I do think that you have been treated unfairly. But we are not going to simply wait for you to go to be free again."

Donovan exhaled and nodded. "I understand, Gus. No problem." His face clouded.

"Maybe one. Look, if Jiltanith sees all of you go crazy, and I don't know if I could stop her control again. Let's just get this container out of here, through the door, and that'll be it. You just wait a few minutes and come out, okay?"

Beth said, "You're going to trick us, look at us here!"

"No," said Donovan wearily. "The door is locked, latch. Besides, why should I? I understand why you're doing this. I just want to get away from here as quickly as possible."

"But we're witnesses, we know who you are, and what you are!" she screeched. "You have to go!"

us!" She made as if to leap forward, but the others restrained her.

He shook his head, smiled. "No, Beth. Where we're going we won't need to worry about witnesses."

"Where are you going?" asked Joey, interested.

Donovan smiled again, broader. "The future. Come on, I still have to get this outside."

He stooped to raise the carton but was restrained by Gus' hand. "You mean, time travel?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean. But I can't stop it to talk with you more, so let's go." A bit of Jiltanith's fear had passed on to him, and he could imagine the Angels coming across him now.

"If it will make you feel better, I'll tell you where my diagrams and formulae are, fair enough?" Gus simply nodded, this being one too many shocks for him to maintain his composure.

"Good. Now let's move!" Mechanically, Gus lifted his end of the case and followed Donovan out the door towards the garage.

to leave. Do you?" An emphatic shake was her answer. "I didn't think so. Since we can't go back, we have to move forward, so..."

He moved the control forward to the eighth position. The men, visible as individuals before, now appeared as streaks until they were little more than streaks of gold. A few minutes the sun rose, a bright streak, and set. A few minutes after it rose.

"How fast are we moving?" asked Jiltanith.

"Um, let's see. We're up to the eighth position now, so..." Donovan was lost in calculations for a moment. "Five days, eight hours per hour. At least, that's what it should be. Unless I can get out and check, all I can tell you by is the ratio I programmed into it. If it's inaccurate, it's the counter, or the elapsed timer, then there is no way to tell precisely."

"Why not? And how can you be that accurate with just a row of numbers?"

"The control is set up to correspond with the ratio of two - like two to the first, two to the second, two to the third, and so on."

"See, we use just a little bit of energy to start, and to push, like a skier going down a hill. Then when we want to stop we have to use the energy we have stored in the power packs to act as brakes on the temporal momentum, to reduce the inertia. And finally, we can only slow our progress to a certain level, and that is what the rest of the universe moves at, one second per second. We can't beat entropy; that's the main problem." Donovan looked as unhappy as Jiltanith did as he pronounced this.

"I don't like the way it works either, but we can't escape it." He sighed, turned back to the clocks. "Four hours gone by. We have to increase the pace."

"Why? If you are so worried about that thing breaking, then why go faster?" There was a tint of anger born of confusion in her voice.

"Because, like I said, it's not the 'going faster' that takes energy. Increasing our speed won't damage the machine - and it is not a thing," he noted, a bit annoyed. "It is a temporal accelerator, if you need to call it a name. It's purely personal - I don't relish spending a few hours in here waiting for those cretins

## Chapter 5: Run Away!

Sirens could be heard faintly over the noise. "Dammit, I thought we had more time!" cursed the vampire. Tapping his greater strength, he took a step from the human and trotted to the garage, leaving the human bewildered behind him.

"Jiltanith!" he called out. "Get in the car now! We need to give it power! We are *leaving!*"

Within the garage, a light came on, and the sounds of machinery suddenly grew from nothing into an almost painful cry. Just above the noise, Donovan could hear Gus calling to him, "Where are the others?" but ignored him.

*Let them look for them if they want to. I have no thought. I certainly don't want to be followed!* The vampire, with no shape to pursue him, stopped and hunched forward with his hands on knees, and simply watched.

He threw open the door to the garage, revealing the renovated car, a whine filling the small space. Jiltanith crouched in the seat quivering in fear.

"What's wrong with it?" he could see her saying.

Shaking his head, he mouthed, "Nothing," as he opened the trunk, already filled with extra fuel and parts, and laid in their food for the journey. Taking a final glance around, he climbed in and shut the door.

The noise was slightly less inside the car. He looked over at Jiltanith and said, "Ready?"

She hesitated, then nodded her head slowly. His hand reached down to the slide and moved it forward a single notch. The whining grew deeper and steadied. Then he advanced it another notch.

For a time the scene was unchanged. He could see all the way to the house and the back door. Then Gus suddenly appeared, glanced into the garage, and walked away. Seconds later the machines of the Angels arrived, and the troops dismounted. Stealthily they surrounded the house, arms ready, encircling it to cut off any escape. An officer raised a megaphone to his lips and called out, but his words were lost in the rumble of the engine.

does," and he gestured toward the front of the machine. "We can't simply make us move faster in time. But only if we have more energy. We can't go backwards because we don't have enough energy to get over the back of the grooves."

"What if we had more energy?" prodded Jiltanith. "Maybe we can hook up more of the packs to it!"

"He shook his head sadly. "No. Even if we were willing to use them, there is simply no way to get that much work. The energy we need to go over a single notch is infinite, and we just can't get that much power."

"Can we stop? I mean, really stop, and you can check the checks then?" She looked at him pleadingly.

"No, we can't. 'Stopping' time would require us to use the machine, see? So if it's running, I can't stop it off to check it, right? Then there's the energy problem again. Most of what we will use doesn't come from moving faster - it's from slowing back down to 'normal' speed." He thought furiously, trying to think of a way to explain it.

"Do you have to examine it? Isn't it working fine now?" Jiltanith's voice was concerned. "It isn't broken, is it, and we're trapped in here?"

"No, nothing like that." A glimmer of a smile returned to his face. He checked another instrument. "But we've been traveling for a little less than thirty minutes so far, and I want to see how everything holds up."

"Then let's go back! Before they arrived!" she protested.

"We can't go back," he said softly. "You remember that, don't you?"

"Well..." She sounded unsure if she did remember it, or if she believed it.

"I'll explain it again. You've used my ratchet wrench, haven't you?" He went on before she could answer. "And you know how it moves forward, bracing against the last notch? Well, time is like that. Imagine a long straight row of grooves. That's time, what we can see of it. You and I and all the other people and things are simply ratchets, moving steadily forward. What this

"Why haven't they noticed us yet?" mumbled Jiltanith. A figure appeared at the door, hands held high. It was Joel. The others quickly followed in example and were led away by the troops. There seemed to be some confusion among the soldiers, perhaps curious as to why the evil creatures were taking captives go. The leaders ordered the men to move to the house and search it. The soldiers moved cautiously, and through a window Donovan caught one ripping his way through the books he kept in his study. In a very few minutes most of the soldiers were back outside, reporting.

Donovan still couldn't hear what was said, but it was evident that it was an order to search the house. *Here we go*, he thought nervously. *If this works, they'll walk right by us...* He licked his lips and crouched, as if this might help. Very quickly, it seemed, the men reached the garage, and shone bright lights into the corners. One even pointed his light at Donovan's eyes, blinding him before he could raise his arm, but then moved on.

"Jiltanith, it works! It really works!" Jiltanith was delirious with joy, thrilled at the accomplishment.

*Maybe we can actually escape all this!* "Jiltanith, isn't this great? Jill?" He turned to look at her. She was nearly catatonic, her eyes unseeing, her ears deafened, her mind paralyzed by the fear. Donovan slipped the control up two more notches and turned his attention to her.

"Jill, it's okay! We're safe, we're on our way! The Angels are behind us now, they can't catch us any longer. Even if they make their own machine, they've got the whole infinite future to search to try to find us. Somehow, I don't think they'll try to search Time." He had been holding her head with his hands, looking into her eyes, trying to capture a spark of life. Finally he found one and guided her back to herself. "Feeling any better?"

She shrugged, smiling feebly. "I suppose so. Where are we?"

"In our garage," he answered mischievously. Just like he thought she would, she appeared puzzled.

"And -" He glanced at a new instrument on the dashboard. "- about three hours into the future."

"Oh! Oh, Donovan, I didn't think it would be so good. I thought you were just trying to make me feel better, maybe help my fears." She sat more upright now. "How do you say it is really working?"

"It certainly is! The Angels can't touch us now." Triumphantly he looked out the windshield. "Blah!"

Her sudden confidence turned into fear. "What's wrong?"

He pointed. "Them." Members of the Angels were patrolling the house and the property. "They're here! Leave!"

"Th-they can't see us, can they?" she asked Jiltanith.

"Hmm? Oh, no, they can't see us - or hear us - by any way you want to examine it, we are invisible to them." He scowled. "But with them standing around, I can't stop to do a check of the circuits without them spotting me. I need time to do it, and I can't do that with them patrolling..." He let the sentence trail off.