Chapter Submission Cover Page

Author Name	Book Title	Category	Date Submitted
Ty Mall	If Only We Had Never Touched	Science Fiction	10/31/11

Main Characters	Sub Characters
Kyran	Brianna The Order of the Gufra, led by Ruati Leon (Kyran's friend and fellow Hidden member) Via (Kyran's love) Other Hidden members to be named later Melvin (medic) Gilbert (medic) Various unnamed medical personnel, unnamed citizens

Plot
As a guardian member of the Hidden, Kyran is strong, skilled in all forms of combat and immortal. As one of the first humans ever, he's lived underground for millenia, protecting the innocent. But with the days of sword and sorcery gone, he takes a job as a medic in the big city, using his powers to heal the injured, as well as persuade them that nothing really happened to them at all, if the occasion called for it. After healing a woman named Brianna at the scene of an accident, he doesn't feel power return as before. Kyran sees the flower on her neck disappear and realizes the Gufra still survive. One of them is coming for him. What are they planning? Could it be that the ritual books of the Hidden, which contain the immortality rituals, escaped destruction? If that wasn't enough, Kyran's now losing his immortality, and his life force, with each healing. Will he stop helping the sick and hide? Or reach out to his contacts, take the fight to the Gufra, and get his life back? Is he doomed to live alone, or are the rumors about the death of his immortal love Via untrue?

"What we got today, Mel?" Kyran asked, as the ambulance bounced down a side street.

"Always gotta know," Mel said over his shoulder. He adjusted his cap. "Where's the suspense? The excitement? Hmm. Woman jump out a hotel window. We're here."

The vehicle lurched to a stop. Five years with Mel and still cards up his sleeve. Kyran popped the rear door, and eased the crash cart down to the pavement, with Gil's help. Their fathers were just the same. Kyran handled the cart solo from the back and Gil followed, hauling what he called "the bone hitchup kit."

Straight ahead a woman struggled and swore. "Stop moving, please." Kyran swept glass away with his hand and some stuck. He knelt down. "Where's it hurt?"

"Everywhere." The woman moaned. "Mostly my leg. Thought you'd be smarter."

Telling Gil to check for anyone else, Kyran set the woman's leg with a snap, and she screamed. "Gil here," Kyran pointed behind him, "is coming soon to get you bandaged up, all right?" He stared into her eyes, and touched her shoulder. "Everything is fine." A little peace flowed from him, then came back.

“Yes, Kyran.” The woman said.

“You won’t remember my name, or anything from today.”

“No.” The woman almost whispered.

“What are you, first year?” Gil laughed and came up behind them. “Ain’t no one else round, and took you that long to diagnose a broke leg?”

“Ankle.” Kyran helped Gil wrap, careful to hide his hand. The two got the woman on the cart and into the ambulance.

Kyran checked his watch.

Gil nodded. “Shift’s almost over, Gargoyle. You coming for drinks?”

“Nope. I’ve won enough of your money this month,” Kyran said to Gil, and heard Mel laugh from the front seat.

“Not my loss.” Gil pulled the rear door shut.

“Yeah, it’s mine.” Could quit today if I wanted. Kyran closed the other door, and rapped it. The ambulance sped away. Sure they were gone, Kyran pulled his right hand out of his jacket and picked out all the glass. Bloodless gashes stitched in seconds. He threw the glass into a nearby dumpster and walked home.

In a cramped apartment in the run-down section, Kyran hung his hat and coat on pegs by the door, and then stopped. He’d remembered to pay old Mr. Wilbur the rent this month.

“Why’s a young buck like you with a great job staying way out here?” Mr. Wilbur said to Kyran every time he saw him. “The city center’s the place for a hipster like you.” Don’t know if I can stall much longer. Wilbur seemed older than eighty-five.

He trudged to the empty fridge and looked inside, just for kicks. Another reason why Mr. Wilbur could never come in. No bed or couch—could the old man believe it?

Kyran remembered a lot of his training. The weak point of the Slar beast. How to stop a charging Unna bird. What to do to deflect the magic of the Yulaan tribe.

All worthless now. He sighed. The upside of not worrying crossed the downside of having to adapt. Every century, studying currency movements—which changed little. Nailing the safe investments provided the challenge. The Internet made that so much easier. Keeping up when corporations changed names, or hands, or even countries made Kyran glad to be alive, not to mention proud of the fact he never slept. After that came learning new skills and new crafts to make great impact without being noticed.

He booted up his laptop and adjusted his age and DOB in all the city databanks. Safe for another few years. Piece of the puzzle nobody else worried about. Avoiding questions wore on Kyran, but only for a while. Nobody would believe you.

Kyran stepped out on the balcony and watched nightlife in the city, the pulsating lights. Who would need medical attention tonight, and wouldn’t get it? To have a good time, people threw a lot to the wind. He

imagined Gil and Mel dousing their livers right now at East End Tap on Tollman Boulevard, unaware of what lay ahead. A luxury Kyran couldn't afford.

Art's never let me down. Kyran liked the gallery on Ninth Street that showed everyone an antique yataghan given to an African prince in the year 1238. Kyran to tell all the men in suits and ladies in beautiful gowns that the real one he made in 1152 got broken in half in a battle in North Africa. Prince Anahazi lay dying, his sword shattered. The enemy stabbed him with one of the pieces. Kyran made sure he didn't walk away and healed Prince Anahazi too. Kyran sighed. The beauty of Hutioli, his daughter—who the prince promised for Kyran's service—touched him even now. Kyran declined and instead requested His Majesty's right thumb ring.

On its chain, the ring's sapphire looked bright as ever. He wiped a tear away. Pop culture finally got it right. Outliving everyone you knew really sucked. Hutioli deserved to be happy. But that meant somebody else. It always did, and you built walls, you had to. Images of a smiling woman flooded his mind.

Via.

Kyran wiped his eyes again and peeled a bit of dangling paint off the wall that his cousin built—in 1922. Another Hidden told them that the Spelman Building would make a good hideout in about a century or so.

Old Mr. Wilbur just might check. If he wasn't drinking. Wild laughter echoed down the dim hallway.

Kyran knew that day wouldn't be today. He powered down his laptop.

Sure he told Gil and Mel he wouldn't make it, but maybe tonight was perfect for a night out.

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Kyran strode through the double-glass at Porter's, and sat down.

"What can I getcha?" The bartender breezed over.

"Brandy." Kyran dug out his wallet. "Keep the change, and leave the bottle, please." Large bills hit the table.

"Sure thing," she said, scooping up the money. Her hair jewelry nearly bumped Kyran's glass as she slid it over on a cocktail napkin. "There you go. Classy spiked 'do."

"Thanks." No hair gel needed, ever. "Interesting tattoo."

She looked down at her neck. "The tiger lily? Oh, my cousin gave that to me a few years back."

Something in the middle of the blossom bothered Kyran, but he couldn't place it. Some boys from the south side med team trooped in, and waved hi before watching the game on the plasma.

After his third fill, Kyran decided to slow down. The girl at the bar seemed to be lingering, holding on to his glasses longer than usual, putting other customers on hold, just for a second. Asking him what he liked, and then looking at him when he told her interests of his that were decades apart, just for fun. Any younger and she couldn't serve anyone, he was sure of it.

When she told him about her mother leaving when she was sixteen and then hurried away to help someone else, Kyran figured it out.

She'd probably planned to ask him.

And he planned to refuse. People always got hurt, and they should be as pain-free as possible because they weren't around long. There were substitutes for genuine listening and they were all bad.

It didn't matter what she thought about him. Maybe I got it all wrong. Maybe I don't want her finding out the side effects of being made, not born. Kyran cursed his desire to help, if only for a moment, and stared at the bar's polished wood, trying not to look up at the portrait of Cal Porter, above the bar. Loved me like a brother, back in the day. Couldn't be a father like him, or at all.

Kyran bit his lip, and waved the bartender over. Being immortal proved a good way to hold two things—liquor and pain.

After serving him, the bartender stepped outside for a break.

Kyran heard the screech, then the crunch and ran out the door before anyone could block his way.

The bartender lay on her side, and the car sped down an alley across the street.

"I'm a medical professional, please stand back," Kyran said as a crowd pooled outside Porter's. He rolled the girl on her back. Whew. Just some head trauma. Easy.

Kyran radioed for backup. ETA was four minutes. Plenty. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Brianna." The girl's eyelids started to flutter.

"Brianna. Nice name. Stay with me. We don't want you unconscious all right?" Kyran tried to ignore car noise and gapers. He touched Brianna's hand and concentrated.

"Thank you, Kyran."

"You're—" Never told her my name. Kyran felt pain in his mind.

Brianna moaned and the tiger lily on her neck faded away. She grabbed his arm. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. They made me. I really did like you." She clutched her stomach in pain.

"Wait. Who?" Kyran tried to hide the pain.

"The Gulf." Her eyes started to close.

"No, stay with me."

Her head drooped to the side.

Kyran saw a tattoo reappear on her neck. An ornate letter G.

Kyran swore. The mark of a Vessel. The Order still existed.

And they were coming to finish the job.