

# Fugitive

John Day

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**Acknowledgement to my wife for all her help and support.**

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**November 29th 2005: Talos Dome Plateau, Antarctica**

Steve Ross braced himself for the vicious onslaught he was about to face. He hated this place, the complete opposite to hell. Outside the temperature was a cool  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ , but there was a storm blowing so wind chill and the driving snow added to his misery. His team had noticed interesting strata in the ice core they had pulled up and wanted him to see it, immediately. He took a deep breath, adjusted his mask and pushed open the outer airlock door of the habitat. Blinded by the snow swirling past and buffeted by the wind, he tethered himself to the guide rope and leaned back into the wind. The storm had struck suddenly, but would soon pass, so the core drill team had taken shelter in the core store.

He pulled open the metal store door and greeted his excited colleagues. "What's got into you guys, you're like boys in a brothel. I hope it's worth getting up out of a warm bed for." The door closed shutting out the howling weather and he removed his mask. It was a lot warmer in here without the wind chill but still their breath hung like smoke in the stark fluorescent light. The five other men were gathered around a long, stout timber table and beckoned him over to see the exposed ice core laid out on it. Harry Wilson picked up a marker pen and used it as a pointer. "This is the stratum we want you to see, that fine black hairline, just there."

"You've got good eyes Harry, are you sure it goes right through the core?"

"Yes, I turned the sample and also scraped it in case it was a surface stain, but it's solid. It's a fine layer of deposit, dust from some event I would guess, Steve."

Steve pulled out a small phial and disposable scalpel from their sealed packs, from his parka pocket, then scraped the black substance into the phial. "There's no other band on the core that I can see, so I will go and

test this straight away. Thanks for calling me over, it was worth it.”

The wind had dropped to occasional gusts now and as he stepped outside, he marveled at the expanse of pure white, to the horizon. The sun suddenly broke through and dazzled him, so he hastily refitted his mask and hurried back to the laboratory. People spoke as he rushed by, but he was unaware of answering them, he had to know what this sample contained. As Steve changed into his lab coat, Dana his assistant got up out of Steve’s bed and dressed.

Steve spoke as he worked feverishly with the sample and peered through the eyepieces.

“I’ll take a preliminary look at the sample using the optical microscope, can you set up the electron, then start a chemical analysis. It’s very odd Dana, this substance should not be here. Thank goodness Harry spotted it, especially in such poor conditions.

“Wow, Dana, you have got to see this!”

She peered in and drew a sharp breath, “well, I’m fucked!” she said, in awe. They rushed off separately to set up and carry out the other tests.

Several hours later, Steve typed up his report, backed by microscopic and chemical analysis, and then phoned through to Stella Bancroft, the Director of Operations.

“Hi Stella, I have completed the preliminary analysis and am confident my conclusion will be supported by independent testing, can I come and see you now and run through my findings?”

“By the tremor in your voice, I couldn’t stop you. Yes, come straight away.”

Steve arrived, grinning and breathless and ran through the report. Stella was excited, but held it in check. “You did follow protocol, didn’t you?”

“Yes, Dana and I were very careful, doubly so when we saw what the electron microscope revealed. The sooner we get the core back to base for full analysis, the better I will be pleased. I am amazed that it could

have survived for 3 million years, no wonder we can't identify it."

"We don't actually know what age it is, until it's dated. If your assumption is correct, and the iridium trace suggests you are, it could be up to 3 million years old, but also much younger. I will get this report off to base immediately and arrange transport of the core. Thanks Steve, I will thank Harry personally."

That night, the station was alive with activity, Harry was ill. Paul Brown the station doctor was in a panic, Harry awoke with a fever but the poor man was getting worse by the minute. Paul phoned through to Stella to make his recommendations.

"Stella, we need to move Harry back to base immediately along with everyone who has been in contact with him today. All those people should be kept in quarantine for the time being, to see if they go down with it as well."

"What do you think is wrong with him Paul?"

"It could be something he came here with that has been dormant, but I don't really know. It is like a bad dose of flu, he's been coughing and sweating, and now he is in a lot of pain, not localized, but all over. I have dosed him up with pain killers, but it's not holding it back."

Stella felt sick with fear and leapt out of bed to contact the base in Australia for support. Current weather conditions ruled out an air lift for 24 hours, they had to manage the situation as best they could, for now. She issued instructions for everyone to stay in their rooms and not to go near anyone, there was a serious infection risk and until help came, do nothing to spread it.

The station went quiet soon after that, but hours later, the screaming started!

**August 19th 2012: London.**

Sam Leighton phoned Max Fortune at 10pm for their next mission.

“Max, I need you and Carla for an urgent job. Your flight from Gatwick in the Learjet leaves in eight hours. Your brief is on board.”

This was a typical phone briefing; just the basics, no critical or sensitive information with the ever-possible risk of unwanted listeners.

Absolutely everything they would need for the trip would be provided on the flight: instructions, identities, funds, credit cards, and clothes suitable for the country, climate and their new persona.

Sam was Head of The Organization, a position of immense responsibility. His calm and efficient manner put everyone at ease, even though they would not be speaking with him unless the matter was serious. When Max first met Sam, he knew he was dealing with a very rare character, a man of awesome intellect and clear focus. He had greeted Max warmly but his eyes disassembled Max during the first few seconds of unwavering eye contact as they shook hands. He knew everything about Max from a dossier and when offering future missions, would manage him accordingly. Sam always asked his people for help, knowing they would never refuse him. Both Max and Carla Day, Max’s work partner and lover, were hooked with the request for help. They craved the challenge of the unexpected, his missions always brought.

Carla asked Robert Leighton, Sam’s brother and party host, to call a taxi to take them back to the Hilton, “Sam needs us on another mission,” she said. They bid goodbye to the guests that mattered, thanked Robert for all his help in making their just-completed mission a success and wished him all the best for the future. Their taxi was arriving just as they reached the gate-.

Earlier the same day, they had been celebrating-.

### **The celebration**

The celebration at Robert Leighton's home marked the successful end to a most unusual mission for Max Fortune and Carla Day. It also celebrated Robert's promotion.

Sam had asked Max and Carla to track down a blackmailer and destroy any evidence which compromised his brother Robert, a senior administrator in MI5.

Robert knew Sam could get things done and it would remain totally secret. Even after using the resources of MI5, Robert could discover nothing about his brother's activities and still had no idea of the power at Sam's command.

Their just-completed mission had been to trace (and if necessary, eliminate) a blackmailer who had recorded a private conversation between Robert and a woman from Homeland Security, in a prestigious London hotel. Although such unofficial meetings are common, making this recording public would have killed their careers.

What made this mission unusual? That it was of no benefit to The Organization.

The Organization's business model worked by linking people, finance, inventions and businesses to one another and making money from it in the form of fees, shares or commissions. With their international business connections, they had key people working for them in all strategic posts. These key persons always presented themselves as shareholders or sent innocuous invoices for "services rendered", never anything significant or revealing, so all investigation to uncover them remained futile.

Max and Carla were not private detectives or spies; they were trained and employed, with others, as trouble shooters and undercover key operators for The Organization. Although nearing fifty, Max's physique was that of a very fit man around thirty five. He was ruggedly handsome, of average build and nearly six feet tall. Carla was a lithe and

very athletic twenty eight year old petite blond, just over five feet three inches tall. They were the perfect team, Max had a creative and ingenious way of getting out of trouble, preferring brain to brawn. Danger scared him, but it never diminished his resolve, it just made him careful. Carla used all gods' gifts, shamelessly. To her, they were her tools and she knew how to use them to get what she wanted. They also loved each other deeply, a mixture of mutual admiration, adoration, trust and passion. Individually they were brilliant, combined they were formidable. The definition of "Counterpoint".

In another recent typical mission, Max and Carla were chosen to investigate a carved stone that was exposed during deep excavations for building foundations in Egypt. When they found that it was part of a tunnel leading to a tomb, their mission suddenly changed. Now they were instructed to empty the tomb and conceal it totally, keeping its discovery secret from the Egyptian authorities, who would otherwise stop the building work and thus cost The Organization countless millions to reposition the building.

In addition, jars found in the tomb contained substances with valuable medicinal properties. These would be exploited by The Organization through specially set-up pharmaceutical companies. The medicines based on these substances, marketed at a future date, would yield phenomenal windfall profits.

During their mission to protect Robert, Max and Carla discovered the blackmailer had also recorded the activities of other high profile people who had been developing a terrorist plot to murder thousands at the London Olympics.

Even though the recordings were passed on to MI5, they were dismissed as a smear campaign against the highly-placed persons involved. The intelligence was not credible, so MI5 did nothing. It then fell to Max, Carla and Robert to extract confessions from the conspirators and leave them tied up so that arrests could be made by MI5. Robert was projected as the person who uncovered the plot and

whose investigative efforts led to the arrests of the leaders and terrorist cells; his promotion in MI5 naturally followed.

Meanwhile, the security forces were hell-bent on finding Max and Carla, who had broken all rules to achieve their ends. MI5 were also upset because Max, Carla and the terrorists slipped through their cordon during a shoot-out in London.

At the celebration, Carla gave Robert Leighton the DVD containing the incriminating evidence against him. She watched as he snapped the disc into fragments and threw them disdainfully into a waste bin.

“You do realize, Robert, that had it not been for your indiscretion, the terrorist plot to murder thousands of innocent souls would never have been discovered. I like to see the positive outcome.”

“You are right, of course. It is a wonderful feeling to be free of this threat to my freedom and way of life. Thank you, Carla and please thank Max for me.” She drifted away and circulated with the guests.

Neither Carla nor Max actually liked Robert; he was diametrically opposite to his brother. They saw the charming and charismatic Robert for what he was deep down: selfish, cold and ruthless, perhaps ideal qualities for senior MI5 staff.

It was, however, part of the plan that Max and Carla would be the fall guys. Robert had to remain unimpeachable and to be credited with the success of the foiled plot. Plenty of false leads were left to confuse the security forces. Sooner or later they would give up the chase, but in the meantime, Max and Carla were hiding in plain sight as guests at this party. The house was packed with guests, many curious about this striking couple. Robert anticipated his friends' probing and had already created suitable cover stories.

After getting Sam's call about their next mission, Max informed Carla, and they planned to leave. Hand in hand, Max and Carla came out. Their taxi was arriving just as they reached the gate-

### **Surprise attack**

Just as the driver wearily dimbed out of his taxi and started to open the rear door, four men rushed out of the darkness and began to viciously attack them. The sparse street lighting cast deep shadows between parked cars.

Two men attacked from the left and two from the right. One struck the taxi driver and heaved his unconscious body into the shadows, then ran to help his accomplice, who was lunging towards Carla. The other two men were already punching and struggling with Max. His expensive tailored evening suit hampered him as Max did his best to fight back. Carla, relatively unencumbered after pulling her close fitting white dress to her hips, lashed out with feet and hands. She was inflicting painful but hardly damaging injury on her two brawny attackers.

As Max went down under a torrent of blows, one of his attackers ran to help his two colleagues capture the wildcat in white. Carla knew the best she could hope for was to keep her attackers at bay either until help came or a better opportunity presented itself. One heavy blow to her head from any man could finish her.

The three men stood equidistant around her, just out of range of her high kicks. All but the newcomer were bleeding heavily from nose and mouth. Carla constantly lashed out as each man tried to get closer. With her stocking feet shredded and bloody, she held her high heeled shoes as weapons, thus extending her reach.

Carla sensed an opportunity. The man who stood between her and the open driver's door of the taxi was the most heavily built and appeared the slowest. A flying drop kick could disable him sufficiently to allow her to get to the car. She could close and lock the door before the other two could grab her, and then escape.

She also wondered why these men were attacking her and Max. If they wanted to kill them, a single gunman was adequate, so why four oafs? As no knives or guns had been used so far, these men obviously wanted

them alive.

The heavily built man pulled out a knife and wielded it menacingly with arm extended, but too far away to thrust or slash, possibly a warning to stop fighting or he would stab her. Carla, who had faced several knife attacks in her past, was unconvinced that this man actually had the authority to stab, which carried the risk of her death. The two men closed in from behind to grab her, believing that the knife was distracting or sapping her will to fight. But they were wrong.

The man closest on Carla's right received the full force of a pointed heel through his cheek as she swiped him faster than a cornered cat. The other attacker fell on his back as she followed through with her left leg, her foot catching him behind the knees. The man with the knife lurched closer as she spun to face him.

Now she had the opportunity she had been looking for.

In an instant, Carla had grabbed the right wrist of the knife-wielding man. Her right hand bent the knife point away from her as she forced herself against him. By curling her left leg behind his knees and using her momentum, the man fell back.

Instinctively, he tried to break his fall with his hands. Trapped by Carla's firm embrace, his right arm was imprisoned between their torsos, and his grip on the knife relaxed involuntarily. As they fell, Carla turned the knife point to his chest, the blade parallel to his ribs for proper penetration. As they hit the ground, Carla fell on him with her full weight, pressing the knife fully into him. With luck, she thought, the blade might penetrate a lung or other vital organs.

Rolling off his body, Carla pulled the knife out, ready to mercilessly stab her two approaching attackers. She figured, after slicing the first man, the arc of the blade would continue unabated across the second man, meaning three men down. But it was not to be.

A well-built man, lithe as a cat, rushed out of the darkness. With a

powerful swing, his fist smashed into the back of Carla's head, like an enraged man pounding a desk.

Carla's limp body rolled off the stabbed man and she lay still. The blood-stained knife fell from her hand and rattled across the pavement.

Max's attack had torn his opponent's left knee ligaments, causing the man to hobble away. Starting to rise, Max saw their arch enemy Philippe leap from the shadows and strike Carla. Carla's lifeless body rolled onto her back, the dark bloodstain over the right side of her lower chest contrasting with her white dress, which had risen to her waist. Max knew Carla would hate the indignity of dying with her raised dress exposing the translucent white panties that clung to her like a second skin. She had often joked with him that she hoped she wouldn't die in dirty lingerie.

### **Help coming.**

The attackers bundled the stabbed man, Carla and the knife into the taxi. One man drove, the other squeezed into the back. The fourth man and Philippe ran to another car and closely followed the taxi.

Max realized how Philippe's thought processes worked. Philippe was determined to avenge all the trouble that Max and Carla, especially Carla, had caused. He knew that Max would feel survivor's guilt for losing Carla; uncertainty and anguish would tear at Max's mind: Was Carla alive or dead? If she was alive now, how long would she stay that way? This torture would hurt Max far more than the physical pain he would face very soon.

Max pulled himself together as a police car approached. Staggering towards it as it stopped, he told the police officer to chase the two cars, their tail lights already faint in the distance. A stickler for procedure, the police officer climbed out of the car, intending to take a statement and review the situation before deciding what to do next.

Grabbing the police officer, Max impatiently ripped off his radio, pushed

him to the ground, jumped into the police car, started it and drove off behind Philippe.

Believing no one was following, the men drove sedately, anxious not to draw unwanted attention by speeding. Max soon caught up and followed at a discreet distance to avoid the assailants thinking the police were pursuing them.

Max knew the police officer would have phoned in by now and they would already be tracking the car. With time running out, he pondered as he approached a road junction, his eyes glued to the distant vehicles. After a quick glance left and right, seeing nothing coming, he accelerated towards the receding tail lights.

A blinding light from his right filled the side window...

The briefest blast of agony, too painful to bear, too instant to understand it was pain-

Voices, familiar words, but unintelligible-

Electrocution.

More vague voices. "He's back in sinus rhythm."

Then a man was pushing on his chest, pressing and releasing alternately, the taste and smell of blood, metallic, unpleasant... Now he was looking up at lights racing above, racing from foot to head. Blackness and nothingness enveloped him-

### **August 20th 2012: Amnesia**

TV news reports identified the critically injured man in the London hospital as Max Fortune and displayed the photo of a man appearing to be about thirty five, though he was actually approaching fifty. The report said:

*A police officer driving by had seen a group of men drive away from the scene of a violent attack leaving Mr. Fortune sprawled out on the dimly-*

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*lit pavement. The police officer stopped to assist Mr. Fortune, who claimed he and his 28-year-old girl friend, Carla Day, had just left a party when the attackers had abducted her. No photo of Miss Day is available.*

*The taxi driver who had come to pick up Mr. Fortune and Miss Day had also been rendered unconscious by the attackers and was found in deep shadow on the footpath. He has now recovered fully and the police have found his taxi, which was stolen by the unknown attackers.*

*Mr. Fortune, agitated when the police failed to respond to his pleas to chase the attackers, pushed the police officer to the ground and stole the patrol car to pursue them alone. During the pursuit, Mr. Fortune was seriously injured in a collision at a road junction with a stolen van, which was not found. Mr. Fortune is now undergoing treatment in a London hospital and is under arrest.*

*Mr. Fortune and Miss Day are linked to the murder of a scientist during a bomb attack at an exclusive London hotel, where they were staying at the time. There is also evidence linking them to a morning rush hour shooting and a foiled terrorist plot at the recent London Olympics. Enquiries are on-going into all these allegations.*

None of these reports meant anything to the patient who fought to stay alive. The serious brain injury had wiped Max's memory clean, though he suspected they were talking about him. Having seen himself in a mirror only with bulky head bandages after his memory loss, it was impossible for him to correlate his appearance with the news photograph. The doctors and nursing staff had been told to discuss nothing other than his health with him.

When the driver of the heavy van had deliberately smashed into the police car, the side impact had fractured Max's skull, ribs and pelvis. And if this was not enough to kill him, he had a strange underlying medical condition that flooded his system with stem cells. Although his injuries were healing at an unprecedented rate due to these cells, his increased metabolism was simultaneously killing him.

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