

After the Dark (Dark Angel, Book 3)

By Max Allan Collins

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Secrets and betrayals, as the saga of Dark Angel continues!

In a chaotic world where the lines between good and evil often blur, and violent anarchy and brutal repression become commonplace, secrets can be deadly. So when Max discovers a shattering truth that Logan has kept concealed from her for years, the betrayal threatens the very essence of their trust.

Yet when Logan is kidnapped, all questions of truth and loyalty are cast aside. Max's search will lead her to a familiar, menacing enemy—and back into the shadow of the Snake Cult, which waits for her with chilling anticipation.

But the search will also lead her into wholly unexpected territory. Locked in the fight of her life, Max will discover a captive of the cult who can provide her with the one thing that has haunted her ever since she escaped from Manticore. . . .

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap
"Secrets and betrayals, as the saga of Dark Angel continues!
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About the Author
Max Allan Collins has earned an unprecedented ten Private Eye Writers of America Shamus nominations for his historical thrillers, winning twice for his Nathan Heller novels, *True Detective* and *Stolen Away*. A Mystery Writers of America Edgar nominee in both fiction and non-fiction categories, Collins has written five suspense novel series, film criticism, short fiction, songwriting, trading-card sets, and movie/TV tie-in novels, including *Air Force One*, *The Mummy Returns*, the *New York Times* bestselling *Saving Private Ryan*, *CSI: Double Dealer* (from the CBS series), and *The Scorpion King*.

He scripted the internationally syndicated comic strip *Dick Tracy* from 1977 to 1993 and has written the *Batman* comic book and newspaper strip. His graphic novel, *Road to Perdition*, has been made into a DreamWorks feature film starring Tom Hanks and Paul Newman, directed by Sam Mendes.

Collins lives in Muscatine, Iowa, with his wife, writer Barbara Collins, and their teenage son, Nathan.

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Chapter One

A COLD DAY IN HELL

MEANDER RIVER, ALBERTA DECEMBER 18, 2021

Six months on the run.

Six months in small towns, big cities, motels, hotels, campsites, public parks, cohabiting with the riffraff, even the homeless, scrounging, surviving . . .

What a humiliating tenure this had been, in the post-Pulse ruins that was America, for a man of Ames White's abilities and sensibilities. But White was, if nothing else, a man able to endure difficulties, to overcome hardships, to shrug off adversities that would defeat even above-average specimens of mere humanity.

True, he was not particularly blessed with patience--that attribute had always eluded him. Nor was grace in the face of frustration his long suit; forbearance in the presence of mediocrity--not his forte. Nor was

compassion a trait he considered worth cultivating. So in his lack of "sensitivity," he seemed--to the second- and third-rate minds he so often encountered--cruel, even cold.

But such (wrongly) perceived cruelty and coldness only bespoke a superiority of mind and spirit, the end result of thousands of years of selective breeding; and, as such, were part and parcel of his ability to prevail. Anyway, Ames White was free of most of these primitive "human" emotions, though admittedly vestiges remained. He had loved a woman, once; and he loved his son.

But that was family. Breeding. That was allowed, even encouraged.

And Ames White was possessed with a dark, wicked streak of humor. He could well appreciate the irony of a "cold" character like himself finding refuge in the bitterly frigid Dene Tha town of Meander River, Alberta, Canada.

Its population no larger than the Sunday crowd in a Seattle marketplace, Meander River had taken him about as far north as he could manage, short of renting a dogsled. The people who lived here were so removed from civilization that White wondered if these subhumans had even heard about the Pulse, let alone felt its repercussions.

The Meander River economy was based on barter, and the citizens had very little use for computers, which meant scant had changed here, after what had been a cataclysm to the nearby United States. When terrorists set off an electromagnetic pulse over the East Coast back in 2009, the USA had lost everything, a superpower instantly reduced to the status of Third World nation. To Meander River, the event was as trivial as an electrical outage in a thunderstorm.

Buried under a mound of snow measured in feet, not inches, Meander River was the perfect vacation getaway for the person who didn't want to be found by persnickety types . . . NSA federal bosses, say, who might be annoyed that a certain agent had gone rogue; or the Familiars, White's breeding cult family, who might be ticked that one of their own had failed in every one of his mission objectives, and could merit a reprimand . . . the fatal kind.

If those were the kinds of people you needed a vacation from, then Meander River had much to offer. Not only was there the biting cold and daunting snow, Meander River was also over three hours from the nearest pre-Pulse landing strip, and a good twelve hours from Edmonton and a real airport. Those conditions did not make travel to this fugitive's frozen paradise a simple proposition, particularly only a week before Christmas when the average high for the day was still well below zero.

Meander River was also located in the middle of the Dene Tha Native Reserve. Back in the United States, such locales were called Indian Reservations, with the generally abominable conditions to be expected as the end result of a several-centuries-long government-sponsored genocidal undertaking.

Up here, conditions were at least slightly better, with a school, a firehouse, a general store, and maybe a hundred clapboard houses, all in decent enough shape. The area was neatly maintained, without the abandoned cars and paint-peeling buildings White knew were par for the course on U.S. reservations. Best of all, the Meander River racial makeup meant that White wore reverse camouflage--he was one of only four or five persons in the town without the dark red skin and flat, wide features of the Dene Tha--giving him the prime advantage of seeing pale-face trouble coming from a long ways off.

The Familiars were universally white, racial purity being one element of the breeding recipe that had been

perfected over countless centuries. And, of course, the U.S. government, particularly the ironically dubbed black ops agencies, weren't exactly renowned for their Rainbow Coalition hiring practices. So, for the time being anyway, White felt--if not safe--prepared to meet any difficulty, in this tiny Canadian burg.

Of course, White's whiteness had its downside. Among this dusky population, he stuck out like a failed Manticore experiment--he wouldn't have looked any more out of place had he been that imbecilic Dog Boy or that psychotic Lizard Man. While this would make him easy for his pursuers to spot, over all he maintained a certain peace of mind knowing that anyone hunting him would likely be in the same Caucasian--or at least non-Native American--boat.

Even so, White would also be harder to spot now than half a year ago, when his picture was broadcast on every television in North America. His spiky brown hair had grown out and covered his ears, a neatly trimmed beard and mustache replacing his previously clean-shaven face, giving him a well-groomed mountain-man appearance; his piercing dark eyes remained his most identifiable feature. The parka somewhat masked his lithely muscular build; but then, he had always looked slighter and less capable than he actually was.

He thought of himself as a mild-mannered Clark Kent, who could remove his glasses, strip off his attire, and reveal the Yber-man beneath. On the other hand, he had no need for glasses, with his keen Familiar-bred eyesight, and no one had ever accused him of being mild-mannered, or of having any manners at all, when it came right down to it.

When White had first arrived here four months ago, the former NSA agent rented a small blue house once owned by a schoolteacher who had taken a post in Calgary. With its two bedrooms, a sometimes functioning TV aerial, a bathroom with perpetually cold running water, and living-room fireplace, the one-story clapboard at least kept out the chill. He had enough money to live comfortably up here, the benefits of both government service and money provided him by the Familiars to run their operations.

Working for two secret organizations over half a decade had kept a steady flow of untraceable cash running through White's hands and flowing into numerous bank accounts under as many names. The fact that the NSA didn't know about the Familiars had allowed him to work both sides of the fence. For their part, the well-funded Familiars had been in existence longer than anyone could imagine, and they had wanted White to maintain his position within the NSA. The loss of that position through the treachery of his subordinate Otto Gottlieb would definitely have angered his Familiar superiors, a good reason for White to take this extended Canadian getaway.

Eventually, he would have to approach the Familiars and make peace with them, though doing so would surely mean risking his life. His priority for these many months had been survival--to retrench and use his best weapon . . . his mind . . . to begin working out a solution, to think his way out of this seeming impasse. He had personal desires, involving his boy, but he still shared the beliefs and goals of the Familiars, and his goal was to convince them that he should be allowed a second chance.

And yet still he remained in Meander River--telling himself that he was merely allowing the Familiars to cool off, to achieve a distance from his failures that might allow him to present his case before dispassionate judges. Truth be told, though, he had come to like living up here, where just getting by was a little harder--it gave him a feeling of tranquillity, and also pride that he was not only surviving, but adapting quite well to his new surroundings. He was free of the stress of his former double life. Someday, when he and his son Ray were reunited, this might be the sort of place where they could live together.

Even White's dreaded migraine headaches--something he struggled against constantly while working for the government (of course, those assholes could give Jesus Christ migraines)--hadn't bothered him nearly as much as he'd settled into life in Meander River. Pain was something White and those of his breed had largely overcome--their pain thresholds had been bred to near extinction, the remnants remaining only to serve as the warning system nature intended. But certain physiologically driven discomfort--genetically passed along--broke down the well-bred defenses of White and his kind . . . the migraines a prime example.

Bundling up in a parka, ski mask, and boots, White prepared for the short walk to Malcolm's, a combination restaurant and bar that was the only place in town to get either a hot meal or a real drink. Cooking not being among his many skills--and not an interest he wanted to cultivate--White spent a lot of time at Malcolm's, where the hired help, as well as the owner himself, had long since recognized him as a regular.

They were a stoic, sour bunch, however, still treating him like a stranger, an outsider. Perhaps it was racial, but in any event, White had the unmistakable feeling that none of the Malcolm's crew liked him. It wasn't an uncommon response on his part; people often appeared to instinctively feel an antipathy toward him, probably because of his well-earned air of superiority.

White didn't give a good goddamn whether these savages liked him or not, another common response on his part. If he could not be with his own kind--his son, for example--Ames White was quite content with his own company. If anything, he appreciated the staff at Malcolm's for not inflicting small talk upon him--such interaction was a part of life among the mongrel humans that he had endured far too long.

Trudging down the street, White once again considered all the things that had gone wrong in the past twelve months or so, and the people who had been responsible. At the top of this ignoble list was the transgenic bitch called Max--he had missed numerous opportunities to either capture or kill the X5--specifically, X5-452--who had turned his life into a living hell. His faithless NSA partner Otto Gottlieb had not only turned on him, but ratted him out to the only enemy as dangerous as 452 herself: Eyes Only, the underground cyberterrorist.

The rebel investigative journalist--whose identity remained unknown--was always prying into matters of importance; most of this interference had been peripheral . . . annoying but never anything that could truly block White in his own sub-rosa efforts. That had all changed, however, when Eyes Only broadcast one of his trademark video hacks, the subject of which was Ames White.

For all intents and purposes, the renegade broadcast had ruined both of White's careers, tainting him not only with the NSA but the Familiars. And Eyes Only's little unscheduled "program" had even been highlighted by segments showcasing inside information courtesy of that wimp NSA underling Sage Thompson and White's own former partner, Otto.

And though this was the major setback that had sent him scurrying for his life in the anonymity of Meander Falls, even that could not compare to the loss of his son, Ray. Kidnapped by 452 and an unidentified man from the Familiar's own school, Brookridge Academy, the boy was now MIA, leaving no clues to his whereabouts. In the end, he not only had lost Ray, but his wife Wendy as well.

Of course, White had killed Wendy himself . . . a necessity, considering her treachery toward him; but that didn't negate the nagging needle of loss. His wife had been a fine companion, with many good qualities--she just hadn't known when to let things go. In the long run, though, he supposed he and Ray were better off without her--she was merely the vessel for Ray's creation and, as such, lacked the breeding he and his son shared.

The most important thing now was to find Ray. Someday, White knew, he would get his son back. But this was a search he dared not undertake until he'd made his peace with the Familiars.

And in a matter of days--and he did wish he could be with his brothers when it happened--an event would transpire that would put his people on the top of the world. He might seem more valuable to the Conclave, soon--when his expertise and knowledge of X5-452 would come in very handy . . .

Even on the best of days, as its name implied, Meander River wasn't exactly a bustling metropolis; but as White strode down the deserted street, it dawned on him that things were even more quiet than usual . . . and usual was pretty damned quiet. As snow blew through, on a moan of wind, like cold sand thrown in his face, White felt as though he were walking through a snow-covered, subzero ghost town. His pistol nestled in the usual belt holster at the small of his back, the cold steel against his spine somehow reassuring; and a second gun was snugged in his parka pocket, where he could get at it immediately. So there was no need for apprehension.

You've been in the boonies too long, he told himself.

The snow crunching beneath his boots, the frigid air carrying the not unpleasant aroma of Malcolm's beef stew, now barely a block away, White recalled the pre-Pulse homily: "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you."

But White's newly revised version was, "Just because they're out to get you doesn't mean you have to be paranoid." He smiled at the thought--even on the run he could maintain control--and started to cross the alley that ran beside Malcolm's.

And, as he did, from the alley emanated a deep voice--unthreatening, not at all loud, and yet booming: "Fe'nos tol."

White froze.

The familiar greeting of the Familiars.

After all these months . . . they had found him. Just because you're not paranoid, he thought, doesn't mean they won't get you. It didn't matter how they'd managed it, only that they were here, that they had somehow gotten into town without his being aware. He forced out a long, slow breath, a plume of cold steam rising from his mouth as he turned to face the voice.

"Fe'nos tol," he replied.

Two men faced him, each winter-bundled in parkas much like his. They also wore full ski masks, but whether these were men he would recognize, with their faces exposed, was a moot point. Who they were wasn't as important as who they represented.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carlee Smith:

Do you one among people who can't read pleasant if the sentence chained in the straightway, hold on guys

that aren't like that. This After the Dark (Dark Angel, Book 3) book is readable by you who hate the perfect word style. You will find the details here are arrange for enjoyable looking at experience without leaving perhaps decrease the knowledge that want to supply to you. The writer regarding After the Dark (Dark Angel, Book 3) content conveys the idea easily to understand by many individuals. The printed and e-book are not different in the written content but it just different in the form of it. So , do you nevertheless thinking After the Dark (Dark Angel, Book 3) is not loveable to be your top listing reading book?

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