

THE HOUR TRAP

JD Moores

In 2022, Hal Price was a North Florida detective with the world at his fingertips. Having orchestrated the capture of several internationally-known rapists and serial killers and won the affections of a gorgeous local brunette named Rayna, there was no reason to believe that Hal Price wouldn't go on to make Lieutenant, Sheriff, maybe even Mayor someday. If he could capture and bring to justice drug kingpin Antoine Quasar, he would certainly be on the path to any or all of those rankings.

On the balmy August morning of the raid on Quasar's Atlantic Beach headquarters, Hal quickly reviewed the data that had trickled in from the four undercover officers he had working there the last two weeks. Then he set out with the Lieutenant and SWAT backup in tow to bring in the city's most wanted crook. What he hadn't anticipated was the betrayal of one of the officers, and worse, that officer was a best friend. Down on his luck with an illegitimate eight year-old child and a fiancée to support, Hal's friend Robert had been a low-level enforcer for Quasar even before being put undercover. When the cartel found out about the undercover operation and upcoming sting, they literally stripped and beat Officer Norton to within an inch of his life before abandoning him on the side of Highway 9A and then armed themselves for Hal's *invasion*.

When Hal's envoy arrived, they did manage to capture Quasar, but not without significant losses and the serious wounding of Hal himself. Hal's career wasn't over, but it had certainly stalled, as the press jumped on his evident lack of preparedness, attributing it to too much success too early making him apathetic and light on his feet. He was lucky to live, but once at the hospital, he was completely repaired and within the year completely healed – physically, anyway.

Intending to go on with his life, he married Rayna and advanced up the ladder in the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, but never quite reaching the pinnacle of success that seemed inevitable before that fateful August morning. For everything that had been fixed in terms of Hal's physical health, there was much of Hal's mental and emotional health that wasn't fixed and wouldn't be because Hal refused to deal with it, denying it or, ultimately, covering it up with alcohol and occasional drug use. The marriage lasted for about thirteen years, long enough for them to pay off a house and have a son of their own, but when Hal's inward turmoil took on external, abusive characteristics, Rayna left with their twelve year old son. They didn't get far – they didn't even get but a few miles down the road.

The death of Rayna and their only son in what was ruled a vehicular homicide shattered Hal, bringing him to the breaking point. He held it together just long enough to bury his family, then quit his job and literally disappeared. There was no trace of him, and after years of self-imposed isolation save for the contact he had with his wife and child, there was nary a soul with a clue as to Hal's whereabouts and activities, even in a city over 50% of which knew Hal by name

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Meanwhile, it was 2035 and a well-known, middle-aged, Puerto Rican inventor with the peculiarly un-Hispanic name Donald Olivaw was ready to announce his latest groundbreaking invention to the world. Not, however, before getting the financial support of the Global Patent Office Funding Committee for replication of his invention for worldwide use. So, one evening, he made his presentation to the Committee via holographic uplink from the very workshop in which his invention had been designed, developed and built.

When his speech ended, he was sure of his presentation's success and the success of his

invention: The world's first time machine. It was then that a knock came and he answered the door to find a man in a green raincoat wearing a black mask. This man carried a gun, and the struggle Donald put up at the door didn't make a bit of difference.

The man entered, removed his mask and revealed himself as Donald's long-time next door neighbor Oscar. The half-Hispanic Oscar was 21 and still lived with his mother, a widow whose Caucasian fiancée died in prison several years earlier. For ten years they had been neighbors during which time Donald had befriended the woman and been a father figure to Oscar. None of that seemed to matter the night Oscar came to the workshop demanding the invention, hidden safe behind a wall.

At first, Donald thought Oscar was alone in this, and tried to appeal to Oscar's familiarity and sense of responsibility to his mother. Then he found out that Oscar was only one in a group that wanted the machine for nefarious purposes. Oscar's reason for being a part of the group, though, was disturbingly simple. The man the group was going back in time for happened to be the same man that testified against Oscar's father, which got him sent to prison where he was later killed. Oscar would cooperate with the group long enough to get back in time and if able, kill the man he felt ruined his and his mother's life.

Oscar finally killed Donald to get the machine, then he and his buddies went back in time, for one man, exactly thirteen years into the past, to a balmy August morning.

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He was ready to go out the door and lead his team on the drug bust when a group of hooded, masked thugs assaulted him at the door, dragged him inside, electrocuted him with a taser rifle and proceeded to hold him hostage without giving him a reason. There were five of them, four of whom would remove the hoods and masks and go by names: Damien, Harvey, Ralph and Oscar. They had no last names to Hal, and the leader had no name at all save for what everyone called him: Leader. He was also the only one not to remove the costume. His voice was unnaturally low and booming and it seemed to be electronically altered. Usually that meant an identity to conceal, but when they finally told Hal that they were from the future, Hal began to wonder whom from the future he could possibly recognize that would do this?

By the time their time-traveling truth was revealed, it was about the only thing Hal knew of why he was in this predicament. Otherwise they had only told him that it was for his protection. He had more reason to believe that they were somehow connected to Quasar since this was obviously keeping him from leading the raid, but the raid went on without him, led by the irritated Lieutenant. Cut off from the world in every other way since the group controlled the communication devices in the house, they nevertheless allowed Hal to get news reports of the disastrous raid, the loss of life and the betrayal of his friend, Officer Robert Norton.

Hal was devastated, and what's worse, he was terminally baffled. The group had even let him contact the Lieutenant and explain the situation earlier in the morning, but the Lieutenant wouldn't believe him, ordering him to give up the joking and report to work. Now, even his girlfriend was a hostage with him, having left on her lunch break to check on him when she was notified that he didn't show up for work.

Suddenly, Oscar took control at gunpoint, forcing Hal and Rayna into the open for execution despite Leader's orders. After saying that Hal's testimony would send Oscar's father to prison, where he would later die, Oscar was to have vengeance for the life of the father he barely knew – Officer Robert Norton. But Leader intervened, and before Hal knew it the place was in chaos, Oscar was dead, and the Lieutenant was at the door. Damien wrestled control and blew Leader's cover, removing the costume and revealing Leader's all-too-familiar identity to everyone in the room. It was a shocking climax to a harrowing situation, which ended with the Lieutenant's gun-reliant intervention. Now, Hal needed to come to terms with an enemy from the future even worse than Quasar – himself, old and remorseful of events that both hoped had been averted and would never be.