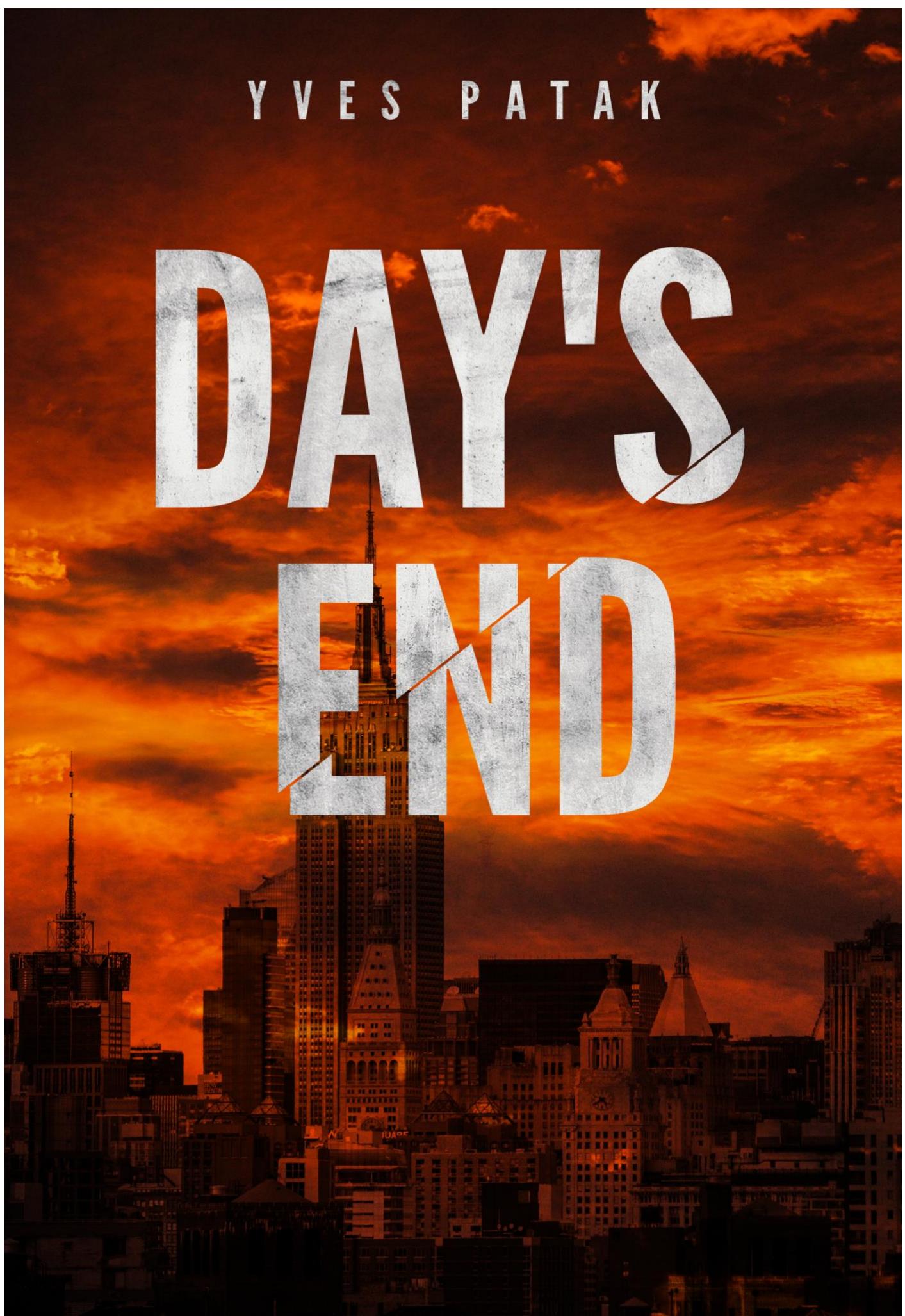


YVES PATAK

DAY'S END



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Yves Patak

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A frown of concentration spread across Cannagan's brow as he read the contract one final time. On the ebony desk the thick document seemed luminous, nearly aglow.

Eventually, he nodded and leaned back in his office chair. A hard smile that never reached his eyes stretched his lips into a thin line.

I win. As always.

Hands laced behind his neck, he gazed through the panoramic window overlooking Midtown Manhattan. The spacious penthouse office on the sixty-second floor in one of the city's most upscale buildings was his safe haven, his pride, his command center. In the supreme stillness behind the thick hurricane-proof windows, he had engineered the master plan that had brought about his archrival's downfall.

Thoughtfully he touched the contract, making sure it was really there.

Incredible, he thought. Just a signature away from absolute petrochemical power!

And didn't he deserve that final triumph! Ever since his father had died of lung cancer and left him a small oil company, Cannagan had slaved away, had fought and contrived his way up the ladder to success. Oh yes, it had been rough going, but the time to carry off the laurels had come at last. Steadily, stealthily, NaphtaCom had become the globe's leading oil corporation, and it kept growing. None of the great oil moguls

had taken Cannagan seriously. Not until the 'Black Wave.' That had been in the year 2018 - one year after Trump had moved into the White House - when downtown Manhattan had been laid waste by an unspeakable Tsunami. After that, everything changed. NaphtaCo swallowed Shell in 2019. British Petroleum fell victim to Cannagan's insatiable appetite a year later, along with most other major petrochemical companies. By the year 2020, Dean R. Cannagan, the underestimated underdog, had shown the world the conquering performance of a third millennium Julius Cesar.

Only one company had managed to keep NaphtaCo at bay - until a week ago, that was.

Once more, the unfamiliar smile spreads across his face. As a rule, Cannagan was not the type of man who indulged in the thrill of anticipation. The few defeats in his business-dominated life had taught him not to pull back the sword until his rival's heart stopped beating. But now, looking at the contract on his desk, he tasted the savor of absolute success on his lips. The contract was there – really *there!* – only waiting for Cannagan's signature.

He opened the contract and leafed back to the last page. There it was: Alfred Reinecke's elegantly curved signature. Reinecke, CEO of Omega Oil, had met his master at last. Cannagan looked at the black ink, procrastinating the moment when he would seal the deal with his own signature. His eyes wandered to the empty line above his name, and he felt his hand itch to finalize his masterstroke.

Not yet. He could sense that the sweetness of this moment would never come again. *Let's wait another minute.*

And why hurry? In a moment, Omega Oil would be nothing more than history; the last diehard opponent finally taken down and swallowed by the almighty NaphtaCo Empire. There would be no one but the late afternoon sky beyond the panoramic windows to witness Cannagan's ultimate triumph. And nobody would ever know that Reinecke had lost the race because of an ugly incident with a black whore and some

white powder – a whore that happened to be dead now. *Poor Alfie.* Cannagan gazed at the fountain pen in his hand. *Such a whizkid. Such a financial genius. And yet not bright enough to smell the rat when I offered a merger...*

Framing Reinecke with the Ethiopian hooker had been a no-brainer. Like many men of power, Reinecke was a womanizer, and his predilection for black ladies was no secret. A young banker who owed Cannagan introduced the Ethiopian to Reinecke at a party, and it didn't take long until the German fell for Arsema's feminine charms.

Cannagan's investigations on Reinecke had shown that the German was too smart to be a cokehead himself, which made it a child's play to slip the Ethiopian lady some nose candy blended with a deadly dose of strychnine without risking Reinecke's life too.

Cannagan and one of his odd-job men called Milo had tailed Reinecke to a five star hotel. Stethoscope on the door, they had waited for the commotion to start, had waited for the moment when the tycoon discovered the whore had died while he was lying next to her in blissful exhaustion. As soon as they heard the German panicking – “Arsema! Wake up, for Chrissake, wake *up!*!” – Milo had picked the electronic lock and waltzed into the suite, camera flashing. Reinecke's open-mouthed bewilderment had been priceless.

On second thought, not *really* priceless.

Cannagan had looked at his stark naked rival with an air of sympathy.

“Hey Alfie.” He shot a glance at the dead woman on the bed. “Looks like you got yourself a little problem here.”

Reinecke stared at him – and understood. In mute horror he watched Cannagan put his briefcase next to the dark-skinned corpse, watched him retrieve a thick contract.

“Dean …” he said hoarsely. “Don’t –“

“Shut up, Alfie, will you?” Cannagan pulled a fountain pen from his breast pocket. “I want your signature here on this

contract, your irrevocable consent to sell me Omega Oil right here and now, on my own terms. In return, I'll spare you from fifteen years of rough, non-consensual fag sex behind barred windows. Fair?"

Reinecke shook his head. "I booked this suite with my credit card! They have my name!"

Cannagan smiled his crocodile smile. "Alfie. This hotel belongs to me. I can have things arranged."

Alfred Reinecke signed – saving his bacon by selling his 40 billion dollar corporation for a song.

Cannagan pulled himself out of his reverie and glanced at his watch.

Time to crown myself.

He set the contract straight and reached for his Montblanc fountain pen. With the golden tip hovering over the empty line above his name, he froze.

No!

His eyes widening, he stared at the name below the line:

Dean Robert Canganan

Canganan! He jumped to his feet, fists on the desk, gaping at the typing error in disbelief.

"Fuck!"

In an instant his wrath turned on Sheryl, his secretary. *Stupid bitch! Misspells my name on the single most important document of my fucking life!* Pallid with fury, he slammed his hand on the intercom button.

So the little bimbo thought she had a right to get sloppy because she occasionally shared her master's bed! Oh but how wrong she was! True, she was pretty, and she knew how to

please a man. But she had failed to notice that just around the corner waited a never-ending line of Sheryls, young cheesecakes nothing short of desperate to work for one of the world's mightiest tycoons.

Time to give her the pink slip.

Drumming his fingers on the desk, he waited for her to answer. Now that she had spoilt one of his rare good moods with her inexcusable typo, he was actually looking forward to seeing her in tears, crumbling to pieces when he told her to pack her stuff and get the fuck out of his building. And if she got hysterical, he'd slap her face for good measure.

Seconds passed. No answer. His anger blossomed into something nasty. *All right, you little whore. I'm gonna smoke you.*

He grabbed the contract and stomped for the door. Reaching for the knob, he suddenly felt a pang of apprehension. Surely Reinecke would sign the rectified version of the contract one more time. *What if not?* a cold voice within whispered. *What if he found a way out by now?*

No way. Cannagan had photos. Glorious high-resolution photos of Alfie and the dead whore. There was no way Reinecke could escape a heavy jail sentence if Cannagan chose to send those photos to the authorities.

Pushing away his doubts, he pulled the soundproof door open and stormed into the secretary's outer office. *She'll be on the street before she knows what hit her – and I'll make damn sure she stays there for -*

He stopped dead in his tracks, staring at her empty chair. *What on earth...?* He glanced at his watch. Half past five. Sheryl was generously paid for being at his beck and call until eight. Even when she took a toilet break it was her goddamned duty to have her cell phone at the ready! He looked around.

Irrespective of her absence the silence outside his office was unusual. Ominous. He looked through the tall glass door that led to the six bullet-shaped façade elevators in the skyscraper's atrium. All elevators were still. There was no one to be seen.

No hustling secretaries, no stressed-out businessmen, no delivery boys.

No security guards.

Had there been a fire alarm? A bomb threat?

“Hello?” he called into the empty space. “Sheryl?”

The walls seemed to swallow his words. Frowning, he walked down the corridor, the sound of his shoes muffled by the soft rug. He pushed open the glass door walked to the atrium’s railing. The abyss was as disconcerting as the absence of life in the building. He pressed the elevator button. Instantly, he heard the familiar *bling!* as one of the doors slid open. No blackout. With growing alarm he stepped into the empty elevator and swooshed down toward the lobby at near free-fall speed. Just like the rest of the building, the main floor lobby seemed deserted.

“Hello?” Cannagan shouted.

The vast foyer’s emptiness gave him the creeps. Even the doorman was gone. He hurried through the revolving door onto the street - and nearly recoiled. Underneath the towering skyscrapers, Broadway and 56th Street were devoid of humans. Worse still, there was no sound. Not a bird to be heard. The smell of early spring hung in the air, along with something else, something acrid he couldn’t quite put his finger on. The cars in the street had come to a traffic jam stop. He walked past the endless line of cars and found them all empty. In utter bewilderment, he spun around. *What’s going on?* Warily, he walked on. *Where is everybody?*

Nothing moved – but there was a tingle in the air. Something electric. An atmosphere of breathless expectation.

He hurried toward Central Park, nearly running now along Broadway, a tiny figure in the twilight between the high-rise buildings. When he reached the corner on 58th Street he glimpsed a motion from the corner of his eye and froze in his tracks. A little black boy, peeking out from between two cars. The boy looked at Cannagan with round eyes.

“Hey, kid!” Cannagan called out. In the ghostly silence, his words sounded too loud and strangely hollow.

The boy gaped at him but remained between the cars.

“Do you know where your mom is?” Cannagan inquired. “Or where anybody is?”

The boy just kept staring.

“Hey, dumbass, do you understand what I’m saying?”

Cannagan felt like shaking the living daylights out of that tongue-tied boy until he came up with an answer to this mystery. As if sensing the menace, the boy turned around and ran away.

“Goddammit!”

Cursing under his breath, Cannagan walked on. Due to the skyscrapers he couldn’t see the sun, but the crimson reflection set the windows high above him on fire. He reached the southern end of Central Park, where there had been ample trees before the Black Wave of 2018.

Dean Robert Cannagan, CEO of the world’s mightiest petrochemical empire, didn’t know he was walking the last steps of his life.

There was a huge crowd on the meadow. For a moment, it seemed to Cannagan as though all of Manhattan’s citizens had gathered on the lawn, congregating in a bond of ghostly silence. Everybody, men, women and children, were facing him, looking south, their eyes riveted on a spot somewhere above Cannagan’s head - thousands of human statues, gaping, paralyzed in the presence of something too grand, too powerful, too *impossible* to conceive.

Cannagan turned around and looked up into the dawning sky. In a flash he understood his error about the sun’s reflection in the skyscrapers’ windows. The light he had seen hadn’t been the sun at all. Deep inside, he felt a scream building up, but in the proximity of this unearthly force, he remained mute like all the other victims-to-be.

Stunned, his eyes sparkling with the reflection of the blaze, he watched the mushroom cloud spread across the crimson sky, devouring the city, combusting the universe.

It was day's end.

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About the author

Yves Patak, MD, physician and writer, sees himself as a modern Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde: psycho- and hypnotherapist by day, he spends his nights writing about the dark side of the human soul and the eerie entities between the dimensions.

Inspired by Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King, Patak´s pet subject became the mystery thriller.

Published novels: Der Screener, Tödlicher Schatten, Ace Driller, Himmel und Hölle, Null Bock auf Karma, Gespräche mit Luzi (latter also translated into English and Spanish).

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