

LAST BASTION

ALAN CARTER

ABOUT THE BOOK

While his co-conspirators enjoy a government amnesty, Sam Willard is in prison, paying the price for exposing war crimes. Surrounded by enemies eager for revenge, his greatest challenge is survival. But then a mysterious federal agent offers him a dangerous proposition: his freedom in exchange for infiltrating an extremist group to rescue the son of a radical politician.

Meanwhile, Detective Sergeant Jill Wilkie is on the case of a series of racially motivated attacks, and as tensions escalate, so does the danger. As Hobart becomes a battleground for competing ideologies, one slip will expose Sam – and ignite the very attack Jill Wilkie must stop.

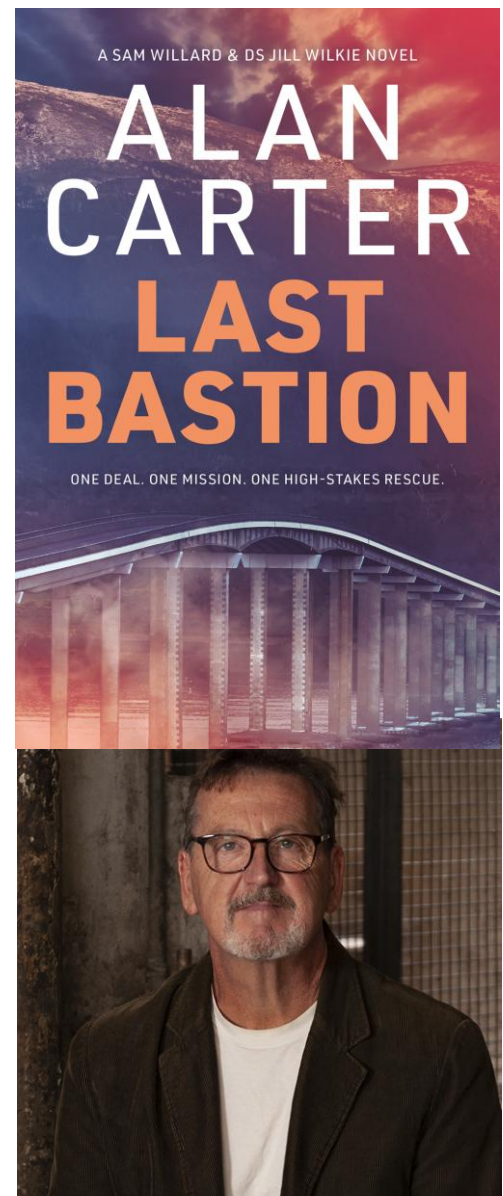
This most recent Sam Willard and Jill Wilkie crime novel explores the harsh realities of loyalty, betrayal and the fight against extremism.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Carter was born in Sunderland, UK. He immigrated to Australia in 1991 and now lives in splendid semi-rural semi-isolation south of Hobart, Tasmania. In his spare time he follows the black line up and down the local swimming pool or drags on his wetsuit and braves the icy waters of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. *Last Bastion* is the sequel to the Tasmania-set *Prize Catch*. He is also the author of the NZ-set Sergeant Nick Chester series – *Marlborough Man* (which won the Ngaio Marsh Award for Best Crime Novel), *Doom Creek* and *Franz Josef* – as well as the Fremantle-set DS Cato Kwong series, which include *Prime Cut* (winner of the Ned Kelly Award for Best First Fiction), *Getting Warmer*, *Bad Seed*, *Heaven Sent* and *Crocodile Tears*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is this novel called *Last Bastion*?
2. Do you agree with Aaron that Tasmania 'is the last bastion of the true Aussie spirit' (p.61)? How do you think that Aaron might define 'true Aussie spirit'?
3. Do you think this novel is uniquely 'Tasmanian', or is this story playing out in other communities around Australia?
4. Do you think that a crime novel is a useful or effective vehicle for social commentary? If so, in what way?
5. What factors do you think influences the way that Australians see themselves – and each other?
6. How do different characters represent different facets of the world that Carter is exploring (e.g. Aaron Felton vs Kevin Reynolds vs Kristin Baker vs Conor Ross)?
7. What does this novel have to say about who holds the power in society? Who is accountable to whom?
8. Why do you think Sam agrees to accept the proposed mission?
9. How would you describe the investigative style of Jill Wilkie?
10. Do you think her values and beliefs align closely with her role as a police officer?
11. What is the role of journalists in this novel?
12. Why do you think that Pankaj Kumar responds to his attack as he does?
13. What motivates Kristin Baker, and what emboldens her?



14. What is the role of the rule of law in this novel?
15. Who, in the end, is this novel's 'puppetmaster'? And what do you see as their motivations?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Did this novel begin with a 'what if' question? Or are you instead writing more closely about a place that you already (to quote something you once said) 'know and see'?

The rise of the far right in Australia, and around the world, is front and centre in the news headlines. That, plus the relatively recent shocking attacks by far-right and sovereign citizen extremists on police officers in Queensland and Victoria, point to an increasingly fractured, polarised and dangerous juncture in society. I've always used crime fiction as a means of holding a mirror up to ourselves and so it goes. Tasmania and Hobart are not immune.

Did you come to any conclusions while writing this novel about the country in which you live?

At times, particularly in the early stages, it felt profoundly depressing. I suppose that's what you get when you spend too much time hanging out with the zeitgeist. When world leaders set such a toxic example and when misinformation and fake technology combine to undermine basic notions of true and false, right and wrong, fact and fiction or lies, it's difficult to see how the world pulls back from that. Small wonder then that, in the apparent absence of heroes and heroines in real life, we might seek an escape to them in the stories we tell. In so doing we can perhaps find what unites us rather than divides, conceive of a better way for things to be, and to be able to cheer on those who still know the difference between right and wrong and choose to act on it.

In what ways do you think Australia has changed since Cato Kwong solved his first mystery in Prime Cut in 2011?

Can it be that it was all so simple then? I suppose that while Cato had to deal with bad folks, lies, idiots, all that, he at least didn't have to argue that up was down or black was white or whatever. The rise of social media and its use in mass disinformation hadn't really kicked off when we first met him. Far-right populists existed where they belonged, on the fringes – along with the conspiracy theorists, flat-earthers and anti-vaxxers. In many ways, Cato is better off at home with his family, his piano and his cryptic crosswords. But at least in most crime novels the reader can be reasonably confident that, by the end, some kind of equilibrium is restored and we can sleep easier once again.

To what extent do you think that novelists (and crime novelists in particular) can contribute to important conversations about this nation's identity?

Novelists, and crime novelists in particular, have been part of the conversation about national identity since the First Fleet and the first crime novel. Sometimes challenging our ideas of ourselves, sometimes reinforcing our myths of ourselves. Either way, it's important and necessary to stay engaged. We still need heroes and heroines to fight the good fight and right the wrongs of the world. To set a good example to us all.

What is next for Alan Carter?

More More hi-octane zeitgeist hi-jinks with Jill and Sam.