

*A Christian thriller set  
in a frighteningly  
possible near-future.*

**VICTOR**  
**The Reloaded Edition**  
***Shadows of Sunlight City #1***  
by Tony Ross

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SHADOWS OF SUNLIGHT CITY | BOOK ONE

# VICTOR

THE RELOADED EDITION



TONY ROSS

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ISBN 978-1-62141-987-7

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

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2012

First Edition

## ONE

Mona Macheski stepped from shadow to sunlight, exchanging the empty alley for a place among the thousands filling the city streets. She merged with the unsuspecting passersby and immediately became anonymous, just another face in the crowd, one more resident of Sunlight City travelling in the early daylight hours. No one would pay any attention to her.

She hoped.

She reached up with her left hand to brush back her long dark hair, adjusted her sunglasses, and silently scolded herself for fidgeting. *Calm, stay calm.* Yet it took every ounce of her resolve to keep from panicking every time somebody inadvertently brushed against her. Any moment now it would happen: the grasp of a strong hand, a shout of alarm or a look of recognition...

No. She had time. Josef couldn't know yet that she had fled.

Could he?

She'd been gone for perhaps three hours. She'd successfully bypassed all the security systems, avoided the guards and had now managed three hours of beautiful, unrestricted freedom. The trick would be surviving another hour, and another, and the next.

Josef would find out. Maybe he knew already. He had almost limitless power and assets, and he would no doubt turn all of his attention and resources to one goal: reclaiming his property. She was far too knowledgeable and valuable to the company. Josef would bring her back in if he could. If he couldn't, he'd have her killed. Perhaps he'd have her brought to him and he'd personally end her life. He'd never been the merciful type.

For the moment, though, and the foreseeable future, she was free. Every

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moment of freedom meant a moment to plan, to further distance herself from her past, and if God was with her, an opportunity to escape.

*God?* Mona surprised herself by thinking of Him. She was twenty-eight years old and had believed in God at one time, but had spent much of her life trying to prove to herself and the world that man, with the proper knowledge and use of technology, could replace Him. From a strictly scientific point of view, it could be argued that she had succeeded: boldly, brilliantly, beyond every reasonable expectation. Her victory was something that the public would never be aware of- not that she had any aspirations to fame and fortune anyway- but Josef had been thrilled and had rewarded her handsomely.

Then he had taken her invention, twisted it beyond recognition, and unleashed hell on earth.

*It has to stop,* Mona thought. *Now. No one else is in a position to do anything. Nobody even knows.*

Mona had taken matters into her own hands by removing the very key that Josef needed to continue his operations. The madness had begun with her, and it would end with her.

If, and it was admittedly a big *if*, she could make it out of Sunlight City and off the island alive.

Mona kept one foot moving in front of the other, still trying to control her racing heart. She was thankful for the sunglasses that hid the fear in her eyes. She prayed- there was God again- that the bead of sweat trickling down her temple would be attributed to the blazing sun promising another humid August day and not to the terror that drove her on.

*One foot in front of the other.* She had to continue. There could be no turning back. Even if she wanted to, it was too late now. Josef *had* to know of her absence already. He always knew. He had eyes and ears everywhere, especially if he called upon the resources of the other Granters.

And when he knew with certainty that Mona had no intention of returning, there would be only one course of action he would take. That

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thought, more than any other, sent cold waves of fear rippling up and down her spine.

He would send Victor for her.

## **TWO**

Cold was the first thing that Victor knew as he awoke: bitter, mind-numbing cold, the kind that raises gooseflesh on your arms and seeps into your bones and convinces you that you'll never be warm again. Lying in darkness, Victor shivered.

Disconnected thoughts and images danced around the edges of his mind, proving as elusive as quicksilver each time he tried to grasp one and focus on it. Perhaps his mind had checked out for the day, gone off on its own and left him here with insanity in its stead.

Pain hit him unexpectedly: unrelenting, throbbing pain in the left side of his skull, just above the ear, terrible in its intensity. For a fleeting moment he wondered if he'd been shot. The carousel in his mind turned and the pain faded, as if it was not injury but memory, slipping away with each passing second.

He heard the crackle of flames and the murmur of unseen voices accompanied by frenzied screams. Razor-like claws dug into his legs and began to pull him downward. His heart rate spiked as overwhelming fear crashed over him.

Victor knew this place. He'd somehow blocked it from his mind and forgotten, but now he remembered.

He'd been here before.

The carousel spun again, pulling him away from the nightmarish scene and into calmer, tamer images. The dizzying blur of scenes began to slow, allowing him to reach into thoughts and memories and sample at will. He recalled contentedly watching the sun sink below the horizon at the end of the day, listening to music flowing from his fingers and out through the

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guitar on his lap, the warm touch of a soft hand on his, showing love and inviting it.

He remembered killing.

The unexpected thought startled him, jarring him from his reverie, overriding and erasing all other memories and replacing them with startlingly clear purpose. Warmth and strength seeped into him and he knew, as he always did, what he needed to do.

*Kill.*

The prompting came again, not as a memory but a mental command, and he knew without question, as the whirlpool of memories faded quickly away, that this was his ultimate purpose, his highest calling. Power and adrenalin coursed through his body. He could see himself in action in his mind's eye, strong, fast and blindingly quick. He longed to feel a weapon in his hands, be it gun or knife or something improvised. He was perfection itself, the perfect killer, a god of war among mere mortals. He existed to bring death and destruction to those who had been condemned, and he never failed.

He was Victor.

Victor wasn't his real name, though he thought it rather suited him. He couldn't remember his real name and didn't much care. He'd made many sacrifices, holes in his memory among them, and been rewarded with great ability, making him a better killer than nearly anyone on the planet.

Heat rushed through his body, flowing through his veins. Another familiar sensation. Not quite pure memory but a hint of it, like déjà vu. The pleasant warmth brought life to his stiff limbs and clarity to his mind, but would never be enough to fully offset the cold he'd awakened to. Victor knew that he would never truly be warm. It was a small price to pay for perfection.

In his heightening clarity he suddenly knew who he was supposed to kill. For the first time that he could recall, he hesitated. Was this right? Had he really been given this assignment, in person or by phone? He couldn't recall the details. Was he misunderstanding, latching onto another fragment of



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memory-?

*Kill Mona Macheski.*

The command came again, bringing with it clear direction and confirmation. He remembered now. Mona had betrayed him. She'd betrayed everything, and in doing so had declared herself an enemy. As such, she would be dealt with quickly, harshly, in the most severe manner possible. Killing her was the only option. Any pain that it caused him would only strengthen and further perfect him.

He was nearly awake, the sluggishness nearly gone, his mind becoming more clear and coherent by the second. There were no more dreams of pain, flames or godhood, only crystal clear focus. When he was ready, he would act, and nothing on earth would stop him.

He was Victor.

He would kill.

### **THREE**

The office was deeply shadowed, heavy curtains pulled shut against the morning sun, a few flickering candles providing the only illumination to the large room. The red-painted walls and thick carpet absorbed all sound except for the quiet hum of air conditioning already laboring against the heat of the day. The furniture, from the enormous desk and the high-backed chair behind it to the low table and chairs across the room, was meticulously carved black walnut.

The darkest thing in the room was the man behind the desk.

Josef Hirigawa sat still in his chair, straight-backed and expressionless, both hands resting on a thin, narrow case that sat on the desk before him. His brow furrowed in concentration. The dancing flame from the single candle a few feet away deepened the shadows and creases in his long, narrow face. Occasionally his brown eyes would flicker upward as he imagined what hid in the darkness just beyond the candlelight. It was not a reaction of fear, but of interest. His greatest allies favored the darkness. Perhaps one would visit him now and offer him further insight into how to deal with the problem at hand.

Hirigawa's eyes returned to the case. Slowly, tenderly, as if caressing a lover, he ran his fingertips over its leather surface until his thumbs reached the twin clasps that held it closed.

He was a tall man, the only son of a Japanese father and Russian mother. His mother's side of the family was responsible for his imposing height and broad shoulders. His father had passed on his almond-shaped eyes, olive skin and jet-black hair. Hirigawa was only now graying at the temples, the only indication of his advancing age. He might have been fifty or eighty. He had

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aged well and it was impossible to tell.

His thumbs moved and unlocked the case with a barely audible *click*. Gently, he opened it.

Hirigawa's vast inheritance had come to him at an early age, the successful software business of his parents falling into his hands shortly after completing his extensive education in Europe. He had wasted little time in evaluating that business, selling it for a handsome profit, and disappearing from public view. Years later he had emerged again in Sunlight City as the CEO of Bifrost Technologies, named for the rainbow bridge in Norse mythology. While still very reclusive, Hirigawa maintained extensive connections with numerous other business ventures. He was without question the richest man in Sunlight City and ranked among the wealthiest in the world. Such power and influence had earned him an exalted position among the five Granters.

But wealth and possessions were not his ultimate goal. Josef Hirigawa had other plans, a grander vision. Like legendary Bifrost, he would bridge the gap between men and God. Unlike anything the ancient Vikings had imagined, he intended to replace God. It was for this vision, he knew, that his parents had lost their lives at his hands. He had sacrificed much for his power.

With his right hand he withdrew the single object within the case. This was what he had used on that night so long ago.

He contemplated the slender silver dagger, admiring it, eyes locked on the six-inch blade. Reflected candlelight danced on the polished steel. He remembered his parents tied down like cattle; his father strapped to a tabletop, his mother to her bed. He remembered his father's begging, his mother's screams. Such weakness. He'd done them a favor by ending their lives.

Only the strongest deserved to live. Josef Hirigawa was strongest of all.

And yet, in all his strength, in all his power and wisdom, he'd *overlooked* something. The thought grated on him, though the anger it brought never

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surfaced. Hirigawa had complete control of himself and those around him.

Or so he'd thought.

"Mona," he whispered to himself and his invisible companions in the shadows, "you really don't understand what you've done, do you?"

He briefly reconsidered his course of action. Mona was a valuable asset to lose. Perhaps he should simply have her brought back here alive. He'd cut her feet off at the ankles so she'd never run again. It was a harsh lesson, to be sure, but she would learn again to fear him.

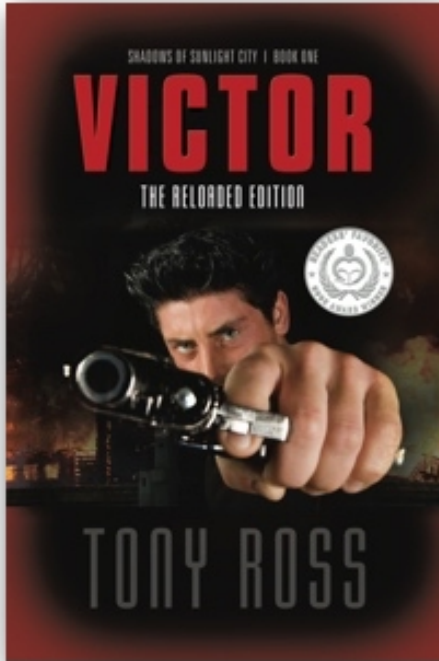
No, he thought, it was better that she spend her last hours in this life running in terror, constantly looking over her shoulder in anticipation of her death. Better to break her down entirely, stripping away her heart, her will, and her mind before the bullet came. She'd experience hell on earth before he sent her there for eternity.

The intercom hidden in the surface of his desk chirped softly.

"Sir," a male voice said, "Victor has been sent out per your instructions."

An idea came to Hirigawa, a moment of inspired revelation, and he knew what else he needed to do. It was a course of action that carried a great deal of risk, but everything at stake demanded that he move boldly. The ultimate reward would be well worth it.

"Send out Omega," he ordered. "He is strictly to observe Victor. Should Victor hesitate in completing his mission, Omega will be my failsafe. Omega will then complete Victor's mission... and kill Victor for his weakness."



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